**From Movement to Magic: The Search for True Wealth**

**By Aimee Bernstein**

At eighteen, a friend asked me who I envisioned myself to be at fifty. Without hesitation I responded, “A woman of character.” That answer has directed and informed my life. Though there have been many moments when I have wished to be a mother, a wife, a financially successful career woman, the only desire that has been steadfast and compelling has been to discover and live the truth of who I am.

The path has not always been smooth and direct. I’ve chased the dollar and have been seduced by love more times than I choose to admit. Yet, I have never forgotten for very long what is most important to me. Always I have known that true wealth comes not from the material but from a connection to what some call “The Source of All That Is”. Others refer to this Higher Power as the Tao, YAHWEH or God. All other relationships, be it with myself or others, are dependent on this primary connection. In fact everything in life is. Many years later, I would read the words of the founder of aikido. “*How can you straighten your warped mind, purify your heart, and be harmonized with the activities of all things in Nature? You should first make God’s heart yours.”* However, at eighteen, I knew nothing about aikido or even religion. Nevertheless, I intuited that there was something more within me that would shape my life for the better.

The challenge of my life has been learning to loosen the hold of my personality, which pinches from time to time in its containment of me. When my personality with all it desires, needs and preferences chatters too loud, Source becomes for me the echo of a distant note that I fail to hear. On the road to discovering my character, I’ve sometimes confused the voice of my personality with that of a higher consciousness. In those times, I’ve always come up a dollar short. Yet these experiences have taught me a great deal about aligning to Source. I’d like to tell you now about one of those times and what it taught me about true wealth.

In my mid twenties, I began studying Aikido, a Japanese martial art that teaches the way of harmony and love. Though not much of an athlete, I had stepped onto the mat in the hopes of learning what my teacher, Robert Nadeau, knew about how the human system aligned to universal energies. I wanted to discover--not just intellectually but with every ounce of my being--my relationship to Source. I was looking for true wealth although I didn’t recognize it as such at the time. I chose to study with Nadeau because he provides the clearest and most comprehensive map to establish a connection with Source that I have found.

After training for a few years, I finally took my brown belt test. This was an auspicious occasion for me. In my mind, a brown belt rank marked the beginning of mastery. For months, I practiced diligently for my test with Sue Ann, the best of the Aikido students. Eager to exemplify the budo spirit I admired, I forged forward despite sprained ligaments and sore knees. With her assistance, I came to know each technique intimately. My stance was strong and my determination to demonstrate excellence abundant. I knew that a great performance did not occur through technique alone. As Nadeau taught, it required an alignment with Universal Energies. This alignment allows inspiration to come through transforming simple movement into magic. I was ready for the magic, ready to join the ranks of the special few whose tests were talked about for years to come. I wanted to make my teacher proud and to distinguish myself as one who really knows.

Confidently I stepped onto the mat when my name was called. To my surprise, Sue Ann came forward with a fury I had not previously experienced. It took everything I had to successfully deal with her attack. At first, I felt angry; then I realized that what had appeared as confidence was really fear so frozen in my body that I could hardly move. Sue Ann’s powerful attacks were her way of trying to rouse me from my rigidity.

Her strategy worked and I was able to demonstrate each required technique. But was my test memorable? Hardly! Though people congratulated me afterwards, I felt a cold disappointment that reeked of failure. And when Nadeau, who usually made students wait a week to receive their certificates, hurried back to his office to write mine out, I felt ashamed and angry. Ashamed that I had not achieved the brilliant performance I had envisioned; angry that Nadeau could accept anything less from me.

Though I was not a drinker, I stopped on my way home that night and bought a bottle of whisky. Not knowing anything about whiskey I bought a bottle of Yukon Jack advertised as ‘The black sheep of Canada.’ It’s name represented how I felt inside. Clearly I was young, distraught and overly dramatic.

I sat on my patio, taking slugs from my bottle while trying to come to terms with my perceived failure. “My test was quite average,” I bemoaned. “Therefore, I must be average.” I sat with this thought for a while allowing it to sink in. A couple of slugs later my pride took over and announced, “Well, not really average--maybe a little above average--but certainly not extraordinary.” Both were voices of my personality trying to find truths they could not know. For a couple of hours they debated until they exhausted each other.

As the voices stilled, the brilliance of the starlight attracted my attention. I noticed the trails of light that led from one star to the other. What had appeared as separate entities were now linked in a mosaic that went further than my eye could see. Everything was connected, yet, in my limited view, I could not perceive its grand design.

At that moment, I realized I had been operating with a great misunderstanding. I had pursued a relationship with Source in order to become a better person, more highly functioning and more enlightened. And Source, being what It is, allowed me to do so, offering me enough results to keep me interested. My search for character and spirituality, I realized was as ego driven as my search for money and love.

That night I learned not to cling too tightly to external results, to how I appear or how I compare in the world. I saw how in choosing image and ambition, I lost sight of who I am. I realized that what seemed like an average test was really quite a significant leap for me. It was more than my new ability to demonstrate techniques; the disciplined training had transformed me from the inside out. Though I did not recognize it immediately, Nadeau had.

That night I learned that what appears as greatness seems ordinary once you achieve it. From the new vista, an even higher plateau brimming with new energies and possibilities looms and calls. And so the Source of All That Is continuously reveals itself and the process of growth occurs. But what truly changed my life is that I made a new decision that night. Instead of using Source, I would allow Source to use me.

Forty years later, each day has become an opportunity to choose to be of service to the Source of All That Is. Though at times I still resist, I notice the face in the mirror has more character these days. And though my banker still does not consider me a preferred customer, as my willingness to serve spirit deepens, I know that I have become a very wealthy woman.

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