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YOSHINKAN AIKIDO

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SHUHARIKAN DOJO AND PARKER SHIHAN TO HOST SHIODA KANCHO CLINIC IN MAY 2008

Yasuhisa Shioda Kancho will come to the Shuharikan Dojo to present instructional Aikido clinics hosted by the dojo and Amos Parker Shihan (8th Dan). The exact dates have not been set but the clinics likely will be held on either the second or the third weekend in May.

Watch for further details.

THE SHUHARIKAN AIKIDO DOJO TRAINING SCHOLARSHIP

By John Sharratt

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Instruction in Yoshinkan Aikido

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I became aware of the essay below titled *Peace Dojo Project* and other works by Bill Leicht using Aikido (www.aiki-extensions.org), and conflict resolution, while working with Damon Drake on setting up the first Shuharikan Dojo Training Scholarship for kids at Boys Totem Town in St. Paul, MN.

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Training Scholarship (Continued from page 1)

The idea behind the scholarship was, and continues to be, one of offering kids coming from a *difficult situation* the opportunity to train at the Shuharikan with an awarded training scholarship.

The individual must fill out a short "application," answering the following questions:

- Why would you like to participate in the Aikido scholarship program?
- How do you see the scholarship benefiting you?
- What lifetime goals do you have at this time?

These are taken into consideration along with the recommendation of an adult: teacher, parent, guardian, etc., attesting to the individual's character, interest, and the benefit the individual would derive from the scholarship.

The *Peace Dojo Project* essay struck a chord with me in that others are using the "art" of Aikido to reach out to those in need and offering a different path or way to approach life.

As students of Aikido, we have unique opportunities to share our wonderful art with others, and to me author Malcolm Gladwell captured this concept perfectly with his "Three Rules of Epidemics" in his book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*.

He says, "There is more than one way to tip an epidemic, in other words. Epidemics are a function of the people who transmit infectious agents, the infectious agent itself, and the environment in which the infectious agent is operating. And when an epidemic tips, when it is jolted out of equilibrium, it tips because something has happened, some change has occurred in one or two or three of those areas. These three agents of change I call the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Power of Context."

I hope you find Bill Leicht's essay and the quote from Malcolm Gladwell as encouraging and thought provoking as I do and will share the Shuharikan Scholarship information with someone you know and would recommend.

Regards in Aiki, and be an "infectious agent!"

WELCOME TO AIKIDO CARDS

In the Fall of 2007, the students in the Children's Class were introduced to a new activity: Aikido Cards. The cards were developed as a fun tool to help encourage creative and imaginative thinking.

A deck of thirteen cards was created, displaying descriptive words such as *Aikido, Artist, Forest, Reading, and Shuffle*. Each card has four words, the kanji for Aikido, and an individual card number.

The students were each challenged to draw two distinct cards from the deck. They were then asked to use one or more of the words from each card to create two sentences that would be combined with the sentences from the other students to create a story. The idea of creating "forced connections" between words and a stated "challenge" is a creative thinking and imagination tool used by many institutions worldwide.

The authors of the samurai story below were **Aaron Seyer, Helen Dolan, Henry Dolan, Julian Estrellado, Jaymir Hare-Phillips, Alex Hathaway, Alex Leininger, Tyler Leininger, Colin McNeely, Lee Tran, Ian Williams, Isabella Williams, and Austen Eberhardt**.

To see a set of the cards, stop by the Dojo office and ask one of the instructors to see a deck, or, better yet, ask one of the students in the Children's Class, as they each have a deck of their own.

The story our noted authors created was based on the

challenge to describe "a Samurai in training at a dojo."

AIKIDO CARDS: THE SAMURAI STORY

By the Shuharikan Kids

Oneen was a young samurai training at a dojo deep in a mist-clouded forest. He reflected on his studies and thought, "I like reading, but not most of the time." He daydreamed on, and this floated across his mind, "I practice Yoshinkan Aikido and someday I hope that I get a Dan rank. I'm currently at Orange Belt, and I show my etiquette and attitude by listening in my classes."

