

# THE KIAI

FALL 2001

Newsletter of THE AIKIDO INSTITUTE Volume VII, Issue 3

## 30 YEARS OF AIKIDO



The most difficult part about being the editor of the KIAI is asking people to submit articles. I see the dread fall across people's brows as the realization hits that they have been asked to write. It's painful for me to see.

I've tried asking quickly (much like a band-aid is ripped quickly away so that the pain will be brief). I've tried having others ask. I've tried insinuating, cajoling, threatening...

Sometimes I hide too long in denial of the fact that I must ask, if I am to get articles. The deadline looms suddenly upon me and I'm left phoning the dojo to see just what stuff the uchideshi is made of.

I love that students are required to write essays when they take Dan exams. That's one definite article for the KIAI. One that I didn't have to ask for.

I wish I was better at asking. Or better at not feeling bad about asking. But I guess that's why I'm doing this job. I still have something to learn from it.

The best part about being the editor occurs after the articles have arrived. As I open up the files to ready them for publication, I am the first to read them. As I do, I often find myself absorbed and amused. Struck by what a wonderful way writing is to get to know someone. And wondering how so many good writers all happen to train at our dojo.

DEBORAH MAIZELS

TRAINING IN BUDO FOSTERS VALOR, SINCERITY, FIDELITY, GOODNESS, AND BEAUTY, AS WELL AS MAKING THE BODY STRONG AND HEALTHY.

MORIHEI UESHIBA

### NIDAN ESSAY

*Heaven is right where you are standing, and that is the place to train."*

- O'Sensei

I don't know if I have 700 words about Aikido that merit an entire essay. Really, I think I only have one word: Train. Like: train and train and train.

I've trained when it felt great and energy pumped through me like a well-oiled piston. Also trained when it felt like I spent the day being trampled by an angry mob, which meant digging deep for energy, for my center, for any connection to my partners, to the Earth.

How about, after enduring a dreadful day and a nightmarish commute, the wicked struggle all the way up to the moment of walking through the dojo door ... ugh, I should go home; take a bath; crack a beer; watch TV.

Vapid, exhausted, the poor schlep drags himself into the dojo. But he does enter. He walks through the door, bows with humility and appreciation, and trains. Training. Like a powerful tonic, it dilutes the misery and multiplies that little tiny flick of power left inside, tenfold. Infinitely. Can't get that on TV, not even cable.

There are times when it's tough to be on the mat, to roll and fall and stay present. Sometimes it seems Sensei demands too much, or some nuthead steps on my toes. At 6 a.m., the mat can be cold and hard.

Other times the mat is like a great friend who knows everything about me, challenges B.S., forgives transgressions and waits with an open heart and huge smile for our next meeting. One who always provides support and (often painfully) honest feedback. Oh, mat, old friend. You're a devil that lures aching joints into one more rude encounter. A joyful playmate. A heartless taskmaster. A poet. My best pal.

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And like any friend, it's a relationship nurtured through time, repetition, shared experience. Through training.

It's fun. It's a party, a celebration. We're all here together, doing something wonderful and exotic. Let's get up. Let's fall down. Let's run all over and grab at each other just to experience what it's really like to touch deeper than fingers can reach.

Let's train.

Well, that's one word. When I tried to think of 699 others, it all came back to training. What exactly is Aikido? How about a system of joint locks, pins and throws. Cool. Learn that by training.

Maybe it's about protection, gaining the awareness, self-possession, insight and arsenal of techniques to feel a little safer out in the world. I know how: train.

I want to learn how to be a better person, to pay attention, to share, to offer compassion, give selflessly, celebrate the human condition and break a sweat. I Train.

Want to make friends. Train.

Want to build stamina. Train.

Want a direct bond with the universe, inner peace, more harmonious relationships among all humankind? Quit reading this and train.

And I think the opportunity to train doesn't always happen around practicing techniques, or even to bowing into class. Training is being drawn to the calm spots in the crowd walking to PacBell Park or blending peacefully into a hectic marketplace. It's listening to Karen when I want to lash out, or standing tall for her when it's the right thing to do. Being an honest, dedicated professional, a decent driver, a trustworthy friend.

Everyone has his or her own path and sometimes a really good person may intersect with my path in a challenging way. Heaven is right where you're standing.

Aikido's lessons can seem pretty obvious and relatively basic. Find your own center; okay. Blend; oh yeah. Breathe; sure. Relax; of course. Just like a monk who shoots an arrow or draws circles with ink. Simple.

