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YUDANSHA RANK PROMOTIONS

Yudansha are holders of black belt ranks. The Shuharikan Dojo is pleased to announce the following promotions as the result of gradings in April and May, 2007:

Shodan - 1st degree black belt

- John Seyer
- Ryan Clarke

Sandan - 3rd degree black belt

- Jim Nolan
- Maggie Murphy

Yondan - 4th degree black belt

- Gordie Shumaker
- Glen Giacoletto
- Jon Sharratt

The shodan ranks were awarded by the Shuharikan instructors. The sandan and yondan ranks were awarded by Fred Haynes sensei (6th dan).

In addition to the rank promotions, instructor upgrades were also awarded. Jon, Glen, and Gordie received dai san instructors' level, which allows them to promote students through the rank of nidan (2nd degree black belt). Jim and Maggie received the dai yon level, which authorizes them to grade through shodan (1st degree black belt).

The Shuharikan congratulates all the recently-tested yudansha.

BLACK BELTS IN PERSPECTIVE

The Shuharikan Dojo has in its membership 12 students or teachers who hold black belt ranks. To give some perspective as to the significance of that number, we consulted the registry maintained by Steven Miranda sensei (4th dan) at Aikido Yoshinkan Sacramento. As of May 22, 2007, in the United States there are 20 registered 4th dans, 15 3rd dans, and 74 1st dans. So, the Shuharikan yudansha are part of an elite group in U.S.A. Yoshinkan Aikido.

But particular congratulations go to Maggie Murphy. She is now one of three women in the United States who hold the rank of 3rd dan in Yoshinkan Aikido. It surely is a privilege to have Maggie as an instructor at the Shuharikan.

It should be noted that black belt ranks are serious designations because they signify that (1) the holders have made a sincere commitment to uphold and practice the principles of Yoshinkan Aikido, and (2) the holders have accepted the responsibility to promote and spread the art by teaching, mentoring, encouraging, and recruiting others. Although black belt ranks are designations of privilege, they carry obligations as well. After our recent instructional clinic and the yudansha gradings, Keith Taylor sensei (5th dan) asked Glen Giacoletto, who had been promoted to 4th dan, whether he was "feeling the weight of his rank yet." That inquiry says a great deal about the meaning of a black belt.



THE SHUHARIKAN HOSTS SENIOR INSTRUCTORS

On April 27, 28, and 29, the Shuharikan Dojo hosted an instructional clinic conducted by Fred Haynes sensei (6th dan), chief instructor at Island Aikido in British Columbia, and Keith Taylor sensei (5th dan), chief instructor at the Sowakan Dojo, also in British Columbia. Senseis Haynes and Taylor were assisted by sensei Steve Poplawski (3rd dan), chief instructor at Derry Road Aikido Club, and sensei Ray Wilkins (3rd dan), both of Ontario.

Senseis Haynes and Taylor divided the teaching responsibilities so as to address all experience levels at the clinics. Sensei Haynes also spent considerable time in assisting the yudansha-grading candidates with their test preparation. Senseis Poplawski and Wilkins also trained with the candidates and acted as ukes for the gradings. Gil Warnacutt (1st dan) of the Shuharikan also served as uke for the gradings.

Our thanks to all for a splendid clinic that helped all participants grow significantly in both their techniques and their understanding and appreciation of Yoshinkan Aikido.

To capture the significance of the clinic, we have included in this newsletter issue the observations of several dojo members. These observations nicely reflect the value of the clinic

CLINIC OBSERVATIONS

- **Key Words/Phrases—Key Ideas**

One of the values of a group discussion after an Aikido kenshu is that collectively we are able to

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capture most, if not all, of the important teaching points that the instructors made. For the kenshu conducted by senseis Haynes and Taylor in April, those points are listed below by key word or phrase:

- Find the Aikido in your Aikido
- Form, form, form
- Extension
- Constant kamae
- Relax, slow, soften
- Position, space, distance
- Connection, relationship
- Timing
- Mental unbalancing
- That last 5%
- Using the planet
- Disappearing and reappearing
- Circle around the resistance
- Immovability and transparency
- Effortlessness

It will be helpful in our Aikido growth to think more about these points, to continue to discuss them, to try to discover their meaning and how they might fit our Aikido, and, most importantly, to put them into actual practice.

