

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

Please visit our website at [www.aikidoDavis.com](http://www.aikidoDavis.com) for information on membership & class times.



## Try Hard, Then Let Go

*Hoa Newens Sensei*

I have explained this principle at various times in Chi Kung classes. Trying too hard makes it harder to get the result that we want. When the intended result is relaxation in a certain part of the body, trying hard to relax will most likely not get us to the desired state. Doubling our effort will drive us further from the wanted end. It's like trying to fall asleep; or trying to solve a tough algebra problem. Slumber often comes on its own terms and the algebraic solution usually appears after we give up raking our brain.

Then what is the value of hard work? Am I not supposed to “do my best, share and persevere in my practice”, as prescribed in the Dojo motto? To understand this contradiction we need to understand the process of trying or making an effort. Stage 1: our mind is attracted to an object and creates a desire. Stage 2: when the desire increases we intentionally hold the image of the object in our mind for a prolonged period. Stage 3: there comes a point when we want it bad enough to muster the will to take action to get it. Stage 4: when the desire dominates our consciousness, we intensify our effort until we either give up or obtain the object. On the surface, this process makes sense and should lead to success. Yet, often times it leads to failure.

What might be the element that throws a monkey wrench into this apparent path to success? To find the answer we need to view the Individual as a holistic composition of Spirit, Mind, Intent, Energy and Body. In this hierarchical grouping, Mind is the post-natal personification of Spirit and acts on its behalf to command the other elements below it. (The part of Mind that is most relevant to

our discussion is the Ego, but we will continue to use the term Mind to avoid any parallel with the field of psychology).

Of these five elements, Mind is the most unstable, being most vulnerable to external stimuli and easily stirred up. It is this vulnerability and instability of Mind that causes it to attach to external objects (tangible or intangible). It is this attachment that gives rise to a desire (Stage 1). When the external stimulus continues and the mind succumbs to it, it begins to pull in Intent and direct it to take action to satisfy the desire (Stage 2). Once Intent is involved, it summons Energy and brings to bear other resources to generate the necessary Body movement toward acquiring the desired object (Stage 3).

All is well, until a strange phenomenon occurs. Due to imperfect communication between Intent, Energy and Body, the first action is often off target. The restless Mind returns soon and chastises Intent for the lack of result. It directs Intent to intensify effort and often, hijacks its authority and begins to micro-manage Energy and Body. Whereas Intent has a direct link to Spirit, Mind does not, since it came into being after the birth of the Individual. Therefore, when Mind commands Energy and Body to double their effort (Stage 4), it tends to disconnect from Spirit. At this stage, due to its preoccupation with the object of desire, Mind is most likely not in tune with Spirit, and thus is unable to bring to bear other powerful resources of the Spirit realm. This isolation of the autocratic Mind in turn causes isolation of the Individual action. The withholding of Spirit's omnipotent support usually leads to failure.

The above analysis points out interference by Mind as the cause of failure. Preventing this interference, specifically after the desire has arisen, seems to be the way to increase our chance of success. (Obviously, getting rid of Mind altogether would eliminate all desires and solve

most our problems; but this is not the theme of this essay).

The secret of successful effort seems to be that, once the Mind has decided on an object of desire, it should step out of the way and allow Intent do its work. Mind should sit on the bench and patiently wait for the results.

This is not to say that Mind has no role in the eventual success. It is Mind that initiates the first mental image of the desire; and it is Mind's responsibility to keep that image alive by refreshing it periodically to help sustain Intent's focus.

Most people are thwarted by two difficulties: the first, is to know when Intent is sufficiently engaged so that they can relax the grip of Mind; the second, is to have faith in the effectiveness of Intent working by itself, unsupervised by Mind. A partial solution would be to sustain the initial mental effort and ramp it up as needed to engage Intent then let go when we reach an impasse. This method works for many people. It is how they discover solutions to their most difficult problems. However, we can train ourselves to engage Intent at will.

In *Kyudo*, the archer takes aim at the target, focuses Intent on it briefly then releases the arrow, with no concern for the result. If he takes too much time and effort to focus on the target, Mind will interfere with thoughts and worries that weaken Intent and cause the arrow to miss its target.

Similarly, in many traditional oriental arts and philosophies, the state of no mind (*Mushin*) is emphasized.

In our daily life, once we have set our mind on an object or a goal we need to take only two more steps to ensure success: sketch out a plan in broad strokes to engage Intent, and reconfirm the goal at intervals to help Intent stay on course. Other than that, no detailed rigid plan is needed, no continuous checking is required, no worries are needed, and no stress is required.

In Chi Kung practice, when we want to relax a certain part of the body, we just need to feel that part of the body with the intent to let go of any tension thereat.

