

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

The Awase newsletter is published twice yearly in Winter and Summer.

Please visit our website at [AikidoDavis.com](http://www.aikidodavis.com) <http://www.aikidodavis.com/> for information on membership and class times.



The Teacher-Student Relationship

By Hoa Newens Sensei

I recently took a group of twelve Aikido students from our dojo on a brief visit to Japan. We trained in a class led by the Sandai Doshu, Ueshiba Moriteru, at the Aikido Hombu Dojo in Tokyo, and in classes led by Inagaki Shigemi Shihan, at the Ibaraki Branch Dojo (formerly known as the Iwama Dojo or O Sensei's Dojo). The first teacher is the leader of our martial art tradition, the second is the leader of our lineage in this martial art.

My purpose was to restore a vibrant lifeline to our roots and maintain the strength of this connection for the continuing benefit of our students. In the decade and a half that followed Saito Morihiro Sensei's passing in 2002, the division and confusion in our Aikido community that resulted from his absence was not conducive to healthy relations with our roots. Though we, his senior students in the Takemusu Aikido Association (TAA), maintained the minimum communication with Hombu Dojo for administrative purposes, our physical relations with the dojos in Japan came to a halt. The number of students who visited and trained at Hombu Dojo and the Ibaraki Dojo plummeted. However, during this hiatus we refocused our effort in strengthening the infrastructure of the TAA, building such things as ranking requirements, instructor certification program, online ranking database, financial system and policies, and strategic planning.

Now that this structural consolidation is nearing completion, and that the dust from the change in leadership has mostly settled, our TAA leadership is reviving effort to restore the bridge to Japan. Our firm belief is that training in Japan, especially under O Sensei's direct students and at O Sensei's Dojo in Ibaraki provides an essential ingredient for growth to the serious Aikido students and, more importantly a key to the proper transmission of Aikido.

This latter point is often the least understood, so I will explain it in the balance of this essay.

On a typical Aikido journey to Japan, the average Aikido student from the U.S. can expect two forms of experiential enrichment. The first one is the direct result of exposure to the Japanese culture and all of its social accoutrements. This in itself is a wonderful experience that challenges the viewpoint of many first-time visitors to an oriental society. Concepts and social values such as public behavior versus private feelings (Tatemae vs. Honne), indomitable spirit (Fukutsu no Seishin), moral obligation (Giri), harmony (Wa), etc. and the social traditions and mores resulting from such values are manifested as exemplary social order and high standards of hospitality that produce a soul-satisfying experience during a trip to Japan.

The second form of enrichment is the application and refinement of these social values in the Budo environment, especially with regard to etiquette (*Rei*). I have examined this concept in a previous writing ("*First Rei, Then Waza*", *Aikido Insights*, 2005) and will discuss only the *Rei* between Sempai and Kohai in this essay.

The terms Sempai and Kohai simply mean Senior and Junior, respectively. We will continue to use this Japanese terminology to preserve congruency with the context of the essay.

The sempai-kohai relationship essentially creates, and builds on, a hierarchy of human positions with defined roles. Generally, the determinant of a person's position in this

hierarchy is chronological seniority. For example, someone with more time in rank would be sempai with respect to another person with lesser time in rank, who would then be the kohai. This placement is necessarily relative, since most often, one is sempai to someone and kohai to someone else.

The sempai-kohai relationship is a covenant among individuals who interact with each other in a cohesive group, especially one centered on a knowledge system. This covenant establishes an ordering among the participants to facilitate the flow of knowledge. The master-apprentice relationship is an example of this sempai-kohai system. Certain trades and crafts in the world, such as baker, clock smith, metal work, musical instrument maker, etc. still rely on an apprenticeship system for skill transmission.

Hierarchies can also be observed in organizations such as in the military, academia and the clergy. The purpose of these institutional hierarchies is mainly to organize their activities for the accomplishment of organizational goals. In this essay we focus our discussion on the types of hierarchies that facilitate the transmission of traditional artistic skill and knowledge, and therefore will not refer to the institutional hierarchies.

Aikido is transmitted through a hierarchical system. Skills in the art can only be transmitted by direct personal interaction between student and teacher in accordance with a defined code of conduct. The Sensei-Deshi (Teacher-Student) relationship is built around a strict code of conduct that is described below, and represents a subset of the more general sempai-kohai relationship.

