

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

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Believe and Create

By Hoa Newens Sensei

When you believe in something, you feel it,
When you feel something, it happens.

I taught a *chi-kung* workshop at which I posited the above principle to the class during the introduction. It is a fundamental principle of *chi-kung* as well as creative activity. We can use this principle to create our life, as we want it. I explain below how this may work.

Several years ago, I was conducting an Aikido seminar in Bolinas, California. The venue was the community center in the downtown area. We had use of a gymnastic hall with mats on the floor and a few other gymnastic apparatuses including a couple of swings attached to the ceiling. The swings were two-foot platforms hanging about five feet off the ground and attached to a 20-foot ceiling with long ropes. This was the beginning of a 24 hour *gasshuku* and we were starting it with a demo for the public in about one hour. Everyone was in high spirit. We warmed up individually with stretches and some *tai sabaki*. As we were practicing rolls on the mat, our *hakamas* displaced air and moved the swings, calling my attention. On the spur of the moment, I told the students that we could practice high rolls by jumping through the ropes of the swings. Upon that thought, I instantly locked on one of the swings, and before my rational mind could evaluate this idea, I ran toward it and flung my body between the ropes and the platform. I executed the high roll with my *hakama* whooshing by the ropes and landed safely.

After I got up, no one followed. I realized quickly the risk that the friction of the hakama against the ropes could cause them to tangle up with the jumper's legs and make him plunge head down on the mat. This was one of my reckless actions as an instructor that I would never repeat. Despite the potentially harmful consequences, I realized much later that I had learned an invaluable lesson. The lesson was that whatever I felt my body doing I could actualize it, if I trusted the initial impulse and acted before my judgmental mind kicked in. I recalled that the feeling of flying through the ropes flashed momentarily in my awareness immediately before the act itself took place; it felt almost as if the feeling and the act occurred simultaneously.

I recount the above episode in my training career as an example of how a feeling of certitude often precedes successful action. I'm sure that many readers have experienced a similar situation in which a desired action is projected internally as a vivid sensation right before it occurs, with no interference or checking by the intellect.

After two decades of additional training following this incident, I can affirm that, in fact, a successful act is always preceded by its blueprint, irrespective of whether the actor is aware of it.

A more complete description is that our intention to act creates a blueprint that rearranges the etheric energies to print out the tangible product. At a simplistic level, it's not unlike how 3D-printers work. At a cosmic level, the process is analogous to how the sexual act leads to procreation.

A good product is the result of a firm intent and a clear blueprint.

A firm intent is created by focused and sustained consciousness; we see such a focus in a person who is driven. The ability to focus consciousness is the divine privilege of conscious beings and one that enables the conscious being to create.

How does creation take place? Each human being carries karmic results of past lives as the

seeds of his potential in the present life. A seed remains dormant until awakened by the light of consciousness resulting from the human being making an intentional choice. The seed is nourished by the sustained beam of consciousness and germinates, releasing its contents, which is the blueprint for the physical realization of the potential. The blueprint is mostly a continuation of past karmic trends, which can be changed or bucked by the person exercising free will. As the person's intent continues to feed the sprouting seed, it marshals his energy and other surrounding energies to produce the favorable conditions for further development and refinement of the blueprint.

For example, a person may be born with a tendency to imitate movement. Continued exposure of the newborn to a lively environment prompts the tendency to gradually morph into an uncanny ability to replicate movement. As a youth, this person may be attracted to movement arts. The attraction is fueled by life experience in the proximity with athletes. Soon, the person begins to dream of becoming an Olympic gymnast. As she builds the ability to assert her free will, each successive life choice strengthens her intent and leads her closer to fulfillment. Her intent broadcasts loud and clear in the cosmic field and the energies with resonant frequencies do not fail to respond. In this way, the confluence of energies resulting from the focusing of her intent causes events in her life to unfold in such manner that facilitates the acquisition of relevant personal skills. She may stumble on the perfect coach who can take her to new heights, through obstacles and hardship, to an Olympic medal.

