

Fall/Winter 2009

Volume 13, Issue 1

Shuharikan Newsletter

Yoshinkan Aikido St. Paul, MN

Special Dates:

- **Fall Kyu Exam**,
December 4, 2009
@ 7:00pm
- **Bonenkai**,
December 12, 2009
@ 7:00pm
Location: HoHo
Chinese Restaurant
in St. Paul.
- **Shimewaza Class**,
January 11 & 18,
2010
- **Spring Kyu Exam**,
March 5, 2010

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Jim Stewart Sensei, 7th Dan, visits Shuharikan for a week of instruction

After a weeklong visit during which he taught all the classes at the Shuharikan Dojo, Sensei Jim Stewart (7th dan) of Toronto, Canada left us with many valuable thoughts to consider further as we train and refine our Aikido.

Here are just a few.

Sensitivity—this is the idea that we should practice becoming sensitive to uke, that is, feeling the nature and direction of uke's energy, because sh'te will use that energy to accomplish a technique. This means that we really must pay close attention to uke. Most often, sh'te is focused entirely on himself, and is concerned about how to do a technique. In other words, sh'te is concerned with his own sensitivity. Now, sh'te should switch his attention and awareness to uke.

Extending—this applies to our basic movements (but, of course, we bring those movements into techniques). We should try to extend the range of each movement so as to deepen it. So, for elbow power #1, for example, we should increase the bend in the front knee. And, as another example, in 95-degree pivot, we should spiral down lower. Extending a movement will eventually create more flexibility (and thus mobility) and stability.

Hips—our hips should never lag behind the technique, but rather should lead the technique. Expressed another way, we need to make sure that our hips become the core of the

technique by keeping them underneath the movement. If we fail to do this, we are relying, not on the whole body, but only on the upper body.

Upper body—this should be kept upright, and not leaned far forward or backward. In other words, it's kamae posture before, during, and after a technique.

No force—if a technique does not seem to be working or uke is resisting or trying to escape, there is a temptation to use a bit of force. Instead, we should try to adjust the movement. For example, we should take uke just a little farther than to point at which we have him or in a slightly different direction or at a slightly altered angle.

Empty mind—this applies especially to jiyu-waza. Instead of trying to recall techniques under pressure, we should just relax and keep evading until a technique presents itself. Eventually, a technique will "bubble up from the subconscious." And, when it does, we should use it.

Of course, Jim Sensei had much more to say, but these key points will give all of us plenty to work on until his next visit. Finally, Jim is a great example of power in softness. His techniques are very powerful and effective and are accomplished through the skillful use of uke's own energy against himself. The "softness" is the absence of force exerted by sh'te; it is not however, a soft feeling for uke.

Fall/Winter 2009 Kyu Tests

The following people tested for Kyu ranks on Friday, December 4th, 2009:

- 8th Kyu - John Sebastian
- 6th Kyu - Angela Runnels

John Seyer 2nd Dan

4th Kyu - Mary Beth Lardizabal

4th Kyu - Andy Roterling

All those who tested did a wonderful job and showed great Aikido spirit in their test and preparatory training. Congratulations all!



"It's a dangerous business, going out your door. You step onto the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off too."

Bilbo Baggins

The Fellowship of the Ring

J.R.R. Tolkien

Feeling the Power - Some thoughts about the Shioda Kancho Clinic

Gil Warnacutt 2nd Dan

It was only Friday evening, the first session of the clinic and Kancho Shioda had started out with some variations of basic techniques. All was going well with the first few techniques until we got to a relatively simple technique that I was struggling with. It was a shomen tsuki technique from migi hanmi kamae (I think), where shite made a slight pivot to the outside and placed the palm of the left hand on uke's elbow and knife edge of the right hand on uke's wrist as the punch came through. The focus of this technique was to generate the power from shite's hips and through shite's left arm to bring uke down to the mat. I had the feeling that I was just pushing on uke's elbow by using my upper body strength - causing pain to uke's elbow. I bowed to Kancho and shook my head indicating to him that I was having problems. Kancho smiled and walked over to me and had me punch him. Before I realized what happened he had flung me down to the mat in a fraction of a second. I quickly got up and smiled and bowed to Kancho in amazement. Thinking that I may have to have my arm reattached to my body, I quickly realized that I felt no pain in my elbow or arm but did experience an incredible amount of force that took me to the mat.

