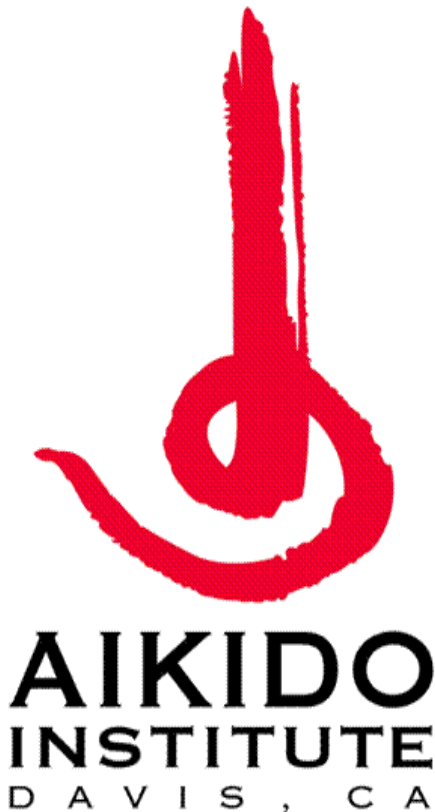


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How to Practice Suburi by Hoa Newens Sensei

Suburi (素振り), is a Japanese term which refers to the repetitive practice swings in sports (golf) or strikes in martial arts (kendo).

In my earlier writings I have established the fact that regular practice of suburi strengthens basic skills in Aikido. Now I will explain how to practice suburi correctly.

Since suburi is part of Aikido *bukiwaza* (weapon techniques), let us first review the various levels of bukiwaza to put suburi practice in perspective.

There are generally four levels of bukiwaza training. At the beginning level, the student's main goal is to learn the physical form, including how to hold the weapon so that it becomes an extension of the body and how the different parts of the body move in relation to each other to optimize alignment. Suburi practice is the training focus at this level. The correct way to practice is at low speed, with no power and with emphasis on the general accuracy of the form.

Next, at the intermediate level, the student's learning goal is to make the movement more effective by injecting some speed and power and adding target practice. For this purpose the student practices at moderate speed, and learns how to move from the hips and use *kokyu* (breath power; focused extension of ki). A partner will serve as the target, sometime stationary, sometime moving; thus, timing becomes an important aspect of practice at this stage. Suburi practice is still a mainstay.

At the advanced level of bukiwaza, the student further refines the form to capture the energetic footprint and begins to use intent to direct the form. To these ends the practice should be at

slow speed with meticulous attention to the detail of the form and to the direction of energy. Suburi practice is still done regularly in the background. The practice also includes resistance training to elicit the use of intent in creating and directing the *ki* (life force). In paired practice, the focus is on receiving the *uke*'s (training partner) energy and neutralizing it.

Ultimately, after decades of assiduous practice, the student will reach a point at which handling the weapon feels like handling a bar of energy and much of the practice can be done at the mental-feeling level, with or without an *uke*, including suburi.

Suburi is a core practice throughout these four levels. I elaborate below on suburi practice at the advanced level of bukiwaza.

Advanced Suburi Practice

Five phases of movement can be discerned in any suburi: beginning stance; collecting; discharging; grounding; and ending stance.

1. Beginning stance. We often refer to this stance as *kamae* (stance). This is an important and integral part of the suburi which is often neglected. In the beginning stance one should check the proper horizontal alignment of body and weapon, and the vertical alignment of the body with the centerline. The centerline is the line that goes from the center point between the two feet, through the *tanden* (center of energy in the abdomen) and the crown of the head. After this check, one should hold the stance for about five seconds, in full alertness, and feel the readiness to move in any direction, at any speed and power. This state of mind is called *zanshin*. This should be done with minimum tension. One should feel like a cat ready to jump on its prey or an eagle poised to fight with a cobra.

2. Collecting. In this phase the body gathers energy by either opening (stretching) or closing (compressing) the joints. For example, in *katate toma uchi* (the 12th jo suburi) this is done by drawing the jo with the right hand a few inches

past the left ear while the left hand is keeping the other end of the jo in front. The feeling is similar to that of pulling a bow. In a different example, the collecting phase occurs in the compression of the hips when one prepares for a *tsuki* (straight forward thrust) with a ken. This is similar to crouching to prepare for a jump.

To optimize this phase, it is important to position the body parts to create maximum tension (through either extension or compression) while aiming at the target, and while retaining the integrity of body. In *katate toma uchi*, this means keeping the left side of the body anchored in the front while pulling the right side to the rear to the max. It is important to not overdo this movement because one could lose focus of the target in the front, or impair balance or centerline. It should be noted that maximum leverage is achieved when the right hand is holding the jo at the tip and is positioned no further than five or six inches behind the head.

During the drawing of the jo, one should feel the tension as if pulling on a string of a bow. Although there is no physical resistance the student should feel the mental exertion during the move. This is the secret to using intent to gather the *ki*.

