

Keiko basically means that we reflect on the past, to learn from both our successes and failures in training. We are not to ponder on those past items, nor are we to focus on making them part of our present, but rather we are to "reflect" on them. To reflect on items in the past requires great concentration and focus. You must be seated, relaxed and close your mind off to everything except that one thing you are reflecting on. You can examine it, go through it in your mind but once you return to the "now" you can no longer ponder on that item. This is what makes Keiko study so hard.

Most people use things in their past as a gateway to not repeat the same mistake by remembering them. Some of us ponder on the past so much so that it becomes an obstacle to the future and can produce outwardly bad things in our lives. Others pay little or no attention to their past and thus end up repeating the same mistakes over and over again. The martial artist will take time out of their day for meditation. At this time they will reflect on the past item and come to an agreement with it, thus making it part of their existence and learning from it. Once the lesson is learned they do not reflect on the item anymore and return to "now", or the time in the present. Since the Zen states you are not to live in the past, this makes Keiko the perfect tool to learn from the past. You are not reliving your past, nor spending too much time on it but rather examining it daily to gain experience and wisdom from it. You can see the basic contradiction here...you can not live in the past, nor dwell on it...but yet you must take time to reflect on it and gain wisdom from it.

In my years of practicing Keiko, or reflection I have come to several almost enlightening moments in my training. It is very hard on a martial art instructor to take this time to reflect as we are always looking for ways to grow our Ryu (family) and improve it. I have found it necessary to take at least 15 minutes a day to reflect on the previous day, but not to allow the problems from that day to overflow into the present. My daily reflections help to clear my mind and prepare me to do my best at the moment that is now. It is very unique because at this level in my training I have noticed that I do not even need to think about a subject, they just appear to me and affix their meaning and lesson in my thoughts. I truly believe that to be a successful instructor you must practice this period of Keiko daily. Mornings are best but it can be done at any time.

Keiko is so valuable to your martial arts training that I have incorporated it in to my testing periods for students below black belt. After they test they must wait for a period of 2 to 5 days, or longer depending on their belt status. This period is used for reflection on their abilities and performances during the test so that they may learn what they need to work on.

A great way to begin this practice is to find a quiet place away from distractions and to sit down comfortably. Take several deep breaths in the nose and out the mouth relaxing the body with each exhale. Then begin to envision the past item in your mind. Go through this item and concentrate on it. Do not try and analyze it but rather let the answer appear to you. It may take several times before you can learn to allow the answer to appear, but your mind will analyze it for you with the need for thinking heavily on the item. When I first began I focused on the same thing for a period of four weeks before the answer appeared. The main reason it took so long was due to my mind's ability to wonder to other items. Eventually I learned to control those and only focus on the item at hand during my sessions. Once I did it was readily apparent how beneficial this period of Keiko was to me in both my training and in my life. Good luck