

**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.



## Aikido Stances and Postures

*Hoa Newens Sensei*

Aikido training on the mat tends to focus on execution of techniques. Understanding the structural elements of a technique will help proper modeling and effective execution. Below we examine the structural composition of martial arts techniques with specific reference to Aikido.

We'll begin with the basic building block: a body position. A body *position* describes the relative placement of various body parts in relation to each other. For example, in a particular body position, the back is erect, the knees are unlocked, the feet form a T, and the hands are held close together in front at navel level. When a body position is an essential element of a martial art, and is repeated often during drills, we refer to it as a *stance*. Stances include particularly those body positions that are held in preparation for the execution of techniques; in this regard, the carriage of the hips and the placement of legs and feet are most important in defining stances. In Aikido such stances include Hanmi, Hitoemi, Ken Kamae, and Tsuki Kamae. In Karate, there are Neko Ashi Dachi (cat stance), Zenkutsu Dachi (forward stance), etc. (*Tachi* means stance; *Kamae* usually refers to posture). In Taichi there are Single Whip, Golden Cock Stands on One Leg, etc.

When we speak of *posture* we refer to the dynamic interaction of body elements to express a certain feeling or inner state. The emphasis in a posture is on the quality that it evokes rather than how the body appears, as in body position. For example, a person can hold an unusual body position such as that which simulates a monkey; although it is unusual, the person has infused this position with agility, athleticism and unpredictable action, characteristics of the monkey style of Kung fu and therefore has transformed this body position into a perfect posture for this purpose. In advanced martial arts training, students adopt certain stances and make them postures; that is, they infuse the stances with the energy and feeling of a posture. Such training include grounding practices such as *Zhan Zhuang* (pole standing) and the famous Shaolin horse stance.

When we adopt a consecutive series of postures in a particular configuration that achieves a specific purpose, we refer to this as a *technique*. For example, a technique may be designed to dodge a punch and deliver a throw to upset the attacker's balance. If we study a multi-shot picture of this technique we may discern certain stances and postures used in basic drills. The technique is then essentially composed of linked postures.

Since the technique is a sequence of postures and a posture is an enlivened stance, it is clear that one way to strengthen one's technique is to reinforce the stances. All traditional martial arts training incorporate stance practices, in various formats. A practice may be to hold a stance for a specified time, such as the horse stance in Shaolin Kung fu and the Sanchin stance in Karate. Another practice is to perform a serial repetition of stances, such as what we call Aiki-walk in the dojo (e.g. sliding steps while holding Hanmi) or Tai sabaki (e.g. Tenkan). Another practice is to perform kata, which is a pre-arranged sequence of essential postures connected in a fluid manner. A further way to reinforce stances is to perform basic techniques in a slow and deliberate manner, such as in Karate or Taichi or in the way we perform Kihon waza (basic techniques) in Aikido.

Now we discuss the qualitative aspect of martial arts movement. This is what differentiates the stance from the posture and can engender wide differences in movement. The quality and feel of the movement are defined by the purpose of the movement. A movement that is intended to destroy surely contains a different quality than a movement that is intended to preserve. From this perspective, we need to understand the purpose of the movement in order to execute it properly.

In my view, an Aikido practitioner has four objectives when initiating a movement.

First, is preservation of life, specifically, the preservation of the bodies that are involved in the movement. The movement is designed to minimize, rather than cause, injuries and pain. This is one reason that Aikido movements appear convoluted and somewhat impractical from the viewpoint of other martial arts whose aims are to break, kill or maim.

Second, is connection of energy. During the movement, it is critical that the Nage and the Uke remain physically and energetically connected through their centers as well as with the ground. Their attention and energy are directed toward each other and this connection is maintained throughout the

technique, to the degree that it might be difficult to distinguish the Uke from the Nage. In addition, in order to remain grounded, they need to connect their centers with the earth energy and initiate their movements from their centers. Centered movements in which protagonists remain connected throughout are naturally graceful. In this way, Aikido movement has been likened to a dance, both in a complimentary and pejorative manner.