Until you look more closely. Because the arrow isn't a shaft of wood. It's a ray of light, a projection of the tenacious monk's spirit, manifest physically. In a lifetime of practice, the monk may loose a single, perfect shot. And in my lifetime, maybe I'll execute a single, perfect ikkyo.

"Do not be in a hurry," said O'Sensei, "continue to train daily with your friends ..."

So I'll look deeply into that ikkyo and explore its relationship to the mat, to my hips, to my partner, to the hassle I had parking that day, or to the dinner salad I ate last night. How does it feel? Is it mine at all, or does it belong to both of us? To Sensei, or the dojo? To O'Sensei?

Yeah, there's a wrist an elbow a shoulder a spine a hip a leg. Is that muscle I used, or ki? My big toe itches with anticipation. "Include me! Include me!" Is the goal to ... do what? Make a connection, secure a response, isolate a moment, lay on a pin?

Only one way to find out.

RICHARD LEVITT

## 2 HAIKU 4 ALL

*At Bo Gasshukuu*

*Compressed time intense effort*

*Only once a year*

*At Bo Gasshukuu*

*Sensei Sempai Kohai say*

*I am one with all*

RICHARD GARCIA

## BOLINAS GASSHUKUU

Mariposas drifted across the Shomen, two from the North when we first bowed in, two from the South when we last bowed out, and in between an intensive – not one and half hours or two hours but twenty-four hours of Aikido. Each revelation and learning strung like pearls on a thread of Aikido consciousness.

There were pearls of symmetry, surprise, revelation, fortitude, sharing, community and family. Nature contributed her splendor and mischief too.

The symmetry of black and white reverberated at every glance: the white mat etched with the dark shadows of Sensei Sempai and Kohai; the white belts and black belts; the white butterflies and black flies.

Surprise came in the form of Kim Sensei joining us on Sunday and surprise that only Peter San braved the Pacific Ocean.

Hoa Sensei demonstrated subtle adjustments to blends, grasps and throws that revealed a fluidity of motion throughout the techniques practiced.

Can you say one-thousand Bokken strikes? Easily said...but Sunday morning, all demonstrated fortitude and perseverance to complete o-n-e t-h-o-u-s-a-n-d !!!!!

The sharing and sense of community and family were ever present and most poignant at meditation and meals.

Nature filled the mornings with her own pearls of dew,

**KIDS CLASS: After the tests.....**

sunrise and green phosphorescence under foot at the beach. And don't forget the run away wave that greeted us at the ramp that evening.

The Bolinas Gasshukuu experience is like Geoff's tidal charts, there's a cadence - a rhythm - a crescendo of focused intensity - an ebb into relaxation and soon there is another phase.

RICHARD GARCIA

**ON THE ROAD**

*"Security does not exist in nature, it is an illusion, therefore life is a bold adventure or it is nothing at all."*

*Helen Keller*

*[quotation inscribed on a bench in the Berkeley marina]*

A long-standing goal of mine has to become a writer. So I took some classes. Then I set a goal. I would write everyday, sometimes a paragraph, often a sentence, sometimes only a word. Punctuation marks were not enough. I decided I would call my exercise a "novel." Even though I didn't know anything about the craft of shaping a story, breaking it into chapters characterization or for that matter the rules of grammar. However, I thought that if I worked at it there would be something I could take to a workshop where it could be turned into the rudiments of a draft of a novel.

At approximately the same time I joined the Aikido Institute. I had walked by the dojo and saw a class. It was beautiful and it looked like fun. I wanted to be able to do what those people were doing. I consistently went to classes. I worked at it, even if I didn't know what I was doing. I

thought if the thing was valid and I worked hard, something would come of it.

Everyday I wrote and almost everyday I came to class. I became an uchi deshi. I finished my "novel." After my uchi deshi period I decided to apply the same focus to my writing. I wrote for two hours everyday. I turned my "novel" into a screenplay and then took a class on writing screenplays. The first one was awful. However, in one regard it was a smashing success.

Vicious dogs stand at the gate of every endeavor to test your resolve. The first dog is called the fear of failure. It is often disguised as the dream of the perfection. This dream floats above us. It is beautiful. The thing you want to do is there, perfect, pristine, bursting with unlimited potential. And it's completely your own, you never ever have to share it nor will anyone criticize it. The only way to keep this dream safe is to not do anything. Action makes things real. And reality will always fall short. The thing will be misshapen, malformed. It will be weird.