From the lectures and stories the many sensei told in the dojo, Oneen knew it is important to be honest in Aikido, as well as in life in general. He has many friends at the Dojo who help him with his training. Smiling, Oneen thought of the Old Master who told funny stories of when he started training in Aikido. One time he said, "My friends are nice to me and I am nice to them, and I follow the advice of my friends when they say, 'I listen to the sensei to learn, and I love Aikido because it is fun.'"

The Old Master also said, "The Samurai had to learn both Bushido and etiquette before he could get his yellow belt. If the Samurai did not learn honesty he would not get to play in the river." This was the favorite spot for all the young Samurai.

Oneen's favorite story was of a mysterious Samurai who was a Black Belt at the far-away Shuharikan Dojo. He had confidence in his forward rolls. He trained with honesty and effort, and that's how we all promise to train in Aikido as well.

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Aikido Cards: The Samurai Story

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Sometimes the samurai went off on a horse, in a dogi and hakama, and practiced body changes and thought a sword is a fighting thing and I like it. He knew he would learn lots at the Dojo if he listened to the sensei.

In Oneen's daily classes, he always took pride in being presentable, and taking care of his clothes was an example of good attitude, and that the spirit of the samurai was in him; especially when he wore his dogi while riding his horse.

On the tatami mats he learned about Budo and had such great focus even when he had to shuffle. His parents told him, "It's important to put effort into Aikido as well as into your painting and other school work." He agreed and thought, "I am an artist in all that I do and I like painting, sometimes at least."

In Oneen's last Aikido class, the sensei told a story about Aikido and in Aikido we use a Jo. The sensei's story was about a ninja who lived in a castle and had defended himself with a pivot while using his Jo. He thought about his friend the ninja who practices close to a river.

When the class ended, Oneen went outside with his friends and saw the sky, and it reminded him of water which feeds the trees and gives us oxygen, and thought, "I am an artist who likes to draw a river."

TEACHING AND TEACHERS

This issue of the *Shuharikan Newsletter* is devoted to the theme of teaching. Because we have launched our first formal teacher-training course, which is designed to lead to the acquisition of an international Yoshinkan Aikido teaching license, we have solicited from all students comments about

teaching. Many of those comments are included in this issue.

The point is not to be critical of any teaching method or style but rather to note differences and to share observations of what seems to work and what needs improvement.

We hope this information will benefit everyone, licensed teachers, licensed candidates, and all other students (who are often informal teachers of their juniors).

A DOSE OF HARD-LINE TEACHING

By Robert Wozniak

My first impression reading Daniele Bolelli's book, *Philosophy, Fighting, and Martial Arts Mythology*, was that he comes across as somewhat embittered. He says things like: "Many people face life without any more awareness than Pavlov's dogs" (page 40), and "Many people wouldn't see a diamond if it were shining in their faces" (page 26), and again on page 110: "... it's easier to convert the Abominable Snowman to surfing than finding people who dare to dream big." The book is full of similar notions. I can see his point but can't go quite that far. But plenty of passages from the book paint a bluer sky anyway. Maybe I honed in on that slant as candy for candy-coated tongues.

Nor can I help feeling he hasn't much hope for humanity, especially "western civilization." His criticism of UFC naysayers like Senator McCain, for instance, (on page 149) is spot-on, if rather acidic. Has humanity somehow failed Bolelli? I believe he sometimes thinks so. The saying: "If you want to learn the sweet taste of victory, speak to a defeated warrior" comes to mind. But his tea might be a bit too bitter for some. Like he's somehow done all he could for the

world but it just ain't happening, so, you know, save yourself or something.

But I liked reading it, albeit in a devilish way. I liked it quite a bit, really. He is unashamedly opinionated and therefore engages me in both heart and mind. I get so sick of the pseudo-objective, deceptively unscientific mindset that gets bandied about just about every which way you turn these days. It really borders on hollow ritualism at times. Bolelli grabs me and gets my juices flowing. Of course, in such an opinionated work, I'll have many opinions of his opinions, both yeah and nay. But that is as it should be.

