

Awase is the newsletter of the Aikido Institute of Davis, a dojo where you can learn the arts of Aikido and Tai Chi. Please visit our website at www.AikidoDavis.com for information on membership & class times.

Two Training Approaches

Hoa Newens Sensei

In the 1990's, when Saito Morihiro Sensei was still alive and teaching in the old Iwama dojo (now the Ibaraki Shibu Dojo) he demonstrated the technique and carefully explained the correct posture and form. His explanation related specifically to the detail of the technique, in a straightforward and down to earth manner. There was nothing abstract nor philosophical about his talk. It was succinct and clear. He was the only one doing the talking during the entire class. Students did their best to look, listen and replicate the techniques energetically, without a single word, except for "Hai" and the ubiquitous Kiai. That was the way to train and learn in Iwama, Japan, at that time.

Contemporarily, when Robert Nadeau Sensei conducts his classes in the San Francisco Bay Area, he often demonstrates a technique several times on various students and asks them "What did it feel like?" Students might blurt out "sea breeze", "floating", "emptiness", etc. The students are encouraged to verbalize their experience of the technique. The implicit expectation is that such expression helped the students become more aware of the experience and also helps other students re-create that feeling in themselves.



Both teachers, despite using divergent approaches, produced exceptional Aikido students who went on to become outstanding torch bearers in their respective lineages. I use the above examples to illustrate two different approaches to teaching Aikido and have no intent to compare the two teachers, who belong to two different generations of Aikido leadership, with Saito Sensei being the senior.

In the traditional martial training method of the Orient, the body is the main vehicle for learning and teaching. The student is to follow the example of the teacher and faithfully obey his or her instructions, which are sometime direct and to the point and sometime ambivalent.

In a typical Aikido dojo in the East, the instructor

demonstrates a technique while students sit and watch intently. When he is done, all get up and reproduce the movement as expertly as they could. You may hear some kiai, some grunting, slaps on the mat but hardly any other sound except for the instructor making occasional corrections to certain students. Classes at the Hombu Dojo in Tokyo are still conducted in this manner.

After several years of regular and rigorous training, the body movements become more refined and energetic patterns begin to form. The student gradually develops the ability to feel the techniques. Over time, these feelings are further polished, until each technique conjures a signature feeling.



Sensei and Toby train together at the Tahoe Gasshuku. Picture by Guy Michelier

This is when the physical training expands from the lower energy center and reaches the heart center. From this point on, the student is driven by an inner passion that is the result of these various feelings wanting to express themselves. For example, a student may be in the midst of carrying out her secular job, when suddenly an urge for Shihonage arises and her body

itches to perform the related movement. For students who are predisposed to emotional expression, this passion is an internal fire that possibly leads to addiction. The student may frequently feel that the only way to get through the day is to come to the dojo and let the body burn that fire through hard training. Fortunately, this addiction too, shall pass.

After many more years of polishing the technical detail and refining the feelings, a natural inner synthesis takes place that assemble the somatic feelings into groups. This ordering of previously disparate elements is the beginning of discernment and deep understanding. At this stage, the training has reached the higher wisdom center and brings about clarity of perception. The physical training still goes on, as well as the non-tangible practice. The difference is that now, the training has graduated into a much larger context and is gradually merging with the daily life activity of the student. The student realizes now that every activity in daily life contributes to the training.

The training approach that is described above works well in a traditional Asian milieu because it is supported by the societal structure. Proclivity toward tradition and rites, respect for elders, belief in the natural order, non-judgmental practices, perseverance and loyalty are key elements for the success of this approach.

There exists an alternative approach.

In the rational approach to training, the student is initially presented with a concept that is appealing to the intellect. The student may have come across a book that explains the philosophy of Aikido. His mind is struck by the unusual juxtaposition of martial arts and non-violence. Intellectual curiosity is aroused and drives this person to further exploration. He reads all the Aikido books that he can lay his hands on and devours the Aikido movie clips on YouTube. Images of Aikido movements are firmly ingrained in his mind.