In the classical view of the Orient, learning (or teaching) an art is a holistic process that engages all facets of life, physical, mental and often spiritual. For example, the training for a traditional Taiko drummer or a Balinese gamelan player may involve exercises to limber up and strengthen the body, abstinence and restrictions in lifestyle, as well as meditation

practices. At the advanced level, every interaction between teacher and student is a teachable moment.

In the sensei-deshi code of conduct, the implicit agreement is that, the deshi, in his sincere desire to learn the art, is setting aside his ego and opening himself completely to the sensei to receive and follow instructions in whatever form. The sensei, on the other hand, pledges to hold the student's growth at heart, and exhausts her resources in guiding the student along his chosen path while honoring the student's trust in her ability and integrity as a teacher.

The student must open all the gates and the teacher must control and guide the delivery of knowledge through those gates so that the student makes progress without being harmed. The concept is simple, but the system is fragile, and though very effective, is vulnerable to failure when either party fails to perform their side of the agreement.

On the student's side, a failure may result from a refusal to pull down all the barriers due to lack of trust in the teacher, specifically trust that the teacher truly possesses the skill that she purports to have, or trust that the teacher will protect the student from any harm during training. We elaborate on these barriers below.

The most formidable barrier is the student's own ego. If not temporarily checked, this ego will screen all incoming bits of information according to its own criteria, assign judgmental values, and block certain items that are not congruent with its existing database. In this way, it inhibits new perception, and hence learning. For example, thoughts similar to these might course through the student's mind: "I don't see what's in it for me?", "That wasn't what Saito Sensei taught" or "This technique wouldn't work in the streets", etc. These thoughts are barriers that thwart further reception from the teacher.

This is not to say that a tame ego is healthy for the student. A student who is raised in Eastern traditions may not have the aggressive ego problem, but is vulnerable to a different type of

problem. A typical Eastern upbringing may turn a person into a very compliant student, always submitting to authority and unable to discriminate and take the initiative for change. Over the long run, this type of submission reinforces belief in the status quo and may lead to dogmatism, which shuts the door to learning.

Therefore, a student must tread a very delicate path, balancing between total openness and trust on one side, and intellectual discrimination and curiosity on the other side. The ability to go back and forth along this spectrum of behavior during a learning interaction is crucial for the assimilation of the lesson. Rare is the student who possesses this fluidity. The most chance of success inures to those who have rooting in both East and West, such as a person born in the East and raised in the West, or vice versa. For students born and raised in the same culture, it becomes imperative for them to soak as much of the other cultural values as possible. Such is the case for most Aikidoka born and raised in the West. Immersion in essential oriental traditions would help immensely to understand and endure certain rigorous aspects of Aikido practice. For Aikidoka born and raised in the East, it is vital for them to be exposed to the inquisitive and progressive values of the West so that they can constantly keep their art alive and free of unnecessary intransigence.

I'll open a bracket here to note that, thus far I have made the distinction between East and West mainly for simplicity. The real distinction should be between a modern society that is centered around the freedom of individuals striving for dominance over a dualistic world through accelerated development of the intellectual mind; and a more traditional society that is centered on community and emphasizes classic human values based on emotions. Nowadays, examples of these two types of societies are scattered all over the globe in the five continents, not just in the East or West. We now return to our essay and continue to use the simplistic distinction between East and West.

A second barrier causing the student's failure is fear, especially fear of being hurt by the sempai or the teacher. "If I follow the technique all the way I might get hurt", "Does he have sufficient control to not hit me in the head if I give it my all?" These are legitimate concerns that may arise in the student's mind. This might be a well-founded fear that is based on past observations or experience with a particular sempai. In this case, the student should back off timely and refrain from engaging. Developing the awareness to back off timely or conquering the fear once in the game, are the challenges that make Aikido a martial art. In my experience, the risk of being hurt is proportional to the fear of being hurt. In other words, the less the fear, the less the risk of getting hurt. This risk has everything to do with the subject and hardly anything to do with the other party. In the face of overwhelming obstacles, the Budoka fearlessly pushes forward. This is called Fukutsu no Seishin (不屈の精神, Indomitable Spirit). If someone has not trained in a traditional Budo dojo it is unlikely that they have experienced this spirit. Training in O Sensei's dojo in Iwama affords the opportunity to live this experience.

