

# THE KIAI

SUMMER 2001 Newsletter of THE AIKIDO INSTITUTE Volume VII, Issue 2

## 30 YEARS OF AIKIDO

### A WAY TO RECONCILE THE WORLD

Attempting to corral all the possible articles for this issue of the KIAI, I put off the Summer Edition until after Labor Day. I then struggled to meet deadlines at work while also trying to make progress on publishing the newsletter. Finally I was able to create a first draft on September 10th. My plan was to create the final copy on the 11th. September 11, 2001



Needless to say everything was reprioritized in all our lives on that day.

I have, like you, been watching TV, reading the newspapers, asking friends if they knew people in New York... working through as best I can what has happened.

Yesterday I remembered that the KIAI needed to be published. All those articles had been written. All those thoughts had to be shared. But the KIAI was missing a crucial piece: there was no mention of the recent events that will dramatically shape our lives in unforeseen ways from this moment forward. I needed to include some acknowledgment of what has happened.

There used to be a photograph found in many dojos. It showed two hands being gripped in ryote-dori. The hands being held are performing kokyū, blending with uke's power. Using O'Sensei's words about Aikido, the photo was entitled: "A Way to Reconcile the World."

I kept remembering that photo and thinking, "How do we reconcile this, O'Sensei? How do we ever reconcile this?"

O'Sensei wrote many years ago: "You might ask what is the most important thing in Aikido training. It is to look at yourself, your innermost soul... Each of the individual cells of your body carries a map of the divine plan of creation. ...



The secret toward which this old man is training himself is the way to open the rock door that shuts the light away from the human mind. It is to change the world of war and ignorance into a world of divine light. It is to improve the spiritual quality of all human beings and to open their intuitive consciousness... That is why I call Aikido the budo of love. ... Reading prayers and scriptures does not suffice. We must express this consciousness through our actions."

"We must express this consciousness through our actions." And that is what we do at the dojo each time we perform a technique. Each time we perform tai-no-henko, our bodies express the concept of blending. We feel the strong energy attempting to hold us captive. We move around that energy. We move to a new position of stability.

I am not naive enough to believe that we can reconcile what happened in New York with one tai-no-henko. But I do believe that these techniques we practice can teach our bodies universal truths that our minds are too sophisticated to grasp. And once our bodies understand these truths, they teach our spirits. When our bodies and our spirits are in alignment, our minds are not slow to follow.

Tai-no-henko teaches us to blend. From practice I can see that each tai-no-henko leaves an energetic imprint within uke and within nage. I would even say that each tai-no-henko leaves an energetic imprint in the dojo. The vibrational imprint of blending, created whenever two partners do tai-no-henko, is cumulative and persistent. As energy is added repeatedly, day-by-day, the vibration begins to increase, until, like the expanding circles created when a stone is dropped in a pond, the harmony of blending energy begins to be heard on the street in front of the dojo, then across the street from the dojo, then across town from the dojo.

**5036 TELEGRAPH AVENUE at 51ST  
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 94609  
www.aikidoinstitute.org**

O'Sensei's intent with these Aikido techniques was to "open the rock door that shuts the light away from the human mind". Maybe he knew that with each tai-no-henko we add to a universal harmonic oscillation of energy that beats against the rock doors in our minds. These are the rock doors that keep us from blending with each other, from understanding one another, from living in peace with one another.

Just as debris is being removed from New York one bucket-full at a time, we can hope that the debris from the rock doors in our minds is being removed one tai-no-henko at a time.

DEBORAH MAIZELS



### HOA SENSEI AT TAHOE

I drove up to Tahoe with JR and Girard on Saturday August 11th to watch Hoa Sensei give a seminar.

When we left the dojo shortly after 4 A.M. it was still pitch dark, but we were wide awake with hushed excitement. Driving up we met the sun in the foothills, and by the time we arrived at the lake around 7:30 it had almost burned off the morning chill. Ninety peaceful Sierra minutes until keiko. For JR and Girard the right preparation was a good nap. For me it was a brisk hilly hike, an attempt to burn off some of the anticipatory energy. My practice today would be sitting and watching.

