

Struggling With the Guitar? Here's why...

Why is the Principles Method of Learning Guitar Superior to All Other Methods?

by Jamie Andreas

Long before The Principles became popular with guitar students, and its superior value was recognized from so many quarters, I was the only one who knew the true value of them. During all the years I was developing the Principles, each student was a guinea pig, and year after year, student after student, I refined my methods, making my system of teaching as powerful as possible. I was determined not to stop until I reached my goal: a complete analysis of all dynamics involved in the playing process, and more importantly, the learning process for guitar. I would not stop until I had developed a way of communicating that knowledge so that it could be used and understood by anyone who was willing to make the necessary effort.

For many years before my methods took their final form, (before the Internet, when I was operating only locally in my area) I was aware that my private teaching was, simply put, the best in town! Of course, I wasn't the only one who knew. I enjoyed that reputation in my area from even the early years of my teaching. But, of course, occasionally, I would have a student who did not seem to properly appreciate the difference between my teaching and what was commonly out there.

Now, this hit directly upon one of my many character flaws: I get very upset if I think I am not being properly appreciated! This would happen especially with students who had never had another teacher. They had nothing to compare me to!

There does happen to be a good reason that I feel this way. Unless the student is sufficiently aware of the true value of my methods, I often could not get them to do what I told them to do, which is rule number one when studying with me. So, I would tell them "Look, you need to go take lessons with somebody else for awhile. Then you will appreciate me more, and you'll do what I tell you to do. Then come back if you want (no one ever took me up on that)!".

I happen to believe that most people never change, they just become more of what they already are. So, at this point, I am even worse! But, it seems to be a good thing, since I am always involved in marketing The Principles, and marketing is really nothing but explaining to people why your product is better than brand X. So, why do I say "The Principles" is the best method in existence for learning the guitar?

You Are Not Learning Guitar!

The first thing that might come to mind in answering this question is to say "The Principles is the best method because it enables anyone to learn to play, even those who have nothing but a history of failure with all past efforts". Well, that is a true statement, but it is merely descriptive, it merely describes the results of using the method. I want to look more deeply; I want to look at why it is so effective.

The first and most overarching reason the Principles is superior is directly related to what is wrong with all existing methods, and that is this: all existing methods for learning guitar teach you from the logic of the guitar itself, and not from the logic of how the body learns and develops. And so, even though the hardest place to play on

the guitar is the first fret, even though starting to learn by learning the notes down there will absolutely cause moderate to great excess tension throughout the whole body (especially for the beginner), and even though this tension will become locked into the muscles and severely affect all future playing -- still, that is where every method begins, down at the first fret. And why?

Well, because it is called the first fret, so I guess we should start there, huh? That makes about as much sense as learning to type by learning "A" first, then "B", and so on through the alphabet, rather than allowing the learning method to be dictated by the actual structure of words and sentences.

It is of supreme importance to realize the fact that when we learn to play the guitar, we are not, in fact, learning to play the guitar. We are learning to use our body to create music from the guitar -- that is what we are doing. We are learning to use muscle, nerve, and bone, to create music from strings, wood, and frets. Because this is what we are really learning, we must allow our method to be dictated by the logic and rules of the body's learning process and operation, not according to the physical construction of the guitar itself. Let the guitar makers be concerned with that!

I have given one example of how this wrongheaded approach degrades the learning process, I could give hundreds more. Because the physical reality of playing is ignored, because the fact that we are really learning to use the body, not play the guitar, is not recognized, all training methods are a torment to the body, and continually violate the laws by which it learns -- and those laws are the laws of motor control learning.

All of those laws are recognized in The Principles, and their unbreakable power is used to master the guitar, not become its slave. There is an old saying "You cannot break the law, you can only break yourself against it". This is what happens for so many guitar students, and it happens because conventional teaching methods remain in the Dark Ages.

The Visible & The Invisible

When we follow the correct path in learning guitar, the path that understands, respects, and works with the body's own laws, amazing things happen as time goes by. What are these amazing things? Well, there are two parts to them, the inside parts and the outside parts, the invisible parts and the visible parts.

