

THE KIAI

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THE AGATSU OF AIKIDO

by Stephen Kilmer

Masakatsu agatsu katsu hayabi; true victory is self-victory, a victory right now.

This traditional saying is one that O-Sensei often commented on and one that held great importance for him. He writes about it in the most literal terms; he speaks of it as the search for self-development instead of a search to defeat enemies when he says, "Techniques used for fighting, for determining victory or defeat are not true budo, because true budo is masakatsu agatsu katsu hayabi – it is invincible. It is invincible because it does not contend with anything. Victory means to utterly defeat the mind of contention that exists within." He also speaks of it in very esoteric terms where he equates each concept with what he called "the divine functioning of masakatsu agatsu katsu hayabi. Masakatsu means unflinching. Agatsu means unflagging. Katsu hayabi is the splendor of victory."

Many people who come to the dojo asking about aikido have come not because of the techniques and the physical side of aikido, but because of aikido's philosophy of harmony. The philosophy of aikido is what brought me to training and it is what has kept me training. This philosophy is placed center stage by O-Sensei in the name he gave to his martial way, aikido. Ai, harmony, is central to what we do, not just physically, but in the philosophy that should drive our techniques.

The Founder expressed this philosophy in his 1938 book, Budo, saying, "Our enlightened ancestors developed true budo based on humanity, love, and sincerity; its heart consists of sincere bravery, sincere wisdom, sincere love, and sincere empathy."

The person that we should most be in harmony with is ourselves. Indeed, without being in harmony with ourselves, how is it possible to be in harmony with others? For me, being able to be in harmony with someone else is the goal of agatsu. Self-victory results in harmony with oneself, and that leads to harmony with others. A doka, a poem about the Way, by O-Sensei gives a hint at what agatsu entails:

"Ei!"

*Cut down the enemy
lurking inside oneself
and guide all things with
shouts of "Yaa!" and "Iei!"*



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With its explosive sounds of kiai and its images of cutting down an enemy with a sword, this doka sounds more martial than one might expect from an art with a philosophy of harmony. It does, however, express the seriousness with

which we should seek to attain agatsu. The enemy lurking inside is anything that is in contention with the humanity, love and sincere empathy O-Sensei sees as lying at the heart of true budo. Nothing should stand in the way of our efforts to achieve agatsu, and anything that does should be cut down.

In working on one's agatsu, it is important to train as often as one can, daily, if possible. But no matter how often one can train, training should be done with full attention. O-Sensei, in his precautions regarding training, listed following the instructor's directions and not being distracted by contests of strength as important. In the second doshu's book, The Spirit of Aikido, O-Sensei is quoted [cont. p.3]

AIKIDO INSTITUTE
5036 Telegraph Avenue at 51st
Oakland, California 94609

IN THE NEWS

THE KIDS' GASSHUKU



Friday, June 18th the kids' class had their annual Gasshuku. It's also known as The Sleep Over. The fun part is that the kids get to join the adults for the 6:30 aikido class. It's a good reminder for us adults that kids are immortal, have everlasting energy, and take their flexibility completely for granted. I have never been bombarded by so much energy in my life.

The Sleep Over has become a favorite tradition at the dojo. The adults look forward to it each year. It's great to see

these kids growing up and eventually making the transition to the adult class. The best students in the adult class all came from the kids class. And that is truly amazing to watch. Read Lars-Eric's article on the event in this issue, page 13.



[continued from page 1] as saying, “In training the first task is to continually discipline the spirit, sharpen the power of nen (concentration), and unify the body and mind.” Thus, focused and consistent training aids the process of agatsu.

For training, one should seek an environment of support that comes not only from one’s sensei, but from everyone who trains at the dojo. I have been fortunate in this regard and with few exceptions, everyone I have encountered in my training has been willing to share their knowledge of aikido and has done so in a spirit of love, harmony and empathy. To put it another way, everyone I’ve met is on the same path and wants everyone to reach the same goal.

The Founder said, “All living beings originate and are manifested by love. Aikido is the purest expression of that love.” Like love, self-victory isn’t selfish. Sharing my knowledge has always been something I’ve done without hesitation, whether it has been as a tutor at college or at an adult literacy program, or as an aikido instructor. It is in all these ways that I feel that I have tried, even before encountering aikido, to make a contribution to O-Sensei’s vision: “The entire world is like a single family under one roof, and there is not one outsider. Let us create a prosperous and happy heaven on earth as quickly as we can.”

We often speak of using aikido outside of the dojo and the rarity with which we use the physical side, the techniques, of aikido. More often we speak of using the philosophical side of aikido, of harmonizing with someone, usually someone who is confronting us. These situations, though, are rare and thinking about harmony only in these situations blinds us to the encounters with others we have the rest of the time.

All aikidoists can share aikido’s philosophy of peace – an inner peace that is attained through agatsu – by showing an outer peace expressed through treating others not as outsiders but as one’s family, and this can be done whether one leads a class, trains with a new student, or smiles at the clerk at the checkout stand.



1

*Tsukis in rondori
Met with kote gaeshi
Can't think of more moves*

2

*Watching long kyu tests
Feelings of awe mixed with pain
Leg cramp from seiza*

3

*Dojo dilemma
Kim's ice cream or Eddie's flan?
Why not have them both?*

by Ray Wan

AIKIDO OFF THE MAT

By Dave Soss

We work hard on the mat to perfect our technique: That, of course, takes years. But how do we use it off the mat?

Most aikido practitioners will not come across a situation outside of the dojo where an ikkyo or koshi nage resolve a problem. In fact, most of us need not employ an aikido technique in self-defense. We learn to use our awareness, confidence and spirit to avoid martial conflict, to *not* employ our mat training. People speak of the value of aikido study for conflict resolution. How can that work?