That is the dilemma. To keep your dream pristine, a vision of perfection beyond criticism or to make it real and have something crappy that will have to be fixed with bubble gum and scotch tape.

My first screenplay sucked. I chose crap. But I'd given the first guard dog a healthy whack on the nose and sent it running. Over the past couple years I've written three more screenplays. They've improved. I've gotten some tentative nibbles of interest from the industry. It's time for me to get closer to the industry and see what I can make this.

*[The part of the article where I draw unsupported comparisons between Aikido and a completely unrelated activity.]*

Writing is immensely difficult. There are thousands of websites, hundreds of books and a multitude of seminars on dramatic structure, characterization, dialogue and finding the high concept idea. They promise to help, often they

make things worse. But there should be more books, seminars and websites. Dramatic structure, characterization, dialogue and finding the high concept idea are essential and gaining some control over them is an ongoing task. However that is not enough. What people really want is to hear your voice. They want to know another person.

Aikido is also immensely difficult. And there are thousands of websites, hundreds of books and a multitude of seminars that will show the fundamentals, the secrets, the philosophy, the history and the lost techniques. All of them are important. And none of them matter without the time on the mat to make them real. There isn't a perfect style, a perfect technique, or a golden age. There is only class at 6:30.

Martial arts masters say there is a progression in martial arts training. Training starts with rote memorization of the forms. At this point the trainee adds nothing other than their effort and frustration. As training days accumulate into years the trainee absorbs the physical lesson of each of the forms. And if they have been training with an open heart they will be able to express themselves through the form. They will have acquired a voice.

From this ancient wisdom should we be secure in the belief that putting in the time will pay off with desired result? No, we shouldn't. It won't. Helen Keller is right. You can never be secure in the belief that doing one thing will always get you the other thing, whether this thing is security, mastery or happiness. All of us are participants in an adventure, whether you've consented to it or not.

In any case, I'm moving to Los Angeles to continue the adventure I've started. Maybe the work I've done will pay off in the manner I've hoped. Maybe it won't. But that is the nature of an adventure. The outcome is uncertain and the odds are long, but to be in the hunt is the thing.

TED ANDREWS



## AI STUDENTS BLEND INTO UNIVERSITY DORM

On Wednesday, October 24th at 9 p.m.(DATE) Steve Kilmer, Cynthia Lorie, Richard Levitt and J.R. Richards were invited to give a 90-minute self defense demonstration to the residents of Griffiths Hall dorm on the Cal Berkeley campus. The focus of the demo was awareness rather than technique, although there was plenty of Aikido displayed and discussed.

About 30 people attended the demonstration, which our host Heidi Morey said was the biggest crowd ever to show up to an evening workshop.

The demo began with a brief explanation of self-defense thinking, grounded in Aikido. The rest of the demo included the topics: be aware; actions to take when confronted; response to assault; where and how Aikido fits in.

J.R. began the demo with a discussion of awareness. The main points were: know your environment; move quickly and deliberately; connect with people on the street, make confident eye contact; don't display wealth and don't carry around a lot of stuff.

He invited two students to come up for an exercise in awareness. After unsuccessfully (and jokingly) trying to get them to fight, JR asked them to turn away from each other then describe one another. Everyone seemed to enjoy the exercise, and came away realizing how much you can know about someone just through observation.

Richard then discussed some basic self protection ideas: monitor your surroundings; don't attempt heroics; your stuff and your money is not worth your life; try to de-escalate a threatening situation; keep your keys handy; carry a flashlight. He also suggested carrying a decoy wallet that can be tossed to a thief, giving one the chance to escape.

He relayed a story of being assaulted on the street and how, in spite of being insulted and angry, he de-escalated the situation and walked away.

Cynthia talked about what to do when one is inescapably confronted with physical assault. She reinforced how important it is to let go of your stuff, then went on to say if violence is unavoidable then fight back with everything ... scream and try to attract attention, kick, poke at an attacker's eyes or stomp on his (or her) knees. Then get away as quickly as possible.

The entire crowd went silent as she told the story of her friend who was assaulted. During the attack, it became clear that there was no escape or fight possible, only the will to survive. Her friend chose to acquiesce to the attacker's demands rather than risk further injury, or worse.

The last part of the demo was Steve's discussion and demonstration of Aikido. He talked about blending and how it applies both on and off the mat, and what how the ideas of awareness and readiness play a part. Training is key, he pointed out. The group went around the room gently demonstrating *nikkyo* and *sankyo* with the audience.

