

THE KIAI

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THE POWER AND TECHNIQUES OF FOCUSING

During training we “kiai” to focus our energy. This focusing of energy is an essential element of martial arts. I will explain this important concept in this essay.

The Meaning of Focus

In general, to focus means to bring some form of energy into convergence at one point. In terms of daily life, focusing on a purpose means rallying our various activities toward accomplishing that purpose.

Our daily life abounds with examples of focused energy. We can see because light rays focus in a specific way inside our eyes. If these light rays are out of focus we do not see well.



You can lift an object with your arm because you direct your energy into the motion of grabbing and lifting. Anything that interrupts your focus such as a startling noise may cause you to drop the object. You can converse meaningfully with someone at a party full of people because you focus your attention on what your interlocutor says. If an old friend passes by and catches your attention, then you may lose your focus and the thread of the conversation.



In fact we generally see only what we focus on, we hear only what we focus on, we feel only what we focus on, we smell only what we focus on and we taste only what we focus on. It can be said that we live the life pattern that we focus on.

I believe that what one focuses on determines one's destiny. If I keep focusing on not being able to do high falls, I will not be able to do high falls. If I keep indulging in being sick, I will be in ill health most of the time. If I keep focusing on failure, I will fail most of the times. If I keep working on my goal, I will get there.

All living creatures have been granted an innate ability to focus on the basic instinct of self-preservation. For

example, the photosensitive cells of plants focus on light so that plants naturally turn toward light sources for survival. Birds fly in V formation to ensure that they do not lose the leader who is in charge of looking for food.

Human beings can elevate this focus toward more sophisticated goals if they so choose. If they do not then their lives are controlled solely by the automatic survival focus.

The Power of Focus

At the macrocosm level, in the beginning, there was a balanced void. There was nothing but pure energy. Then there was a differentiation that

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caused some energies to align in a particular order and the rest to align in another order. That was the beginning of the creation of the universe and also the beginning of focusing.

In a cosmic perspective, focusing means aligning energies in a particular order. Without alignment, there is no orderly movement and things will not be created. At the earthly level, if our planet stops rotating or begins to rotate at an erratic rate, life on earth may not exist. If water does not flow in a sustained direction then there are no rivers, no hydraulic energy, no irrigation, no inland life, etc.

At the biological level, can you imagine the impact on a living being when its circulatory system suddenly refuses to perform its clockwork process? Or what if any organ in the human body suddenly stops focusing on doing whatever it is supposed to do to maintain the body in good health?

In your daily life you probably know that if you intend to do something you should plan for it and take the first step soon, otherwise you will never do it. Just think of that closet or that garage that you were “thinking” of cleaning. Thinking about it is the first effort in rallying your energy on the subject. Focusing does not take place unless you sustain this effort by coming back to this subject again and doing something about it. And then again and again.

Imagine a thousand infantry troops standing in a field. Suddenly someone not in sight yells out the command “charge!” Heads will turn in all direction to look for a leader then bodies will move in random directions in an ensuing stampede. Now imagine a

commander on horseback yelling the same order and heading toward an enemy post. You can visualize all troops rallying around the commander easily and charging in one direction.

This metaphor can apply to our body and our life. If I do not command the trillion cells in my body to remain healthy, for example, they will remain sitting ducks for invading viruses. If I do not focus on specific goals during my lifetime, at the end of it, I will have only survived and not accomplished anything worthy of a human being.

My point is that: if there is no focusing there is chaos. Therefore, to make progress along the life that was given to us we must focus our energy, otherwise we revert to the primitive chaotic state. This may sound like a farfetched statement. But just think of those great beings whose accomplishments you admire. Jesus Christ, the Buddha, Henry Ford, Mother Theresa, Michael Jordan, etc. Their biographies reveal an intense and sustained focus on their goals.

Techniques of Focusing

When you hold a colorful object in front of a newborn baby it seems like it cannot see the object. It is because the baby has not yet learned to focus the various stimuli into a coherent

shape and color. The process of education that a human baby undergoes from birth is essentially an exercise in organizing the world into a particular order, a focusing process.

Based on my experience here are some simple techniques that can help a person focus better.

