THE KIAI

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HARD TRAINING AND SOFT TRAINING

Hard training, in the context of our Dojo, does not necessarily mean sweating it out on the mat. It is often the soft training that we need the most and that is hard to do.

For the purpose of this essay, hard and soft pertain to the method of training rather than the physical characteristic of techniques. A useful analogy is the distinction between hardware and software or hard costs and soft costs. The hard stuff refers to the tangible outer parts and the soft stuff refers to the non-visible inner parts.

Before we get into a detailed discussion, there is another distinction that will be helpful. Martial arts can be generally categorized into internal styles and external styles, depending on the degree of emphasis on the physical body.

External martial arts focus on the physical characteristics such as forms, muscular power and speed. They are often displayed as complex, fast and explosive movements. Internal arts put emphasis on what happens inside the body such as energy sensitivity, energy extension and mind-body connection. The external display consists of simple and subtle motion sometimes performed at a deliberate pace

In this spectrum of martial arts, Aikido is probably closer to the internal styles. In fact, Aikido would be just a dance if devoid of the internal emphasis.

Of the two methods of training in the martial arts, hard training and soft training, the latter is more compatible with the internal styles.

The hard method of training, also referred to as the fire method, is aimed at improving certain qualities of the physical bodies, notably power and speed. This method uses physical props such as weights, dummies and heavy bags. It involves training to increase muscular strength, harden body parts used for striking, increase the precision of strikes or kicks, and improve fight strategy such as sparring practices. This training method is normally based on coercion and fear and is often reinforced by a rigid etiquette.

The soft method of training, also referred to as the water method, is improving the inner self. This method involves breathing exercises, slow motion practices designed to bridge the external motion with the internal energy circulation, exercises aimed at gaining control of inner parts of the body, and meditative techniques. This method is not effective if imposed on the trainee by the instructor. It works only when the trainee is motivated by an intense desire to improve.

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Table of Contents

Hard Training and Soft Training 1
San Rafael Retreat 2
Zen and the Art of ...Mat Maintenance 4
Nishio Sensei 5
Membership and Dues 5

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As examples, okinawan karate and most wushu styles are external styles based on the hard training method and tai chi is an internal style based on the soft training method.

Aikido is not regarded as a true internal style because it lacks a structure for internal energy work. O Sensei might have talked about Ki and demonstrated the expression of Ki but he did not leave a detailed method for studying Ki. Some of his early apprentices undertook that task personally and designed their own system. Koichi Tohei Sensei developed the Ki principles taught in his organization; Mutsuro Nakazono Sensei devoted his time to kototama study, Rinjiro Shirata Sensei blended Shinto purification exercises in his Aikido teaching.

The rest of us will have to find that internal component of Aikido ourselves. To get there, we need to emphasize the soft training method.

My own experience suggests that all martial art training should begin with hard training and gradually shift toward soft training. The timing and the extent of this shift depend on the type of martial art and the trainee.

For our Aikido training to be complete, this shift should take place soon after we have achieved a reasonable proficiency of forms. Various ways to do soft training in Aikido include: stretching to increase flexibility, breathing exercises, concentrating on smoothness instead of power, visualizing techniques, teaching beginners to learn patience, receiving criticisms to practice forbearance, making a commitment to attend classes regularly for a long period, drill basic techniques through endless repetition, etc.

These seemingly non-technical practices form the core of soft training in Aikido, which will facilitate the transition into spiritual practices at a later time.

In my view, our Aikido training should proceed through these ten phases:

1. Strength: physical strength is built up.
2. Flexibility: limbs and hips become more flexible.
3. Coordination: all parts of the body are aligned in stance and motion.
4. Forms: forms become precise and a repertoire of basic techniques is mastered.
5. Timing: timing is mastered so that techniques do not appear fast but are always well timed.
6. Power: kokyuu is mastered so that power is delivered effortlessly.
7. Energy: internal energy movement is controlled at will.
8. Integration: takemusu aiki is achieved.
9. Mind practices: the training is based on controlling the intent.
10. Spiritual practices: these are aimed at achieving an awareness of our fundamental connection with the universe.