In Aikido practice, when we want to execute a technique correctly, we need have a clear image of the correct technique in our mind then engage the body in replicating the image without much concern about what how the execution went. If it turns out to be incorrect, we adjust the image then let the body print it out again without need for self-judgment.

Eventually, we learn to engage Intent directly and instantaneously with our Heart rather than going through the roundabout way of the Mind. This is the subject of another discussion since we have not yet introduced the Heart. For now, it is sufficient to remember to engage seriously in any endeavor and not be too serious about achieving results.



*Aiki bloom. Picture by Martin Dubcovsky*

## Whittled and Sandpapered

*Elise Bauer*

*"We are not on this earth to accumulate victories, things, and experiences, but to be whittled and sandpapered until what's left is who we truly are."  
- Arianna Huffington*

I think what first drew me to Aikido was purely intellectual—a flier describing it as a martial art dedicated to peace and the resolution of conflict. Sounded good. Who doesn't want peace and conflict resolution? But what kept me coming after the first class wasn't anything I could intellectualize. My body wanted me there. My heart knew that it was good for me. If anything I found aikido rather scary; for the first couple of months, if a technique called for rolling I would just sit out and watch. But there seemed to be some invisible force compelling me to class each time. Regardless of what happened during the class, when I left the gym, our dojo, I felt at peace, and all the small and large annoyances in my life at that time seemed to just fade away.

Do you ever have those moments of perfect alignment within your heart and mind? There's a clarity of purpose, an ease of action. What to the outside world may seem difficult, to you it just flows. That for me was Aikido, when I first started training in earnest in the mid 1980s. At some point in my early twenties I realized that Aikido was something I would be doing for the rest of my life. There was no decision involved. It was just the path that was there, like the Yellow Brick Road, beckoning me forward.

For the first several years, the path was clear. I spent most of my twenties doing aikido. I trained with Doran Sensei at Stanford and Aikido West, and with Doran, Nadeau, and Witt Senseis at the Turk Street dojo in San Francisco. After graduate school I traveled to Kyoto, Japan, and trained with the Kyoto University Aikido Club for almost one

year, where I received my shodan in 1989. Then training became more difficult to do. I got injured. My career kept me busy and traveling. I had no interest in testing further, after years of school and intensive aikido training, I wanted a social life and I had work to do. I still trained, but only a few times a month, instead of five days a week. Several years later I got sick, very sick. My training was down to a few times a year, if that.

So, what is it about this path? O'Sensei tells us, "True budo is a work of love. It is not killing or fighting; it is a work of creation and growth which gives life to and nurtures all things. Love is the guardian deity of everything. Nothing can exist without it. Aikido is the expression of love."

For a couple of years I couldn't train at all. I could barely walk fifty yards without running out of breath. Every doctor I consulted told me the same



*Elise disarms Toby during her nidan exam.  
Picture by Guy Michelier*

thing—avoid all stress, and any activity that might make me tired. My world became very small. I did sitting and standing Chi Kung meditation twice a week for four years.

I didn't think I could ever do Aikido again.

I learned to let go of everything, to surrender. How I saw myself, my identity, I had to let that go. The things I thought were important—my competence, my vitality, my success, my health—gone.

At first I struggled and resisted with this state of affairs, but that took too much energy. This new path, the only path left, was acceptance.

I found that quiet place inside from which springs compassion and serenity.

Surrounded by my family, I learned love. When everything was stripped away, that was what was left. Love, and a deep appreciation for being alive every moment.

Slowly I started to get better; it took several years. Now I'm fifty two years old and I'm taking my nidan test in Aikido. I'm deeply grateful for our sensei, for my training partners, and for the gift of the universe that is letting my body do this practice once again.

I started this essay with a quote by Arianna Huffington, "*to be whittled and sandpapered until what's left is who we truly are.*" I love this quote. Now that I'm older, I get it. Aikido, like life, polishes us. Every day we bring our selves and our worlds to the mat, and every training is an opportunity to let go of ego, let go of opinion, anger, emotion, let go of everything that isn't essential, of everything that isn't love.



April 20, 2013 - Seminar with Hans Goto.  
Picture by Guy Michelier

## Nidan Essay

Kathleen Holder

For many people who have just a casual acquaintance with martial arts, a black belt signifies an “expert.” In fact, my *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines “black belt” in just this way:

- A black belt worn by an expert in judo, karate, and other martial arts.
- A person qualified to wear this.

Maybe that’s why, when I earned my shodan rank, I felt a bit the impostor. Certainly, passing the test requires a certain proficiency in a certain set of techniques, but I hardly considered myself expert at them. At that point, I’d been practicing aikido about four years. At my slow and (mostly) steady rate of training, those techniques still seemed to me almost like clothes I was trying on—much like the new belt that I was breaking in and the hakama that I was still learning to tie. In my perception, my knowledge of aikido seemed not yet even skin deep. I remember thinking at the time, now that that the stress of the dan exam was behind me, I could go back and *really* learn those techniques.