It's fairly easy to appear to be sitting and watching, but actually doing it with any level of skill requires some practice. For 3 1/2 weeks all I could do was watch, and I learned a great deal, both about Aikido and about the watching itself. In the beginning I would always try to see everything at once, with the result being that I saw hardly anything. Watching with a broad field of vision is like looking into a kaleidoscope. The linked patterns of bodies in motion are beautiful in their logic and inevitability, but the underlying forces, the hows and whys, remain mysterious. This kind of watching holds my attention for maybe three minutes. In order to put on a good show of general awareness beyond that point I would have to do one of two things. I could either try to appear alert while letting my mind wander, or I could try to discover ways to watch that would hold my attention.

Fortunately I'm a wretched actress, so it was almost as easy to choose the second option. Experimenting with different watching games, I discovered an interesting physical

way to watch. I would closely observe Sensei doing a technique and at the same time remember the feeling I had in my body when he had performed that technique on me. I would then choose someone I knew, whose particular style I could easily remember the feeling of, and watch his body move through the technique. I found that I could see what made each person's technique feel the way it does. Different cadences, degrees of smoothness, closeness, distance, focusedness of hanmi. From the sidelines I could see how each of the familiar bodies moved and how each was different from the others and from Sensei. I would try to predict how each person would move through a particular technique. I would imagine how the techniques of unfamiliar partners might feel. The practice of watching became endlessly fascinating.

So Tahoe. Sixteen guys bowed in with Sensei on the lawn near the lake. Jo was the weapon. I started my watching with kaleidoscope vision. Weapons are all about wood and air, especially outdoors in the sunshine. Unless they are wielded with solid grounding and firm intent they tend to flap and clatter. I focussed in on Sensei. Hoa Sensei is grounded and intent. He is like a stalking cat with his jo, hips low, body wound tightly but easily, coiling then springing, but never completely uncoiling. Mind and body of one purpose. Extending through the wooden stick and reaching through the thin mountain air to the exact center of uke, one thought and one desire, never wavering.

Watching weapons practice is more subtle than watching taijitsu. The precise small angles that characterize a clean strike or tsuki are difficult to observe directly. What is observable is attitude, the focus, the balancedness of stance, the smoothness of motion. Even more revealing is uke's reaction. Those who are practicing with a skilled partner have a rapt expression which is quite telling. And Hoa Sensei never failed to capture his partner's full attention.

An hour and a half of concentrated jo work, then Rich, from the Tahoe dojo, ably demonstrated several kumi tachi and kumi jo for the weapons part of his first kyuu test. Then a short break and a short drive inland to the Tahoe City Recreation Center.

Indoors in the low ceilinged downstairs, taijitsu appeared very different from the outdoor weapons practice. In taijitsu, the damp resilience of flesh against warm flesh is fueled by hot metabolism. Outdoors it was wood and air, in here it was a matter of fire and water. Hoa Sensei directing the flow of hot bodies. Sitting on a plastic chair at the edge of the mat, I could close my eyes and feel damp waves of heat and sweat roll off the mat. Fifteen largish guys now, and Sensei. Easily a ton and a quarter of body weight, accelerating then slowing then coming back to static, at first. Tai no henko, morote dori kokyuu ho, and some techniques from ushiro as a warmup for the second half of Rich's test.

Then liftoff. Techniques in motion, from yokomen uchi, in two groups, four throws per turn. Large bodies, airborne. Sitting gingerly, my own body still in a very fragile state, it was more obvious than it had ever before been to me just how dangerous what we do is. How can it happen that these men are flying through the air, hitting the ground hard, every one bouncing back up with a huge grin on his face? By all reasonable standards limbs should be breaking right and left. But here in this wide cave of a room the energy is not only big and intense but also oddly benevolent. As if the heartfelt energetic connections among these people form a strong springy net, keeping everyone safe.