This is my personal path and I have quite a distance to cover so I am not ready to recommend the exact same path to every one. However I urge all serious students of Aikido to clarify their own path so that their training can become purposeful and hence, more effective.

Hoa Newens

SAN RAFAEL RETREAT

Since I couldn't make a trip to Iwama in the spring, I thought that the San Rafael retreat would be an opportunity to immerse myself in aikido a little closer to home. While I was the only Aikido Institute student to attend the weeklong aikido summer camp this year, I was aware of a long tradition connecting our dojo to the retreat. Hoa Sensei was the guest instructor a few years back—I met quite a few people who recalled his beautiful aikido and informative instruction. Rumor has it that Kim Sensei also frequented San Rafael in years past, bringing with him a group of dedicated AI aikidoka.

The retreat was held from June 20th to 27th at the Dominican College, which is a tranquil, wooded setting with deer roaming freely about campus; a pleasant change of pace from Oakland's urban landscape. As a newcomer to a tradition which some have attended for over 20 consecutive years, I was welcomed by Frank Doran Sensei at the first class Sunday evening. Doran Sensei gave us some of the history of the retreat and introduced us to the retreat's motto, "Clean body, clean mind, … take your pick."

The routine was limited to three activities: keiko, eating, and sleeping. Being that those are three of my favorite activities, I found myself right at home. I learned on my first evening that some years ago Dave Delong set an Oakland dojo standard by training every class, and I set out to uphold that tradition.

Early morning class featured a different instructor each day, including Danielle Evans, Frank

McGourk, Michael Friedl, and Cynthia Hiyashi. Most mornings we were shown blending exercises and flowing techniques ended with backstretches; this enhanced the popularity of a.m. classes and appeased our aching joints. However, the class on choke hold variations and high falls left a stronger impression on me.

Fortunately, it isn't more than a block or so from the training hall to the cafeteria, so within minutes of completing class one could be into the next activity of the day: breakfast. I give the coffee only 2 stars, but the variety and quality of the food rated much higher. Meals were also an opportunity to share stories with people from around the world; I heard many tales of trips to Iwama and other aikido experiences.

After breakfast each day was Doran Sensei's class, which focussed primarily on ikkyo, with some nikyo and sankyo interspersed – all the favorites. Doran Sensei captivated us with his sense of humor and charismatic teaching. He showed the relationship between taijutsu and sword movements, and emphasized atemi in his flowing blends.

There was no formally scheduled keiko in the pre-lunch time slot, but popular demand called for some weapons classes led by Kayla Feder Sensei; she taught ken suburi, ki musubi no tachi, and the "new" 13 kumi-jo. There were also ukemi classes led by Bob Nadeau Sensei and Julio Toribio Sensei.

Keiko is held in a very beautiful old barn-like wooden-beamed gymnasium, which has accumulated quite a store of positive energy over more than 20 years of annual retreats. San Rafael's summer sun beaming down, rather poor ventilation, and the enthusiasm of the crowd of 200 aikidoka made for some sweaty keiko! I was really awed by the spirit of openness and joyful practice of aikido that was shared by all participants. I felt a great sense of community with the many people I trained with. I had the sense that by being by being open to and learning from each of my training partners I was somehow getting a glimpse of what aikido is really about. Doran Sensei commented to me at the end of the week that every time he saw me on the mat I had a wide smile stretching across my face.

After lunch each day, Hiroshi Ikeda Sensei taught for an hour. Those that have seen Ikeda Sensei are familiar with the baffling subtlety of his powerful movements. With a twitch of his wrist he can "catch" his partner, then send him to the mat. Ikkyo, kokyu nage, tenchi nage – they are all executed with scarcely noticeable hip movements. To grab his wrist is to become a believer. Repeating the same, however, can be perplexing for novices like myself. His charming and generous teaching was inspirational.

The next hour was taught by this year's guest instructor, Julio Toribio Sensei. Toribio Sensei used weapons such as the tan bo (a 12-inch jo-like stick) and the han bo (a 36-inch jo-like stick) to perform aikido techniques. He asked many of the senior students to devise and demonstrate techniques of their own. He also surprised us with a variation of a kotegaeshi pin that involves performing a forward roll with your uke's arm locked in your knee!