Third, is efficiency of movement. The student seeks to accomplish the movement with minimum effort. This is a goal of all martial arts. This objective requires making the shortest move, with the least number of steps, and engaging only the muscles that are necessary. From the viewpoint of practice, counting the steps during the execution of a technique is one

## Musings on Life in Irvine

Clelia Clark

Missing the dojo  
But liking beach suburi  
Refrigerator

way to cut parasitic movement. At higher proficiency level, the adept can maximize energetic saving by engaging the appropriate connective tissues (fascia). For example, the adept would use the arms (with its fast twitch muscles that are quick but tire quickly) as connectors (with weapons or with the training partners) and use the hips and legs (with their slow twitch muscles that are slower but more powerful) as the engine that generates power for the motion.

Fourth, is discovery of the true self. The student initiates an Aikido movement to reach out to training partners and get their feedback then adjust his movement according to the feedback. At the advanced level, the student detects the energy current that underlies the movement and uses its echo to discover her own inner energetic self, much like bats use sound echo to find their location relative to their surroundings. At yet a deeper level, the student uses her interaction with other selves to polish her own self.

It is useful to periodically re-examine the reason that we engage in Aikido techniques in order to make the right progress, lest we get distracted by other more entertaining motives that tend to dilute the essence of our techniques and lead us astray of our original training goals. Remember that a technique is the manifestation of the inner state.

## **Flowers for the Dojo: Balance and Aikido**

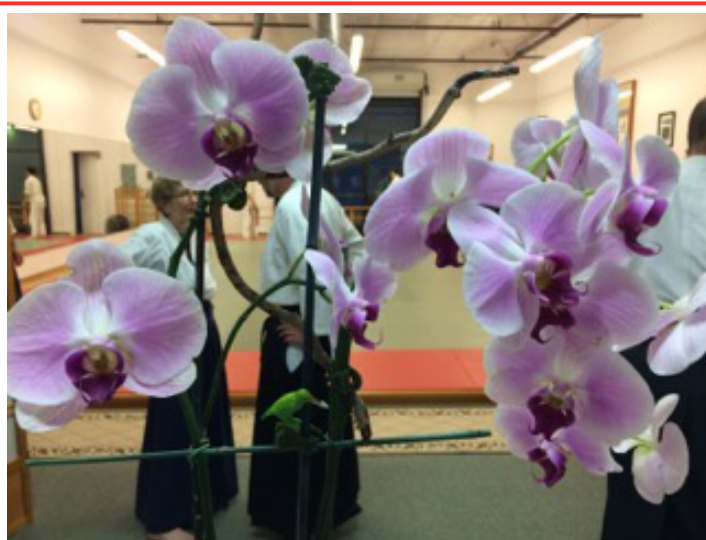
***Bruce Donehower***

Students of Aikido are used to hearing discussions of the question: “Is Aikido a martial art?” Whether or not we approach Aikido as a martial art, there is one physical skill that we develop during our practice that everyone can appreciate: balance. Daily, weekly, monthly, yearly practice of Aikido enhances our sense of balance and gives us more confidence on our feet.

This became dramatically clear to me following my wife’s eighteen-hour surgery for a brain tumor fourteen years ago.

After the surgery, Marion could not walk without assistance. We weren’t sure she’d ever get back on her feet. The procedure had interfered permanently with the balance mechanism of one ear. She had lost the ability to orient herself in space. Aikido played a big part in her recovery. As soon as possible, she was back on the mat. Her persistence with Aikido and her dedication to her recovery gave me one of my most important Aikido lessons.

Shortly after this event, Sensei Frank Doran came to our dojo to teach a seminar. One of the main points of his teaching, as I recall, called our attention to



*Pictures by Bruce Donehower.*

## Ken Seminar – Oct 18, 2014

Thanks to some unseasonably warm and dry weather we gather outdoors for a very engaging and instructional class on the principles of aiki ken. The seminar moved quickly, going over all the kumitachi as well as some henka allowing us to practice and test each principle.

