

Unexpected Side Effects

by Kathleen Holder

I had a fairly good idea of what I was getting into when I first started Aikido—or so I thought. Over the years, friends and family members had invited me to watch their Aikido classes, demonstrations and tests. And watching them, I figured that someday I, too, ought to learn how to spin out of harm's way, to tie multiple attackers into a big knot, and to fall—with a loud slap to the mat—and pop back up no worse for the wear.

I especially wanted to know how to fall safely. Despite a lifetime of moving and falling, and a series of lessons in things like tumbling, dance, yoga and striking-style martial arts, I still lacked confidence in my ability to take a fall without hurting myself.

So when this very fine dojo appeared before my very nose—"You might want to try this," my husband said, showing me an ad in the newspaper for an introductory course—I finally signed up.

I began with expectations that Aikido would change me, just as we are shaped by our other life experiences. Some changes I anticipated—my legs, arms and back got stronger and my wrists more flexible. But other effects, still revealing themselves, have been more surprising. Just one example: Not only is my back getting stronger, but I also find myself standing up straighter.

Other changes are more internal. One of the best is discovering the joy of practicing Aikido. I am having far more fun than I ever imagined.

Suddenly, long hallways and grocery-store aisles look like invitations to break into two-step Tai Sabaki spins. I also have a growing appreciation for all the help I receive in my progress in Aikido, not only from the estimable Newens Sensei but also from my many sempai and other students of all ages at this school. I feel very lucky to be a part of this dojo.

There are other "side effects" of the physical training. Learning how to be uke, how to blend and receive, has affected me in conversations; I find myself becoming a better listener, not so quick to jump in before the other person has finished speaking.

A growing awareness of my center and sense of balance is slipping into other areas of my life as well. I suddenly noticed this one morning while listening to the radio. I had gotten upset with something that somebody had said, until realizing that I had given up my emotional center and let the comment throw me off balance.

And that sort of self-realization, I strongly suspect, is not a side effect of Aikido at all, but rather a primary goal.





**New Year's Day Seminar
To Celebrate Sensei's
40th Year in Aikido**

**40-Year Lessons
by Hoa Newens Sensei**

On January 1, 2007 I celebrated the completion of forty years of training in Aikido with a seminar at which I shared five important discoveries along my journey. I am exposing them again here with the hope that they may serve as beacons to guide others on the Aiki path.

Just reading them will not do much for you except provide some temporary mental stimulation. You need to train hard, stop and ponder about your training experience in the context of these principles, make adjustments then repeat this sequence ad infinitum.

Here they are, in the order that they became manifest to me.

1. The most efficient movement originates from the hips, the seat of Kokyuu.

The hips here refer to the abdominal area centered on what is known as Hara or Dan dien. This principle is based on the premise that Aikido as a martial art seeks to achieve efficiency of movement, that is, use as little energy as possible to achieve a desired impact. Since the seat of our energy is in the hips, the secret of energy efficiency is to find the way to connect the hips as directly as possible to the desired outcome. This is done first by connecting the hips to the trunk, then the hips to the limbs, then the hips to any weapon that we hold, then finally the hips to the target. In short, when the movement originates from the hips it can cause the body to move as one unit and deliver the maximum flow of energy with minimal leaks toward the target. The early years of training will require maintaining a rigid relationship among the body parts (hands, hips, feet, etc.). Afterwards, when the energy has found the most efficient path, the martial artist can relax the body and achieve the same efficiency. This secret, though described explicitly here, can only be unlocked by assiduous training.

2. Aikido energy follows spirals: outward and inward.

Energy transmits in spirals in nature. Aikido movements are in harmony with natural movements and therefore follow spirals. In fact energy moves only in spirals. Some human movements reflect these spirals better than others if they are tuned into them. A human movement is made up of several layers of energy enveloping a core that is a spiral. If all the layers conform tightly to the core then the spiral manifests outwardly. This is what most students should aim for. Years later, upon mastery of the internal energy, the spiral can be intentionally hidden under loose layers until close to the final impact. In that way, a seemingly innocuous move can deliver a very focused spiral that may not be seen but can definitely be felt by the receiver.

