

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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Meditation Practice

By Hoa Newens Sensei

*“Within each one of us is a temple of stillness
that permits no intrusion of the world’s turmoil.
Whatever may be going on around us, when we
enter that sanctuary of silence in our souls, we
feel God’s blessed presence and receive His
peace and strength.”*

“Enter the Quiet Heart”
Sri Daya Mata.

Meditation allows us to get in touch with our
Higher Self, which is directly connected to the
Divine Source whence we came. Through
meditation, we receive divine guidance through
the Higher Self.

In simple terms, meditation detaches us from the
impact of the world so that our Higher Self can
come out and the Divine can come in. Three
stages can be discerned.

Though there are many methods of meditation
from various spiritual traditions, all contain
essentially three basic steps:

1. Still the body
2. Still the breath
3. Still the mind

Below are instructions for a simple method of
meditation based on the Taoist tradition.

Still the Body

Sit or stand comfortably, making sure that the
Central Axis of the body is vertical and well
supported by a stable base. The Central Axis
(also known as the Tai Chi Pole, see diagram
below) is the vertical line that joints the three
Dantien (lower, middle and upper) and the two

energy portals (*Baihui* at the crown of the head and *Huiyin* at the perineum). Concentrate your awareness on the Central Axis and let the rest of the body hang from it, loose and relaxed. Let all movements settle at their lowest level on their own without suppressing them.

Scan the body from top to bottom, note any tension and release it. Repeat at least three times.

Still the Breath

Once the body has become relatively still, focus attention on the breath and let it settle in the belly without forcing it. Feel the abdomen expanding outward with each in-breath, in all directions: upward and downward, to the front, the sides and to the back. Let it relax naturally with each out-breath.

Let the breath happen on its own and keep your attention on the movement that it generates within the torso, for about 30 breaths, or until you become aware that the entire torso is breathing and yet the breath is barely perceptible.

Still the Mind

Once you feel your entire body breathing smoothly and continuously, turn your attention to the mind. The mind's normal activity is to generate thoughts, so let it be but refrain from feeding it. Witness each thought as it arises and set it free. The mind will slow down when your consciousness stays detached from its thoughts.

Every few minutes, cycle your awareness through the stillness of body, breath, and mind. The sound of a bell can help you remember this periodic check.

Practice at the Basic level for a few years; daily practice sessions of 15-30 minutes are advisable. There is no rush. You will know when to proceed to the next level.

Even if you just stick to this basic level, as you sincerely persevere through your practice, you will receive implicit guidance on how to proceed and arrive at the same results as would the advanced meditators under the tutelage of a teacher. The only requirement is for you to

remain open and alert to what is unfolding within you.

Experienced practitioners can add an energetic dimension by using the Chi dissolving practice for **Still the Body** and add **Breathe Chi** into the practice routine, which should now last about 30 minutes.

Still the Body

Sit or stand comfortably and keep the Central Axis vertical. Dissolve the energy gates from top to bottom (This is a Chi Gung practice that is not discussed in detail here). Advanced students can dissolve from the center outward. When energy gates have been dissolved, scan the body from top to bottom three times to release any other residual energy.

Breathe Chi

Upon completion of **Still the Breath**, extend Chi along the Central Axis through *Baihui* toward Heaven, and through *Huiyin* toward Earth. This is when the Central Axis becomes the Tai Chi Pole, and connects the three *Dantien* of the human body to the heavenly energy pole and to the earthly energy pole (*Infinity Poles*)

As you inhale, draw the Chi from Heaven to the *Upper Dantien* and Chi from Earth to the *Lower Dantien* by concentrating simultaneously on these *Dantien*. Alternatively, you can choose the Lower Dantien as the only focal point.

As you exhale, release the Chi in the three *Dantien* outward through the bones, flesh and skin.

This breathing increases Chi flow and helps to integrate the energy bodies. It will gradually strengthen the connection between the Dantien and the Heaven and Earth Poles, helping to expand consciousness in the infinite space between these two poles.

After several years of practice, an advanced meditator can modify the fourth step **Breathe**

Chi and add a fifth step **Welcome the Higher Self**:

Breathe Chi

Continue the breathing until you clearly feel the Tai Chi Pole breathing with Chi: on the out-breath, the Chi is dispersed from the center outward; on the in-breath, the Chi is drawn inward from the Infinity Poles to your Dantien.

Once the adept becomes proficient in this type of breathing, at a certain point, the breath and Chi will transcend the body, and physical boundaries are dissolved. The Chi can be pushed further out of the body boundaries to form a Chi ball around the meditator. With practice, as the meditator's awareness grows, the Chi ball grows.

Welcome the Higher-Self

Gradually, layers of mundane clothing fall off, boundaries of the normal self are dissolved, allowing the inner light to shine through and the Divine light to reach in. During these brief moments there are only awareness and total clarity. With sustained practice, these moments will occur more frequently and in longer interval, providing openings for the Higher Self (the Soul) to emerge and reconnect with its Divine Source. This is the beginning of communion with the Divine. From this time on, you will receive relevant messages at opportune times that provide much needed guidance and solutions.

