

Awase is the newsletter of the Aikido Institute of Davis, a dojo where you can learn the arts of Aikido and Tai Chi.

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Please visit our website at AikidoDavis.com for information on membership & class times.



Relationships in the Dojo

By Hoa Newens, Sensei

The third rule of our dojo etiquette states: “Upon entering the dojo, focus your mind on training”. It means that one comes to the dojo to train, not for any other purposes. One should leave other activities and mental states outside the dojo. It also means that as we enter the dojo, we are only students and teachers and sempai and kohai. There are no husband and wife, father and son, boyfriend and girlfriend, attorneys, doctors, gardeners, professionals, unemployed, etc.

Inside the dojo, we are all training partners at various levels. We relate with each other as travelers along the path, each person leading the one behind and following the one ahead. The only goal is to move forward while helping others. Any other goal or incompatible activity would dilute the training focus and possibly cause injury - physical, mental or emotional.

When humans relate with each other they extend their energies to contact and mingle. This exchange of energy is predominantly physical if it involves mostly physical contact, intellectual if it involves mostly exchange of thoughts, emotional if it involves exchange of feelings, and spiritual if it involves exchange of more subtle energy.

Each of these four categories of relationship invokes a certain type of energy that has specific characteristics and manifests according to specific rules. The rules for intellectual energy are different from the rules for the emotional energy. One cannot use logic (a rule of the



intellectual energy) to solve a problem of the heart (which is dominated by emotional energy).

The famous 17th century French mathematician and theologian Blaise Pascal had pointed this out: "*Le cœur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point.*" (*The heart has its reasons, which reason cannot understand*).

To maximize the training benefit in the dojo, we need to distinguish these categories of relationship and use the proper one inside the dojo while checking all others at the door. To see which is relevant, we need to review our purpose in Aikido training.

Our training goal is *Takemusu Aiki*, a state in which our intent expresses the correct form of energy or movement to synchronize with the flow of the universe. The training begins with the body but the ultimate aim is to allow the individual intent to connect with the universal intent. This ultimate goal dictates that human relations in the dojo be based on spiritual interaction.

On the other hand, should the training goal be perceived as self-defense, which is the preservation of the physical self against all threats, then the predominant relationship in the dojo is necessarily physical.

For example, during training, a student aspiring toward *Takemusu Aiki* would treat her *uke* as a partner rather than an opponent because she understands that both are trying to reach the same goal; whereas a student learning self-defense would treat her *uke* as an opponent, someone that must be taken down or eliminated. A different relationship dictates a different technique resulting in a different outcome. Losing the spiritual focus of the training may increase the risk of injury.

In a more specific example, while performing *nikyo* on my training partner, if I remember my

spiritual goal I would use my partner's arm as a bridge to extend my energy toward her center and learn to pin her with that extension of energy. Should I forget this goal I will try my utmost to take her down by twisting the wrist until she succumbs to the pain.

Therefore physical self-defense is not an entirely relevant relationship during training in the dojo. There are other physical relationships which are entirely inappropriate for training in the dojo, such as those of a sensual nature or combative nature.

Now let's look at relationships based on intellectual energy. On the mat, do we train with a high school student differently than with a college professor? Do we treat a gardener differently than a physician? Do we care about the social standing, sexual preferences or political affiliations of our training partners? These factors are obviously not relevant and should not be allowed to have any bearing on our training. In this regard, most intellectual activity, including value judgment and comparison are not useful in the dojo context. Adherence to basic safety rules and reasonable social norms are sufficient use of the intellect in the dojo.

Then there are those relationships that are based on the heart. This is a bit trickier since emotional entanglements are more difficult to insulate from. For example, when a father trains with a son who is his *kohai*, would the father be able to keep their emotional relationship in check and apply the same discipline to his son that he would apply to another unrelated student? A similar difficulty arises when two students engage in romantic relationship. Their challenge is to keep the romance and all of its attendant intricacies out of the mat. Unchecked outpouring or even leakage of emotional feelings on the mat

is a major distraction during training and should be avoided at all costs.

Some schools and organizations realize the risk of romantic association and go as far as banning them altogether. There is no such ban in the dojo, but participants need to realize the additional challenge to the sempai-kohai relationship in the dojo.

