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Ki no Nagare Keiko

By Hoa Newens Sensei

Ki no Nagare (気の流れ) Keiko simply means Flowing Ki Training and is one of three ways of executing techniques during Aikido training. In earlier writings, I have explained the related concepts of Kihon Waza (Basic Techniques) and Yawarakai Waza (Soft Techniques). I have waited until our dojo is more mature and the Sempai group has grown sufficiently to grasp the next level of training, before I lay out the more advanced concept of Ki no Nagare. Now the Sempai group is strong and the time is ripe, so here it is.

First, let me point out the change in nomenclature. I refer to Ki no Nagare *Keiko* (training) rather than *Waza* (technique) for a reason. In Ki no Nagare (hereafter KNN), technique is no longer the focal point, rather the way the training partners carry themselves while interacting becomes more relevant, that is, KNN is a way of training; therefore, we refer to it as KNN Keiko.

It is helpful to remind the reader of the effective order of training in the traditional approach: first, Kihon for many years, then gradually incorporate Yawarakai for several years, culminating naturally with Ki no Nagare. The more solid the Kihon foundation, the easier it is for Yawarakai to lead naturally to Ki no Nagare. Kihon is the roots, Yawarakai is the tree trunk and branches, Ki no Nagare is the flowers and fruit. For a more complete discussion on Kihon Waza and Yawarakai Waza, I invite the readers to refer to my essays in *Aikido Insights*.

In appearance, KNN techniques are flowing and circular as opposed to the linear and segmented execution in Kihon. But so are Yawarakai techniques. One way to explain KNN is to distinguish it from Yawarakai.

There are three differences, albeit subtle, and not easy to discern by the untrained eyes.

First is timing. Whereas in Yawarakai the Nage moves upon physical contact by the Uke, in KNN Nage initiates the contact, physical or energetical, and appears to be moving as Uke begins moving toward contact, that is, ahead of the physical contact.

Second is connection. This characteristic, though present in Yawarakai, is not as important as it is in KNN. Continuous connection between Nage and Uke is the essential condition for KNN. The connection is at the energetic level, that is both Nage and Uke must project their Ki toward each other and interact based on this energetical contact during the entire period of engagement, from the time they bow to each other to begin till the time they bow to each other to part.

Third is the form. In KNN the form of the technique takes a back seat in relation to the connectivity explained above. In each KNN engagement, the participants will create the form that is most conducive to maintaining the Ki connection, and this form will likely not resemble the basic form in Kihon or the soft form in Yawarakai. Thus, the form for each KNN engagement is unique, and will vary according to the underlying circumstances, even for the same set of techniques.

The readers may have noted that power and speed have not been mentioned thus far. They are not necessary ingredients for KNN training, although they might be by-products. KNN training can be accomplished at slow speed and with little Kokyu power.

The experienced student will also note that among the three characteristics described above, connection is the hallmark of KNN training,

while the other two are derivatives. Now let's develop this idea of connectivity further.

In order for the participants of KNN to be connected, each must do two things: 1) Extend their Ki continuously, and 2) Focus the Ki on each other's center. Furthermore, they must maintain these two acts throughout the engagement from beginning to end.

The first requirement means that, at the moment that they bow to each other, they must be fully alert and in a state of readiness such that each person has called forth the totality of himself (body and mind) as he is facing the training partner. It would be only a slight exaggeration to say that when they bow to each other to begin the engagement, they stand ready to die and are fully conscious of this possibility. It is clearly very difficult for normal Aikido practitioners to bring forth this state of consciousness in the beginning stance, unless forced by circumstances, such as the presence of lethal weapons or other potential risks of severe injuries. Diligent and deliberate practice is required to achieve this level of consciousness.

The second thing that the participants must do is to lock their energy on the other participant(s). I use the term participant because in this practice, the distinction between Nage and Uke is no longer relevant. Two or more people lock their energies together and take turn issuing and receiving Ki energy, not unlike two bucks locking horns either for fun or a fight to the death. This second requirement is also a challenge for most Aikido students whose focus is normally on the execution of the form. In some dojos, I even see students chatting up while performing techniques on each other. If the connection of Ki is interrupted, there is no Ki no Nagare. In Ki no Nagare, the Ki that needs to flow is the Ki coming from all participants who are engaged in the technique, not just from one of them.

KNN is a very intense practice that takes a high level of energy and concentration. It does not consist of just flowing techniques. The physical

appearance is mostly irrelevant since what truly matters is of the etheric realm and is not necessarily palpable. How the participants feel during the interaction is of utmost importance. From the viewpoint of the participants engaged in KNN, the intercourse of energies is pure pleasure. In Aikido keiko, aside the sudden enlightenment experienced by O Sensei, there is probably nothing more satisfying than drinking from each other's energies. This tight and genuine inter-connection among human beings during Aikido is possibly the basis for O Sensei proclaiming that true Budo is love.

KNN is a highly-advanced and highly-charged type of training that is meaningful only when one has become fully proficient in all the Aikido forms; otherwise one will be distracted by concern for the correct form and timing during the engagement. As a corollary, it is not advisable for the average students to model their training against the senior Aikidoists working on KNN, lest they be confused and lose their footing. Copying and replicating the results do not necessarily lead to the natural production of those results. Everybody must start from step one and undergo the rigors of a disciplined training program.

Students ranked sandan and above can begin the KNN training and even then, should do so only moderately. Strictly speaking, KNN is not a practice; it is more aptly considered as the fruition of persistent practices at the Kihon and Yawarakai levels.

Many of the extant video clips of O Sensei performing Aikido show him demonstrating Ki no Nagare techniques with his students. It is a blessing to have a record of these phenomenal performances for generations to enjoy; however, it is also a curse that misleads beginning students into practicing Ki no Nagare on a regular basis.

