

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.

Moving From Center

Hoa Newens Sensei

I recently taught a workshop on how to move from center at which I took participants through a series of exercises. At that time, I explained certain key contextual concepts to facilitate understanding. However, time constraints necessitated brevity. Here is a more complete rendition of these concepts.

When we intently watch a skilled dancer perform on stage we are enthralled and feel drawn into the performance. It feels as if we are no longer just spectating but are participating in the dance. The same effect can be observed when a well-seasoned actor or any master artist display their art. In each case it feels as if the artist and the art are one and the same and that there is no point in making a distinction, in large part because we find it difficult to separate our self from the spectacle that we are beholding. Performer, spectator, and art are all fused into one feeling. Youtube.com abounds with examples of such spell-binding feats.

That fusion of the three elements involved in this interaction is the result of these elements achieving a state of energetic resonance which revolves around a central theme. This central theme is best described as a feeling that originates from, or is initiated by, the performer. The performer, through her art, connects deeply with the spectator and captivates his total attention. Afterward, reflecting on this experience, the spectator might conclude, among other things, that the artist “moved from center”, and he would be almost correct.



Aiki-Turtle. Picture by Clelia Clark



*Tea House built by Bill Sleuter in Davis, CA.
Picture by Edim Kurtovic.*

The artist has found a way to dig deep in herself and allowed her true nature to express itself through whatever vehicle she was using as an art tool, be it her body, her voice, or an instrument. She opened herself, gave up control of her body and her chosen vehicle to an inner intelligence that is connected to the deep roots of the universe. Due to this primal connection, when manifest this intelligent core resonates with all sentient beings that are sensitive to it, that is those who are pure and not inhibited. Un-inhibition and purity are the primary requirements for the performer and the spectator to be enjoined in this expression of art.

This intelligence manifests as pure energy that runs through any medium (e.g. a human body, a physical tool) and appears under a multitude of forms (sound, image, movement). The medium can be trained such that it becomes totally compliant with any direction

from the intelligence. It is this aspect of the manifestation that makes the medium appear like it is moving from center. Thus a solid block of wood can be transformed into a miniature town under the hands of a master carver. Similarly, an entire 72-chapter epic novel can be created by a master novelist with hundreds of multilayer plots. From one, many. How these artists manage to remain centered and coherent amidst the multitude of detail is a superhuman feat that can only be attributed to the intervention of a superhuman consciousness. A sense of order amidst chaos is a key characteristic of a centered movement.

Not all witnesses of this manifestation will be able to appreciate this aspect; only those who have reached a certain level of purity and un-inhibition would be able to open themselves to the effect of this primal energy. It takes a master to recognize a master.

Returning to our expert dancer's performance, although not everyone can appreciate the depth of her connection with the art, the average spectators would still be affected, in a sort of a pleasing manner. They can recognize the beauty of the movement, enjoy the sweet fluidity and experience a feeling of contentment after the performance. However, this feeling will be vague and shallow. The untrained spectators would not be entranced by the performance; they are not able to abandon themselves and let the energy of the performance transport them into the immensity of true art, and afterward, they will not be inspired.

A performer who moves from the center is necessarily a clear channel for the art. She let it through in an unobstructed manner and gives it flavors with her own personal tendencies. The strength of the flow is what gives the appearance of moving from center. Therefore, the first task for moving from center is to not be in the way. Any practice of quieting down and letting go, relaxing and releasing, would help toward clearing the path. The quiet moment required by a professional artist just before a major performance serves this purpose, if used correctly. That moment is used to empty the mind, rather than recapitulating the performance and crowding the mind.

After clearing the path, the second task for moving from center is to move with the art, from center. This seems obvious but is a difficult proposition: letting go

and doing are contradictory. Even if the artist manages to ride the flow of the art when it comes through, she must artfully navigate the middle path between volition and surrender to produce balance. Here we introduce another key characteristic of a centered movement: balance. Not simply physical balance, but overall balance, the kind of balance that gives rise to a feeling of peace and serenity.

This balance can be achieved partially through rigorous practice. The best practice situation involves interaction with a human partner, such as in team arts, in which the partner serves as a sounding board, reflecting the result of our volition and surrender. In solo arts, the performer can use the resulting feeling of peace as a gauge for the right mix.