Set goals and plan for them. To focus you need a clear target. If wearing a hakama has been a fuzzy thought that keeps surfacing from the back of your mind, you should face that thought squarely and recognize it as a worthy goal. Then you should outline a series of realistic steps that will take you there. For example attend classes 3 times a week for the next nine months.

Your goal may be simply to learn high falls. Then you should get a very precise picture of a high fall in your mind by watching the experts. That picture will be the goal that guides the movement and position of each part of your body as it takes off. The clearer the goal the sharper the focus.

A related technique to goal-setting is to decide on priority. Attribute a value to each goal. Or rank them in importance. You should know which of these activities is more important to you: have dinner with your spouse tonight, go and train at the dojo or put in some overtime at work. Without



prioritizing, the circumstances and your survival instinct will dictate your life.

Another technique is to enlist the help of other people and resources. Use an organizer or a planner. Tell people whom you trust about your goal, because they may help propel you into taking the first step of your plan or will remind you of your goal. Sign up for programs that monitor your progress. Set up things around you so that they remind you of your goals.

Review your goals often. Question the validity of your routine activities. Why do I drive to this job in San Francisco every day? These activities may arise from very valid goals but if those goals are buried in the subconscious mind they do not effectively serve as foci for the activities. Answering such questions will bring your goals into the conscious realm. This constant mental scrutiny is absolutely necessary to keep you focused on your goals.

A great strategy to help retain focus on a goal is to eliminate potential distractions. Once the goal is set, eliminate any activities that do not contribute toward it and keep your life simple so that your goal always stands out. This is the strategy used by serious spiritual seekers such as monks. Without leading their austere lifestyle, you can always adopt the simple lifestyle of an uchideshi.

Periodically, consider taking time out to reassess your goals and focus. Don't just take a vacation. Spend a little time during your time-out to examine your life and determine whether it needs more focus and whether it needs to focus on something different.

To focus on small tasks is a great way to practice the focusing skill for

larger tasks. Focus on just driving. Focus on making an omelet for brunch. Focus on just walking. Focus on just taking one step at a time. Focus on each breath.

Take one task at a time. Some people may appear as if they are focusing and performing multiple tasks so well. In reality, they can focus on only one task at a time while putting the rest on autofocus.

When something distracts you from your focus do not fight it because you will get entangled in it and lose your focus. Just ignore it. (But if it is a big distraction and it keeps coming back then you may have to respond to it by "receiving" it in an Aikido way. We will discuss this on another occasion. We are discussing the aspect of Aikido that pertains to "extending" in this essay). For example, when a random thought comes to you while you are focusing on your breath during meditation, just acknowledge it and let it go.

One critical but difficult skill to work on to polish your focus skill is to refrain from indulging. In anything. To indulge means to give free rein to the sensation or the mood of the moment, irrespective of whether it relates to your goal. Indulging means letting go of your focus. The easiest way to combat indulgence is to take an immediate action toward focusing as soon as the urge to indulge is noticed. But do it right away before the sensation or the mood takes control of you. When the alarm goes off in the morning, get up. When it's time to say good-bye, leave.

The act of focusing consumes energy. Just like it would take a lot of work to redirect a river or to dam it. Energy is needed to hold all kinds of distract-

tions at bay while you main stream of energy moves toward your goal. People who engage in serious focusing always go into seclusion to complete their task. Therefore, get in the habit of saving your energy for these serious endeavors. Don't slam the door if you don't have to. Don't stay up late if you don't have to.

Focusing in Aikido Practice

Instant and total shift of focus is a hallmark of an expert martial artist. She can instantly move her total energy at will to support any move or strike. In some martial arts there is no need for competition to determine the better martial artist. All it takes is a simple demonstration of this capability for causing instant and total shift of energy.

We practice this same skill regularly in classes. The kiai we do is for summoning our energy and focusing it on the move or posture at hand. The hanmi posture has the sole purpose of focusing our energy toward the tip of the triangle. The constant connection with uke is an exercise to focus on a moving target. At the advanced level, the eight-direction cut, the randori practice, the jyu-waza practice are exercises to shift focus totally and quickly from one target to another.