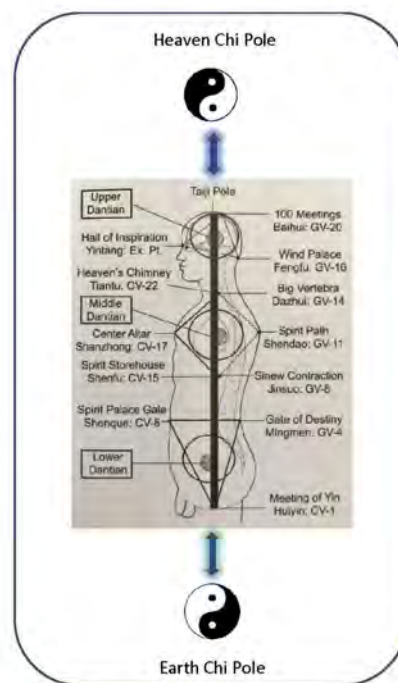
The following practical considerations facilitate the practice of meditation and allow it to bear fruit:

- Meditate daily, at the same times, e.g. 15 minutes before bedtime and 15 minutes upon waking up in the morning.
- Keep the meditation space clean and uncluttered and surround yourself with calming objects, sights and sounds.
- When entering the meditation space and time, let the world recede and let go of everything except your meditation practice.

- Stretch for a few minutes before and after each meditation session.
- Follow a disciplined schedule and let it become a habit, with no expectation of result.
- Periodically, find the time to sit for a longer session, say one hour or more.

The Taiji Pole and the Three Dantian

Picture from *Chinese Medical Qigong Therapy*, Vol. 1 – J. A. Johnson



A Teacher's Job

By Hoa Newens Sensei

The job of a gardener is to guide the plant to its optimal growth,

The job of an artist is to nurse an idea to its natural fruition,

The job of a parent is to help the child find his vocation.

A good gardener does not bend the plant according to her fantasy,

A good artist does not color the idea with his own thoughts,

A good parent does not impose her own will when raising the child.

Therefore, a good teacher guides the student gently,

Enabling the student to find and follow the dictates of his own soul.

Conversely,

A plant is a living being that is equipped to find its own nourishment in nature,

An idea is a potential energy that only needs a catalyst to realize,

A child is a divine spark that chooses to disguise itself in a human cloak to experience this earthly realm.

Therefore, a healthy plant thrives on its own with scant human intervention,

An idea lies dormant till it encounters human stimulus that lights it up into a multi-color array,

A healthy child will uncover its calling in due time,

A dedicated student will blossom past the teacher's touch.

Kokoro: Unifying Heart, Mind, and Soul in the West

By Korina Hargreaves

"Aikido training is a way of taking off the layers that cover up what is inside. If each of us could shed those layers, we would all shine with the same light."

Motomichi Anno Sensei, 8th Dan
(Translated by Linda Holiday Sensei, 6th dan)

At the rank of 3rd kyu, I attended my first seminar taught by a visiting teacher from Japan.

Motomichi Anno Sensei, 8th dan, travelled to Santa Cruz, CA to teach at the annual week-long gasshuku hosted by the Aikido of Santa Cruz dojo. Anno Sensei is one of the few direct students of O'Sensei still alive and actively teaching. At the time of the seminar, he was head of the Kumano Juku Dojo in Shingu, Japan, where he had been a senior instructor for four decades. He led his classes that week in Japanese, and the chief instructor of the local dojo translated his words into English as he taught. Listening to him speak, one word kept standing out to me over and over... that word was *kokoro*. It seemed to be at the center of what he was teaching, "*Kokoro o migaku*" he would say, placing his hand on his chest in a circular motion between techniques.

The phrase he repeated was translated into English then as "polish the heart." At that point in my training, focus had been directed wholly toward learning technique, and to be instructed to polish my heart was something new... the thought, words, and this general translation, stayed with me for years to follow.

I would like to explore *kokoro* in this essay, because as a Western student of Aikido I have come to think it is an important concept that is not done justice by basic translation... and yet, translation is how many of us here in the United States have access to the written teachings of the Founder and his direct students. For me as an English speaker, coming to understand more fully what the meaning of *kokoro* encompasses in Japanese culture has opened new perspectives in my training.

Kokoro, written in Japanese kanji as 心, is commonly translated here in the West to mean either "heart" or "mind", depending on the context. In English, these words are used to denote two different things, and generally would not be considered interchangeable. However, in Japanese the character is used not to indicate a single noun, but instead a larger concept. This

concept is unique from mainstream Western views of a separate heart and mind, thus making a basic verbatim translation challenging. Ask a Japanese American to translate the meaning of *kokoro*, and they will explain that it encompasses many English words, including but not limited to: heart, center (of life/the body), soul, mind, feelings, emotions, thoughts, self, essence, will, intention, motive, character, attitude, core, true nature... Whereas in the West we tend to think about many of these as relatively separate concepts, in Japan they are woven together with one word.