For most students, the best approach is to persevere in the hard techniques of Kihon and the soft blending of Yawarakai and view Ki no Nagare training as the reward that will occur naturally in due time.

Three Principles of Training

By Hoa Newens Sensei

After five decades of training I have distilled the best approach to training into these three principles.

1. Go from simple to complex; then return to the simple often to add more detail
 - a. Start from where you are, sketching out the technique with simple straightforward linear movements.
 - b. The form of the techniques evolves from linear to curved to multi-level complexity.
 - c. The simple outer form must be packed with multi-level detail representing potential that will gradually unfold into the form.
 - d. To imbue the form with this potential, the student must return often to the original sketch (a.k.a. basic technique) and add increasing level of details to build several layers of energy into the form.
 - e. To ensure that these layers of detail are imbedded into the technique, make sure to fold the detail along the same crease every time and many times.
 - f. The multiple layers of energy allows for more intense and lively expression of the original form.
2. The techniques already exist; there is no need to create, we just have to uncover them.
 - a. All potential techniques are pre-etched as a basic matrix in a background web that underlies the universe. Scientists call it dark matter; pragmatists call it the Tao.

- b. The way to uncover these implicit techniques is to purge ourselves of extraneous attachments and open up to this original web. This purging is done through stilling the mind and shedding off as many earthly attachments as possible.
 - c. Extraneous attachments include attachments to new and varied forms. Give up the many, return to the few. Remember the motto of the United States: *E pluribus unum*.
 - d. A teacher will provide helpful guidance in the beginning but becomes increasingly irrelevant to a true seeker who has reached communion with the original web and draws from the basic matrix.
 - e. For every opportunity, the technique unfolds naturally as it should; there is no need to shape it or control it. Listen for what is wanting to express and let it be.
3. The basic matrix allows the student access to the original web, which is the portal of Creation
 - a. I'll tell you more after I have the chance to explore this web.

[If this writing looks a bit dense to you, viewing the movie on The Origami Revolution (produced by Nova) that Guy showed during Movie Night might help with comprehension; it is available in YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/s4R5LUGmH08>; or you can borrow the DVD from the Dojo Library.]

Fourth Dan Essay

By Terence Phan

Moments before my recent test, Sensei instructed me to bow to the shomen in a specific, deliberate manner. Sensei stated that I should raise my clasped hands to forehead level, pause for five seconds, then bow deeply and again pause. Sensei stated that this is something that I should focus on at my current level of training. At the time, I expected some technical correction instead of elaboration upon what I considered to be mundane. Not until later in the day when Sensei led class did I understand the meaning of Sensei's instruction. Sensei explained that the bow is not just a rote exercise. One unifies his energy when he puts his hands together, raises the energy to the head, pauses in reflection, charges mental intent into the act, then bows deeply and sends forth the energy. In the case of bowing to the Shomen, one acknowledges the Founder's history, emotes gratitude for the opportunity to practice the Founder's art, and sends forth the feeling of gratitude during the act of bowing.

In the past, I thought of the bow as a formality and a relic of another culture from another time period. I was more eager to learn technique and preferred relaxed etiquette. Technique, as I now realize, is an empty physical dance without the presence and balance of mind and spirit. Likewise, mind and spirit have no channel or conduit without the physical. In this case, the act and form of bowing are what we can physically and apparently see, or the *omote*. The intangible mental and spiritual energy that we charge into the form, the unseen aspect, is the *ura*. The physical bow without intent is reduced to a series of otherwise meaningless muscular

contractions. The energetic intent without the physical body and technical form as a conduit is stagnant and ineffective. Following Sensei's instruction, I realized that even a seemingly insignificant act like a bow is an important practice of physical, mental and spiritual balance. The practice of introspection reveals great depth beyond visible appearance. In bowing to the Shomen, one recognizes the Founder and forefathers of the art, the history and evolution of the art, gratitude for the opportunity and personal enrichment through practicing the art, and the personal responsibility to share this art to enrich others in our community. The act of bowing to the shomen connects one to a greater whole encompassing past, present, and future.

Reflecting upon the Aikido's past, we recognize the research of Stanley Pranin and others who have elucidated the history of Aikido and its lineage. We now are well aware of the importance of the Founder's teacher, Sokaku Takeda, and his art Daito Ryu of which the Founder was a licensed instructor. The Aikido Founder's 1954 technical manual "Aikido Maki-no-Ichi" which included written and drawn technical explanations and principles contains mostly the same material from the 1933 technical manual "Aiki Jujutsu Densho (renamed from "Budo Renshu"). It would seem that Aikido and Daito Ryu are almost the same art, philosophical discussion aside. Further, as research about Takeda and his prominent student Yuki Yoshi Sagawa reveals, there was a clear distinction between Daito Ryu Jujutsu and Daito Ryu Aiki-no-jutsu. The latter, as Takeda admonished, was only to be taught to a select few students of each instructor. The distinction was *Aiki*, something beyond mere physical movements involved in a technique. Sagawa seems to describe certain components of Aiki as neutralization and non-opposition of force, likely a combination of mental and physical strategies and conditioning. Those with understanding of Aiki principles and conditioning in the application of martial techniques feel markedly

different from those performing empty physical movements.

If we have all been practicing the same physical techniques, then why do the Aikido Founder's, Sagawa's, and Takeda's martial skills seem so extraordinary to us? Many believe that these budoka possessed some special unknown attribute or godliness that granted them extraordinary ability and power. Some who have laid hands on these and other notable budoka state that the experience had to be felt to be believed. Such rare budoka can feel like a thousand immovable pounds or invisible but certainly were not born with these skills and attributes. Research about these notable budoka reveals that they shared a common practice: solo body training and conditioning. Descriptions about Sagawa's solo training included hundreds if not thousands of daily shiko and other movements. The Founder and Saito Sensei advocated daily weapons suburi practice alone and against targets. With proper mental direction throughout the exercises, these exercises inculcate internal body dynamics, sensitivity and proprioception, and program, connect and strengthen the internal body, notably the fascia. I highly encourage those fascinated by internal body dynamics to train in the Tai Chi and Chi Kung program taught by Sensei. There is endless depth to the *ura* of the visible physical movement.