The Dojo Mission and Code and the Dojo Etiquette are also tools that help us to focus during our training. The rules of Etiquette provide an environment free of distractions so that we can just focus on training. The Code describes the essential elements in our daily practice to help focus our long-term training. The Mission reminds us of our purpose in training.

HOA NEWENS

PROCESS AND PRODUCT IN AIKIDO TRAINING

Nidan Essay

In the culture we live in, media images emphasize instant gratification, material possessions are a measure of success, and busy schedules an indicator of an individual's position in society. Most every aspect of our daily lives is infused with these fast-paced values: transportation, food, certainly work, even entertainment and recreation. This product-oriented culture is obsessed with convenience, achievement, and material rewards. What happens when we shift our perspective to look at how we live, rather than what we live for? Can we not value the richness of the experience itself rather than ask what we will get for it?

The question I am raising is that of process versus product. I am not suggesting that it is wrong to have goals or that we don't depend on the 'products' of our efforts, in fact some are indispensable: food, clothing, shelter, etc. Rather, we should not lose sight of the means by which the ends are achieved. The integrity of the process itself gives the product meaning and value. Those of us who have been drawn to aikido probably already have an awareness of the value of process. Whether consciously or sub-consciously we may have come to aikido looking for a different perspective, an antidote to the incessant pace of modern life.

In aikido, product is intimately connected to how we conduct our training. What if someone could wave a magic wand over you and you could instantly perform the perfect ikkyo? So what? The benefit is in the keiko itself. Aikido training is a process and

a way of life – a way of giving and receiving energy harmoniously, a way of self-evaluation and personal growth, a way of noticing and connecting with everything and everyone around us. Through physically practicing the techniques O'Sensei has given us, the principles of aikido seep into our minds and spirits.

When observing aikido techniques performed, it is usual to view the throw (or pin) as the outcome, or product, of the technique. It can even be tempting to judge the quality of the technique by how hard uke falls, or how loud a noise it makes. When we are practicing, if we succumb to the temptation to focus on the outcome, this opens up the possibility of failure. And with that possibility come fear and anxiety. During each split second of the technique our awareness is dulled. Anxiety about getting uke to hit the mat hampers the ability to be fully present each moment and to perform each step impeccably. When we fixate on any one thing, we lose the ability to perceive the whole.

Now, this is not to say that we can practice the techniques correctly without completing the throw or pin. When the technique is performed with full attention, the outcome evolves naturally. The creativity and power come when you can allow the throw to spontaneously emerge from the situation, when it is the natural next step in the process. Anxiety and fear slip away, and instead of being determined to make something happen, we are fully present in the moment.

I remember when I was a beginner, and after maybe three or four weeks of practice made a realization that a lot of the movements I was being taught were actually a repetition of ones I'd already seen I guess I had been a little slow to catch on, so this was a big revelation. Now, with the perspective of about six years of training, I see that repetition is indeed an important aspect of aikido training. With each execution, my challenge is to learn something new, sharpen my awareness, appreciate the uniqueness of my uke, let the movement become more deeply engrained in my body.

The danger here, of course, is slipping into rote repetition. When attention to the process lapses and the iterations become mindless, I am essentially just repeating that which I already know. There is no growth and no creativity. It sometimes means taking the risk of being clumsy or making a mistake in order to try something new – this is a risk well worth taking. Keiko is not a success or failure proposition, it is a process through which we can grow and forge our spirits.

On my most recent trip to Iwama, I arrived on a holiday and had to wait a long day and a half until first keiko. When morning class finally came, my jo suburi really drew Saito Sensei's attention. I got three dames on the first three suburi, and that was only the beginning. Going into evening keiko, I suspected I wouldn't fare much better; in fact I predicted I'd have another dame before tai no henko was done. My fellow uchideshi were encouraging and told me I would be just fine. Well, let's just say it took five dames on tai no henko before Hitohiro Sensei went on to morote

*Uke's determination moves like a
ship
Watch the paint chips fly!*

PETER SLOTE



dori kokyu ho in exasperation. I guess not being able to do something as seemingly simple as tai no henko after six years could be seen as a source of frustration. What the experience showed me, though, is how vast aikido really is. The things I already know might be a foundation to build on, but it is the challenge of learning everything else aikido has to offer that makes each repetition fascinating and rewarding.