In essence, when speaking about the heart in Japanese culture, it is impossible to separate the heart of feelings and emotions from its larger connection to the thoughts, mind, soul, and true nature of a person. Similarly, when speaking about the mind, intelligence, and intentions, one cannot omit their connection to the fabric of heart and soul.

Absorbing this, one can see how a quick word-for-word translation of *kokoro* into English as either “heart” or “mind” is rudimentary at best, and a listener or reader may very well miss the point intended by those with a deeper understanding of the cultural context of the word.

For example, if you were instructed by your teacher in English to “clear your mind” while training, you may settle into releasing the thoughts you were having about the workday or what you might be fixing for dinner... but how would your response change if you were instructed to clear your heart? Your soul? *The essence of your being*? If, when your teacher told you to “clear your mind,” it was understood that you would clear all of these interconnected aspects of your self... what would that feel like? For me personally, this shift in thinking away from isolated intellect is incredibly powerful.

It brings us to *Mushin*, a concept often spoken of across the martial arts. *Mushin* has been widely translated from Japanese into English to mean “no-mind”, and is used to reference an ultimate

state of awareness in which all extraneous thoughts are absent, allowing a person to be entirely present in the moment, to react to whatever comes in the most natural way...

Mushin in Japanese, is written 無心. The first character *mu*, 無, is used to indicate absence or nothingness. Looking more closely, one can see the second character in this compound word, *shin*, is in fact 心 (*kokoro*). The reason for the pronunciation difference (and why *mushin* is not pronounced “mukokoro”) is that Japanese kanji generally have at least two phonetic readings: *kunyomi*, the traditional Japanese pronunciation, and *onyomi*, which is based on the original pronunciation of the kanji in the Chinese language, from which the Japanese written characters were adapted. One or another phonetic reading of a kanji is employed in spoken Japanese depending on the context and its combination with other characters, but the meaning of the character remains unchanged regardless of which reading is used.

Without any background in Japanese language, a student of the martial arts in the United States such as myself might encounter the words *kokoro* and *mushin* and never draw the connection between the two concepts by simply hearing them spoken or seeing their Romanized written forms. With our heavily mind/intellect-based culture, it is easy to take in the English term “no-mind”, and assimilate it as an entirely intellectual concept. That is, when striving for *mushin*, I might focus on the need to empty my mind of thoughts, again and again, and make the “empty mind” my ultimate goal. However, if, by understanding the complexity and cultural differences in the concepts being referenced, I incorporate the entirety of the concept *shin/kokoro* into my practice, *mushin* would come to mean both the emptying of extraneous thoughts from my mind, as well as extraneous emotions and feelings from my heart. It would include clearing anything extraneous from my soul, my essence, my intentions, and my true nature, to arrive at a place of pure awareness in

the present moment that encompassed not my mind in isolation, but my entire being. Free of clutter, this openness would give a person access to all his or her living intelligence at once: physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental, and thus be open to respond naturally with whatever combination was most appropriate in the moment.

Beginning to explore the inevitable gaps in translation through which precious aspects of teachings can be lost and diluted can lead us to a greater understanding of the heart, or *kokoro*, of Aikido training. Returning to the words that touched me at that early seminar with Motomichi Anno Sensei, where he told us again and again with so much love, “*Kokoro o migaku.*” I first heard this phrase, and thought he was telling us to polish our hearts. Now I am beginning to see that his meaning ran much deeper and wider than that: *in training, polish your heart-mind, your soul, the core of your being... hone and refine your thoughts, feelings, and true nature in entirety, until your essence shines in the truest light.*

Given all of this, the written teachings of O’Sensei that are available as English texts take on new mystery and depth. What other rich cultural concepts and wisdom in the Founder’s words are we as English speakers missing when we read these translations at face value? When striving to practice an art who’s teachings lie in a culture other than one’s own, seeking to understand that which lives beyond wrote translation can uncover new lessons and nurture new perspectives.

In closing, I return to words of the Founder:

*“The Way of a Warrior
Cannot be encompassed by words or letters:
Grasp the essence
and move on toward realization.”*

Morihei Ueshiba O’Sensei
(Translated into English by John Stevens, *The Art of Peace*).



A Joyful Spirit Empowers Practice

By Joseph Galamba

As a musician, every few minutes of performance producing something for consumption by another person requires many hours of solitary practice. Working alone, there is no listener to judge and guide me, only my own idea of how something should sound and my awareness of how my body is responding to the unnatural process of clutching an instrument for hours a day. It is necessary and desirable at these times to be my own best critic; after all, there is nobody else to hold me to any external standard...at least not until it is too late!