As part of her training the gymnast watches the performance of past medal winners over and over, replaying incessantly the image of a perfect landing from a backward somersault. She gets on the mat and practices the movement repeatedly, compares her performance with the model image and fine tunes after each replication until she attains the impeccable version.

Over time, the continuous application of consciousness works like the additive process in 3-D printing. It adds layers of energy to a prime seed, following a blueprint, and a form gradually takes shape.

When our consciousness is unshakably anchored in a thought or image, we refer to this phenomenon as a belief. The term belief that we use here is more like a conviction. A belief, as we mean it, is a state of being that bypasses the thinking mind and that is governed directly by the heart. When I “believe”, there is no questioning by the mind, there is certitude. I feel that there is nothing that stands between me and what I believe. I am my belief.

If there is any trace of doubt attached to this state of being, it is not yet a belief. For example, through rational analysis, I become convinced that a certain action among several options is the best course of action. This is my judgment under a specific set of circumstances, and is subject to change with the changing circumstances. This is a state of mind that is to be differentiated from my belief, which is a “state of heart”, not normally subject to the precariousness of the mundane world. When I believe in something, I identify with it wholeheartedly.

When a feeling is derived from a belief, it is vivid and it represents reality to the subject. When the feeling is associated with a clear vision of the world, this vision materializes easily, in accordance with the process that we described above. “Feeling” in this context, is a projection of the belief. Feeling is the language that we must use to communicate with the energetic realm. This language can be learned and mastered with practice.

There are times when the feeling is not clear or when it feels that nothing is happening. The subject may not have developed sufficient sensitivity to be aware of the energetic currents. However, if her faith is strong and she sincerely believes in the outcome, it will materialize. As applied to chi-kung for example, while a student is working on moving *chi* through a particular

area of the body to soothe an injury, he may not detect any change in his body. However, if he faithfully follows instructions and sustains regular practice, one day he will find that the body has healed.

Repetition reinforces belief. Over time, faith grows and when it is built up to a certain level, it congeals into a sensation that gradually becomes more vivid and real to the subject.

In the case of our would-be Olympic athlete, the more she experiences synchronicity between her intent and her life events, the firmer her belief becomes. She gradually acquires the ability to “feel” and actualize her techniques in the detail that she envisions. In the long run, through the power of her beliefs, she feels and creates her life.

Kozen no Ki: 浩然の氣

By Naomi Hayashi

“Budo-ka must possess humility and selflessly to serve others; that is the true Bushi-do” by Risuke Otake in the video “Katori Shinto Ryu”

Last year, Sensei asked me how to read the calligraphy “浩然の氣 (Kozen no Ki)” which you can find in the Sensei’s room; it is literally very large Ki. That was the first time I saw the word, so I had to check the meaning when I got home. Since then, I have encountered the word while reading old Japanese Budo (martial way) books. I understand that “Kozen no Ki” is an important concept for people who study Budo, so I would like to summarize about my understanding of “Kozen no Ki”.

During the Edo-period (1603-1868) in Japan, Neo-Confucianism was popular subject to study. Mencius was a classic Chinese philosopher, and his book was one of the must-read books for the

Samurai (warriors) class; “Kozen no Ki” was described in his book. His most famous concept was “human nature is basically good”. This implies that we are all born with the seeds of four virtues: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. Bad environment and education could prevent the growth of the virtues. It requires good ethical education and some individual efforts to grow the seeds to sprouts, and we will eventually have fully matured (or developed) four virtues inside of us.

According to Mencius, “Kozen no Ki” is naturally occurring huge and strong moral energy; it is like spiritual power or fundamental of human being to do right things. It takes time to accumulate and grow larger with continuous practice of righteousness; as a result, the Ki can fill up between earth and heaven. However, the Ki shrinks easily when the artificial righteousness comes externally. We sometime do nice things to others by expecting some returns from the good deeds, and “Kozen no Ki” does not grow in the situation. The good conducts should be spontaneous, and there should be no calculation nor ulterior motives.

I understand that many Budo-ka (people who practice Budo) have believed that growing “Kozen no Ki” is more important than growing their status, property, or fame. I would like to keep this in my mind to continue training both physically and mentally.