- ***Aikido Weekend Thoughts***
by Gil Warnacutt (1st dan)

I experienced and took away many valuable things from the clinic. After the first-day training on Friday evening, I told Sensei Taylor that I felt like a beginner. He said that was great. We all need to feel like beginners for our Aikido to grow, he stated.

But I think the most important insight I achieved is the importance of calming my mind and slowing down my techniques. My biggest obstacle in my growth is my inability to relax. The clinic emphasized the importance of slowing down the technique, which in turn improves timing and enables relaxation in performance. Sensei Haynes also discussed this issue with me and suggested ways to calm my mind and to just let the techniques take over.

clinic with senseis Haynes and Taylor.

During the weekend, many of the ideas presented in the book seemed to show themselves. Please don't misunderstand this. I will not be using a saddle for my pillow anytime soon, but the key principles that serve a philosophical base for the art that we study are as important today as they have ever been. Many of the frustrations are also quite similar. The book was written in a time of peace. With few battles to fight, the warriors had some trouble with waiting until they were financially solvent before starting a family, having a nice house, or having many possessions. Similarly, we live in a time of relative ease, if not peace. Everyone around us has creature comforts, and we would like to share in that bounty. But the way of the warrior calls us to live more deliberately and challenge ourselves to lead disciplined lives.

The samurai stressed the importance of discipline and not allowing oneself to simply coast through the days and weeks but to study every day. The weekend came up very suddenly, and I found myself scrambling to get prepared. It was a lot of fun, but it would have been less stressful if I had followed that advice and been challenging myself on a regular basis. As it was, I was facing the bokken jiyu-waza for the first time in many years. I had forgotten how much fun that is. Our guests served as a reminder to enjoy the challenge of Aikido and to relax in confrontation. Regular practice makes it a lot easier to achieve this.

Another important principle told in the warrior's primer (Budoshoshishu) is that of renewal. It compares old hands to dirty white garments. The idea is that when someone has been in the same occupation for a long time, they are like a white shirt that

(Continued on Page 4)

- **Spring Clinic Thoughts**
by Sofia Estrellado (8th kyu)

The recent Aikido clinic, hosted by the Shuharikan Dojo, was an incredible and motivational experience. The clinic offered a general sense of the possibilities afforded by the study of Aikido, a window into what Aikido spirit is. And it confirmed for me that Aikido involves a lifetime of learning.

The tone of the second of the four clinic sessions—the first that the kyu-ranked students were invited to attend—was more serious and more formal than the Saturday classes I usually attend. The instruction was clear and concise, and the introduction and execution of the techniques covered was swift but efficient. I appreciated the lessons regarding the placement of the body in relation to the mat and uke, and the importance given to basic movements. The demonstrations during the open mat were amazing, and the ease with which each shite deflected, incorporated, or returned uke's energy was astounding.

In watching our own instructors' tests, I sensed, as I had throughout the clinic, that each person continually learns Aikido and that learning is lifelong. After the fourth, and last, part of the clinic, Steve Poplawski sensei, visiting from Canada, approached me to thank me for being his uke. I was completely humbled by his sincere utterance of appreciation and, at the same time, I was embarrassed that it had not even occurred to me to thank him immediately after the clinic. This humility is what I presume constitutes Aikido spirit.

- **Throwing**
by Pat Gerkey (1st dan)

One of the highlights of the clinic for me was that our guest senseis took the time to throw all members of the dojo, irrespective

of their rank or experience. So, 8th kyus received the same throwing experience as 1st dans.

This was a unique opportunity to feel the Aikido power of some of the best teachers in the world. And it was quite interesting to see how they adjusted their throwing techniques to fit the levels of the ukes they were working with, thus bringing Aikido to the exact level at which the trainee was functioning

- **Fred Said**
by Edward Toussaint (7th kyu)

Fred Sensei told me, "You are firm in your posture, but remember that the ankle is a hinge joint, and you need to make your ankles 'soft.'" By "soft," what sensei meant, I believe, is that we should allow our ankles (and other body parts) to work as they are supposed to work. So, by using and moving the ankles properly, we are able to achieve a deeper and more stable kamae. This will then translate into more stable and effective techniques.