On a basic level, consider how you feel after working out on the mat, the sense of calm, the confidence that workout provides. Now, consider working with someone that makes some hostile (verbal) jab (we all get that). Albeit verbal, the uke offers a type of attack. We don't train directly on the mat how to nage a verbal attack off it, yet those are the attacks we more often confront in daily life. Your response or technique may occur as quickly and efficiently as the attack.

You may simply look directly back and say nothing in a way that garners the proper connection. We learn to remain silent and look while on the mat. Or, you may say something that approximates a technique—something deliberate, forceful and again with an appropriate look. You may think about it afterwards and appreciate the spirit of the lessons that infiltrated you through hours of training, in relative silence, while on the mat.

Do you keep track of your off-the-mat successes? They may be a result of your hard work on the mat. Success off the mat builds success on the mat, and vice versa. The successes to track are those that stand out, that would not happen without your aikido study. Here are two off the mat examples, both true:

Person In Need

In a residential area, an aikido student with a daughter walks out of a home. They head just across the street to their car. The daughter goes around the back of the car to the passenger side to get in. Just then, a middle aged man appears, running up the block along the sidewalk, calling out to the parent. He stops near the car and daughter, but faces the parent.

The man, thin, winded, in apparent emotional distress, looks around 55, thin, 5' 8", dressed in something like a corduroy outfit from the 70's.

He implores: "Can you give me a ride to the end of the block?" The parent turns, looks down to the end of the block. It is 50 yards away.

He looks back at the man, says nothing and listens. The daughter looks on uncomfortably.

There is a brief silence.

The man more exhorts, "There are some men that are after me."

The parent looks back down the other direction where the man came from and sees no men coming. He again turns and looks with concern at the man.

Silence.

The distressed man comes closer and implores, "They want to kill me!"

This was an off-the-mat aikido experience; with uke, nage, energy transfer, technique, compassion and positive outcome.

The daughter is now distressed, but the man appears to just want help from the parent. This is psychological, not martial—a request for relief.

With those words, "They want to kill me!" the parent receives true nage engagement. A type of attack has been sent directly at him. There is now a compelling basis to respond.

The parent responds precisely:

"Here's what you do. Run to the end of this block. Turn right. Run down two blocks. You will see a fire station. Go into it. You will be safe there. You can have a firefighter call the police, if you want."

"We will stay here and watch out (for the men)." The parent looks at him with a look that says, "Go, now." The distressed man runs off as directed.

The parent and daughter wait a bit and discuss the situation. No one comes running up after the man.

They then drive by the fire station (compassion--ensuring the safety of the nage).

There he is, outside of the fire station, trying to catch his breath. (He did not go in, perhaps the events would unfold if he did).

Based on the response, this was an off the mat aikido experience, with uke, nage, energy transfer, technique, compassion and positive outcome. The true attack—"They want to kill me"—was accepted, though there were no apparent attackers. Silence, listening and observing were key. The only hindsight issue was the daughter, who was uncomfortable, yet not in danger.

How did the parent know this to be aikido? Afterwards, the parent mulled again and again: "The aikido study made it possible for me to do this:

The Holdup

In truth, this story was told to me by a man with a black belt in karate. It is worth hearing, nonetheless, because of what he did, and how he described the incident.

Around 1994, I interviewed a middle aged client that sought career change help. I noticed on his intake information that his personal hobby/passion was karate.

Back then, I knew little of martial arts other than what was shown on TV. I was captivated by his stated interest and asked to know more.

The conversation went something like this (he is called G):

D: I notice you study karate. What level are you?

G: I'm a black belt.

D: Really!

He can tell I wanted to know more.

G is matter of fact and humble, not talking about his own capabilities, which makes his story more credible. He tells me first about his instructor. He tells me how his instructor can pin someone holding the tip of a person's finger in a certain way. *Note: There is archival film footage shows O-Sensei doing that.*

D: I then ask the question: "Have you ever had to use it?"

Without thinking twice, G, in a matter of fact fashion, tells this story:

G: I parked my car in a parking lot in a downtown area. I was sitting in it, resting, my eyes closed. Suddenly, I hear tapping on the window. I turn my head and look up out the side window. There is a man there with a handgun. He tells me to give him my wallet.

G looks at me.

D: *I'm captivated, and have to know what happened.* What did you do?

G: I went like this: *G, sitting straight up, and looking only forward, gently and firmly falls forward, raising his arms folded before his face, back of hands covering his eyes.*

Looking at his destination, he arcs down, hands onto his car horn, face on the back of his hands and stays there for a while. The car horn becomes a long, loud technique.

He pulls his hands and face up from my desk, sits up and looks at me and says, "When I looked up, the man was gone."

What is marvelous about this story to me is this:

1– He knew that any martial response was out of the question. He was in the car. The robber was outside, with a gun.

2– The way he moved: He fell forward without creating tension or reaction in the nage. He froze the assailant. That takes years to learn, if ever, and it isn't something one practices in a car. Imagine the assailant not knowing what was happening while G fell forward, and then panicking when the horn went off.

3– G did not look at the would-be attacker while falling on his horn. This circumvented a potentially angry response.

4– G instinctively thought of hitting his horn that way at that moment. *Note: This was his way. Most people would and should hand over their wallet.*

This is my favorite off the mat karate/aikido story. I will always remember watching G demonstrate his gentle fall (lean) forward onto my desk.

There are many off the mat stories of aikido training put to good use. You probably have some now or will, in time. It is worthwhile to consider and share them.



THE UCHI-DESHI DIARIES

by Vu Ma

MORE RICE

We were working in pairs when Kim sensei ordered me aside. He gestured at me to grab at him with both hands.

“You got it?” he asked. I gripped at his arm and dropped my weight and nodded. “Are you sure?” he asked again.

I took a breath and again dropped my center “I got you this time!” I thought. My confidence was drunk from all the suburi and pull-ups I had been doing everyday. “Rrrrrrr!”

Kim Sensei lifted his arm effortlessly and I was immediately carried off my balance. He began scratching his moustache with me struggling to hang on. He shook me off and offered me to grab his arm again. I grabbed it this time with more determination.