Sagawa described that *Aiki* could only be understood by those who had completed the groundwork of a conditioned body and who had changed their way of thinking. The conditioned body that Sagawa referred to is created through specific mental direction and connection during specific physical exercises over time. Despite the power and efficiency of the conditioned body, Sagawa seems to note that further mental direction is required to employ the conditioned body in a manner of non-opposition, balance and management and neutralization of force and without unnecessary muscular tension.

There are specific exercises that students regularly practice in the Tai Chi program, in koryu, by certain of the Aikido Founder's students and students of other arts which directly relate to this ideal. A first point of practice universally is ensuring sound body structure by aligning the spine and relaxing any tension unnecessary for maintaining vertical body structure. Budo requires efficient body mechanics which cannot exist if parasitic tension occurs throughout the body. Localized muscular tension in a body structure is easily traced to the center of the structure, compromising oneself in a martial encounter. Often, Aikido techniques involve connecting to another's structural center without allowing the other to connect to one's own center, manipulating the other's center and structure to compromise it, and creating an opportunity to control by pin, throw, and/or weapon deployment. The manipulations can be simple external movements as well as subtle, sophisticated linked movements of the body's internal and external levers, pulleys and tissue chains and use of axes of rotation. We do not often hear discussion of these topics except at niche seminars and forums, private instruction, yet, introspection and new perspective may reveal that these seemingly specialized and esoteric teachings are accessible through familiar physical kata.

Some teachings are hidden in plain sight. At the beginning of every class, we perform ritualized stretching exercises of the body from the center to the extremities. With deeper examination, we may become more acutely aware that we are practicing body axis alignment and rotation, twisting and stretching of the fascia and connective tissue. With further mental direction, we may transform these exercises into internal body awareness and connection practices. We may recognize that the beginning exercises progress from sensing and connecting pathways within the body, to aligning and connecting the body structure to the ground (tenkan, Aiki walk, rolling), to connecting the grounded self to another structure. Tai no Henko, another

seemingly mundane practice that I once overlooked and took for granted, holds new meaning to me as an internal and external structural connection and rotation axis movement exercise. It is no wonder that the Founder required three foundational exercises during every class: tai no henko, morotedori kokyuho, and kokyu dosa.

The practice and explicit teachings of Aikido have changed since the time when the art was known as Daito Ryu but the form remains mostly constant. The outward technical form contains principles, history, and rich teachings which are accessible and may be explored in as great depth as one desires. As Sensei inspired me, there is much more to be unlocked and discovered through the physical form given new perspective and introspective thought. One can enrich one's training by increasing awareness of the unseen aspects within and beyond the apparent form and by enlivening the form with directed mental energy.

Third Dan Essay

By Kathleen Holder

"Keep the connection." I've been hearing those and similar words of instruction throughout my time in aikido: "Connect center to center" and, perhaps more often than I like to admit, "You've dropped the connection."

Aikido is keenly focused on connecting – with our partners, with our own centers and with our surroundings. In this aspect, aikido seems as much akin to a dance form like tango as it does to other martial arts.

What does connecting mean exactly? And how do we learn it?

My short answer to the first question is that connecting is about feeling – not in an emotional

way but sensing in a calm, deeply attuned fashion (*awareness*). And like everything else in aikido, we learn connection through practice – guided, mindful and often sweaty practice—and lots of it (*humility, perseverance*).

Attention and Intention

Because aikido is a peaceful martial art, many of us come to it with little or no background in fighting. Aikido attracts intelligent and kind people who don't want to hurt anyone, eager to learn how to avert an attack by stepping out of the way. That makes for a wonderful community of people, which is also important for connection. On the other hand, learning to redirect someone's energy requires that they give us energy to work with. As an *uke*, we have to commit to an attack. That doesn't mean we have to go fast. Our strikes can be slow, but they need to be even and on target – aimed right at the *nage*. Our strikes need intention in order to connect.

The *nage*, in receiving the attack, learns to connect through intention as well – striving to match the *uke*'s speed and by paying attention to form, position and safety as we execute each technique.

Aikido is very much about touch. Learning how to connect begins, on one level, with physical contact (though the mind needs to engage long before and well after). Moving from our hips, extending to our feet and hands, we engage our partner – wrist to wrist in *shomenuchi*, palm to wrist in a *katatedori*, hand receiving fist or weapon in blending with a *tsuki*, and so on. Then extending from our centers, we turn our partners to execute a technique. And our partners, by giving the appropriate level of resistance, help teach us by returning an energy that travels back from our skin to our core.

Riding the wave

In the beginning, our focus is primarily on getting our own bodies in the right place at the right time – whether we are in role of *uke* or

nage. But as we practice, we also become more attuned to what the technique *feels* like, both from inside and out, or upside and under. This, in my experience, is a primary value of learning *kaeshi waza* or reversals. They expand our perspective of the technique, turning us inward as well as out. The more we connect, the more aikido becomes a Möbius strip of motion between two or more people, like riding a wave or a roller coaster. Are we on the inner or outer edge of the loop-de-loop? It can be a joyous thrill but it also comes with a certain fear: Are we about to crash?