Bolelli speaks as someone who earned his spiritual insight at the wrong end of a knife in Central Park, not from sitting cross-legged under some tree in India. He also couches discussion of his martial-arts philosophy in an everyday-mind kind of way, a feat totally commendable. Both attitudes give immediacy to what he has to say. A lot of stuff out there fossilizes a tradition into shriveled, bone-dry facts and practices on an otherwise desolate landscape. Bolelli invigorates and gives the art relevance and a sense of place in the here and now. He doesn't paint the art's essence as necessarily ethnocentric, to the point that actually persuades people of other cultures to either not take up the practice (because they feel they'll never be a part of it or understand it in any real sense) or to develop some crazy romantic notion of the art as something mysterious and "oriental" and, therefore, somewhat, paradoxically, perfect for them.

Bolelli, sure as eggs are eggs, comes across as a warrior, as I understand the idea: from my cubicle, my Subaru, my pouffe, armchair, and heated toilet seat! He pushes his readers to reassess their lives, assures us that taking up the warrior's path demands it.

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A Dose of Hard-Line Teaching
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I've heard it said that a martial-arts instructor is like a bird in a cage: admired and provoked to perform but denied the gift of flight. Here we have Bolelli caged in a book: admirable, bold, and provoked to sing. He's challenging us to reassess our relationship to our art and the art to the world around us. I hope I've the wherewithal to live up to it.

**TEACHING AIKIDO –
THE BASICS**
By Gil Warnacutt

Aikido is complex and sophisticated budo filled with many nuances and subtleties, not to mention a philosophy as well. At the heart of Aikido are various principles that all students of any level strive to learn. For some of us, this could take a lifetime.

As students, we know there are many challenges we face throughout our journey to learn Aikido. Conversely, there are also many challenges when it comes to teaching the art of Aikido. I believe the teaching of Aikido starts and ends with kamae. In regard to teaching, we can't stress enough the importance of kamae and keeping the elements of kamae throughout the techniques. Students must understand that, without a strong kamae, their techniques will lack effectiveness and spirit.

Training hard with focus is important so that students learn what their bodies are capable of doing and to trust their capabilities while performing techniques or ukemi. A student must be encouraged to push just beyond their comfort zone in order to make progress. However, teachers must be aware of the capabilities and limitations of each student in the class and tailor and adapt their

teaching plans accordingly. Given that Aikido can be a frustrating endeavor, encouragement and positive reinforcement must be utilized. It is always important to give students as much guidance as possible so as not to develop any bad habits. Once a bad habit is learned regarding an aspect of a technique, it is very difficult to unlearn. Patience along with a mix of constructive criticism is needed in a teacher; although I think students must be given a chance to stumble a bit and gain certain insights by their own persistence. The examples that the teachers set will give students a model so that they can develop an understanding of working together in a class and not just as individuals and incorporate spirit throughout their training.

At a clinic I attended featuring Chida Sensei, he stated that the reason we do basic techniques is because we don't know where to move. My impression of this is that the principles of Aikido that teachers want to transmit to students are embedded in the basic techniques and basic movements. I think as a teacher, by stressing the basics again and again, this shows students how to move properly, and the principles of Aikido emerge through hard and diligent training. Given that there are many layers of Aikido, I don't think it would be wise to bombard less-experienced students with a lot of lofty concepts of Aikido before they are ready. It may be helpful to relate concepts of Aikido to other endeavors or sports to establish a point.

Before students can learn the intuitive aspects of Aikido, such as relaxation, tension-free application of techniques, and breath power, the teacher must provide a strong foundation of the basics to develop weight transfer, balance, and timing first. Once this has been accomplished, the rest will follow in time.

Students should also be made aware that different teachers have different methods for teaching Aikido and may focus on different aspects of the art. Students should be encouraged to look at different ways to learn a technique or principle as long as the core tenets are met. From this they can take teachings that fit their style of learning. Students need to also realize that not everyone will have exactly the same form and movements when it comes to Aikido techniques. The techniques are merely the tools we use to learn Aikido so that each student can make Aikido unique to them.