Viewed differently, this optimal balance reflects synchronization with the natural rhythm of the conscious universe. Ultimately, although balance can be affected by practice, it is determined, not by action, but by a state of being. More precisely, it is the predestined, natural state of being of the performer that determines the quality of balance during the art performance. The more this state of being is in tune with the natural rhythm of the universe the less the effort required to maintain the balance. For example, an artist who sincerely loves his art and performs for the pure enjoyment of all would spend less effort than

the artist who desires perfection and does his best to win a contest. The universal rhythm favors those who are sincere and loving. Because of this effortless quality, all movements from center exhibit poise and grace. Stillness amidst motion is the third characteristic of a centered movement: the mover remains calm and unattached during the movement.

Although each individual is born with a predestined state of being, this state represents only tendencies. These tendencies can be re-directed and fine-tuned through a purification process. All masters of traditional arts understood the importance of this process and devote a significant portion of their practice to prayers, meditation or ascetic practices designed to purify their selves.

In summary, moving from center is a result of inner practices that involve quieting the self, purifying it to tune in with the universal benevolence, and opening up to super-consciousness that will guide us. Moving from center is not a tangible goal that we can aim at, but is rather the observable effect of deeper inner work. We can work toward it by first adopting a daily quiet period to find our selves.

April 4th, 2015 - Seminar at Suginami Aikido



Left: Newens Sensei Demonstrate Shihonage with uke Donny Shiu. Right: Hendricks Sensei throws Friedman Sensei dojo cho of Suginami Aikikai in San Francisco. Thank you to everyone from Aikido Institute Davis who traveled to participate in this event. Pictures by Guy Michelier.

On Expectations

Kim Sullivan

I wrote the first draft of this article after a challenging training session, which caused me to have an intense emotional reaction, which surprised me and confused me. After all, I am an educated and capable person with well-practiced coping skills. (In fact, I teach coping skills and emotional regulation skills, so I should be able to practice what I preach.) I explored the thoughts and feelings associated with this experience and came to the conclusion that I had a set of expectations for the situation that did not come to fruition, which resulted in the emotional consequence.

This scenario of unmet expectations can play out in relationships, employment, or other endeavors. Oftentimes, the outcome can be quite devastating

when more time and energy is invested. When I think back on the times of my life when I was truly sad, hurt, or distraught, it was invariably related to my expectation of the situation. I expected events to unfold a certain way or people to behave a certain way. When things did not unfold as I expected, I can recall intense feelings of confusion, disappointment, and disillusionment.

Growth rises out of pain. If the pain is about unfulfilled expectations, then the next steps involve either changing the situation to match the expectations, or changing the expectations to match the situation, or leaving the situation altogether. If we can apply skills of adaptability, openness, and acceptance, then we can change our expectations and reach beyond our previous boundaries, and hence grow.

The concept of “Beginner’s Mind” has cropped up several times in my studies over the past few years. Things appear when you are ready for them and need them (but that is another article). Beginner’s Mind is about seeing the world as a child does with awe and curiosity and willingness to explore with no restrictions. It seems that the notion of facing new experiences with no preconceived notions and just being open and receptive would serve to mitigate the distressing consequences related to unfulfilled expectations. Funny how you can know something, but not really KNOW it. I thought I was practicing beginner’s mind. I was actively making an effort to not let anything that I learned previously interfere with this new training. I was not assuming that I already knew whatever was being taught. However, I still developed an inaccurate expectation, which inevitably blocked my being receptive and open to new experiences.

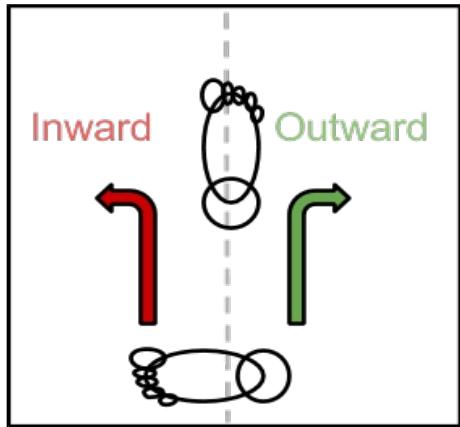
If a person enters into a situation with no preconceived expectations, then there is no place for disappointment or any other barrage of related emotions. This is a good argument for practicing “Beginner’s Mind,” and being open and non-judgmental and eager. Wouldn’t it be nice to just experience a situation with no judgment, no worry, and no fear – just openness and acceptance of the current moment?