Here we must distinguish the feeling associated with an emotion and the “feeling” that refers to the perception of an invisible energy, similar to “intuition”. For example, in *jyu-waza* (freestyle) we should “feel” the attacks and let the body respond spontaneously, instead of trying to understand the attack first then devise a corresponding response. This method of direct perception is an integral part of Aikido training, whereas the expression of emotion is not.

In the realm of emotional feeling, passion of any kind would detract from the training on the mat. This includes passion for Aikido, for training, for martial arts and for Japanese culture. A passion is a fire in the heart that fuels the activity of the body. This fire leads to extreme behavior and other imbalances which will harm the self and others.

During my immature years in training, I used to force the *uchideshi* and myself to execute a series of high falls early in the morning immediately upon waking up during *gasshuku* at the Oakland dojo. Now my body is paying for this extreme practice. In a later period of my life I advocated for training until one passes out by offering to pay tuition for whoever does. Well, I nearly passed out one night and may not be alive today if it were not for the two good *uchideshi* who took care of me and fed me water every few minutes. I have since then retracted that offer, and since then *uchideshi* have always made sure

that I remain hydrated after class. Clearly, passion has no place in Aikido training.

In summary, the only worthy and permissible relationship on the mat is that which links human beings at their spiritual core. Off the mat, in the dojo, minimum socialization and expression of emotion are allowed. These restrictions exist for a good reason; we need to be mindful of them to preserve the sacred purpose of the dojo – the place for the practice of the Way. Remember then, “upon entering the dojo, focus your mind on training”.

Musings at 2012 Tahoe Gasshuku

This Question Was Posed to the Participants at the 2012 Gasshuku:

“Which Aikido technique comes to mind and how has it affected your training?”

Ikkyo teaches me *ma-ai*, entering and blending. With the first, I learn to sculpt the emptiness; with the second, I learn to plunge fearlessly into the void that I created; and with the last, I fill that void with love.

Kotegaeshi, wrist turning, reminds me that sometimes, in order to blend with your uke, or partner, or co-worker, you must change that person’s direction for their own good and for the greater harmony.

Kokyuhō is one of the first techniques that we learn. But even though we practice it every day, it continues to surprise me and increase my desire to train.

Ikkyō. There are so many basic principles wrapped into this one technique, “the first teaching”, regardless of how many times I practice it, each fresh attempt is always a learning experience.

Kokyudōsa captures the peaceful, yet overwhelming power of Aikido in a seemingly simple blend.

Iriminage makes me appreciate Aikido because, whether it is an attack or a life situation you always want to access it quickly, welcome it, embrace it, blend with it to see the situation from another perspective, and by technique redirection it produces the outcome you desire.

Kotegaeshi; this technique makes me appreciate my hips movement to connect with my training partner.

Shomenuchi Yonkyō. I always apply Yonkyō with the thought of the first ken suburi: to use the kokyū as if the partner’s forearm was a bokken. This connection between Taijutsu and Bukiwaza reflects the way I try to connect the material and spiritual practices of the art with actions in daily life.

Ninindori. Let your partners lift you up then drop down and take them with you. Hans Goto, shihan of levity, shows me how to go with my partners’ attack.

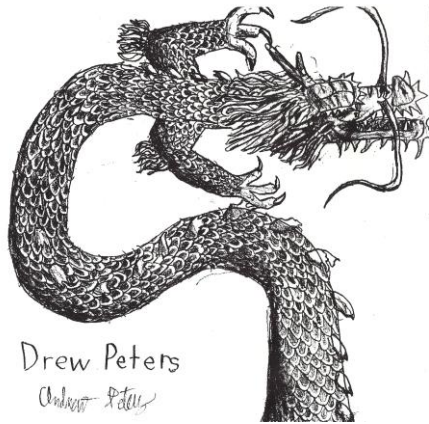
Katatedori Ikkyō. It shows me, the second I move to step off the line, if there is conflict or unity in my body, and if there is conflict or harmony between myself and my partner.

Kotegaeshi. It is simple, effective, rapid and deadly.

Sankyō. It was the first technique that I learned at the academy; it introduces me to Aikido.