3. Discharging. In this phase the body releases the tension/energy that was collected earlier to propel the weapon toward the target. Here it is important to make sure that the weapon path is continually aimed at the target and that the body is continually supporting the weapon. Should the target move, causing a displacement of the point of impact, the weapon and the entire body should move accordingly.

In suburi practice, although there is no impact, one should time the release such that the payload is preserved during motion and maximum energy is released at the impact. To this end the weapon should be aligned such that the released energy is delivered to the target with minimum leakage. In *katate toma uchi*, this means not releasing the jo too early so that some of the

energy is dispersed toward the right, while the target is located in the front.

During the forward move, the student should feel as if hitting a target at every point along the way, similar to hitting a series of standing targets in one move. In other words, although the physical resistance may not exist, the student should feel the exertion as if moving against strong headwinds. This is how we use intent to extend ki.

The extension of energy should be sustained beyond the point of impact, real or imagined. That is, although the impact may cause the weapon to deviate from its course, stop or break, the energy should continue to penetrate the target, guided by the intent of the student. This is a crucial understanding for effective suburi practice: the extension of ki continues although the weapon has physically stopped.

4. Grounding or return. This is an important phase that is often glossed over. After the discharge, the weapon needs to be brought back under the control of the user and recharged. This is accomplished by retrieving any residual energy after the impact and bringing it to the centerline to ground it so that it helps to reinforce the stance instead of destabilizing it. In most instances, this grounding is physically effected by bringing the centerline back to the center of the stance and by either slightly sinking the hips or tilting the forward hips downward. This grounding begins from the tanden then spreads through the arms and hands, and brings the weapon to a halt. If grounding does not occur, physical balance will be jeopardized by the momentum of the discharge.

In katate toma uchi, immediately after the jo hits the target (imagined or real), close the forward joints (right shoulder, arm and hip) and sink them slightly to absorb the returning energy and direct it to the centerline and downward into the ground. This should feel like the jo is attached to the centerline via a retractable cord; the cord winds the weapon back and stores the potential energy for the next extension.

5. Ending stance. At the end of the return movement the student should maintain the ending posture for about five seconds, in a state of zanshin, to allow the excess energy to completely drain downward and the body to restore its centerline. At the end of this phase the student should feel ready to move again, in any direction.

These are the five phases of a suburi movement that allows the student to put into practice the four principles of bukiwaza – which are stated below for reference.

Bukiwaza principles:

No. 1 – Hold the weapon as if it is an extension of the body

No. 2 – Align the body with the weapon and the target

No. 3 – Move from the hips, that is, use the centerline

No. 4 – Use intent to extend ki through the weapon and through the target

The approach explained above is effective irrespective of the type of weapon. It works even without the weapon, since the weapon is regarded only as an extension of the body. The hand can be the weapon, as in karate. It is in fact how *kata* (pre-arranged forms) should be performed. I suspect that it will work for sports too to a large extent.

The practice described in this essay is an advanced practice that is appropriate for students ranked *nidan* (black belt 2nd degree) and above or those who have practiced bukiwaza for at least seven years. Advanced students who drill at this level of detail will be able to transcend the form and realize the essence of suburi practice. They will then understand that continuous suburi practice is an essential condition for the refinement of Aikido training.

Live Forever by Chris Neilson

Do you want to live forever? We all age and we all eventually meet our maker or are delivered where ever your beliefs take you. I often wondered about the fountain of youth, that magical elixir for immortality. Was there a way or a power that enables us to live beyond our years? What about the life after? How can that be the answer when you must first die to get it? These questions are impossible and a waist of everyone's time. Having said that, I know the secret, finally, to what has been passed down in my family for generations. I know the secret of living forever.

GREAT GRANDPA CLARENCE

I was eight years old in July of 1978 and my family was celebrating this countries birthday. I loved the Fourth of July, sparklers, snakes, all of the fireworks we used to play with, and I loved my Great Grandpa Clarence. He was tall, at least he seemed tall to me, and he was a very soft spoken man. I remember sitting with him but we didn't talk much. We didn't have to. I loved him and I knew he loved me. Sometime during the celebration, as we were playing a game with marbles on a wood board he had made with his own hands; I asked him a question I should have known better than to ask an old man. I said, "Grandpa, when are you going to die?" I know what you all must be thinking, how rude, right? I agree; how rude a question it was. Grandpa Clarence didn't mind though. He looked at me and then out across the dirt lot where the other kids were playing tag around an old wood shed where Clarence had made that marble game. He seemed to take his time answering my question, but then looked at me and simply said, "I'm gonna live forever." I smiled, looked at the other kids, and then ran out to play with them.

A few months later, school started and I was in the third grade. It was the beginning of the year

and I didn't know too many kids. I was in class when I was pulled out by my mother. She walked me down the stairs and out of the building toward the parking lot where the old school had once stood. When I asked where we were going, she said Grandpa Clarence had died. My body went numb and my mind went blank. I couldn't even cry. I started to think of the last time we had talked, when he had said to me, "I'm gonna live forever." I remember thinking, "Did he lie to me or did he make a mistake?" This was the first time I had been old enough to try and process the whole idea of death. I was nine; I had just had a birthday.