In a display of great technique and uncommon bravery, he shot a powerful *tsuki* at Cynthia, who threw him with *kote gaeshi*. Steve took a great high fall, landing onto the dense carpet that barely softened a concrete floor.

After, the dorm offered punch and cookies while many of the students hung around asking questions. The feedback from the dorm was very positive. They indicated the desire to participate more, enjoyed the examples and stories, and gave the demo very high marks.

RICHARD LEVITT

## IWAMA JOURNAL #2

## Training

So Jonathon Lane took me over and I met Saito Sensei in the first 5 minutes that I was in Iwama. "Oakrand," he said, with a smile on his face. I could tell our dojo held a special place in his heart and he started to open his presents. The first was a jacket with our logo on it. He unwrapped it and we made sure it would fit him. For the first 4-5 days I was there, he wore this jacket quite often. Next, he opened up the seeds I brought. There were about 8 packets, which he passed through quickly until he got to the hot peppers. He saw these and smiled and pointed at the packet. Saito Sensei likes hot things and I think he was guaranteed to plant these particular seeds.

At this point today, I find myself glancing through my journal that I wrote while in Iwama. It is one of many times that I have picked it up and one of the few times I have actually read it. Why? Please read on. It starts off with a list of the people I had met at the dojo thus far and now I will share an excerpt about my first keiko.

*First keiko: We got on the mat at 6 pm and cleaned the mat and vacuumed. Then we had time to stretch. I just tried to go through our normal exercises from the dojo. The Ki exercises I did got an odd reception. The only people I have seen do ki exercises in Iwama were fresh foreigners like myself. Many people hardly stretch.*

*The other deshi pulled out a space heater to warm up the dojo. I stretched and stretched. Initially, it was just the uchi deshi on the mat. Then out of the woodwork Anglo's and Europeans, male and female started to show up. They seemed to just appear out of the dark and into the light of the mat.*

*Then the first Japanese Sempai appeared. "Konbawa!" Each one that entered, we bowed and welcomed them on the mat. Man, did they look scary. We sat in a kneeling position for 15 minutes as they came in. My feet were falling asleep and my knees hurt from notches on the mat.*

*I heard chatter outside in Japanese and heard the Sensei start up the steps on our left and the head uchi deshi opened the shoji for him. We all bowed, yet I tried to look up slyly to catch a glimpse of Saito Sensei about 3 feet away, not Hitohiro Sensei. I still cannot get over the thrill of seeing him walking around. He came in and took off his jacket and he was wearing rubber soled booties, not unlike surfing shoes.*

*They clap slower in Iwama. Class started with Tai no Henko and Morote dori kokyu bo. Small circles.*

During that first class, I wapped my foot on the wall a couple of times rolling out of throws. When my Sempai really started throwing me, I almost went through the walls for they were very thin. The building itself was quite small and sort of decrepit. There was a value in having it be old and in such a state, I guess. They have a new dojo with the fanciest amenities, but they never use it. Even the toilets are just porcelain holes in the ground, except the "western toi-

let" at which you can actually sit. There were two of those.

The guy I trained with that first night was named Owada and someone told me he also teaches at his own dojo close by. Neither of us spoke each other's language, but I learned a lot from him about kaiten nage that night. Maintain kokyu energy in my hands and do not give the uke any slack. For the uchi-mawari, he taught me that after ducking under the arm, turn and wap the uke in the face with my arm. It's an old-school way of doing the technique that pushes uke back and keeps them off balance. Nice stuff. He also taught me how to fall out of kaiten nage in a tight spot, so I didn't go through the wall, I suspect.

Outside of practice, I spent a lot of time making mistakes on dojo rules and correcting myself and trying not to be a nuisance. As a project, I worked on all of the dojo bicycles and tried to fix them as best I could. From my notes, I sound lonely and often fall into talking about my girlfriend and calling her. Calling the dojo and talking to Kim Sensei was one of the most exciting things I did in Iwama. In retrospect, it was very lonely there, yet I remember clearly and fondly all of the people I met while I was there.

Probably my biggest lesson involved my bad weapons practice. Before going to Iwama, I spent a lot of time avoiding weapons practice for they were not as much fun to me. Maybe because they are harder, maybe not. It is really a shame, yet now I really see the extreme value of weapons practice. Regardless, my weapons were not great and it showed in Iwama. All I can say in retrospect is that I got a lot of da-me's there and learned a lot about weapons in Japan. One thing I learned is not to zig zag backwards as you receive attacks. Step straight back and adjust the forward foot if you have to.