The teacher's side of the relationship too, is fraught with inherent risks of failure. The biggest and most obvious is the risk of abuse by the teacher. The survivalist instinct exists in all sentient beings and lays mostly dormant in modern humans, being most of the time controlled by conscience. However, a human with thin conscience may succumb to extraordinary pressure of basic needs (food, sex, and shelter). When these primal instincts prevail over conscience, the person will take any action to fulfill these basic needs. In the case of a teacher, this action may include violating the safety, freedom, or dignity of others, including their students, especially those students who have pledged obedience and openness in exchange for instructions. When left unchecked, these actions can turn into habits that will eventually destroy the teacher-student relationship and the parties involved.

Even when the teacher's conscience remains in control and he means well, if he uses the fire method of teaching, which is based on ruthless enforcement of strict discipline, in an unrestrained manner, he may cross a critical threshold beyond which the discipline is perceived by the student as abusive treatment. This abuse is a breach of trust with damaging result to the relationship.

Another risk of failure stems from lack of maintenance in the relationship. The teacher and the student have neglected the relationship and let it go stale, either from lack of communication or misconception about the continuing relevancy of the roles. For example, the student may have moved out of state and has not kept the teacher apprised of her training progress, until the question of rank promotion arises. Or the student may have reached a high rank and incorrectly assumed that he has become independent from the teacher's influence and now has complete autonomy in his training. In both cases, the teacher is responsible for either clarifying that the relationship is still relevant and continue to monitor the progress of the student, irrespective of the distance; or acknowledging clearly that the relationship has ended and advise the student to seek the tutelage of another teacher.

So far, I have explained the major areas of weakness in the teacher-student relationship. I have stressed this point many times in my earlier writings, but it bears repeating that a sempai has a solemn responsibility toward his kohai, and the teacher has a sacred responsibility toward the student. The two primary ingredients in these relationships are trust and obedience. Not everyone can be a good sempai and very few can shoulder the charge of the teacher.

Here I need to open another bracket to explain that obedience describes a situation where a person submits to, and carry out, the order of another person in authority without involving the questioning mind. This temporary suspension of the mind is a necessary condition for the transmission of high level skills. As such, our

concept of obedience has none of the more modern connotation of subservience.

On rare occasions, we find a perfect combination of a good teacher teaching a good student. Their relationship is characterized by mutual respect and trust and is anchored in a solid understanding of their respective roles. In this ideal situation, the student has emptied herself and is ready to receive and the teacher transmits his knowledge and skills in the optimum manner. The transmission takes place through verbal instructions and physical training, as well as at the energetic level. In this latter case, neither the student nor the teacher needs to do anything; they just need to remain open and allow the energy to flow uninhibitedly through them. When they allow, the energy circulates freely between them and they both receive value. The student receives a higher quality energy that translates into higher skills and deeper knowledge. The teacher feels relief from a burden and gets inspiration from the sincerity (purity) of the student's energy. [I have explained in another essay that every full-fledged teacher carries a burden of transmission. *When Am I Ready to Teach? Aikido Insights, 2010.*]

To increase the chance of successful learning, there are a few things that a student in America can do. First, is to experience the working of a good sensei-deshi relationship by visiting a traditional dojo, such as the Ibaraki Dojo in Japan or other similar dojos in the world. Second, is to constantly strive to perfect the roles in the relationship, that is, being a good sempai and being a good kohai, within the current relationships. This practice applies to all ranks, from beginners to seasoned instructors. The importance of this practice is underscored in the Takemusu Aikido Association Member Guidelines in three specific references to sempai-kohai relations in the document.

With practice, these roles can be applied through all situations in daily life, not just in the dojo in martial arts training. If we are to believe that the

purpose of our life on this Earth is to learn and grow, then the act of receiving knowledge (student's role) and that of imparting knowledge (teacher's role) lie at the essence of our existence.

In the old times in the Orient, the Teacher-Student roles defined the supreme relationship between two human beings, and served as the primary model for other relationships in society. These relationships were codified under rigid Confucian precepts governing the Three Relationships: King-Subject; Parent-Child; Husband-Wife. Various forms of these fundamental relationships are still extant in certain segments of contemporary Asian societies. It is not within the scope of this essay to explore these relationships. Suffice it to note that the teacher-student relationship described in the essay has roots dating back to ancient history of mankind and has facilitated the uninterrupted transmission of true knowledge through chains of teachers and students. One of these chains was the transmission from Sakakibara Kenkichi to Takeda Sokaku to Ueshiba Morihei to Saito Morihiro, and so on. If we are to allow this information to flow on for the sake of future generations of Aikidoka, we must honor and keep alive the correct teacher-student relationship.