When we join together as a dojo to engage in this process of discovery, we create a spirited sense of community. We benefit from a powerful synergy that arises when each of us is sincere in our keiko and brings an open heart onto the mat. In my experience, when I give of myself freely, I come away from keiko renewed and invigorated. I am very, very grateful to my senseis and to the dojo community for making this possible. O'Sensei advised us to "always train in a vibrant and joyful manner" and "one by one, make each technique your own". I hope to take these words of advice to heart as I continue on my path, and I'd like to thank Hoa Sensei and Kim Sensei and all of my training partners for helping me on this path.

MAGGIE VASHEL

TWENTY YEARS OF TRAINING

On March 26th of this year it will be 20 years since I got my 9th kyu Certificate from the Aikido Institute. The Dojo was 2 blocks from my home. It looked like fun rolling around so I joined up. Now here we are still rolling along. I love rolls.

I can't say I have trained straight through those 20 years. Boring injuries, being a restless teen-ager and my location, but it has been with me and will be with me for ever. I realize it has been a major factor in shaping how I move both physically and mentally through my life. I can't imagine not having Aikido in my life or our Dojo to practice in. If it wasn't for Sensei and the rest of us coming here to practice this beautiful Art, 5036 Telegraph Avenue would be just another store front in Oakland. But it is a very special place for me. I wish to thank everybody from O'Sensei on down to the student who has yet to walk in the door for making Aikido what it is. Thank you for everything.

GEOFF EVANS



LET'S TRAVEL THE PATH TOGETHER

It took approximately two years before I stepped through the doors of the Aikido Institute to register for classes. I remember the day I was driving down Telegraph Avenue when I saw the school. I parked my car and went up to the door of the Institute to see if anyone was there or if there was any information I could get. Upon approaching the doors, I felt a spiritual presence and I knew then that some day, I would enter this door to continue my study and training.

What took me so long from that first day of peeping through the door and seeing the white mat for the first time was that it took time to get my family situated; and then I remembered the workouts from ten years earlier. I knew that I had to get into some kind of physical shape before attempting to start my training. At least this was my thoughts at the time. I joined the Oakland Athletic Club and started an intense training program because I was 60 pounds overweight. My training included weight lifting, yoga,

THERE IS NO GREATER
ILLUSION THAN FEAR,
NO GREATER WRONG THAN PREPARING
TO DEFEND
YOURSELF,
NO GREATER MISFORTUNE THAN HAVING
AN ENEMY.
WHOEVER CAN SEE THROUGH ALL FEAR
WILL ALWAYS BE SAFE.

TAO TE CHING

swimming, and walking 4 miles 4 times per week.

It was a Monday morning when I was coming back from Zen meditation at the Zen center in Berkeley when I stopped by the Institute to pick up my application. I met Alberta who was very gracious. She told me to come back that evening to sign up and start my classes. I now realize that no matter how much pre-physical conditioning that I undertook, it still would not have prevented the tremendous aches and pains that I endured after that first work out. The only thing that did not ache was my eyelids and they probably would have ached if I had done one more roll. Yea, Gavin, you gave me my gi and told me to enjoy.

I have been to a number of martial arts schools in my younger years but I can truly say that there is a spiritual presence at the Aikido Institute that is missing at most other martial arts schools. My joyous nature is a carry over from my military days. When we were training to go to Vietnam, even though we knew that maybe some of us would not be returning standing up, we had a comradeship and spirit among us that can not be explained. We laughed, kidded, and developed a bond that lasted even until this very day. The Spirit at the Institute reminds me of the spiritual bonding my comrades in combat developed during those days.

The Aikido training at the Institute has given me an inward joy because all, from Sensei Hoa to all of the shodans and lower belts, are willing to help you and work with you. You really know your stuff even to the smallest detail. I really appreciate the lack of competition and the sincere desire to see everyone succeed. I have asked myself many

times why did I come back to Aikido at 54 years of age? I can tell you from a beginner's point of view that much of the coming back power comes from the lack of a judgmental attitude at the Institute but the exhibition of patience that is in everyone at the Institute. The older practitioners seem to say in their every helping hand, "I've been where you are today, just be patient and keep trying and you will progress."