Paul and Martin

A Shift in Meaning for an Aikidoka

By Paul Williams

There are many things in life that give one grounding, purpose, and a sense of direction. For me it is aikido more than anything else. It has been my life raft that keeps me afloat in the most turbulent waters of my life.

How did it happen? Why was it aikido and not something else? These are hard question to answer. For me, it was always going to be aikido and nothing else.

I was introduced to aikido through a friend of mine in high school. He was stoic, confident, and everything that I wasn't. I remember my first teaching from him. It was koshinage (a hip throw) in the middle of a parking lot. Although as exhilarating as it was flying in the air without knowing how or why, it wasn't what really peaked my interest.

At that time I was 17 and like most 17 year olds I was going through a bit of an existential crises. I was lost. I had very few friends in an orthodox southern Baptist school. Most likely because I didn't buy into the dogmatic belief systems taught there. Instead, I'm of the school of

thought that no one has all the answers but some have many. I was looking for something else out there; a new philosophy, a new way of being, and a new ethic.

Aikido had most of what I was looking for at that time. It was a philosophy of love born from the ashes of World War II. There was an enigmatic founder who was a prolific martial artist. It was an effective martial art that can render any attacker subdued if practiced enough. Last, but not least, it was something that I thought even Jesus himself would enjoy. I mean the art of fighting without hurting the attacker. It was the ultimate ethos. It was the practice of love.

Aikido has also benefited the lives of people I am close to. A few months after my introduction, I learned that my older brother had started practicing in Chicago without me knowing. It was a strange coincidence but one that makes sense considering our family trait with issues of channeling our anger. This had led to a positive turn in his life. My brother moved to Japan, became a Shodan, and learned to speak and write Japanese fluently. It was there his temperament completely changed. He became slow to anger and responded to adversity without knee jerk reactions. He was a changed man for the better and I will always admire him for that.

I feel fortunate to have found aikido at such a formative age. It has always been there for me throughout my adult life. Aikido and its principles kept me afloat through my worst break ups, my rock bottom party days, and recently the passing of my father. The principles of redirecting an attacker's energy helps you blend with life's curve balls and teaches you that control over the self is the most important lesson you can learn. To get out of your own way and let the chips fall where they may.

Tragedy in one's life is the ultimate test for those principles in the art of peace. There are no words for the grief that I have felt in the past few months since my father's passing. If I did not

have in me the lessons learned from aikido, I am not sure I would have fared so well. While the lessons learned in practice are important, the one thing that I've gained most is the community found in aikido. There has been so much support and love from the good people at The Aikido Orlando Dojo and people around the world that I have met through this martial art. In so many ways they have been my safety net and support system. I hope one day I will be able to return the favor and love they have given me.

So in short, what I was originally looking for in aikido (a self defense with philosophical underpinnings) was not what gave me the most meaning and purpose in my life. The aikido community is vast and rich with some of the most amazing people. These range from people that have helped me through the tough times in my personal life to the people across the globe that inspire me to live a more fulfilled life. Aikido practitioners tend to be the type of people that seek better ways of being. They want to live a life with less conflict and wish to live in more harmonious ways. This community is the manifestation of what I was looking for all those years ago.



Paul and Sensei

Answering the Call

By Kori Hargreaves

You are standing at the edge.

As you look out across the canyon, you sense that the next level of your potential lies beyond the precipice...

You can hear it calling to you.

Despite yourself, something in you is compelled to answer... drawn beyond the steep lip of the canyon, longing to meet the call echoing across the landscape.

Fearful bells are screaming in your veins, arguing for you to stay with your familiar, safe, predictable existence,

Advising you to:

Wait!

Think.

Rationalize.

Don't move!

And even so, you are already scrambling down the rocks to the bottom, heading for the other side to find out what it is, who you are, *who you can be that you never knew before.*

The journey up the opposite wall is full of challenges, doubt, breakthroughs, and hardships

But you continue on, and in the process you are changed.

When you finally get to the top, it takes time to catch your breath.

As you walk on across the steppe, your heartbeat slows...

Refreshed, you notice your surroundings, and the fervor begins to subside as you adjust to your new sense of being.