Thank you to all the participants, specially those who had far to traveled from Oakland, Reno, San Rafael, Santa Cruz, and Tahoe. We are also extremely grateful to Hoa Newens Sensei for organizing and presenting the material so clearly and skillfully.



Top Left: Newens Sensei and uke Kent Standley

Bottom Left: Newens Sensei with uke Toby Hargreaves

Right: Newens Sensei

Pictures by Guy Michelier

balance. In this case, Sensei Doran talked about how Aikido techniques train us to intuitively sense a partner's balance. When we interact with an uke to perform a technique, we lead the partner into imbalance. Or rather, as O'Sensei might have put it, the partner's intention to attack is by nature an act of imbalance, which the nage and uke reveal. Because Aikido is cooperative, the uke regains balance after the "throw", and thus harmony is restored. Sensei Doran emphasized repeatedly how important it is to intuitively understand this process of balance, imbalance, and re-balance when we practice.

But there is another side to this training in balance that became clear to me over time. In this third example, I need to mention Marion's old Tai Chi instructor T.T. Liang. Master Liang was one of the closest students of Cheng Man-ch'ing, who is well known and highly respected in the recent history of Tai Chi. (He holds a position of respect in the Tai Chi world somewhat like O'Sensei holds for Aikido.) To me, one of the more interesting things that I learned about Cheng Man-ch'ing from Master Liang was that although Cheng Man-ch'ing was highly respected for his martial arts ability, he also was acknowledged to be a master of Five Excellences.

What does this mean?

Briefly summarized, Five Excellences refers to a Confucian belief that in order to actualize our full potential as human beings we need to maintain a balance in many areas of our life. In this case, mastery of Five Excellences refers to a mastery of five traditional arts that were part of Cheng Man-ch'ing's repertoire of accomplishments: calligraphy, painting, poetry, Tai Chi (martial arts), and medicine (the art of healing). He achieved distinction in each discipline and was acknowledged for this versatility.

Now don't get me wrong. I don't think it is necessary to naively assume that in order to be a good Aikidoka we literally need to study the extra four disciplines that Cheng Man-ch'ing mastered. This would be silly and contrary to what we strive to develop in Aikido training: intuitive common sense. On the other hand, I have come to see great wisdom in the Five Excellence ideal, broadly understood – especially in regard to

developing a healthy sense of balance.

As mentioned, we know from our Aikido training that a movement or intention carried to its extreme results in reversal of the original intention. "The bigger the front, the bigger the back"— as we used to say in macrobiotics. Or, as O'Sensei explained, an aggressive intention carries as seed potential the event of its downfall or reversal. We see this all the time in life, let alone Aikido. One-sidedness throws us off balance. The more one-sided we become, the more tenuous becomes our balance between heaven and earth. Bigger front, bigger back, as noted.



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*Mitchell Peters demonstrates tanto dori during his 2nd kyu exam with uke Martin Dubcovsky.*

*Picture by Guy Michelier.*

I suppose some students get this lesson early, but it took me a while because I am a slow learner. When I first started Aikido I had a common experience. I loved it! I remember thinking: "Wow, this is great! Baby, where have you been all my life! I want hang out with you all the time. Close the doors; turn the locks; clear the decks! Full speed ahead! All the lights are GREEN!"

Terry Dobson (whose prose I'm parodying in the last paragraph) wrote some amusing essays about this beginner's mind experience. And I recommend



*Hsinli Yen throws uke Kathleen Holder during her 3rd kyu exam. Picture by Guy Michelier.*

reading him. I remember in particular reading one of his essays (written after he'd just come back from Japan as Uchi Deshi under O'Sensei) in which Terry Dobson described how he trudged off enthusiastically all alone into the snow in Vermont one afternoon with his bokken to practice suburi and how he ended up getting caught by his uniform in a tree so that he almost froze to death. He had overbalanced – thrown himself, so to speak.