That was nearly three years ago. As I prepare for my nidan exam, I find myself assessing whether I did that. My answer? Yes and no.

After attending another 160 or so more classes, my understanding of the core techniques has deepened. Indeed, the feeling for me is almost one of absorption—that aikido has gotten under my skin and that knowledge sunken a little deeper within my being. Continued practice has affected my very center of gravity, my *hara*, and improved my sense of balance and ability to “roll with it”—both physically and emotionally. But at the same time, I have no illusion of mastery. I still struggle to recall techniques, even ones that I practiced just a few nights before. There are always new things to learn and forever room to improve on what I thought I sort of knew. It’s a lot like the biological process of osmosis—I need to steep in a high concentration of aikido practice before some of it seeps through. At my slow and (mostly) steady rate of steeping, it could take a long time to reach equilibrium between the aikido that I am taught and the aikido that I can perform.



Kathleen demonstrates kumi-jo with Martin  
Picture by Guy Michelier

Sensei has described the shodan rank as a beginning, and I believe that now more than ever before. Not long after I got my black belt, I started an essay about my test and what comes next. In

writing this essay, I went back to reread what I had written in 2010. In part, I had said, “This is starting to look like a whole new ballgame.” But that’s where I trailed off; I was unsure how to follow up on that thought. I had little idea where the journey was taking me, other than back to the mat. And almost immediately, my lessons on the mat began to surprise me—in small, but crucial steps. I was seeing new details about techniques, making new adjustments in how I executed them. Was Sensei teaching them in a new way or had I just not noticed? Had I not been ready to see these points before?

Being placed in the position of teaching some junior classes, and being a training partner for kohai after class, also have helped me deepen my knowledge. Showing someone else how to do a technique requires not only that I know how to do it myself, but also that I can break it down into teachable steps and can identify where mistakes are being made to help the kohai improve. At the same time, in learning techniques required for my promotion, I have gained a new appreciation for the teachers who developed our aikido curriculum. They are the true masters. For instance, I had never spent much time before considering the value of learning kaeshiwaza, or reversals. I don’t consider aikido a competitive sport. In practicing, we work *with* our partners, rather than trying to best or defeat them. I can imagine instances where kaeshiwaza could be useful in self-defense, though I hope I never have to confirm their efficacy in a real-life attack. In my earlier introductions to kaeshiwaza, the techniques wowed me, but held little meaning for my practice at that time. I don’t think that I was ready to learn them. I needed to do many more repetitions of ikkyo, nikyo, sankyo and the other basics first. But lately, kaeshiwaza counters have been opening my eyes and teaching me more about the dynamic of those core techniques — almost as if I’m learning them from the underside or inside-out. I still don’t view myself as expert. I’m still at the start of my black-belt journey. I’m looking forward to

discovering where it will take me next.



*Nishi-Honganji, Kyoto. Picture by Andrea Wagner*

## The Best Place to Learn Martial Arts

*Erica Frederickson*

Natalie wiped the chlorine out of her eyes. Over the ruckus of the splashing and laughing, she heard Coach Dubcovsky yelling over the rails of the wheelchair ramp, just next to the stairs of the lockers.

“Come on, Natalie! One more lap! The pool’s yours!” he encouraged. Her timer was ticking, but she faltered in a stroke somehow and lost her breathing pattern. Seconds passed on her record timer to go to the championships. She took a deep breath and dove under, then cocked her head to breathe as her arm scooped up fresh water. Natalie’s legs kicked swiftly behind her and she propelled forward. Then would be the same routine, practicing for championships the day after, the day after that, and the day after that, and then the day after that.

If only I could have one more sport to keep my mind off of just swimming one-hundred percent of

the time, she thought to herself. She reached the pool's edge and swam freestyle back.

After practice, she grabbed her towel and wiped the chemicals out of her eyes. Constantly, she kept on reminding herself how she had to get another hobby. Competitive swimming does have to be attended to every day of the week, other than the weekends. Gymnastics? Probably not. Track? Maybe in junior high. Soccer? Basketball? Been there, done that.

...Martial arts???

She raced to the locker rooms, took a rinse, and dried herself off to get changed. Head Coach Holder walked in. She blow dried her hair after her swim. "Great job today!" she complimented. Natalie smiled, but was too excited to say thank-you. She nearly forgot her flip-flops as she sped down the wheelchair ramp. Martial arts sounded fun. But where could she go?



*Flower at Walker Creek.  
Picture by Serena Shimada*

She biked home, speeding so fast that the wind blew her chocolate hair almost clean off her head. Immediately after, she got on the laptop and researched all the martial art classes in Davis.