Keep on rolling

The more I practice aikido, the more I find myself focusing on *ukemi*, or receiving technique. In many ways, that brings me full circle to my start in aikido. One of my reasons for signing up for a beginner's course was I wanted to learn how to take a fall without hurting myself. Little did I realize how much my own deepening connection 11 years later would depend on this: Sensei's lesson on creating circles within circles as we take *ukemi* – making one circle with our legs, another circle with our arms and, surrounding both of those, a bigger circle with our whole body. That principle is fundamental to blending, whether with the mat in a roll or high fall, or with our partners in technique. Keep practicing how to make like a circle! I certainly will be.

The Weapons Connection

Aikido is deeply rooted in *bukiwaza*, particularly the sword. Practicing the *suburi* teaches us the hand position of *kokyū* as well as the rise and fall of hips and the grounding of stance essential to so many of our techniques. Both the bokken and jo also help us connect – to the weapons themselves through the palms and fingers of our hands, and in *awase* to our partners. By extending our reach, the weapons amplify how much we are off in our aim and timing.

The importance of kohai

In my early days as an aikido student, I

sometimes felt a bit sorry for the *sempai* who got me as their training partner. Advanced students were flying joyously on either side of us, while my *sempai* painstakingly instructed me on which hand and foot to put forward. Now that I'm in the inverse role, I have a completely different point of view on *kohai-sempai* relationships. We need and strengthen each other. In practicing with *kohai*, I feel sometimes that I'm almost *listening* to the technique from within. In identifying points that I can help them with, I also tune my body. In practicing with *sempai*, I hone my skills by watching what they do as well as absorbing the effects. Practicing with *ukes* of all levels also fosters connection.

Connecting with the dojo

It doesn't take very long for even the most beginning students to recognize that, in learning aikido, we embark on a close relationship with the mat. We come face to face with it repeatedly as we roll, take *ukemi* or pin our partners. The connection really begins before we even step on the mat, with our bow as we enter the dojo. We deepen that connection when we sweep and wash the mat, clean the dojo, pay dues on time, participate in seminars and celebrations, and bow to one another at the end of every class.

The Circle, the Triangle, and the Square.

Third Dan Essay

By Elise Bauer

In the mid 1980's I had the privilege of training for a couple years at the Aikido dojo in San Francisco on Turk St. and Van Ness. Three equally powerful, impressive, and high ranking

sensei shared this dojo – Bill Witt Sensei, Frank Doran Sensei, and Robert Nadeau Sensei. Depending on which day you trained, you would have a class taught by one of these sensei.

What was remarkable about this arrangement was that the three senseis represented noticeably different styles of Aikido. I had started my Aikido journey with Frank Doran Sensei at a class at Stanford. Doran's style was dynamic and flowing, always in motion.

Bob Nadeau Sensei's approach to Aikido was also dynamic, but focused on building an awareness of your own mental and emotional state. He stressed base, moving from your hara, and lowering your center of gravity.

Bill Witt Sensei, coming from the Iwama tradition, worked on form. Witt Sensei broke every technique down into identifiable precise steps, which was especially helpful for a beginner like me learning the techniques.

The downside of course to having such markedly different teachers was confusion. Which way was right? One day one sensei would teach us to do a technique a certain way, two days later another sensei would direct us to do the technique in a completely different manner.

The uchi deshi of the dojo at the time, Steve Gengo (now a sensei in the bay area), gave me a visual that helped me understand and deeply value each sensei's approach and instruction. He told me to think of the three sensei each demonstrating a different important aspect of Aikido, which could be represented by a Circle, Triangle, or Square. (I've learned since then that this interpretation of Circle, Triangle, and Square isn't exactly traditional, but it certainly helped me appreciate the different styles of each sensei!)

The word Aikido in Japanese can be parsed into "ai" meaning harmony, "ki" meaning spirit, and "do" meaning the way. All together the word Aikido means "The Way of Harmonious Spirit".

Aikido can also be represented by the three fundamental shapes in geometry: a Circle, a Triangle, and a Square.

Consider the Circle shape as the “ai” or harmony in Aikido. To achieve harmony in technique you need to blend, to turn. Even direct entry techniques require a spiral, or a circle in motion, to do them properly. Otherwise you are blocking, not blending. Aikido is also a dynamic art; the dynamism of its movement can be represented as a circle.

Of the three sensei at the Turk St dojo, Frank Doran Sensei was the Circle. He focused on flow and movement, turning and blending. Unless you were in a class specifically for beginners, all of Sensei Doran’s techniques were taught in a flowing ki no nagare form, typical of hombu dojo Aikikai.

The Triangle can represent the “ki” or spirit in Aikido, as well as the triangular stances so basic to Aikido's techniques. In Aikido it’s important to stay grounded, connected to the earth, and to move from this grounded base. We pull up ki or energy from the earth and extend it back down into the earth.

Of the dojo's three sensei, Bob Nadeau Sensei was the Triangle. Nadeau Sensei focused on base and understanding how your ki was flowing in your body. He related the ki flow in your body to your emotional state. Whatever we are going through emotionally gets expressed physically and it helps to have an awareness of this in your training. Nadeau sensei urged us to practice body and emotional awareness even when walking down the street. He urged us to notice our posture, to move from our hara (about 2 inches below the belly button), to notice our emotions, and to be aware of the posture and energy coming from people we walked by on the street.

Finally, of our geometric shapes the Square represents the “do” or the way, the path of Aikido. The square has structure and stability. It’s the geometry of a fundamental building block; in three dimensions it becomes a cube, a

container. In Aikido we have a form, a curriculum, a set of techniques, the sincere practice of which is our pathway to the spiritual goals of Aikido. Without these techniques, this form, there is no Aikido. Without practice, there is no aikido.

Bill Witt Sensei was the Square among our three sensei. While Aikido styles and techniques continue to morph as the practice of Aikido spreads globally, as a student of Saito Sensei, Bill Witt Sensei was and is a guardian of our core Aikido techniques and training. His teaching of the fundamentals of Aikido anchor all of the other styles.