- **Weekend Update**
by Maggie Murphy (3rd dan)

About a year ago, I read a book called *Budoshoshishu of Daidoji Yuzan*. The irony was never really lost on me. I would be sprawled in my claw-foot tub soaking in the hot, soapy water, with my feet propped over the edge, reading about how I should not seek to be comfortable and that all I really needed in this life was my sword, my horse, and my bow. As I lay reading about filial piety and the importance of a noble death, there was this convenient disconnect that made me separate my life from those of the samurai warriors that I was reading about. I thought of the ideas as being quaint, somewhat entertaining, and not a part of my reality. I hadn't really thought much about it until our weekend

Clinic Observations

(Continued from page 3)

has been worn for too long, they need to be cleaned. As detergent, the author recommends loyalty, righteousness, and courage. I believe that all of us felt renewed at the end of the weekend. People who never take jiyu-waza got up and did their best. No one hesitated or refused to participate. It was a proud moment for the dojo.

Now the weekend is over and the visiting senseis have gone home. To me, the weekend was a challenge to train more vigorously and with greater spirit, to find the fire within to expand and improve my Aikido, or perhaps to find the Aikido in my Aikido, which Haynes sensei designated as the theme for the clinic.

- **Workshop Reflections of the Lady with the Purple Belt**
by Marty Gerkey (4th kyu)

Energy! Years or months or weeks of training—the mat was alive with our Aikido.

Whether you were younger or older,
there was a space for your Aikido.

It was a place of adventure.

It was a time of learning.

It was a feeling of camaraderie.

For this time: Just Aikido!

- **Thoughts about the Haynes/Taylor Clinic and the Dan Exams**
by John Seyer (1st dan)

Given the inclusion of the Dan exams, and the close proximity to my own Shodan test, I anticipated a very interesting weekend—and was not disappointed. Having the opportunity to observe, hands on,

the Aikido of Haynes Sensei and Taylor Sensei was a real thrill. To date, I had not had much opportunity to directly experience Aikido at that level, and had never taken high-level ukemi from someone of that rank. These experiences were a real growth opportunity for me and have given me much to ponder and work on for some time to come.

I came away with a number of things from the clinic. It was interesting to view and experience the difference in technique between Haynes Sensei and Taylor Sensei. Haynes Sensei's aikido is softer and feels slower, but is quite disorienting. I really found interesting his teaching on the mental unbalancing of your opponent in lieu of only thinking of Aikido as taking physical balance. I found, in taking ukemi from Haynes Sensei, that I wasn't always sure of where I was. I had plenty of time to think about it, but was often mentally confused about where I was and where he was (his intent, I'm sure!). In contrast, Taylor Sensei's aikido is very quick (and felt a lot harder!). It was very impressive and effective. Taking ukemi from Taylor Sensei, I found that I didn't have any time to think of what was happening—it happened so fast. I found taking his ukemi very difficult, and it showed. Over the course of the weekend, and through discussions with Taylor Sensei on the topic, I learned to relax more and just go with it (instead of trying to mentally keep up with what was happening). Sort of like feeling my way instead of trying to think my way through taking ukemi.

I also found Haynes Sensei's discussion on the last 5% of your movements delivering the majority of the "Aikido" very interesting. It reminded me of Payet Sensei's teaching several years ago in California when, during Kihon Dosa, he would push me and extend me to a point I didn't think my body could actually reach and then said, "Feel that? Work

towards that." What he was saying was to strive for deeper and longer extension through all basic movements and that will eventually translate in your techniques. I think that was what Haynes Sensei was saying. Push your extension and the range of your Kamae because it's in that last bit of a movement or technique where Aikido is found. This will be one of my main points of focus for the next year.

One other point that I saw exemplified at the clinic was the power and effectiveness of atemi as demonstrated by Steve Poplawski from Toronto. His use of atemi during his jiyu-waza demonstrations was remarkable. It was the first time I've seen "real" atemi used, and the results were amazing to watch.