Gasshuku Pictures





“Lining Up”

Essay Written for DAN Exam

By Bruce Donehower

One of the very first things we experience when we start Aikido is “lining up.” “Where do I sit?” This question arises for the beginner and sometimes also for an experienced student who visits an unfamiliar dojo. It is always a slight moment of comic relief for the old hands when a brand new white belt arrives and plunks himself or herself down at the very head of the line. Likewise there are often moments of social negotiation when a yudansha who is visiting the dojo tries to figure out where to sit in relation to the other yudanshas. For the very new beginner, there is yet another “lining up” process to be learned: how to line up in regard to the shomen. “Who are those old gentlemen in the pictures? Why do we bow to them?”

When I teach a beginner course at the dojo, I always take time at the very beginning of the course to explain the etiquette of “lining up” and the rationale for doing it. I tell the students that “lining up” in the dojo has (or should have) a

different meaning and connotation than it does in other areas of life. For example, most of us have memories of lining up for sports when we were kids. For some of us, this was fun and a validation of our social standing and peer acceptance. For others, this was hell. Students come with all sorts of backgrounds, so I try to level-set the expectation on day one. I tell them that while competence in technique and length of time in service is one rationale for rank order when we line up, there are other factors in Aikido that explain why we begin and end each Aikido class by arranging ourselves in a rank-order line that faces the shomen, and I’d like to explore this a bit in this short essay.

One of the best opportunities we have as instructors to carry forward the message of Aikido occurs briefly when we have the chance to introduce a brand new beginner to Aikido. This opportunity does not last very long. Those first few days of practice set a tone and expectation that can carry forward for the rest of one’s Aikido career, so when I have a chance to teach new students I always try to make the most of it. I typically take time to explain the transition from outer world to dojo and explain that stepping onto the mat involves more than just a pro forma bow. I explain that when we step onto the mat we transition from the world of ordinary everyday activities to a special environment sustained with care. In this special environment of the dojo, we practice certain rituals of etiquette in order to help us focus on the one thing we have come to do: Aikido. I explain that when we line up in rank order before the class we do so for two main reasons: to show respect and gratitude for the tradition we are practicing and to heighten our attentiveness. I also explain that while a brand new student sees many more experienced students on the right, he or she should keep in mind that there are also many other invisible students to the

left—these are students who haven't yet but will someday try the art of Aikido.

I then discuss the role of senior students and how we relate to one another in the ranking system. I start, however, by pointing to Osensei's picture above the shomen. After discussing Osensei's life and his dream for Aikido, I point out that when we bow to the shomen we do so in the manner of friendly greeting and respect for the gentleman who is responsible for giving Aikido to the world. Our interest in Aikido starts with him. For this reason we clap and bow to his portrait. Some students get confused on this point and wonder if clapping and bowing means we are worshipping an old man. I explain that in my opinion this is not the case; rather, we clap and bow to show gratitude to Osensei for bringing into the world an art that we enjoy. Some of us will practice for a short time; some of us may end up practicing for many years. However long that period of time might be, it is important to remember that without Osensei we wouldn't have Aikido.

Using this as a starting point, I then spend a little time discussing what it means in the larger sense to line up. I explain that while we respect Osensei as the founder of Aikido and acknowledge this at the beginning of the class, Osensei also stands in a line up, so to speak. By his own admission, Osensei saw Aikido as more than a martial art. Right or wrong, I tell the students, Osensei had big dreams for Aikido. I talk about those dreams and I explain that in his time and place Osensei was an iconoclast and spiritual revolutionary. I discuss how Osensei saw Aikido as a spiritual path. Rather than define what this means, however, I tell the students that they need to figure out through their own effort and initiative what they think Osensei meant. I tell them that they have this task of questioning as an obligation if they are in

the art. I say that no one can hand them a ready-made answer to a question such as this (and if someone does, they should be skeptical), but I also tell them that they have to know that this is a question they need to ask and to research. If Osensei put so much emphasis on Aikido as a path to reunite the human being with the spiritual world and dedicated his entire life to the proposition, then as students of Osensei we have a responsibility to take him seriously and try, each in his or her own way, to figure out what Osensei wanted us to do. So in a sense, when we line up and face the shomen and clap our hands and bow, we are acknowledging that we are lining up to figure out a mystery: who is Osensei and what does he want us to learn?