The great benefit of learning from such talented committed senior teachers of different styles was to open my eyes to the breadth of diversity of different approaches to Aikido and to appreciate their unique gifts of training.

Circle, Triangle, Square. Three different ways to draw a line. Three different approaches to the path of Aikido.

In the end, Aikido itself is simply one path toward a higher purpose. In the words of O’Sensei, “The true meaning of the term samurai is one who serves and adheres to the power of love.” And, “The Art of Peace begins with you. Work on yourself and your appointed task in the Art of Peace. Everyone has a spirit that can be refined, a body that can be trained in some manner, a suitable path to follow. You are here for no other purpose than to realize your inner divinity and manifest your inner enlightenment. Foster peace in your own life and then apply the Art to all that you encounter.”

Breathing and Aikido Training.

Second Dan Essay

By Guy Michelier

According to Google search, “A person breathes 7 or 8 liters of air per minute. Air is about 20% oxygen. But when you exhale, your breath is about 15% oxygen, so you consumed about 5%. Therefore, a person uses about 550 liters of pure oxygen each day...” Reading it that way sounds like enormous numbers but we still do it every day without even thinking too much about it until it becomes an issue.

Do we remember the first time we took our first breath after being born? Did we have a burning feeling? Did it feel very cold or warm? I am sure we don't, and since then we take breathing for granted because it comes naturally and as an instinct. However, breathing is so crucial that if we do not breathe properly especially in sports we seem to be gasping for air. Some extraordinary divers can hold their breath while free diving for over 10 minutes and there are some, such as those that practice what is referred to as “Static Apnea”, that can hold their breath *without moving* for up to 20 minutes. Well I am not going to focus on that goal and I prefer to look above the water and acknowledge that breathing is very important when the body is in motion. Without proper breathing, I find it extremely difficult to train and it becomes much more evident when I am doing “*Randori*” with 2 or more *Ukes* in the practice of Aikido.

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 including breathing properly while practicing Aikido.

When it comes to training, we start with various warm up techniques including some breathing exercises. First, the body is warmed up by gentle then harder exercises and stretching techniques. During this time it is important to recognize the major muscle groups involved and to stretch them in all directions that is feasible.

Generally, there is no need for excessive strength during conditioning or warm up. Second, during the practice of various techniques, especially in *Yawarakai*, it is important to breathe in rhythm according to the practice/technique at hand. If one moves fast one may see the breathing going a little faster. Our goal here is to practice what I call “focused breathing” and concentrating on our breathing being slow but without feeling out of breath.

Faster breathing is a natural way the body reacts to the need to get properly oxygenated blood throughout our vascular system. For myself, when I am sitting at the beginning of class I become aware of my slow breathing but I also notice my breathing is much faster even after a simple practice of a technique. That is when I try to practice my “focused breathing” to bring it down along with my heartbeat. I tell myself to focus on my breathing deeply into my “Hara” with a rolling motion in the bottom naval area where I visualize the air entering my belly as though taking the size a small beach ball.

This focused breathing allows me to calm down both physically and mentally, which brings my

heart rate down. Constant conscious attention to my breathing during warm-up exercises, stretching routines, and practices, helps me establish an unconscious link between my breathing and movements that eventually allows me to carry it over into my techniques especially during *Randori* where I find its importance and the lack of doing so more evident.

Another important part of practicing focused breathing is in a *Kiai*, which translates as 'energy in harmony', but more realistically as focused energy and refers to the shout that is sometimes emitted during the execution of a technique. Sometimes it is done for every technique but more often when using weapons. Of course the *Kiai* originates from the breath exhaling from the lungs but one can add to this a measure of power by contracting the stomach muscles to help push the breath out. Easier said than done I must admit. The result is that it feels as though the sound actually emanates from the pit of the stomach. Accordingly, the sound can be deep and powerful. But one should be careful, a common mistake is simply to growl or scowl loudly from the throat which if done too often and too strongly can irritate the throat.

In Aikido we generally use the *Ei* sound as *Kiai*. Other sounds commonly heard are *Ai*, *Hai*, *Ho*, etc... However, as there is no apparent uniformity of such common usage between Aikido styles it is difficult to establish whether such *Kiai* style is preferred other than accepting that our "focused breathing" allows us to release it as a form of energy that the attacker may feel perplexed and startled at the sound of it which gives us that split second to perform a counter attack or *Kaeshi-wasa*. For some, the *Kiai* is either emitted at the beginning when attacking, or less commonly, as an aid to break a fall at the end of a technique, as when hitting the mat. One challenge with the *Kiai* is that it demands on one's level of energy in the moment, and if one's technique is ineffective, it will be dissipated negative energy, leaving one vulnerable to counter attack. Finally, sometimes the *Kiai* can also be fairly silent. A common example is

during warm-up exercises when extending our arms up during heaven and earth and releasing our breath while extending our arms forward.

As we can see "focused breathing" or being conscious of it especially in Aikido training is very important and cannot be ignored or taken for granted. I often wonder how my breathing would be or would feel like if I were caught in a *Randori* situation with multi attackers in real life. Hopefully I will not because my Aikido life is to always remember at least one of the four important rules "Do not give anyone or anything a reason to hurt you" but if one must... well then need to pay close attention to my breathing.

I would like to leave you with one of many O'Sensei's quote addressing that specific issue about breath and it's meaning in life.

"All the principles of heaven and earth are living inside you. Life itself is the truth, and this will never change. Everything in heaven and earth breathes. Breath is the thread that ties creation together. When the myriad variations in the universal breath can be sensed, the individual techniques of the Art of Peace are born."

Visiting Hombu Dojo.

By Mitch Peters

Over the past year, I have made several work-related trips to Tokyo. One of the highlights of these trips was taking the subway from Akasaka to Shinjuku to train at Aikiki's world headquarters located at "Hombu Dojo."