Untitled Essay

By Tom Roberts

O Sensei once said "life is growth. If we stop growing, technically and spiritually, we are as good as dead." Over the years I have observed that few things are more likely to challenge us to grow than major life changes. Most recently for me it has been changing jobs and moving from a rural community with a very small dojo to the comparatively big city of Sacramento and the Aikido Institute here in Davis.

Large classes, new customs and protocols, variations in techniques, a new Sensei, and a large and amazingly talented group of senior students have been both exciting and humbling. This relocation and change in environment brought me to the reflection that sometimes when our daily routines and activities are too familiar, static, or without challenge, it is possible to become comfortable in our surroundings to the point of stifling our own opportunities for growth.

So, the task, it seems, is not to await life events to challenge us to grow, but to continually challenge ourselves. When O Sensei advised us to “create each day anew” perhaps that is what he had in mind.



New Visitors / Old Friends!

Surprise visit from the Santos family: **Rebecca, Aniel**, and their 5-year old son **Phillip**, dropped by the dojo on December 22 after almost a ten-year absence. Rebecca and Aniel were instrumental in the early growth of Aikido Institute Davis in the early 2000's. They now live in Columbus, OH and occasionally visit family in California. As can be seen, a second son is on the way. Cheers!

Aikido by the Bay 15th Anniversary Seminar

By Paul Williams



In my last article, the thesis I tried to explain concerned how aikido, as a body of knowledge, is experiential. That our connection to O Sensei is incomplete if we stay exclusively inside our styles. Well, the rabbit hole gets even deeper within styles. I discovered that this is not only true of our connection to O Sensei but also our connection to the keeper of Ueshiba's techniques and weapons, Morihiro Saito Sensei.

Daniel Brasse from Aikido by the Bay recently held their 15th Anniversary Seminar with instructors from the old Iwama Ryu era. Legendary shihan and teachers such as Bill Witt, Pat Hendricks, Jason Yim, Mark Larson, Kim Peuser, Bruce Mendenhal, Rob Okun, and Micheal Field all under one roof for the first time in many years. It was a lineup that someone like me from the East coast could only dream of. Three days of good training and great people.

What I learned from this event was that each teacher had their own unique perspective and even interpretation of what was taught to them by Saito Sensei. Of course, the training methods and principles were similar but when it came down to the individual there was no doubt that each brought their own uniqueness and history with them. There was a moment in the seminar

when one teacher illuminated that in fact Saito Sensei developed the Ken tai Jo in the 70's and not the later 80's. He even demonstrated variations to some of the Ken tai Jo that Saito Sensei was playing with at that time. For an aikido nerd like me, this was pure catnip. I was enthralled in the living history being displayed before me.



There were so many different variations of the things that I once believed were petrified in dogma. This again reminded me of the parable where blind people described the essence of the elephant. Each Shihan had trained with Saito Sensei at different moments in his/her own development. Some trained with him in the 70's, 80's, 90's, and 2000's. Each decade Saito Sensei himself was growing older, more refined, but also had to adapt to his own injuries and realities of what happens to those who train hard their whole lives. I got to discuss this in length with Jason Yim Sensei. He was one of the first students of Bill Witt Sensei and one of the first foreign uchi-deshi to train in Iwama in the 70's. He shed light on the reasons for the differences. He explained in great depth how the dojo culture and training methods were different in Iwama each decade. It was thrilling to hear this not just from him but from everyone else.



What is important to note is that these differences were celebrated at this event. You saw it in each teacher's enthusiasm to pass on what they felt to be very special to them. I'll never forget Bernice Tom Sensei almost in tears talking fondly of Saito Sensei and the fact that she was at this moment with old friends that she had not seen in years. A great thrill was to hear first-hand from Bill Witt Shihan. His perspective is incredibly valuable. He was the first foreigner to train in Iwama under both O'Sensei and Saito Sensei. What's certain is that it was a different time then in Iwama as it is now. As ephemeral as time can be, we still have solid connections to this past through such great teachers including our own Sensei.