I then talk a little bit about lineage and its importance in Aikido and other traditions. Using the portrait of Osensei as the starting point, I explain that Osensei taught Saito Sensei, that Saito Sensei taught our Sensei, that our Sensei teaches us, and that this linkage of student to teacher is very important. I try to make the point that paying the dues to study Aikido is more than just a consumer-opportunity. When you decide to study Aikido you become part of a worldwide community. Although this community is very broad in terms of style and approaches to technique, it is united in its respect for Osensei, for the most part. I point out again that this act of "lining up" in respect to Osensei means that we acknowledge a common origin for the art we are trying to learn and that we share similar sincere questions about its origins. Without Osensei, I tell the students, none of us in the room right now would have met. Aikido is what we have in common. Osensei's Aikido brought us together.

In this respect, I offer them my opinion that Osensei has changed the world. Relationships have formed and will continue to arise due to

Osensei's influence and inspiration. In my opinion, we should acknowledge this when we line ourselves up; we should keep in mind our respectful dedication to attentive inquiry and try by that means to understand through the daily routine of practice who Osensei was and what he meant.

Essay Written for DAN Exam

By Kent Standley

Attack: the word itself bristles with sharp edged letters, evokes fear, a heightened pulse, excitement. It was, therefore, to my great astonishment on a peaceful winter day as the cognition of a real attack abruptly intruded into my mind a second or so before the physical attack began. While skiing someone came up along side me, placed their snowboard across my skis and tried to knock me down.

The physical attack, over and done in the time you could read this sentence, is not the purpose of this essay. Even though, I had always wondered what would happen in a real attack. Will Aikido really work? Will my anger at being attacked overpower my training? Will I needlessly hurt someone else?

My sempai have told me that "a true attack is telegraphed in advance." "An attacker losing his balance will always attempt to grab anything to regain his balance, especially a wrist." "A grab is a gift; it allows one to do Aikido." These and other quotes rushed into my mind in the aftermath as I carved in the powder down the mountain leaving my assailant behind.

"A true attack is telegraphed in advance."

Did he pass a distance threshold as he approached that clued me in? Was I able to detect his "energy" or intention? Did I detect pheromones, a chemical message, of the attack? I don't know the answer to those questions. But I reacted. My reaction was one of focusing on my stance, balance and posture. I did not panic; I remained relaxed.

"An attacker losing his balance will always attempt to grab anything to regain his balance, especially a wrist."

Though I did not realize it at the time, the attacker did grab my wrist. That was his connection to me to take my balance and knock me over. I did not contend with his grab but moved my hara in the same direction as the attack. My body moved as one integral unit. The movement of my hara led to an anticlockwise and downward movement of my hips. This led to a movement of the fingers of my hand in a circular movement. This was followed by my wrist passing through the same point as my fingers which led to my elbow following my wrist. This led to the rest of my arm moving into a clockwise movement at this time my hara was again leading the way with a clockwise and upward movement as well. The attacker's hand was holding my wrist this entire time. A short time after my wrist reached the apex and was heading down he let go. There was no resistance from his arm to my movement that I could feel. He just went along for the ride.

"A grab is a gift; it allows one to do Aikido."

The attack was a confidence builder for me; it assured me that Aikido works. This essay is about why it works. How does one remain relaxed when being attacked? How does one transform the fight or flight response to neither? How does one move first from the hara?

Aikido

Our training consists of deconstructing the ingrained habits passed down to us from our ancestors and constructing new habits that we will automatically follow when attacked. This is accomplished primarily by practicing suburi. When practicing tai-jutsu or bukiwaza with a partner my mind is overloaded with what I am doing as well as with my partner and I usually find myself reacting to the situation. Though I am not so overloaded now, as a beginner I was. With suburi I go at my own pace; without interference from the environment. This allows for relaxation to take place without the fear of an attack or attacker. Even though we call them training partners they still attack us and I have not, as yet, convinced my body completely that they are not attackers.

Suburi

Suburi seems like a repetitive practice performing a movement over and over and over. If one is aware and engaged in what is taking place there is no repetition. Each movement is unique. Hopefully, each movement improves upon the previous one with mindfulness towards a goal.

In mindful suburi practice the Aikidoist is practicing with intention toward achieving goals by focusing on a specific element of a suburi. Intention, of having your lower spine more vertical, for example, combined with awareness of the state of the spine allows for the feedback leading towards improved suburi.