Near the end a woman came in and introduced herself to me as Douglas Dale Sensei's wife. Looking onto the mat where her husband was handily flinging large people into the air, she said "Oh dear, has he been practicing like that this whole time?". Yep, I said, he's been flying. "Oh no, he's supposed to be taking it easy. He was in a head-on collision on Tuesday, they had to extract him with the jaws of life. The left side of his body is completely messed up." It didn't seem to be slowing him down much.

Then it was time for the second half of Rich's test. The energy in the room coiled down from motion into stillness and focussed into Rich. He wore through three large ukes, never faltering.

Then it was over. Everyone radiant with sweat and exhaustion. Mats were put away, the floor swept, people wandered happily upstairs to chat and drink water and snack on Douglas Dale Sensei's enormous baked fruit concoction.

The three of us eventually drifted off toward the cars then out to a very peaceable and friendly lunch with Tom Rennie and his student Mohammed. Although I hadn't physically practiced, and the altitude and lack of sleep were pounding in the top of my head, I had that feeling of exhausted, calm, post-good keiko happiness. And I was very glad to have been there.

SAILL WHITE

*Seeing me before him  
the enemy attacks  
but by that time  
I am already  
standing behind him.  
Morihei Ueshiba*

## YON DAN ESSAY: ON COACHING, KUMI TACHI, AND STANDARDS

A lot of what I do on the mat is coaching. I am neither qualified to transmit aiki teachings or can I even describe them satisfactorily. My task as a training partner and instructor is to provide thoughtful feedback and, specifically, to help position others. Deconstruct, then correct every little thing about somebody's shomen uchi ikkyo omote waza and you give him or her a fish, a small one at that. Position somebody where they feel what its like to receive, to execute, to participate in shomen uchi ikkyo omote waza and you begin to teach him or her how to fish. These training techniques I am referring to are not aikido techniques. They are, for example, powerful ways of continuously studying and improving forward and backward rolls; positioning the body to connect suburi to tai jitsu, or extension with blending movements; and above all, positioning the body to receive. When strategically offered and reinforced this activity contributes to the development individuals with depth of skill, individuals with good toolboxes of their own. The larger the pool of such individuals the more effective the dojo's program becomes, broadening and deepening aikido's roots in the community. These techniques are often technical, and usually have long-term benefits. In fact, they are sometimes provocative challenges to an individual because they replace a movement that expedited a throw or pin with a skill that might take years to blossom and yield a fuller benefit. "If I can't raise my elbow way up in the air in ikkyo ura waza then how do I bring my partner down?" If the questioner came to this impasse on his or her own, and is, preferably, frustrated and desperate with their current understanding of the technique, these moments light me up. The spirit of my response is, "Now that's a worthy question, and one that I hope will trouble you for a while and bring you great results!" I have not cataloged these coaching tips nor do I distinguish where I obtained them. Many are from my early years of training. Others are certainly variations on what specific teachings I continue to receive. A few are directly from Iwama doctrine and are, as Saito Sensei will show anybody who asks, straight from O'Sensei's playbook.

Iwama legend tells us that the kumi tachi were once "secret" teachings which only san dan and above were instructed in, behind closed shoji no less. This was a quality control measure. Practitioners were required to be firmly grounded in suburi and basic awase practices or the kumi

tachi would (and often still do) regress into mere sword banging. In time there were so few competent practitioners of kumi tachi that Saito Sensei opened the teaching of them without restriction. At the Oakland dojo members get access to them very early, although suburi and awase are strongly emphasized for years. We practice and correct and correct a lot more and generally try to get people doing the kumi tachi “right”, that is, hands and feet go here, uchi-tachi initiates this move, uke-tachi initiates that move, etc. But the large amount of technical information involved in the kumi tachi sometimes over shadows the lessons these practices offer. Consider the practice of tai no henko. We can get somebody “in the ballpark” doing tai no henko relatively quickly. Instructors continue to provide correction, but it soon becomes the practice itself, executed regularly, that teaches the body its lessons over time. It is the same with the kumi tachi, although it takes a relatively long time, perhaps through san dan, to accomplish simple technical competence compared to tai no henko. I don’t practice the kumi tachi just in order to become a kumi tachi expert, although I strive for that, too. I practice kumi tachi because I want to receive their teachings.