The visible parts are on display anytime you see a great player. You watch the great player and you cannot believe that all of these wonderful sounds are coming out of the guitar, and it looks so effortless! You say, "My God, when I try that it's so difficult to do! How does he do that and make it look so easy!?" The great player truly appears to be at one with the guitar, and all sense of struggle is absent. Quite the opposite; there is a palpable sense of equanimity, even joy.

These are the things you can see. The reason they appear the way they do, is because of everything you can't see.

Those who have found and followed the true path to instrumental mastery have achieved a profound state of communion between their physical body and the body of the guitar. They are not doing what most people do on the guitar. Most people play ON the guitar, and play ON the strings. The great player has seen the

uselessness of that. The great player has learned to play WITH the guitar, and especially WITH the strings. The difference is as great as the difference between lightning and the lightning bug (apologies to Mark Twain!).

What does it mean to play with the string instead of on the string? It is quite simple really, and the essential phenomenon is within the experience of most people. Most of us have, at some time in our lives, dived off a diving board. Or, perhaps you have played basketball. In both of these circumstances, we are directing our body to interact with a flexible medium, i.e. the diving board or the basketball. Both of these flexible mediums, like the guitar string, are sources of potential energy, they both contain "spring".

The good diver or basketball player, like the great guitarist, has learned to play WITH the board or ball. This means they have learned how to bring their body into an active relationship with the flexible medium so as to USE its potential energy, not be used by it. If you walk to the end of the board and start bouncing up and down, you can do it in such a way that you are able to bounce incredibly high with great ease. This happens if your body is in sync, or is entrained properly to the flexible medium; both of you are moving in tandem, moving with each other. If it is done wrong, it feels terrible, and you get no bounce because you are not tapping the energy of the board, you are in opposition to it instead (this opposition will always include rigidity, tension, and the inability to relax after efforts). Likewise, if you dribble the ball without having your body in proper communion with the ball, well, you will look like me every time I tried to play basketball!

This is what it means to play WITH the strings, and not ON the strings. Everything found in my methods for guitar promote the ability to play with the strings, and there are many ways to foster this great sensitivity of the hands, arms, and body that is the prerequisite for this exalted state. Unfortunately, there are even more ways to ruin the body's sensitivity to playing with the strings, and many of those things happen to virtually every player.

Transformation

Although "The Principles" may seem complex to someone on their first encounter, at its heart, it is simplicity itself. All of the specific methods that we employ are based upon seeing certain fundamental truths, and the seeing of these truths is called *understanding*. Once these understandings have taken firm root in a player's mind, that player is equipped to embark on an endless journey, a journey of transformation of their life as a guitar player.

Many long time users of "The Principles" are living testimonies to this process. The difference between their guitar playing before "The Principles" and after is like the evolution of a helpless infant into a capable and functioning adult. They watch themselves go from a state of complete inability to get anywhere with the guitar to a position of firm confidence in their power to move anywhere they wish on the guitar playing continuum. They experience a complete transformation as guitarists; they have been empowered and the power is now inside them, theirs to nurture and increase. They have learned to align the power of their own minds with the truth of how the body learns, and thereby dominate the guitar and its possibilities.

At some point, users of the Principles realize that these truths have been sitting

there all along, waiting to be noticed and understood by anyone paying attention. They begin to realize that the attitude of mind by which they have now learned these things is the most important thing of all, and the most powerful. The power of Attention and Intention, the necessity for maintaining the complete openness to each moment of experience that we call "Beginners Mind", is seen as the key to their own process of growth.

Very often, a person who has reached this point begins to use these same inner powers in other areas of life endeavors and discover a greatly enhanced ability to learn anything. They realize that the same things that prevented insight and ability on guitar are preventing insight into life's other challenges as well. In the ten years since "The Principles" went worldwide, we have had many emails from students thanking us for that.

"The Principles" change your relationship to the whole thing you think is "playing the guitar". You will learn, over time, that it is nothing like what you thought. You will find that more is asked of you than has ever been asked before, and you will discover parts of yourself you did not know were there. If you meet the challenge, you will be transformed as a player, and very possibly as a person.