Coming into the clinic, I really didn't know what to expect. I knew that, in some way, I was going to be "tested," given the close proximity to our Shodan test. I didn't expect that testing to be taking jiyu-waza ukemi from both Senseis. A comment was made that you can tell someone's rank by how they take ukemi. We all got to experience that, and we were all tested in that way. A number of techniques I took were a first for me, and I found that I did not do well trying to think my way through. The biggest thing I learned from the clinic was a start at how to correctly take that level of ukemi. Now, I just need to keep working at it, and all of the other key points from the weekend.

Finally, it was a real pleasure to be present for the Dan exams by our instructors. I was impressed by the connection they all had with their test partners, the importance of breathing during jiyu-waza, their spirit, and even the way they handled the stress of the test. The experience of the Dan exams and the teachings of Haynes Sensei and Taylor Sensei were an inspiration for me in my future training.

- **Spring Kensu**
by Ryan Clarke (1st dan)

The spring clinic and Kensu was a great opportunity to accelerate your understanding of Aikido and reignite the fuel to keep training. Having Haynes Sensei and Taylor Sensei teaching at our dojo was a gift and an honor. Both are high-ranking instructors well renowned for their skill; skill that was evident as they easily tossed all of us around the round-robin style jiyu-waza. Furthermore, they were kind and a pleasure to meet. As a huge bonus, we got to observe our instructors prepare and take their next respective Dan examinations. It is comforting to know that it isn't just us out there with the pre-test jitters!! Our instructors did very well and set the bar high for the rest of us!

Some of the major points I took from the clinic involved the concepts of timing, distance, and speed. For myself, timing and speed are very important, and I have tried to work on matching my speed to the energy given by uke. I am naturally quick, and sometimes moving too fast is the same as moving too slow. If you move too early, uke can adjust the attack or prepare a defense. The quickest movements are not always the fastest. Rather, the quickest movements are when shite moves at exactly the right time and pace, governing the distance and making uke unsure about the next movement. This relationship allows shite to remain calm while taking uke mentally off balance. At this stage, a technique is much easier to do and requires much less effort.

Also, receiving instruction from these master technicians can certainly help perfect your technique or make it more effective. There are so many subtleties and small adjustments that can be made to increase the effectiveness of a technique, and Taylor Sensei spent some time offering slight alterations in our

shihonage and sankajo techniques. The main focus from his teachings involved making a circular cut down with the aforementioned techniques, as opposed to pulling or pushing uke down.

It is these concepts that I am applying to this year's training—the relationship of proper speed and distance and using better circular movements to break uke's balance. I would like to thank Fred Haynes Sensei, Taylor Sensei, and also Steve Sensei and Ray Sensei for coming down from our northern neighbor and spending time with us.

- **That Last 5%**
by Jeffrey Hanson (1st dan)

A simple idea stressed a few times during Canadian senseis' visit for the Spring Kenshu Clinic here at Shuharikan was this little bit of 5% pushed into the end of your techniques. The idea of groundedness, or using the "planet" as said a few times by Fred Haynes and Keith Taylor, and turning your hips further square and centered towards the end of the technique is what makes for a nice display and feel of controlled power without exuding much energy or muscle strength. Just moving a bit more forward while keeping your centeredness and Kamae and bringing the hip into a more squared forward position help maintain your balance while providing an extra smidgeon of oomph and control into and over Uke. While training over the four different sessions, this was stressed from time to time and was adapted into a few techniques we were able to work on. I, for one, really found it to be difficult as it was a new concept and a new feeling for the trained body movements I've been accustomed to. Perhaps this was why my soreness was more in my knees and hips than my back due to this extra turn inward towards my center? Hard to say, really. It was

a new tension in my muscles brought on by different Sensei training methods and concepts.