GRANDPA FRED

I was in my early twenties, I was living on my own, and I had my whole life before me. I could do almost anything, I could go anywhere, and I knew I controlled my heart's desire. I was sitting at home doing nothing, as usual, when the phone rang. It was my mom. She told me that if I wanted to see Grandpa Fred, that I had better come to the hospital right away. Grandpa Fred had been fighting cancer for the last decade and he was winning, or so I thought.

Grandpa Fred was one of those people that everyone seemed to like. He was a people person and, I think, he would have done well in public office. He loved talking to people and would often be invited to have dinner or to stay in the houses of people he had just met.

When I arrived at the hospital, I saw a broken man that I almost couldn't bear to look at. He was writhing in pain and struggling to breathe. His lungs had filled with water. The doctor emptied his lungs and gave him some medicine for the pain. Finally, hours later, he was calm, comfortable, and able to talk. He told me he was pretty sick. I nodded my head but I already knew he was pretty bad. I knew that Death was coming and I wanted something, some final words to remember. So in my typical, less than tactful, manner, I asked him, "How much longer do you think you have?" I know, I should have learned years before not to ask rookie questions

like that. Grandpa Fred didn't seem fazed by the question. He looked across the cold, sterile, hospital room and with a warped smile looked at me and said, "Well, I'm going to live forever. Didn't you know that?" I looked at his chin because I couldn't stand to look into his eyes and responded, "Okay."

The next day, I went to the hospital, to his room, and found it empty. I asked the nurse at the counter where he had been moved to. She looked at me, but didn't say anything. I don't think she knew how to say it. Grandpa Fred was gone. Nobody from my family had called. Grandpa's "forever" turned out to be pretty short.

DAD

I was in my mid-thirties. I was married now, with a child and another about to be born. I had a mortgage. I was about to change my career to law enforcement. I had just finished my second degree. Everything was great and I was very happy. I was at the hospital; my wife had just gone through thirty hours of labor only to have a C-section child birth. Her blood pressure had dropped to about 15 and for a moment, while I was holding our new born son, I was worried I would lose my love. The doctor quickly solved the problem and in no time she was resting in the recovery room. Still, I had that lingering question about how long she would be with me.

At some point I was sitting with my father. We were talking about the boys and I asked that same question. I know what you're thinking, but you might as well get used to it. It seems I don't have any sensitivity and will ask these questions regardless. I said to my father, "So, how long do you think you'll live?" He responded with a question, "Why do you want to know?" I said, "I don't know?" After a few minutes, he said, "Forever." I said, "What?" He said, "The answer to your question is forever." When I asked him what he meant by forever, he said, "I'll live forever because you're my son, and if you live right, you'll live forever too." I didn't ask him any more about that.

ME

Through the years, I have often thought about Great Grandpa Clarence, Grandpa Fred, my dad, and what they all said to me. Clearly, nobody can live forever. At the same time I wondered what each of them meant. I could ask my dad but perhaps, finally, I may have enough thoughtfulness not to.

The way I understand it is the little pieces and memories of them make me who I am. I am tall and soft spoken like Great Grandpa Clarence. I seem to have a knack for talking to people like my Grandpa Fred. When I think about how different my dad and I are, I run into the fact that we're more alike than different. My boys are growing up and acting like me, and now and again I see bits and pieces of my dad, Grandpa Fred, and even Great Grandpa Clarence in them. Everyone I touch, everybody I'm connected to, and all of my children allow me to live forever. I think I finally understand.

THE BOYS

I was talking to my boys a while ago. True to form, I asked them, "So, how old do you think you'll live to be?" My oldest son shrugged his shoulders and said, "Ahi-on't-kno." He then asked me, "How long are you going to live?" Without hesitation, I responded, "Forever," and I truly believe it.

AIKIDO

This article was intended to give perspective on legacy. Morihei Ueshiba has clearly cut a path and Morihiro Saito has given exceptional direction. However, others are required to walk the path otherwise it will be lost. There must always be a few who finish the journey, but for many of us knowing where to start and that others continue is enough.

Many of you may not remember or even know me. I am not a great Aikido master or even a black belt. My rank is 5th kyu and I claim no profound knowledge and have not any exceptional skills. I do love the idea of Aikido and would like to commend each and every

person who continues to learn and teach the peaceful methods. As long as there are people who believe, then Aikido, Osensei, the idea, and all of the others within will live “forever.”

Learning How to Stand by Clelia Clark

In the last year, I feel that I have finally started learning how to stand.

This might seem like a silly thing to say - we stand all the time! We stand to watch the demonstration of techniques in class, we stand in a line as we wait our turn to wash the mats at the end of the night, and we stand before and after bowing to our training partners. Overall, we seem to spend a good deal of time standing. So how could it be that I am just finally learning how to do something I seemingly have been doing for several years now?