He becomes enamored with the lofty concepts and rejoices watching the beautiful movement of Aikido. After some time, his mental fascination leads him to believe wholeheartedly in the teachings of Aikido. His

heart is now engaged and it slowly becomes an addiction; he can't get enough Aikido in his life. The next natural step is to find a physical outlet for this addiction. Thus, he finds and visits the nearest Aikido dojo. Within this person, Aikido was conceived as an idea in the mind; the idea slowly transformed itself into a belief, which now will be translated into action.

A student joining Aikido through this route would try to express the concept of non-violence and extend the feeling of harmony into his Aikido practice. This student would revel at the teacher's discourse on the ideals of Aikido and would beseech her in clarifying the rationale for each type of practice. The questioning mind is totally engaged in the practice of Aikido. Why do we bow to the picture on the wall? What if the Uke does not follow along? Questions abound and answers will be available. During training, the student will naturally draw from all the Aikido images that he has stored internally from prior researches and let them manifest into physical forms. The early stage of translating the cerebral images into the physical motion may produce awkward results, in comparison to students who approach training from the physical aspect. However in the long-run, after numerous repetitions, the movements acquire a discernible quality about them. The inherent clarity of the internal images will help define the movements in further detail, and eventually they become more precise.

This second training approach is more likely prevalent in the West, where individual exploration is encouraged and the inquiring mind is given free rein. An intellectual concept is hatched into a physical art.

Each of the training approaches has its merit and is appropriate for different personalities and in different surroundings. It matters not which approach one uses to study and train in Aikido. What matters is that one perseveres through all stages of the chosen method and achieves integration of all three centers, physical, emotional and mental. Such integration leads to total immersion, in which Aikido and daily life are one and the same.



*Top: Elias Marvinney (right)
Bottom: Remy Cordier and Elise Bauer.
Pictures by Guy Michelier.*

Unbroken A Story of the Aiki Spirit

Toby Hargreaves

In the 1940s, there was a young, rising Olympic track star from Los Angeles named Louie Zamperini. When World War II broke out, the Olympics were canceled. Dreams shattered, Louie enlisted in the Air Force and was deployed to the Pacific to fight the Japanese. After a few years of service, his plane malfunctioned and crashed in the ocean. What followed is an incredible story of heroism and the strength of the human spirit. *Unbroken*, a novel by Laura Hillenbrand, recounts this journey. In this essay, I will explore the story in terms of Aikido principles and explain how such a story can be an inspiration for our practice.

After crash landing in the Pacific, Louie swam free of the sinking plane, and along with two other

survivors, climbed aboard a life raft. Equipped with almost no food, water, or supplies, the three men drifted in the vast Pacific awaiting rescue. Planes were sent out to search for them, but to no avail. Growing thinner and thinner, the castaways survived off of rainwater, seabirds captured by hand, and flying fish that fell into the raft. Encircled day and night by hungry sharks, the men had to be constantly on guard. Despite the grim circumstances, Louie and the pilot, Phil, kept each other in good spirits. They told each other stories of their childhood, quizzed each other on facts and trivia, and never gave up praying for rescue. The third man, Mac, however, retreated into himself, and was gradually succumbing to despair. "Mac remained in his own world... [his] body grew weaker, following his broken spirit." (p. 149) Mac held on for quite a while, but after thirty-two days on the raft, he passed away.

The other two men were faring badly physically at that point, but despite that, "Louie and Phil were



From Left: Back row: Morgan Curtis, Remy Cordier, Mitch Peters, Guy Michelier, Martin Dubcovsky, Marco Martinez. Middle row: Donny Shiu, Inagaki Shihan, Newens Sensei, Elise Bauer, Clelia Clark, Kori Farrell, Rob Kamisky, Elias Marvinney. Kneeling: Kent Standley, Toby Hargreaves.

enjoying remarkable precision of mind, and were convinced that they were growing sharper every day.” (p. 166) This example shows how powerful the spirit is—it can sustain the body long after the body would give up on its own for lack of food or water, and exposure to extreme elements. In Aikido, we study this power of the spirit: how it animates our body movements (*kokyu*) and governs the flow of energy throughout the body (*ki no nagare*). Through our practice, we train both body and spirit, but ultimately we learn that it is the spirit that leads the energy which in turn leads the body.

Another principle this story illustrates is the importance of the training partner. Louie and Phil supported each other, fed each other, and kept each other from giving up. This is the same relationship we should have with our training partners in Aikido. Paradoxically, the more we give and share ourselves with others, either by teaching or training, the more we benefit ourselves in our own training. I believe this to be a key principle of Aikido: to become more powerful by allying yourself with others rather than separating from others.

