

TACOMA AIKIKAI JOURNAL

NOURISH

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Cover Photo -Shiitake mushroom logs from All Creatures Farm. Photo Credit: Ea Murphy

EDITOR'S NOTE

ALLISON MUIR

As editor, I have the joy of watching the journal come to life, each submission complimenting the next like a well woven tapestry. A thread that stands out to me in this issue is the concept of nourishment through our mindset, how we see ourselves and interact with each other. Brittany writes about the impact of embracing her self-worth during self-defense classes. Liam shares that aikido has helped build confidence and keep balance. Zita, one of our youth members, describes her experience of both mentoring and learning, a concept echoed in articles shared by senior students. Another thread is the nourishment given and received in the spaces we create together. In "Deshi Life," Avery writes "the dojo is a living, breathing organism." Eric Sensei and several

students share about the benefits of the weapons intensive and seminars attended this year. Flynn Sensei shared how he was cared for by his role models both on and off the mat. He describes being nourished by training, but also by invitations to experience Japanese culture and to share meals and conversation. When I think about what nourishes me in this moment, I think of sounds. Flynn Sensei's voice expressing gratitude for his inspirations. The sound of clapping at the end of testing. The sound of water on the beach at Gasshuku. Chanting the Heart Sutra during Zazen, the ring of a singing bowl, and the silence just after. I am overcome with gratitude for the many contributions to this year's journal. As Tacoma Aikikai moves into its 6th year, may we continue to nourish each other.△

NOURISH

EA MURPHY

What nourishes our practice? How does our practice nourish us?

When I think of the title of this journal, "Nourish", I think of an exchange. We, in our physical form, are transient points in time. The stuff of the universe - air, water, food - carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, hydrogen - become and then pass through our bodies continually. Nourishment is this flux that passes through us, in and back out to sustain our very life. In this process we are connected to everything else, animate and inanimate, that exists or will ever exist in the universe.

Over billions of years, a single carbon atom is birthed from the stars, condenses into a planet, transforms into the body of a plant, then into the body that eats that plant, returns to the soil, and is released back to the atmosphere. We inhale and exhale into each other, continuously. If that is not magic, I don't know what is.

So, what nourishes our practice? Perhaps we can distinguish between what feeds and nourishes. Many things feed our practice and motivate our training, differently at different times. Maybe it is the hunger for movement, or the de-

sire for a committed discipline. Maybe it's the goal of getting to the next level or facing a fear. Sometimes it is the ego's desire to be the best, or its counterpart, to beat ourselves up for being the worst. To win or to lose. Sometimes practice is fed as an obsession, sometimes as simply survival. Running from demons or running from tigers. Sometimes, there is a sense of obligation to ourselves, the dojo, or the lineage. These are all important, and very normal, reasons to get on the mat. But rarely will they sustain us for the long term.

My own practice, over these last 25 years, has had ups and downs. Times when it was easy, and times when it was hard. Moments of profound doubt, however, lead me back to what truly sustains my training, heart-to-heart and center-to-center. True nourishment of practice, I believe, comes from this exchange, with my partner, myself, and the whole universe. In this way, I am nourished, and in this way, I also nourish.

"In the Way, you must first stand on the Floating Bridge of Heaven. If you do not stand on the Floating Bridge of Heaven, then Aiki will not come forth." What did O-Sensei mean when he extorted his students to stand on the "floating bridge of heaven"? Some unpacking of Shinto mythology comes in hand, the bridge of heaven being part of the creation myth of the universe, standing upon which our own world was formed through the unification of opposing forces of nature. Our own experience can enlighten us as well. Feet connected to the ground, and spine connected to the sky. Breathing in and out through our whole being, we feel connected to everything around us. Finding this natural stance is

our first task in preparing for practice.

Nourished by the breath, our fundamental moment to moment exchange with all the universe, we align ourselves with the forces of nature. From here, anything is possible. This might sound grandiose, until we remember that we are an integrated part of the universe, nourished and nourishing in turn.

From this state of being, bowing to my partner becomes another type of nourishment. I attack, they blend to respond. They attack, I blend to respond. An exchange of breath, position, gravity, and ener-

gy. Beyond strength and weakness, the exchange refreshes, energizes, and nourishes.

This state of nourishment sometimes continues when we leave the mat. Moment to moment, if we remember to inhale and exhale, we can find natural movement in harmony with the ground on which we stand. If we remember to inhale and exhale, natural responses to each other come more easily connected to the heart. Inhaling and exhaling, we draw strength from the trees and the waves, and joy from the song of birds.

Reading O-Sensei's writings, I can only glimpse at what he might have meant about our practice to unify with the whole universe. However, connecting to my breath, relishing the food I eat, opening to the heart-to-heart connection with another, I feel the truth of what Aikido can offer. A truth beyond that is beyond Aikido in its fundamental nature - we are all a part of everything. True nourishment is this exchange. △



Joshua Tree at the Women's Aikido Camp

*Increasingly, students ask me about food. As one trains, the question of how to fuel the body naturally arises, so too, I believe, does the understanding of how food connects us to our natural selves. Chiba Sensei addresses both themes in his article, "Food and Diet", first appearing in the 1989 edition of **Sansho**. Strongly influenced by his father-in-law, a pioneer in macrobiotics, Chiba Sensei was well known for the emphasis he placed on food, and many uchi-deshi fondly recount the cooking lessons they received from Mrs. Chiba. In this internet age, the information on diet is vast and conflicting. While details may change, Chiba Sensei's message is simple and clear, eating close to nature brings us in harmony with nature. It's an honor to reprint this article here, with permission from Birankai North America. -Ea Murphy*

FOOD AND DIET

TK CHIBA SHIHAN

My basic philosophy of Diet is "Shin Do Fu Ji: Body and earth are inseparable." Shin (body), means the physical body and presence, the "being." Do (earth) is the multitude of conditions that comprise the "being," including the environment, locality, and seasons. Fu Ji (inseparable), means that body and earth are one. This philosophy corresponds to the concept of the circulation of energy: Human beings absorb energy from other entities through eating, and create new entities with the energy we take in. This view also parallels the Buddhist concept of reincarnation — the foundation of the Buddhist view of the cosmos.



All life forms depend on the presence of other life forms. We exist in a continuously flowing cycle of life in which we eat other life forms, absorb their energy as a source of our life force and create other life forms with the energy we have absorbed. The reincarnation theory of Buddhism is not only an abstract concept of rebirth to another life, but also a reality happening before our very eyes. We must recognize the fact that all the life forms we consume are a necessary sacrifice to maintain our lives. This recognition is fundamental and is the wellspring of reverence toward life. Through it, we gain awareness of the importance of self-sacrifice in our own lives as well.

To restate this philosophy as a simple universal law applicable to all life forms: "Respect others!" Reverence to-

ward life can be manifested through three principles of recognition: (1) Know what is enough. (2) Do not waste. (3) Do not devour. These are the principles of eating. These three principles point to one central theme: We should sacrifice more than what we need in the universal flow of life.