The process is unfortunately something of a catch 22. As necessary as intent practice is, the more invested I get in a session the more tense I also become. The more effort that is exerted, the slower my movements are and the less likely I am to actually succeed at an attempt at a passage. Even more nefarious than physical tension is psychological tension. As the time of a performance approaches, frustration over missed repetitions gives birth to fear; fear, in turn, gives rise to all sorts of barriers to success that are difficult to overcome in practice and all but impossible in performance. In other words, intense practice can aggravate stage fright.

I believe that the practice of aikido is not dissimilar to that of an instrument. Though I have the benefit of a teacher and a partner in aikido to provide feedback, there is no competition or other fully objective means of gauging success, only the desire to execute a technique or movement correctly. Frustration, tension, and becoming myopic are all certainly problems common to the practice of aikido and it seems likely that if the need should ever arise to use the techniques of the art for self-defense, fear would also be a common problem.

The founder of aikido instructed that we should “always practice with the spirit of joy.” I don’t believe that this is a mere platitude, but a serious directive on how to practice effectively. Surely this does not mean to be happy and smiling at all times when practicing aikido, the founder took it very seriously; instead, I have come to understand that the spirit of joy is the ability to get out of our own way in practice. By detaching the part of the mind that observes our work and is critical of it from the process of practicing itself, we are able to always demand more while still finding satisfaction in what we are currently capable of doing. This way, success is something to celebrate, but failure is an opportunity and also worthy of celebration.

I have not found a way to eliminate fear, perhaps this is not possible, but O-sensei’s teaching has provided me with the means to prepare for and overcome the obstacles that fear presents. Looking for meaning in the very act of practicing has empowered me to practice without worry of creating problems for myself in performance. Now, I try to see a performance as just another aspect of the practice.

Flowing with the Training

By Kimberly Lounsberry

I have been practicing aikido for over two years now. I had been practicing circus arts for two years before I started aikido, so I was familiar with repetition, positioning, momentum and

muscle memory. When I began practicing aikido I found it a little more challenging than circus arts. It was challenging for me in the beginning because you needed to build a foundation for the techniques. There were a lot going on within the techniques and things were going slower than I had wanted.

Aikido has an added element along with its practice that isn’t just repetition, muscle memory, momentum and positioning. Sensei often talks about energy, spiraling, extending and receiving it. In the beginning I could tell that different people’s techniques had a different feeling. The more I trained, the more I began to feel an energetic flow whether I was receiving a technique as an uke, the environment or in myself. It is hard to explain, but energetic flow is like the swirling of wind but much subtler.

One of my discoveries this past year from training for long periods of time at the Tahoe and Bolinas gasshuku was that the more often or longer I trained, the deeper I got into the techniques. It was easier to build from the basics and what I had already done if I attended class more often. But it wasn’t as if I was just mentally remembering, but my body and mind were remembering at the same time. I would make an adjustment, feel it and then remember it in both mind and body. When I would feel a technique I did well, I would do my best to remember the feeling and replicate it. When I would receive a technique, I would capture that feeling and energy from the individual.

In my personal experience I remember how a technique feels in my body more than mentally how the technique is done. It is as if I have a library in me somewhere that curates the feelings of energies. The more I trained, the stronger the flow of energy I gained and retained. The momentum of this energy builds upon itself and helps me train day to day because it feels so energizing. Now I certainly feel like I can grasp any technique and become better at it if I train and practice daily and keep the flow going.

Anticipate

By Donny Shiu

Be Prepared

Practicing aikido involves blending with your uke a.k.a. “attacker.” Uke’s grabs, punches and strikes are physical actions that are pretty obvious. The intent to attack is less apparent. To anticipate what the attack will be is also not easy. If you have a sports car parked, the police cannot ticket you for intent (to speed). No action equals to no reaction. But, one can always be prepared. BOLO, be on the lookout. Driving is a perfect example of the necessity of being alert every time we are on the road. What is the intension of the other cars around you? Hopefully, they will signal. What if that car cuts in front of you? How are you going to react? Hopefully, you will take appropriate action.

First learning how to drive is a solo act. For example, learning the basics of operation of a car and/or driving around in an empty parking lot. As a beginner we learn aikido through the basics movement of one’s body. Next we learn how to blend with another person, similar to graduating from the parking lot to a four-lane freeway. With practice and experience, we become better at anticipating. People can’t hit you if you are not there! How good are you in anticipating?

We improve our odds through training and practice which can sharper our observation and awareness skills. For example, a new driver learns how to scan for, identify and analyze potential hazard on the road, including other moving cars, bikers, and pedestrians. By the time you feel contact is too late. When practice aikido in motion, you may get hit if you don’t anticipate, move, and blend. We should always be alert and prepared.

There is a “catch”. Anticipation is not the same as assumption.

Anticipation is about analyzing the situation and then predicts what is to happen next. If you are wrong, then it is considered your assumption.

Try not to assume because assume can make an ass/u/me.