You walk, and walk, exploring the plateau, until one day you find yourself at the edge of another canyon... different and perhaps wider or steeper than before,

and something is calling you from the other side, shrouded in mist.

The fear bells start ringing

your pulse quickens,

and you know that Time has come again to draw you beyond

the limits of what you know yourself to be.

Eventually you recognize the pattern,

How it appears in so many forms,

Large and small...

How it compels you and shapes you,

How you grow, blossom, fruit, dissolve, and rest,

again and again.

Herein lies the courage of the ages.

The curiosity and willingness

the inner laughter and light,

the humble and immense potential

in the spirit of all things.

Bukidori Abroad: Jo and Bokken as Travel Companions

By Elias Marvinney

Since I've been in Davis and practicing aikido, my work for the university has provided both opportunity and responsibility for extensive travel. This has included trips abroad for conferences, research, and education as well as visits back home to the East coast. While I count myself fortunate for each of these opportunities, it has posed a slight obstruction to the continuity of my training.

Overcoming these training lapses was a major consideration when I first decided to acquire my own jo and bokken, just before shipping off to Sri Lanka for a 6 week tropical agriculture development training practicum in summer 2010. We flew out of LAX, and this was my first time going through airport security with the jo. I should never have used the phrase "practice weapon", because that held me up at the ticket counter for about 30 minutes. Lesson learned, and although they made me unstrap the jo from my pack eventually I got through. Ironically though, following the 22 hours and 2 layovers only the jo ended up arriving in Colombo, with everything else held up somewhere between Los Angeles and Dubai! So that was interesting – a week without a change of clothes, but at least I was able to keep up with my suburi.

I carried that jo with me all around Sri Lanka, from the Royal University in the central highlands, to the major Ceylon tea producing region, the ancient city of Anuradhpura now occupied only by hundreds of thieving macaque troops. I did feel a little safer around the monkeys carrying the jo – fortunately I never had to use it, but those guys can be terrifyingly aggressive.

I practiced everywhere I went, and sometimes it drew a crowd of locals eager to find out just what the heck the crazy American thought he was doing. When not traveling via the Victorian-era rail system, motorbikes and 3-wheeled "tuk-tuks" were the primary mode of transportation – and it's a good thing the traffic laws there have a somewhat looser, more improvisational feel, as the jo protruding into the street probably would not have been tolerated otherwise.

Since then I have made it a habit to travel with jo and bokken on any trips longer than a week or so. I've found that it's typically easier to send them by mail to meet me when I fly home to my parent's house in NY or elsewhere within the continental United States, but otherwise I just accept the awkward conversations with TSA and airline representatives.

I've found that calling jo a "walking stick" is usually sufficient, and ever since my visit to Ecuador in 2013 it's even been true. A copper pipe cap fitted with heavy denim makes an excellent protector for the jo on long hikes, and in Ecuador you really ought to have something like jo to keep feral dog packs away. The dogs are smart – if they see you with jo protection, they won't approach.

Aside from security, traveling with jo may have come close to saving our lives on a two-day trek – we had one case of severe altitude sickness and one sprained ankle, and I'm not sure how the victims would have made it down out of the mountains without the support of jo.

Unfortunately I missed my chance to practice at altitude surrounded by the remains of an Incan watchtower, but I was happy to have come prepared to help. It's pretty hard to find walking sticks or crutch material in the paramo.

I had a similar experience in Scotland this past summer – climbing down from the Cairngorms my foot cramped up – still don't know what caused it, but I was really glad to have jo with me. On that trip I also brought it to Germany to keep up with my practice during a visit with friends, and I even managed a few sessions in

the tiny backyard garden of the London flat we rented during my conference.

Last year, in Australia, I drove 3000 miles through the outback visiting orchards and university research sites. This was of course on the left side of the road, and between that and the constant surprise kangaroo crossings, it was quite a taxing experience. However, I learned that there is no better pick-me-up than running through the 31 jo kata at a rest stop. I got some odd looks there as well, but only from the kangaroos.

All told, my experience of traveling with jo and bokken over the past several years has been interesting, but overwhelmingly positive. Despite a few sticky situations with various authorities, I can honestly say that I've never regretted bringing them along and I'd recommend it to anyone!