After forty-seven days on the raft, Louie and Phil drifted close to an island. It happened to be controlled by the Japanese, so they were captured and thus began the second chapter of their journey. They remained imprisoned until the end of the war, just over two years.

The two men were soon split up and the narrative follows Louie’s experience. He was taken through a series of prison camps, first in the South Pacific, then on the Japanese mainland. Each one was successively worse, and he endured brutal interrogations and torture, solitary confinement, beatings and humiliation. Despite that, he and the other prisoners kept up hope that the war would end and they would return home to their families.

Early in his time as a prisoner, Louie encountered a head prison guard who took particular notice of him.

This guard, nicknamed The Bird, singled out Louie—likely because of Louie’s defiant attitude--and took to viciously beating him whenever he caught sight of Louie. The Bird was a sadistic monster, and found pleasure in giving pain to others. He became Louie’s constant fear, and haunted his dreams every night. The Bird followed Louie when he was transferred to a different camp later in the war. The beatings grew worse, but Louie never gave up nor capitulated to his tormentor.

Finally, the war ended and Louie was able to return home and reunite with his family. After the jubilation and celebration subsided, however, he was still tormented day and night by images of The Bird—in his head he was still living as a captive. Louie turned

to alcoholism and his life fell apart. Prone to angry outbursts, he began fighting with his girlfriend. Both of them at their wits end, she convinced him to attend a lecture by an evangelical preacher. During the sermon, Louie had a flashback in which he was on the raft again. He remembered a promise he had made to God, “If you save me, I’ll serve

heaven forever” (p. 375). It was a promise he had not kept since his rescue and suddenly he was ready to keep it. “When he thought of his history, what resonated with him now was not all that he had suffered, but the divine love that had intervened to save him.” (p. 376) Louie went on to dedicate his life to sharing his story and helping troubled youth find meaning in their lives.

This moment of revelation sounds strongly similar to the story of O’Sensei’s enlightenment. Of course, stories like these are not things that many of us can speak about from personal experience, but they can inspire by showing what is possible when the human spirit is forged by extremely intense suffering, or in O’Sensei’s case a lifetime of intense training and spiritual seeking. Just as O’Sensei gained the power to be unbeatable by any opponent, Louie proved himself undefeatable by any amount of suffering, and thus transcended to a higher level of consciousness in this world.

Thanks

Christine Palmer

Spring of gratitude
A word so small in size, yet
The heart overflows

Dojo Cleaning



Top: From Left: Marion Donehower, Jan Ng, and Kori Farrell.

Bottom: Toru Saito and Guy Michelier.

Many thanks to everyone who participated in the dojo cleaning on April 12, 2014. Maintaining the dojo is an important part of our training.

Pictures by Martin Dubcovsky.

Ouch!

Donny Shiu

It was easy to figure out something wasn't right when I felt a sudden pain in my foot during practice. From the level pain, I knew it wasn't good. It became swollen soon after. Even I knew playing hurt wasn't going to be an option in this case.

The cause was due to wear and tear...aging didn't helping. No amputation necessary, the recommended treatment was to stay off it. It was difficult getting around. I couldn't train and that sucked.

I was angry, frustrated, and disappointed by this "pain-in-the-foot" situation. Complaining felt good for a while, but I knew it was not a solution. Tough as it was, I relented and *took a step back* from training and let the body heal. Get your way by giving in. I *blended* with what I was confronted with by modifying my training and rested when needed. Success, I was able to slowly train again. Aikido does work because my lame foot and I are now in harmony!

Denial is Not Just a River in Egypt

Clelia Clark

Alternate titles to this article were, "When Are You Leaving?" and "Transitions: Preparing for Life Behind the Orange Curtain". As I and several others prepare to relocate to other parts of our great nation, we've all been struck with the reality of the fact that beginning a new adventure also means leaving other things behind.