Daily classes are taught there by the "Doshu" (the head of Aikiki and the founder's grandson) and nearly two dozen instructors. Many of the instructors are 6th Dan or above and have the title *Shihan* (master instructor). There are many lineages of Aikido, but most are still under the

umbrella of Aikiki, including our own Takemusu Aikido Association. Any member of Aikiki is permitted to train at Hombu for a daily fee of 1620 Yen (about \$14.00). Prior to hopping on the subway, I visit the Hombu Dojo's website, <http://www.aikikai.or.jp/eng/information/practiceleader.html>, to see the class times and instructors.

Hombu Dojo is located in a four-story building with three mat rooms. The main mat for the regular class is on the third floor along with the men's locker room. The beginner classes are usually on the fourth floor and kid's classes on the second floor. The main mat has two doorways: one for the instructor and women (the women's locker room is on another level) and another doorway from the men's locker room.

Over the past year, I have taken 14 classes including one from the Doshu. As a non-Japanese speaking foreigner, there is good news and bad news. The good news is they are accustomed to many visitors from all over the world that don't speak Japanese. The bad news is there are only a few English speakers; however, that is not a hindrance to finding a training partner: "Onegaishimasu" works just as well there as it does here.

Even though the Aikiki style is a little different from ours, in the big picture, the techniques are the same. It's the blending where you will see some differences. Most of the corrections I have received while training there have been in my role as the attacker. The "bigger" movements of the nage require the uke to follow and position himself appropriately. As uke, I seem to move either too far or not far enough, or put the wrong foot forward or stop in front of nage's line of attack leaving myself vulnerable to a kick or strike. Some of the corrections were obvious, such as you don't want to make yourself vulnerable, other corrections, I had to chalk up to the nage-uke relationship and your agreement to train together in an established manner.

My first few visits, I attended the beginners class to get familiar with some of the differences. There were few beginners in the beginners' class, but I wanted to stand in the shallow end before diving into the deep-end of the pool, so it was a good place to start. Depending on the day and time, the regular class has approximately 30 to 60 people on the mat and finding a safe place to fall can be challenging.

Just like individual style varies depending on who you train with in our dojo, you will notice the same thing when you train at Hombu. I have trained with people who resist and make sure that the technique is proper, and others who practically throw themselves as soon as their opponent moves. In the regular class, you will typically train with the same person for the entire session. It is rare to pair up with an English speaker, but on a few occasions, I have been fortunate enough to train with someone who is fluent in English and Japanese and can translate some of what the instructor says. For the most part, I have had to rely on non-verbal cues to understand an instructor's point.

It is of course easier to learn in the comfort of your regular dojo. Familiar surroundings and people, and instructors that know your capabilities make training relaxed and routine. But, there is much that can be learned from the insight of other instructors and styles. Just like learning a foreign language helps you to better understand the mechanics of your native language, training at other dojos can teach you something new and help you a better understand what you already know.



Mitch at Hombu Dojo

Unpossessed by Style

By Paul Williams

“The Art of Peace is medicine for a sick world. There is evil and disorder in the world because people have forgotten that all things emanate from one source. Return to that source and leave behind all self-centered thoughts, petty desires, and anger. Those who are possessed by nothing possess everything.”

Morihei Ueshiba

So I have been practicing aikido for around 20 years now. In this time, I have trained with many different styles other than my own. Everyone of them has taught me something new and valuable not just in technique but also in insight into that styles history as pertaining to O-Sensei.

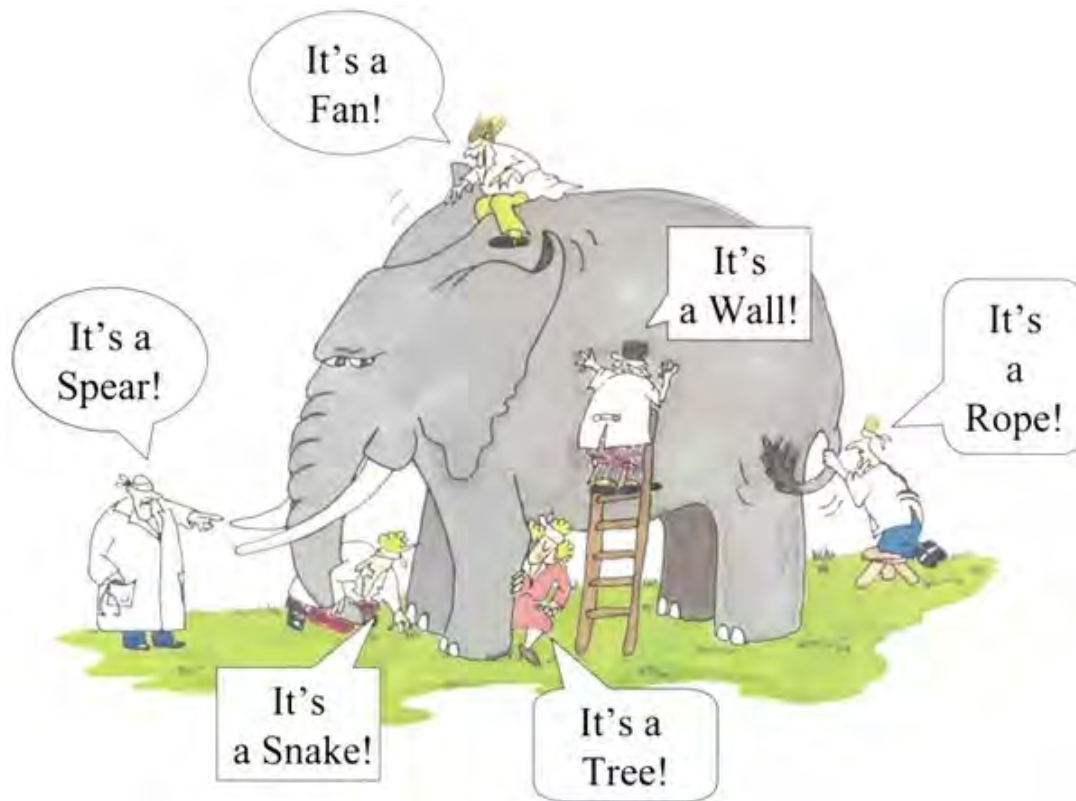
For example, if you train with people from Yoshinkan one gets the hard and austere nature

of aikido before WWII when it was known as Aiki Budo. When you train in Iwama style one gets an exposure to how weapons relate and influenced O-Sensei’s aikido post WWII.