These principles of recognition lead us to the importance of mindful chewing when we eat. Chewing well is important because of the physiological necessity of absorbing nutrition, but it is also significant because it creates a quiet dialogue with the life forms being sacrificed. Through this dialogue we unite with other life forms. Only then are we able truly to taste the essence of the sacrificed life forms.

The Eastern and Western views on this subject are quite different. Christianity teaches us that God and human beings are in separate domains, and that humans and other life forms are also in separate domains. It teaches us that other life forms are created for humankind. This is a very "human centered" view of the universe.

Buddha taught that "Weeds, trees, the earth and all creation can have Buddha's nature." In this view, not only human beings, but also weeds, trees, earth and rubble may have Buddha's nature!

Similarly, Shinto religion teaches us that there are eight million gods in the universe. This means that from a Shinto perspective, we see gods within all life forms as well as in natural phenomena. In Buddhism and Shinto, humans are not above all other creatures, and therefore cannot do whatever they wish to other life forms.

Now let's return to my basic theme, the "Shin Do Fu Ji" philosophy. First of all, the actual practice of the philosophy — in other words, the fundamentals of diet — should be based on the earth. This means that the food you consume should be based on the life forms indigenous to your locale, i.e., life forms which grow in the same environment in which you live. Moreover, you should eat food in season (spring, summer, fall, winter). The advancement of refrigeration technology and worldwide transportation allows us to eat anything at any time. Without being conscious of it, we eat foods from all over the world, even if they are not in season

locally. In this day of modern convenience, we need to pay particular attention to the food we consume.

Second, you must eat food which is as close to its original form as possible. Thus, when you eat rice, eat genmai (brown rice). When you eat wheat, eat unprocessed flour. When you eat fish, eat it whole, as much as possible. Small fish should be eaten as they are (head and all). Large ones can be cooked with skin and bones intact. If you eat vegetables, eat roots, leaves, stems and flowers. In short, you should basically eat foods which are processed to the least extent possible.

Third, eat foods that still have life (ki) in them. The question you should ask is whether what you are about to eat will grow if you plant it in the earth. Is it alive? (Does

it have ki?) Eat food that is as close to this state as possible. Examples of these foods are root vegetables, beans, unrefined grains, seaweed and seeds. They are closest to the ideal foods. In the case of fish, the basic method of cooking should be cooking whole (head, skin, flesh and bones). Dried or smoked fish, deep fried fish, small fish tempura, etc., are ideal methods of fish preparation.

You should be careful about meat, however. Meat can be appropriate for people in cold climates. On the other hand, we Japanese have been vegetarians for a long time and have a rather short history with the practice of eating meat. Consumption of a large quantity of meat has physiologically harmful effects on us. We have a longer small intestine than Europeans (because we were traditionally vegetarians). Therefore meat remains in our bodies longer, and the decaying meat acidifies our blood.

When you eat meat, also eat colorful vegetables, potatoes, and drink red wine to balance the meat's extreme acidity. Most meat in today's marketplace is artificially raised. Thus, most chickens are diabetic because they are crammed in a small area without freedom of movement and fed high calorie feeds and antibiotics. When it comes to fish, yellowtail tuna, which most Japanese love to eat, tastes completely different when naturally caught in the ocean than it does when farmed. If you must eat meat, to the greatest extent possible select kinds that are raised in a natural environment. Lamb is close to the ideal meat in this sense.

The reason why I fish so frequently is that I don't trust

the fish that are available in markets today. Prepared filets can be washed too much, to the point where nutrients have been washed off the meat. Also, they are no longer a totally balanced food since they are missing heads, bones and skin. They have no power to harmonize.

The importance of diet is that it is the foundation of the creative development of life and living. We must not neglect what kind of food we consume. The conscious choice of diet is also a concrete way to recognize and feel one's participation in the law of universal nature.

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It is important to understand that each individual must choose his or her best diet with comprehensive study and actual experience, based on the customs, seasons

and climate of the area where he or she lives, his or her profession, individual body constitution and characteristics, family environment, etc.

Take, for example, a man who has physical flexibility but who lacks muscle and body strength. If I describe flexibility versus strength as negative (-) versus positive (+), he is too much on the negative (-) side. In order to regain the ideal balance in his body, he must include the following items in his diet: high quality protein (grains, beans, naturally raised meat or fish), a variety of vegetables (burdock, carrots, radish, turnips, yams, onions, potatoes, etc.), and all kinds of seaweed. They are positive (+) yang foods. Consumption of these sorts of foods will offset his strong (-) tendency. In addition, he should include high quality vegetable oils and salt, such as sesame oil and natural vegetable oil and neutralized salts such as sesame salt, miso (soy bean paste) and umeboshi (pickled plum). These are (+) foods. Even if he doesn't like fish bones, smelt and smoked whitefish — when broiled well — are good companions to beer. Ancient Japanese wisdom created miso soup with dried small fish in the soup stock.

It is a well known fact that during the Russo-Japanese and Sino-Japanese wars, Japanese soldiers' body strength (stamina) was number one in the world — even though, based on European standards of nutrition, it should have been among the worst because of their "poor" diet, from a European point of view. Nowadays the simple traditional Japanese diet is being re-evaluated in light of contemporary nutritional excesses.

As I mentioned above, diet is the foundation of life ac-

FOOD AND DIET, CONTINUED

tivities. At the same time, as we are social animals (beings), it is the foundation of harmony among people. The consumption of food should have a social aspect to it. Excessive insistence on a certain kind of diet may disrupt harmony in groups and within your family. In your association with food you must keep flexibility in mind during those times when you are the host who provides food for others, as well as during those times when you are the guest who is treated to a meal. It takes great internal strength to practice this middle-of-the-road lifestyle. It is a difficult road to travel — that of clearly knowing the foundation of your own diet while having a sense of balance and understanding of how to harmonize with other people in society. My own motto is: “Harmonize yet do not get swept away.”△

DESHI LIFE

AVERY MILLER

The nice thing about getting laid off in a seven-minute Zoom call at 11 a.m. on a Friday is that you can still make it to noon class—as long as you’ve got a gi bag packed and ready to go. I closed my laptop on the HR Zoom, fired off a few angry texts, and headed straight to the dojo. And I never looked back.

There was never any question in my mind about how I would spend my time unemployed. My suddenly open schedule was the perfect excuse to start training full-time, but I’d been reading about uchi deshi programs since May. Even a few weeks in, Aikido felt like a practice where the more you put into it, the more you get out.

The first few months of training—hovering around twenty hours a week—were grueling, brutal, and addictive. It felt like I spent every waking moment either training, inhaling calories, or collapsing into sleep. I forgot what it felt like not to have tape on my toes or bruises on my forearms. I found myself Googling things like,

“How many meals can you replace with protein bars before organs start failing?” and “Do people really need working pinkie toes?” Sensei once told me that training could be thought of as forging the body. After a particularly tough class, I told her what a joy it was to keep discovering so many unforged parts of my body.