Different personalities handle these transitions in a variety of ways. Some people are eager to embrace new experiences and thrive on change. A dear friend of mine, who thought that spending three months living on a boat anchored in San Diego Bay was a good way to save money, embodies this persona perfectly. She was confident that living on a boat was an excellent summer adventure, and she reassured me

that she could simply “row to work” from her aquatic home. She would be sharing her new residence with the gentleman who owned the vessel, who she described to me as being “quite a bit older than I had initially imagined”. Spending three months on the water with a seafaring Father Time was not my idea of prime living conditions, but for her lot, it was all a part of living life to its fullest.

There are others who take an obnoxiously Hallmark-esque attitude to change. These are the “Don’t-cry-because-it’s-over-smile-because-it-happened” people. They are mostly obnoxious to those of use who are deeply rooted in denial because we resent them for their willingness to accept what they cannot change, for being the change they wish to see in the world, et cetera et cetera. My parents fall into this category and, on a daily basis, try to convert me to their exasperatingly positive way of thinking. Not an opportunity is missed to cheerily point out the plethora of things I could be doing to prepare for my move to Southern California. “Well, you aren’t using *all* of your cook books,” wheedles my mother over the phone. “Why don’t you just box them up now?” I roll my eyes and murmur a noncommittal sound into the phone while in my head screaming, “Don’t act like you know my life, woman! What if I need to whip up an Alsatian Apple Tart from scratch? Or if I should get a burning desire to tackle making a soufflé? Would you have me go digging through boxes? No! The books stay. It all stays!”

Into the last category fall those of us who are deeply immersed in the trenches of denial. When people ask us when we are leaving, we may laugh maniacally, get a wild gleam in our eyes, or suddenly realize that there is something in the dojo that needs immediate dusting. We are occasionally violently called back into reality and have to do some sort of preparation for our move, but for the most part we are able to blissfully disavow ourselves from our impending transition. Sadly, as much as we dig our heels in, the day will come when we eventually need to pack up our gi and hit the road.

I don’t believe this comes from unwillingness to start a new adventure but rather a deeper acknowledgment of all of the wonderful things that we have found here

at the dojo, and difficulty letting them go from our daily lives. We have found more than a place to train, we have found family, we have found comfort, we have found enrichment and joy. How could any sane person walk away from that without invoking some intense psychological coping mechanism?

Fortunately for all of us, the bonds that we have forged at the dojo transcend distance. Our dojo family will continue to be our dojo family, even if we only see them once a year at the gasshuku or once every ten years when we are able to travel back to the dojo. The comfort we have found is locked into precious memories, able to be recalled at a moment’s notice. The enrichment and joy we have discovered through our training is a call to continue Aikido even if not in the same way as before. We have an opportunity to branch out from our foundations and enrich our training experience in terrifying but perhaps very fulfilling ways. While I can’t say I’ll be renouncing my denial any time soon, I know that my lessons from the dojo will be there for me when I come back to reality, ready to hand me my bokken...and probably telling me to pull it together and get started on my suburi.



Christine Palmer poses as Super Grover at the super hero themed dojo movie night April 18, 2014. Picture by Martin Dubcovsky.

Is Aikido a Martial Art?

Morgan Curtis

In the United States, systems of fighting or defense are called martial arts regardless of the origin of the art. It is with some trepidation that the subject of a Japanese budo is discussed from the perspective of Western mythologies. While budo is the correct term for Aikido, it is not a word generally understood in the West. Western cultures use the term “martial,” thus, exploring Aikido in terms of Greco-Roman myths has some validity. In considering the word “martial,” there is still some question as to the validity of this term when applied to Aikido.



Donny Shiu applies ikkyo at the Gasshuku. Picture by Guy Michelier.

The word martial is a derivation of the Roman god, Mars. The fourth planet in our solar system is named for him. The planet was so named because of its red coloring. Red is a color of strong emotions most notably including anger and passion. Red is also the color of spilled blood. The war-hungry Roman

conquerors of early Greece, while not truly believing, absorbed the Greek deities into their own culture and renamed them. The Greek’s war god, Ares, was given the name Mars. Since the Romans adopted the Greek gods, looking at the legends of ancient Greece gives us an understanding of the attributes of said deities.

“The Hymn to Ares,” credited to Homer, sings of an heroic, brave and daring figure. Ares is accredited with having a mighty heart and powerful arms, and is named as a superior force, the guardian of cities and helper of justice, and “dispenser of sweet youth’s courage.”¹ Such attributes are worthy of any Aikido practitioner when incorporated with the peaceful and compassionate intent of the Founder.