Aikido’s depth and richness is experiential. Meaning, we learn about the character of a style somatically through our bodies. This is largely how aikido was taught when O-Sensei was around. There was barely formal instruction. Students had to steal those techniques by looking and feeling them through their partner or Morihei Ueshiba. Subsequently, each generation of students that learned under the founder and eventually became teachers themselves created new branches reaching out from the original source. Unfortunately, the more years that pass the more we lose that connection to the past. It seems lately that every year that goes by we lose an original student of Morihei Ueshiba. His students are almost all gone. One day, the direct connection to Morihei will be lost.

We as aikidoka need to preserve this connection to the past. So how do we do this? Well, and this may be an unpopular idea to some, we need to train with other styles. We need to open ourselves up to the idea that our style may not be the whole picture. For most practitioners of aikido, the style they train in is based on the teachings of the founder during a small window of his own development. Even if you are part of a style like my own where the direct student was with him for around 23 years, there’s still a significant part of O-Sensei’s development and history that is missing.

When I think about this I’m reminded of the classic parable of several blind people trying to individually and objectively decree the essence of an elephant. Comparatively, some say that aikido is soft. Some say aikido is hard. As we can see from the graphic all of these things can be true. Think about this. Are you the same practitioner as you were 5 years ago? Did you work on the same things then as you do now? If you are a teacher, are you able to demonstrate



and teach at the same intensity and vigor as say 20 years ago? Of course not! So what makes you think that the teacher or founder of your style saw the whole picture of aikido during their study and practice under O-Sensei?

The answer to that question is, I hope, obvious.

Personally, I would like to see a new movement in aikido. For the last several decades, aikido has expanded to almost every continent and has branched out to include many different styles. In this expansion we've seen many fractures and instances of separation. We need to come back together. We ought to mend those fissures and find each other in this art to preserve what our lineage has taught us. If anything, this would give us the opportunity to teach each other what our style has to offer.

Just recently we've lost several prominent figures in aikido. One of which spent his whole life preserving the connection to the past. If

there was anyone who saw the elephant for what it was it would have to be Stanley Pranin. His work is more important than any other aikido historian. As a result of his fastidious attention to detail, we are left with a legacy and connection to the founder that I hope will be kept in preservation for future generations.

But tracing lineage, preserving documents, restoring videos, and creating archives is only half of the equation. Our community and what we experience on the mat is where the rubber meets the road in our little world of aikido. Together we can come together with our own lineages and techniques to enrich each other's aikido beyond what we would be capable of if we had stayed in our own little silos we call dojos. We need to do as O-Sensei said and dispossess our styles if only for a little bit so that we can return to the source and bring peace to our community. If not then how can we claim as O-Sensei said, "Aikido is a way to reconcile the world"?

Why Aikido?

By Bruce Donehower

Now that I am nearing my mid-sixties and contemplating the right strategic moment to start Social Security payments, I find myself asking silly questions more often. One of these persistent silly questions for me has been: “Why Aikido?” Silly questions usually have no answers – or maybe the answer can’t be put into words. Plus, these silly questions often bore and/or annoy other people – like for example when a child of three or four repeatedly asks the parent “Why?” “Why this, why that?” Most adults know the answer is obvious: “*Why* is irrelevant – do it and get with the program.”

On the other hand, these *Why* questions can be useful not only because we can bust our heads on them but also, in a community that shares personal information in a newsletter, it’s interesting to know what is going on in someone’s noggin. I mean, sure we practice together and comport ourselves with one another with an astonishing degree of scripted physical intimacy – but Sensei wisely advises us to write about our experiences with Aikido, knowing that such musings add an important extra dimension to our shared journey.

So back to the question: Why?

As a teacher of Aikido, this question often reared its head for me when I taught beginners. As everyone knows, people come and go in Aikido. Over the years, you witness a very large number of people who train for a time (often with great enthusiasm) and then disappear. Also, as a teacher I can see at once that certain individuals who come to Aikido are destined to have special challenges, let us say. For some, even, Aikido is the wrong match because of their age, body situation, life situation, or personality.

On the other hand, a teacher cannot pre-select. When I taught at UC Davis as a professor, I could not tell a student: “Gosh, you know, you really have some tremendous challenges ahead; maybe you should try something else.” No, as an instructor I was professionally obligated to accept anyone who met the requirements for the course and to do my best to guide them to insight and to a successful learning experience.

So let’s follow this beginner thread for a moment as we chase “Why Aikido?” down the rabbit hole.

Some reasons to learn Aikido that I have heard:

- I need to defend myself.
- I want to get in shape.
- I want to learn to be poised and balanced and to roll.
- I’ve always been interested in Japanese art and culture.
- I like the vibe of your dojo.
- I need a friend.
- I like cool gear (costumes and sticks).
- I tried other martial arts but they were too competitive and I got hurt.
- I want to get a black belt. (Maybe several!)
- I want to teach Aikido, or at least hold a respected position in the hierarchy.
- I want to have my own dojo.
- I’m making YouTube videos.
- I admire Osensei.
- I want to understand the Way of Harmony.
- I want to experience the great Mystery. (?)
- I want to have fun.