Endless Discovery

When this new relationship with the guitar has taken root and had time to grow, your guitar playing life will become very exciting because you will be in a constant state of discovery, change, and improvement. When "The Principles" are understood on a deep level and your entire relationship to playing and practicing guitar has been turned around, you are ready to make another discovery.

You are ready to realize that "The Principles" can never be learned; they can only be done. Learning is always in the past. The next truth you need to see is always sitting in front of you waiting to be recognized in the present moment. And so, the heart of my teaching is not merely a body of knowledge to be learned and a set of procedures to be performed in a generic fashion. It is rather an insight and an understanding that leads you not merely to a way of doing with the guitar, but ultimately to a way of "being with" the guitar. You will be with the guitar differently than ever before and that way of "being with" the guitar will constantly reveal your path of growth, and provide the power to travel it.

Getting to Now

"The Principles" is an open system, not a closed system. Every discovery you make will be the doorway to the next. "The Principles" is your guide on the path that leads from one door and through the next. As you travel from one doorway of insight and ability to another, you will often travel on paths that are unlike any you have seen before, and that is why you must practice *Beginners Mind*; otherwise, you will be looking for something you have seen before and miss the truth in front of you.

Long division is a closed system, you learn the rules, you apply them, and you solve any problem that can be solved by this set of rules applied to this set of relationships between numbers. When it comes to growth as a guitarist, we are primarily dealing with the process of becoming aware of our unawareness. In this process there is an infinite number of variables, and there is no set of finite rules by which it can be done. It can only be done by the introduction of something outside the system, and

that something is a part of your being that is outside the limited awareness from which your present limitations, or "problems" are arising. The power to bring about this expanded awareness is always determined by the intensity of involvement in your personal present moment, not in someone's rule which is by definition, a past artifact.

"The Principles" will teach you how to "be now" every time you are with the guitar. They will release you from your prior state of ignorance and inattention. They will release you in the mind as well as the body from the destructive forces that have taken over your relationship with the guitar. Movement will occur.

As you move along your path of development, everything you have learned up to the present moment you find yourself in will bring you to the jumping off point from which you can reach a new place. However, at the same time, you must be free of everything you know, and everything you think you know, in order to leave where you are and arrive somewhere new. Your next discovery, your next truth, is never in the past, it is always waiting for you now, if you can get to now. Whatever you are holding on to cannot be the ultimate truth, because truth cannot be caught, it cannot be held onto and made to stay in one place. If it could it would not be free, and if there is one thing every artist in search of truth knows it is that the truth is free. And it gives itself to who it will, to those it finds deserving.

It is not that one truth is replaced by another. Rather, it is that each truth realized previously is brought into a higher context; it is subsumed in a "higher truth". You now look down upon the lower truth and realize that it is still there and valid on its level, but now you see it in a larger set of relationships. That is because truth for a human being is an ever expanding, ever becoming Reality. It is a tapestry, and as you gather the threads, the picture is ever greater and clearer. The process of "realization" is the process of making it real for you personally, and bringing yourself into relationship with that greater vision. Then, your power increases.

Only by being completely in your now moment, with your complete self, can you be led to the new. And so, the now is the doorway to the new. Now is always new, and new is always exciting. That is how you know that you really "get it"; when your practice is like mine: exciting, moving 100 mph, always interesting and fulfilling. If it is not, you have not yet learned to be free.

The Method of No Method

In the final analysis, this is why "The Principles" are superior to every other method - -because it is not a method -- although it looks like one on the outside. When you have truly "gotten the point" you will realize that methods are stationary, methods are dead. Understanding and seeing the truth creates endless methods, and this understanding is the real prize.

"The Way To Do Is To Be" said the great sage Lao Tzu in his classic of wisdom the "Tao Teh Ching". When you fully grasp this method that is no method, when you're doing on the guitar proceeds from the intensity of your being with the guitar, you will be more than a guitarist, and more than a musician. You will be an artist; and you will truly be able to claim the guitar as your own.