

# THE KIAI

Spring 2005

Volume XI, Issue 1

Newsletter of THE AIKIDO INSTITUTE

## NIDAN ESSAY

*The Founder considered Takemusu Aikido to be the highest form of Aikido. Takemusu ... refer(s) to martial movement spontaneously created, without active thought, resulting in a pure Aikido technique. O-Sensei felt that one's training went through four major periods of development: Basic Technique; Flexible Technique; Flowing Technique; and finally Takemusu Aiki. He considered this final form of Aikido to be attainable by anyone through practice.*

*[Takemusu Aikido Association - Web site]*

Takemusu has been the unifying theme of my Aikido training and in my life outside of the dojo for the past few years. While O-Sensei was referring to Takemusu in regard to martial practice, I have been thinking about



Takemusu in all areas of my life. The goal of Takemusu has transcended my practice in the dojo – now I seek to create a “spontaneous appropriate response” whether I am at work, at home with my family, in rush hour traffic or working on Aikido techniques with my fellow aikidoka.

And yet, while I strive to have Takemusu in my daily life, it is on the mat with my teachers and training partners, where I continue to develop and refine the techniques that O-Sensei gave us, that I continue to develop and refine my actions and responses to the world at large.

O-Sensei's statement above calls Takemusu Aikido the highest level, but I believe that we can experience Takemusu at all levels of training. Steady practice has given me glimpses of Takemusu at every stage of my training.

For example, in the early months of my practice, when I finally started learning to roll, at the right time, without thinking – that, in retrospect, was Takemusu for me. But soon I learned that it's important to roll to a safe place and

to get up quickly, so that I did not hurt or get hurt by one of my training partners. And later, over the years, when I had a minor injury or strain, I learned that backing off from a more vigorous fall, to protect myself, had become reflexive and it furthered my training.

For a very long time, my spontaneous correct action was almost solely as an Uke. And it was on the Uke side of the Uke-Nage equation that Aikido started to manifest itself in my life outside the dojo. I started to be calmer in my day to day life and even in times of stress at work, home or in snarled traffic, I began to sense possible responses developing that felt like blending rather than panicky or defensive reactions. My body, mind, and spirit were being transformed by Sensei and my sempai as they led me through more difficult ukeme, as if my internal systems were being rewired and upgraded to be more efficient and more robust.

Later, as I began to be more proficient as a Nage, I had moments, however brief, of Takemusu. I think that over the almost 13 years I've been training, I may have performed Ikkyo Ura-waza in a Takemusu way – that transcends the component parts that I bring to its execution – perhaps three times. Each time years apart. But each time was thrilling and an inspiration to do it again.

And as I have continued to learn, I have been able to experience glimpses of Takemusu during randori and jiyuwaza. For a moment or two just, I was able flow from one partner into the next, with no idea of what would emerge, only sure that something correct would happen. At least I've done it a few times, enough that I felt something different and good about that moment and my training partners after class said that they had felt something unusual as well.

But I feel that the real difference for me has been in my life off of the mat. I remember when, shortly after taking my Shodan test, I was having a tense moment with my boss. My boss was anxious about a proposal getting done on time

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and, for a moment, my boss's anxiety started to infect me. But I realized, understood in the moment, that the feeling that began to develop in me because of my boss's infectious anxiety was so much like the feeling that Sensei can generate in me in the dojo. After a moment of thought, I acted as if I were being tested by Sensei and I remembered to breathe and shift my weight to a balanced stance and to lower my shoulders and just to be ready without an agenda. And then, I was not anxious and, actually, my boss calmed down, too.

Thankfully, these types of infectious anxiety events do not occur all that often, but day to day life includes their possibility. In terms of the possibility, I feel confident that I can have a Takemusu-ish response to potential and real conflict and clash. At least I feel confident that a Takemusu type of response is available somewhere in me.