Aikido, as we all know, is a fundamentally soft and gentle art. Usually, there’s no pain at all. If there is, it’s typically only in the toes, feet, ankles, calves, knees, thighs, hips, core, fingers, hands, wrists, forearms, and—if you’re really unlucky—your neck, shoulders, arms, and back, too.

“You can’t train alone. The community offers the real fuel for the fire, the nourishment and energy needed to deepen our training and forge our practice.”

Gradually, my body adapted to the intensity of training, which was a relief. But the real benefits came from the moments when I was completely exhausted and still had another hour or two on the mat. There were days when I showed up to class after landscaping jobs, with no strength left in my arms or back. To bow in for class already drained meant I had to find ways to move without wasting energy. This, I realized, was where the real magic of Aikido happens.

It often feels like a cheat code when you finally discover the tiny, seemingly insignificant adjustments—shifting a foot, turning the hips, straightening the spine—that make ukemi feel like an effortless breeze or nage an easy, loving takedown. It’s part physics, part anatomy, and part something else—maybe you could call it spirit, or extension, or zanshin. One of the most important aspects of any athletic pursuit is how it feels to physically transform, to realize you can do things you couldn’t before. It’s the embodiment of change.

There was a lot I expected from this level of training, but one thing I didn’t anticipate was how much I would come to appreciate the broader life cycle of the dojo. From the quiet serenity of early morning zazen to the rambunctious energy of noon classes to the screaming chaos of the kids’ classes, from the sociable hustle

and bustle of evenings to the late night talks with the laido group—the dojo is a living, breathing organism. I can't remember where I read it, but someone once described a dojo as not quite a school, not quite a gym, and not quite a church but with elements of all three. You can't train alone. The community offers the real fuel for the fire, the nourishment and energy needed to deepen our training and forge our practice. To be able to attend every class has been a privilege, not just because of the opportunity to train, but because of ev-

COLLEGE ESSAY

LIAM JOOSSE

He came at me with a knife as long as my forearm. I know that I could not let him hit me. Following his thrust, I turn beside him, my hand grabbing his wrist. With a single turn, I flip him through the air, then pin his shoulder against the ground. The knife was now in my hand, made of wood. I look up at my sensei, now returning a look of approval.

Aikido has been a part of my life for so long, I barely remember a time before it. It consists mostly of throws and pins, focusing on using your opponent's energy against them. This is reflected in the translation of Aikido, being "the way of harmonious spirit." The most important part of the art has to do with keeping and losing balance, and above all else, getting back up.

I started in January of 2020 and trained for about three months, until... well you know what happened in March 2020. The dojo continued with online classes, but I just could not continue with it. I tried it out, but without contact, it was just not the same.

In June, things started looking up. Instead of online classes, we did weapons classes at a nearby park, using wooden staff and wooden katana (Jo and Bokken). It got me back into Aikido, and I ended up doing weapons classes extensively over the entire rest of my time at the dojo.

Even though the classes were great, lockdown was still wearing me down. I was not adapting well to online school, and I got the worst grade of my life... a B-. But through all of it, I stayed with Aikido- the only thing keeping balance in my life.

This all came to a point in late 2022. I had been struggling with my mental health, having had persistent panic attacks and anxiety over the past few months.

everyone else present on the mat each day. I've learned something from every single person I've trained with—whether they're seasoned practitioners or the youngest members in the afternoon classes, who are among the most dedicated and impressive people on the mat.

What's true individually is also true collectively: we all get out of the dojo what we all put in. It's been a joy to be a part of the dojo this past year, giving as much as I could and receiving far more in return.△

Even my relationship with Aikido had become strained. My life became unbalanced, so focused on my grades and training that I left no room for meeting with friends.

Then in early 2023, things started looking up. I got a



therapist, and I had picked up new responsibilities at the dojo- I was helping with some classes, having joined the founding year of the leadership program at the dojo. This

was probably the most important part because it really helped me integrate into the dojo community. I had finally found my balance between mental activity, physical activity, and community.

After that, things have only been trending upwards. In the summer, I took more classes, now having a better relationship with Aikido. I was now helping teach the kids classes, and I tested for my first adult rank, 5th kyu.

From then on, things have been consistent. I'm still helping teach kids classes, and I'm taking 6 classes at the dojo a week. I've since reached 3rd kyu and am now preparing for my brown stripe belt test, and I have high hopes. △

ANNOUNCING THE KENSHUSEI PROGRAM

The Kenshusei program at Tacoma Aikikai is a committed teacher-training program, based on traditional apprenticeship model and rooted in rigorous and dedicated practice. Students 2nd kyu and above, who are passionate about their study, are encouraged to learn more.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MIKE FLYNN SENSEI

Tacoma Aikikai was fortunate to host an International Seminar with Mike Flynn Shihan from March 22-24, 2024. The seminar took place at both Tacoma Aikikai's dojo and the University of Puget Sound Memorial Fieldhouse. Aikido practitioners from across the region, country, and globe came together for an exceptional three days of training, which included body arts, weapons, and laido classes. Flynn Sensei took us on a rigorous, inspiring journey with humor, wisdom, and care. In June, I had the opportunity to talk with him more about his aikido and laido experiences. I am honored to share highlights from our conversation here. Flynn Sensei will return to Tacoma to lead another seminar on March 7-9, 2025. You definitely want to be there! - Allison Muir

How did you first become interested in Aikido and how long have you been training?

I was first exposed to Aikido when I was 15 years old, and I started studying Sho Rin Ryu Karate. There was an Aikido teacher in the same school, but I always looked at it as kind of an advanced practice. Fast forward to 1981. I'm in the Marine Corps stationed in Japan at Camp Fuji, and studying karate from a school called Chitokai Karate. That teacher really helped me a lot. I was fighting in tournaments there, representing his school. I told him I was interested in laido, so he set me up with an laido teacher and gave me a sword.

Fast forward again. I left Camp Fuji and went to Korea for an operation; then we came back to southern Japan. My Chitokai Karate teacher's teacher, the founder of Chitokai Karate, was at the dojo in Kumamoto City in Kyushu. We went there, and I watched him. He was like O-Sensei - so soft and fluid. It was just, wow!

When I came back from Japan, I was stationed at a recruit depot in San Diego and was looking around for a place to continue to study karate and laido. I couldn't find anything. I called Chiba Sensei on the phone, and I said, "I know you do laido, and I want to continue my laido training." He says, "why don't you come to watch an aikido class too." So I did - the next Saturday. As soon as he walked on the mat, I thought "this is my teacher right here." And that was the start of it all.

Please share a few highlights from your aikido journey. Who are your inspirations? Who have been your guides?

There were quite a lot of people who were in San Diego at the time who transplanted from other teachers. You know, sometimes you listen to advice, and it is the wrong kind of advice. So, I kept to my own conscience. I listened to Chiba Sensei adamantly, constantly. Whatever he said, I just tried to take in. Sometimes I would get it, and sometimes I wouldn't.