Kori Hargreaves performs koshinage on uke Toby Hargreaves during her nidan exam on February 22, 2015. Picture by Guy Michelier

Sandan Essay: Two Throws

Martin Dubcovsky



Aikido has a great breadth of techniques. Between pins and throws, variations, reversals, weapons practices, and applications, the Aikido curriculum boasts hundreds of distinct techniques. There are not enough hours in the day to keep each one of those swords sharp. More importantly for me, when I focus on what distinguishes techniques I miss the underlying principles that unite them as Aikido techniques and not something else.

This is not a novel thought, but rather the fundamental realization that underpins the Iwama Ryu curriculum. The handful of basic techniques that comprise the core Iwama curriculum are selected as the teaching vehicles to transfer and train the principles of Aikido. The Iwama pedagogy holds that serious and persistent drilling of the basics will give the practitioner a firm grasp of Aikido principles, the tools he needs to perform the vast array of Aikido techniques, and the ability to uncover as many new techniques as any engagement may dictate.

By that logic, if we examine the choice of techniques and structure of the Iwama curriculum, we should be able to work back to first principles. With the caveat that focusing on throwing is counterproductive to training, I will devote the remainder of this essay to examining the very last motion of Aikido throws in order to discern and isolate just one of those principles. Aikido throws are actuated in just two basic directions: inward and outward.

The inward form is characterized by a rotation

towards the instep of the leading foot, such that the uke is thrown in front of uke's belly. The body arcs forward as though forming around a large ball centered a few inches in front of the hara; this rounds the back, arms and legs. In affecting an inward throw there is a strong cross-body connection between the leading hand, and the back foot. There is a feeling of stretching in the body creating a slight tension. Lengthening the spine vertically up from the hara through the crown of the head, and downward from the hara, tilting the pelvis forward. There should also be a lateral stretching, as though pushing apart the scapula in the back, and an internal rotation of the arms and legs which push apart the elbows and knees respectively. This rounded body feels exactly like the posture one assumes at the start a roll. Core techniques that I classify as inward throws are iriminage, shihonage, and koshinage.

The outward form is characterized by a rotation over the forward thigh towards the outstep of the leading foot. The body is still extending vertically up and down, but whereas the inward throws felt like holding a big ball between the arms, the outward throw feels like rolling that heavy ball out over the thigh and dropping it down on the outside of the stance. The hips will be stretched open in the front, and closed in the rear. Inversely from the inward throw the arms and legs experience an external rotation, corresponding to



*Joseph Galamba with Newens Sensei upon passing his Shodan test on January 25th, 2015.
Picture by Guy Michelier.*

an opening of the chest and genital area. There will be a strong same-side connection between the leading hand and the leading foot, exerting a firm down force on the outside of the leading leg. This posture feels the same as the uncurling and standing up at the end of a roll. Core techniques I categorize as outward throws are kokyūho, and kotegaeshi.



Kelsey Imamoto (top) and Lauren Lauren Rayburn (bottom) at the Memorial Day Tahoe Gasshuku. Pictures by Morgan Curtis.

Although I have used the final motion of the throw to divide techniques into either inward or outward techniques, the full execution of techniques will incorporate both inward and outward directions, in turn. The point is simply to become aware of this common thread that runs through all Aikido techniques. By focusing on one principle it becomes possible to identify simple isolation exercises to drill that principle into the body.

For the inward direction the first ken suburi is the perfect representative technique. As we bring the bokken down, the primary motion is the vertical compression of the hips in the front supported by a secondary inward rotation and a tertiary bowing of the spine. Rolling is another good solo practice to strengthen inward throws. Simple partner exercises would include basic mune tsuki awase and uchi mawari choku barai with the jo.

For the outward direction, the choku tsuki with the jo is probably the simplest exercise. The forward extension through hitoemi exerts the outward rotation we seek to train. However, it should be complemented by hasso gaeshi which incorporates the downward extension of the outward form. Rolling is equally important for outward throws. Simple partner exercises would include soto mawari choku barai and hasso barai with the jo.

Of course our daily classes already incorporate exercises for both inward and outward forms. Each class begins with warm-up which prepare us for the flexing and rotating these forms require, and the rolling to strengthen and fill the form. The first techniques of every class are tai no henko and morote dori kokyūho which primarily train inward and outward forms respectively. And every class concludes with kokyūdosa which brings together both inward and outward practices.

Serious and persistent drilling on this principle can be accomplished through rolls and simple suburi, but will have a significant effect on the quality of all Aikido techniques.

An Older Beginner's View

A Collection of Thoughts

Zachary Laputz

I read the Introduction of Aikido on the website and was very interested in the blending of the mind, body and spirit. So, I enrolled and started practicing Aikido in January (2015).