Aikido by the Bay

**December 16, 2017 / Seminar
And Celebration at AID**

On Friday night, I had the opportunity to ask a question to these teachers. I asked, “All of you have such a strong connection to the past. What do you see the future of aikido to be?” Some responded to the obvious change in demographics in aikido. Aikido is attracting an older crowd these days. Some answered about staying true to the teachings of Saito Sensei. What response stuck out the most was Mark Larson Sensei’s answer. In his charismatic way, he stated that he would like to see a stop of the infighting in aikido and even went so far as to say that if we fight anyone then let’s fight with karate. Joking aside, I understood his point well. The infighting in aikido is ridiculous and only hurts the art. It severs the connection to O’Sensei that was experienced at this great event. With all these great teachers, we can learn so much about aikido without ever stepping foot on Japanese soil.

I hope that Aikido by the Bay makes this seminar an annual event. It’s important for all of us in the Iwama style to galvanize together and spread this rich history. For the preservation of the past, and for the continuance of O’Sensei’s aikido in the future.



Celebratory Cake

**In Honor of Sensei Witt and Sensei Newens
Celebrating a Combined Grand Total
Of 100 Years of Aikido Practice
And Teaching!**

Thank you, Sensei Witt and Sensei Newens, for your extraordinary dedication to Aikido and for your tireless efforts to teach and inspire love for the art!

“Try”

By Donny Shiu

Don't know what to write

*Try and fail is better than not, so here we go
I just put pen to paper to see if I can make this
sound tight*

*Just as we can only practice blend and throw,
only if we show
Aikido happens when you train hard at the dojo*



Aikido Shrine



Hombu Dojo



Ibaraki Dojo

The Power of Positive Resistance

By Toby Hargreaves

I think the beauty of Aikido is that it makes us inhabit our bodies more fully. We so often hear the phrase mind-body-spirit oneness that it can seem cliché, but it is that ideal that we are actually working towards in our training. In contrast to running on a treadmill while watching TV, where the mind does one thing, while the body (and part of the mind) does another, martial arts training demands the full participation of mind, body, breath, spirit, attitude, and awareness. We are challenged to bring our intention to our bodies continually. To correct our posture, relax unnecessary muscles, call forth feelings like roundness, extension, cutting through, sinking down, uprooting. And not just to imagine these with eyes closed, but to embody and express them. This takes a lot of focus—the whole self has to be mustered to meet the demands of training.

One tool we use in the pursuit of unified self is a human partner, or *uke*. Hitting a tire, a straw mat, or a tree can give a certain kind of reliable feedback that is useful in developing qualities like extension, cutting through, or moving from

the hips. These inanimate objects provide a certain resistance based on their size and density, etc. However, only a human partner is capable of providing dynamic feedback, in which they move with you while at the same time resisting to a certain extent. Furthermore, a partner has the ability to intelligently vary the resistive feedback they give based on the person they are training with. One does not grab a beginner the same way one would grab an advanced practitioner. The *uke*'s ability to move with the *nage* while providing sensitive feedback is an incredible ability, one that is crucial to our successful daily training.

What is even more interesting, and a little bit mysterious, about working with a human partner, is the quality of the partner's feedback. Is their resistance saying, "I'm stronger than you, so I'm going to stop you from moving at this vulnerable point, and make you feel weaker and less skilled than me. I want to prove my dominance over you and that's why I am resisting you."

Or perhaps it is saying, "I'm going to stay with you here so you can fully complete this movement and get the full benefit out of your training. I'm going to grab just a little harder than you think you can deal with, so you have to muster all of your resources to complete the motion. I'm here for you to get stronger."

Or maybe it is saying, "I'm not really here with you right now. I'm thinking about other things and my body is here for you to throw around until it is my turn to do the technique."

These are very different energetic messages, yet perhaps to an outside observer the difference between them could be hard to perceive.

Resistance as a word has a bit of a negative connotation. A resistant person is not generally happy about what is happening. They are wanting to stop the flow or slow things down. In Aikido, maybe we should use the term "positive resistance" to emphasize good intentions, similar to the term "constructive criticism".

As the one giving this resistance, this valuable feedback, it is clear that if we seek to live the principles of Aikido—love, peace, harmony—then we should strive to give the most sincere and honest feedback possible. Plants need sun, water and nutrients to grow. Humans need all of that, plus support and encouragement from each other to grow.

I believe that while yes, we should regulate the resistance we offer each partner based on their needs, above all, we must keep the intention behind that resistance supportive and encouraging in quality.

As writer Maya Angelou said, "At the end of the day people won't remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel." The same goes with training. It is the energetic quality you bring to training that others will take away from training with you.