There was a guy named Paul Sylvain who was with Sensei's group in Japan, and he would come to San Diego from time to time. I thought the world of him and learned a lot from him through the years. Many years later, he and I would always room together at summer camp. I'd bring my son and a couple of other kids. Paul was a giant. I remember one time he picked me up off the ground, raised me high in the air and said to my boy, who was probably like 5 or 6 at the time, "You love your daddy, don't you? What are you going to do now?" He was fun - a good guy. Bruce Bookman was also connected with Chiba Sensei at that time, and I learned from him as well. He was very willing to share advice.



Chiba Sensei went back to Japan at the end of '84. And I got sent to Japan again for a year in '85. That's when I went to Hombu Dojo and met Shibata Sensei, together with Chiba Sensei. Shibata Sensei ended up moving to the Bay Area in 1987. Chiba Sensei basically said, "This is you, Jubei. I give you to Shibata Sensei." So, then I had to be his number one guy and help him train his workforce in Berkeley. That lasted until 2000 when Chiba Sensei and Shibata Sensei split. Shibata Sensei was great. I learned so much from him.

I also learned a lot from Kisshomaru Doshu and Osawa Sensei, the senior. Osawa Sensei came to San Diego, and I took him around. I took him to the marine base and showed him my graduation parade. He just loved it. Then, when I was in Japan, he told Shibata Sensei to tell me to make sure to attend his private seminar during a time that the dojo was closed over the holidays. He told Shibata Sensei to tell me that I didn't have to pay. Then at the seminar, he introduced me to everybody in the class and said, "This guy took good care of me in America. I want you to take good care of him while he's in Japan." He would give me all this calligraphy that he made on nine inch square frames. He treated me like another son. When I would come down from Kisshomaru Doshu's class, he would invite me to breakfast at the coffee shop, and he would take Waka Sensei along to interpret. So, he and I became really close over the years as well. Those guys were really good to me.

"Try to extend your joints within the practice because then your body becomes loose and supple. That's how you make an aikido body."

Another role model for me, who taught me much about Aikido and much about life, was Murashige Sensei. He was a force of nature. I love him like a big brother. I'd go down to the sushi bar he worked at every Saturday night. I would eat sushi while he was cleaning up, and then we'd go out somewhere - me, him and his wife. Then Sunday morning, if there wasn't a seminar, they'd be by the house around nine, and we'd be off to the beach or something with his three kids and me. It was a blast, a really special gift. He taught me a lot about Japanese culture too. They don't make them like him anymore.

When did you know you wanted to teach?

Chiba Sensei and I had a conversation in '83 or early '84. I told him that's what I wanted to do, and he said, "that's really hard." But this was also what he wanted to hear, and it was what I wanted to do. Now, I'm just trying to focus on transmitting what he taught me - him and Shibata Sensei.

Has teaching changed your experience of aikido or your own training?

I don't think it changed my training, per se, but it changed the delivery. I believe there's sort of a method that you have to go through to share with the students and ensure a progression. If you miss a few steps along the way, then it can be fatal for the students. Chiba Sensei always said, "you've got to turn the body into an aikido body." That means you have to do a lot of ikkyo, nikyo, sankyo, yonkyo, shihonage (Neru Waza), because that is how you massage the joints and that is how you teach the body how to absorb. I see a lot of people when they teach just doing stuff like kokyunage all the time, and that teaches the body how to escape and run away instead. I think that's probably the main thing that I learned in teaching - how to teach the body to absorb. My son is teaching like that now to a large degree in Alameda, and it's a joy to see. Your teachers are doing the same thing.

It sounds like you were interested in laido even before you were interested in aikido. I was wondering if you would talk about the relationship between the two.

A lot of aikido is derived from swordsmanship, but you can't really incorporate a live blade into body arts practice because you will run out of training partners really quickly. It's good for people to understand how to use the sword. I was fortunate to meet Chiba Sensei's teacher, Takeshi Mitsuzuka Sensei when I was in Japan. I spent a long time with him, which was a great opportunity for me. He is so precise. It's funny because Chiba Sensei was a student of O-Sensei, and Mitsuzuka Sensei was a student of Nakayama Hakudo Sensei. Those two guys [O-Sensei and Nakayama Sensei] were considered the most enlightened masters of the Meiji era. I had the fortunate opportunity to study with the offspring of both of them. It was really lucky for me.

As you train, you think, "Okay, this is body arts. This is gyaku hanmi. This is ai hamni. This is shomenuchi." And then you think "Okay, this is a bokken. Cut this way. Cut like that." And then, "This is a jo. Do that." Then, "This is a live

blade. Do that.” But now it all seems like it’s the same. It’s one thing, you know? That’s why I did those laido forms at the seminar last March. Chiba Sensei kind of developed those forms, but it’s all Aikido tai sabaki. It was an opportunity to drive home that message. If I had done suwari waza techniques like shohatto, sato, uto, people would be lost and say, “I don’t see the connection here.” Those forms from Chiba Sensei, where you can see the body arts applications, are ideal for development. My aim in that seminar was to show the connection between everything.

“Those forms from Chiba Sensei, where you can see the body arts applications, are ideal for development. My aim in the seminar was to show the connection between everything.”

Do your students do both aikido and laido?

Yeah, they have to do both if they come on a Monday or on a Thursday, because I teach body arts and laido during the class. Saturday they do weapons and body arts. For me, it’s all kind of glued together now. I can’t separate them.

One thing that Ea Sensei has been talking about more with our dojo community is senpai-kōhai relationships. Could you share about how these relationships have shaped your aikido experience?

You know when somebody tells you something that you don’t want to hear, but you have to hear it anyway? That’s kind of like being kohai. You have to listen. You have to take it in. Like when I first entered the dojo in San Diego, there were a bunch of people there that were senior. They were Nidan and Sandan, and I was just a beginner off the street. I had martial arts experience, but I didn’t have any aikido experience, so I had to listen. When you have seminars, you have all these other people show up, and you just go “uh huh, thank you”, then you take what you think you can use. If you can’t use it, then you don’t take it.

The idea of senpai, to me, is easy, because it’s like being with a senior in the Marine Corps. If I’m a lieutenant, I’m in charge of the platoon. If I am a captain, I’m in charge of the company. If I’m a colonel, I’m in charge of the battalion, and my job is to make sure those people are all on the same page. That part was always easy. But you got to listen both ways, you know? And that’s the thing that people forget. It’s not a one-way street. I think a lot of people don’t understand that because it’s kind of an alien thing. If somebody starts a day before you, then they are your senpai forever. Even though you might pass by them. I remember there were guys when I first started going to seminars that gave me a really hard time. I didn’t even know who they were. Then a couple of years down the road, I was giving them a hard time. But they are still my senpai. There are senpai in your dojo, there are senpai in your organization. Then there are people that are senior to you, but they don’t share the same teacher or anything like that. It’s important, but it’s an Eastern concept and a lot of Western people don’t grasp it. There’s utility to it. You just have to remember that if somebody started the day before you, then they’ll always be your senpai, even if you’re a Nidan and they are a first kyu. You have to give them respect.

Do you feel like that system is important for aikido development?