But it comes from the regular practice on the mat, with my teachers and my fellow students. When I started training, I never realized how much there was to learn. Now I realize that I can keep learning for the rest of my life.

Metaphorically, it seemed that the top of the mountain was relatively close and the route was direct. Now I can see that the mountain top that I thought was close not only wasn't all that close, it wasn't even the top of the mountain. That makes me happy because this is a fun journey and the end is nowhere sight.

JOSH LANGENTHAL



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2005

The Calendar of Events is now posted at the dojo and will be updated with new information as soon as it is available. Look for it in the hall near the back mat.

### *March 1 – April 19: Introduction to Aikido*

Our 4th "Introduction to Aikido" class will be held on 8-consecutive Tuesdays 6:30-7:30 PM. You do not need to have a black belt or have trained for a long time to have a profound effect on someone's first experiences with Aikido. Plus there is no better way to warm up for the brisk 7:30 PM classes that Peter Sempai promises will follow the 6:30 Intro class!

### *April 16: Dojo Cleanup Day*

Offer your time and your effort to, and take pride in, your dojo. After regular Saturday morning class we will clean where you didn't know there was dirt, dust where you didn't think there was dust, fix things, and renew our facility.

### *April 26: Tai Sai (Founder's Day)*

Special training at the regular evening class time followed by a celebration. Join Aikido practitioners around the world as we celebrate the life of O'Sensei and the gift of his art, on this the 36th anniversary of his passing.

### *May 16 & 17: Kyu Tests*

Look for candidates names to be posted approximately 3 weeks prior to test dates.

### *May 27-30: Memorial Day Gasshuku at Tahoe, CA*

Bigger and better in 2005, including Saito Hitohiro Soke. See complete information about the 16th (almost) annual event at [www.gashuku.net](http://www.gashuku.net). Registration forms are available at the dojo. Take advantage of the \$25 discount if registered before May 2, 2005.

### *June 11: 2nd Annual Temescal Street Fair*

The Temescal district's own street fair happens right outside our door, literally. This is a great day to help with our public demonstration and open house, and enjoy a celebration of this great Oakland neighborhood that Aikido Institute has been a part of since 1981.

### *July 23: Dojo Seminar*

Look for details to be posted in the dojo.

### *August 6: Special training at Aikido Institute of Davis*

"Reunite" with our training partners at the newly expanded Aikido Institute of Davis. The training is really special when Hoa Sensei and Kim Sensei are on the mat together (2 one-hour classes).

### *August 8 & 9: Kyu Tests*

Look for candidates names to be posted approximately 3 weeks prior to test dates.

### *September 7 – October 26: Introduction to Aikido*

This time on 8 consecutive Wednesday evenings.

### *October (dates to be announced): Mendocino Gasshuku with Kim Peuser Sensei*

Look for more information to be posted at the dojo.

### *November 7 & 8: Kyu Tests*

Look for candidates names to be posted approximately 3 weeks prior to test dates.



### MY FIRST HIGH FALL

I went to my Aikido class at the usual time and place. I thought it would be the same old class, but to my surprise, my instructor, Lars Eric, said, “Whoever wants to practice high falls, go with Martha”. So I went with six other kids to practice – they were Meagan, Emmanuel, Ohannah, Zoe, Zori and Amaa.

I was a little scared at first, because I had never done a high fall and I was scared I might injure myself. When I watched everyone else do it, I felt much better because after I saw yellow belts do it, I knew I could.

Finally, it was my turn - I was called up to do a high fall. So I grabbed Martha’s hand and all of a sudden, I was on the ground. I had done it!

What I like about learning high falls is two things – one, it’s exciting, and two, it makes me feel confident. Plus, it’s fun!

CHRISTOPHER ORMAN, AGE 8



## AIKIDO AND SPORTS

*Focus. Breathe in. Step. Breathe out. Extend.*

Aikido? No, that was bowling. I suppose any sport requires some elements of what we practice in aikido. In fact, the great Japanese baseball player Sadaharu Oh trained with O Sensei for a time and credited his aikido training with improving his hitting. Taking bowling as an example, what are the elements of aikido that are needed in sports and how are they applied?