Be Flexible

Anticipate but bear in mind that your predicted outcome is likely but not absolute...still prepared for the unexpected. If your prediction is wrong, adapt and maintain flexibility. Another driver may unexpectedly cut you off in traffic, making sudden lane changes, etc. Anticipate, but be cautious, flexible and adapt quickly (particularly in dynamic ever changing situations) are important skills in driving as well as in aikido, martial arts, and in life.

Training and experience improve your skills in managing situations, prepared for possibilities. Don’t get faint out of your shoes. Act timely and appropriately, be flexible. It is always the attack you didn’t foresee that will bite you in the a**! Luckily even a fool can learn something once he/she get hits.

Like them or not, life is full of surprises. The unexpected do happen, good or bad. Welcomed surprises (e.g., parties) can be a cause for joy. Of concern are the unwelcomed, unanticipated events, which can be bad for your well being, those “oh sh** moments.” An example of situations where you don’t want any bad surprises is an attack.

In combat, an unexpected attack could be hazardous to your health. A pilot anticipates preventing surprises in flight. Through training and experience, we can improve our predictive skills to minimize/eliminate the unexpected. You should also know what to do in cases of unanticipated events.

Anticipation is not assumption! Anticipate is to eagerly WAIT for a predicted outcome. To assume is to reach a conclusion based on incomplete data. An anticipated likely attack to be a punch or a kick is not a real punch or kick until it is. Something that walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, or looks like a duck, it’s likely a duck, but it’s still not a duck yet. Trust but verify.

Don't assume how an attack is executed (kick/punch, high or low). It does not mean ignore signs of threat, does not mean don't prepare, or that you can't initiate (elicit a desirable response). Be ready, be flexible, empty your mind, *Mushin*.

"Everyone has a plan 'til they get hit in the mouth" –Mike Tyson-

Train hard to not get hit, but do you know what to do if you did? Anticipate, don't assume, be flexible. All these skills can be developed and constantly improved upon through training and practice. Keep on training and practicing (move, blend, adapt)!



Our Recent Trip to Japan

By Donny Shiu

The Journey

With Sensei's leadership, the 2018 trip to Japan was successful and filled with great experiences. Martin Sempai, Naomi and a couple of Sensei's friends were very helpful in guiding us around Japan. The early part of our trip included a visit to Tanabe, where we paid our respects to O'Sensei at his gravesite, attended Doshu's seminar. We even had a private reception with Doshu. I adjusted well enough to join Sensei

and company to hike part of the Kumano Kodo Pilgrimage Route.

Soon after, Sempais Eric, Martin and I departed for Iwama early in the morning to make it in time to attend evening training. Our journey was long and hectic having to run for trains. A ride on the Shinkansen made it worthwhile. Our uchi deshi experience began in Iwama for the rest of the week along with Paul and Mitch, who met us at the dojo. We lived and trained together with fellow aikidoists visiting from other parts of the world.

Naomi and Sensei arrived later in the week to join us in Iwama for training. Luckily, the Davis group did get to enjoy a visit to a Japanese bath, onsen. At the end, our group had to leave for home as scheduled. We left Martin and Paul behind for a few more days of training.

Our departure was through Tokyo, where we had a group dinner and spent a night. To max out on our trip, we squeezed in a training session with Doshu at Hombu Dojo at 6 a.m. before heading for the airport. I missed my train to the airport (caught a later one) because I was easily convinced by Sensei to join the group for breakfast at this awesome pastry shop. It was worth it; the pastries were incredible. This is just to share a brief recap of my memorable adventure.

Importantly on my aikido training: I survived by following the motto below throughout this trip as well as my journey in aikido.

Awareness

I always look, listen, and learn

Humility

I bow with humility to receive from all

Perseverance

I always do my best, share, and persevere



Find Your Inner Flow

By Toby Hargreaves

If we are a lump of unformed clay when we are born, then as we grow we are shaped by many hands. Parents, family, teachers, and friends all contribute in informing us what is appropriate, acceptable, and expected from us as a part of society.

As young children, our inner urges and desires are right there on the surface, spilling out moment to moment. We grow up, and learn to control and manage these impulses, expressing them at proper times and places, and appropriate ways. By the time we're adults, we've become rather intricate sculptures, and such contraptions of checks and balances, it can be easy to lose sight of the inner self that seemed so accessible before.

Society does such a good job of schooling and training us into being responsible worker bees, but it doesn't always do the greatest job leading people back to themselves.

I feel that a key part of the mission of Aikido is to lead people back to themselves. This is also important for Peace in the world. People who are connected to themselves and satisfied with their lives don't tend to start wars or oppress others. People who march their own tune are difficult to brainwash and control.

Ironically, the practice of Aikido demands a good deal of conformity to a structure outside oneself. Giving oneself over to a rigid hierarchy and strict curriculum sounds like an odd pathway to freedom. But as Kori put it recently of the uchideshi program, "it's like you have to give yourself away completely, and then you get yourself back."

I think the practice of finding your inner flow, involves giving yourself sincerely to what you're doing. The more sincere and in the moment we are in giving, the more we get feedback that we are on the right track.