I do, because Aikido is a Japanese martial art, and it’s part of the culture. It always amazes me how people take that part with a grain of salt. They just take a little bit of aikido here and a little bit there, and they leave the rest. They don’t speak any language. I can speak Japanese. When I went to the Shihan ceremony in Japan in 2008, everybody said, “Will you take me here? Will you take me there?”, because they needed me to interpret for them. But to me that was part and parcel of studying Aikido. If I want to deepen my understanding of the culture, the first step is language so that I could communicate with Doshu and with Osawa Sensei. I could communicate with Miyamoto Sensei and Shibata Sensei. To me, that was an important thing. I would encourage it, even if it is just a visceral understanding. You can’t remove the culture from the art. You need to understand where it comes from. I’m still learning it. I still get on the mat and think, “What am I going to learn today?” even now, 40 years later.

Everyone who attended your seminar in March really loved it and got a lot out of it. How was it for you?

It was great. A lot of times you go to seminars, and you have many experienced practitioners who think they know everything. You show one thing and then they go do whatever they want to do, and it’s completely different than what you just showed. But at this seminar it seemed like everybody was trying to genuinely do what was being

taught throughout. That was really gratifying to me. It was amazing how busy it was. There were a lot of people I hadn't seen for a long time, which was nice. It was good to see Bruce Bookman Sensei, Daniel Kempling. Of course, Steve, as well. And my son was there. A bunch of folks. It was good, you know.

Do you believe that seminars are important to the organization and for student development?

I do, because seminars are like a firehose. You get hour after hour to drill and to practice. It is like when somebody comes to class Monday through Friday, they are going to develop three times the rate of the person that comes twice a week because a synergy develops, and it gets into your body faster. There is a similar benefit to a seminar experience because of the time spent focused on training, and you are exposed to a bunch of different partners. The kicker is to really find somebody that's going to help you train. When I was a beginner, I used to try to get the top people all the time because that's what was going to make me better. But if there's a timidity about that, the opportunity can be lost. It can be frustrating, too, because if you get stuck with somebody that doesn't know what they're doing, then it's your loss. Finding the right training partner is about learning how to train your eye.

Margie from Bookman Sensei's dojo in Seattle was over here in Scotland and took a class with me. She was at the seminar with her daughter. I noticed her daughter was energetic and well connected. Her contact was really good, so I asked her to uke. It was interesting because Margie told me in the beginning of the seminar, her daughter would bow to senior people and they'd turn away to partner with someone else, but as soon as they saw her uke for me, she had people jumping in front of her trying to partner with her. So, you have to train your eye to see who you can learn from and go after it. Most people understand that and want to help. Of course there is always the village idiot, but most people want to help. At the seminar, Yahe was there, Eric was there, Ea was there, Paul Goatman was there, Bookman Sensei was there, and his students were there. You just have to see where the opportunities are. There were a lot of people at the seminar working together and helping each other to push their limits.



Group photo from the March 2024 seminar in Tacoma.

That's really good advice. Do you have any other advice for our readers?

Practice, practice, practice. Try to extend your joints within the practice because then your body becomes loose and supple. That's how you make an aikido body. It is so important. You have all these Cro-Magnon people walking around like from planet of the apes. It just doesn't help you when you get to be older if you don't know how to move. For me, I would go through periods where I would only train with women, because I wanted to study the movement for the movement sense and not have to match power with anybody. I could power through pretty much anybody, but there's no point to doing that. So maybe for a month at a time, every place I'd go, I just practiced with women to remind myself to be flexible.

The other thing that I think is important is not to resist. I never got in the habit of resisting people, because it never made any sense to me. If you're practicing this martial art, which is supposed to be fluid, trying to block somebody's power or force instead of going with it is setting yourself up for a catastrophic failure. I just always try to move.

What keeps you training?

It's a living, breathing thing. You're constantly finding something different, something new. "Oh! that connects to that and that connects to that." That's what keeps me going. I learn something new every day!

Is there anything else you want to share with our readers?

Keep training, and I look forward to seeing everybody in March! △

THOUGHTS FROM MY FIRST AIKIDO SEMINAR

STEPHANIE RADZIK

This past March Tacoma Aikikai hosted a three-day seminar with Mike Flynn Shihan instructing. Flynn Shihan is a 7th Dan instructor who traveled all the way from Scotland to train with us! Students from all around the PNW came to take advantage of this exciting opportunity.

This was my first seminar and a big step on my aikido journey.

I found Tacoma Aikikai in October 2022. Like so many others, I had a difficult time with my mental health during the pandemic and was looking for a way to break out of my comfort zone. I stumbled across the Beginner's Series and before I knew it, I was hooked. The Beginner's Series soon became beginner classes, then weapons classes, then mixed level classes.

What kept me coming back again and again was the community. I've met so many great people and made wonderful friends. We support each other on and off the mat. Ea Sensei and Eric Sensei are always so engaged with their students. They always know when to push them and when to check in. They of course encouraged all of us to attend the seminar as much as we were able.

Even with so much support the seminar felt like a huge hurdle. I wondered if I was ready. Would I embarrass myself? I still felt so new to aikido and practicing with new people and a new sensei was an intimidating idea.

I was put at ease immediately on the first day. What was I even worried about? The first class took place at our home dojo and involved both weapons and body arts. The dojo was packed with familiar and unfamiliar faces. Everyone seemed excited and nervous to work with Flynn Shihan. I worked with white belts and black belts and found that everyone was patient and helpful, and they were just as eager to work with new students as I was. Right at the beginning of class I found myself paired with a black belt working a technique I had never done before. He walked me through the technique step by step and let me take it as slow as I needed to. This was the theme throughout the seminar.

Flynn Shihan is an amazing sensei. He was direct, hilar-

ious, and clearly incredibly talented. The classes were huge and yet he was still able to move through the class and spot mistakes or places where direction was needed. He would help individual people and groups and always seemed to be able to pinpoint where in the technique people were struggling.

Most of the techniques he had us work were familiar to me. We practiced tenchinage, iriminage, and shihonage. We also worked some techniques such as a variation of katadori shihonage that seemed unfamiliar to most students. Whether working a familiar or unfamiliar technique, it was a fantastic opportunity to learn. I loved seeing the small differences in the way a technique I knew was performed by someone from a different dojo.

Over the course of the seminar I learned that the aikido community extends far beyond my home dojo. I met so many students of all different levels and learned from each of them. It was great to experience practicing with so many new students and to learn from Mike Flynn Shihan as well!

I came out of my first seminar exhausted, bruised, and ready for more. △



Stephanie and Quinn training at the Gasshuku Retreat

AIKIDO: BRINGING ME HOME TO MY TRUE SELF

MONICA J WRIGHT

The March 2024 seminar with M. Flynn Shiha in Tacoma was my first Aikido seminar - my first big one. I'd been to one-day seminars at my home dojo with Fleshler Shiha, who started Multnomah Aikikai. He came back to share his wisdom. And he did so willingly, and with kindness, and with eyes that saw the fire within his students as he gently blew the flame.