**TEACHING AIKIDO –
FOUR ESSENTIALS**
By Thephong Le

Etiquette

The first and foremost thing to remember is rules and manners in the dojo. An Aikido dojo is a Japanese martial-art training hall that is not the same as an open gym. The Eastern culture is generally stricter than the Western. Even though we are practicing the Art here in the U.S., we should not and must not downplay its tradition. The first impression is also the very last one; we must keep this in mind because the last thing we need is to give our Shuharikan Dojo a bad name in the Yoshinkan Aikido community. During my five years training at the dojo, I have noticed many times the Board has talked/issued handouts about etiquette, but some instructors/students do not thoroughly follow. A few examples are: students show up with smelly, unreasonably dirty and wrinkled uniforms; questioned instructor's instruction; talking during class. The message about this is if one does not have good etiquette in practicing Aikido, then he will not have any respect for others, and

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Teaching Aikido—Four Essentials

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the Art itself should consider taking what is called a “self-evaluating manners” course instead.

Basic Techniques

I really like what our instructors are doing: teaching/focusing on basics of Aikido as well as our style. Without a solid foundation, the house will collapse, and everyone knows that. It’s no different in practicing Aikido, and everyone knows that. The question is: are we often aware of this while practicing?

I would like to mention that there were times a technique would be differently taught by each individual instructor, and this really causes confusion for our students. Or, an instructor demonstrates a technique but ends up wrestling with a student! The same instructor would demonstrate certain “Control” on a student’s wrist and apply it repeatedly as if he doesn’t see the pain on the student’s face.

I would like to point out the issue of some students would watch on DVD, VHS a rather “cool/fancy” technique, then come to class and try it on others without any knowledge/understanding of the technical aspect behind it. Needless to say, it doesn’t work!!!

Another issue that is rather important I observed during many freestyle practices when most students fail to stay in “Kamae.” In the heat of the “battle,” we tend to forget the readiness/preparedness, and that’s how we fail. I remember one of my favorite instructors explaining the true meaning of “Tense”: be aware, be ready but not overreacting or nervous.

Patience

Everyone likes to be the best at what they do. But we just simply cannot always be so because where is the limit and who sets the limit? However, we could be good

at it if we have patience and discipline. A new student just joining can’t be as good as the one who has been practicing months or years. We must acknowledge this reality. As an instructor, one should recognize and take appropriate action in any students who are too eager/hurry to bypass the basics. One should point out the good/bad, do’s and don’ts, to his/her students. Most often times, impatience will lead to unsafe manners, injury, and unwanted results. Personally, I like to compare being patient to a calm and quiet stream or creek. Its water contains an unstoppable force that will change a shape of anything in its course: rocks, terrains.

Discipline

This is one of the most important values that one must have in life, and it is even more so in martial-art practice because of its demands. To myself, I don’t think of it as just train hard, be perfect (or good) at techniques. I think if one likes to be a good martial artist, he/she must be very disciplined in etiquette, patience, ego-freed heart, open mind, and forgiveness. As a teacher, being truthful to yourself when facing your own weaknesses and staying focused when challenged by obstacles are musts because that is what your disciples expect of you. However, do not misunderstand, thinking being disciplined is the same as being stubborn. Again, let’s take water for example; the flow could be partially blocked by a huge rock, but the current would go around a rock, wrap it, and release a difference force downstream. Isn’t this what Aikido does?

There are more than just several of these issues in Aikido teaching, but these are some of the most important to my training.

TALK, TALK, TALK

By the Unknown Aikidoka

I went to an Aikido class in a dojo out of town. We bowed in and warmed up. The teacher then called a student to the front and demonstrated a technique. The teacher told us the name of the technique and then demonstrated it three more times. He followed that with ten minutes (I peeked at the clock) of explanation of virtually every aspect of the technique. My knees were aching and my attention had wandered about five minutes into the lesson. I began to feel as though I were in a lecture hall rather than a dojo.

Finally, the teacher had us stand up, face our partners, and do the technique. My partner went first, and he did the technique twice when the teacher interrupted the class to tell us what mistakes were being made. There followed another five minutes of explanation. So far in the class we had had about three minutes of training and fifteen minutes of talking.