There is a Buddhist parable I remember hearing (might be getting the details wrong). Someone rafting down a river. This person keeps encountering tangles of branches or logs that hold them up for a time, before they free themselves and keep floating down the river. Eventually, they reach the sea.

The river is our life, and it does flow. If we can avoid and/or extricate ourselves from the myriad distractions and pitfalls that we encounter along the way, we'll eventually arrive at that Sea of Enlightenment.

Find that flow.

Reflection

By Donny Shiu

2018 is now history. Since I survived, it has been a pretty good year. Upon reflection, there were a number of special events that made the last year memorable unlike others. In brief, I'd say the Japan trip, the Bolinas Gasshuku, and the rank tests. There were a few inspirational moments really stood out for me that I'd like to share. I hope my stories will inspire you too. Visualize...

Kim's doing bokken strikes with the suburito as big as she is on the beach in Bolinas like a champ, Olive's great kyu test in the front of the adult class without hesitation...girl power! Martin Sempai's strength was amazing while we were in Japan. He was ill with a severe cough,

lacking sleep, feeling miserable and yet he carried on. He trained, cleaned, helped others, and took care of business like a true warrior. Paul was cool in having Eric Sempai's back after too many beverages in Japan.

In 2018, all the kyuu exam and dan test (less mine) performances were great and fun to watch. They inspire me to train hard to keep up with the high standards. I can't train without everyone, so thank you all. Of course, this includes all my driver buddies.

Happy New Year! Wish everyone great training in 2019.

The Secret Teaching Revealed! Seiza

By Bruce Donehower

Over the years I have written about seiza several times for this newsletter. I've always seen seiza as the most fundamental and perhaps most fundamentally forgotten Aikido technique that we practice. We do it all the time, but often in a distracted fashion as we contemplate our journey to the next big event: Ikkyo! Hip Throws! Jo Nage! Lunch! Seiza is a lot like breathing: we do it all the time; it's very important; and we ignore it.

As I get more mature with my Aikido, I appreciate seiza even more. It is the fundamental "mat" experience – a randori with yourself – or better said maybe, a randori with all those crazy partners who make up your crazy idea of "me."

When I taught Aikido on a regular basis, I periodically used to ask a question to my class: why are you doing Aikido? Why aren't you doing something else – like maybe snowboarding or learning concert piano or falling in love or tending a garden or becoming a doctor or creating an amazing world transformative company or writing a novel or visiting the Dalai Lama or watching the big game?

Some typical answers:

"Hmmm. Good question."

"My dad made me." (Good answer!)

"I want to be a sensei." (Seriously, folks...I've NEVER had this answer . . . although I often thought some students *should* answer this way. Why not?)

"I want to protect myself on the street." (Always a departure point for jolly conversations.)

"I want to get fit and have fun." (OK . . . but why *Aikido*?)

"I'm interested in the philosophy and a friendly community. I'm not so interested in martial arts." (Uh oh! Could be a problem!)

Or: "That's a dumb question and I don't like people who ask dumb questions – that's not why I'm here." (??)

I once attended a seminar by a Shihan who asked the class this question. "Why do Aikido?" That's actually where I got the idea to ask this question myself. The Shihan went on to make the point (his opinion) that Aikido was on a par any other activity – more or less chasing your tail or someone else's tail – unless you did Aikido in the spirit of Osensei. Now what did that mean? Instead of giving a lecture however, the fellow just practiced. The class began to learn various answers by working with him. He went around and did Aikido with as many class members as he could fit into the time slot. But he didn't really teach. He just practiced. I remember I was working with a white belt; and I was trying to be the Helpful Wise and Buff Sempai and give lots of tendentious corrections overtly and covertly. The Shihan came by and watched my partner and me "practicing," and then he stopped things abruptly and said to me: "Don't teach! Don't talk! Don't correct! Why do you think you know so much? Who is your partner? Find out! Do Aikido! Don't be insecure! Study Osensei. Learn from Osensei."

Now, where am I going with this? (Learn from a dead guy?) No! I'm going to the mat, obviously! When we sit in seiza and breathe we have an opportunity to visit the fountainhead of Aikido.

Seiza is an Aikido technique that is bigger than all Aikido. It transcends all the pedagogical chit chat and leads us back to silence, where it all began and where it all disappears. I think back to my experience at the seminar when I thought that Aikido was a series of infinite incremental bio-mechanical accomplishments celebrated with awards of achievement that validated my progress in a nifty book – kinda like everything else I had done with my life: school and work, to be precise.

But if this is true, then what's the use?

Unless I'm in the challenging position of having to teach Aikido professionally, why do Aikido?

Shift the focus back to seiza. When we just sit, do we fuss this way? Initially, yes – but with time and practice, no. To get to the teaching that seiza has for us, we need to take the advice that the Shihan gave once upon a time: "Don't teach! Don't talk! Don't correct! Why do you think you know so much? Who is your partner? Find out! Do Aikido! Don't be insecure! Study Osensei. Learn from Osensei."