My experience in Tacoma was not that. It was way bigger! In every sense of that word! As soon as I stepped on the mat at Tacoma Aikikai I went from the small pond to the deep sea. Instantaneously.

My first seminar with Fleshler Sensei introduced me to the magic, the oneness, the possibility that Aikido could bring me home to my true self. I believe that's why I continue to practice at Multnomah Aikikai, and learn from my senpai, and Suzane Sensei, and grow alongside my peers. That's why I went to the seminar in Tacoma - to continue my journey home.

What I discovered was humbling. I know now, more than ever, that my journey has just begun. The material presented on the mat was ALL BRAND NEW to me. I was overwhelmed with the newness, and challenge, and ambiguity, and fast learning without knowing what I was doing, but I managed to get through each move with a TON of help and kindness from my senpai who were 99% complete strangers but whom I had to trust with my life if I was to truly learn. I found out again and again and again that I could trust them, because they were trustworthy! They really were holding the door open for me and encouraging me to step through.

It's an incredible experience to feel utterly vulnerable and completely supported at the same time. And that is how I felt with my senpai on the mat in Tacoma.

Every single person I worked with on the mat, met me where I was, and we went from there. No questions. No judgment. Just train.

It was beautiful and simultaneously jarring because community is not a culture I'm used to. I was raised with competition. I'm not inherently competitive. I wasn't born competitive, but the voices of competition that raised me still ring in my ear when I confront novelty and challenge. And they are voices of degradation

and shame. As a motivation I suppose. That's how competition works right? Be better or be ashamed.

I heard those ghostly voices loud and clear on the mat during the seminar. I found myself treading water in the deep sea while others were diving and swirling all around me. The competitive voices of my upbringing said, you are nowhere near good enough, you shouldn't even be here, you're a burden to their art.

And, at the SAME TIME, everyone who was swirling around me reached out to lend a hand and help guide me from treading water to gliding (well not quite gliding but at least a relaxed doggie paddle if there is such a thing).



On the mat at the 2024 Mike Flynn Sensei Seminar

It was the wildest emotional roller coaster to simultaneously confront the voices in my head (the competitive narrative that says you have to be the best or you are shameful) with what I know to be true in my heart (it's not about being better than, it's about realizing your potential and helping each other succeed.)

I have found a rare community in Aikido. It feels like we are brought together to continue a universal truth, a legacy. Here is an artform which intimately connects the body and the spirit to such an acute degree that it slices through life and death.

This seminar weekend in Tacoma solidified in me that it is an honor to train in the practice of Aikido and that there is a way in Aikido. It's an open way. But the only way the legacy can continue, is to keep the door open so that we can continue to come through. So the senpai hold the door open for their kohai and it's the most incredible growing experience I've ever had. Humbling and inspiring. I'm grateful. △

IAIDO: A BEGINNER'S PERSPECTIVE

ALLISON MUIR

Although the term “Iaido” wasn’t in use until the 1930’s, most sources attribute its founding, along with kendo and other swordsmanship schools, to Hayashizaki Jun-suke Shigenbou in 16th century Japan. The legend surrounding Shigenbou’s training and his quest to share his knowledge of battōjutsu involves samurai battles, grief, vengeance, devotion, and visions gifted by Shin-to deities. Iaido was originally developed as a defensive method to respond quickly to a surprise attack with the objective of killing the aggressor with one cut. To accomplish this, practitioners must be calm in mind and spirit, precise with their body movement, and one with their sword.

Nakayama Hakudo Sensei, a famous 20th century Japanese

swordsmanship and close friend to O Sensei, is credited with coining the word Iaido. In my research I found the most common English translations are “the art of drawing the sword,” “the way of mental presence and immediate reaction,” and “the way of responding in harmony with your surroundings.” Iaido is distinctive from other schools in that it is a solo practice that focuses on developing concentration, precision, and equanimity rather than focusing on combat.

Iaido training involves performing a series of kata that consists of drawing the sword (nukitsuke), cutting (kiritsuke), removing blood from the sword (chiburi), and returning the sword to its saya (noto). The kata that make up Tacoma Aikikai’s core Iaido curriculum are the shoden, chuden, and shindo munen ryu forms. Through opportunities provided by Tacoma Aikikai and seminars with affiliated dojos, we are fortunate to learn from teachers who trained directly with Iaido masters such as Chiba Sensei and his teacher Takeshi Mitsuzuka Sensei, who was a student of Nakayama Hakudo Sensei.

Iaido piqued my interest as a meditative practice from my first introduction to the dojo, but I was cautious to take on another practice when aikido was still so new.

Plus, I was intimidated by the gear. Over the years, as aikido became more familiar and the relationship between weapons and body arts became more evident, adding Iaido seemed like a natural progression. I was still intimidated by the gear, but when Ea Sensei encouraged me to register for the Iaido beginner series in February of 2023, I really couldn’t refuse. The slower pace of the beginner’s series and knowing that the majority of students were also new to the art eased my trepidation. During the first class, Sensei shared back-



First night of the Iaido Beginner's Series

ground for the art and introduced the uniform, the sword, and saya. She also gave us language, Japanese terms for parts of a katana and iaitō and names for the basic movements. Throughout the series we performed conditioning exercises and were introduced to the kata.

Though the beginner’s series was a helpful entry point for me, you do

not need to wait for the next beginner’s series to get started. If you are interested in exploring Iaido, simply show up for class. You will be warmly welcomed by students of all levels and Sensei will take good care in introducing you to the art. I’ve been attending Iaido class fairly consistently for almost two years now, and these are a few takeaways that I hope are helpful for dojo members who are curious about Iaido.

#1: Get the Gear. Early in the beginner series Ea Sensei encouraged us to buy an obi, which is the belt worn during practice. Obi are wider and quite a bit longer than the belts worn for aikido. I will admit that I was quick to purchase one not for practicality but because I thought it was pretty. However, the first time I wore it, I realized the reason for Sensei’s recommendation. The obi made me more aware of my center and firmly held my sword so that it wouldn’t slip. At first, I was resistant to wearing a hakama because I felt like it was more appropriate to wait until I “earned” one in aikido even though it was explained to me that hakama are part of the basic uniform for Iaido. Fortunately, a generous member of our dojo donated a hakama that was a good fit for me, so I tried it out, and it made a big differ-

ence. The hakama further supported proper positioning of my sword and made moving on my knees easier. A bokken and plastic saya are perfectly fine for training, but once you try an iaitō, you will notice a difference in the weight and feel of the blade and in the relationship between the sword and the saya. That feeling has changed my training in both laido and aikido. Iaitō and katana are expensive, so that is an investment to consider as you decide if laido is a good fit for you. In the meantime, don't hesitate to say yes when Sensei offers the opportunity to use one of the extra iaitō in the dojo.

