

TO FIND IT IN SOMEONE ELSE . . . -by Leslie Simmons

I was trying to prepare for an advanced Aikido class. We had been given an assignment to prepare and bring with us. We were asked to offer our thoughts on one of the quotes or comments given to us. I was drawn to the quote from O Sensei that had to do with focusing on the attacker not the weapon. I had heard this many times in our dojo but couldn't avoid staring at the weapon. I was working an extra shift and as I had the chance, I reviewed all the quotes and comments trying to find 'the right one'.

As I sat in a parking lot that night I heard gunshots, nothing unusual for the area in which I work. As I listened to the police radio I heard officers asking for a code 3 ambulance for an officer down. The stress and concern in their voices was unmistakable. I responded to the call with the other units. As the officer was being taken to the Trauma Center I was told that the plain-clothes officer had been shot by uniformed officers. It is bad enough for an officer to be killed in the line of duty but for the death to be at the hands of other officers compounded the tragedy. I spent the rest of that shift and most of my shift the next day trying to help my crews and some of the officers deal with the situation. I too was trying to cope.

While driving around trying to tend to business as usual I found myself running the situation through my head. I suddenly began to realize the gift I was given. I realized that when people use weapons, quite often they never get the chance to resolve things any other way. Dead is dead. On this plane, in this level of existence, we can't change that and the opportunity to apologize or handle things differently is gone.

I continued to contemplate. I have always struggled with the idea of 'connecting' with the attacker. How can I connect with someone who is full of hate and violence? I

have been responding to 911 calls for 24 years. Unless you've been there, you can't possibly know the amount of violence and brutality I've encountered. How can people do the things they do to others? There are people who make a living doing very violent things. How can they...ah, they do the same thing I do. In order for me to be effective as a paramedic, I have to be able to care for people without being caught up in the circumstances surrounding their medical needs. Early in my career I had to find a way to shield myself and yet still be caring and compassionate. I had to learn to suppress or ignore the human connection. It is a weird process and difficult to explain but I got very good at it. To do violence you must do the same thing. You have to find a way to disconnect and not see the human you are hurting. Suppressing or disconnecting is not a one-time deal. The shields must constantly be fortified. I have cared for violent people. I have seen them as very loving parents and family members. They cry over the loss of loved ones and when critically injured they cry for their mothers and hope to see their children again. The human connection is never gone. It is always just under the surface and we convince ourselves that this shit doesn't bother us but we all know the truth. To make the human connection all you need to do is put your energy forward. Suppressing the life/love connection takes too much energy. It will flow forth willingly to meet like energy. To find it in someone else you need only give it.

I lived my assignment for the class but I continue to find how much more I have to do. During our class we were asked to keep notes. All I wrote was:

If intent is what makes something a weapon, then anything is a weapon.

If intent is what makes something a weapon, then there are no weapons.