When this element of practice enters into our seiza, things shift. Aikido shifts. At least, that has been my experience. The big game got even more interesting!

Iwama in My Heart

By Paul Williams

My whole adult life Iwama aikido has been shaping and forming my body and mind. In a sense, I have been slowly creating a container to fill. Iwama ryu (or nowadays refereed to as Iwama style) has shaped and molded me from head to toe. This is how I've known Iwama. Not as a place where people live out their lives but as a style of aikido. Now having been there in Iwama, I feel as though my heart has become connected to this body and mind.

I had wanted to travel to Iwama like those before me since I started aikido. It was a dream but I thought I was too late. Too late see Saito Sensei and therefore disconnected from the founder's home and jinja since Saito Hitohira Sensei left Aikikai soon after his father's passing. Thanks to Hoa Sensei we have a connection through Inagaki Sensei. Through his commitment to O-Sensei and Saito Sensei, Inagaki Sensei is keeping Iwama aikido alive and well. He is forming and evolving the aikido taught to him by his teachers, therefore, keeping the tradition going and maintaining the link to the founder.

This is the time to go if you're contemplating it. Time is no friend to those who wait and there is so much that this place still has to offer. The following are my experiences and advice if you so chose to take the leap and pack your bags for the birthplace of O-Sensei's aikido.

What should you expect? What do you need?

The training is tough. Inagaki Sensei is on another level and his morning weapons teaching is quick, vigorous, and very advanced. It's as if he knows he has little time on this earth and he's trying to transmit his knowledge all at once. If you and your partner aren't well versed on all aiki-ken and aiki-jo then you'll need to review in the afternoon class and pray there's enough of you to put the pieces together.

Training is hard. This is known as katai (vigorous) training. A staple of Iwama aikido and an essential practice in developing an aiki-body. Most often practiced in kihon, this includes tight grips, grounded partners, and hyper focus on fundamentals.

These days at Ibaraki Shibu Dojo there's a good mix of katai training and vigorous flowing kinonagare especially when Hombu teachers including Waka Sensei come during the week. You'll get your fill on many perspectives and approaches grounded in excellent training from those that trained with O-Sensei and Saito Sensei. So come to Iwama in good shape and a hunger for hard training.

Expect to get a little slap happy. If you're lucky you'll be running on 6 hours of sleep a night. Training is about 3 hours a day or more if asked to participate in helping out with aikido classes at the local schools. There's several hours of chores that could include yard work, cleaning

gutters, and the deep cleaning of bathrooms. All this will induce a type of giddiness yet exhausted psychosis that is only temporarily cured by the much needed nap in the afternoon.

You'll need a friend. A compadre or two that will help you out when needed. I had a great one. Martin sempai was a life saver. He picked up my slack when needed and showed me the ropes since this was his second tour. And that's the name of the game. Look out for one another! We all at one point forget to put dishes away or turn out lights. This is what makes the experience a bonding one. Look out for your fellow deshi and they will do the same.

Even if you mess up or don't have the guidance of a dai sempai then don't worry. The people of Ibaraki Shibu dojo have your back. What will bring me back to this place is not just the place itself. It is the kindness and thoughtfulness of people that call this dojo home. I found a connection with each and everyone of them. The people there are much like our dojo. They are an aiki family.

Everything about this place has O'Sensei and Saito Sensei in it. As I walked through the doors

and stepped on to the floor I'm reminded this is the place where it all began. Where O'Sensei formed his Aikido from Aikibudo and where Saito Sensei created Aiki ken and Aiki jo from the countless bukiwase sessions he had with O-Sensei

My two cents.

Our time was short compared to many that have come before. However, I'll never forget not just the great training but the moments I felt I was cleaning or looking at an item placed or built by O'Sensei. Few places if any exist to this degree. As an uchi deshi, I have cleaned and stepped on the grounds of the aiki-jinja few have ever been before. I loved the fact that I helped in a small way maintain the beauty of such a place. I'm so thankful for this opportunity!

Ibaraki Shibu Dojo is the last connection to O'Sensei we have and everyone that visits feels it. During the day, it's not uncommon to find stragglers wondering the grounds after visiting Aiki-Jinja. I enjoyed showing them around and taking their picture for them. They all felt as though there was something special about the place.

My hope is that Inagaki Sensei and the many other Sensei will be able to hold watch and continue to maintain Iwama aikido in its place of birth. I also hope that others from our style will take this opportunity and not pass it up as I did years ago. I'm aware there are two ways to look at that misfortune. One is that is that all things happen for a reason and it wasn't my time. Now I was ready and I was there with the right people for the perfect experience. The latter viewpoint is that I really messed up on an opportunity to see Saito Sensei before he passed and shoulda woulda coulda. I'd of course like to believe the former more romantic view than the latter.