In Iwama, the locals we trained with grabbed very firmly. But for the most part they were all wonderful to train with. Daniel Brasse Sensei, who was there at the same time as our group, put it this way, "I want you to get better, so I'm going to grab hard." This attitude epitomizes positive resistance. Kind of like tough love, it seems at first a contradiction, but on further thought is the most natural thing.



2017 Trip to Japan

By Bruce Donehower

As we all know, in November the dojo sponsored its first group trip to Japan. Yay! It was a splendid journey. In addition to visiting Hombu dojo and Ibaraki dojo, we enjoyed sight-seeing and comradery. A large part of the success of the ten-day trip was due to Naomi, who involved herself from the get-go: busying herself with arrangements, phone calls, itinerary checking, rentals, organizing payments, herding cats, staring down head-on collisions on the backroads of Mt. Atago, and generally doing so much prep work that my head spins to think about it. Not to mention her zeal and effort once we got to Japan! Gosh, Naomi, I can only say thank you thank you again!

I'm sure everyone will share a favorite story or highlight of the adventure. My highlight and biggest thrill was the brief visit to Hombu dojo for our one morning class.

Let me first say that I had zero expectations for this visit. In 2011, Marion and I visited Honolulu to participate in the fiftieth anniversary celebration of Osensei's visit to Hawaii. Sensei Witt and Sensei Goto were there, along with Geoffrey sempai, as I remember. It was a huge gathering in a large gymnasium. This was my first experience of the Doshu, who instructed and did several demos with his son. It was thrilling to see father and son work together with such fluid harmony and grace.

So, when I went to Hombu, I thought that I'd just re-experience a little bit of what I had sampled for several long days in Honolulu in 2011. But I could not have been more wrong.

It started as I negotiated the crowded dressing room. Let me say, the place was packed. I am impressed by the dedication and activity going on at Hombu, where all kinds of people, male and female, and of different ages, are busy enjoying Aikido. It pleased me to see the popularity of the 6:00 am class. I had made up

my mind that I would move away from the Davis group once I was on the mat, since I wanted to optimize my chance of practicing with someone I did not know. I had been told that once you bowed to someone, then that was the person you practiced with for the entire class. I hoped that I would have a chance to practice with someone new – hopefully someone from Tokyo who attended the dojo regularly.

Well, as I was sitting in seiza quietly, an older Japanese man came in and began to warm up. I swear, I thought that the dojo had made a call to central casting, because the gentleman who was warming up looked very much like Osensei in his older years. I thought: “hmm, that's quite odd and perhaps eccentric.” So, I continued to sit quietly in seiza and waited for class to begin.

Imagine my surprise when class started and the old gentleman and I ended up next to each other! It was the most natural thing in the world to bow to each other and practice together. (Now, I know I am being silly here, because I have no idea how old this fellow was. I am pushing 65, which is already in the old man category – so perhaps I am older than him! Who knows? I call him the old gentleman because he looked just like Osensei. And of course, I have no idea what rank he was – since rank order is not required at Hombu. Who knows – maybe I outranked him!)

So, we bowed and started to practice. And right away I felt that I was in Aikido heaven. I had to drop every habit that I had brought with me from the USA and just open myself to intuition and movement. At first, I thought – mistakenly! – that the practice would be at an adagio or andante tempo. Not! My partner loved to move. I am rather fit, aerobically, and if I really go at it I can wear down most partners (certainly anyone in the age 60 zone) – but not this guy! We kept pace at a clip.

Just so you know, the Doshu demonstrates, but he does not “teach.” Which was a big relief. It meant that no one was stopping to explain anything or to correct or to make a pedagogical point or to set things right or to give a lecture –

as I admit I am very prone to do (what can I say... I'm a retired professor! "You can always use your voice!") The class proceeded as I remembered from Honolulu: quick demo – fluid, smooth, harmonious – then go at it! It meant that my partner and I could really get into an Aikido dance and dialogue and devote pretty much one hundred percent of our attention and energy to movement all the time – without breaking ki by dropping into "gosh, now how does this really work" or "gosh, I ought to know this better by now" or "gosh, is my foot in the right place?" We just had to go at it: like when you decide to shoot the slope on a pair of skis or you're up there in front of a huge lecture hall (you just got the call that you're needed to fill in for someone) and you just have to wing it.