“You got it?” Sensei asked once more. I pulled down on his arm with all my weight and nodded. “Are you sure?” he asked again. “Rrrrrrr!”

Sensei raised his arm effortlessly and pulled me off my feet. He began to scratch his moustache like he did before. The more I struggled to control his arm the more ridiculous I looked as he casually scratched an imaginary itch. My effort lasted until I was gassed. I let go of his arm. “More rice,” Sensei advised as he walked away.



FLYING FIRST CLASS

As an uchi-deshi you have to think of yourself as always being on-call.

“Vu!” commanded Sensei. I stood up and advanced awkwardly from the second line.

Shit.

Damian was standing at the other end of the mat. It was his big test and he was sweating profusely. He had already battled his way through two ukes and I could hear one of them sucking air just a few feet away from me.

“Buckle up,” I told myself. This wasn’t just anyone. I was face-to-face with an animal and the toughest vegan I know.

Sensei ordered Damian to perform a hip throw.

Shit.

It was time to go to work. There was no time to pack. Flight time was scheduled to depart in about 2 seconds. There was no time for check-ins or carryons. I advanced and grabbed him.

Moments later he sent me flying first class.

July - August, 2010



IN THE NEWS

A SEMINAR AT DAVIS

JUNE 26TH - Kim Sensei was invited to give a seminar at the Aikido Institute of Davis. Davis is the sister dojo of Oakland. It's run by Hoa Sensei. Hoa and Kim Senseis are very good friends, have known each other for a very long time, and took turns being dojo cho in Oakland. So, the Davis dojo is like an extension. Almost like an extra bedroom 1 1/2 hours away.

It was an important day at the Davis Dojo. They had 3 students taking Shodan tests and a party afterwards. Hot, hot, hot was the order of the day. We arrived at 9:00 AM and it was already hot. Kim Sensei gave an awesome seminar and Vu did a wonderful job as his uke.

The three Shodan tests were great. Each candidate was right on the mark, confident, and centered. Needless to say, they all passed. And then there were plenty of Kanpais to celebrate. Way to go Davis!



LESSONS LEARNED AND UNLEARNED OR “WHAT’S THE POINT?”

Deborah Maizels

We think that the point is to pass the test or to overcome the problem, but the truth is that things don't really get solved. They come together and they fall apart."

- Pema Chödrön

I have studied aikido for over 30 years. When I began, I thought the point was to learn how to do some somersaults, some forward rolls, some backward rolls, all kinds of rolls... so that I could use that ability when I performed in the theatre. I started my studies in Oakland where the classes were very aerobic, with lots of rolling. I did learn to roll, so that ukemi problem was overcome.

I went to study theater in Paris and continued my aikido classes there. I lived in a maid's room located at the top of seven flights of stairs. Bathroom down the hall. There was no place to bathe. However, the dojo in Paris had a shower. My focus was on my theatre studies, but I would train at the dojo so that I could use the shower there. The point of training was to shower after. That bathing problem was solved.

I returned to Oakland after completing my courses in Paris. I started practicing again at the Aikido Institute, but there was now a new teacher. The dojo had become an Iwama-style dojo. I was surprised by how real and strong the techniques now felt to me. And the falls were much harder. My ukemi weren't really up to it. I struggled with falling. That ukemi problem was alive again.

I vividly remember training with a senior student. She threw me and I fell hard. I tried to throw her without much success. I think I said something like “why can't I throw you?” and she said “You're not strong enough.”... I immediately felt myself take on another problem to overcome: Become strong. Become stronger than her.

Over several years, I trained, she trained. Then she stopped training. I continued. I got stronger. Probably stronger than her, although she wasn't around for me to really know. But there were a lot of other people at the dojo senior to me and now the problem was to become stronger than them.

At the dojo, we'd often be regaled with stories about O-Sensei. How he had wanted to become strong because he had witnessed his father beaten by thugs. How he had beaten his head against a cement pillar so that it would become thick and strong. (So thick and strong that when an army officer later hit him on the head, the officer hurt his own hand.) Eventually O-Sensei had come to realize that the point wasn't to become strong. True power was not the same as physical strength.

**I look forward,
but can't see
very far ahead.
The point...
the objective?
It keeps
disappearing and
reappearing.**



Even though I loved the O-Sensei stories, at that time in my training the point for me was to become strong. I was still taking hard falls because my ukemi weren't up to the throws of some of the senior students. One uchi deshi threw me in a shihonage in such a way that I thought my arm would break. I thought: I want to learn how to throw him in shihonage so that he also fears for his arm. I want him to know that I am powerful, too. I decided I'd study in Iwama. I needed to learn how to solve that shihonage problem.

In Iwama I learned a lot. I was thrown hard. There were many students stronger than I was. I often feared for my arm in shihonage. But at this point in my studies, I was now seeing and feeling the power of Aikido. I was differentiating it from strength. I was beginning to understand the difference between the two.

As I was learning to focus on my form, I saw that correct form gave me more power. The problem was to maintain form while being attacked. I wish I could say that I then made the point of my training to focus on form. But the problem I was still trying to solve for myself was how to become strong.

I trained for a year in Iwama and got stronger. That strong problem seemed on the verge of being solved, when I fell ill. I was hospitalized. I stopped training. I had become strong. But then, I had gotten sick. I was weak. The calluses on my hands from training with weapons, those calluses that had painfully emerged and then become thick from training, those calluses melted and disappeared as I lay in my hospital bed. I was too weak to carry my bags when I returned home. Too weak to train. While the problem I went to Iwama to overcome was how to be strong, when I returned to Oakland and was actually training again, I found to my surprise that my ukemi had improved. That ukemi problem didn't seem to be a problem anymore.

As I began training again, the point of training now was just to find my groove. To be what I once had been. However, there followed a series of misfortunes having to do with my health, one of which made it impossible for me to do any ukemi at all. Now that ukemi problem was alive again and so huge that I put that power problem completely on hold.