3. The technique happens as you want it: you create it with your intent then let it manifest.

We live in an energy matrix with crisscrossing energy lines. The Creator has pre-configured some of these energy lines into shapes that are inanimate objects or living things. Humans are endowed with a bit of this creative power in the guise of “intent”. A human being can re-arrange the energy lines around him/her with his/her intent. The intent generates a conceptual sketch (an idea) that will materialize in specific forms that help to support the idea. The seasoned martial artist would concentrate on the idea instead of the form. Attachment to specific forms puts unnecessary restrictions on the way the idea manifests and may not result in the desired outcome.

This principle also contains one of the most important precepts of martial arts: you can create the situation that you want to be in. In other words, you do not react to a situation but you take the initiative and create the optimal conditions for your technique to express itself.

As an application, in a *randori* (multiple attacks) or *jyu-waza* (free style) situation a good strategy for the defender is not to try to decide quickly on the appropriate technique to counter each attack but to focus his intent on the desired outcome, which may be “get out of harm”. The more advanced martial artist can choose the idea “get out of harm using Aikido techniques and without harming others” and let his training experience take over to achieve the desired outcome.

4. We are all in it together: approach your training partner not with the intent of destroying him but with the intent of restoring his wholeness.

This is a radically different way of dealing with aggression. It is almost the “turn the other

cheek” approach. This is the hallmark character that differentiates Aikido from other martial arts. The purpose of doing Aikido is to restore balance, not to annihilate the source of discord or violence.

We should realize that whatever we do to the other person will come back to us because of our energetic inter-connection with that person. In a conflict we understand that the aggressor is a member of our Family who has temporarily lost his balance. We use Aikido to help that person regain her balance. Thus we use Aikido to help preserve the integrity of our Family. When we train in Aikido with the mindset that there is no enemy and that the aggressor is part of the family, this attitude will be reflected in the type and quality of the techniques.

5. Unlock the Aikido essence within you: it's already inside you by divine design, all you need to do is to tune in with the divine key to unlock this essence and let it manifest as Takemusu Aiki

In other words, Aikido exists already in its pure form within each of us. We need to rediscover it by removing the obstacles that stand in the way of its manifestation. This is a realization that came late in my martial art career and I have no adequate words to explain this yet. I would just invite you to keep training until this meaning is revealed to you directly.

The Living Portrait

by John Hardin

A walk among the Tall Ones;
 they have stood here long enough, that stillness
 is infused in the creeping mist;
 The rusty red hue permeates the air and my skin;
 I breathe in the physicalness of that hue into the
 belly;
 The lulling waves of embryonic fluid along the
 shore dissipates the modern mind;
 Their red hue mixes with my own redness at the
 tail;
 Their stillness is within me. . .and I see that it,
 all of it, is being painted right
 in front of my own seeing. . . And I am being
 painted as well. I bow in the
 dirt, in the wet stench of rotting leaves, hands
 pressed into snail slime
 pathways, I bow in the presence of the Portrait
 and the Painter. I bow to
 quell the emotional eruption of the piercing
 wound of having been severed from
 Life by the conditioned mind.

The One Minute Juggler

by Paul Tu

A couple of Christmas ago, a friend at work gave me a pack of 3 juggling balls as my Christmas present. He intended as a reminder for me to maintain work-life balance. Knowing that I have the dexterity and coordination of a blabbering inebriate, I thanked him profusely and promptly used them as their intended purpose—a paper weight. They sat on my desk

and worked wonderfully keeping my paperwork from walking away.

One day, boredom got the best of me as I stared at the blinking screen, twiddling my thumb and waiting for my computer to boot up. I took the perfectly good paper weight and opened its package. Three juggling balls and a small instruction sheet fell out of the package. Still waiting for the computer to boot, I began to read.

The instructions were short and simple. You take two balls in one hand and one ball in the other. You throw one ball from the hand with two balls to the other hand. When the ball you just threw reached its apex, you throw the ball from the hand with one ball...blah, blah, blah, so on and so forth. What the heck, how hard can it be!

I followed the instructions precisely and threw the ball. It flew over the cubical divider and landed right in the middle of my neighbor's desk. Startled, he looked over and saw my futile attempt to juggle. Shaking his head and laughing, he walked over and proceeded to demonstrate how easy and simple it is to juggle. Then, my neighbor from the other cubical walked over and showed her excellence in juggling. Hmm, okay, now simple boredom and curiosity became a quest.