Aikido helps me with the mind component, with the myriad of physical techniques that I need to learn.

The physical aspect of being in better shape is clearly beneficial to me and I have seen positive results.

Lastly and most important to me is the intertwine of the Spiritual growth with the other two components.

Aikido thru one of my Sempai has piqued my interest in a plethora of books and new ways of viewing life.

This blend has become more apparent when I bend over to pick up my new grand-baby; how this happens I am not quite sure.

Also I greatly appreciate the emphasis (and importance) of all my Sempai that I treat the mat as my friend.

When I first attempted a roll, it seemed like I was looking at the water from the high dive platform as a kid again -very scary!

I regard the importance of balance and learning to roll of huge benefit to me as I get older. It empowers me to want to do more active things.

I wondered what all these people were doing with their wrists?

Just do it!

Donny Shiu

Years ago in purchasing my first car, I researched it to death like a PhD thesis. Months went by without a decision because I didn't want to make a bad choice. I have since come to realize that there are often no right answers in life and one must accept a certain level of unknowns and uncertainties. All I can do is minimize risks and bad outcomes the best I can and have the confidence to just do it. Mulling over the pro's and con's back and forth can easily trap us into paralysis

from over analysis. We freeze up, and end up doing nothing.

No decision is also a decision called avoidance.



Martin Dubcovsky in hanmi hantachi for his sandan test at the Memorial Day Gasshuku on May 22, 2015.

Picture by Morgan Curtis.

Alternatively, we can choose to confront or, better yet, embrace the unknown, in spite of our fears of making a mistake, fear of not being in control, or whatever else is holding us back. I acknowledge that breaking the fear of making a "bad" decision is difficult to overcome. Should I go back to school? Do I need a new job? What is the proper Aikido technique? The reality is that we may never have all the facts but need to make a decision. We may simply have trust in our training and experience to make the call. Thus, the best strategy to minimize the unexpected is through preparation and training. When it is time to act, do it with confidence in your ability; right or wrong, commit and do it at 100% without looking back or second-guessing yourself. Besides, you can always make subsequent decisions to change what is not working and adapt.

Learning a marital art can be confusing, frustrating and full of unknowns. You may not get that movement, technique, or counter response in a number of tries. Like learning to ride a bike, you will fail and fall. It's okay. That's why we practice and experiment. Embrace mistakes positively as learning

tools and learn from them. Take small steps. I found being patient with myself helps. I am probably not as bad as I think I am. I just have to persevere and keep training with the goal of sucking a little less with every practice. My motto is the Japanese proverb, “fall down 7 times, get up eight.”

By the way, the truck I bought was a good purchase.

Aikido Kitty

Morgan Curtis

Returning home from the Gasshuku excited and motivated, I began watching Sensei’s “Aikido Techniques: Volume 4” and reviewing techniques. Stimulated by this activity, my cat was soon darting around the living room, behind the couch, up onto the window sill, and down the hall. We made a game of it. While I “shadow boxed” a technique, she would zip past me and under a chair. Pausing my Aikido, I would start the chase and she would rocket to hide behind her scratching post. I would go through the technique a couple more times, then spring at her. She would sprint into the kitchen.

My review became a game of “Aikido Kitty” through the apartment. We both enjoyed it, and I learned something about movement and posture while getting a review of nikyo.

The motivation gained from attending a seminar can provide learning in unexpected ways, and provide renewal, both in practice and in daily life.



Promotions

Congratulations to the following students for their recent promotions:

Antonio Soto	8 th Kyu
Devon Moore	8 th Kyu
Aidan Murray	6 th Kyu
Tim Erwin	6 th Kyu
Daniel Lopez	5 th Kyu
John Bunce	5 th Kyu
Kim Sillivan	5 th Kyu
Zachary Atlee	4 th Kyu
Joseph Galamba	Shodan
Kori Hargreaves	Nidan

Announcements

June 14th 10-11:30am – Advanced Class and Dan Exams. Please come to support Donny Shiu in his Nidan examination. Light refreshments to follow.

July 4th – Dojo Closed for Independence Day holiday.

July 14th – Beginner's Course starts. This course includes basic instruction twice a week for eight weeks, and a training uniform for only \$100. Invite your friends and family to start Aikido with the Beginner's Course.

July 17th 6:00pm - 19th Noon– Fukushidoin Certification course. This is a certification course for Assistant Instructors. The format consists of mat work with light discussion and lecture. Course fee is \$275 for first time attendees and \$145 for repeat students. Registration includes lunch on Saturday. Please register and pay by June 15th.