But another thing was happening at the same time: my partner, the elderly gentleman who resembled Osensei, intuited who I was and what I could do and then he started to teach me by movement, not by talk. And vice versa. He didn't speak English, and I don't speak Japanese. Well, I shouldn't say he didn't speak English, because he could say "relax!" And I could say a few things in Aikido Japanese. But, like I said, I spent the entire class having fun, wallowing in my right brain – in a crazy dance of energy and aiki with this guy – and having to hat-check just about every aikido habit that I had brought with me in my travel kit. I had to get out of my learning-space and go back to Aikido for the sheer joy of Aikido and practice without a gaining mind. It was a lot like playing music with another musician who is really good and who is so good that he or she carries you along and makes you better and better by being selflessly present. And then synergy happens, and who knows who is teaching whom? It reminded me why Aikido is more fun than Tai Chi, sometimes. We laughed and had fun, and I don't even remember what specific technique we were supposed to learn. Who cares? The guy only taught one thing: move from your hara as you relax and breathe. Do Aikido! That was enough!

We were both breathing hard and smiling and laughing at the end of the hour. I was so caught up in the total attention required for that practice that I barely had noticed anyone else on the mat. It was like we were in a private world. I am very grateful that my partner bowed to me.

This event really set up the trip for me – and afterwards, when I saw Osensei's home and Aikido shrine in Iwama village, I felt much more open to receive the spirit of Aikido that I believe Osensei wanted to bring to the world. Osensei is so confounding! I'm probably all wet and silly and idealistic and dumb, but my silliness got re-affirmed, particularly when I saw the shrine that Osensei built in Iwama. It was a thrill to be on the property of Osensei and in his home. And the sincere words of love and devotion for Osensei that Inagaki Sensei spoke after chanting the Amatsu Norito touched my heart.

The trip helped to answer some questions that I have had about Aikido – which have to do with my incorrect evaluation of Aikido practice. Like I said, I'm pushing 65 – I'm in the old man territory. I'm pretty fit and young looking, and for years I thought that excellence in Aikido meant practicing like a very strong and athletic twenty or thirty-year-old male. I know, I know, everyone says that this is stupid and wrong – Aikido is for "everyone" – but in real life, so-called, I have to admit that I've received a lot of contradictory messages that made me think: "wink wink, nod nod." Until this trip – when I had a chance to experience first-hand with my partner what this alternate level of Aikido practice might be like.

Now – if retirement and music don't get in the way – maybe I can explore this new territory!

PS >>> Here is a link to a Holiday / New Year video that I shared with "Team Japan." It shows some temple scenery and the mood of one magical rainy day. Happy (Lunar) New Year, one month in advance!

https://youtu.be/_TzC2NTVfQc



“Vinaigrette”

By Hoa Newens Sensei

Vinaigrette on arugula, my favorite salad.

The smoothness of virgin olive oil,

The tanginess of balsamic vinegar,

And its sweetness,

The pungent bite of pepper, or is it the onion?

A hint of sea salt.

My taste buds are having a ball with this vinaigrette.

How complex!

Or is it me?

I wanted to discover the underpinnings of this tasty food.

It was me who divided to discern and learn.

Learning is so much fun, and so much work,

The more I dig, the more I find.

Sometime, I get overwhelmed,

By the complexity,

That I created.

Understanding its components, I appreciate the depth of the vinaigrette.

Now I should let vinaigrette be vinaigrette,

And simply enjoy its wholesomeness.

Life is so complex when I want to grab it,

So simple when I let it be.

Though, grabbing the complex helps me appreciate the simple.

The Bell and the Ball: On Gifts and Giving

By Kori Hargreaves

Winter is a time when the days are short, the nights are long and chilly, and many of us are drawn inside to spend time cozied up with family and friends. With the winter holidays in full swing as I write, now is also a time that many people have gift-giving on their minds.

I love giving gifts—throughout the year I subconsciously note the things my loved ones like, enjoy, wish for, or need but can't make or find for themselves. When the holidays roll around and things slow down at work, I get excited. It is a chance to turn my attention to thinking about family members and what they love, and craft warm-hearted offerings that will bring joy to the people in my life.

I know I am not alone--many people delight in giving gifts (whether tangible things or acts of kindness) that express gratitude and love for the relationships we value. It is a way to open up, to extend our hearts and communicate our love to others.

For many, the act of giving is accompanied by feelings of warmth and happiness... but what about being on the other side?