Until fairly recently, I took standing in Aikido to be kind of like the spaces in between words in an essay. You couldn't write an essay without them, but they weren't an integral part of the message or meaning of the piece. Reading was focused on the words, and spaces were rushed through in order to get to the next meaningful phrase. For much of my training, still moments we just lag time in between movements, and it was the motions of the techniques that were of real importance. The moments when I remained still seemed hardly important, and I was focused on the next movement, the next technique.

In fact, techniques in general were defined by their movement; where I needed to turn, where to move my center, where to move my feet and hands. But in the last year or so, I have had a chance to redefine my technique and have gained a greater respect for the art of standing.

In the past, standing was simpler than moving, as it merely implied the lack of movement. In

my current training, standing has evolved to an important part of training as well as technique.

When I stand, I am no longer waiting for the next “thing to do”. In fact, it's quite the opposite. In my last year of training, I have learned that in the act of standing still, we should already be “doing” quite a few things. Our body is energized and aligned properly, weight balanced evenly. We must be prepared to move in all directions, or to stand steady and hold our ground. Because we must be prepared for the unexpected, our muscles must already be relaxed before we decide to move. To remain tense slows your body's reaction time as you must first relax the muscles before you commit to movement.

In my techniques, I found that stance determined much of how well I completed a throw or pin. I felt the most confident and comfortable when I began and completed my techniques with proper stance, and in fact the throws and pins came easier when carried my body properly and checked my feet and my balance. Realizing the importance of my stance gave me a firm starting and ending point, like guidelines. Begin here, relaxed and prepared, before you engage with uke. At the end, maintain connection with your partner and still remain in complete control of your own body, and again be prepared for further engagement.

As I further began to appreciate the elements of standing still, I saw that stance could not be limited to the times when we were not moving. Stance was present in all elements and times in Aikido, even in the middle of a technique. Moving at high velocity made having proper stance more difficult, but not impossible. The body should remain energized, aligned, and ready to change course at all times. This is not to say that we should not commit to our movements, because without committing to movements it would be difficult if not impossible to train in Aikido. But we must always remain ready and balanced, with strong stance, within those movements.

I am personally just learning how to stand. I often forget its importance and fall back on jumping from motion to motion, or get caught up in the more eye catching movements of Aikido. It is often easier to focus on the movement rather than to slow down and learn how to stand properly, but in my future training, I hope to improve my execution and skill in the art of standing.



Upaya: “Skillful Means” by Marion Donehower

Although I had some practice in meditation, I never had experienced meditating days on end in large groups. When this opportunity arose recently this autumn, I was excited and a bit nervous. This October Bruce and I went to a six-day retreat at Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe. The retreat was led by Stephen and Martine Batchelor. I have admired their work, but I never had seen them in person. While I was excited to see them, I also was worried about sitting so long. Finally, however, my curiosity had the upper hand, and when I came to Upaya I was instantly happy and relaxed. I found myself in a super beautiful place with lots of great people, great food, and the brilliant fall colors of the aspen trees. I relaxed even a bit more when I

entered the zendo. Lots of people sat in chairs, others sat on cushions in seiza or lotus position. Instantly I was remembering the story of Suzuki Roshi when he saw Aikido. He said that Aikido is moving Zen. This insight of Suzuki Roshi astounded me. And now I wanted to know whether I could see in meditation and meditators the same principles at work as in Aikido. In movement it was easy for me to see relaxation, groundedness, and flow. But what was going on when people were just sitting? Glancing around the zendo while quickly doing all the required bows at the beginning, I thought that I could quickly see the different levels of short or long term meditators. Everybody sat pretty relaxed and calm; however, there was a special holding of the body with an inward directed quiet alertness in those who were more experienced. There was a visible groundedness which only evolves through years of practice and breathing consciously. I felt there was a certain balance between relaxation and form.

In my mind I compared this to my recent experience with the Doshu in Hawaii. In Aikido we work with dynamic spirals, but in the zendo all we have to do is sit quiet and calm. Nevertheless, I found the process to be pretty much the same. I could see that with the meditators the movements were happening inside in a very small space: in the breath arising and falling. Both practitioners, Zen and Aikido, have a strong foundation of centeredness, and one can feel and visually see that the hara is the reverence point for the body.

For my own meditation practice, I was happy to find out that after initial wrestling with different pillows and different positions I started to feel at ease. I could feel that my time in Aikido and Tai Chi had prepared a centeredness which was useful when I was sitting.

Osensei said: “There are three things important in Aikido: breath, posture, attitude.” For me, attitude means devotion to practice, inner quietness, openness, groundedness, humor,

playfulness. These three things are also important for sitting meditation practice.