We went back to our practice, and it was my turn to do the technique. As I stumbled through the beginning, my more senior partner stopped me and began explaining what I was doing wrong. More talk! About twenty-five minutes into the class, I had had only about four minutes of actual training.

While I was trying to follow my partner’s advice, the teacher came over, stopped me, and began to explain further. Even more talk.

At home that evening, I recalled reading something on Aikido training by a sensei I had never heard of. He was very big on repetition. He contended that repetition “hardened” us, made us strong, and trained our muscles and our nerves so that techniques would become a part of us. He specifically did not like just talking

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Talk, Talk, Talk

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about Aikido, which, he said, only reaches our minds and has very little relation to actual doing. I highlighted this statement, which I had copied into my Aikido notebook:

You must boil yourself,
training and training,
heating your spirit until it glows
and burns away the muddiness
of your doubt and hesitation.

I do not wish to be too critical of the “talking” teacher because I know he had good intentions. I know he genuinely wanted us to understand the technique as fully as possible.

But I think understanding a technique comes mainly through a process over time, a process primarily of doing the technique again and again and again, with just very little bits of explanation as we go along. Typically, we start out with the gross, general movements, trying just to get the feel of what we do with our bodies. Then we keep refining and becoming more subtle. However, the refinement is not likely to happen in just one class, and it is not likely to happen merely through verbal explanation.

At least for western students, there is a sense of, “I want to get it as fast as I can.” And for western teachers, there is sometimes the feeling of, “I need to give it all as quickly as I can.” Patience evaporates. I think both teachers and students need to acquire self-restraint, postponing the instant gratification of getting it all right now. For me, the best Aikido training is that which is marked by 85% doing and 15% explaining. Also, if there is talking to be done, it should be done only by the sensei, unless he says otherwise.

Finally, I can't help feeling that excessive explaining in a class, even if done with good intentions, deprives students of the opportunity to “harden” through doing, of the

chance to “boil” themselves and to burn away the muddiness of their doubt and hesitation. Hearing about it, thinking about it, although useful, will never really bring students the experience of Aikido,

TEACHING AIKIDO Evolution of a Good Teacher

By Ryan Clarke

At some point in our study of Aikido, we all have been influenced by our teachers and influenced others with our teaching. Recall back to when you were just a beginner—white belt around the waist, trying to take in all the information being offered by the instructor. I'll bet every Aikidoka took that information home and asked a spouse, family member, or friend to be uke and show them what they learned. In effect, every one of us has been teaching Aikido since we have started training.

I would not dare to compare a junior student teaching a technique to friends to a licensed Aikido instructor. Instead, I would like to discuss the natural evolution of learning to leading to teaching and what attributes make for a good teacher.

As we progress in our study of Aikido, the level of understanding increases proportionally with the amount of time and effort spent studying the art. We obtain colored belts to signify the promotion of rank and to some extent the responsibilities of the student. A responsibility that gradually increases over time is that of being a leader and sharing Aikido knowledge with others—in effect, being a teacher.

There are several aspects to being a good teacher. The majority of our classes have a wide range of experience levels. As such, the instructor needs to be aware of the individual abilities of each student, and try to format the class to

appeal to both the beginner and the seasoned student. An example may be having the senior students working with the juniors, a soft teaching approach as the juniors learn from practicing with the more advanced students. Often an instructor will assign a senior student to help integrate a newcomer into the class. Being clear and concise with direction, managing the time well, and sensing the energy of a particular class also make for effective instruction. Furthermore, a good teacher will test the resolve of their students and challenge them to become better Aikidoka and better people in general.

The Shuharikan Dojo is blessed to have several licensed instructors, each bringing their own perspective and knowledge to our study of Aikido. And there may be more instructors in the future to add to our teaching group. Having multiple instructors offers a richer and deeper understanding of Aikido because every Aikidoka develops their own Aikido; and a good teacher helps each student develop their own Aikido.

A potential setback in having a large group of teachers is inconsistency. Because a teacher has developed his/her own Aikido, instructors tend to teach techniques with slight variations from one another. Often, students become confused or frustrated if they get contradicting instruction. This is natural and healthy—it shows the student is thinking about their own Aikido and what makes sense for them. Lastly, I think the most common problem with having multiple teachers is communication. Sometimes direction from the top is unclear, expectations of students and teachers not fully understood, or maybe there is a special class starting that only some of the students know about.