Baciarini's, the Karate school, her friend Torrey went there. That would be fun! She liked the description of the average classes, but continued to search.

Ooh! Davis Judo Club! That seemed like fun, but she still eagerly scrolled down the list on Google. Her eyes widened. She snatched up the laptop, too excited to be aware that she had accidentally yanked the plug from the wall. She sprinted down the hallway and into her room.

Aikido!

It took no convincing. "You're really busy, but this looks like fun. I think it suits you," Natalie's mom said the next day. I jumped up and down and gave her a huge hug.

"Thankyouthankyouthankyouthankyou!!! This will be so much fun!"

"But," her mother began, "you begin today. Are you sure you're up for it?"

"You bet I am!" And just like that, she got driven down to Cantrill Drive. The drive there was twenty billion hours long, so it seemed. She could hardly sit still. Her mother told her that she looked like a blur when she bolted into the room, bowing and everything.

"Woooooaaahh," she sighed in awe. The mat looked squishy, and the different rolls and wooden stick fighting seemed so amazing. There was a really pretty decoration on a wooden ledge with a logo. Weaponry lined up and down the walls. A car tire sat in the corner. Something really caught her eye, though. Someone got flipped on the mat, but it looked so beautiful and majestic, not brutal and painful. Something that she really noticed was who was flipping her. Coach Dubcovsky, with Head Coach Holder in midair.

She ran up to the mat and waved ecstatically. Natalie couldn't believe it! She didn't want to

interrupt their glorious little technique, so she just stood there all jumpy-like.

Coach Holder noticed Natalie and came up with Coach Dubcovsky. “Wow! What brings you here, Natalie?” She asked.

“I wanted a sport to keep me busy and happy. Aikido was awesome sounding to me!” Coach Dubcovsky came off the mat, bowing first. “What a coincidence!” he smiled. “Well, now you’ll just call us Martin and Kathleen sempai .” Huh, funny. I never even knew my swimming coaches first names.

Class began and it was a blast! Stretching, yoga, fitness and so many awesome things! It all bolted by like only two minutes had passed. Natalie knew for a fact that she would go again on Wednesday!

*My encouragement for you is to find someone you know and tell them about Aikido Institute Davis today. It is the number one place to ever learn martial arts! Go Aikido! WOOT!!!*

## Yurt Raising

*Elias Marvinney*

One fine weekend in April, Toby and Kori and a community of their friends and relatives gathered together in Bonny Doon to raise a yurt. Rachel and I packed up our musical instruments and a cooler full of treats and drove down from Davis to join the party. As those of you familiar with the area know, the setting could not be more vibrant. There is something indefinable about this part of the coast, off highway 101 north of Santa Cruz. The primeval splendor of the redwoods combined with the bracing sea air, various cabins and farms, and plentiful wildlife make a perfect backdrop for a yurt. Although incomplete – when we arrived only the platform and frame were standing – it already

looked like it was just where it belonged. That afternoon we leveled the truck-damaged lawn and searched the meadow for patches of native oatgrass to transplant – a mini restoration project.

Of course, Toby and Kori had already put in weeks and weeks of work on the site, clearing and leveling the ground and building the foundation platform. The yurt had just arrived, mail order from Colorado, and many hands were needed for raising the frame and stretching the covers. The cover had to be lifted through the central skylight



*Gathering the crew. Picture by Elias Marvinney*



*The happy yurt-going couple. This must be at about the point of 30% completion, but after all it was a labor of love. Picture by Elias Marvinney*

and unfolded in a precise manner, as did the insulation and weatherproof outer cover. We all gathered round the yurt and dragged the covers to and fro under Kori and Toby's watchful eyes from the apex of the yurt. After a few tugs to and fro, everything was perfectly in place and the covers were locked on.

The afternoons work was followed, of course, by an extravagant potluck dinner featuring a wide variety of delectable dishes. We built a fire and spent the evening having a few beers and making music under the stars. Melanie regaled the group with some really excellent Moroccan fiddle, although everyone's performance contributions were quite well received, most especially an impromptu rendition of "Happy Yurt-day". Many of the gang slept in the yurt to give it a test run – seemed to work just fine, even before being completely finished. The next morning was started with oatmeal and Lorrie's fantastic scones. Most of the difficult positioning work with the insulation and outer cover were accomplished Sunday afternoon, as was the placement of the skylight. Since then, Toby and Kori have been working hard at turning their yurt into a home, with some exciting furnishing developments upcoming. We are all anxiously awaiting the yurt-warming party!

## Studentship

*Martin Dubcovsky*

It feels wrong to tell people that I *do* Aikido. I prefer to say that I am *studying* Aikido. This fits a bit better since studying is a process. I ingest new information – from reading, listening, watching, training, etc – and in doing so am changed in some way.