From that day about 8 months ago, every time I boot up or shut down my computer at work, I practiced and practiced with many more errant juggling ball incidents. One morning a few months later, as I started my usual morning waiting for the computer to boot up while figuring out where the ball will land routine, I made a full revolution juggling three balls. Then two, three, four revolutions, it became easier and easier. Finally, I can keep the balls up in air for the duration of boot up. All together, it took me about 2 minutes a day to go from wondering where the balls will land to actually able to maintain some semblance of juggling. With this in mind, I am going to practice shomenuchi on the back of my chair.

Mastery by George B. Leonard

A Book Review

by Toby Hargreaves

(Editor's Note: *Mastery* and other inspiring books are available for checkout in the dojo library. Would anyone like to review another book for the next newsletter?)

“Just what is mastery?” George Leonard asks. It can be in anything: music, sports, science, business, relationships, cooking, driving, walking, or doing the dishes. Leonard writes that perhaps what makes humans most unique among animals is our capacity for lifelong learning. Most people, however, reach a certain degree of competence in the skills of life, then stop improving those skills. This is largely due to the fact that we are results-oriented creatures: we do something if it has a big enough payoff to justify the expense of getting it.

I think this “rational”, reward/fear-driven behavior is instilled in us by culture. For example, children are encouraged (by parents, peers, and society) to study hard and do their homework (even in subjects that bore them to tears) so they will get a good grade in the class. They are taught that they must get good grades in order to get a “good education”. They are taught that they must get a good education in order to get a good job, a house, financial security, a family—in other words, to be a successful member of society.

The journey of mastery is the polar opposite of this system. Mastery is more akin to the way a child plays. A child will do something if it is interesting, and when this happens, they are completely open and curious about it. Kids don't play because someone makes them do it or rewards them for it. The play itself is the reward. Similarly, the journey of mastery is undertaken primarily for its own sake, and one practices for the sake of practice itself.

According to Leonard, the journey of mastery has a generalized shape: long periods of practice with little or no improvement (plateaus),

punctuated by short spurts of progress. Because of this shape, the journey is often discouraging, especially to the results-driven mind that we all have. People tend to get stuck and fall into three generalized patterns of behavior that Leonard calls the Dabbler, the Obsessive, and the Hacker.

The Dabbler loves trying new things and begins each with great enthusiasm. When they reach their first plateau, however, they become discouraged, decide that it's not for them, and try something else.

The Obsessive thinks that the harder he tries, the faster he will improve. When he reaches the inevitable plateau, he redoubles his efforts. Eventually he burns out.

The Hacker, on the other hand, after getting the hang of something, is content to stay on the plateau indefinitely. She has a good time during the practice, chats a lot with others, but doesn't put much energy toward improving her skills.

Leonard points out that while one is on the path of mastery in a particular field or pursuit, one might be a hacker or dabbler in other areas of their life. Ultimately, however, the path of mastery applies to all aspects of one's life—they are all interconnected and cannot be separated. Zen master Shunryu Suzuki said, “When you understand one thing through and through, you understand everything.” Thus, broad wisdom and understanding come through a specific practice.

Remember that learning never ends. Yamaoka Tesshu once wrote:

Do not think that
This is all there is.
More and more
Wonderful teachings exist—
The sword is unfathomable.

Relationships in Aikido

by Marion Donehower

When I started Aikido in the seventies in Germany, the concept of ki was like a revelation of something I had been waiting for forever.

Right away I was attracted to the concept of ki, and I was excited and dedicated to explore it. But due to an Aikido accident (broken collar bone), I had to learn about ki through Tai Chi, which I practiced and taught for many years. Tai Chi and its application was a wonderful way to work on relaxation, posture, breathing from the hara, and rhythmical movement. Practicing outdoors in a quiet and serene way lets you experience nature and yourself in a deep and nourishing way.

But a few years later, when I saw Aikido again, I fell in love all over. I still feel an excitement and happiness every time I bow in at the shomen before the picture of O-Sensei and then step on the mat. Just seeing good and beautiful Aikido is an aesthetic and spiritual experience for me.

One thing that fascinated me about Aikido from the start (and still fascinates me) is the fact that two people move together in harmony. As a psycho-therapist and social worker, I always have pondered relationships. In the modern world, we don't exist in a vacuum; we don't live in a cave or forest for years; we prove our maturity in relationships—through connecting or disconnecting to people. On the mat, we explore a relationship through movement instead of through talking. This makes us more honest and open. Movement reveals everything; we can't cheat or weasel on the mat. We can't get annoyed or scared and use words as power tools or be violent. We just have to be there on the mat! I came to understand that the ultimate advance in Aikido is not the perfection of technique or doing "soft," "strong," or "whatever" Aikido—no, it is the perfection of our character. To really advance, I think

everybody should work with people they don't like or people they may be uncomfortable with. Then observe what happens to you.