Elements of suburi that were helpful in my defense are related to Shihan Kochi Tohei's basic four principles. The first of these is "Keep one point." This refers to the hara, a point about two inches below the navel. Keeping one point is to have your awareness of that center versus having your awareness from the center of the

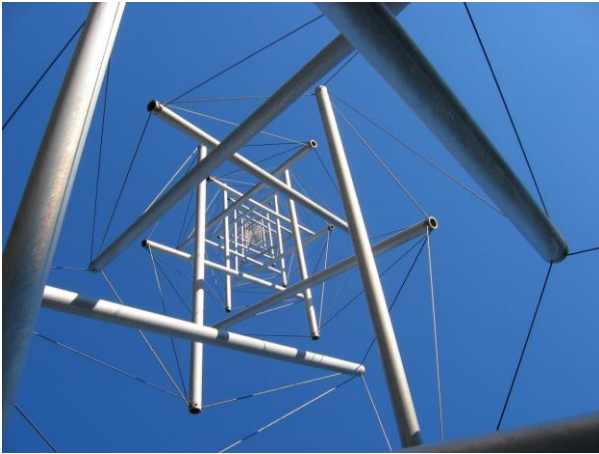
main sensory organs, your eyes and ears. Moving from up in your head, and ignoring the body causes uncoordinated top heavy movements and loss of balance. Initiating all movement from the hara and keeping your spine parallel with gravity helps maintain balance. This is closely related to Shihan Tohei's second principle of: "Keep Weight Underside."

The "Keeping Weight Underside" principle acknowledges that the body is over 90% water and not a pure solid. Parts of our body can move around in relationship to one another like a large tanker truck going down the road. The tanker truck has baffles that damp the motion of the fluid within the tank. By being aware of the internal parts of our body we can have damping baffles that keep our weight underside, and hence, more stable.

Third of Shihan Tohei's principles is "relax completely." This is frequently misunderstood as being limp. Complete relaxation cannot be described as purely just a muscular phenomenon; it is a mind and body experience. The mind must be relaxed as well. In complete relaxation we are in balance; the body has just enough tension in the muscles to hold the body upright and full. The bones of the skeleton are structural members in compression isolated in a cover of muscles and fascia under tension. This tensional integrity of the body is now called tensegrity thanks to Buckminster Fuller and his work on geodesic domes.

Fullness is the feeling you have when a roll is executed without collapsing or flat spots. This dichotomy between relaxation and fullness makes this principle difficult to understand and even harder to practice. Suburi is the key to resolving this dichotomy. During suburi practice we are not being attacked. We can focus internally on what is happening in our body. This would include mental processes as

well: your internal dialog. The more suburi, the more fatigue, the more intention toward less effort as we teach our bodies to move more efficiently. The more efficient, the more relaxed and full the body can be. The more internal awareness you have the easier this becomes.



Fullness leads into the fourth principle of “Extend Ki.” When ki is being extended it feels like a pressurized fire hose: every part and muscle fiber is being utilized and the whole body is working in concert. When we are stationary and our body is tense muscles are being utilized both directions to keep us in place. We are literally frozen in place until we relax our muscles and then start utilizing the correct muscles to move where our intention guides us. Extending ki requires your body to be in alignment which permits movement in an efficient, unified, and concentrated manner.

If it sounds like these four principles are very similar and overlap they do. They are four facets of one entity. Practice one principle correctly and the others are accomplished as well.

With so much to think about internally, there was no room in my mind for conflict, or anger. Aikido is indeed a unique martial art; for what

came out of this attack was not a fight, but this essay.

And nobody got hurt.

(Photo Credit: “Image of Needle Tower II”

From the book: *Forces Made Visible*: Kenneth Snelson)

Essay Written for DAN Exam

By Martin Dubcovsky

The learning modality that has been most prized in my education, and which is prevalent throughout the western world, has been one of analytic reasoning. This style of learning focuses on logical deconstruction of arguments in order to discover flaws in the basic assumptions or the logical flow of an argument. Under this model, students are expected to be critical of their teachers, and challenge the teachers understanding of the material. This type of learning values reasoning and deduction skills above memorization and repetition.

However, in Aikido, this mode of learning is not that useful, especially not in the beginning. The primary learning modality in Aikido is one of unquestioning trust and repetition. As a new student begins with no domain knowledge, he has to place absolute trust in sensei, and, to a lesser extent, in the instructors and sempai. A student is expected to watch carefully, and emulate the forms that are presented.