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Teaching Aikido
Evolution of a Good Teacher
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Our recent Shugyo class was a good example. Some of the senior students were not aware the class had started, nor did some junior students who accidentally attended the all jiyu-waza class. However, all who attended learned a great deal, and it was fun to watch everybody progress in their jiyu-waza.

In conclusion, teaching Aikido is part of a natural progression of understanding and responsibility. Teaching others also helps build and improve your own Aikido. Having a variety of instructors offers multiple perspectives and enriches the training of all in the dojo. Osu!

**INSTRUCTIONAL
STRUCTURES FOR
YOSHINKAN AIKIDO**

**The “Way of Harmony”
Applied to Life Other Than
Training**

By Jeff Hansen

There are conceivably just as many ways to teach a technique as there are techniques to teach. That said, I would actually like to address something different, other than the many ways of teaching a technique, rather; the specific “Way of Harmony” that is to be encompassed within our training and then applied in everyday life and experience. Aikido translates to “The Way of Harmony.” So what exactly does that mean as a practical modern martial art? And how do you teach that meaning without necessarily involving the performance of any technique, fall, or application of physical work? It’s within the practice and training itself where the experiences are

developed so that the “Way of Harmony” becomes a part of all things in life other than just as the Dojo.

There is a great quote that goes something like: “The best Dojo is wherever you are.” This should be taken quite literally in the sense of being mentally prepared for the same Harmony you give and receive while training at the Dojo to that in which you live your life everyday and wherever you are.

There always seems to be this haze of insecurity that envelops the mind of nearly every student and Sensei alike that somehow the techniques we are practicing may need to be adjusted to fit a more “real life” situation. What “real life” situation is everyone talking about? A fight? An altercation of some physical struggle for life? If it is, why does it have to be any different than that of the harmonious care we take while training at the Dojo? Why is it that we assume that this “real life” situation is always going to involve a reaction as to a more violent end or struggle? If for some reason someone has decided to try to harm you doesn’t necessarily mean that you have to harm them back. Is that the Way of Harmony?

Does the force of an attack always have to be met with an equal or greater response of violence? If it is this kind of desired reasoning that you wish to injure your attacker, as they want to do on to you, then it is a sad thing, indeed, that we as humans need to have this instinct; let alone, those of us who train in Aikido who should know or need to know better of. Of course, of all human history we know of the violence that has marked us, plagued us, and made us all. We are constantly reminded of it everyday, which, for some seemingly strange accepted reason, is needlessly glorified in today’s fast-paced world of TV, media, movies, and then imitated in life as in art. That is for another discussion, however.

What if, for example, there were no such reasons for violence

because everyone in the world practiced Aikido. Would there still be this fear of being attacked in some manner that will take your life? Of O-Sensei’s teaching, wishes, and dreams, this was exactly the kind of notion and thinking behind his philosophy of Aikido - “The Way of Harmony” - is to endure. Of course, this is a lot to ask of or to foresee, and quite impossible. Never has the world, let alone the modern one, had every human being been in belief of, or in capacity to do, the same thing as everyone else. But what if, for example, from the moment you wake in the morning to the moment you take up the pillow for sleep again, you have the exact same dedication to awareness, focus, centeredness, and balance that you have while training at the Dojo while doing everything else everywhere you go?

. Wherever you go, there you are. Dojo is wherever you are. There you are; always harmonious in the way you react to anything, the way you carry yourself, the way you speak to others, and react. If someone says something you do not like, should you be harmonious and react with a balanced tongue, or do you react with an equal or greater venomous tongue? And is it harmonious to react equally, if so inclined? These are interesting questions, and there can be plenty of situations or scenarios in which this kind of questioning could and should be used. Sounds familiar, don’t you think?