While some found themselves tired after about 4 hours of keiko, many of us used an opening in the schedule during the late afternoon to practice the techniques we learned during class. There was also ample time to experiment with a type of ukemi called the "rolly-polly".

Dinner was a not-to-be-missed activity. I ate heartily at all meals. Mid-week I made the switch from drinking just water to consuming an anti-freeze-blue colored beverage provided in the cafeteria which was touted for its electrolyte-replacement capability. The magical blue potion seemed to give me a mental as well as physical edge, enabling me to keep up with the six to eight hours a day of training.

After dinner, the hard-core donned their gi one more time (or perhaps just left it on all day…) and headed back to the dojo. Bob Nadeau Sensei instructed two classes each evening, one an aikido class and the other an "energy" class. Nadeau Sensei taught mostly gyaku-te dori ikkyo, with some other techniques thrown in. We learned to "align with the force" while performing nikyo ura-waza, and to have a sense of "allowing" while executing techniques. I learned a different, more metaphysical perspective on the same aikido techniques we practice every day by attending Nadeau Sensei's classes, and I still find myself learning from his teaching as time goes by and his words seep in.

By Saturday morning, having attended every class, I had been on the mat close to 40 hours over the

course of the week. While I was weary and a little achy, I hadn't suffered any injuries and was tremendously energized by the experience. I'm already looking forward to next year, and hope that a large delegation from Aikido Institute will be accompanying me!

Maggie Vashel

ZEN AND THE ART OF... MAT MAINTENANCE?!

Kim Sensei once told me that repairing the mat was much like painting a boat; you paint from bow to stern, turn around, and begin at the bow again. After endeavoring to repair the mat this summer, I couldn't agree more. For those of you who have trained consistently for the past six months, you will agree that the mat was in pretty bad shape; we trained nightly with white paint flecks on our faces and feet, and swept up massive quantities of chips at the end of the night. Those of us who trained frequently also suffered from "cheese grater toes," a phenomenon in which the pads of your toes become rough and jagged, resembling a cheese grater. Cuts and scrapes were common from the scaly surface of the mat. To be short, the mat was in need of help.

Being the new uchi-deshi, I decided that I would single-handedly repair the mat, and save the toes and feet of the Aikido Institute members. A sort-of Wonder Woman of the mat repair world. My goals were lofty(I would scrape off the surface of the mat wherever serious flaking was taking place, and repair any gouges or tears when necessary. I thought that it would take me, oh, ten hours a week, and would be complete within a month.

Those in the know on mat repair shook their heads and questioned my sanity. They knew that while my goals were expansive, my timeline was minimal. My mat-repair gurus, Peter and Dave, warned me early on that perhaps I was taking on too much. While I took their advice into consideration, I proceeded with my project undaunted. And the adventure began.....

When I first began to scrape the mat, Peter gave me some sound advice that guided me throughout my journey into mat repair: Remember the History of the mat. Think of the thousands of footfalls and techniques that this mat has seen. You cannot erase those, and should respect the mat's worth: our dojo is this mat. Peter's words struck at a key misconception I had; that the gouges and tears, flaking paint and thin spots, were a sign of the mat's weakness, and therefore needed to be eliminated. Through Peter's words, however, I began to respect those areas of most wear because they represented the largest amount of energy and training. Suddenly, I felt very small and young in comparison to this mat, which is just a few years younger than me.

With my new understanding of the mat, I scraped with respect and care, and began to be able to "read" the mat. By examining the paint and patterns of flaking, I could determine whether the area would be easy or difficult to scrape, whether the mat was strong or weak beneath the paint. At times, I became overly concerned with the mat, and would watch it closely during training, protectively watching over the well being of the mat as a mother would her child.

After six weeks of work (I will not disclose the hours per week I worked), the mat was finished. By the time I had scraped and painted the last panel, the first panels I had repaired were already flaking. Kim Sensei was right.

I cannot say that I finished the mat with the same enthusiasm with which I began the project, but I certainly ended it with a deeper respect for the mat and its value to the dojo. As I begin at the bow again, I do so knowing that my work with the mat will never be complete, and that there exists no quick fix for the mat's repair needs. The mat is my sempai, and I therefore listen to it, and behave according to its needs.