The setting and maintaining of standards in the dojo are and always have been important to me. With the increased responsibilities in the dojo that seniority brings I have had to look closer at those standards. A 4th kyu training partner recently said to me, “Thank you for having high expectations of us”. Holding high expectations, without too much attachment to results, is a good start. I was taught to pursue excellence, but again, to not be attached to the results. Rather, the process is the thing. So then, my standard is not, “achieve excellence” (if it were I would promote screening members and accepting those whose prospects for “success” were highest, as a professional sports teams or for-profit businesses do). My standard (and one that better represents the inclusive mission of Aikido) then, is, “pursue excellence”. In pursuing excellence we call out the qualities we want manifest on the mat. Qualities such as determination, a deep desire for self- and perhaps group-improvement, open mindedness, vigor, perseverance, and the glue that holds all those qualities together, consistency, as quietly practiced and demonstrated over many years by Hoa sensei, Kim sensei and Alberta sempai, to name a few.

A few years ago I was thrilled to receive san dan (see “On Keiko, Membership and Promotion”, The Kiai, Summer 1997) and to participate in the promotion of some of my peers soon thereafter. I am honored with and humbled by this promotion to yon dan. I aspire to thank Newens Sensei, and all my instructors and training partners, with my contribution on the mat.

PETER SLOTE

## MISCELLANEOUS REFLECTIONS ON MY TRIP TO IWAMA

Training in Iwama is a unique experience. The training is intense. After the 15-20 minutes of tai no henko and morote dori kokyu-ho, there is a rapid succession of techniques. It is hard to believe the class lasts only an hour. There were many very talented people on the mat. I was able to take the opportunity to train with both men and women of higher rank as well as some very energetic and intense students.

My guess is that Leif will write more about the training, so I will go into more mundane subjects. But I will say that it was a worthwhile trip. While I was there I would say I was having an enjoyable time, even fun. In retrospect I would say that I had a great time. Would I go again? You bet. But I would try to do things a little differently. I would want to stay at least 3 weeks, instead of the two weeks that I did stay. I would not want to be there during O’Bon because we missed out on a full measure of training because of this holiday week. Other things I would change just because I would want to have a different experience.

Planning – The hardest part of the trip was trying to coordinate with others to arrange a joint stay in Iwama. Ultimately, I only had to coordinate details with Yuko as we traveled over together. Leif and Dave coordinated between themselves, arriving two days later than Yuko and I and leaving two days later.

Before Yuko and I left, we got a lot of good advice from a number of people. The advice covered a number of areas: money, baggage, layovers, gifts, clothing, trains, learning Japanese, etc. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone that took their time to give me some personal tips. Their information was very helpful.

The Language – Richard Levitt-san suggested weekend Japanese language classes from Soka Gakkai in S.F. Unfortunately, I did not have the time to take advantage of this advice, but I would like to pass it along. I did buy some Japanese language tapes to listen to in the car. They helped me to get my head in the right place, but since I am more of a visual person, I had trouble picking up the vocabulary. I had studied the language years ago during two separate, but relatively short periods. What I feel would have served me better than the tapes was to memorize the katakana and hiragana (phonetic alphabets). This knowledge enables one to sound out signs that are often phonetic transcriptions of English words.

Money – One is expected to pay for one’s anticipated stay (registration for first timers (3,000 yen), dojo fee



(42,500 yen for the first 14 days), and money for the food fund (4,200 yen for the first 14 days) almost immediately upon arrival. Before I left I ordered \$200 worth of yen from Bank of America and it was shipped to me with a \$10 charge for shipping and handling. The ultimate rate of exchange was not the best (about 114 yen per \$1), but at least I had some yen upon arrival. In addition, I got \$300 worth of American Express traveler's checks at the California State Automobile Assn. Since I am CSAA member there was no charge for the traveler's checks. I cashed these all in at the airport immediately upon arrival because Yuko and I planned to go directly by train to Iwama and I needed more yen to pay the dojo. I got my best rate of exchange at the airport money exchange window (about 123 yen/\$1).