#2 Pay attention to the stories. The kata are enactments of specific scenarios. The attacker comes from behind or to the left. You are defending against two attackers, performing an execution in a crowd, or participating in a ceremony. Depending on the kata, your target might be the wrist, head, abdomen or knee. Understanding the situation, the story behind the form, helps you visualize the opponent and gives perspective for distance and timing. It also helps bring focus to your practice and supports the development of zanshin. We should always remember and honor that laido is deeply rooted in Japanese culture. Learning the language, rituals, and symbolism of the art is essential.

#3 The sword is sacred. Ritual surrounds all aspects of a Japanese sword from its creation to its care and use. Japanese swordsmiths have years of training and are highly skilled in and respected for their art. Forging a sword is considered a divine discipline where the swordsmith's spirit becomes part of the sword. Learning the proper etiquette for handling a sword and entering the training mat is an important part of laido. In his book *Drawing the Samurai Sword*, author Darrell Max Craig, Shihan expresses the importance of preparing your mind and spirit through zanshin when bowing into laido practice. He states, "You must try to become one with your sword, thinking of it as part of your body and not a weapon in your hand. Only when you achieve this frame of mind will you be able to do laido smoothly and find that the significance of lai is peace and harmony with the universe" (52). I don't have the knowledge or experience to truly address this concept, but as a beginner I think it is important to recognize that the sword is more than a weapon and to appreciate it as an implement for personal growth. This is at the heart of laido and that should be the space from which we train. I also encourage you to read more about this on your own to gain a deeper understanding of the philosophy of laido. I found the explanation of laido published on

Aikido Center of Los Angeles' webpage a good place to start. (<https://aikidocenterla.com/laido>)

#4 The saya is as important as the sword. Currently this takeaway has had the most impact on my physical practice in both laido and aikido. In all of the conditioning exercises and kata we perform, both hands are used synchronously, the sword and saya flowing together and apart. This is not an easy task for me, but referencing the placement of the saya on my hip and how my hand moves from saya to sword in laido has improved my aikido technique. Whether it's finding more precise alignment in ikkyo, using both hands in shomen, or opening my chest more in irimi nage the relationship between the two arts is eye opening.

#5 laido is more than technique. "laido is made up of two very important parts: technique and spiritual training" (Craig, Shihan 125). I believe that any spiritual endeavor is personal and unique to the practitioner. Even with a shared language for forms and techniques, words never fully capture the intimate relationship between an individual and their chosen contemplative practice. Since many master swordsmen also practice the arts of calligraphy, philosophy, and poetry, I thought surely through the process of writing this article I would find the perfect quote to articulate my "spiritual" experience of laido. I didn't. Instead, I rediscovered a well-worn scrap of paper placed on my bookshelf years ago with this quote translated from the Sufi poet Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī, "Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it."

A challenge for me in my aikido practice is finding connection and keeping it. I long to find that stickiness that Diane Deskin Sensei and Ea Sensei talk about in weapons training. That firm and stable response in perfect time with uke's attack, and that deep connection to my core that allows my movement to be both grounded and fluid. Sometimes I catch it for an instant but mostly it feels just out of grasp. The more I come to know connection, the more I am aware of disconnection.

In my brief laido journey, I've experienced how attention to small details, like a slight change to my saya-biki, creates a sense of connection inside my body that makes me feel a little more whole. I imagine over time with practice this sense of connection will continue to develop from the inside out until eventually my body and sword will work as one, each cut slicing through the barriers of separation.

IAIDO, CONTINUED

I am not sure if all iaidoka would resonate with Rumi's quote or equate the connection cultivated through training with love, but it makes sense to me. This idea not only describes the nature of my spiritual relationship with iaido but also gives more context to my aikido training. Whether you are considering iaido to compliment body arts, looking for a moving meditative practice with a lot of lunges, or are simply intrigued by the sword, I hope this article inspires you to get on the mat and discover what iaido has to offer. △

SELF-DEFENSE SUNDAYS

BRITTANY GIESEN

What did the self-defense classes mean to me? They were freedom. They were peace. They were validating. They were a way out from the incessant worries. They were a path to feeling more in control.

When I signed up, I am not sure what I expected. I was hesitant, as most organized activities can be challenging for me, but I believed in the idea. As a teenager, my mother put me through a one-day course and that helped me feel a sense of power. I wanted to renew that feeling and refresh my knowledge. What I found was so much more.

The approach was a little different than I expected. We did not jump right into "hit here," "block there," and "yell this," but instead started with our mindset. Before we can truly protect ourselves, we need to own that our worth is inherent, and we are worth defending. While some part of me already knew this, taking the time to acknowledge and meditate on it seemed to shift some of my thinking. As we practiced, I reminded myself of my worth, and in later days, I found the thought growing.

We spent some time practicing using our voice. It was telling to see so many people had a hard time raising their voice in a situation that made them feel uncomfortable. We learned that using one's voice is the first line of self-defense. It can potentially de-escalate when we might otherwise need physical defense. It can show would-be attackers, or boundary pushers, that we mean business. By the end of the series, it felt easier to throw social norms away and be loud in a self-defending way.

One concept we reviewed more than a few times was "just do something!" If you find yourself in a situation where self-defense is needed, the defense move combinations do not need to be perfect, but you need to do SOMETHING. Owning that you are worth defending can help provide the fuel to keep trying even if things may appear less than ideal.

The most difficult part of the class was the opportu-

nity it provided to acknowledge and sit with the more brutal parts of humanity. There were moments of grief, realizing the harsh realities some people face. For instance, we practiced escaping chokeholds against the dojo posts to simulate being held against a wall while being choked. The images that flooded my mind were sobering. Although hard to think about, avoiding these truths would not diminish their reality.

It stood out to me how much passion Ea, Avery, and the other guest teacher brought to the classes. They



worked hard to bring us every possible self-defense move we may need - whether it be wrist or grab escapes, striking, or defending against a knife or gun. They worked carefully with each of us to ensure we all had a basic understanding of the techniques, and they were mindful of any emotions or concerns that bubbled to the surface.

We heard encouragement from them as we struck the pads with increasing strength and precision. We were gently guided as we worked to learn the mechanics of the more difficult techniques. I am grateful for their vision, guidance, and leadership.

The self-defense series gave me a new perspective in addition to teaching an impressive array of self-defense techniques. Yes, it was emotionally hard and uncomfortable at times, but with every exercise, I could feel myself stand a little taller, my voice grow a little louder, and my combos get a little stronger. I am not looking for a fight, but I believe in my core that if I find myself in a position where self-defense is needed, at minimum, I WILL DO SOMETHING! △

NOTES FROM THE SELF-DEFENSE SEMINAR

ROBB SILVA

There has only ever been one sole occasion in which I've felt even the slightest discomfort in this dojo or with its people. (Emotionally, I mean; as for physical discomfort, well, who among us hasn't caught an unexpected atemi to the face, or spaced out and forgot how soon to tap out on a nikkyo ura? But that comes with the territory, and I digress.) When I - as a bi cis man - attended the January women's self-defense seminar, I received not the slightest hint of judgment in word or deed from any of the women or femme-presenting

enby folks present; but there was a discomfort entirely within myself, as if I'd walked into an empty women's locker room by mistake: there were no external indicators, I simply felt the space wasn't for me. And for that precise reason, I feel grateful for having attended.