Exploring more of Homer’s writings, the story begins to change. The Iliad, in book five, introduces “Ares whose lust for slaughter never dies”². During the battle between the Trojans and Argives, he is wounded and in his pain screeches the yell of nine or ten thousand warriors². He then flees the field to return to Mount Olympus. There, he tells Zeus a twisted version of events leading to his injury. Zeus, knowing the truth, says to Ares, “No more, you lying, two faced ... / no more sidling up to me, whining here before me”², before adding, “Always dear to your heart, / strife, yes, and battles, the bloody grind of war”².

Graves, a noted scholar of Greek and Roman mythologies, supports this latter illustration of Ares’ character more than the former. He tells us that in to the ancient Greek myths, Ares “loves battle for its own sake” and enjoys “the slaughter of men and the sacking of towns”³. Regarding Ares and Justice, “he professes too deep a contempt of litigation ever to appear in court as a plaintiff, and has only once done so as a defendant”. Ares’ joy of battle gives him a mercenary-like quality in which he chooses sides based on inclination rather than for any logic or compassion. According to Bulfinch, Mars has a “savagely love of violence and bloodshed”⁴.

- 1 Boer, Charles, Translator. “The Hymn to Ares.” The Homeric Hymns.
- 2 Homer. The Iliad. Robert Fagles, translator.
- 3 Graves, Robert. “Ares’ Nature and Deeds.” The Greek Myths: 1. p. 73,74.
- 4 Bulfinch, Thomas. “Minerva-Niobe.” Bulfinch’s Mythology. P 101.

It would be fair to say Ares/Mars represents the frenzied violence of war. These characteristics are not in the realm of practice and intent of Aikido or its students.

If not a martial art, one following the way of Mars/Ares, is there another mythological figure that better represents the principles of Aikido? “When in Rome,” look to Minerva, and in Greece she is named Athena (think of Athens, the Acropolis and the Parthenon).

Ares’ injury in *The Iliad*, is inflicted by the warrior goddess Athena. Ares, in relating his wound to Zeus, speaks of her as senseless, “...that murderous curse— forever bent on crimes”² and implies that she is a spoiled brat². Athena is the Greek god’s preferred warrior and is never named as one who would destroy a city. The opposite is true, with a hint towards this as Homer describes her battle helmet as, “...engraved with the fighting men of a hundred towns”². In Book Six, the Trojans offer sacrifice to Athena, “...shield of our city”². This status as a protector is supported in Boer. The lyrics decry “...that grand goddess, / bright eyes, / so shrewd, / her heart inexorable, / as virgin, redoubtable, / protectress of cities, / powerful.”⁵ This is somewhat negated in the second hymn, which notes that “with Ares, / (she) takes care of / the work of war, / the destruction of cities”⁶.

Graves’ scholarship supports the first hymn: “Although a goddess of war, she gets no pleasure from battle, as Ares and Eris do, but rather from settling disputes and upholding the law by pacific means”⁷. Unlike Ares, she never loses a battle, “being better grounded in tactics and strategy”⁷. Athena engages in matters of justice and is compassionate. “Her mercy is great: when the judges’ votes are equal in a criminal trial at the Areiopagus, she always gives a casting vote to liberate the accused”⁷. Bulfinch associates Minerva with defensive war and the unusual circumstance of her having been born directly from the head of Zeus supports her reputation for wisdom and cunning⁴.

5 Boer, Charles, Translator. “The Hymn to Athena I” *The Homeric Hymns*. P164,165

6 Boer, Charles, Trans. “The Hymn to Athena II” *The Homeric Hymns*. P166

7 Graves, Robert. “Athena’s Nature and Deeds.” *The Greek Myths: 1*. pp96

Further, she is associated with the care of children, invention of agricultural and craft implements, and musical instruments, all of which suggest her support of culture and society.

In the god Ares/Mars, one sees a primal response to situations, jumping in when provoked, fighting for the love of it, and fleeing when the tide turns against him. He is more concerned with conflict and uses the judicial system only for defense. Athena/Minerva engages in battle as a protector, but only as needed or in instances when the judicial system breaks down. Taken from home in Japan, where budo is a concept of its own (deserving of its own examination), it may be worth considering Aikido not as “Mars-tial” and conflict driven, but rather as “Athenic” and associated with defense of culture and society.