My experience at Upaya was put more in focus by Stephen Batchelor's brilliant lectures. Thoughtfully he took apart people's concepts, fixed ideas, set philosophies, and frozen attitudes. Stephen Batchelor brought new life to my thinking and opened my mind to a more flowing process. I said to him: "You are doing Aikido in words!" And he laughed. I realized that although I had done moving arts for so many years my thoughts and my ideas about life and my practice of Aikido can be disconnected. People often say that Aikido practice leads to better communication and a better ability to blend with people, but this always struck me as a bit superficial. It seemed more helpful to see Aikido as fostering foundational beliefs about ideals, life, existence, and meaning. Such attitudes and thoughts get fixed over time and become habits, so it is important to bring them into motion and weave things together again and again in new patterns. Stephen Batchelor said (I quote him freely) that our practice is operating in a very dynamic context and is not concerned with the idea of place, of ultimate absolutes, not with positions of any kind. This point of view helps to free me from vexations that trap me in a fixed set of images, ideas, and views. It is an ongoing opening and response to the world. To me that sounded a lot like Aikido.

Stephen Batchelor's website is
Stephenbatchelor.org

Upaya's website is Upaya.org

The Three Jewels by Bruce Donehower

I didn't know what to write about, but after I read my wife's essay I felt inspired to a similar theme. So now you have two versions of the same thing!

What brings people to Aikido and keeps them in a dojo? What can people find in Aikido that they can't find in other sports activities or martial arts? Why not just play golf?

These are questions that have rattled around in my head for the past years as I continued my practice of Aikido. Over those years I have been in four dojos and have studied under five Senseis. All the dojos and Senseis were different in their approach to Aikido, but each dojo grappled with the same challenge: how to attract students, how to keep the students enthusiastic and practicing, how to build the dojo community. When I did my shodan exam at my second dojo, part of the passage to shodan involved giving a short speech to those present at the dan exam. I talked about community and how difficult it is to build a dojo community. Since then I have continued to ponder the riddle of Aikido as a path of personal development and as a social practice. With so many martial arts in the world today and so many excellent teachers, what would draw someone to Aikido and keep them practicing? Why not just go snow boarding? Or, if you are fear driven, why not really learn to "fight"? Yes, as Bill Witt exclaimed joyfully at the recent seminar in Davis: "Aikido techniques are so elegant!" I think this is one reason we stick with Aikido: the beauty and elegance of the techniques. But techniques alone aren't what I think Osensei was aiming at when he talked about Aikido as an Art of Peace or when he talked about his hopes for building a peaceful world community through Aikido or when he said that "Aikido completed all religions." Everyone must ponder this in his or her own way, and in this essay I will just share my thoughts at this point of my process.

As Marion mentioned, according to written accounts Osensei said that there are three basic, foundational elements in our practice: breath, posture, and attitude. When I get confused about Aikido or its relevance to my life or when I think I should really be engaging in a more age-appropriate activity or one that is less physical (or more spiritual) or just do Tai Chi and backpack and run, then I return to Osensei's statement as a touchstone. Here's how I understand what he means.

Breath. So much is contained in this single word that many entire lifetimes could be spent meditating the miracle of breathing. And yet many people go through existence oblivious to the miracle of breathing. Breathing practice is foundational for all spiritual paths. It is the simplest exercise and at the same time the most profound and challenging. When someone naively starts Aikido, the movements get the person breathing. This alone makes the person feel better—but let's be serious: the beginner could just as well have done some other activity to get their lungs going (without all the complications of learning a very demanding movement discipline). At a certain point, however, Aikido as a disciplined practice begins to change a person's conscious relationship to breathing, and with this comes a shift in our relationship to Aikido movement, technique, our own practice, and other students. At this point, one begins to intuit that the breathing-emphasis in Aikido is not just about aerobics; it is about flow, connection, and alignment. This is a moment in our practice when we need to pay very very close attention to what is going on (not *outside* us in the class, but *inside*—pay attention!). We need to slow down, breathe deeply into our hara, relax, and fill our body with oxygen. If we attend closely, two important things occur. 1) As a consequence of attention to breath, we center and become more grounded and calmly focused. 2) In a supportive manner that reinforces this process, our relationship to our environment alters. In Aikido context, we

begin to learn to “breathe our partners” (admittedly a difficult exercise if the uke is unskillful, overly muscular, tense, resistant, etc....but oh well, persevere; it will all come out in the wash!). Although these two shifts are gradual and subtle, they begin a profound change in our practice. (The progress may seem as slow as the movement of a glacier, but attend to it diligently; it is happening!)

Once your attention orients to breathing, you enter the realm of ki. Although ki is central to AiKIDo, working with ki is subtle and paradoxical, and often we don't talk about it, perhaps thinking that this is a subject better reserved for later stages of the practice when we will be wise and all knowing. But ki is with you all the time, and you access it through attention to the breath. So, not paying attention to ki is like not paying attention to breathing. It is like not paying attention to the fact that you are alive. When the student begins to intuit the importance of breathing and ki, something exciting and challenging begins to happen in his or her practice. For one thing, the attention and engagement with the uke changes in subtle but very important ways, as noted. One no longer wants to work in an “arm wrestling” mode of practice on the mat. One becomes less satisfied with “bodies crashing into bodies” or principles of leverage and mechanics or getting off a throw; the attention orients to practice in a more playful and peaceful way. At the same time, Aikido becomes more challenging: at this point, practice partners can become much more frustrating, for example. If one persists through this change and pays attention, breathing will become a gateway to a new and fascinating level of practice and engagement with the dojo, yourself, and other aikidoka. Breathing and the flow of breath—and the flow of movement that results—present to one the paradox of ki. Now one has the taste of ki; one wants more. One begins to ask: how do I explore this experience; how do I get more tastes of ki?