### Focus and Awareness

A bowling center is a noisy, active place and being able to focus on one’s shot while standing on the approach is vital. Being able to focus on the target for the ball, usually a spot or arrow on the lane, and shutting out all distractions is the beginning of a smooth, effective delivery. The term zanshin can be used for this and although a complete explanation of zanshin is something that would require its own article, it is enough to say that it is sustaining a heightened state of awareness and mental follow-through. This state is by no means easy to achieve and being able to identify the goal is not the same as achieving it, but without being able to identify it, it will never be achieved. It is what we try to maintain on the mat when we “finish” a technique and maintain a connection with our partner even though we have physically separated and are preparing to “start” another technique. The start and stop are merely waypoints between bowing in and out with our partner, which are waypoints between bowing in and out of class, which are waypoints between stepping onto and off of the mat, which are waypoints between waking up and going to sleep. As I can’t imagine zanshin sleeping, I will leave that for the Zen masters.

### Breath

The breath is important in any physical activity and breathing the wrong way – in when it should be out, and out when it should be in – is a sure way to spoil a technique. I’ve noticed recently that as I stand on the approach, I’ll inhale, exhale, then inhale as I take my first step and draw the ball back and exhale while bringing the ball forward to release it. Breath awareness and timing are things we practice in aikido, too. The third ken suburi is a great practice not only for breath awareness but for directing one’s ki.

One thing that I’ve tried to notice is the time when the movement happens. In many martial arts, especially in kyudo, Japanese archery, it is important to be able to let the movement, technique or event happen at its own time. One piece of advice passed on to Sadaharu Oh by O Sensei was to wait for the ball to come to him in its own time. In our dojo I’ve often heard Sensei and the sempai speak of not

being mechanical when doing tai no henko. If it happens one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four as if both training partners were listening to a metronome instead of connecting to each other's ki, then the practice becomes meaningless. There's no real connection to the partner's energy, no connection to what they are doing and how they are moving.

### Extension and Kiai

In bowling, extension is most closely tied to the follow-through after the release of the ball. Lack of it results in a weak delivery as surely as lack of extension will cause a roll to fall apart. While I haven't yet gone as far as doing a third ken suburi-style kiai when I release the ball, I do exhale forcefully at the release.

These examples of aikido's application to sport are only an example of what is really the application of aikido to everyday life. Just as we try to achieve an awareness and connection with our partner on the mat that spans the ma ai between us and between our techniques, we should strive for a connection with others – our partners – outside the dojo at all times.

STEPHEN KILMER



## REPORT FROM THE KIDS' CLASS

### Current Status

Those of you who come to class on Mondays, Wednesday, and Fridays may have encountered the (somewhat) shorter group of Aikido practitioners who are leaving as you arrive, especially if you arrive close to 6:10 or 6:15. These are the students in the Aikido Institute Children's class, which meets every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from 5:00 to 6:00. The sessions run from early September (right after Labor Day) until mid-June. There is a break for the summer. In other words, the children's classes run roughly on the same calendar as most school districts.

Also, I recently, guiltily realized that I have been remiss in reporting how the children's class is doing — my apologies. I will try to have a report for each issue of the Kiai in the future.

The current enrollment is 18 students; the class size varies between 8 to 14 children per class, depending on various family and school schedules. We had a good return from last session; in fact, we have a core group of about 8 students who have been practicing together for 3 years or more. In addition to some new students we picked up at the beginning of this year's session, we've had a recent influx of 3 new stu-

dents this past February, one of them just this week. We have also just had two alumni recently return, one who last trained three years ago, and one from two years ago.