Kancho's movement of his hips and arm was ever so slight. As I looked at him in disbelief after experiencing the technique, he just put his arms out in a kamae position with his palms down and started moving his hips to show me what he was doing and how he made the technique work. That

was all that was needed for me to understand how he was generating all that power with so little movement. Having me feel the technique made me pay very close attention this time as to how he was moving his body.

This was a great example showing the subtleties within a technique on how power can be generated by using the hips in unison with the entire body. I also realized first hand that Kancho's powerful Aikido does not result in any pain to uke. I had never seen him in person before and it was a pleasure watching him display his brand of Aikido. I was also impressed with his teaching methods. He did not have to say much to get his point across when he was correcting my technique.

This clinic was a great opportunity not just to see great Aikido but to experience it first hand. By feeling the power of a technique by someone like Shioda Kancho, gives me a much better understanding of what lies underneath the technique, which in turn, gives me another direction to approach my Aikido training.

Fudoshin

Robert Wozniak 2nd kyu

Lately I've had the pleasure of getting a thorough introduction to single and multiple person jiyu waza by the Shuharikan instructors. The instructor's methodology has, at times, been different: there's shugyo, there's the fast-paced kakari geiko, the kakari geiko with same attack but different pre-selected waza, the kakari geiko with varying attacks and waza, the "your turn, good luck" theory of pedagogy, and so on. All of these strategies are illustrative of what I think are the dynamics and purpose of jiyu waza: to keep your center while all around you is changing and to let your aikido be aikido. But my "deer in a headlight" fumbling on the mat has shown these

sessions illustrative of a more personal dynamic and purpose: that the way is in the training of both body and mind. For where the mind won't go, the body will not follow.

Sometimes the single person jiyu waza is relatively solid: the waza magically appears and both uke's and my Space, Position, Timing, Pace and Breath coalesce and carry us through. These moments are exhilarating, instilling in me great calm, concentration and connectedness, if too few and far in between.

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But by and large the most difficult sessions are the multiple person jiyu waza: I always freeze up, waza disappears, what kamae I had and my breath control are lost. What's up with that? The attacks are still sequential and their number and frequency don't change much, only the uke. Is multiple person jiyu waza so much more demanding than single person? Although all of it is physically demanding (until I learn to relax and keep my center), I'm beginning to wonder if the problem is more psychological.

To better understand the problem I put on my gi and practiced some old school armchair waza (i.e. I read a book). For these problems are rarely ours alone and much beautiful literature is available for us to discover. With a glass of wine, or maybe a beer, I enjoyed pondering those philosophical insights, that for centuries have served to illuminate the depths of the various arts, invite us to incorporate that wisdom into our lives – both on and off the mat. Aikido, a new but traditional martial art, dovetails with the literature wonderfully. But it's up to the practitioner to figure out how. The famous monk Takuan Soho, in a letter to Yagyu Tajima No Kami Munemori on the *Mystery of Prajna Immovable*¹, addresses similar psychological hang-ups as they pertain to the art of swordsmanship. In it, Takuan ascribes survival in battle to a fluidity of mind, unfettered and imperturbable, that is at once moving yet unmovable: Fushodin. Where the mind is affected, it stops and attaches to the stimulus. On the mat it asks "Which uke?", "Which strike?", "Where's my waza?" and so on. And to attach to a stimulus, in the heat of battle or intense jiyu waza, is to forsake the forest for a tree, to disastrous effect.

He writes: *"in the case of swordsmanship, for instance, when the opponent tries to strike you, your eyes at once catch the movement of his sword and you may strive to follow it. But as soon as this takes place, you cease to be a*

master of yourself and you are sure to be beaten. This is called 'stopping'". (pg 95)

And again, when facing many opponents: *For instance, suppose ten men are opposing you each in succession ready to strike you with a sword. As soon as one is disposed of, you will move on to another without permitting the mind to 'stop' with any. However rapidly one blow may follow another, you leave no time to intervene between the two. Every one of the ten will thus be successively and successfully dealt with. This is possible only when the mind moves from one object to another without being "stopped" or arrested by anything. If the mind is unable to move on in this fashion, it is sure to lose the game somewhere between two encounters." (pg 98)*

Of course, having come to some understanding of the mind and its tricks is a far cry from having trained the mind to, well, get out of the way when it should. The mind is a drunk monkey. Armchair waza is not enough. "The way", says Musashi, "is in training" and on the mat that translates to more kihon.

