

WHY DO WE PRACTICE EVERY DAY?

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"Sensei, why is it that we have to practice piano every day?"

"Why do we have to repeat the same thing over and over every day?"

I have known many students over many years. Always at lessons all my adorable little grade-school children ask these very questions. The parents who accompany these students report that their children hate to practice, and they want to know what to do about this problem. I get asked this question by parents from all over the world. My answer is always the same.

There is not a student anywhere in the world who loves to practice. The importance of practice is not just to play through pieces, but to repeat small parts of pieces. This is especially true of piano music. If there is a child somewhere in the world who loves this practice, perhaps she should have her head examined. Your child who hates to practice is absolutely normal. Children love music but hate practice.

When children ask me why they must practice every day, I explain, "The human body is not like the brain. Each day is one unit. You eat every day and you sleep every day don't you? If you thought that it maybe a bother to eat every day and decided therefore to eat three days' worth of food all at once, you could not do it. Sleep is the same. Would you be able to sleep for a while week all at once and then be up the next seven days? Breathing is the same. God decided that there were some things that our bodies have to do every single day. This is why piano practice has to be done every day. If you do not practice for three whole days, your piano technique suffers quite a bit and will not improve. It is all right if you just practice a little bit, okay?"

Children usually listen to my reply, but their faces seem to say, "I sort of understand, but..."

Our brains immediately take in things we see and hear. Furthermore, we are able to remember our impressions and feelings of things we said and heard many years ago. There is such a radical difference between the brain and the body that most people are confused about this.

Because of the high importance placed on test scores, students nowadays are forced under great pressure to memorize unreasonable amounts of information. They have not had the repetition necessary to develop their intelligence and have not had space in which to grow naturally. This interferes with their proper development. Furthermore, they are not given the opportunity to use their bodies with simple practice. They have not been given the chance to play the piano or to do sports. Being able to use our body well, however, is a prerequisite for life itself. To walk, to run, to eat, to sleep, -TO MOVE- is everything. For example, if you do not use your legs over a long period of time, you will not be able to walk.

For this reason, we must learn every day, little by little, how to play well by practicing. Because children have not yet acquired a great deal of knowledge, they find practice to be tedious and they resist it. On the other hand, unlike adults they are far better at enduring repetition. If you have reared children, you are well aware that very young children are able to repeat something that they like, something that interests them, ceaselessly, to a point we adults find difficult to imagine. Whatever children repeat over and over again, even if they hate doing it, whether it is good or bad, becomes apart of them.

As adults, we are able to acknowledge that practice is necessary and to determine earnestly to do our best. This adult knowledge and desire interfere with our bodies by making them stiff and unable to do the task at hand. It is not absolutely impossible for adults, but.. when it comes to learning a physical task even if we devote the same amount of time with the same patience and effort, children always do better because childhood is a stage when the gains of learning a task are ten, no, maybe one hundred, times greater than for an adult.

When it comes to the body, childhood is the time to learn a physical task well. What children can learn naturally and with freedom is so great that we cannot even compare it to what can be learned in adulthood.

To practice piano properly every day is quite a job for parents. Whether a child starts at three or six years old, if you try as hard as you can for ten years you will be giving that child an invaluable gift: a lifetime of deep appreciation and love for music. This is a gift which cannot be bought anywhere with any amount of money.