This wording also feels insufficient. Aikido is not just techniques, Aikido is a process I am involved

in. Which is just another way to say that Aikido is a path I am on. Aikido is the path of aiki, so perhaps what I should say to people is that am in aiki. But I digress.

I am a student of my sensei. I am a student of O'Sensei, and Saito Sensei. I am a student of my sempai. I am a student of my kohai.

But what does it mean to me to be a student? How is it different to study (aikido) than to *do* something?

As a student, how do I relate to my teachers, other students, and my study?

As a student, how do I study, when do I study, and what do I choose to study?

What do I do that supports my study?

What do I do that does not support my study?

And perhaps ultimately, why am I studying?

Sometimes we have the chance to choose our teachers. We can choose to dedicate ourselves to someone whom we respect, and who in turn respects us. Other times, we do not get that choice.

Every day, teaching moments arise and many times we dismiss the lessons simply because we do not like the teacher. Sometimes we reject a potential teacher because we do not like what he is teaching. Other times we reject them because we do not like them personally, or consider them beneath us. And sometimes we reject them because we are too entrenched in the belief that we already know what we are doing, and that we are already doing it right.

When we begin our Aikido training, we know very little or nothing at all. Everyone in the dojo is sempai. And in comparison to our uncoordinated flailing, they are consummate masters. There is no question they should instruct us, and this makes

everything very simple. We look, we listen, we learn. In the beginning, we absorb all the lessons without the filter of prior training.

As we continue on in our training, the techniques become more comfortable, and the motions more natural to our bodies. With this comfort, often comes the idea that we know what we are doing. And that is when we are most in danger of losing our practice.

It is important to avoid becoming stuck in our training. We must always be refining our aikido. The way to do this is to train with everyone with an open mind and without engaging in contest. Just as we accept instruction from our sempai, so must we listen to our kohai. We must accept that regardless how far along we are on the aiki path, that our understanding is incomplete and imperfect. This should help us foster our humility, and prepare us to receive teachings from all of our training partners, regardless of their rank, skill level, or our personal opinions of them.

While the immensity of what Aikido has to offer is humbling, it is also inspiring. At least for me it is incredibly motivating to know that there is always more to learn. That continued practice will be constantly rewarded by new teachings; that there is no true end to the aiki path. Even so, a loosely defined goal of “learning Aikido” should be enough of a destination to set our feet walking in the right direction.

After that, it is up to each of us to persevere in our practice. To work hard, and share our knowledge and our errors with other students. To train with a sense of urgency and not idle. To practice slowly, deliberately, with the full intent of reaching a destination which we know is unreachable.

## **What is a Belt?**

*Donny Shiu*

It is something that holds your pants up. In martial arts, it has other uses and meanings also. It can be used to hold your uniform together in practice, as a weapon, as a tool, and etc. Aside from its physical functions, a belt may represent rank order.

Many martial arts have adopted the colored belt system to represent rank since its introduction by Dr. Jigoro Kano, founder of judo. Some styles use sashes, certificates, or whatever symbolic recognition the instructor chooses to use or not. Although the use of colored belts to represent ranks is common, the standards are not universal. They vary across the martial arts world, even within one style. Colored belt/ranking system is supposed to represent a certain level of competency of skill, knowledge and character in the art for which it was earned. Establishing uniformed standards is very useful; unfortunately, these standards do vary greatly. This can be illustrated by the comparison between Bruce Lee who didn't wear one to an eight year old wearing a black belt (tied incorrectly BTW). In spite of the limitations of belt/ranks systems, we can still gain benefits from their proper uses.

Many of us students of martial arts know that there is no “secret sauce” and no “Dragon Scroll” except hard work and study the teachings of the instructor. Proper respect should be given to rank. In training, kyu and dan ranks can guide students progressively through a structured body of knowledge, a.k.a. curriculum. Ranks represent standardization of skills, knowledge, maturity, and other qualities deemed qualified for a particular rank (in the dojo, the organization, the style), a.k.a. quality control. Rank order systems can provide effectiveness, efficiency and safety during training, a.k.a. appropriate lessons and training partners.

The ranking system is best seen as road marker for



*Feb 23, 2013 Donny, Kori, and Remy receive their black belts from Sensei. Picture by Guy Michelier*

the practice and study of martial arts. It points the students in the direction of proper training and code of conduct. It should challenge and motivate.

To me getting promoted in rank is the beginning of the next chapter. It is my responsibility to maintain a high standard and character worthy of the rank bestowed upon me. It is a simply matter of respect to my instructor, fellow students and myself.

A belt in martial arts can mean whatever you what it to mean, ranging from a piece of cloth that holds your pants up to a false sense of invincibility (ego). I subscribe to neither. It is only as good as the person who is wearing it. The Dragon Scroll in the movie “Kung Fu Panda” was empty except

it showed Po his own reflection. Your belt or rank is a reflection of you. The belt cannot train for you; it cannot perform for you. To paraphrase Royce Gracie, a belt covers 2 inches of my butts and I have to cover the rest myself.