I come from a very intense adversarial environment. Our society is built on competition (the legal profession is extremely adversarial and competitive) and many martial arts schools judge you by how well you can defeat your opponent. I believe that many of our stresses (heart attacks and strokes) come from the constant promotion of combat competition. Our founder, O'Sensei, was wise when he named the art, Aikido, which also means, "Arm in arm, let's travel the Path together." This is what keeps me coming back. It is the spirit of togetherness. O'Sensei also said, "...you must continue to train daily with your friends and students and progress together in the Way of Harmony."

TALIB



DON'T JUDGE AN UKE BY HIS BELT

In January, I was privileged to attend the Mt. Tamalpais Winter Aikido Retreat at Mt. Madonna. The featured instructor at the retreat was Ikeda Sensei. Besides Maggie, I was the only student at the retreat who trained in Iwama style, as the majority of the students studied in Aikikai-style schools.

While many differences exist between Iwama style and the more flowing Aikikai style, even more differences exist between our style, and the Aikido that Ikeda Sensei instructed at the retreat. Specifically, Ikeda Sensei used small, tight motions (sometimes imperceptible) to move one's uke. With a flick of the wrist, Ikeda Sensei was able to throw his uke, in what in our style would require a large, sweeping motion. Any one who has attended an Ikeda Sensei workshop will agree that what he does is amazing to watch, and almost impossible to perform.

As an outsider attempting very difficult techniques, Ikeda Sensei's classes were a joyful struggle. While I had anticipated a struggle on the mat, I did not expect it to come from my fellow retreat-mates. In Aikikai style dojos, many students wear hakimas, even if they are ranked 5th kyuu. In addition, when a student moves up the ranking system, he/she transitions to colored belts; white for 6th and 5th kyuu, blue for 4th and 3rd kyuu, and brown for 2nd and 1st kyuu. Therefore, to determine someone's rank, one must look at the side of a person's hakima, at the small strip of belt that is revealed. Only the most brand new of students wears just a white belt, with no hakima or colored belt. When people looked at me, therefore, they judged that I was a brand-new 6th kyuu. My newness to the Aikikai style, and to Ikeda Sensei's

*A lump of a student with the finest
sword
is still a lump
but an uchi-deshi with a lump of
wood
is something to reckon with*

PETER SLOTE

techniques, did not help my case, as it often took me a few tries to get the gist of a technique.

Not take this backdrop, and try to imagine my experiences through out the retreat. First, it was like I had a disease, as no one wanted to deal with teaching a 6th kyu how to move. I therefore had to fling myself in front of people, and then endure the disappointed shrug I got as people determined my rank. Once training, I felt a pressure to prove that I knew what I was doing in order to avoid being handled like a fragile child. The fact that I was learning new ukemi and techniques made this difficult. If I could not successfully prove my salt within my first go of the technique, I lost my uke's confidence and was doomed to the fragile treatment.

Through out the weekend people (especially fellow second and first kyu's) condescended to me, and told me that everything that I was doing was wrong, even if it wasn't. They just assumed that I did not know what I was doing, and therefore took it upon themselves to correct me—and not too kindly I might add. The low point was when a nine-year-old orange belt with whom I was training looked me up and down and said, “How long have YOU been training,” suggesting that it was beneath him to train with some one of my lowly rank. That kid infuriated me, but I handled it with a smile, as I did everyone else. I was determined NOT to reveal my rank, as I do not believe that you can judge your training partners by that marker. Those who did give me a chance were a joy to train with, and were like an oasis in a bleak desert.

The experience reminded me of the frustration and bad feelings I often felt

as a new student to our dojo. When I was brand new, I felt like I was a burden to my training partners, and perceived that sentiment from some members of the dojo. I felt that I had nothing to contribute, and that I was a drain on my partners' resources. While my perceptions were probably correct in a few instances, I now know that it is a privilege to train with new people, as they have much to teach. Most importantly, I was reminded that corrections must be given in a positive and kind manner, and that rank does not directly translate into value. My experiences at the retreat were a very real reminder of how important it is to enthusiastically train with all of your partners, regardless of rank, and to know that each training partner has something to teach and share.