There are just as many ways to teach a technique as there are techniques to teach. And so it goes, there are much and many ways to teach of this harmony that go beyond the techniques. This is why I enjoy Aikido. This aspect of teaching Aikido—“The Way of Harmony”—for me will be of highest importance both as a student and as I begin to teach. I have the unfortunate graces to mostly agree with the notions of the

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Instructional Structures for Yoshinkan Aikido

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“real-life” temptations and truths of the world. But, alas, it is my wish that as I continue to change my ways to be more harmonious in everything I do and say has influence on those of my family, friends, and, above all, strangers that are not my friends yet. And that real life turns out to be just as harmonious as I make it out to be and for it to be the same for everyone else.

TEACHING AIKIDO – “Secrets” of the Art

By John Seyer

“Secret techniques begin with basic techniques; basic techniques end as secret techniques. There are no secrets at the beginning, but there are secrets at the end. The key to success is hard training.”

Karate Master Kanken Toyama from *Budo Secrets* by John Stevens.

“We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

T.S. Eliot

I believe that the true beauty of Yoshinkan Aikido is that the “secrets” of the art are presented to us from the very beginning. Through the concepts of Kamae (basic stance) and Kihon Dosa (basic movements), along with “cultivation of spirit” inherent in the Yoshinkan name, Shioda Gozo Sensei reveals the true secrets of the art of Yoshinkan Aikido. These concepts are presented to us on the very first day of our training, and we spend a lifetime studying

them. Gradually, through repeated training, the secrets begin to reveal themselves to us. It is the study of these fundamental concepts that I believe is key to the understanding of Yoshinkan Aikido and is the focus for my training and my teaching.

A Shodan—first-degree black belt—in martial arts is generally understood to “know the basic fundamentals” of the art. As such, my intent is to teach what I am supposed to know, and what I am studying—the fundamentals. I think that, for me, the most successful classes are ones in which the basics (kamae and kihon dosa) are taught and practiced, then carried into a specific technique (or set of techniques)—with emphasis on the relationship between Kihon and the actual technique. I also see great value in having a jiyu-waza component to the class where the technique(s) taught are taken to a more freestyle engagement. I think that this is when the importance of the “basics” is truly revealed. In our recent eight-week Shugyo course, it became apparent to me, and to most of us, that kamae and kihon dosa were fundamental to successful jiyu-waza, and were sometimes missing in our technique. Especially during the stress of two-on-one jiyu-waza, maintaining kamae was fundamental to our effectiveness. It was obvious when we were “in kamae,” and it was obvious when we weren’t.

Kamae (basic stance) is a study of static balance. I believe it is also a study of mental balance—that is, a study of readiness, focus, and discipline. Through kihon dosa, the concept of kamae is extended into movement—the study of maintaining balance and focus while moving. The discipline to maintain physical and mental kamae throughout one’s movements is key to understanding Aikido and to revealing the “secrets” of the art, encompassing concepts such as “center power”

(Chushin Ryoku) and “focused power” (Shuchu Ryoku).

Complete physical and mental kamae, I believe, is developed through the study of Shugyo. I believe that the cultivation of “Shugyo” and “spirit” are key elements of Yoshinkan Aikido and should be part of regular Aikido instruction. Shugyo is a difficult concept to define and understand. Jacques Payet Sensei, in his introduction to *Aikido Shugyo, Harmony in Confrontation*, by Gozo Shioda, describes the concept of Shugyo as “ascetic training—constant training in order to unite body, mind, and heart.” It combines physical training (the “endless repetition of techniques”), mind training (the “diligent practice of awareness, sensitivity and intuition”), and training of the heart (the suppression of ego and learning humility).

We recently have had several good opportunities to observe and experience Shugyo: the recent Dan exams, the Shugyo course, and the clinic with Haynes Sensei and Taylor Sensei. An excellent example is Fred Haynes Sensei’s quote at the beginning of each recent clinic session: “For the next ninety minutes—only Aikido.” Shugyo is evident in the focus and spirit we bring to each class—a spirited “Osu” in acknowledging our instructors or our training partners, quickly moving to position on command, a sharp kamae, and maintaining constant connection with your training partner throughout a technique.