Over the years, I personally have tried some of these answers but I found them to be less than satisfying in the longer run. Even the answer: “I want to come into a better state of balance with myself, other people, and the universe” seems wanting, because you don’t need nikyo to achieve that goal.

Which brings me to where I want to go with this essay.

Several years ago – maybe as many as twelve years at this point – Sensei sponsored a New

Year's day get-together at the old dojo where he sat us down on the mat and among other things talked to us about the value of setting goals and the value of getting clear on our goals. He talked about habits. Over the years, I've heard him return to this theme many times – particularly at New Year. I've pondered this a lot – both as an Aikido teaching and as a general teaching applicable to, well . . . anything, actually. Let's take meditation, for example, since it's an easy and transparent example and one that works very well in the lab. At some point, many of us in the Aikido game get the notion that it's a good idea to add meditation to the mix. So we read some books maybe, attend this or that event, get the gear, and plop our butts down, seiza or cross-legged or whatever. And then? Well, what? Not much. There you sit (or stand), breathing. Maybe you think: "I'm on the way to becoming a great enlightened Master like Osensei." Not! Maybe you think: "I'm acquiring merit and esteem." Not! Maybe you think: "I'm circulating the subtle winds and developing internal ki power and will live forever or if not forever then at least I will defeat the common cold." Not!

Nope. You're just sitting or standing there breathing. That's it.

Something else may happen, but is that the point?

You guessed it: I like paradoxes. They seem to help express what otherwise falls flat when I try to be precise. In the case of "Why Aikido?" – for me the answer has a lot to do with this example of meditation. People ask: why meditate; what's it good for? But really, I don't know. I like it; my body likes it; I keep returning to the routine on the tiny mat. At some point I have noticed that with meditation as with aikido as with other things I choose to practice in a sustained, ongoing fashion, that a certain self-affirming momentum gets built up. A habit happens. Neurons rewire. For better or worse. (Brain plasticity, as we're discovering, is a fact. Even for oldsters!)

So maybe the answer lies in the practice for itself. Until we get the final scoop, be attentive to your posture and what you do with your mind and your time. And of course: have fun with your practice!

Oh, What a Beautiful Day!

By Donny Shiu

After much rain in the prior months, everyone was blessed with a beautiful day on April 19, 2017. It was the day of the Grand Opening of Aikido Institute. How timely and reflective of what Aikido Institute of Oakland have experienced as the result of having to relocated from the Oakland location. As one can image, the relocation of the dojo in an expensive estate region was no easy task. Adding to the challenge is a space that can accommodate a dojo. Undauntedly, members continued training religiously and had to train at a temporary facility as the search continued. Patience and hard work paid off by locating a site to build the dojo from the ground up. Finally, home sweet home!

On this warm sunny day, Grand Opening, the dojo was easily found at the end of curvy side road (cul-de-sac like). It was conveniently adjacent to a café/restaurant. Was it part of the plan? The entrance was wide like open arms, very welcoming. Guests were warmly greeted by the members and politely showed us the way, including to the facilities that I needed. They had not one but two. What a relief!

The stairway to the upstairs changing area is immediate to the left as you face the front office/reception area, which is really in the front entrance of the dojo (unlike the previous dojo). The changing area is an upper level overlooking

the mat area. In addition to function, this balcony has a great top view of the mat area. The upper level space extends only to the edge of the mat. As you bow and step on to the mat, you would immediately be greeted with a high ceiling above and a high-tech mat below. Sunlight shines through the back array of windows. Through these window is a view of the building across the way; it is pleasant and void of distractions. Shomen is to the left and a nicely painted wall to the right. I hope these description moves to visit and train.

Sensei Bill Witt led the seminar. Soon the mat was full of aikidoists moving, blending, and taking falls when possible. Sensei Witt used this opportunity to point out to us that we blend with the environment and not the contrary. It was a great time to train with old and new friends, extending energy and receiving energy. At the center of it all, it is about energy, spirit, and ki. Everyone is there to give support and celebrate the Grand Opening by practicing aikido!!

Don't forget our Davis dojo roots. Sensei taught and trained in Oakland for years prior to coming to Davis. In a way, Oakland is our sister dojo. Changes happens, but everything will just be fine by accepting and adapting and improving...as will Oakland Aikido Institute located in Emeryville. It is the spirit, the people, and KI that will sustain; otherwise, a dojo without passionate practitioners is just a nice structure. As you may see photos of the dojo, including Guy's superb work, can only capture visual images. Check it out for yourself in person and give it some of your mojo.



Senseis at the Oakland Dojo Opening

KYU Promotions

February 2017

Camilo Leiva Conklin	7K
Daniel Lopez	3K
Hannah Miller	4K
Kimberley Lounsberry	5K
Luca Del Bene	7K
Nikko Yoneda Cruz	8K
Oren Vinokurov	7K
Teo Kurtovic	7K
Zachary Lounsberry	5K

June 2017

Jan Ng	1K
Naomi Saito	1K
Edo Kurtovic	1K

DAN Promotions

Rob Kamisky	Yondan
Terence Phan	Yondan
Kathleen Holder	Sandan
Elise Bauer	Sandan
Guy Michelier	Nidan



Rob in Randori



Rob and Toby



Terence in Randori



Terence and Eric



Elise and Rob



Our Excellent Dojo Photographer, Guy



Oakland Dojo Opening



Kathleen



Oakland Dojo Opening



Joy of Aikido!

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!

If you know you will be absent from the dojo for an extended period, please inform the Sensei.



**Aikido Institute Davis
638 Cantrill Drive, Suite B, Davis, CA
95616
530-297-1215 www.aikidodavis.com**