So now, when I think back to my younger days doing Tai Chi and hearing about Cheng Man-ch'ing and his Five Excellences philosophy, I appreciate very much that I was exposed to this idea early on. I chewed on it, and with time it helped me understand that it's okay to give myself permission to avoid one-sidedness in pursuit of a beloved ideal. It helped me to begin to better understand that many seemingly unrelated disciplines contribute to mastery of an individual art. Or, as I liked to tell my kids when I had them at home when they were growing up: you need to learn when to zig and when to zag.

Therefore, I conclude this essay with a picture. (I had to do a big build up so that the picture made some sense.)

Every month Phoebe brings her glorious flower arrangements to the dojo. This is a tremendous gift to my Aikido practice because the flowers are supreme masters of the art of balance. Every time I look at the flowers, I remember my training ideal. I remember that the big reason I train and practice is not to become skillful at martial art techniques but to become more balanced. The flowers radiate this masterful achievement. They do so by being beautiful. Their beauty says it all.

Granted, this is not the sort of lesson one expects when one commits to the study of a martial art. But according to what I've read and according to what I heard the Doshu say when I was in Hawaii in 2011, O'Sensei believed that the practice of Aikido would help human beings restore balance between heaven and earth. A very big dream! By giving the world Aikido, O'Sensei thought that he was constructing a rainbow bridge between heaven and earth. Who walks across that bridge in a dance of balance? You!

In this respect, flowers have achieved O'Sensei's dream. For me, flowers in the dojo are the rainbow prophets of balance who remind me of the ideal that inspires our art.



*Naomi Hayashi and Toru Saito upon completing their 4th kyu exams. Picture by Guy Michelier.*



*Bill Witt Shihan and Hoa Newens Sensei Seminar on Dec 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Thank you to everyone who came out from Reno, Silicon Valley, Sonoma, and Tahoe. Picture by Guy Michelier.*

## **Growing Love: A letter to the Self**

*Kori Hargreaves*

Breathe deep,  
Nurture compassion

Hold pure intentions,  
Try for peace.

You might not get it the first time  
But stay open, and you will learn

You will grow,  
You will get closer.

Each mistake is feedback,  
information to help clear the path.

Judgments and accusations  
are food for the ego, not the heart.  
Let them fall away,  
And you will not go hungry.

Keep working  
Keep opening, trying, relaxing, and loving...

Let yourself be something different  
than you know.

Don't give up.  
Or, do give up.

Then, when you are done giving up,  
Rise and try again.

We are all a work in progress  
We are all human  
We are all part of this same pulsing entity:  
The universe.

We all just want  
To love  
And be loved,

To let love *Be*.

## Being a Beginner

*Max Abrahams*

I've spent most of my life involved in the arts, but never any of those that involve the word "martial" before it. As a kid, I liked watching samurai and kung fu movies and imagined I could one day do magical feats like that. I finally decided that it was that time in my life to take the plunge and I began my research to find a martial art that would work for me for me, one that focused on self-defense as well as inner harmony. The hardest part was getting my self to finally start and when I finally did, I was glad I chose Aikido.

clear the clutter in my mind and focus on the specific exercise.

Outside of the dojo, the techniques and practices have found their way into other aspects of my life. With my teaching, I have shown music students the Aikido wrist opening exercises as a warm-up and way to prevent carpal tunnel. At home, lifting things now involves a solid kiai. The daily carrying my bike up the stairs and placing it on a rack, the opening/closing of a car door, and the flipping of a crepe occasionally benefit from a kiai. The "kitchen samurai," with his spatula bokken and hanmi stance can be found at our apartment most evenings. The aiki walk has also proven a useful way to walk between rooms. Occasionally, I'll clear out the entire living room to practice rolling. I would like to thank my girlfriend for her patience in all this.

There aren't many things I put on my wall, but above my desk I have my certificate of 6th Kyuu. I think it's something worthy of my wall space. Thanks for the support and patience and I look forward to continuing my practice with you all.