This necessarily brings you to the next foundational point that Osensei mentioned:

Posture.

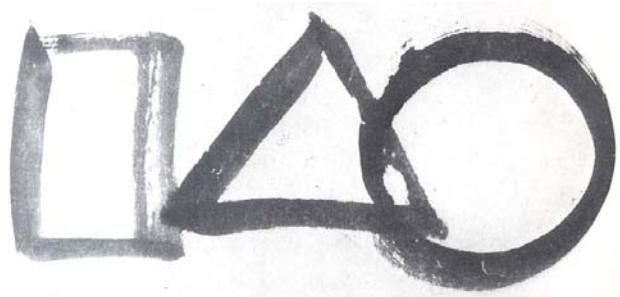
Once you intuit the connection between breathing and ki, and once your attention gets re-oriented from the mechanics of Aikido (the dead-end Newtonian universe of objects crashing into other objects) and once you have the taste of ki, you pass over a threshold in your relationship with the art. Now breath, flow, and ki become the mysteries that hold your attention. You want to explore. You want more tastes. In order to explore breath, flow, and ki, you need to give attention to posture. By giving attention to posture and alignment, we place ourselves in the attitude needed to become Explorers of Ki. We maximize the opportunity to have more tastes of ki. On other spiritual paths, this is true as well. For example, in sitting meditation, a lot of attention is spent in the early years of training working with posture on the meditation mat. A saying common in the Zen tradition: “it takes ten years to acquire your seat.” Meaning: at least ten years of attention is spent on discovering how to sit properly. In Aikido, Osensei said something similar: “It takes a minimum of ten years to master the basics and advance to the first rung.” However, in either tradition, it is important to remember that you don’t have to wait ten years to get started. Meaning: even though you may not understand posture, breath, ki at the beginning of your practice, you need to be working on acquiring this understanding from Day One—with this as your primary goal. To put a humorous spin on it: when in doubt, fake it! (Or, to paraphrase Tai Chi Master T.T. Liang: Imagination Becomes Reality.) You should not think: oh well, I won’t be able to start to understand posture, breathing, or ki until I have at least ten years of Aikido practice, so I will wait to get started with something that is obviously far above my humble ability to understand; I will ignore it until I achieve [fill in the blank]. This is as wrong as thinking that you can be a Master from day one. One attitude is an example of yin arrogance; the other is an

example of yang arrogance, as we used to say in Macrobiotics. Osensei did not expect us to re-invent the wheel. He did all his decades of work to get us down the road farther than he was when he started. So get started as soon as possible with your investigation of breath, posture, and ki.

Once you become an Explorer of Ki through your engagement with breath and posture, you are on the threshold of what is really the most important aspect of Aikido and the reason Osensei believed in Aikido as a transformative path, in my opinion: **Attitude**. Attitude—specifically, a **POSTIVE ATTITUDE** of joy, gratitude, social engagement, happiness, excitement for the new, and spontaneous and fearless creativity out of the moment—this is what Aikido seeks to nourish. Osensei also remarked that people should have fun doing Aikido. Once people begin to make this attitude shift in their Aikido practice, the world completely changes and the dojo completely changes. This brings me back to my starting point in this essay. You don’t want to mistake the proverbial finger that points at the moon for the thing itself. In other words: the purpose of Aikido practice is **JOY**. If we don’t come out of our Aikido practice feeling joyful, refreshed, renewed, and happy, then we need to seriously think about whether we should choose another path. Life is very short, and you don’t have time for bad Aikido. You need to connect to the good stuff right away. Or, as another great iconoclast once boldly remarked: “If your path to Nirvana seems intolerably long, your orientation can’t be right.” George Ohsawa (the founder of Macrobiotics; the person just quoted) and Osensei are pointing at the same thing: Don’t waste your time on distractions; go to the source! Get the big picture now! Work on the fundamental things all the time from day one! These fundamentals are: Breath, Posture, Attitude. And by the way, don’t get too literal minded in your approach. By this I mean: although the rules of logic and the constraints of material existence require us to deal with items sequentially and on a priority basis, actually

everything works together simultaneously all at once in one hurly burly jumble of progress/disarray. Confusing? You betcha! What this means: a change in your attitude will change the way you breathe, which improves your posture, which improves your breathing, which helps your attitude, which makes you feel better, which improves your posture, and so on. (It works just as good the other way—try it! Slump, restrict your breathing, cultivate a hateful attitude. You’ll be amazed!) So start wherever you like—but get started! Flow! If you focus on these fundamentals from day one continually and do not get distracted by side shows like competency issues or competition or goals like “I need to learn this or that technique in order to” [fill in the blank], then you will always be at the dynamic center of Aikido. You will be happier, less subject to injury, more fun to practice with, and your happy joyful attitude of contentment will percolate through the dojo and voila! more people will be around for you to have fun with in an endless loop. The actualization of Osensei’s vision of Peace and Harmony starts with the very breath you are taking NOW.