So that last 5% of movement while keeping centered is something I will be trying to push myself into doing during my training over the next few decades. For what it's worth, I have already found it to be helping a bit in some of my techniques. When I get it to work, adding just that last 5% of movement into a technique, I find my control over Uke a bit more easily controlled and without much more effort, other than just pushing the hip or Kamae more forward. It helps me become more aware of where I actually need to be rather than forcing Uke with muscle or tension. Just move in a controlled Kamae fashion and add that extra 5% near the end of each movement, and feel how Uke has no choice other than to follow along or comply with the control. Overall, I need to be in control of myself before I can control someone else. And that is a huge step towards a deeper understanding of Aikido. And that last 5% could be one of many keys to helping develop that understanding.

After the weekend, Jim-sensei and I were talking about taking Fred's uke, and he asked me "When he did his demo was he immensely immovable or totally transparent?" Thinking about this, I was reminded of the Tai Chi Classics that say your attitude should be like that of a hawk seizing a rabbit. That is what he was to me; a speck in the sky circling, and when he went in for the kill a mountain, immovable. He was transparent until he laid it on you. His irimi-tsuki was certainly immovable enough! But the way he led uke around the mat to play with his/her balance and energy: it was light and soft. So I had to conclude he was both transparent and immovable.

- **The Weekend Clinic**

by Paul Schulstad (1st dan)

The participants were taught, and they enthusiastically received, some exceptional lessons in Aikido technique and theory. It was fun and helpful to be presented with new, or at least differently-presented, insights respecting the technique aspects of Aikido, especially all-direction, and second and third control. Moreover, the focus on the idea and practice of “disappearing and reappearing” was especially educational and interesting. But I believe that the most valuable return on the weekend perhaps lies in the extent to which it reinforces the significance of the less tangible aspects of Aikido, that is, by cultivating a Yoshinkan or Aikido spirit in students by engaging each student and positively recognizing abilities and accomplishments of Shuharikan students (and other participants).

• **Clinic in Verse**

by Jon Sharratt (4th dan)

Chickpeas and lentils,
full belly.

Take a hostage,
execute a technique.

Spaghetti and meatballs,
what a meal!

Form and spacing
continue to grow.

Cold beer and smooth wine
soothe the soul.

Good friends, old and new,
time to go.

• **No Struggle**

by the Unknown Aikidoka
(10th kyu)

Sensei Haynes advised, “Find the Aikido in your Aikido.” A splendidly challenging idea. Reputedly, O-Sensei advised, “Find the Aikido in your life.” So, now we have two remarkable challenges. It’s always exciting to see how much Aikido permeates our lives.

That brings me to an observation by English poet William Blake: “Without contraries, there can be no progression.” This notion is fully reflected in the philosophy of dialectical theory, which tells us that there is a thesis, and then an antithesis, and the result is a synthesis. The synthesis, in turn, becomes a new thesis, and so on. That’s how we progress. But Blake and other dialecticians, such as Plato, Hegel, and Marx, seemed to see the process as involving a good deal of struggle.

What I saw demonstrated by senseis Haynes and Taylor was acceptance of the notion that without contraries there can be no progress, but what was different is that they seemed to take the “struggle” out of the process.

Uke attacks (thesis) and shite responds (antithesis), and the conflict is resolved (synthesis). But senseis Haynes and Taylor showed that, while they fully appreciated the “contraries,” they found ways to either avoid or to ameliorate the aspect of struggling with them, or against them. Uke’s attack was nothing more than a situation to be resolved. It was not a situation to be clashed with, and no solution (synthesis) was the product of force or exertion. The “defense” (antithesis) was effortless, and the solution (synthesis) was effective but without harm.

I’m sure sensei Haynes meant many things by his urging that we find the Aikido in our Aikido. For me, surely one of those things was to let go of the force, the struggle, and to use position, extension, and direction to apply a technique

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smoothly and easily, to apply it “softly.”

O-Sensei’s life lesson can be that, even though progress might come through contraries, we do not need to clash with the contraries. Rather, we need to find a way around the resistance.

Find the Aikido in your Aikido. Find the Aikido in your life. Those two ideas will engage my thoughts for a long time.

**FORM, FORM, FORM—THE
IDEA OF SHIKATA**

by Gordon Shumaker (4th dan)

I’m willing to bet that if I randomly selected an Aikido student and asked him or her to discuss the importance of “form” in Aikido, the focus would quickly be directed to things such as kamae, basic movements, and techniques—the technical aspects of the art.