I looked for an ATM in the airport because I had been advised that the rate of exchange would be better. But the only one I could find said that my ATM card was not valid. In Kashiwa, on the way to Iwama, I tried locating an ATM, but had no luck. Ultimately I got a cash advance on my credit card at Sumitomo Bank. (It has an agreement with VISA). Factoring in the charges, the rate of exchange was okay (about 119 yen/\$1), but not great.) Later I found ATMs at the post office in Kasama and Iwama (again about 119 yen/\$1 if you factor in my ATM charges.) Leif found an Iwama bank with an ATM, but I never tried it.

Layovers – Alberta Hankenson Sempai strongly advised that Yuko and I hold up in a hotel the night of our arrival and go to Iwama the next day in the daylight. Ultimately this is precisely what we did. It took me, a foreigner, more than one hour to clear customs, which put us way behind schedule. Therefore we stayed at a businessman's hotel in Kashiwa, had a leisurely Japanese breakfast the next morning and arrived in Iwama in the early afternoon to find Saito Sensei and Hitohiro Sensei working on the grounds of the Aiki Shrine. Yuko-san boldly walked over and said hello. Saito Sensei then personally escorted us to the dojo and instructed the uchideshi on what to do with us.

Yuko-san had to leave after 5 days to fulfill family commitments. I traveled back alone. My plane was scheduled to leave from Narita Airport at 6pm on Monday. I left the dojo on Sunday morning at about 10am and headed to Ueno with the expectation of finding a hotel and sightseeing until Monday afternoon. That is exactly what I did. Using my limited Japanese, I found a hotel through a travel agency at JR's Ueno station, I found my way around and even did some shopping. Jordan Kramer-san had warned me that credit card use is not easy outside of Tokyo. I found that to be true, even in Ueno at what appeared to be a decent size store. It took about 30 minutes to receive approval of my credit card for my purchase.

Baggage – Another helpful tip from Jordan-san was use of baggage services to transport luggage from the airport to Iwama and vice versa. Yuko-san and I sent off to Iwama a heavy cardboard box filled with foodstuffs. This saved us lugging around more luggage than we could comfortably manage. On the return trip I sent through the same box filled with gifts and items I didn't need during the remainder of the trip. I was able to pick up the box at the airport just before I checked in.

Attitude – One should be humble. To paraphrase a greater mind than mine, there is a lot to be humble about. One goes there to learn, not to show what one knows. Corrections should be accepted gratefully and eagerly. Corrections are a gift and a compliment. Sensei deems one worthy of time and attention. Just because corrections are not given to one does not mean that they are doing the technique properly.

I will end my reflections at this point. However, I would advise serious students of Iwama-style Aikido to make the trip. Take the opportunity to train under Saito Sensei and under Hitohiro Sensei. Hitohiro Sensei is a dynamic force. I overheard someone say he has been training since age 7 and teaching since age 9.

KATHY MONTGOMERY

*Even when called out  
by a single foe,  
remain on guard,  
for you are always surrounded  
by a host of enemies.*

*Morihei Ueshiba*

## HOW AIKIDO PREPARES ME FOR A CAREER AS A PRE-SCHOOL TEACHER

As I continue on my career transition from desk-bound planning consultant to pre-school teacher, I begin to see more and more applications for the lessons from Aikido in my day-to-day life. Sometimes the lessons are those of randori, when swarms of little ones rush in with all manners of attacks—I mean greetings! Sometimes the lessons are those of practicing on a crowded mat. Mostly, the increased awareness and readiness that I seek to learn in my practice is always needed in a classroom or play yard full of boys and girls ages three to five.