Again Takuan: *"We must know that it is not enough just to see what the Mind is, we must put into practice all that makes it up in our daily life. We may talk about it glibly, we may write books to explain it, but that is far from being enough. However much we may talk about water and describe it quite intelligently, that does not make it real water. So with fire. Mere talking of it will not make the mouth burn. To know what they are means to experience them in actual concreteness. A book on cooking will not cure our hunger. To feel satisfied we must have actual food. So long as we do not go beyond mere talking, we are not true knowers." (pg 104)*

To sum it up: I'll see you on the mat!

Zen and Japanese Culture, D.T. Suzuki, New York: Pantheon Books 1959

"Cracking Through" Aikido

In trying to follow the advice of O-Sensei that Aikido practitioners should apply Aikido to their lives off the mat, I am always looking for ways to do that. From time to time, I find something off-the-mat that applies to the performance of Aikido inside the dojo. The following quote of musician David Torn's description of his musical performance is just such an item:

"I lose myself at some point during almost every musical performance. There's a point of struggle and super self-consciousness, but I always get lost at some point. While I'm playing, there's a pattern of struggling through something and then cracking through it by a weird combination of willpower and letting go. That's the most enjoyable thing for me. . . ."

There are two things about this description that maybe all of us can relate to our Aikido performance:

- Don't we all sometimes "struggle" with techniques and become "super self-conscious" about how we are doing?

- But if we persist ("willpower") and then finally "just do" the techniques without rigid concern about how well we are performing, don't we often experience a "cracking through"?

Torn speaks of getting "lost at some point." He is not talking about being lost as in being confused and not knowing how to continue with his performance. Rather, he suggests that this is what happens when he cracks through, after struggle and persistence.

One way to look at this "lostness" is to see it as a point at which we become our performance, a time when we cannot separate the technique from ourselves. In other words, we do not just do front strike first control pin #2, but rather we "become" all that underlies and is involved in that performance. We crack through; we are "lost to the technique, and to the art of Aikido.

Gordon Shumaker 4th Dan

It's a Small World After All

Jon Sharratt 4th Dan

It is interesting the things you remember from youth. One that I carry with me is when, in elementary school, we had yearly musical performances I'm sure as all children do.

There are a couple songs that I remember singing ranging from "Country Roads, Take Me Home" by John Denver, to "High Hopes (Oops, there goes another rubber tree plant)" by Jimmy Van Heusen and Sammy Cahn, but the one that has always carried a special memory is the Walt Disney song "It's a Small World After All".

In the past year I've traveled to two Walt Disney destinations and each time came across the same song. The jingle always sticks in my mind....

it's a small world.
it's a small world.
it's a small world.

It's a world of laughter, a world of tears.
it's a world of hope and a world of fears.
there's so much that we share,
that it's time we're aware
it's a small world after all

it's a small world after all
it's a small world after all
it's a small world after all
it's a small, small, small, small world.

There is just one moon, and one golden sun.
and a smile means friendship to everyone.
though the mountains be tall.
and the oceans are wide.
it's a small world after all.

it's a small world after all
it's a small world after all
it's a small world after all
it's a small, small, small, small world.

it's a small world after all
no matter if you're big or small
come on everybody let's bounce to this!
let's play some love with a little twist!

it's a small world after all
it's a small world after all
it's a small world after all
it's a small, small, world.

After hearing the song I flash back and forth from the present moment to the past again when my class was singing on the stage. There are fond memories of friends I grew up with and played many games with. Each has gone their separate ways, but when we cross paths, fun memories arise. It also makes me realize how fast time goes and that time in school is a microcosm of the world we live in.

I flash back to the present moment and time seems to have stood still when I think of how fast it has been since I first started my training and study of Aikido. I smile when thoughts drift from the beautifully decorated, well appointed, and world known dojos to the unknown, tiny, "non-ventilated" training halls I've trained in and met great Aikidoka and Budo practitioners.