And so it continues. One problem seems solved until something happens to revive it. If I look at aikido as a way to solve that ukemi problem or that strong problem, I am frustrated.

It goes like this: I learn ukemi only to discover I didn't really learn proper ukemi. And then I learn proper ukemi but, before I can master that, due to illness I cannot do any ukemi. So what was the point of learning ukemi?

I want to be strong. I do all I can to be strong, but through no fault of my own, I grow old. My body can't do what it once could. So what was the point of trying to be strong? Things come together and they fall apart... so what's the point? I've been on the path of aikido for many years. Several times I've thought I have reached my destination only to find that the path continued on for me. I look back and marvel at the ups and downs. I look forward, but can't see very far ahead. The point... the objective? It keeps disappearing and reappearing.

I've learned that things will come together and then... they will fall apart. All I can do is continue.



COMMUNITY

by Zoe Laventhol

Aikido is a set of techniques, a practice, a philosophy, a way of life. But Aikido is also a community. Your dojo is made up of your family, your friends, the people who you might not even know very well off the mat but who have seen you on good days and bad days, have seen you sweat and bleed and eat and drink and train and grow. And that counts for something.



In the buildup to the kyu tests, we were all training harder than ever. People who weren't up for testing were helping those who were, people who were testing were helping each other get ready, people who weren't testing at all were inspired to train harder anyway. Everyone kept pumping each other up until the energy in the dojo was palpable. It bounced off the walls. It radiated from the mat. It made the very air vibrate with anticipation. Heck, it even set off the fire alarm. Twice.

They say that the real test is the training leading up to test day. In that sense the whole dojo was tested and, I believe, passed with flying colors.

"So how did you feel up there?" I asked Cathy after her test. She laughed, "I remember at one point I looked up and saw everybody staring at me," she said, "And I just thought 'Gosh, my whole school's out there watching me. I'd better give them everything I've got!'"



THE NIDAN ESSAY

By Eddie Guardarramas

Wow! A Nidan. I should know it all by now, shouldn't I? Wrong!

I remember Steve Sensei coming up to me before class one day and showing me a piece of paper with a lot of numbers on it. Not having my glasses on at the time I congratulated him on his neatness in having all those numbers on such straight lines.

"Put on your glasses. These are your number of hours. You're up for Nidan," he said.

Oh my God. It took me a few seconds to react. All the blood was drawn from my face and I went numb. The thought had never occurred to me. I was going to be a shodan forever. "Yes, Sensei. I'll begin training immediately," I said.

Right then and there I started talking to all the members of the dojo. I was going to need everybody's help. I was going to be the dojo project. The date was set for November 13th and the godfather of the Sensei people, Bill Witt Shihan, was going to be there. Everyone chipped in to help me prepare. From the lowest Kyu ranks, to the Shodan ranks, through the Sensei, all the way up to Kim Sensei himself.

How did the test go? Funny you should ask. Well, it was somewhere in between "OMG! What a wonderful test. Congratulations, you're the next Doshu!!" and "OMG! What a horrible test. You're a disgrace to humanity. Leave this dojo forever."

So, as a Nidan, what do I think of Aikido? Why come to class?

Aikido means many different things to everyone. That's the beauty of it. Yes, it is a way of self-defense. Yes, it is beauty of movement. Yes, it is learning patience. Yes, it is perfecting your technique. Yes, it is an art form. Yes, it is strength. Yes, it is suppleness. Yes, it is receiving. Yes, it is giving.

But Aikido is even more than that. Why do I come to class day after day? Can't I practice this stuff at home by myself? So why do I come to class?

I come to class because of the people. The wonderful student

body. I come to class because the senseis inspire me not only to become a better aikidoist but to become a better person. I come to class because it's fun to share my new found discoveries with the others. I come to class because others can share their new discoveries with me. I come to class because it's a place where older generation meets younger generation, stiff meets supple, tall meets short, chubby meets thin, and yet we all enjoy training with one another (and where else could I learn that *donkey* means "bad" and *dope* means "good?").

I come to class to train with my role models. I come to class because it reminds me that even though I'm getting older, I can still play with the others. And I come to class because the others still want me to play.

So... you put all these things together and it spells A-I-K-I-D-O.



MY LIFE IN AIKIDO: YEAR 1

By Frank Somerville

I must have driven by the Aikido Institute a million times over the years, always wondering, what the heck are they doing in there? And what's with those black skirts that the guys are wearing?

Then I just happened to be watching a TV show, talking about Steven Seagal and how he was a black belt in Aikido, and because I was always fascinated with the moves he used in his movies, I came in the next day and signed up.

When I first started I felt so damn uncoordinated; but I wanted my two daughters to learn by my example; how when you try something new, you stick with it and practice until you get it right.

I even told my six year old, "Daddy is so bad they gave him a special corner," so when she first came in to see the dojo, the first thing she asked me was, "hey daddy, where's your special corner?"

Right off the bat, I was stunned by how nice everyone is; how all the teachers are volunteers, and how passionate everyone is.

And then I learned about how everyone is expected to pitch in; and I remember thinking here I am, at the top of my profession as a TV anchor, getting paid quite well, and I'm sweeping the mats and washing the windows, and not only that, but according to Scott, I'm doing both all wrong!

But at the same time, the fact that Scott was worrying about me damaging the brooms by sweeping too hard, and about me wasting paper, because I crumpled it up as opposed to folding it to wash the windows, told me everything I needed to know about the Aikido Institute. The people who are there care that they are good people; and that they're the kind of people I want to be around.

I find that when I take class, I just forget about everything else that is going on because I'm totally focused. Usually I'm always checking my watch; especially at plays. GOD I HATE PLAYS. I just can't sit still; and I do things like count the lights in the lighting grid, or the number of aisles, and try to figure out how many people are in the theatre; just trying to

kill time until the play is over...

But in aikido class, I actually LOSE track of time. And I NEVER lose track of time. But that just tells me I have found a second home; and one that I will be visiting for a long time to come.