I started thinking about relationships on the mat when I was all of a sudden disabled through losing my balance and as a consequence I was no longer able to fall in ukemi. I felt vulnerable and fearful, and I felt that I imposed on my partner, since my condition prevented the partner from completing the entire technique. My attitude changed when, at a workshop, a guy came to me afterwards and said: "Thank you; I learned so much by taking you down." And I felt he really meant it. I was so surprised. I then realized: breathe, relax, extend ki, and be in the movement. By doing this you will be open for your partner and experience Aikido as a mirror of the process of your entire life. It becomes a barometer to show you where you are. When you know who you are and where you are in your learning about life, then you can see the path ahead of you and know more clearly where you want to go.

Injuries in Aikido

by Bruce Donehower

Aikido presents many challenges—spiritual, emotional, and physical. In this article, I'd like to talk about one of its physical challenges—injuries. It's hard to generalize about these things, so I speak for myself, from my own experience.

Injuries Due to Adjustment

Aikido is a demanding physical art. Even if you're athletic, Aikido will place unusual demands on your body. In learning Aikido, I found it helpful to take the long view and be patient as my body adjusts. For example, during the first two years of my training I had a constant pain in my left shoulder. My sensei pointed out that I was rolling incorrectly, but it was hard for me to break my bad habits because

my hips were tight and this tightness pulled my rolls out of alignment, causing repeated stress to the shoulder. My sensei and sempais urged me to try to understand the message from the sore shoulder. This meant learning to “scan” my movements and be aware of habits, postures, and mental attitudes (stubbornness) that contributed to the problem. I had to learn to listen to my body—ease up and be aware.

Injuries Due to Re-injury

Once you get the Aikido bug, it is often difficult to acknowledge that you need to give injuries adequate time to heal. Aikido is so wonderful, and it feels so unfair and frustrating when we have an injury that limits practice. Understandably, many students will attempt to find a strategy of perseverance that allows them to continue practicing while injured. The problem is: re-injury often occurs while they settle on a strategy that works. It’s a real dilemma, because re-injury obviously often makes the original injury much worse.

Injury Due to Aging

In addition to our training on the mat, we train in the larger dojo called life. Bodies age at different rates; life wears and tears at us in different ways. Or perhaps an old injury, caused before we started Aikido, rears its ugly head. Can our practice be adjusted to accommodate this changed pattern of being; can we give ourselves permission to practice in different ways? My observation from watching others is this: if a path still beckons, a strategy of perseverance will emerge.

Injuries Off the Mat

Once we start Aikido training, we need to be consistent and we also need to see how our other activities support or do not support our Aikido. Over the years of my Aikido practice, I’ve spent a lot of money on chiropractic treatment. Although a lower back strain, for example, typically manifests during Aikido practice, the initial set-up for the injury is almost always due

to activities off the mat. Likewise, now that I am over fifty I find that I have to keep doing Aikido regularly because my body loses its tone and conditioning so quickly. Fitful bursts of training increase the likelihood of injury. Activities such as aerobic exercises, stretching, tai chi, meditation, attention to diet, and adequate sleep all help keep the body tuned for Aikido and should complement our practice, but they don’t substitute for consistent time on the mat.

Injuries Due to Inattention

Awareness is essential. In the beginning of my practice, I thought that “injuries just happen; it’s bad luck; it’s inevitable; martial arts are dangerous; gird your loins and hope for the best.” But now I see that attentiveness shapes what happens.

Aikido is an art; your body and your uke’s body are the instruments you need to practice your art. If you’re a musician, you don’t mistreat, misuse, or mishandle your musical instrument; you are mindful of its precious value and unique characteristics. Likewise in Aikido—we’re not on the mat to practice an extreme sport or “break the violin.” Injuries to ourselves or to others are more likely to occur when we drift into martial fantasies, get caught in our own selfish agendas, forget to pay attention to the needs of our bodies or the needs of other bodies, lose awareness of the total situation, use power instead of principle, and/or generally fail to put into practice our awareness of Aikido as spiritual discipline and art. Knee injuries are often the result of inattention—for example, if we torque the knee during tenkan (instead of turning from the hip and moving the entire leg), we will stress the joint and ligaments. Youngsters, watch out! Spare your knees!