It has been said that we are what we do. This is evident in how we conduct ourselves in our aikido training. How we train during those days of endless repetitions is how our aikido will eventually manifest itself “in the heat of battle.” The “secrets” to Yoshinkan Aikido are right there—in the basics (basic stance and basic movements) and in the name (“House of Cultivating Spirit”).

Teach the basics and cultivate the spirit.

ON TEACHING

By Maggie Murphy

Like most brown-belts, I really wanted to start teaching. Aikido was so much fun and at that level you start to see so many little things, and landing falls was no problem, so I felt an obligation to share my limited knowledge with anyone who would listen. I think that it is often called brown-belt disease, and I had a serious case of it. Someone would ask a simple question and I would ramble on for about twenty minutes.

My teacher at the time often failed to show up, so I felt lucky to be able to lead class. The problem was that I had very limited knowledge and no warning as to when I would be teaching. He felt that this was good training for always being prepared. A fellow brown-belt and I would prepare classes in advance to have something to teach, but this effort was thwarted by him dictating what to teach and still not allowing prep time. The primary thing that I learned from this is that in order to be a good teacher I needed to prepare. I suppose that my former teacher was correct in saying that we should always be prepared, but, realistically, for me to teach proper kihon, I needed (and still need) to prepare.

The preparation makes a person look at the technique in a new light. You not only search for how to move properly but you think about the common mistakes and what little things make the technique more effective or ineffective. In brief, teaching is an invitation to go deeper into a technique, seeing when you would use this type of movement and when you would avoid it. You start to see where Sh'ite might be vulnerable and where Uke might escape and you think about how to avoid that. As I watch students execute a technique, I start to see

how differently people understand the movements and look for ways to broaden that understanding.

It is also both very humbling and very gratifying to teach. It is humbling when people with half my experience do some things better than I have ever been able to do them. That same moment is gratifying to see someone who has worked hard, learn and do well. It is their body, they did it, but it is still exciting to feel a part of their learning process. It is equally gratifying to see someone begin to understand something that they have struggled with and then execute properly. While age has mellowed my classes considerably, the greatest thing about teaching is still seeing my students do well. No matter how many students I teach, that part is still exciting.

KUGI WA TSUKIDASHI

By Gordon Shumaker

In his October 2007 column in *Black Belt Magazine*, Dave Lowry Sensei refers to an interview in the 1960s with two Hawaiian aikidoka visiting a Midwest dojo. They bragged extensively about how much harder Aikido training was on the islands. Lowry notes that they both had near-terminal cases of the afflictions of arrogance and cockiness.

The sensei at the dojo—a woman named Fuji who was five-foot tall and weighed 90 pounds—invited them to train rather than talk. She then went about helping them achieve “a major attitude adjustment.”

Fuji seemed to be whirling just over the surface of the mat. Before the guys could completely get to their feet or really launch a good attack, they got slammed down again.

At the end of the session, says Lowry, they left the dojo “not nearly impressed with themselves” as when they arrived.

The process of adjusting the attitude and squeezing out the arrogance is a manifestation of the Japanese notion of *kugi wa tsukidashi*, or “**pounding the nail back down.**”

As we progress in our Aikido training, it seems inevitable that the nail of arrogance will come up from time to time, at least a little bit. That's all right as long as it gets pounded back down. And it seems that the responsible teacher should assist in the process, like Fuji Sensei did.

The “pounding” can be physical or psychological, or both. Psychologically, it might take the form of assigning to the student only menial roles in the dojo. This allows the student to reflect and find humility.

Is this cruel or unfair? I don't think so. In fact, it is a critical opportunity for the student to grow and mature. The student who truly has the potential for overcoming arrogance will “get it” and will eventually come around. On the other hand, the terminally arrogant student will feel picked on and will complain about being treated unfairly.

The *genuine* martial artist is one who has overcome arrogance and who has deepened his or her humility, one whose nail has been pounded down. Because we do not necessarily recognize our own arrogance, the teacher becomes a critical force in helping us to pound the nail down and to become true martial artists.

**“TEACHERS
OPEN THE DOOR,
BUT YOU MUST
ENTER
BY YOURSELF.”**

— Chinese Proverb

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