The classes have been going well, with few to no problems and much enthusiasm. This year we've been having "units", rather like normal school, where we will focus on a particular topic. September was devoted to getting back into the rhythm; October we focused on jo practice and the 20 jo suburi; November alternated between going over the basic techniques and bokken practice; December we just had a lot of fun before the two week holiday break.

January and early February was focused on testing, as we have had five students test over the past two weeks for their ranks, some of them fairly high level. Everyone who tested did well. For our current "unit" we are now concentrating on rolling and ukemi skills.

### A Typical Class Day

The doors open at 4:30. A few students are sometimes already there, but most arrive between 4:35 and 5:00.

Between 4:30 and 5:00, everyone gets into their uniforms, touches base with their friends, and some sort of general rumpus then ensues. The demeanor during this time is fairly casual and something like a school playground — there are generally two or three groups doing two or three different games. We deliberately do not try to enforce very much structure at this point. This is when they get a chance to socialize, burn off some energy from their school day, and have some unstructured fun. The rules are minimal, but absolute:

- Nothing must ever, under any circumstance, in any way come close to or endanger the shomen
- Nothing can come anywhere near the lights (in other words, the large exercise balls can only be rolled, not thrown, and the strange purple thing can not be thrown wildly or far)
- Nothing must cause injury to a fellow student before class (i.e., no tackles, especially to the knees, no head locks, no WWE moves, no punches, kicks, bites, and no wildly throwing oneself into a wall or onto the ground).
- Taking one of the big exercise balls from the current owner has a penalty of 15 pushups

In his book *Children and the Martial Arts: an Aikido Point of View*, Gaku Homma Sensei describes the pre-class activity for his children's class as "Children will be puppies". And indeed, one of the favorite activities of the junior students is to dog-pile and romp with our senior-most student, who takes it well, with a resigned, yet affectionate air.

At 5:00, we clap in. Whatever else may happen before, during and after class, we are insistent upon a good clap-in

and clap out. Backs must be straight, knees must be on the line, eyes need to be forward, hands must be on one's knees or in one's lap. There have been times when the line has been giggly and fidgety, but I've been having them do a short breathing exercise before each clap-in and clap-out, taking three or four deep, slow, quiet breaths, inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth. This has had a marvelous effect. They all tend to calm down quite a bit, and it also makes a formal, clear demarkation between the pre-class rumpus and the class itself.

The first 15-20 minutes of class, we do some line-drills to warm up their muscles and build some skills, then we gather in a circle to do some stretches. For many of the students, their Aikido classes are most of the physical education they receive, so I've always tried to keep the National Fitness Standards in mind for the warmups. Most elementary school students only have PE once a week.

Then we do some general practice for the next 10-15 minutes, with an emphasis on having the senior students work with the junior students. We often work on basic techniques during this time.

The next 15-20 minutes we often do a 'split', with the more senior students in one group, and the junior students in another, with Lars Eric taking one group and Martha taking the other. We then work on appropriate material for each group. It is often based on what we did in general practice, although we will sometimes work on something seemingly completely different. We do take requests; one student recently asked to work on the *hasso-gaeshi no jo*.

The final 10 minutes or so often get eaten up by the prior practice, either because we are having too much fun, or because we need to iron out details. However, we try to end with some sort of game or drill. A typical example is 'knee-walking tag'.

The rules of this game: the entire group knee walks at random all over the mat. The instructor often calls out various variations, such as "knee-walking with shomen strikes", or "knee-walking with your arms crossed", or "knee-walking while you quack like a duck". (This last is a sneaky way to get some students who are shy about their *kiai* to vocalize). Then, the instructor calls out "Stop". Everyone must freeze where they are, and then stand. They are not allowed to change position. The instructor will then pick a group ("yellow belts and orange belts"). This group must knee walk. The other students are allowed to stand. The knee-walking group must catch, corner, and tag members of the standing group. Each tagged person become a knee-walker, and the game ends when everyone has been tagged.

It's amazing and inspiring to see how fast some people can move on their knees.