Might Makes Right?

By Donny Shiu

Should one impose one's will through superior strength and power? This would mean those who are the strongest will rule others and have the power to determine right and wrong. This does not sound harmonious to me, especially if you are on the receiving end. Fortunately this negative expression of power is not embraced by majority of civilized society. Many of us conduct ourselves with certain moral civil code. We adhere to the concept of majority rules with minority rights. Conflicts and disagreements stemming from different viewpoints should be resolved in a civilized manner. From friends disagreeing over dinner choices to nations at war, imposing one point of view might not be a good strategy to resolve many conflicts big or small. What is the solution?

A good option is to negotiate. Reaching out to understand is a good first step. Maybe there are more agreements than disagreements in the

situation. By seeing the conflict from the other's perspective, create the opportunity for each party to seek common ground. Maybe your friend's idea of having pizza instead of Chinese food is not a bad idea after all. Being flexible and able to adapt is helpful in resolving conflicts through give and take. It is not always a zero sum game.

What about physical confrontations? It is not acceptable in civil society, especially when the strong preys on the weak. Unfortunately it does happen, in an infinite number of scenarios. Since the outcome is never going to be good, it is best to avoid such situations. As current events have demonstrated, good judgement and skill are required in proper use of force. What is in you "tool box" of skills?

For me fitting nicely in the self-defense continuum is Aikido. O' Sensei's non-confrontational approach is expressed in the joining, blending, redirecting techniques. Practitioners do not directly opposing an attack using force-on-force where only the strong often prevails. Instead the Aikidoist joins the incoming force and the aggression/conflict is skillfully blended and redirected/resolved with no harm to anyone. It's not about overcoming power with power where the defender can turn into aggressor very quickly.

Aikido is not esoteric at all. Try this case in point. We negotiate when we drive by blending with traffic. We merge with other cars big or small, fast or slow. We are attentive while on the road. We train ourselves to be defensive drivers, NOT offensive. When the situation calls for, we spring into action to defend ourselves with skillful driving techniques. "Punching and kicking" your way through traffic is to impose your will power. I don't recommend this force-on-force approach; you might get smack by a bigger meaner truck. Might does not right. A harmonious peaceful ride home is preferred. So train hard and drive safe!

Strength Is A Weak Substitute For Strong Technique

By Mitch Peters

Using too much strength is still all too familiar at this stage of my training. I watch the instructor demonstrate a technique, and I think I understand the moves. Then we pair up for practice; sempai goes first and makes it look easy. Then it's my turn, and I get that dreaded feeling that I'm using too much muscle. I have done something incorrectly and now I'm trying to compensate by using more strength. I know this shouldn't be a test of force, but somehow I haven't moved quite the way I should have. Sometimes strength will overcome and sometimes it won't.

There are many reasons I chose to train in Aikido. High on the list was that it is not a competition of strength. Taking advantage of your opponent's energy and redirecting his force seems like the ideal solution to a hostile encounter in which an opponent may come in any size. Work smart not hard so to speak. Don't directly oppose where your opponent wants to go. Blend with your opponent and then redirect them adding a little bit of energy to the force they are providing until they are overextended and unbalanced. An easy concept, but difficult in reality.

After four years of training I have become familiar with a number of techniques; however, I still have much to learn about their proper execution. No matter how familiar I am with a technique, I learn something new each time I train and with each person with whom I train. Each technique that I learn adds to my options to better blend with the movement of my opponent. As I become more proficient in a technique, the strength exerted diminishes.

To say that strength has no bearing would be naïve. But I should endeavor to minimize its role in the outcome of my techniques.

Hopefully over time I will put more of the pieces together. Perhaps someday I will be weaker with stronger technique.