MEGAN SWEET



AIKIDO IS GOOD MIND, BODY, SPIRIT, INTRO- EXTROSPECTION

My husband and I moved here from Philadelphia a few months ago. I don't feel like I moved across the country, I feel like I flew to Mars. Okay, I don't know exactly what it's like to fly to Mars, but you get my point. I didn't want to move. I was comfortable where I was. I have friends and family across the country, it was difficult to say good-bye. Career wise I taught photography at two local colleges - good work if you can get it, hard to find, and therefore hard to leave.

There are few ways for artists to support themselves and their habit and still eat. You can be wealthy to start with, you can be famous and sell your work in galleries, you can teach, you can be a commercial artist and create what other people tell you to (with a little say if your lucky), or you can sling drinks and wait on tables. It's fairly difficult to eke out a living selling your work, even if you sell a lot of it. Most of us find a happy balance between teaching and selling our work. Lots of people like this idea, so positions are few and far between. I try to think of myself on an adventure, and imagine that I was formally complacent so that I can sit back and enjoy the weather. One of the things Aikido has done for me is to help me to realize that it's o.k. to be fumbling around a bit.

The other day Leif asked me “What I thought so far”. I gave the usual answers mechanically, things I'd heard other people say, “it's good to have humbling experiences as an adult...it's a challenge...” I don't even know why the words came out. I guess my defense mechanism was up. I've heard tell it's an “east coast thing” I don't know. I think that associations are dangerous. I could just as easily say that it's a “west coast thing” to be a fast friend, but not show up when invited to dinner”. What ever it was, I had my sign up, the one that reads “I just don't feel like opening up.”

I had enjoyed training with Leif. At least I could have said that. I feel lucky to have such wonderful people to work with class in, class out. But what was I thinking? That Aikido is like everything else in my life right now. Sometimes new and exciting, sometimes confusing and frightening. I have

humbling experiences as an adult every day of the world. It's still a challenge for me to find Adeline from Ashby. I'm scared to death to drive to the city, confused by a million freeways happily leading in four different directions. Did I mention the problem of west being towards the coast? Which is true unless you're in that marvelous little section where you drive on 80 East and 580 West at the same time. It's suits me well because I've always gone in two directions at once, and living here gives me justification for doing so. Everything tallied, I think the new environment is just the kick start that I needed. I'm thriving artistically - which makes every thing else okay. It's the secret that most of us in the magical club we call art keep. Visual artists live in divine happiness by breathing life into line. In kinetic arts, happiness comes from making a motion fluid and confident, and feeling it's energy move with and through you. Kinetic art is new to me, its form is Aikido. I feel it's depth and when I reach for it I feel as if I am desperately grasping at the heavens, like I'm drowning and I want to be saved. But when I relax and tell myself that everything is ultimately o.k., that my spirit knows how to move and will someday communicate that knowledge to the rest of my body, I sense the power of Aikido.

I'm comforted now by my visual art, because it is an old friend, but something is new. Now when I create I sometimes think of Aikido. I first noticed it while working on a stained glass piece. When making difficult cuts, I breathed and felt the energy move through my fingertips into the cutter. My visual art is a constantly changing, always challenging, humbling force that guides me through the

process of taking an image from within and giving it a way out. Just thinking about it gives me that feeling you get when you really feel love - when you struggle for breath a little because your spirit is too happy to contain itself and it dances out of your body and wraps around you. Swirling in spirals and waves, it makes you whole and breaks you apart at the same time. For that moment, instant and infinite, you are aware of internal and external energy. You are reminded that everything is ultimately o.k.