## **Shodan and Hakama**

*Remy Cordier*

After passing my first dan test, I received a black belt from Sensei and the right to wear the hakama in the next session.

In my old dojo in France, we were able to wear a blue hakama starting at 3<sup>rd</sup> Kyu, and usually

Shodan was able to wear a black hakama.

I was curious about these discrepancies of customs between dojo, so I decided to research on the history of the hakama and found some interesting facts. First there are many sorts of hakama that are worn for different occasions, but I will focus mainly on the standard Aikido hakama.

Historically, the hakama is a traditional wear of samurai, and the *gi* we put on during practice was considered as underclothes. The hakama's original intent was to protect horseman and act as leather chaps, but since leather was rare and expensive in Japan, most samurai wore heavy clothing chaps, and kept that tradition when they stopped riding their horses.

In addition, the hakama has seven pleats, two on the back and five on the fronts. The seven pleats represent the seven virtues of Bushido.

The first pleat is called *Yuki* and represents courage, valor and bravery.

The second pleat is called *Jin* and represents humanity, charity, benevolence.

The third pleat is *Gi* and represents Justice, righteousness, integrity.

The fourth pleat, *Rei*, represents etiquette, courtesy, civility and also obeisance.

The fifth, *Makoto*, represents sincerity, honesty and reality.

The sixth, *Chugi* represents loyalty, fidelity and devotion.

The last pleat, *Meiyo* represents honor, credit, glory, reputation, dignity and prestige.

The hakama should be a reminder of the Bushido virtues we each strive to polish during our practice.

Finally, when should a student of Aikido start wearing a hakama varies greatly based on O'Sensei and historical notion. Apparently O'Sensei wanted all students to wear a hakama during practice without regards to rank. Remember that

the notion of practicing with a *gi* was considered as if you were practicing in your underclothes and not fitting properly the notion of *Rei* or etiquette.

However, after WWII there was a shortage of many commodities including hakama and it was suggested that only shodan be able to wear the hakama as a temporary solution. That notion stuck in many dojo. In other dojo, female students continued to wear the hakama before men can wear theirs due to the concept of modesty.

For me it has been a lot easier as a beginner to practice without a hakama. I was able to better view the position of my legs and body for each technique and it's a lot more obvious to correct. Now that I know a little more about the origin of the hakama and its meaning, I still need to get accustomed in putting it on and folding it....