Coming into a pre-school classroom as a student teacher is in some ways the easiest of worlds. Children in the pre-school age-range can communicate with words (at least most of the time), they are potty trained (ditto) and they are interested in all manner of things, especially newcomers. As a student teacher, the full teachers really are there to run the class. They are the sensei's and I am a sempei to the youngsters. I have an opportunity to help out, an obligation to help out for that passing grade, but the true responsibility is the teachers'. We learn to do our best because it makes things work out the best for the most of us, although sometimes we want to just do the things that we want to do. It's more fun to be outside with the kids after lunch than it is to make sure that they have brushed their teeth, but both need doing.

Where I am doing this student teaching, the preschoolers are taught using a constructivist curriculum. That is to say, the students will develop naturally and fully if they are provided the physical, social, intellectual, emotional and creative stimuli and support. The teacher is there to provide those resources appropriate to the students there that day, and to make sure that everyone is safe from each other and from themselves. That reminds me a lot of aikido classes.

From what I have seen on the mat and also heard Sensei discuss, pretty much everyone who arrives on the mat spend the first weeks and even months learning a whole new repertoire of moves and postures. For adults, this looks and feels foolish (sometimes embarrassing) because we are used to being able to use our bodies already. Imagine a play yard full of vocalizing youngsters zooming around learning to use their bodies fully for the first time. I spent almost an hour last week teaching children to bring their hands together in order to catch a ball. These little people are learning how to cut with a knife, how to grip a pencil or pen, how to hang from a bar. It's almost as hard as *morote dori ikkyo ura* is to a new aikido student. And, as someone who already knows how to do the basics, it's just as hard to let them learn for themselves.

But mostly, the work of the students in a child care setting is their development as competent individuals. Everything that we do as teachers is aimed at helping the students learn how to do something by themselves, or alternatively, for them to learn how to ask for help. How will they figure out who to play with when the person that they want to play with is busy or isn't there or when someone else asks to play with them? When will they learn to wait for certain things or wait until they develop enough to do something by themselves (big enough, tall enough, skilled enough)? We don't teach them any of these things, we couldn't, but we provide the opportunities for them to teach themselves. Each time something like this happens in the classroom, I get reminded of the times I had to make (have to make) adjustments when we're training.

Then there are the times we have to learn (I have to learn, for sure) how to stop talking and just do things. Or the times that we volunteer for something and the teacher doesn't choose us. And don't forget the moments when we run out of time in the class but I didn't get my turn or I wanted to do more.

There is a lot more to say, and, hopefully, I'll write some more on this subject for the KIAI, but for the moment, my final thought is that the end of practice there is the clean up. Cleaning up the dojo is part of the practice and it's part of the teaching in the childcare setting. We don't sing Barney songs when we clean (thank goodness), but it's learning and training all the same.

Each Aikido class provides the opportunities for growth in skills, awareness, flexibility, creativity, calm responsiveness and more. Each childcare class provides the same opportunities. I don't know if working with children is making my aikido better, but I know the reverse is true.

JOSHUA LANGENTHAL



## IWAMA AND OAKLAND UCHI DESHI

"Domo Arigato, goziamashita. Oops...Onagaeshimazu." When we were bowing in that day for class, the instructor made an easy mistake. As he bowed twice, clapped twice and bowed again, he forgot whether it was the beginning or the end of class. The experience made me chuckle a bit, but more because of the irony of the situation than the outright mistake. I felt a keen sympathy for what happened.

As uchi deshi things tend to melt together so it is hard to tell what day of the week it is, whether it is the beginning of the class or the end. I have classes where I am stretching and feel tired already. Sometimes it is 5 'til 8 p.m. and I am just starting to feel warmed up. There are night classes where the room is getting very dark and I do not even notice because the morning classes are held without the lights on.