Spirit Of Aikido Training

By Guy Michelier

Aikido, which means the way to harmony with ki, is a modern martial art of Kenjutsu (the art of using the sword in combat) and JuJutsu (the art of using an attacker's force against himself or herself). The mother art of Aikido is AikiJutsu, a highly refined but nevertheless still combative form of JuJutsu. The Japanese word "Jutsu" means skill or technique used in war and was meant for survival in battle. Morihei Ueshiba, a highly spiritualized KenJutsu and JuJutsu master and the founder of Aikido, omitted the word "Jutsu" in AikiJutsu and replaced it with "do". The term "do" means the way that connotes a spiritual path, a way of life. "Do" does not mean a way of violence, destruction or combat. Among other things, it means a way of improving one's self and one's quality of life.

After over 20 years of martial art training in Karate and my past 5 years of training in Aikido, I have learned the benefit of Aikido and what it does to my body, mind, soul and spirit. Although Aikido has also given me at times some physical challenges it has nevertheless given me more benefits that allowed me to grow not only with the techniques but particularly listening to my body when it comes to pain. Although, I can no longer train as much as I would like, executing certain techniques as I used to, I still find the practice of Aikido especially beneficial when I listen more attentively to my body, which ultimately has become the practice of my daily life. Every moment of my life involves some sort of Aikido related training or knowledge – with others, with our environments, with our bodies, such as posture, and within our mind.

And yet, it is our choice to see that we channel this training and techniques as a creative force for changes, which makes true growth and learning Aikido possible. Hoa Sensei and Bill Witt Sensei demonstrated in the last special class such beautiful skills regarding our body in the practice of Aikido especially when it comes to different height, when training with others, using force and strength wisely because not all bodies respond the same way. Both are such masters when it comes to the spirit of Aikido.

Thank you Hoa and Witt Sensei.



Bill Witt Sensei and Hoa Sensei



Seminar Participants

One-Year Observations

By Kim Sullivan

“I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.” -- Bruce Lee

This is a quote that I have heard many times in my martial arts career, and a sentiment that I appreciate and subscribe to. I have heard stories exemplifying this principle, and I have been challenged to perfect a single technique as my “go-to”. I remember a story of a fighter who was injured during a match. His instructor asked him what technique he still had available, and he responded that he had a reverse punch. The instructor told him to use what he had. For the rest of the match, he only threw reverse punches . . . and he won.

I trained in tang soo do (basically the Korean version of karate – empty hand fighting) for seven years before coming to aikido. Lots of drills, lots of repetition, and lots of emphasis on developing ‘muscle memory’. It all made sense as a path to develop as a martial artist – even though the drills did not seem practical or effective in a street fight. We were made to understand the progression of learning the basics before taking them to application. My instructor frequently used the analogy of a ‘bento box’ with 4 quadrants with these being: learning, practice, performance, and application. Every skill, form, or combination set can move among the quadrants. When first learning a new technique, the student is thinking about the technique itself – hand position, foot position, etc. After learning the technique, the student moves into the practice phase. This phase is still a directed practice with the brain telling the body

what to do with lots and lots of repetition . . . and then more repetition. Once the student reaches the performance phase, the technique is in muscle memory and the brain steps back and allows the body to do what it knows how to do. In the application phase, the student does not think about the technique at all. He only sees his target and attacks his target. The technique happens without any conscious thought. Of course, skills learned can move throughout the four quadrants of the bento box as elements are perfected or “tweaked”. Then it is back to the learning phase and the practice phase to incorporate the new elements.

So, how does this philosophy transfer to aikido? In the weapons classes, it was obvious. Suburi drills. First suburi about 100 times on the first day. Then when graduating to the partner drills, it was one technique, stop-start (the learning quadrant of the bento box). Then it was slow awase (the practice phase). Then the awase was slightly more fluid and the pauses were removed (either back to learning phase for some, or continuing practice phase). The instructors demonstrated a performance level of the technique, but it would be a while before a new student reached that level. The application level would involve a randori sword fight (seems dangerous and probably not in line with the current culture).