Here are some other da-me's I got. I was stepping too deep on my morote dori koyu ho's. On ryo kata dori kokyu nage, don't look at your uke as you blend to the side. Keep looking straight forward so your shoulders extend the uke more. Many great lessons came to me through very good and patient Sempai's. For example, I want to mention and thank Tristan Dacunha, Mark Larson and a guy named Watanabe who both spent a good deal of time with me explaining and training. Don't pull during tai no henko. Before throwing in any case, get a solid hamni. Extend and use kokyu on all kokyu ho maneuvers. On soto kaiten nage come around with a full two step for good fundamentals, the other way is more advanced. When taking falls in Iwama, do not slap hard, it stirs up dust and makes Sensei irritated. Make the weapon work for you, do not duck under the weapon or mold your body to it. Do not tilt your head, ever.

Depending on the movement with the jo or bokken you want to tsuki or attack certain parts of the nage. Jodan Tsuki is upper torso (actually face, but we go to the torso for safety). Chudan Tsuki is the mid-section and Gedan

Tsuki and low. It was something they spent time on in Iwama that I never quite understood.

Some Iwama images. We did weapons outside in the snow several days. It is really strange to have steam coming out of your gi as you train. Saito Sensei tilling the soil in his garden and riding his bicycle around the campus. Musashi movies and the “Book of Five Rings.” After getting thrown, jumping up as soon as possible so someone did not land on me. Hitohiro Sensei calling my name from across the mat and asking me to change partners. Leaving class early at Saito Sensei’s request to go buy a television that was placed in front of the kamisama. Whacking the tanren to burn off the embarrassment of dame’s. Riding bicycles through the snow to the budokan for a Thursday night class. Chili dog chasing after rabbits. Certain Sempai’s waiting for Saito Sensei to look away so they could throw particularly hard. Getting clocked by a hard yokomen uchi. Seeing Hitohiro Sensei’s incredible solidity. Buying weapons in Tskuba and getting picked up by two girls for an hour car ride

There were many many more lessons and da-me’s in my tenure there, but those were a few. Hopefully, this has given you a flavor of my experience there. Overall, it was very rewarding and very humbling and difficult. Still when I think about my time there, it is with a certain sadness and pain. Maybe that’s why I rarely actually read my journal from that time, yet I think about it often.

JR RICHARDS

### KATSU!

[*Katsu! a cry of reality from the zen tradition....* ]

“Lin-chi was gruff and aggressive with students, pounding with his fists and deafening them with ear-shattering shouts. He was truly a terror, as Ikkyu described in his inscription brushed on a portrait of the the fearsome master:

**KATSU! KATSU! KATSU! KATSU!**

According to circumstance, he kills or enlivens!

An evil devil with piercing eyes

That see as clearly as the sun and moon.

—trans. John Stevens

Returning to the City from the Mountains

Crazy Cloud blown by who knows what wild wind.

In the mountains by day, in the city by night.

I shout KATSU and wield the staff when I see fit Even Rinzai (Lin-chi) and Tokusan would be no match for me.”

—Ikkyu, 15th c., trans. John Stevens

“Lin-chi screamed KATSU! at precisely the right time gave life death KATSU!

eyes everywhere blazing blazing eyes sun moon KATSU! KATSU!”

—Ikkyu, trans. Stephen Berg

JOSHUA HAYES



### AND NOW A WORD FROM...

[*Richard Levitt, Saill White, and Ted Andrews imagine an Aiki ad campaign filled with these possible tag lines:*]

Aikido. It hurts so good.

Aikido. Brought to you by Advil.

Aikido. It wouldn’t hurt if you did it right.

Aikido. Why God gave us two shoulders.

Aikido. The art of malicious compassion.

Aikido. The art of compassionate malice.

Aikido. Your mother always told you not to.

Aikido. When sanity is not enough.

Aikido. The martial way to fly.

Aikido. Soon you won’t even be able to say it.

Aikido. Not just eighty dollars a month.

Aikido. Often on t shirt, never on tv.

Aikido. They even do it in Texas.

Aikido. Sorry about that

Aikido. Said the chiropractor as she mailed her mortgage.

Aikido. That must have hurt.

YOU MUST TRAIN DILIGENTLY,  
SEEKING THE DIVINE, AND MAS-  
TER THOSE PRINCIPLES THAT  
CANNOT BE SEEN WITH HUMAN  
EYES. . .

MORIHEI UESHIBA