## Happenings in the Dojo

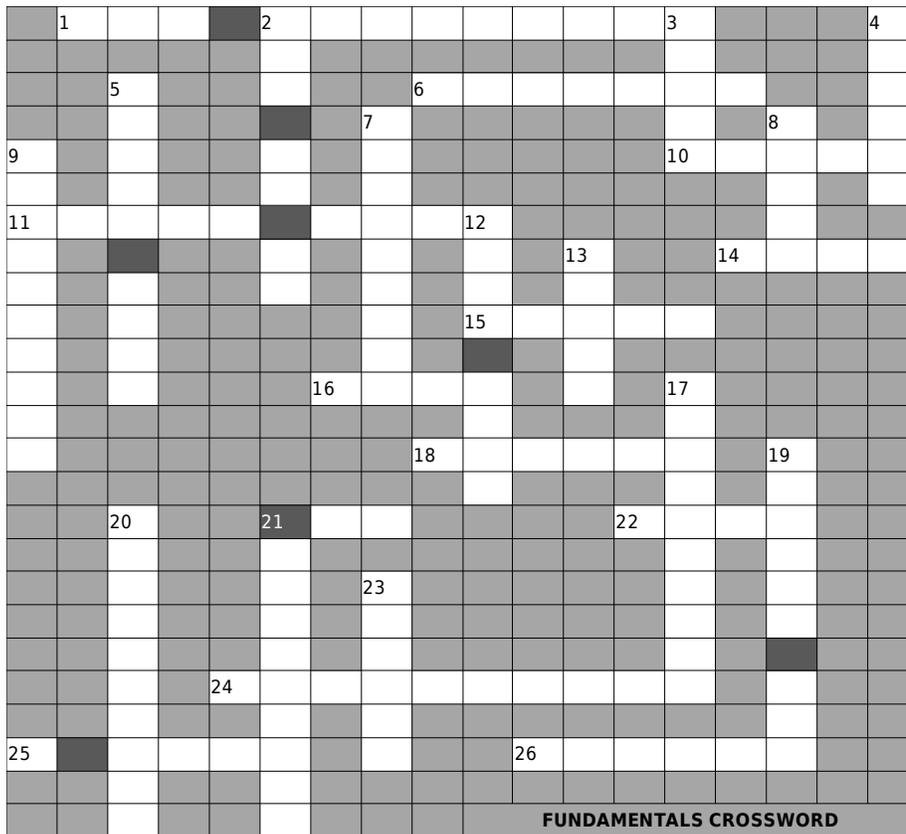
*Clelia Clark*

I wake in the morning to find my eyes glued shut, my sinuses cemented, and my head foggy. This can only mean one thing...allergy season is upon us. As I stumble out of bed and zombie walk, arms outstretched, towards the cabinet that holds my antihistamines, I ask myself, "Where did the time go?" It feels like only yesterday that we were celebrating the first day of 2013 and bundling up against the January chill, and suddenly I find myself being punched in the face by pollen and May sunshine

These last four months have been busy in the dojo. Our family is dynamic one, constantly learning, growing, and achieving. In February, Remy, Donny, and Kori tested for the rank of Shodan. Everyone enjoyed an excellent seminar of jodori and tachidori taught by Sensei, and after sweating

### Crossword

Jan Ng



FUNDAMENTALS CROSSWORD

- 24. First jo suburi
- 25. Energy center in the belly, in Japanese
- 26. Senior student

**DOWN**

- 2. The first vow of our dojo motto, elaborated as: "I will always look, listen, and learn"
- 3. The art of falling (and not missing the ground)
- 4. Footwork, where the body turns as the back foot is drawn around to remain as the back foot
- 5. Two hands grabbing one arm
- 7. Stop-start approach to practicing techniques
- 8. Our traditional standing stance, from which we start and where we end most techniques
- 9. Kneeling breath technique typically practiced at the end of class
- 12. "One two three", in Japanese

**ACROSS**

- 1. Please, in Japanese. Said while bowing at the beginning class and when requesting to train with someone.
- 6. The founder of Aikido.
- 10. The rural location in Japan where the head of our lineage, Saito Sensei, lived and trained with the founder of Aikido for many years
- 11. Mirror-image one-handed wrist grab. (not a cross-hand grab)
- 14. Shout used to focus and extend one's energy, named by the Japanese characters for "universal energy" and "harmony"
- 15. First pinning technique.
- 16. The "harmonious distance" between partners.
- 18. Third pinning technique.
- 21. The "Way", in Chinese philosophies
- 22. The part of one's uniform that is thought to contain knowledge

- 13. Second pinning technique.
- 17. An overhead strike where the blade of one's hand is aimed at a partner's forehead
- 19. A throw from an outward wrist twist
- 20. A Tai Chi and Chi Kung movement that integrates turning from the center with concerted, circular hand motions, as though flowing through and shaping the air
- 21. First partnered exercise at the start of every Aikido class.
- 23. Walking on one's knees

**Fun Fact:**

To find out Sensei's favorite ice cream flavor take the dark shaded letters and read them out from the top down.

1 2 11 5 12 21 19 25 !

off some of their nerves they all passed their Shodan exams with flying colors, trading their well-worn white belts for hakamas. What they didn't know is that the real test was to see if they could put on their hakamas and roll around during their first class without face planting. I'm proud to say that they handled themselves with relative grace, although there may have been a few close calls and a couple of faces which clearly said, "I don't usually roll that way, but my toe got stuck in my hakama so I had to get creative".

In April, we watched two of our very own lovely ladies, Kathleen and Elise, complete their exams for the rank of Nidan. Hans Goto Sensei set the mood with a lively taijutsu seminar, after which we all settled into position on the sides of the mat to watch the exams. With the calling out of each technique, we watched both Elise and Kathleen demonstrate their knowledge of the art and its forms, but also their ability to perform each task with balance, poise, and elegance.



*Hans Goto Sensei showing ryotedori iriminage to Lisa Adda. Picture by Guy Michelier*

To summarize these achievements with "passing their exams" hardly does the event justice. All five of these students spent countless hours on the mat before and after class locking in their techniques and perfecting their footwork. All five of these students brought the dojo closer as a community, banding the students together as a support network, and also uniting us as they

celebrated a milestone for themselves and for the dojo. And, if they're anything like me, all five of these students lost a decent amount of sleep, hair, and sanity in the weeks leading up to the test as they repeatedly asked themselves, "Are you really ready for this?"

The preparation and the journey that these students undertook cannot be overstated. They each have lives, jobs, and families that continue on regardless of what happens in the dojo. When it comes to test taking, I often think it would be nice to have a sit down talk with The World and make sure everyone is on the same page. "You there!" we could say to The World, with a winning smile. "Do me a favor! I have this really gargantuan and incredibly important exam coming up. It's going to be pretty darn difficult, and I'd really appreciate it if you could be on board with making it as smooth as possible. You know, just tell everyone that normally needs things from me that I'll be taking extra time every day to train, make sure there are no family emergencies, and make sure there aren't any particularly stressful events that come up in the meantime. Thanks, World! I owe you one!"