For most of my life, receiving gifts has been awkward—painful, even. The knowledge that someone else has given up their time, energy, and/or money for me has always been uncomfortable, and in some instances excruciatingly so. Whether big or small, I immediately start thinking of how I can repay the giver of the gift for their kindness, my thoughts searching for what I can do for him or her in return. I feel despair, certain I will not be able to appropriately express thanks. I feel stuck, incapable of communicating how much their gift means to me. Also, embarrassed to be the center

of someone else's attention. Undeserving. Indebted. Basically, I feel the opposite of how I do when I give a gift... instead of feeling happy, open, and at ease, I feel awkward, frozen, and inadequate. And I am certain that 10 out of 10 times, these are not the things the giver of the gift was hoping I would feel!

Just putting that down on paper is enough to make me laugh to myself. And while that whole description may seem a little dramatic, I have begun to see how common varying degrees of this type of reaction are in others.

Since recognizing this paradox I have seen it play out countless times around me: How many of us have an easier time giving gifts than receiving them?

Another way to gauge your answer is to reflect on how you react when someone pays you a genuine compliment. When someone exclaims, "Wow, you are so beautiful/handsome!" or, "You are really amazing at ____" how do you respond? Do you deflect compliments? Put yourself down? Feel like you need to give that person a compliment of equal value? Puff up and feel overly important? Boast about your skills?

Energetically, each of these things contain some element of tensing, blocking out, or not fully receiving or being present with what the person is extending to you.

Then again, maybe you are not closed. Maybe instead you listen and take in the compliment, and feel what the person is giving. Maybe instead of deflecting their words, you look at them directly and say with warmth and sincerity, "thank you, that really means a lot to me." And it does.

Several years ago, when I was living in the dojo as an uchi deshi, Sensei said to me, "Everything is about the exchange of energy." He paused, and saw I was waiting for him to explain more. So he went on to say, "When you walk into the grocery store, and there is that person outside, ringing the little bell for charity. They are

throwing a ball of energy to you as you pass...
What do you do?"

At the time, my strategy for charity bell ringers and sidewalk solicitors was to cringe and avoid eye contact. Rush by "in a hurry". Say thanks but no thanks and quickly look away. In other words, put up a wall and block the ball. Realizing this, I wondered why I never tried catching it and throwing it back.

Recently I read a study that monitored the brains of people as they experienced feelings of rejection. As it turns out, feelings of rejection actually activate the same pain centers in the brain as physical trauma... in other words, rejection hurts. When someone reaches out to connect with you and you "shut the door", whether consciously or unconsciously, it is likely that person responds by feeling some level of physical pain.

I am beginning to see how often our doors are shut without us even realizing it—and how many missed connections there are between people as a result. It takes a tremendous amount of courage to let the energy flow between us... to hear the bell and catch the ball.

When we think about things in this way, there is really nothing different between the giving of a gift and an attack. Both acts involve one person reaching out to connect with another. Thinking about my Aikido practice, it dawns on me that I have always been much more comfortable as uke than as nage. As uke, you give a sincere attack, and then see what nage does with it. As nage, your task is to receive what uke is giving... everything that happens next hinges on how fully you receive the offered attack and blend/join with uke.

Do you tense? Shut your eyes? Hold your breath? Think furiously about what technique you are going to do? Move without feeling? Push the person away? Are you soft? Hard? Open? Closed? Afraid? At ease?

As we celebrate this holiday season, whether on or off the mat, the opportunity is there to notice how we receive what others have to give... and ask, "When someone rings a bell and throws you a ball... what do you do?"



Kyu Promotions

Name	New Rank
Alan Adams	8K
Hannah Miller	3K
Jared Canio	4K
Kim Lounsberry	4K
Luca Del Bene Kythos	6K
Nikko Yoneda Cruz	7K
Teo Kurtovic	6K
Taylor Adams	8K
Zachary Lounsberry	4K



A note about the newsletter: The AWASE newsletter is currently published twice a year, at the beginning of winter and at the beginning of summer. 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. – Bruce Sempai

**Dues are due at the beginning of the month. Please pay on time or use automatic payments from your bank.
Thanks!**



**AIKIDO
INSTITUTE**
D A V I S , C A



Aikido Institute Davis
638 Cantrill Drive, Suite B, Davis, CA
USA 95616
530-297-1215
<http://www.aikidodavis.com/>