Accidents

I put this type of injury last. Are there really any accidents? I don’t pretend to have any insights or answers here, but it’s a question I continue to ask.

Perfect Practice Makes Perfect...

by Shannon Newbold

Many years ago a coach of mine made a statement that is as true today as it was fifteen years ago. He said that, "Practice makes perfect is a lie." At that point I did not understand what he was talking about until he followed it up with the following, "Perfect practice makes perfect. Terrible practice makes terrible." At that point, everything became clear and it dawned on me that he was correct. If you are just going through the motions and practicing for the sake of practicing, then you will be average at best, or very good at doing it wrong.

Fifteen years later I still try and live by that phrase, especially in my studies of Aikido. In Aikido, as with many other things in life, there are many simple elements that form the building blocks of more complex elements. Those complex elements in turn can be used again as building blocks of even more complex elements. If the simple building blocks are flawed because of a lack of focus or attention, then the entire structure becomes flawed. When training, special care and focus should be used to make sure that everything is done as perfectly as possible. This way as one progresses more complex skills are easier to master and they are based on a sound set of fundamentals.

January Promotions

Congratulations to all the candidates, and thanks to those who came to watch them and support the kyu tests!

Name	New Rank:
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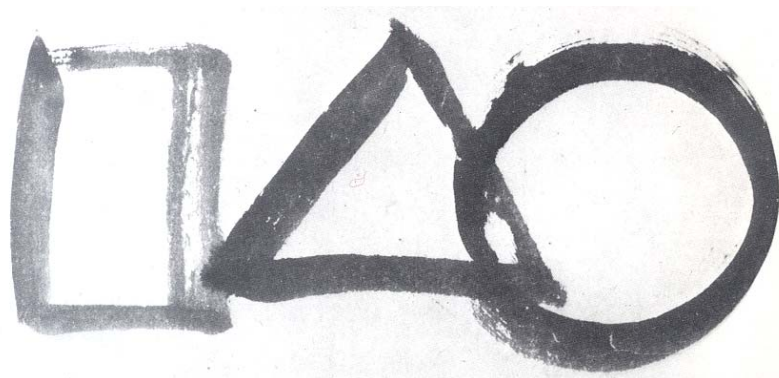
ADULTS

Forootan, Dan	4K
Newbold, Shannon	4K
Tu, Paul	2K

TEENS

Carson, William	4K
Masem, Amy	4K
Masem, Burt	4K
Soto, Bryan	5K
Williams, Brian	6K

Next Kyu Tests: May 12



**Dojo Calendar
April – May 2007**

- **April 4 - 8**
Aikido seminar in San Francisco with Senseis Tissier, Newens, Hendricks, Friedman and others.
- **April 26**
Special class to commemorate O-Sensei’s death anniversary.
- **April 28**
3:30-6:30 PM **Davis Martial Arts Festival** to be held at Central Park, Davis
- **May 12**
Kyu Tests at dojo. 10:30 – 12:30.
- **May 25 - 27**
Tahoe Gasshuku. This is the not-to-miss seminar of the year. You can register online at www.gashuku.net
Those who are interested in sharing a cabin at the seminar should sign up for space right away.

Pictures Needed!

The *Awase* newsletter needs pictures of dojo activities. Got a digital camera? Please use it to document dojo events (like the martial arts festival, eh? Hint, hint).

Big thanks to those of you who helped at the Dojo cleaning in April!

Reminder: Dues are due first of the month. An addition of 10% of the payment will be added if paid after 5th of the month. Thanks for your prompt payment.

You can pay at the dojo, by mail, or at this link:
http://www.Aikidoinstitutedavis.com/Paypal_payment.html

**Birth Announcement
Congratulations to Jonathan and Heidi!**

Jonathan writes that Heidi gave birth to a 9 lbs 5 ounce baby boy on April 10. They’ve named him Bodhi Jai Mermis-Cava.

Dojo Calendar Online

You can now view the Dojo’s Calendar of Activities by clicking on Calendar on the margin of our home page.
<http://www.Aikidoinstitutedavis.com>

Big Kiai!