All have contributed to who I am today and I realize each of us is unique in our many ways and share our friendships and experiences with one another every time we get on the mat and train or sit and converse over a cup of tea or a cold beer. This would not have been possible had I not entered that first dojo, nearly twenty years ago.

Flash back to that first class: the waning sunlight streaming through the windows, watching the small dust particles float in the air. The feel of a fresh, stiff, new dogi, each movement eliciting a crackle. The sight of people swishing across the mat like they were skating; broken only by the soft slap of hand to mat as others go rolling by.

Suddenly my nose picks up a strong, clearing scent of an overly bleached dogi offset by the welcoming smell of recently oiled trim work. The thought and moment closes with the feel of that small bead of sweat rolling down my temple, followed by the commands to line, sit in seiza, and bow in for the class....

As the years and miles roll by, the true treasures are the friends I've made and training partners I've had the great privilege of working with and they will always be with me, wherever I train or travel.

Gozo Shioda Kancho said during the first year of the IYAF (International Yoshinkan Aikido Federation) "My idea is that since the world has become such a small place we should move beyond thinking in terms of nationalities. The goal entrusted to this federation is to spread the harmony of the aikido spirit throughout the world. Its purpose is to create a peaceful world where it is possible to harmonize with anyone of any race. There is nothing as wonderful as the spirit of harmony and when I started this federation I thought about how we must all get along, how Americans and Soviets must become friends. I thought how the world is a single family and that we must make the world into a place filled with fine human beings."

It seems with those flash backs I've come full circle and the jingle is playing in my head again...

It's a small world after all
it's a small, small world.

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An Ode to the Little Things

Jeff Hansen 2nd Dan

As its gets colder and we get older there's nothing like the little things to keep us from either enjoying or detesting our current status in life.

The little thing of entering the dojo to smiling greeting faces and "Osu!" being flung about the air like any Uke during a breath throw is inviting. That is until we open our dogi to find its nearly frozen in folds from the cold drive in and that it now needs to embrace our warm skin in order to become pliant and moveable across the mats.

We enjoy the simple pleasure of not noticing, until a drop of sweat has emerged on our brow, that the dojo has warmed since the start of class. We detest that the mats like to snap at our toes and the cold barks at our joints.

Little things feel accomplishment has not yet reached its limit as the discovery of turning your wrist just slightly more inwards while being grabbed by an active Uke allows for a huge difference in control when you decide to pivot. We're then dubious in second thought as to how this simple thing has eluded us for so long.

The simple smile of acceptance from an Uke that you nearly just crushed life from their wrist, but then realize that perhaps it was not all that necessary and make a little thing of it by taking a bit more touch of strength out of your arms and transfer it to your hips. Then the smile transfers to you as you figure it out. Then partners change and a Uke only half the size of the last ones' wrist seems to encourage exactly what you need to work on. Another simple smile emerges as you

roll with ease from being thrown and court a small laugh under your breath of how easy it was. Then somehow, the following morning you sense a uncomfortable ache in your back and think back to whether it was that one roll or of another, or another...and so on.

To agonize on a little reoccurring tension in your middle finger, or lower shoulder, or that spot in your neck that seems to always get a jolt of pain in it when using it in just the right manner for it to occur and whether or not its something that'll go away on its own or needs to be addressed by a physician. Yet, with simple hindrances of the body older you attend quite a few classes in that time and find that it doesn't bother you enough to find the pleasure of being lifted off your feet by a light lift of power from a movement off the line during a technique that lands you welcomingly on to the mats. Or that was you who threw the biggest Uke across the mats with ease and the class gasped at its accomplishment.

To find as you walk in the entrance and up the stairs you can pick out the voices and percussion of bodies on the mats and then easily forget all the little things that picked at your nerves as you drove across town in the snow to get to class and don't even think about it during class that it'll probably be worse on the way home.

The little things, take from them what you will. But when you take from them, take everything, as they are little for a reason.

About Our Organization...

The Shuharikan Dojo is an officially recognized Aikido Dojo registered with the [Aikido Yoshinkai Foundation \(AYF\)](#) in Tokyo, Japan. The dojo's principle instructors hold black belt ranks and teaching licenses through the AYF.