So how does the martial arts philosophy of endless repetition and drilling apply to taijutsu (hand techniques)? At first, I was at a loss. My first day in the regular class is a day not to be forgotten. In fact, it was December 29, 2014. I did not return to a taijutsu class until March 2015 – and that was on a dare from a friend—a good friend I might add. On that December day, I was introduced to techniques I had never seen before. And then I only was able to muddle through the technique once before moving on to something else. Once again, it was something I had never seen before and I was completely confused and disoriented; there was no opportunity to learn it before moving on to the next technique. This happened about six more

times during the class and I was completely overwhelmed and frustrated. Whatever happened to repetition and endless drilling of a new technique? I did not understand how I was to learn anything in this manner. I would try to practice at home but I could not recall enough of the technique to be able to practice it. Seniors would say not to worry because it would come around again. I was thinking that at this rate, it would take years to learn any technique, much less have the opportunity to practice it or be able to perform it without thinking. Each time the technique came around again, it was like it was the first time because there was not the opportunity to repeat it or really learn it. I drew the analogy of sprinkling sand over a large warehouse floor and then coming back and sprinkling a second layer over the first layer a few months later. And that first layer of sand probably blew away before the second layer was applied. It would take years for that sand to take any shape or form. Why not develop one section at a time?

So what is the thread that holds this together? If the martial arts emphasize repetition and drilling of specific techniques, what was I missing? There had to be a common thread or theme to the class. Clearly, it was not meant to be the technique itself, or we would do it more than one repetition. My recent revelation is that it is not the individual technique, but the underlying philosophy. The technique is just the means to convey the underlying principles of balance, blending, and structure (probably more, but after one year, this is what I have). Ask me again next year and we’ll see what else I can add to this theory.

“I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.” -- Bruce Lee

The Owl in My Garden

By Bruce Donehower

These mornings just past sunrise when I go out into my backyard to do my daily rounds of Tai Chi, I have been greeted by a screech owl. The screech owl lives in the owl house that Marion and I put up in our backyard last winter. The owl peeps out of his house around sunset and sunrise – not to greet me, however; I think he or she is either looking for a mate or else is on the lookout for something yummy to kill and eat. Screech owls eat songbirds, along with other critters and insects. I also have songbirds in my backyard, and I encourage them with bird feeders – so I suppose some persons might say that I am abetting a serial murderer (the owl) and victimizing the poor songbirds. But I don't see it that way.

We have other critters in our backyard. They come and go. A few weeks ago, when the weather started to turn cool, right before Marion and I went to Germany for three weeks, I woke up at 3 am to the noise of what sounded like a burglar in the house. Being a crack aikidoka, my mind went immediately to fantasies of violence. I'd grab my bokken and bash the baseless brute. I'd apply a devastating nikyo that would electrify his wrist and make him a babbling idiot for the rest of his life. But no, I soon calmed down and came into my right mind and lo and behold I discovered that the sound I heard was the noise of a raccoon family on the roof. I grabbed a flashlight and went outside, and for the next hour or so I engaged in a hide and seek game with the raccoon family, trying to get them off the roof by a) tossing oranges at them (they appreciated the game of catch); b) squirting them with a pressure hose (they enjoyed the shower); c) making threatening movements with my flashlight (they ran around the roof in delight to watch me make a fool of myself). Raccoons, in case you don't know, can be quite destructive. Their little paws are adapted to work like the

human hand, so once they find something to pry open they can get in your house and do a lot of damage. (My sister had to battle back a raccoon one night that was taking the screen off her bedroom window – or so she reported.) Raccoons will lure a dog to a swimming pool and then pull the dog in and drown it.

We also have families of skunks and possums and of course squirrels. The squirrels at one time did succeed at gnawing their way into our house. We have been visited by turkeys, cats, a stray beagle, and other critters I'm sure I haven't even been awake to notice. The skunks are particularly lively in our neighborhood. In May, Marion and I often observe the little skunklings following their mom out of the burrow, or we wake up at night to an intense odor of skunk stink.

Anyway, long story short, you are probably wondering at this point why I don't do something to eliminate these pesky critters. I have to admit, I have encouraged them to show up. Some of you have been to my house and have seen the backyard. You know that one of the things I like to do is to plant bamboo all over the place. I have about twelve varieties, I think, at this point. We keep the backyard rather wild and bushy – and the critters like this.