Understanding the internal energy work underlying the forms, or the ultimate teachings embedded in the forms is not too important: Aikido is not a mental exercise. Full and earnest repetition is all that is required for proper practice and progress in the art.

This learning modality based on trust and repetition is not something that comes easily to me and to many others who are used to relying on analytic reasoning. But most of the objections that are raised by students are really misconceptions about the learning process.

The reasoning analytic student worries that copy and repetition never lead to deeper understanding. This first misconception stems from the assumption that the goal of trust-learning is the production of a carbon-copy of sensei. This is not the case. The training process is intended to give students a proper image to hold in their mind while they do the "hard" practice of meticulous repetition. The goal is not to replicate the image itself. The "goal" is the personal discovery that a serious practitioner will make throughout his practice. The ultimate result is a genuine, and unique relationship to the art.

Another worry from the western mind is that an approach emphasizing repetition will take much longer than analytic thinking. The objection is that with prior understanding of the internal energetic processes, that the repetition would not be necessary. The assumption behind this idea is that an understanding of the internal workings could be reached quicker through some process other than the physical practice, and that the body could then be connected to this understanding as a trivial second step. This requires two trips: from the physical to the divine, and from the divine back into the body. Even if the trip from the manifest to the divine could be easily accomplished, for example through prayer, the return trip to the profane is known to be difficult. This must be true from the inefficiency of prayer at manifesting miracles.

Repetitive practice established first the physical form. Continued practice refines the details of the form until the form is no longer varying and

is essentially dead. Advanced practice from this point forward can focus on studying the flow of energy through the now static form. This deliberate process works from the manifest towards the divine in such a way that the ending result is a bridge that connects the two, and exists in all places at once.

The process is similar to signal processing. The first step in signal processing is to study the background noise, build as detailed a model as possible, and then subtract that noise from the observed signal so that the signal of interest can be better observed. The better the background model, the less it will interfere with the observation of the signal. In Aikido the background noise comes from the tiny variations in our physical form. Continuous refinement of the details of the form exposes more and more of the underlying energy patterns and enables further study in the art.

From this perspective, repetitive practices, specially those with few variations, such as ken suburi or standing meditation, form the twenty (or thirty) year *shortcut* to understanding the processes underlying Aikido.

The third typical objection to trust based learning modality, is against faith itself. It is hard to abandon reasoning and in its stead, give over entirely to the guidance of sensei. This is a very valid concern. A teacher who receives this kind of absolute trust from his students is given a tremendous amount of power, and is in a dangerous position to abuse that power. A good teacher must take every care to never violate that trust, and ensure an environment that fosters trust. Measures that can be taken by a teacher include: joining a larger association, establishing a predetermined code of etiquette (so that everyone understands their rights as well as the responsibilities), and requiring all instructors to undergo certification courses. Beyond upholding

the student's trust, the role of the teacher of Aikido is fairly limited. As discussed earlier, it is the student who is largely responsible for his own progression in the art. At most, ten percent of student progression can be credited to the teachers and instructors. As stated previously, the teacher's role is to provide the best possible model for the student to begin their study from. But it is the student who must do the work of continuous and repetitive practice to discover what the model can reveal.

This then is my work as a student of Aikido. First to clear my mind: remove doubt, abandon criticism, and forego competition. This reduces the interference of my busy mind, so that I can work on the body. Next to clear my body: to master the form until its variations are no longer a distraction. With the form dead, I can begin my work on the energetic, without the noise from the body. The final step would be to still the energy flows until nothing remains.

At this point in my Aikido career I am in the process of forging the physical body, with sporadic glimpses into the energetic work that lies ahead.



Saito Hitohiro Sensei Seminar Reno, March 23-25, 2012

By Martin Dubcovsky

I have not yet taken the opportunity to train in Iwama, so this seminar hosted by Reno Aikido was my closest contact with that world. And the big surprise to me was how familiar it felt. Certainly there were a number of differences in how techniques were presented, and what aspects of training were highlighted. But in all it felt like home, and I treasured the opportunity to train with many new partners

Saito Hitohiro sensei himself is a wondrous treasure. He was by turns passionate, attentive, stern, demanding, and funny. He has a lifetime of training insights to share and more importantly he brings the spirit of Iwama with him. Everyone should endeavour to train with him at least once, or better yet make arrangements to train in Iwama.