Sleep comes really easily, normally in 30 seconds. I am always looking at the clocks to gauge how long until the next class or how long until I absolutely have to go to bed. How long can I rest, can I get more done? Hunger? I ate a whole rotisserie chicken for lunch today and still feel a little hungry. Sore? Yes, it does not go away. I have not had a massage or a hot tub bath since I started being uchi deshi. But I think it is better that way, so I can just get used to it and not have the chance to compare and contrast feeling good body vs. feeling sore body. Happiness? I am really happy to be exactly where I am. The lessons are huge and I can feel myself changing, learning, developing, blending. Yet sometimes I don't recognize myself in the mirror. Today, as

I think back on it, I was very grumpy, very raw. Sometimes I feel waves of being far away from other people. They hit like clouds passing in front of the sun at this point in my uchi deshi career, but I remember seeing other uchi deshi's having much longer periods. Maybe they have just yet to come.

The precursor to all of this was my solo trip to Iwama this past March for 17 days. You may have read the article I wrote about my trip in the last KIAI. (There will be a continuation of that article in the next edition.) I want to com-



ment on how my Iwama experience helped me make my decision about being uchi deshi and how it compares to my Oakland experience thus far. In Iwama you have no

privacy. Everyone sleeps on the mat together, except the women go to another building (these rooming factors are largely based on how many people are in Iwama at the time). When I was there, the cold kept everyone in the kitchen/dining hall building huddled around the stove. We would sit on the wooden benches, reading, writing, eating, sleeping, talking and drinking; sometimes all at the same time. There really wasn't anywhere else to go, except a quick jaunt to Hot Spar (the local 7-11). Comparatively, the Oakland dojo has amenities galore, i.e., my own room, a kitchen, an office and I'm still in the same town as all of my friends, can still go out for beers and eat out every once in a while.

During my stay in Iwama, we woke up at dawn and cleaned the whole dojo and other buildings too, trained 3 times a day and also helped Saito Sensei with work details for about 2 hours a day. During all cleaning duties, it was my job to do what the head uchi deshi said, i.e., clean the toilets, dust O'Sensei's house, vacuum the mat, dust this or that, take this dirt pile and put it there, go buy a TV with her, etc.. There were also a host of rules: lay your shoes down straight facing away from the door, don't walk in this door, brush your teeth before keiko, towels with two dots are for dishes, towels with one are not, don't look Sensei in the eye, the list goes on and on. If you look in the Iwama Journal on the bookshelf in the dojo, you will see more of the rules I followed while I was there. What's the biggest rule of all? All rules are subject to change at any time. Just do what they tell you.

Here, I wake up at 5:15 am most days and do a cursory cleaning of the dojo. I stretch and do various warm-up exercises, for we do not normally stretch for the morning classes. On a normal day, I have about 15-20 minutes of cleaning to do. All other jobs I do are voluntary. So far, I have painted a few rooms and tried to effect some good change. The student database will be redesigned and we also all have to start tackling the mat problem. There are also a lot of

rules here, but the Japanese standard helped prepare me. In fact, I try to follow the Iwama rules here and apply the same sort of deliberateness to my life. I put my shoes in good order on the rack and face sandals and shoes towards the doorway for easy access. The dojo public areas are kept as clean as possible, dishes are not left dirty in the sink. Yet, today I worked out twice and have yet to shower and do not really care. But we did not shower every day in Iwama either.

The world class teaching and the Aikido quality here is found in Iwama in a more desiccated form. There are more Sempai with even more experience in Iwama. The Senseis consist of Saito Sensei and his son Hitohiro who have spent much of their lives with the actual founder of Aikido at the place where he perfected it. Both our Sensei's and our instructors have gone to Iwama to learn and have spent much of their own lives cultivating their own Aikido. In general, the atemis and the nikkyos and the pins tend to be crisper and more solid in Iwama. I remember one time I did not pin someone in Iwama because the mat was too crowded, and he said, "This is a martial art called Aikido. You should always pin me." He wanted me to drag him across the mat away from the other people and then apply a solid pin. Maybe we do not do that stuff as much here because we think it might be interpreted as rude. I do not know, but I think Kim Sensei's standard on these issues should be followed more closely. It would make our training more valuable.