“There are two types of ki: ordinary ki and true ki. Ordinary ki is coarse and heavy; true ki is light and versatile. In order to perform well, you have to liberate yourself from ordinary ki and permeate your organs with true ki.” - Osensei



BELT TESTING HAIKU

by Remy Cordier

Aikido belt test

Many hours of practice

Starts a new beginning

On your knee

Here comes an atemi

Irimi blend

Standing, Tsuki piercing the air

Side step, one breath

Heaven & Earth

Boken flashes down

No hands in the way

Take it away

Uke falls like snow

Dropping cherry flowers

Randori happens

Mate, loud breathing

Heart pumping, Rain on your brow

Domo Arigato Gozaimashita

Armor Among the Flowers: A Year at Aikido of Santa Cruz by Kori Farrell



Yin is the silence into which yang speaks

Yin is the soft, the supple,

the cool darkness, the infinite void

Yang is the hard, the driven, the hot light,

the matter of action

Death and life, joined

by the inseparable existence of nothing,

and everything.

When I first began training at Aikido of Santa Cruz, my world turned upside-down—namely, from yang to yin.

After spending the previous year and a half training in Iwama-ryu, in a dojo full of direct, precise, and very masculine energy, I entered into the feminine. Here I found that my grabs were too firm, my punches too fierce, and my frequent kiais were met by large, quiet, sweeping circles.

The Aikido taught in Santa Cruz is descended from Shingu, Japan, where O'Sensei founded the Kumano Juku dojo in 1953, and where Linda Holiday Sensei (dojo-cho of Aikido of Santa Cruz) studied for many years. Through Linda Sensei's teaching, emphasis is placed on

developing relaxed arms and upper body, and a strong, heavy base. Both beginning and advanced students practice maintaining a fluid, continuous connection with their partners, and in class techniques are practiced in motion, yawarakai waza, and are rarely broken down and practiced in their kihon forms. This training results in a different way of moving on the mat, a different quality of exchange between nage and uke, and a notably different style of ukemi.

It became clear very quickly that the way I was training and the way everyone else in the dojo was training were different... I began to feel like an armored soldier tromping through a field of wildflowers.

At first my pride and my dedication to Aikido—as-I-had-known-it would not allow me to see the beauty and strength of where I was. I spent the first few months attending classes, criticizing inside my head (and out loud in the car on the way home), and wishing that the dojo here could be more like the one in Davis. But it wasn't, and the effort it took to resist where I was became exhausting.

Eventually, tired of complaining, tired of silently criticizing my training partners, and tired of struggling, I began to look at the situation. When I relaxed I saw more clearly the beauty beneath the training that was happening around me, and realized that my resistance had made me blind. A little embarrassed, I finally stopped marching around and started instead to ask the flowers how I might in time become one of them.

What has unfolded for me over the last year is a different understanding of Aikido and myself. What was once a collection of criticisms and judgments of a different system of training has gradually dissolved into appreciation as I realize how valuable this process has been in opening and relaxing my heart.

Through the ukemi practiced here (which I had initially labeled *overly-dramatic* and *martially impractical*), I am learning to trust my training partners and my own body. By expanding into a fall or an attack instead of bracing myself for

impact, the pain and strain in my body can disappear: a highfall can be easy on the body. A roll can be done with relaxed arms, neck, and shoulders. An attacker can be met with compassion and acceptance. Energy can be felt, absorbed, redistributed. By connecting with the mat instead of colliding with it, by pressing into it instead of smacking it, impact dissipates, pain disappears, movement continues easily.

What Linda Holiday Sensei and her students have shown me is that I can take off my armor and still be strong. Peace comes when resistance is surrendered, attachment is dissolved, and all is accepted in its true form.

This style of training is not better or worse than Iwama. Instead, the two complement each other. One teaches students from an early stage to focus on clear, precise, strong movements, building a strong core and direct, focused energy. The other begins by teaching students to listen, to feel their partner's intention and to absorb and dissipate an attack, developing fluid movement and relaxed, compassionate calm under pressure. Together these two forms of training represent the yin-yang of Aikido itself.

In this view, those that train in Shingu and similar styles begin their Aikido journey somewhere along the yin side of the circumference, while those training in Iwama and similar styles begin on the yang side. Regardless of where we begin, if we each keep training we will eventually discover the other side of the circle, and in time will navigate the whole. This is tangible to me through my teachers—though they have trained in different lineages, both Hoa Sensei and Linda Holiday Sensei manifest and express a balance in their practice.