I had a neighbor who took me to task on my approach to backyard culture. He was a prison parolee who was living next door in a metal shack that his stepbrothers had put up because they couldn't stand having him in the house. Let's call him Joe. Joe walked around all day in all weather with his shirt off. He had an amazing leathery skin that was tanned like a hide. He also had amazing muscles because he lifted weights all the time. It was something he told me that he did in prison. Joe was dying of liver cancer, but he was really martial and focused and energetic and on the go all the time.

Joe couldn't understand why I let my backyard become a "jungle," as he put it. Joe took the opposite approach and was philosophically opposed to untidiness and mess. When he wasn't

lifting weights, he was busy mowing his lawn obsessively or ripping out shrubbery and plants and generally turning his property into a tidy wasteland. But I told him I didn't share his point of view. I took a more Wabi Sabi approach to life and tried to include untidiness and imperfection in my cosmos. Joe and I, despite our philosophical differences, eventually bonded on basic spiritual principle. He told me one day that he had accepted Jesus Christ as his personal lord and savior, and I said: "Great! Amen to that!" I didn't get into a discussion about Buddhism or Taoism, however; there was no real point in arguing doctrine when we were obviously united in our enthusiasm for the main thing.

Anyway, I mention all this because in the morning when the screech owl watches me do Tai Chi, my mind inevitably wanders to the dojo. As I move through the Tai Chi form each morning, I consider the similarities of a backyard garden to a dojo where we practice Aikido, the art of peace and way of harmony. And I think about Joe, may he rest in peace.

Joe was rigorous and disciplined in his understanding of the application the Way. He had no tolerance for plants or critters. He was straight-ahead and disciplined and uncomplicated in his approach to his backyard. His property was a clear message to critters: KEEP OUT. To co-exist with Joe in his backyard required Joe's permission.

I think he lost some diversity as a result.

He seemed to have understood that, I think. (Or am I sentimentalizing?)

After Joe and I became acquainted and swore brotherhood on the basis of the Unique Principle of Spiritual Insight, Joe took more and more of an interest in my backyard. He liked to play darts outside his metal shed near his dumbbells, and I noticed that after a while he often "accidentally" missed his dartboard so that the dart flew over the fence and landed in my bamboo. Joe then would appear and ask to fetch the dart. At first I thought: "hmm, bad aim." But

like I said, Joe was intensely (albeit narrowly) focused, and so after a while I began to suspect that he intentionally threw his darts into my backyard so that he could retrieve them and visit the backyard "jungle," as he called it. Like the owl, the skunk, the possums, the squirrels, the songbirds, the bees, the raccoons, the beagle, the Airedale, the rats, the mice, the cats, the dogs, the etcetera, Joe showed up. Could be a problem? Maybe. But he showed up.

Once when I was at an Aikido seminar, the Shihan said to us: "I think the highest and most difficult application of Aikido is to create a community that works. Learning to roll or to apply a joint lock is a matter of rote and perseverance, but learning how to create a dojo community is an art that is very tricky, shifting, and difficult."

A dojo is like a garden, at least for me. A garden, in its variety, is a place where all kinds of surprises just show up. How do we create harmony with the unexpected? That seems to be the challenge common to a dojo and a backyard garden, says my owl.





DAN Promotions

Martin Dubcovsky	3rd Dan
Donny Shiu	2nd Dan
Paul Williams	2nd Dan

Announcements

Absences from the Dojo:

Please inform Sensei or one of the instructors for any absence longer than one week.

Monthly membership dues apply irrespective of absence; exceptions are made for circumstances outside of the control of the students, such as serious injury or illness, job or study requirements. Questions? Talk to Sensei.

Instructors: Please remember to turn off the heat and air conditioning when you leave the dojo at the end of the day.

**KYU Promotions
September 14, 2015**

Andrew Peters	5K Jr.
Hsinli "Sunny" Yen	2K
Jared Canio	8K Jr.
John Johnson	6K Jr.
Mehul Paparaju	8K Jr.
Naomi Hayashi	3K

TAA News:

The TAA has strengthened the ranking requirements for dan ranks, e.g. Nidan requires 2 years training after Shodan, Sandan requires 3 years, etc.

**A new introductory “Beginners’ Class”
starts in January 2016.**

**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, 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!**



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