Megan Sweet

NISHIO SENSEI WORKSHOP

A small group of Akidoist went to Santa Cruz for Shoji Nishio Sensei's Seminar and seventieth birthday celebration last month. It was an excellent experience. Nishio Sensei's Aikido is informed by an extensive background in Iaido and Karate. Aside from seeing, a tremendous martial artist the Seminar was a wonderful opportunity to train with people from a variety of backgrounds. And, it was a reminder of what it was like to be an absolute beginner.

The Seminar Brochure said that Nishio Sensei started Aikido after he already held high dan rankings in Karate, Judo and Iaido. Often, he would stop in the middle of a

technique to demonstrate that even though the space between himself and uke was quite close he had positioned himself so that uke would be unable to strike him. Also, every technique that he taught was also executed with a bokken or with a jo against uke who had a bokken. I should mention that his techniques were as difficult as they were beautiful.

It is often possible to hide one's ignorance while doing taijitsu. Strength and poor hygiene will often suffice where technique is lacking. However, this is not possible when it is time to execute the same technique with a bokken or a jo in a crowded room.

One of the most difficult obstacles to overcome is the desire not to look foolish or ungainly. This is often accomplished by standing and watching other people look foolish and ungainly or by discussing the unimaginable difficulty of the technique just demonstrated. Time will pass. And soon, Sensei will demonstrate another technique and it will be possible to sit down.

One can then hope that there will be an aspect of the next technique that will be familiar. And maybe, if you hang on to that little piece of familiar territory, if you execute that one little piece with enough flare and imagination everyone will see, and you can feel, that you are not a complete idiot. That is true. You are not a complete idiot. Foolish, perhaps.

Perhaps a more reasonable goal, or at least one that is within control, is being focused on glorious failure. Glorious failure does not include, being discourteous to your partner, training in dangerous manner or being mentally anywhere except for the paticular spot where you are standing. Rather, it means training in manner that is dangerous to your pride, but not your sore back. Doing your best, regardless of how foolish you think that it makes you look. To merely fail is to do this once, to fail gloriously is to continuously revisit the place where the wheels fell off. Change the way you do everything, except the intensity with which you approach it and soon anything will be possible.

So when my jo became stuck in my sleeve, when I hit myself in the forehead with my bokken or when my foot became stuck in uke's hakama and they barely suppressed a smirk, it didn't matter. Because, I had succeeded at what I had set out to do.

Ted Andrews

MEMBERSHIP AND DUES

A member in good standing is one who trains and pays due regularly.

In the past I used to allow a lapse of six months before I delete a name from our member database, thus terminating membership. This grace period is too long and has created administrative and financial difficulties for the Dojo, and is now reduced to three months.

That is, when there is no training or no dues paid for three consecutive months, a member' s name is automatically deleted from the database. If this person subsequently wishes to re-enroll he would have to fill out an application and pay registration fee like a new member.

Benefits of Membership

A member in good standing is entitled to the following benefits:

Attendance at all classes at the Dojo.

Tracking of attendance and determination of test eligibility.

Examination for kyuu and dan ranks.

Eligibility for training in Iwama, Japan.

The latter three benefits are normally not tangible to the member until the time for the event in question comes.

Dues

Regular and timely payment of dues is a condition for membership.

Dues are payable on the 1st of the month or quarter of membership, irrespective of expected class attendance.

Dues become past due after the 1st and a reminder note will be issued on the second day. Timely payment is critical to Dojo operations since the Dojo rent is also due on the 1st of the month.

Any member who experiences financial distress should talk to me directly. There is financial distress when there is undue financial burden caused by an unexpected event. I always help those who have a sincere desire to train and who help themselves.

If for some reason a member decides to switch from paying regular membership fee to paying the visitor' s fee per class, this person should be aware that this fee does not entitle him or her to the other benefits of membership.

If there are questions about any of the above please see me or the uchi deshi.

Hoa Sensei

> You must train diligently, seeking the divine, and master those principles that cannot be seen with human eyes. . .
>
> Morihei Ueshiba

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The Dojo Code

I always look, listen and learn.
I bow with humility to receive from O'Sensei,
the Sensei and fellow students.

I do my best, share and persevere in my practice.