The fact is, the more I learn, the more I want to learn. There are just two problems: first, my kids keep calling me "sired," a combination of "sore" and "tired," but I tell them, "let Dave do nikkyo on you, and let Damian or Zoe do pretty much any-

Now she wants to do ikkyo on her sister, who is constantly saying, "Callie, i don't want you to do ikkyo on me!"



thing on you, and you'll understand why I'm so freaking sore all the time." The second problem is those damn kyu tests. I keep telling myself they are just demonstrations, but it doesn't help. Seeing that black belt row just sitting there staring at me makes my heart beat way faster than it should.

You would think someone who is on tv, talking to thousands and thousands of people every night would be able to handle the tests, but it just doesn't seem to be working out that way. I keep reminding myself to calm down; and it's getting better, but even so after all three of my tests, I was told in that little meeting room afterward that I should work on my cardio.

Let me tell you, my cardio ISN'T the problem. I have very good cardio; it's that black belt row! That's the problem!

When I know I'm testing, it just consumes me. I'm practicing moves in the shower. While I'm walking to my car in the parking lot at Channel 2; at my desk in the newsroom; heck I'm even picturing the moves in my mind during newscasts; and one time I was off camera, thinking about backward rolls, when they came back to me, I was totally caught off guard for a moment. Wondering why was I seeing myself on the monitor, then I realized, I'M SEEING MYSELF ON TV BECAUSE I'VE GOT A STORY TO READ. But I had totally missed the floor director giving me the stand by because I was so deep in thought about the upcoming test.

My wife is also tired of me practicing on her, and always can't wait until the tests are over. But at the same time, my wife and especially my kids, are very proud of seeing their daddy out there. It's our new tradition that they come to all my tests. And there's nothing more precious than finishing the test, looking back at my two kids and seeing them both give me the thumbs up.

My youngest, Callie, is also fascinated with Vu. I don't quite get it, but every time she comes in, the first thing she says is.. "hey daddy where's Vu Ma?" And during my fourth kyu test, when she found out I was going to be out there with Vu, she looked at my wife, and in her very excited way said, "hey daddy's testing with Vu Ma! This is gonna be good!"

I'm hoping that Callie, the six year old, will get involved with aikido at some point. My oldest daughter Sydney, who's 11, has ZERO interest, but Callie is always asking me questions. I've actually taught her a little ikkyo, and now she wants to do it on her 11 year old sister Sydney, who is constantly saying, "CALLIE, I DON'T WANT YOU TO DO IKKYO ON ME!"

To say that Aikido has changed my life would be a true statement. I am in it for the long haul. And when I finally get my black belt, I am going to be one very proud father.

My new year's resolution, a year ago when I first started, was to go three times a week for a year; and I made up a sheet numbered from 1-156; and every day that I train, I can't wait to come home and cross off one of the numbers. And I'm happy to report, that as of mid December, I've already beaten that goal... and am up to 174 training days.

Next year my goal is 180 days!

So one year down, many more to go; and the best thing of all is that I'm enjoying the process. And you can't beat that!

IN THE NEWS

JULY KYU TESTS

Congratulations to the students who passed their Kyu tests in July!



Vanyel - 6th kyu



Nadia - 6th kyu



Esther - 4th kyu



Bo - 4th kyu



Scott - 2nd kyu



Damian - 1st kyu

KID'S KANGEIKO SLEEP OVER

By Lars-Eric Holm

I am sleeping on the mat, and the mat does not feel as soft as my bed. Earlier this evening, the firmness was fine, but now my shoulder and hip are a bit numb, and my left arm feels slightly asleep. Why am I doing this? Why do I do this every year? I always remember this discomfort every year, and yet I always seem to forget the reality of it until the following year.

It's the "we are going to sleep" portion of the sleepover. As anyone who has ever been around children knows, there is usually very little actual sleep at a sleepover. Besides the discomfort, I frequently have to pop up to 'shush' one or more of the kids, or to ensure folks are not leaving the mat for anything other than water or a bathroom break.

We do this every year, and it is usually the last class of the session. It starts with the normal Friday class from 5:00 to 6:00, although dropping off of sleeping bags, pajamas, and toothbrushes is a bit different. We also have the parents sign in their offspring and leave a contact number for the next 19 hours.

Afterwards, the kids join the Friday evening 6:00 to 7:30 adults



class. This is a novelty for both the children and the adults. The kids get to practice for longer than an hour, with people who are sometimes taller and generally a bit more mature. The adults get to practice with people who are sometimes shorter and usually far more exuberant. The photos you see here were taken before this joint class.

After this, the kids sweep the adults off the mat. Literally. Well, the rule is that the kids are supposed to sweep this night, but it's sometimes a good way to let everyone know that other activities are coming.

We attack a vicious pinata with bokken, forcing it to yield its trove of candy, we dine on pizza, and we watch a movie. Shortly before or around midnight, it's time to at least pretend to sleep. And time for me to realize that I'm a bit older and that the effects of sleeping on the ground are more noticeable.

The following morning, we wake the kids up early. This is our revenge — ahem — way to get everyone up bright and early for breakfast. After breakfast, we do a major cleaning of the dojo, doing everything on all of the task lists, from windows to bath-

rooms to kitchen to both the front and back mats. This year, our resident uchi-deshi wore the white gloves, and determined when tasks were completed. Amazingly enough (especially to any parents reading this), the kids actually seem to enjoy this. Even the ones that publicly grumble.

Then, with the aid of some parents, we transport ourselves to Lake Temescal, in time to leave the dojo empty but sparkling for the Saturday morning class. We have a class of our own outdoors at the park at Lake Temescal, with jos. This usually has great (albeit tired) energy, especially since we have lots of room to swing the jos around.

And finally, we have a family potluck, say our farewells, and promise to have an excellent summer, and to reconvene next September. Everything feels bright and sunny and happy — and then I remember why we do this every year. Certainly there are aches, but the result is warm feelings, happily weary muscles. It's completely and totally worth it.