In both Iwama and here in Oakland, I find that I am extremely tired. In between class in Iwama, we tried to use the least amount of energy to conserve for the next great class. Here, I can work or go jogging or whatever during the day, but I have to conserve my energy and often walk around like an old man during the day. But once I put on that gi and bow into class, things change. I become alive again.

In Iwama, my time there was only 2 weeks. It was enough to get some good dame's and realize that I have a lot of work to do on my Aikido. Training there did not really change my own Aikido radically for it was not enough time. But it showed me a standard to which I must strive. Now, here in Oakland, I have one year, which is really not a lot of time to learn all of the things I want to learn. But I am able to approach my training on a fundamental level I have never approached before. What's my stance? How is my posture? Also, I am tired enough that I cannot use as much strength to power through techniques. I have to be smarter than that, I have to use proper technique more. People who give me tips no matter what the rank, I give it a try. Most of the time, I find they are right and I feel quite thankful.

I feel really different about my Aikido as an uchi deshi

than I ever did before. I am starting to feel a lot more solid and am definitely talking about it less and doing it more. The endless repetitions of suburi and various other exercises are starting to sink in. It is like if I repeated the word "hello" 10,000 times, the word "hello" itself would start to take on a completely new meaning to me or others, both in the process of saying it and in the end. I am working on digging into my suburi and seeing what is to be seen. Just by virtue of obligating myself to do this every day, I am getting lessons I would never get coming in 3-4 days a week. If depth of Aikido knowledge is what I am seeking, I may not be physically that much lower, but the cloudy waters below are starting to clear. I see a farther distance to attain.

So in reading through this article, I'm hoping you can see why I chuckled when the instructor said the wrong words. To me, not only was it hard to tell if it was the beginning of class or the end, but it really did not matter. There is always more training to do, more to learn, more to delve into. I laughed because the distinction itself is superfluous on many levels for me. Onagaeshimazu!

J.R. RICHARDS



### IWAMA THOUGHTS

Before I was born, my parents bought a set of The Book of Knowledge, which was an encyclopedia with a strong emphasis on World geography and World culture. By the time I began reading, I had had all of the thousands of photos explained and all of the captions read many times over. I enjoyed a rainy-day world tour many times over the years. That was good preparation for my Iwama trip. Let's see, there were four British, two Germans, a Belgian, a Swede, a Frenchman from Tahiti, an Italian, a Canadian, an Australian, two Portugese, five of us from the US, a dozen plus college students from various parts of Japan. Yes, people are different, cultures are different, but this trip confirmed the general impression that I've developed over the years, that people are truly the same the world over in fundamental and significant ways. Bridging cultural differences is the great side benefit of Aikido training, especially in Iwama. The enthusiasm and openness of the college students was definitely refreshing.

I was very fortunate to be able to rely on my cohorts, Kathy-sempai, Leif-san and fearless Yuko-san, (she apparently was on quite cordial terms with Saito Sensei shortly after our arrival). The example and admonitions provided

by Tristan-sempai, the head uchideshi, were invaluable.

There are a number of personal memories that are indelible, the mute, mysterious presence of the Aiki Shrine, which drew our attention when we passed, like Boo Radley's house in To Kill a Mockingbird, the rice fields and orchards on the bike ride out to the waterfall, the late night cruises to the Hotspar, and the camaraderie in the shokudo. The most indelible memories of all was the exciting time before class, at the dojo or at the Budokan, with everyone sitting with anticipation, full of energy, and the unforgettable sounds of the exhausted cicadas signing off for the evening, and the crickets signing on.

DAVID DELONG



### HAIKU

*Fresh uchi deshi  
He looks like he sleeps at night  
Let's make the roof leak*

*Kaeshi waza  
You boldly exploited me  
Try it on Sensei*

*He keeps getting up  
Though I throw him so firmly  
Why can't I kick him?*

*Do not kick uke  
It isn't harmonious  
Just break his fingers*

*Just got launched skyward  
I wish I were rotating  
And here comes the mat*

ANONYMOUS