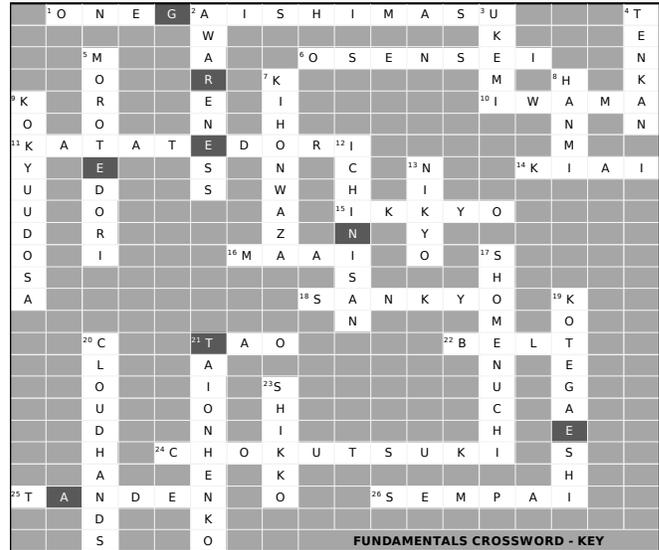
Alas, The World doesn't work that way. Each student balanced their practice with all of their commitments and found a way to excel in their training during class as well as on testing day. In taking and passing their exams, they demonstrated their dedication to the art and their dedication to the dojo. If I were the kind of person who wore hats, I would take mine off to all of you. Congratulations!

## Standing Still

*Kori Farrell*

Each morning I begin to build  
 Through the day I work  
 When evening comes, I dissolve back to nothing  
 and in this place of solitude  
 I find peace  
 in creation and destruction  
 in evolving and de-evolving  
 in motion and stillness  
 Life, death, being,  
 and not.  
 The chaos that was and is the universe  
 is bearable  
 even, wonderful  
 When I find stillness inside.

## Crossword answers:



**Fun Fact Answer: Green Tea**

## Upcoming Events:

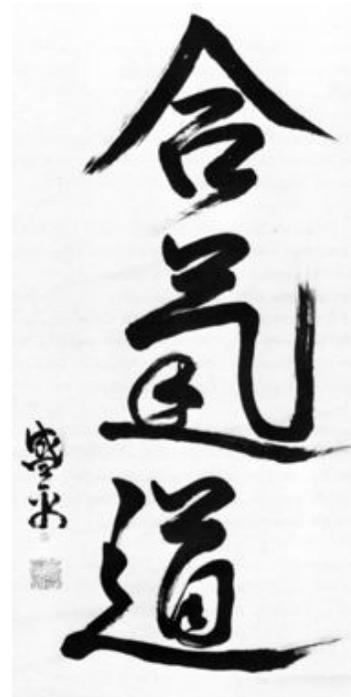
**TAA Memorial Day Weekend Gasshuku in Lake Tahoe** May 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>. This annual event is a must for all serious students. If you go to one seminar each year, this is the one. With an incredible selection of top instructors and a chance to train with aikidoka from around the world, this is a can't miss event. If you can go, make sure to register at [www.gashuku.net](http://www.gashuku.net) soon!

**Uchideshi bows out.** Martin Dubcovsky will be bowing out as deshi at the completion of his deshi program on July 14<sup>th</sup>.

## Promotions

Congratulations to the following students for their recent promotions:

Elise Bauer	2 <sup>nd</sup> Dan
Kathleen Holder	2 <sup>nd</sup> Dan
Remy Cordier	1 <sup>st</sup> Dan
Donny Shiu	1 <sup>st</sup> Dan
Kori Farrell	1 <sup>st</sup> Dan
Evan Recanzone	7 <sup>th</sup> Kyu
Drew Peters	8 <sup>th</sup> Kyu
Lucas Peters	8 <sup>th</sup> Kyu
Hunter Summer	8 <sup>th</sup> Kyu
Serena Shimada	8 <sup>th</sup> Kyu



## Reminders:

**Free Trial Classes:** The first week of each month, the basics class offered Tuesday and Thursday 6-6:50pm is free to prospective students. Come give it a try!

**Dues:** Since February 2013, membership dues collected after the first of the month will be considered late, and subject to a penalty fee.

Please consider using automatic bill payment services offered at most banks to schedule a check to be mailed before the end of each month.

Help us keep the dojo open and in good condition by paying on time!

**Absences:** If you are planning to be gone from the dojo for an extended period of time, please inform Sensei.

We worry about you when we suddenly stop seeing you!

**Note from the editor: All formatting, spelling and grammatical errors are unintended and the sole responsibility of the editor—My apologies!**  
-Martin