Recently, I stopped by a photography lab to see if I could help out in exchange for darkroom access. I was told that arrangements of this kind weren't usually considered. Okay, I thought, usually is a possible yes, and I handed the lab manager my resume. About a week later I was "in". Someone was telling me how unusual it was, almost unheard of, to "get in" I think I got lucky I said, proud of myself for not saying that with a resume like mine it would be unusual not to "get in". When it came time to mix chemistry, which I happily did, the same person laughed and said "you're not a teacher anymore" - meaning of course that I'm doing the kind of manual labor that he assumed was formally above me. I smiled and thought, I wish that this smile could tell you that it's what I want right now, that not only do I not mind it, I like it. I'm sweeping the mat. I'm still a teacher, we all are. Everyone is either a teacher or a student at any given time - sometimes both at once.

MARY ANTONINE GAETJENS



NIDAN ESSAY

I KNOW THE PATH. IT IS STRAIGHT AND NARROW. IT IS LIKE THE EDGE OF A SWORD. I REJOICE TO WALK ON IT. I WEEP WHEN I SLIP. GOD'S WORD IS : 'HE WHO STRIVES NEVER PERISHES.' I HAVE IMPLICIT FAITH IN THAT PROMISE. THOUGH, THEREFORE, FROM MY WEAKNESS I FALL A THOUSAND TIMES, I WILL NOT LOSE FAITH BUT HOPE THAT I SHALL SEE THE LIGHT WHEN THE FLESH HAS BEEN BROUGHT UNDER PERFECT SUBJECTION, AS SOME DAY IT MUST.

GANDHI

KATSU HAYABI (SWIFT DAY OF VICTORY!)

O'SENSEI

I can hardly begin to expound upon the wonderful experience of Aikido, of which I have been a most lucky recipient, without first giving full due to my teachers. Without their dedication, perseverance, and penetrating insights, I find it hard to imagine how any achievement can be made alone. They have given me something that is priceless. They have shared freely and unselfishly of their own accomplishments. I am truly grateful for their support and guidance. They have given me the opportunity to take what I have learned from them and to apply it to my life and the world around me. They have given me a sense of place in the community as well as the ability to look at Aikido as having a place in the world.

I believe that Aikido, in essence, is a path for spiritual development as well as a means of bringing peace into the world. It is inclusive and an interactive practice of the reconciliation of

conflict. To practice Aikido, in a way, is to practice peace.

During my study of this art I have sought guidance through the writings of one of the greatest teachers of peace, Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi believed in order to achieve a perfect state of non-violence “one must be willing to receive”, as O’Sensei said, “ninety-nine percent of an attack.” This and many other parallels in their thinking led me to experiment with my own ideas of peace and spiritual development. Following Gandhi’s lead of being inclusive of different thoughts and religions, I looked into Buddhism for help in finding a structural framework for understanding this interaction.

In Buddhism there are three things which are necessary for spiritual development. They are : the teachings, the teacher, and the community. I believe Aikido has developed in a similar way. In Aikido we have the teachings, the teacher, or sensei, and a community of fellow practitioners who are sharing the same path together. Each acts as a pillar of support to the other. Together they create a triangle, the

most stable and dynamic of all shapes. Perhaps, this may be what O’Sensei referred to in his explanations of the structure of Aikido and it’s related techniques as being a triangle, circle, and square. The triangle is the foundation for spiritual development as well as the basis for technical application. To extend this thinking, a circle is formed when the three factors (the teachings, teacher, and community) are brought into harmony. The square indicating the eight directions of the manifestation of peace and benevolence toward all beings when the transmission of truth is complete.

Although nature itself is the foremost teacher of truth, it is the teacher, or sensei, who internalizes a sense of this divinity and is thus endowed with a heavy responsibility for that transmission. We look to our teachers as our most immediate source.

I am blessed with the opportunity to take part in such a life-enriching experience and to have benefited greatly from the guidance of my senseis. It has been a unique experience to have two senseis who are both such accomplished and well developed people.

They have been a constant inspiration and have always shown me compassion and open-heartedness. I thank them for their courage for never being afraid to speak honestly and directly. Even though the truth may sometimes hurt, it is a most necessary factor for making progress in the development of one’s character . For the teacher, this is a tremendous responsibility. This, I believe, is the sword’s edge to which Gandhi refers. The path of truth can be no wider than the edge of a sword. We trust our teachers who walk along this path, and for our benefit, show us the way.

Sensei, domo arigato gozaimashta.

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THE KIAI



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.