A Beginner's Experience

By Victor Gellineau

Unfortunately, I am not much of a writer, though, ironically I have a job that requires me to write extensively on a daily basis. Life. I have read through several Awase articles and been impressed and moved by the compassion that my fellow classmates and instructors have not only for Aikido, but for life; and how the lessons learned on the mat extend into every aspect of their daily lives. I hope through more practice that one day I can imbue my future articles with the essence of what I acquire from the dojo. I am in the beginning of my training, but to be fair, honest, I have trained off and on in traditional martial arts for quite a while. Up until recently, it was mostly off than on. I find when I take a long hiatus from practice, I can become too caught up in the daily drama, and expectations of life outside of the dojo, and I lose my sense of balance. Slow and insidious, but progressive in the level of internal noise, disquiet, and discontent, until in my case it becomes all consuming. Then I start training in Aikido, and as my sense of balance and coordination slowly

start to improve in class, so does it seem to occur outside of the dojo. Nice.

There is a kind of funny and bizarre set of circumstances that led me to doors of the Aikido Institute Davis, but life is like that; and I think it is rather cool and quite fortunate on my part that things happened the way they did. But that is another story, hmm, maybe a future Awase article.

My experience as a beginner has been awesome, better than expected! When I first entered the Dojo I met Donny Sempai. One of the many things I took away from our first encounter was that when one comes to the Dojo, it is expected that one leaves the outside world at the door, clear the mind and focus on training. Ah, simple, so very refreshingly simple. As soon as I walk through the doors, training starts, by first leaving all concerns other than Aikido at the welcome mat, like when you leave your shoes at the entrance. I look forward to the few minutes before class starts when we line up and sit waiting for the instructor to start class. It is here that I try to quiet my mind completely in preparation for what is to come. I temporarily forget all the cares and concerns of the outside world and as Donny suggested only concentrate on training. Initially for me, these first few minutes are personal and focused inward, as my mind quiets; then I become aware and in tune with those around me, and then awareness expands to the training hall. Finally I hear the footsteps of the instructor walking to the Shomen, eyes open, and all that is left is the simple purpose to train.

The beauty of my experience in martial arts, is that it is a personal growth of mind, body, and spirit, but with Aikido you do this growth with the help of your community. Which for an introvert like myself, this was probably (and still is to a degree) the most daunting but rewarding aspect of training. We are not an island; so I think what has been unique with Aikido is not just a personal growth, but a growth in the

ability to interact with the community in a harmonious fashion, i.e. blending.

Fortunately, these lessons are slowly beginning to seep into my outside world; restoring a sense of balance, quiet, and giving me the ability to blend with the environment. Nice.

REIGI TAA ETIQUETTE FOR TESTS AND DEMOS October 2018

**Shared by Sensei Hans Goto
President, Takemusu Aikido
Association**

Reigi is a formal system of etiquette that externally represents one's heartfelt thoughts and respect for others.... The primary intention of Reigi is to physically convey feelings such as respect, love, friendship and so on. In cases where the pattern of etiquette is performed without sincerity, it simply becomes an empty formality rather than authentic courtesy. –Kano Jigoro

This is a description of relevant etiquette (reigi) for Demos and Tests at TAA events. It is strongly recommended that all Dojo follow this guideline so that it is second nature to all who perform tests and demos at TAA events.

All those testing for a promotion or those giving a demo after a promotion by recommendation (Godan and above) are expected to clearly illustrate Saito Morihiro Shihan's Aikido. For higher ranks (Yondan and above) this should include Katai, Yawarakai and Ki-no-nagare (Solid, Flexible and Ki flow) techniques.

Demos at TAA events should be no more than 5 minutes and tests at TAA events no more than 10 minutes. It is expected that more

comprehensive testing will have occurred during tests for lower ranks (1st Kyu, Shodan, Nidan).

The following details should be observed:

1. Nage and Uke(s) should have clean, good quality (unpatched) Gi and Hakama.
2. Nage and Uke(s) should walk out together, sit together, bow together, rise together. Uke should follow Nage's lead. This may require practice.
3. When bowing in, bow first to the Shomen, then the Board of Examiners, then to each other. It is rude to bow with one's backside to the Board. When bowing out, follow the same order: Shomen, Examiners, each other.
4. Do not bow in with weapons unless the weapon will be used immediately in a demo. In this case, take care that weapons do not clack together while bowing in or out.
5. Arrange for someone on the side to hand weapons to participants when they are needed.



Dan Promotions

Kori Hargreaves: Sandan

Donny Shiu: Sandan

Joseph Galamba: Nidan

KYU Promotions

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| Adam Zimbardo | 5K |
| Alan Adams | 7K |
| Hannah Miller | 2K |
| Jared Canio | 3K |
| Luca Del Bene-Kyhos | 4K |
| Olive Yee | 8K |
| Sean Keagan | 5K |
| Taye Byun | 7K |
| Victor Gellineau | 5K |
| Kimberly Lounsberry | 3K |
| Teo Kurtovic | 5K |
| Zachary Lounsberry | 3K |



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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!