Kent and Keesha Standley at the Gasshuku Party.
Picture by Guy Michelier.

Essence of the Dojo

Lisa Adda

Our dojo has feelings!

After listening to a seminar on Feng Shui (a philosophy about creating harmony in our environment) I learned that our dojo has feelings. Yes, the dojo has feelings and it feels loved!

Try this...

Ask yourself "how do I feel when you step into the dojo and bow?"

Perhaps every time you walk into the dojo you feel safe, warm, happy, and energized because the dojo is clean, well maintained, and loved by its owners and students.

Example:

Do you feel a difference after cleaning the dojo?

If you have ever walked into an abandoned building and felt its pain or negative, stagnant energy then you may have a greater awareness and understanding of what I am saying in this article.

Our dojo feels pain

Just like when I hurt my wrist doing push-ups our dojo feels pain when something gets damaged or broken. If the roof, for example, were to spring a minor leak, the dojo feels injured and needs extra love and care to repair. This care of the dojo also includes the words we say and our intentions expressed in actions.

Try this...

Say kind words to the dojo such as "I am so happy to be here!" Words are powerful. What do you say to the dojo? I say thank you for providing me a peaceful place to study and train.

Example:

When I hurt my wrist no one said to me, "why did you injure your wrist? or Why were you so careless trying

to do those push-ups?" Instead, I heard words of support, kindness, and empathy such as, "Don't worry you will recover from surgery especially with your Tai Chi lessons included as part of your physical therapy."

Our dojo feels purposeful!

Our dojo feels purposeful in providing us a place to study and train and it holds the energy of heaven and earth (dragon and tiger energy) within its walls.

Try this...

Stand at the front door of the dojo and listen to your thoughts and feelings. What does the dojo say to you? Some Feng Shui experts would even say that the dojo has a name. What would you name our dojo?

Example:

On a rainy Wednesday night, Sensei Newens was teaching the Tai Chi class and he reminded us to focus our awareness both internally and externally.

During this particular class I was especially aware of how warm and safe I felt in the dojo. Outside, the wind blew furiously and I could hear the rain pelting the roof, windows, and exterior walls. But the dojo stood firmly against the wind.

I felt the dojo working. It was doing its job and doing it well. It was keeping us sheltered from the storm. The lights of the dojo were bright in sharp contrast to the stormy evening darkness outside.

Inside, the calmness of our standing meditation was enhanced in contrast to the fury of Mother Nature outside the dojo.

Our dojo was staying true to its purpose!

Our dojo misses you!

When you do not attend class, the dojo misses you! Each student and teacher is unique. Our energy is unique to our personalities and inner essence. We each bring a part of ourselves to the dojo and we each take away a part of the dojo that enhances our personal growth and level of awareness.

If the dojo were a puppy it would greet you with a tail wagging when you arrive. It waits for you because without teachers and students what purpose would the dojo have?

Try this...

Recall a time when you missed class. You may have missed one class or maybe had to take an extended leave of absence. Identify, how you felt returning to the dojo? Did you find it welcoming and comfortable as if you were returning home?

Example:

I had to take an extended leave of absence from the dojo when I started a new job and began taking an evening college course in accounting. I missed the dojo greatly but I kept a photo from an Aikido seminar on my "vision board" knowing that I would return in a few months. When I did return, Sensei Newens, my fellow students, and the dojo were all happy to receive me.

As Sensei Newens once said in a Tai Chi class; "Each of us are like an electrical outlet with many cords (i.e. work, school, family, dojo) plugged into us that take away our energy. We can decide which cord gets bigger or smaller and which ones we let go." Sensei, of course, channels a tremendous amount of energy into the dojo and as a result many of us are inspired to do the same.



Rob Sempai at the Gasshuku Dinner Party. Picture by Guy Michelier.

A final note...

In Feng Shui it is believed that everything that comes into our lives matches the essence of our personal energy. I believe the essence of the Aikido Institute Davis is a perfect match to my inner essence. I feel very much in harmony when I practice Tai Chi, Chi Kung, and Aikido within the walls of our dojo with my teachers and fellow students.