But Fred Haynes sensei (6th dan) repeatedly made it clear, especially to the candidates preparing for 3rd and 4th dan gradings, just how much broader the idea of form is. I vividly recall his statement after he had instructed us on entering the mat, distance, position, placement, moving together, and even standing off the mat: “This is all part of your test.”

So, the thought that “form” really matters only when performing the technical aspects of Aikido is deeply flawed. Sensei emphasized that it matters all the time, in everything we do. It also goes beyond the physical and encompasses etiquette and attitude, and the creation of harmonious connections with others. It manifests respect. It becomes an integral part of Aikido spirit. (Continued on page 7)

**Form, Form, Form
The Idea of Shikata**

(Continued from page 6)

Proper form is an important Japanese concept captured by the term *shikata*, which means **the way of doing things**. But *shikata* is not limited to the mechanical way of doing things. It is far more than that as Boye Lafayette DeMente explains in *Behind the Japanese Bow*:

It also incorporates the physical and spiritual laws of the cosmos. It refers to the way things are supposed to be done, both the form and the order, as a means of expressing and maintaining harmony in society and the universe.

Dave Lowry sensei points out in his book *Sword and Brush* that *shikata* reflects the Japanese belief that, if the outer form is correct and proper, correct and proper inner qualities will result. One of the wonderful features of Yoshinkan Aikido is its adoption of the concept of *shikata* as shown by its emphasis on precision in form.

During one of the kenshu sessions, Haynes sensei asked the grading candidates to go to various spots off the mat and to observe and help out a bit with the techniques that were being practiced. During part of the time, I stood off the mat with my arms folded. Sensei slid over to me and softly admonished that it is “not good form to stand with crossed arms.” I had taken up that position without really thinking about “form.” Sensei’s comment prompted me to remind myself that it is important to think about and to pay attention to form at all times, on and off the mat. Additionally, I immediately recalled sensei’s statement the previous day that this broader idea of form would also be part of the test. I quickly dropped my arms to my sides.

Alvin Oyama sensei (1st dan) was one of the founding members of the Shuharikan Dojo and a principal instructor until he and his wife moved to Vermont a few years ago.

Born in Hawaii, Alvin moved to Minnesota after high school, seeking, believe it or not, the place where Spam (the meat) is made—Austin, Minnesota. For those who have not visited Hawaii, Spam is a major food there and is a staple of breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Alvin found the source of Spam as well as his future wife, Donna. They eventually married and lived in Minnesota for many years.

One of the early venues of Aikido training for Alvin, Maggie, Jim, Glen, and Gordie was the Skyway YMCA in St. Paul. We trained three mornings a week for a few years.

In recent correspondence with Jon Sharratt sensei, Alvin made a very telling comment: “Once a new student at the Skyway Y asked me why I do Aikido. I was bewildered. I train in Aikido because I just do. Aikido has become what I am, just as the jo and sword have become a part of me.” Incidentally, Alvin also practiced laido.

O-Sensei often expressed his hope that students would so incorporate the principles and values of the art that they could one day say, “Aikido has become what I am.” Alvin sensei has done that. We really miss him!

If you are a black belt, remember that you were once a white belt, yellow belt, etc. You came up through the ranks by dedication and serious training. You took the steps necessary to get into the dan ranks.

The following Shuharikan students tested for kyu rank and upgraded in 2007:

Adults

Sofia Estrellado	8th kyu
Neil Thomas	8th kyu
Dean Arnold	7th kyu
Brady Coss	7th kyu
Robert Wozniak	6th kyu
Brad Kucera	6th kyu

Kids

Isabella Williams	9th kyu
Ian Williams	9th kyu
Jaymir Hare-Phillips	9th kyu
Lee Tran	7th kyu

These are the gradings through June 1, 2007. Additional tests are scheduled for later in June. Successful candidates will be recognized in the next newsletter.

Congratulations to all, and keep up the good training.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

**AND KYU-RANK GRADINGS
AS WELL**