So it is that over the last year of training I have come to understand that the true soldier, while fierce and precise, dedicated and diligent in perfecting and maintaining his physical form, will in turn kneel with open tenderness to admire the first flower of spring.

My Reflection on the Meaning of Aikido

Adapted from the Essay Requirement for Shodan Rank, 5/30/2009 by Jon "Jes" Siiteri:

My first experience of Aikido occurred in the summer of 1974. At the urging of my younger sister, I finally agreed to observe an Aikido class in San Francisco, CA. Robert Nadeau Sensei was the instructor, with assistance from Frank Doran. As I watched the instruction being given with a sense of great care and enjoyment, then observed the students earnestly attempting to emulate their instructor, Doran Sensei came over to the bench I sat on and he too sat down. After observing the students silently for a few moments, he leaned over and whispered to me: "They would do a lot better if they didn't let their egos get in the way." This was certainly not the practice of martial art that I had anticipated and this first encounter piqued my curiosity about the Way of Peace.

Many years later, during a time in my life that challenged many of my assumptions, I resolved to begin anew my interest in Aikido. Now 45 years old, my body not as capable of the smooth ukemi I remembered experiencing in my early twenties, I nevertheless felt the joy in the movement, and the satisfaction of applying sincere effort in self-improvement. I also acknowledged the worthy effort of seeking harmony with my fellow humans which encouraged me to persist in my practice. At the same time, I had made a commitment to seek a spiritual guide and to renew my meditation practice to help me through this transition period of my life. Interestingly, within 6 months of stating these intentions, I changed careers, found my teacher (also studying Aikido!), and began a new path in my spiritual development.

Both in my personal and professional life I sought a way to incorporate an integrated approach of wholeness in mind, body and spirit. Clearly, Aikido played a key role in these personal aspirations.

One of the biggest challenges I have encountered in my Aikido practice is the ability to perceive the attacker in a benevolent light. To avoid the defensive reaction of an attack underlies the principle of *agatsu* (Victory over Self.) If my first impulse is to confront uke with the intention of bringing him or her under control, my intent is directly communicated to uke, and he or she responds with more resistance, thus requiring the use of more physical strength on my part. However, if I am able to move my body in relation to the movement of uke, blend with his energy, then technique appears with much less effort. Then the movement of nage and uke is more harmonious, appearing to be more freely flowing, without conflict. At times during practice, this is experienced spontaneously, and it immediately generates a feeling of joy and appreciation for both partners.

As my studies have progressed, I am able to focus more on the subtleties of the teaching, such as *katsu hayabi* (understanding intent of the attacker, responding instantly), and *di ai* (the moment of contact with the attack). I also attempt to open my heart and awareness to the flow of *ki* as I engage in blending movement with uke.

However, I also realize how much more there is to learn in addition to technique. As I become more familiar with the teachings of O Sensei, and through the explanations of my sempai and sensei, my goal has expanded to realize these important lessons in my everyday life. Whether it is maintaining equanimity during rush hour traffic, staying calm during an encounter with an angry person, or expressing my loving concern to an upset spouse or an irate adolescent child,

continued practice of Aikido will hopefully enable me to become a more fully realized human being and help contribute to a more peaceful world.

In conclusion, Aikido is a practice in seeking peace, using body, mind and spirit that is now a core foundation of my life. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the many Sensei, sempai and fellow practitioners who have patiently and generously offered their teaching to me through the years, as I am also grateful for the numerous uke with whom I have practiced.



**Bill Witt Shihan
at November Seminar**



Donny and Shannon

DAN Promotion

November, 2011	
Clelia Clark	2nd Dan



Clelia

KYU Promotions

November 2011

Remy Cordier	1K
Donny Shiu	1K
Byung-Kwang Yoo	6K



Clelia



Remy, Sensei, Donny



Remy

**Many thanks to our dojo
photographer, Guy Michelier!**

GATEWAY TO AIKIDO

A new introductory “Beginners’ Class” starts on January 17, 2012.

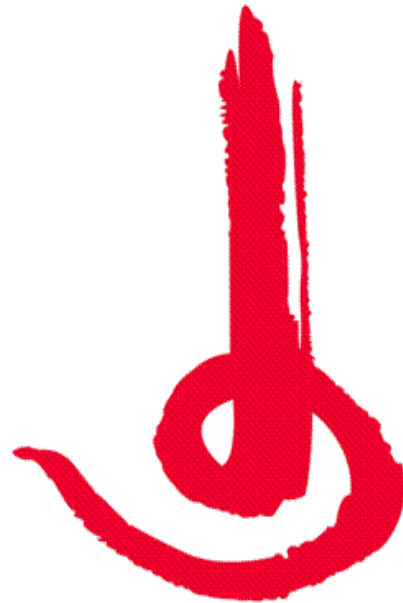
This eight-week special introductory class is designed for new students who want to sample what Aikido has to offer. Check dojo website for details.

A note about the newsletter: The AWASE newsletter is currently published twice a year in spring and fall, approximately. 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.

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!

Dojo dues for 2012 have increased. Adjust your monthly payment.



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