Overall, the essence of our dojo is created by the thoughts and actions of everyone who teaches and trains here. In that way our dojo serves as a reflection of our inner essence. We see this:

- when the dojo has been cleaned by the students after a sweaty Aikido class (feels like a breath of fresh air)
- when the dojo is packed full of students and teachers during a seminar (the chi energy is so strong that it is impossible not to feel energized)
- when Phoebe Newens brings beautiful flowers to the dojo (flowers symbolize yin/yang energy)

Lastly, the essence of the dojo is further enhanced by our own individualized growth and enlightenment.

I offer special thanks to Sensei Newens for providing a safe and peaceful dojo for training and growth.

To our dojo: I know it is hot this summer but stay cool and I will see you on Wednesday nights for Tai Chi class and after summer school is over I will return for Aikido training, until then save some tiger and dragon chi energy for me.

Tahoe Gasshuku 25th Anniversary Edition

Martin Dubcovsky

The annual training event held at Lake Tahoe is always an incredible experience. This year was no exception, and Inagaki Shihan, the guest instructor this year blew me away. Inagaki Shihan, is currently the teaching the majority of classes at the Iwama dojo and is also in charge of the uchi deshi program. Inagaki Shihan has been practicing Aikido since 1958 and is a student of O'Sensei and Saito sensei. He is an extremely knowledgeable and capable instructor, but that is not why I am so very impressed with him.

In a room packed full of black belts, Inagaki Shihan dedicated the entirety of his first class to *tai no henko*, and *morotedori kokyuuho*. I loved it. Where many an instructor would feel pressured to present more “flashy” techniques, Inagaki Shihan used his time to explore these two fundamental techniques.

I was further impressed by how well Inagaki Shihan had prepared. Limited in his ability speaking english, Inagaki Shihan prepared five lectures and had them translated to English to be read at the seminar. This kind of preparation showed a tremendous amount of humility and respect.

The cherry on top for me was getting a chance to chat with him in the parking lot in between classes. He was approachable, unassuming, and (as we all found out at the dinner party) disarmingly funny!

In addition to the awesome opportunity to train with Inagaki Shihan, I had the chance to participate in Toby's sandan test. Since this wasn't *my* test, I had a great time doing my best to stab, cut, or otherwise bring him down! Of course Toby spared no time sending me packing; his test was a great demonstration and testament to all his work and dedication.

Well done Toby-Sempai!

All of that, and I still haven't mentioned the selling point of the gasshuku: Guy Michelier, Master Chef! Those of you who missed it, you really missed out! Guy took it upon himself to prepare two dinner feasts, and breakfasts fit for kings. Without all of his work, I do not think the gasshuku would have been half as fun (nor half as filling!).

Thank you Guy!

And thank you as well to everyone who came up to Tahoe for this awesome event. If you didn't, maybe I've sold it enough that we'll see you there next year!



Gasshuku instructors. From left: Goto Sensei, Witt Shihan, Inagaki Shihan, Newens Sensei, Peuser Sensei, and Tom Sensei . Picture by Guy Michelier.

Aikido at Sixty

Bruce Donehower

This year I turned sixty. I've been thinking about writing an article for the newsletter to share thoughts about this minor event, in relation to my practice of aikido, but I haven't been too successful at getting my thoughts together. Oops.

Of course, as we grow older or just experience injuries on the mat, we begin to think about the frailty of human existence and how our level of physical fitness is often linked to our practice of aikido.

I remember walking into the dressing room at one of the other dojos I belonged to in the past and seeing in the corner all sorts of sparring gear. Some of the "advanced" belts had decided to put on gloves and body armor and really go at it – apparently with the idea that they wanted to "test the limits of their art" and maybe find out "if it worked." Seeing this, I felt despair. I was younger at the time, almost twenty years younger, and my ukemi and my practice were pretty vigorous.