TWIST ENDING!



Special kudos goes to Uchi Deshi Vu Ma who took his 3rd kyu test and two days later took his 2nd kyu test. One for the record books. Just awesome!

IN THE NEWS

DECEMBER KYU TESTS

Congratulations to the students who passed their Kyu tests in December!



[Left to Right] Nadia - 5th, Vanyel - 6th, Cathy - 6th, Zoe - 1st, Mark - 5th, Vu - 3rd



Frank - 4th, Ray - 3rd, Vu - 2nd, Meredith - 6th, Steve - 6th, Bo - 3rd, Kirsten - 6th

IT AIN'T OVER 'TIL YOU'RE OVER AND MAYBE NOT EVEN THEN

By Kathy Montgomery

In doing a little background reading for this essay, I submit to you the following quotations from the introduction to John Stevens' book, *Aikido: The Way of Harmony*, page 18: "The Founder stated that he did not enter the realm of pure Aikido until he was near eighty." "In stark contrast to competitive sports where most forty-year-olds are 'washed up,' one can only get better with age in Aikido." This gives great hope to persistent, aging aikidoka.

I have been giving some thought to how one advances in Aikido while losing physical strength as occurs with aging. Clearly a minimum of strength and endurance is necessary, but Aikido is not a contest of physical strength. The essence of Aikido is purity of technique, including breath and energy. Purity of technique is developed by refining form to remove all extraneous motion; it is connecting to sources of power other than physical strength, such as hips and breath; it is focusing form and power and connecting with your partner. Advancing in Aikido requires a solid understanding of technique; the techniques incorporate the basics of what we do every time we train. As rudimentary as the basics may seem, advancement is not possible without them. Below is my review of some of the basics.

HANMI— Take to heart sensei's reminder to be in hanmi. After the new aikidoist's initial feeling that being in hanmi feels like walking a tightrope, that feeling disappears and is replaced by a feeling of stability and readiness.

If one is in hanmi and facing an opposing force, such as when we do tai no henko and sensei pushes against our shoulders, the force exerted is transmitted through the receiver's body and back foot into the mat. With practice one can learn to receive the force, yet remain in a relaxed posture, unaffected by the force. That being the case what need is there for great strength?

Hanmi is hanmi; one is either in hanmi or not. But there are

varying degrees in how far one is out of hanmi and the closer one is to being in hanmi, the more directed one's energy will be in meeting an attacker.

We start our techniques from hanmi, whether we are attacking or receiving an attack. That being the case, one is not in the optimal position to receive or attack until one is standing in hanmi. S/he who is in hanmi first is the first ready to attack or receive the attack. Good to know if you are doing a randori, weapons work, or Sensei is headed your way.



Besides physical connection there is energetic connection. When nage is not initiating the technique, nage should move immediately with uke.

FOOTWORK— Clean footwork results in efficient movement, eliminating unnecessary steps, and resulting in decreased time to initiate a movement or respond to an attack. As a bonus, fewer steps mean less energy is expended, thus more energy is conserved. When one first starts training there are too many other things to focus on, but as one advances, one should pay attention to this

important detail.

If you are advancing by taking a step forward or retreating by taking a step back, initiate the step by shifting your weight in the direction you are moving, then take the step. For instance, if your right foot is forward and you are going to advance by taking a step with your left foot, don't shift or move your right foot, but shift your weight onto your right foot and step with your left foot. Your right foot should stay in place until you have taken the step with your left foot, at that point the right foot can be adjusted to hanmi.

Watch the feet of other aikidoka and be attentive to the movement of your own feet. Acquiring clean footwork takes endless practice and constant vigilance, but it pays off in speed.

CONNECTING WITH UKE— Maintaining connection with one's partner promotes efficiency, saving wasted effort. As one example, in doing morote dori kokyu ho, being connected at the hip when starting to throw maximizes the nage's influence

over uke. Beginning from a point of connection eliminates the wasted time and lessened power of nage's throw if nage's move must first close the distance between nage and uke to become connected. Beginning from a point of connection also results in less collision between nage and uke.

Besides physical connection there is energetic connection. When nage is not initiating the technique, nage should begin to move immediately with uke. When uke begins a shomen, nage should raise his/her hands simultaneously. When uke launches a yokomen strike for the ikkyo technique, nage's entering blend should be instantaneous to connect with uke's center and move out to the attacking arm connecting with it tangentially to stop the strike before it gains force. If one is really good at connecting, it will be difficult to tell who initiated the strike. In working to acquire this skill, I find that one of the biggest challenges is to be ready to respond and respond instantly without anticipating uke's attack.

OTHER BASICS— There is not time or space enough in this essay to cover many of the other basics, such as use of hips, the importance of flexibility, keeping one's hands in front of center, extension, ma'ai, timing, coordination of movements, etc., so I will leave this part of the essay and write briefly about another aspect of training.

THE BLESSINGS OF DIVERSITY— Aikidoists or aikidoka come in all sizes, body types, energetic presentation, ages, etc., as well as having their own sets of physical challenges. This diversity is a treasure trove for a martial artist. Can you even imagine working with person after person who presented all the same characteristics? The techniques one would develop would work on that single type of individual, but that would not be representative of the world around us.

What do we learn from working with someone shorter or taller than ourselves, older or younger, more or less flexible, more or less sturdy or fragile, injured or not? We learn what makes a technique work and learn to adjust to our partner. We learn to read our partner's energy and accommodate their universe of physical characteristics. This ability makes training safe and is truly in Aikido's spirit of creating harmony.

So, get out there, have fun, enjoy the diversity presented by all the members of the dojo, old and young, hale and hardy or not so hardy, short and tall and everything in between. Onegai shimasu.



IN THE NEWS

HAPPY BIRTHDAY STEVE SENSEI



We were all so pumped up from the Kyu Tests that the whole dojo gang decided to go out to the local sushi restaurant and celebrate big time.