At 6:00, we clap out. No matter how goofy the class itself may have been (and some days can be goofy indeed), we are firm about having a good clap out: knees on line, hands on

knees, backs straight. We usually do three to five breaths to get everyone focused.

From 6:00 to 6:15, we sweep the mat, get water, get dressed, and some students like to work on things for a while after class. Unlike before class, after class is restricted to working on Aikido skills or answering questions. Every Friday, there is juice and cookies. There is usually an adult stationed at the door to see that students are actually being picked up by the right people, and to ensure that the situation at the front door is not overly madcap. It is also when we usually touch base with parents and guardians about their child.

After 6:15, it is 'adult swim', and the children need to be ready to be picked up. No more mat time; the taller (somewhat) practitioners get to take over.

That is a typical class day for the children's class at the Aikido Institute, Oakland.

## Upcoming events

We are hoping to be invited to the San Francisco Cherry Blossom Festival Grand Parade again. (The url for this event is <http://www.nccbf.org/pages/1/index.htm> >). We haven't received the letter yet, but we have been invited for the past two years, and it has always been great fun. This year the Grand parade is scheduled for 24 April, starting at 1:00 PM near San Francisco City Hall and ending in Japantown. The ending time entirely depends on how fast or slow everyone in front of our unit is; it is usually between 4:00 and 5:00. I shall write more about this before and after it happens.

Every year there is a Gashukku/sleepover, where we train on Friday, eat pizza and watch a movie, sleep overnight on the mat, then get up early on Saturday, run around the block, clean the dojo, go to Lake Temescal park, do weapons training in the park, then have a potluck with the parents. Again, more about that as it comes closer.

## Know a potential student?

If you know a child who might be interested in practicing Aikido, please feel free to invite them to come watch a class. This is really the best way to introduce potential students, to have them watch part or all of a class to see if it is something they would like to try. The children's class has a special case, where they may try a free trial class, but I've found that just watching a class and answering any questions they may have works best in helping them decide if it is really something they want to do.

Do note that there are a limited number of scholarships available for anyone who might be financially challenged. Please speak to either Lars Eric or Martha about the criteria (the most important being potential longevity — we want to support students who will continue in their practice). Deborah sempai and Alberta sempai can also answer ques-

tions about scholarships.

If you speak to anyone on the telephone, or anyone who walks in, go ahead and log it in the dojo's message log, and you can also leave a note in the mail slot labeled 'Kids' Class' (the row of mail slots next to the telephone in the back office). In fact, we would very much appreciate it if you would do this for anyone who says they will come in, so we can be prepared for and expecting them.

### An invitation

Any adult member of the dojo is more than welcome to join us on the mat during one of the children's classes. Please let us know in advance if you will be coming, as we need to touch base with you about a few things before joining us. The most important thing to remember is to train appropriately, and to not put undue stress on developing young joints. It is rather similar to not allowing Little League pitchers to risk injury to their elbows by fast pitching.

The children really enjoy working with adult members, and since some of them might very well end up joining the adults class some day, it is always good to meet future potential training partners. There is also great joy in seeing someone when they were small and first starting, then seeing them a few years later, when the movements have become natural and relaxed. It is always fun to be able to say "I knew her back when she was only nine years old. Wow! look at that nikyo now!"

It can also be very astonishing to take ukemi from some of the children, especially when you realize that a 4 foot 5 inch little girl has just taken your balance by whirling about and applying shiho nage.

Feel free to e-mail Lars Eric at <larsericholm@mac.com>, Martha at <mevans@fruitfly.org>, or to leave us a message in the Kids' class mail slot.

LARS ERIC HOLM AND MARTHA EVANS-HOLM,  
CHILDREN'S CLASS INSTRUCTORS

### WHAT YOU CAN LEARN ABOUT AIKIDO FROM CARTOONS.

Sensei speaks frequently about energy flowing in multiple dimensions, that Aikido does not happen on a single plane, but rather uses space in every direction. Sometimes I see it as a sine wave, that ebbs and flows like the tide. Irime nage is like that, so is kote gaeshi. Sometimes it's more like a hurricane, swirling outward, like shiho nage or some of the turning koku nage variations.