I've thought quite a bit about why I felt despair at that moment. What I came to, finally – and what links to this short article in the newsletter – is the idea that I carry about O'Sensei, although of course I never met the guy. Nevertheless, I carry inside me a sharp picture of O'Sensei – idealized, no doubt (perhaps fatally?) as it must be – which nonetheless, if I am honest, explains to me why I do aikido, why I have committed so much time to it in my life to this point, and why I intend to continue aikido into the next decades. It is not because aikido is some superior martial art. I don't even think it is a superior martial art. I think that if you want to learn to fight, you should go elsewhere and really learn it. If you want to be a warrior, join the Seals, for crying out loud – heaven knows there are plenty of opportunities to learn the path of Mars. Or, if you want to test your combat skills in the ring, join a boxing club or something similar. Go for it! Don't waste your time grabbing wrists.

Aikido is something else.



Toby throws Kori during his sandan test. Picture by Guy Michelier.

For me, Aikido is special not because O'Sensei saw it as an alternative to the martial arts, or an improvement to the martial arts, or the culmination of the path of budo, so called – aikido is special *because of O'Sensei*. Again, I say this knowing very well that I don't have a clue who O'Sensei was – I just have my idealized notion of him. But this ideal makes all the difference to my life and to my commitment to the path. As I see it, O'Sensei did not bring a better martial art – he brought to us an important reminder of what it means to be a human being. Why do we have a picture of O'Sensei in every dojo (hopefully!) prominently displayed? Why do we place O'Sensei's portrait prominently on fliers and materials that advertise aikido? Why did O'Sensei go to such great lengths to memorialize himself in movies, photographs, etc.?

One way to answer this riddle: ignore it. We can say: fine, okay. We are two or three or four generations and counting distant from this eccentric genius whom no one really understood anyway when he was alive, so let's just be realistic and concentrate on waza. It will all just sort itself out.

This answer has merit.

But for me, humans live in many worlds – the world of bumps and bruises, and the world of dreams, to name just two.

At sixty, what impresses me most about aikido, challenges me, stimulates me, and keeps me engaged is the portrait of O'Sensei that I carry in my heart as a result of my connection with aikido over the years. Who was O'Sensei? What did he expect of me? What did he really want to teach?

These are my central questions past and moving forward. They are paradoxically related to what occurs to me and around me when I am on the mat – just as my breathing is an ordinary event of human physiology but at the same time significant of so much else.



Inagaki Shihan kindly reminds Martin Dubcovsky of the importance of ukemi. Picture By Guy Michelier.



Inagaki Sensei at the Tahoe Gasshuku. Picture by Guy Michelier.

Home Sweet Dojo Christine Palmer

The meaning of a dojo, a place of the way
Means much more to me, than even just yesterday
A beginner to aikido, to my unknowing brain
It was simply a place, that you go when you train
Brightly lit and well-padded, kept shiny and clean
How quickly I learned, how much more it can mean.

For to me what it is, if I might be so bold
It is really about, what a dojo can hold.

Look beyond the mats, the bokken and jo
See reflected in the mirrors, the kind faces you know
Listen farther than the sounds, of your partner's kiai
Hear the care and support, from instructing sempai
Touch deeper than just, a hand on a forearm
Feel the warmth and compassion, that keep you from harm
Taste the sweetness of being, in such great energy
This dojo is a place, like no other you'll be.

So a dojo really is, a place of the way
But when it comes down to it, it means more every day
With all my senses I know, even if you're apart
It is without a doubt, a dojo holds all your heart.

Announcements

Promotions

Congratulations to the following students for their recent promotions:

Tonio Gunther	8 th Kyu
Finn Boire	7 th Kyu
Tim Erwin	7 th Kyu
Andrew Peters	6 th Kyu
Evan Recanzone	6 th Kyu
Hunter Sumner	6 th Kyu
Logan Johnson	6 th Kyu
Christine Palmer	5 th Kyu
Will Forest	5 th Kyu
Yanin Swangrjithum	5 th Kyu
Zachary Atlee	5 th Kyu
Erica Frederickson	4 th Kyu
Kelsey Imamoto	3 rd Kyu

July 4th – Dojo Closed for Holiday

July 6th – Advanced Class 2nd Kyu and above, 10-11:30am.

July 11th-13th – Fukushidoin Course. No regular classes.

July 13th – Summer Picnic at Sensei and Phoebe's house. 4Pm – dark!



Saito Sensei and Witt Sensei practicing Ken tai Jo in 1969

Note from the editor: All formatting, spelling and grammatical errors are unintended and the sole responsibility of the editor—My apologies!

Martin Dubcovsky