Oh, and by the way, it was the perfect setting to give Dojo Cho Steve Sensei his surprise birthday party.

Happy Birthday Sensei! Well done everyone!



IN THE NEWS

HAPPY BIRTHDAY KIM SENSEI— We took the opportunity after Scott Robert’s special 2nd Kyu test to celebrate Kim Sensei’s birthday. Two fun photos taken by Eddie and a great imagination from Scott M., created a wonderful cake.



At this time we all held our cups high with a kanpai to our fellow aikidoist and friend Scott Roberts. Scott passed his BAR exams and is moving to San Bernadino, where he will be practicing law. Scott was one of the most charismatic, energetic, and fun people



Dave DeLong Sensei sent Kim a specially crafted bokken made of rare wood just for the occasion. It was drop dead gorgeous and the treat was seeing Kim Sensei opening the package, unwrapping the bokken, and using it for the first time. It was awesome.



on the mat. He is irreplaceable and will be greatly missed. That’s why we will hound him forever, until he leaves that freakin’ little town, moves back to Oakland and gets his shodan here. Hurry back dude!

IN THE NEWS

THE NEW NIDAN



CONGRATULATIONS GO TO EDDIE Guardarramas who passed his Nidan test on November 13th. Eddie is the first of the new generation of AI students to take the test. No doubt the others will follow in the next few months. Bill Witt Shihan taught the seminar. The mat was crowded and there was a delightful potluck afterwards. Eddie said, "I was the dojo project. Everyone trained me for this test and my uke's, Jacob and Diana, made me look good."

Way to go Eddie!



THE VISITOR

DAVE SEMPAL LED SATURDAY morning class on November 27th. There was a man and woman sitting on the benches. They would come in and leave, and then come in and leave. Finally at the end of class, Richard introduces him as Paul Rogers, ex uchi deshi of the Aikido Institute!

Paul was so excited; if he did not get on the mat he would explode. So after class he and Dave and Richard threw one another. Paul did his first high fall in 14 years. He remembers everything and was just a bit rusty. He was like a little kid soaking up all this energy from the dojo. It was quite remarkable.



PRACTICING AIKIDO

By Terry Slaman

My aikido practice began in 1975 at the age of 17 in a small town in northern Wisconsin where I grew up. I was inspired by a demonstration given by visiting Shihan Akira Tohei at the local dojo. I joined immediately. Right after college I moved to Chicago to practice at the Midwest Aikido Center where I trained and studied under Tohei Sensei. It was an intense and vivid period in my life, especially the training period leading up to my shodan test in 1981.

Several years later, I met and eventually married my husband, Ted. Together we have two children, Esther and Eli. We have travelled together as a family and have lived in several countries including Japan, England, Germany, Sweden, Italy, and Singapore. And although my practice continued sporadically in the early years of our marriage, it ended soon after my son's birth. The last time I stepped on the mat to study under Tohei Sensei was in 1994. Two years later, we left Chicago for California. My role as a mom happily became my priority.

When in 2008, at 17, my daughter Esther, told me she wanted to practice aikido, I was pleasantly surprised. She had investigated several different dojos in the area before deciding on the Oakland Aikido Institute. Throughout her training, she shared many stories both of her success and failings, and what it meant to her to learn the art of aikido. In particular, she talked about various people at the dojo and their compassion toward her as a young person struggling to learn. Often, as her practice grew in scope and depth, she would demonstrate techniques she had learned, and on occasion, would ask for clarification. Dinner conversations, at this point, almost always included the topic of aikido and usually some sort of demonstration in which I was asked to participate.

Esther's ongoing commitment to her practice and to her relationships within the dojo grew out of gratitude and love for those who inspired her learning. In particular, Sensei Kim and Sensei Steve whom I know now must have kept a careful watch

over her. Esther once told me that it felt as though the dojo was filled with older brothers - concerned people who genuinely cared about her and about her evolving practice. Periodically, over the course of two years, Esther asked me to come to practice with her. I declined, but eventually, convinced, decided to give it a try.

In June 2010, after graduating with a Masters Degree in Education, I returned to aikido after a 16 year absence. I remember walking into the dojo with Esther at my side and Sensei Steve asking Esther if I was her mom. I felt excited to think of continuing my practice. I felt relief to have my daughter at my side. But mostly, I felt this enormous sense of gratitude at the

opportunity to share what was once something important in my life and what is now important to my daughter's life, and to do it together.

I am a teacher, a mother, a wife, and an aikidoist: my roles in life have given me a marvelous opportunity to become a better person.

I look forward to practicing with Esther every chance I can. She is both a compassionate and an intelligent person, and she is gentle in nature. I see her practice progress and change as her confidence and abilities change. When I work with her on the mat, I am her mom first, careful not to over-

do it, and cautious not to let my own practice overpower hers. There is always a balance I look for when we practice together: I want Esther to feel the power of aikido from me as I experience it, but I also want her to experience her own power, to find her own center, and to know what it means to move fully and truly with one's center. I look to see that our experiences together are shared and that each of us sees and recognize in one another each other's capabilities, both in terms of strength and weakness. There are times now, when I look across the mat and see Esther practice with other people that I am suddenly reminded that I am her mom: I feel proud of her accomplishments, proud of her determination, and even more proud that she is my daughter.

I am amazed at the things that never leave one's memory. There was a time early in my training that I was focused solely on my-



self. I never thought about age or pain or responsibilities. My practice was closely tied to the intensity of my training. Nothing else really mattered. But all that changed when I had children. And my practice now is not what it once was: it's better, I think. It's better because I am not a new person anymore. It's better because my daughter and I share something so unique and special, and we get to take this specialness and uniqueness into our practice. I am a teacher, a mother, a wife, and an aikidoist: my roles in life have given me a marvelous opportunity to grow and to become a better person than I once was. And I wouldn't trade any of this in: my life right now is full. Esther has filled my life and I am thankful for this gift.