To no surprise the focus of the weekend was on basics. Basic grabs. Basic techniques. Basic training. Saito sensei emphasized the connections between open hand, and weapon practices. Another principle that came up repeatedly was blending.

"打つからないうでください" he repeated on multiple occasions.

"Please don't run into your partner!"



Seminar at Aikido Westchester

By Kori Farrell

On April 13th, Sensei and I left Davis and flew to New York State. We were met at the LaGuardia airport by Jordan, a cheerful and talkative member of Aikido Westchester. He gave us a talking tour of New York as we drove the hour north into Whiteplains, where we were greeted at the dojo by Steve Kanney Sensei and his students.

As some may know, Aikido Westchester has recently made the shift to the Iwama style of training, and is in the process of adopting a new curriculum. Sensei was invited to teach the weekend seminar and preside over two shodan exams.

Friday evening, Sensei taught the general class, and emphasized the importance of clear, concise movements, and clean ukemi. We worked on nikyō, and kokyūnage from katate dori. Aviv Goldsmith Sensei had flown in from Virginia for

the weekend, and I enjoyed the chance to train with him in a setting less crowded than the Tahoe Gasshuku.

On Saturday morning, Sensei taught techniques from morote dori and katate dori. He demonstrated that when practicing yawarakai waza, the intensity and focus should be the same as when practicing kihon waza. Now the body moves in a more fluid and relaxed manner, but the feeling and intent should remain unchanged. We worked on posture, centerline, extension, and moving from the hips.

Before lunchtime, the dan exams commenced. There were two shodan candidates, and they tested at the same time, which was something I had never seen before. Both bowed in with their ukes, and spread out to different spots on the mat. Then Steve Kanney Sensei called the exam, and both candidates demonstrated the same techniques at once.

Both candidates passed their exams. I could see that it was challenging for them to have trained in a particular style of Aikido for most of their training years, and then have to adjust to a different set of curriculum and rank requirements not long before they were scheduled to take their shodan exams. Regardless of this, both of them (and the whole dojo for that matter) had wonderful training spirits—I appreciated seeing their dojo full of people supporting one another.

After lunch we moved outside, where Sensei led a final weapons class and taught the first five jo suburi, a short jo awase practice, and the 31-jo kata in detail. I think the most valuable thing to me about the weekend was seeing Sensei teach in a different context than I am used to. Here in Davis, most of us are familiar with the TAA curriculum and the Iwama style of training. In a sense, we understand the language. At Aikido

Westchester, most students are used to a different way of training—a different dialect, so to speak—and Sensei adapted his teaching to accommodate this. He has said before that the key to teaching is to be able to reach out and meet students wherever they are in their training, and show them the way to the next level. It was clear after the weekend that he had inspired and invigorated the whole dojo.

One unifying thing he said at the end of the final class struck me: It is as though in your training you are climbing a mountain. Each style of Aikido is a different path that leads to the top. You have to find the path that is best for you, and you may choose to change to a different path somewhere along the way. Each time you change your path, you must walk horizontally across the mountainside for a while before you can continue to move up toward the peak. The more times you change your path, the longer it may take to get there, but that is okay. All the paths eventually lead to the same place. We are all climbing the same mountain.

That evening there was a potluck party and slideshow to celebrate the exams. The dojo presented Sensei with a gift of thanks, and everyone relaxed after the long day. I could tell that Sensei's visit was very meaningful to Steve Kanney Sensei and his students... and now it is looking like we may be making another trip out there in the fall!



“To Study Aikido is to Study Many Things”

By Bruce Donehower

At a recent seminar, the instructor made the point that the study of Aikido techniques is an endless path. He told us that at the end of his life Osensei was reported to have said that he felt he was beginning Aikido. The instructor encouraged us to maintain an open mind and to constantly re-examine techniques from many perspectives but always in light of Osensei's instruction that the goal of Aikido practice is to establish harmony with one's partner and one's environment.

I'd like to add to this a personal perspective that I have found helpful. It is a perspective that I have adopted from the Tao Te Ching. I will paraphrase it: “In order to expand; contract. In order to contract; expand.” Or, as I sometimes

like to say when I teach: “You need to know when to zig and when to zag.”