*Newens Sensei with uke Kori Hargreaves during the seminar on Dec 6th, 2014. Picture by Guy Michelier.*

Learning Aikido with the etiquette and techniques involved has been a blast. Being a beginner has been great. I work and teach, and in those situations I have to be an expert in something. Being a beginner, I get to be on the other side observing and asking questions. The dojo has been very supportive and I was surprised to see the number of sempai who attended and helped during the beginners course. This was immensely beneficial. I've found that the fastest way to improve at anything is to surround yourself with those more experienced than you. The level of formality was something very new to me also, and I have come to enjoy it. Most of my life lacks a defined structure and the structure of the Aikido class gives me a way to



*Witt Shihan working with Naomi Hayashi during the seminar on Dec. 6th, 2014. Picture by Guy Michelier.*



In line with the concept of Fighting Without Fighting advocated from Sun Tzu to O'Sensei to Bruce Lee, my personal favorite self-defense techniques are: don't be there, situational awareness, walk away, and run away.

Be safe.

## Is It Worth It?

*Donny Shiu*

Getting stabbed 9 times over name calling, baited into a bar brawl, or fighting an armed robber over a smart phone are not worth it to most people. Yet these things happen. Poor judgment in an instant can change your life (or even end it).

The problem with martial arts in self-defense is not just when it doesn't work, but, paradoxically, when it does work.

Winning, losing, or drawing in any physical confrontation will cost you in a civil society. If you lose, it will cost you bodily harm or even your life, a draw becomes mutual combat resulting in mutual damage, even if you win you may still lose in a court of law (criminal and/or civil). Is it worth it?

Unlike marital arts training, street violence has no rules, no tap out, no referees, and no weight classes. Expect an ambush rather than a match with start stop. Criminals and predators don't care what belt you have and follow no moral or ethical codes. Is it worth it?

Self-defense? Absolutely one should defend oneself from physical harm when there is no choice. Act wisely; keeping in mind that you are responsible to use only reasonable level of force necessary in a given situation or else you might be held liable (please check with your legal counsel & state law). The use of force is a crime until proven legally justified in a court of law. Is it worth it? It's funny how everyone claims self-defense when the cops show up.

The use of force in self-defense is more complicated that the overly simplified cliché of "I'd rather be judged by 12 than carried by 6." Because if you do use excessive force, you will be judged and I hope you don't end up in an 8x6. Hopefully, with knowledge, you can keep away from trouble and defend yourself decisively with your resources and skill sets.



*Above: Witt Shihan with uke David Yoshinaga.  
Below: Newens Sensei with uke Tom Rennie Sensei.  
Pictures taken by Guy Michelier at the seminar on Dec. 6th, 2014.*



## Promotions

Congratulations to the following students for their recent promotions:

Nirasean Guarino	8 <sup>th</sup> Kyu
Allison Whaley	7 <sup>th</sup> Kyu
Daniel Lopez	6 <sup>th</sup> Kyu
Deena Duran	6 <sup>th</sup> Kyu
Max Abrahams	6 <sup>th</sup> Kyu
Meredith Scott	6 <sup>th</sup> Kyu
Richard Guarino	6 <sup>th</sup> Kyu
Naomi Hayashi	4 <sup>th</sup> Kyu
Toru Saito	4 <sup>th</sup> Kyu
Hsinli Yen	3 <sup>rd</sup> Kyu
Mitchell Peters	2 <sup>nd</sup> Kyu

## Announcements

**Jan 13<sup>th</sup>** – Beginner's Course starts. This course includes basic instruction twice a week for eight weeks, and a training uniform for only \$100. Invite your friends and family to start aikido with the Beginner's Course.

**Jan 19<sup>th</sup>** – Dojo Closed for MLK Holiday

**Jan 25<sup>th</sup> 10:00-11:30am** – Advanced Class. All students ranked 2nd Kyuu and above are encouraged to participate.

**Feb 7<sup>th</sup> 12:00-3:00pm** – Chi Kung Workshop focused on the Dragon & Tiger Chi Kung exercises.

**Feb 16<sup>th</sup>** – Dojo Closed for Presidents' Day Holiday.

**Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> 10:00-11:30am** – Advanced Class.



*O'Sensei and Saito Sensei at a demo c. 1955*