But because I am not a new person, I know that a dojo thrives not just because of those individuals who come through the door to experience individual training, but because of the leadership and mentorship of those who take on all of the responsibility it takes to build a solid foundation. I have been practicing now consistently for six months and I am constantly humbled by the strength of mind and fortitude of Kim Sensei and Steve Sensei, Deborah Sensei and Kathy Sensei. It's because of you that our experiences are so vivid and tangible. I am particularly grateful to each one of the Yudansha for allowing me to be part of the everyday experience: You moved over to give me a place within the dojo and I am forever grateful to you.



IN THE NEWS

AIKIDO PEACE WEEK

Aikido Institute participated in the first International Aiki Peace Week along with more than 300 dojos around the world during the week of September 19th. Peace Week coincided with the United Nations International Day of Peace on September 21st. Events were held at the dojo during the week culminating in 24 hours of training that started Friday evening with Lars-Eric's 5 p.m. children's class.

We trained, talked, trained, meditated, stretched, trained. It was hard, it was rough, it was invigorating, it was amazing. And finally, when we had finished the 24 hours, we yelled and screamed and applauded. We had made it...to the Big Party afterwards!

Then...off to bed.



Thank you Ray for the poster. It was awesome!

LISTENING VS. HEARING

By Richard Levitt

A couple Fridays mornings ago, Kim Sensei called me and [someone who hasn't agreed to be part of this story] into his office and said, "You two talk a lot on the mat ... and I suppose that's okay, but I'd appreciate it if you'd focus on what I'm teaching..."

Even before the end of class I knew he wasn't happy, but didn't actually expect to be taken to the woodshed.

He continued, "The stuff you're saying, it's not wrong; it's what I've taught you. But it's not what I'm teaching now." As you can imagine, I was stunned and ashamed. My purpose is to honor Sensei, not annoy him. I felt awful. It got me thinking. I wrote down ideas. Slept on it. You can bet the next Monday morning I said nothing. Just tried to listen, watch, and train. I followed his instruction to the detail. But I still didn't get it.

He's often observed that it's the senior students that have the hardest time following instruction. I get the whole full-cup-empty-cup idea (if your "cup" is too full there's no room for more "tea"), but I never really saw how it applied to me.

But just last night, Wednesday, it really struck me. We were working on variations of kote gaeshi and pins. Sensei demonstrated the first pin and we went about our practice. I zipped through it, like I've done countless times.

Work on the pin, right. OK. I paid attention to the pin.

Then he demonstrated the second variation, which happened to be the pin I was previously doing.

Ding!

I blasted right through the pin he was teaching on my way to the pin I felt like doing. Not intentionally—that is to say, I wasn't

purposefully blowing him off. Just not paying attention... really close attention. I think I understand full-cup-empty-cup a little better now.

I think it's like this: After training with Sensei for 20-plus years, I pretty much know where he's going with things. (I may not have the capacity to actually *do* it, but I get it.) That leads me to truncate the lesson. Like: Oh, pins ... okay, what's my best pin. A more productive approach would be: Oh, pins ... what's he trying to tell us about pinning? How can I fully internalize that lesson?

Another point he made to me and co-offender-who-remains-nameless is this: As senior students, we may have done it a zillion times, but our partner hasn't. So when we blast through stuff, it robs our partner of the lesson. It also robs us of being present.

After class on Wednesday I told Sensei about my little breakthrough. He just nodded.

"Doesn't matter what you're working on," he said. "You've

been training a long time, you have a different awareness than other students and can focus on whatever you want; the position of your toes or something. But for your partner's sake, you should clearly demonstrate whatever the instructor is doing."

Here's the (not really very) funny part about it all: As an instructor, there's nothing that makes me more crazy than seeing people on the mat doing something other than what I've demonstrated.

Sheesh. Instructor, instruct thyself.

So my commitment is to come onto the mat with an empty cup; well, as empty as possible. Every detail, every nuance, every movement merits attention, no matter how much attention I've paid it in the past.



As an instructor, there's nothing that makes me more crazy than seeing people on the mat doing something other than what I've demonstrated.

Here's a quick story: I was yukking it up with my yoga teachers in Mexico (yes yoga teachers yuk it up, especially after a bit of mescal). And we were swapping stories about teaching.

And Bramani said, "How about when a student comes bounding into class saying, 'Oh I've learned this basic concept from another teacher; how come you never told us that?' But it's something I've said in class over and over." We've all heard it. We all laughed and nodded.

The point is that our teachers can say something over and over, but we don't hear it—don't really hear it—until we're ready.

One time. Ten times. A hundred times. Who know how many times we need to hear something before it sinks in. But if we're not even listening, the answer is never.



IN THE NEWS



Super Congratulations to Mr. & Mrs. Fred Martini. Fred Sempai and Özben met on the mat and started an Aikido romance. Many ikkyos later, they decided the time was right, and tied the knot during Thanksgiving break. Super congrats to both of you!

*Sensei, from seiza,
leaves perfect semi-circle.
In blood, clean tenkan.*

by Scott McCormick

IN THE NEWS

HOA SENSEI'S SEMINAR

DECEMBER 4TH - Hoa Sensei is the Dojo Cho and founder of the Aikido Institute Davis. They are our sister dojo. Hoa Sensei is so comfortable at AI because not only did he train here, but was also dojo cho for many years. This is his home, too.

Whenever Hoa Sensei teaches, the dojo gets full to capacity. This was no exception. He is a very inspiring teacher and always shows something new. It is a pleasure seeing him move.



IN THE NEWS

THE HOLIDAY PARTY

What an affair; it was a potluck that did not disappoint. Homemade salads, desserts, main dishes, and Kim Sensei's own homemade ice cream in a variety of flavors. Lots of kanpais and a chance to unwind and mingle with your fellow colleagues and students of Aikido. It was also a chance to meet some of the significant others and a great way to start the Holiday season.