Clearly the power in Aikido comes from continuity of motion rather than sudden movement. Techniques begin before an attack is presented, and continue past a throw or pin. A "technique" starts with energy roiling in the universe, manifesting itself as the Earth, as life. It surges through an "attacker," through us and back out into the cosmos.

The way we integrate ourselves with that energy is through motion, constantly expanding and contracting, advancing and yielding. I've been trying to figure out a great way to illustrate that, when of course I fell back on the most significant influences of my life: cartoons. There's a basic animation technique they call "stretch and squash."

It's the idea that motion happens in multiple dimensions, and in animation, it's exaggerated. So when a character contracts, he contracts completely, widening, flattening, expanding. Then when he expands, he stretches beyond the limits of physical reality, lengthening, narrowing, extending.

I looked for a more martial example, like Batman or Samurai Jack, but Sylvester and Tweety was the best I could do.

But just look. Sylvester demonstrates the best possible form: First, he compacts all his strength and energy by bending his knees and drawing inward. An Aikidoist might do something like that during a morote dori blend or just about any throw, like shiho nage, irime nage or kote gaeshi. A great example is the parry between the second and third

See how Sylvester's body becomes compacted in anticipation of a leap.





Now he is fully extended making a complete commitment to the action.



With a monumental effort, Sylvester tries again. We can tell, because he's so stretched out, from his fingers to his toes.



Now that crazy Sylvester is squashed down again, gathering energy for his next leap. Will Tweety escape?

move in the 31 jo kata. You start fully extended, blocking overhead. Then you contract back to tsuki kamai, and in the process, smack the attacker's jo away.

Now see Sylvester as he extends fully, holding nothing back. In Aikido, that might look like the third ken suburi, kaitenage, or hasso gaeshi.

Just like Sensei tells it. Sylvester waza.

Here are a couple of other images. You can see Sensei doing irime nage. Notice the source and direction of his motion. It begins in the Earth and swirls up through his



body, curling over like a breaking wave, and crashing down. At this point in the technique, he is squashed, just like Sylvester in his squashed form. The only difference, of course, is that if Sylvester knew Aikido, he and Tweety would work out their differences on the mat, then go out for Sushi.

In the second image, see how Hoa Sensei is all stretched out. You can see how his body is fully extended, sort of the wave as it is cresting, fully expressing the power and potential of the technique, or to be more esoteric, of cosmic force. Again, notice the similarity in the cartoon series. When Sylvester is reaching high to try and snatch Tweety, his whole body is stretched.

Now, Hoa Sensei is not nearly as wacky as Sylvester, nor is he animated, so the movement is not so exaggerated. But the beauty of animation is that it magnifies principles of physical reality for the sake of communication. We can apply those same principles in our own, limited physical reality. The benefits are numerous – more facile movement, more power with less strength, smoother movement, easier blending. It's also good to know that you can enjoy such movement without fear of being hit in the head with an anvil.

So what does all this mean, besides an evident need for a crazy soundtrack to accompany training? It means (IMHO) that we all have an opportunity to exploit forces much bigger than ourselves when we train. By fully extending and fully contracting, stretching and squashing, we are becoming closer to the natural movement in nature. The greatest cos-



mic forces are spiral, and by moving that way ourselves, we will naturally find our movement more powerful, more intuitive, easier and probably more fun.

I'm certainly going to try.

That's all, Folks.

RICHARD LEVITT

*March 21, 2005*

*Guest Instructor: Hans Goto Sensei*

Goto Sensei, 6th dan, has also trained in Judo, T'ai Qi Quan, and Wushu. Goto Sensei is Head Instructor and founder of Bay Marin Aikido