What do I mean by this?

It’s been my experience that the quickest way forward is often not what first appears to be the most direct route. When I began Aikido I was overwhelmed with enthusiasm and filled with the joy of discovery and practice. Everyone who gets hooked by Aikido has this experience. Aikido began to follow me everywhere; I thought about it all the time. While I never lost this enthusiasm, as time went on I began to recognize that I needed to “sleep and breathe.”

Let me tell a story. It’s a well known Zen koan that goes like this:

One day a person accomplished in the practice of Zen came upon a monk sitting in zazen (meditation). The fellow asked the monk: what are you doing! The monk said: I am practicing zazen! The fellow observed the monk for a while and then asked: Why? The monk replied: to become enlightened! The annoying fellow then picked up an old discarded piece of tile and began to rub it furiously. The monk attempted to maintain one-point equanimity, but after a while he had to ask: what are you doing? The annoying fellow said: I am polishing this tile! The monk asked: How come? Answer: To make it a jewel! The monk then asked: how can you polish an old piece of tile and make it a jewel? The annoying fellow replied: how can you get enlightened by sitting zazen?

Like all Zen stories, this one is somewhat circular. However, if we remember the Taoist advice to zig and zag, we might find it useful.

There is a certain inscrutable logic to our development that may appear ill-logical to common sense but which nevertheless we need to abide.

“To study Aikido means to study many things.” By this I’ve come to understand that many things contribute in mysterious ways to my Aikido. I didn’t see this when I started. I thought I needed to just polish the pebble. But as time went on, I began to notice that things that seemingly were not connected to my time on the mat did indeed somehow contribute to progress. I found that I needed to make time for these “distractions.” In a mysterious way, these zigs and zags contributed to the overall mix. It was kind of like gardening, in which there are seasons when nothing appears to be going on and the best thing one can do is take a nap. Or it’s kind of like discovering the solution to an artistic problem by not focusing on the problem but allowing yourself to relax and play with the medium – with no apparent goal or intention. Just for fun.

So cast a wide net, and don’t forget to sleep and breathe!



A Path I Could Walk

By Kori Farrell

There are things I need in order to feel whole as I live each day...

The feeling of dirt between my fingers, for example. Or the weight and texture of a handful of seeds, ready for planting...

The smell of damp forest duff after a spring rain, or the sun warming cool morning rocks and soil.

The sense of wonder that rises while watching red-winged blackbirds chase scavenging ravens from a nest, or spotting a praying mantis swaying slowly up the stem of a flowering bean plant in the garden.

The hum of worker bees in the air, as I squat quietly amidst rows of summer vegetables to examine the first squash forming on the vine.

The clear presence of mountains, ocean, and sky,

And the familiar changing of seasons, as the sun falls closer to the horizon, the trees lose their leaves to the wind, and in the waning light, all living things collectively turn toward winter.

These are the sorts of things that show me how to be in the world, that remind me of my senses and the moment I'm living,

They reveal to me that I am a part of something more vast than my self.

O'Sensei was a farmer and an acute observer of nature. When I discovered that Aikido arose from the life of someone who worked the soil, fed his family and students from the earth, and found wisdom and beauty in the natural world, I was reassured...

that Aikido offered a path I could walk.



GATEWAY TO AIKIDO

A new introductory “Beginners’ Class” starts soon!

This eight-week special introductory class is designed for new students who want to sample what Aikido has to offer. Check dojo website for details.

A note about the newsletter: The AWASE newsletter is currently published twice a year in spring and fall, approximately. (Oops, I guess this is a summer issue!) All submissions are welcome! Very little editing is done. Authors should take care to edit, copyedit, proofread, and make their own stylistic corrections prior to submission; however, formatting mistakes are generally the unfortunate goofs of your editor, who may be confused from time to time. If I have made any mistakes in the presentation of your submission, I greatly apologize! Thank you for submitting to AWASE.

Many thanks to Guy Michelier for the photographs in this issue and for the generous donation of a laptop computer and printer to the dojo!

Dragon Drawing by Andrew Peters

Reminder: Please let Sensei know if and when you will miss classes for an extended period of time.

Dues are due at the beginning of the month and help keep the dojo running. Please pay on time or use automatic payments from your bank. Thanks!



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