When I first learned last year's women's self-defense seminar was being extended into a full series and expanded to include the full LGBTQ community, I immediately marked my calendar and invited my queer, enby and female friends. When I showed up and saw the attendees, I

gathered that the event was intended for more women and queer people socialized as women, rather than gay or bi men and masc-presenting folks. Even so, no one seemed to take any notice of me, and I participated the same as anyone else. For that I'm grateful, as I found the content of the seminar extremely meaningful.

We began with a word association exercise, brainstorming concepts related to women's self-defense: keep one earbud out, carry keys laced in your fist, don't go out alone. From an outsider perspective, this was enlightening: I had never been shown with such clarity how patriarchy affects the daily lives of people - as they walk outside, listen to music, dress for a warm day. Advice I've given in attempt to be "helpful" suddenly seems shortsighted and controlling when viewed from the advisee's perspective. It was an exercise in empathy, received in the first ten minutes of the seminar.

The next unit was my personal favorite and also the most uncomfortable. We partnered up, with one approaching and the other using various tools to halt the

approach: naming a boundary being crossed, identifying an action to reestablish the boundary, repeating the request for that action, and ending the encounter. At this early stage, all components were verbal: common phrases were, "You're too close;" "I need you to step back;" and "Back off." The encounters culminated in simply walking away.

These were tools I had never thought to use. As a man, I've been taught that actions speak louder than words; from Ernest Hemingway, "the shortest answer is doing the thing." Or Clint Eastwood: "if you have to shoot, shoot, don't talk." The simulated situation - being approached by a stranger who encroaches on your space and refuses to leave - reminded me of an encounter I had in college. Walking to class, a man singled me out of a crowd, kept pace with me, and struck up a very uncomfortable conversation about the virtues of far-right politics. The only response I could manage was a right cross. As can be expected, I have mixed feelings about this reaction. As such, the lesson on use of voice to respond to conflict was worth the price of admission to me. It was my hope that this seminar would give me a greater variety of tools to use in situations, and on that front, Ea Sensei and Avery totally delivered.

The seminar was bookended with a quick verbal exercise: we all took a moment to silently brainstorm a word or short phrase indicating something positive about ourselves - which we then shouted at the top of our voices, loud enough that no one suffered the embarrassment of having their own voice heard. This was done, as Ea sensei mentioned more than once, because "we are worth defending." This was a novel concept to me: not because I've ever directly or indirectly been told otherwise, but because it was assumed to go without saying - like how I was simply expected to know when, where and how to renew the tabs on my car without ever having been told. The exercise showed me the difference between this and other self-defense classes I've attended (which were neither women-focused nor trauma informed). Self-defense for men is not about the victim, but the attacker. We men fight back not because we are worth defending, but because those who mean us harm are worth attacking. I have a friend from my daily Sounder commute who's a wonderful fellow: friendly, outgoing, considerate, kind. He offers his seat to standing passengers, makes you feel heard in conversation, smiles while walking to work in the rain. He once told me on our walk from Kent Station that he wishes someone would come after his kids, so he'd have an excuse to pop off and beat someone



SELF-DEFENSE, CONTINUED

bloody. It wasn't a confession; there was no indication of guilt. He said it with the same wistful intonation as when expressing frustration at a Seahawks defeat: "Man, I wish things would've gone differently." Men's self-defense is not a regrettable situation in which we must protect ourselves, our space, or our boundaries; it is a sought-after opportunity to exact vigilante justice.

But it doesn't have to be. We can learn the strength to exercise restraint. We can unlearn the toxicity of societal expectations. We can learn to defend ourselves without harming our opponents. And we can start with seminars such as this one. I would not seek to impose on this space again, but I am grateful for the insights my attendance has led to. Men have a great deal to gain from women's self-defense. Δ

MY SECOND JOURNEY

DEAN IKEMOTO

After a 12-year hiatus of not even taking an ukemi much less stepping onto a training mat, I decided to return to Aikido training.

Yikes! At my age? Could I keep up? What is Ai-Hamni, Gyaku-Hamni again? Will I embarrass myself?

Maybe I should start from the beginning. As with any endeavor that is destined to be in your life, Aikido kept reappearing in mine in some form or another, and in



some of the strangest places. I started my path with Aikido in my early teens. A smattering of lessons with Shihan Gordon Sakamoto while living in Okinawa, a few more lessons with my Judo coach Tom Burke while attending Purdue (he was a 5th degree black belt in Aiki-jujitsu) and a few lessons from an Optometrist while stationed in Germany. My life eventually led me to Charleston, South Carolina

where I started my formal training in Aikido with Sensei Alan Jackson in the Mt Pleasant Aikikai around September 1990. A USAF sanctioned Dojo, I studied with fervor. I was practicing and advancing steadily until I was awarded a Shodan in November 1998 and awarded a Nidan in November 2008. In that stretch of time, I was honored to have trained with some of the pillars of the East coast Aikido community; Shihan Yamada (New York Aikikai), Shihan Kanai (Boston Aikikai), Shihan Peter Bernath (Florida Aikikai) Shihan Clyde Takeguchi (Silver Springs Aikikai), Shihan George Kennedy (Atlanta Aikikai), Shihan Darrell Tangman (Augusta Aikikai), Shihan Mike Friedl (Aikido of Ashland) and eventually reconnecting with Shihan Gordon Sakamoto (Northern

Virginia Aikikai). A truly wonderful experience.

Then I stopped practicing. Life happened. I lost my corporate position. Went through a divorce. Relocated to the Pacific Northwest to be closer to my aging parents. Lost my parents within six months of each other. Became older.

One day while traveling on 12th st in Tacoma, I saw the words "Aikido" printed in huge letters on the side of this brick building and thought "why not?"

I initially met Sensei Ea Murphy in 2016 when the dojo was at Urban Grace Church. While the timing wasn't right for me then, Sensei Ea Murphy and Sensei Eric Gillet and their dojo of wonderful students welcomed me warmly into their home. The dojo's supportive and patient nature has made the start of my "second path" a pleasurable experience.

So, 6 months in the journey, what have I learned?

-Sitting in seiza is the most difficult technique I am having to relearn.

-I'm operating in what amounts to a whole new body and this one heals a lot slower

-Style differences aside, Aikido is Aikido, the basics never change, muscle memory does work.

-Be Patient. My mind is willing to do things that my body isn't ready to do. I am approaching every technique with a beginner's mind.

-Practice is remarkable, everyone around me is learning and is helping others learn. That sense of community is a refreshing breath in today's society

I am enjoying my second journey down the Aikido path. With no "gotta get rank" attitude, the scenery is a lot more pleasant, and I am seeing more of the details that I missed before.

"Expect nothing, be prepared for anything"

"Practice the Aikido that cannot be seen"

-M. Ueshiba Δ

BEING A YUDANSHA DOES NOT MEAN SENSEI OR A MASTER

REV. TADAO KOYAMA

Coming to Tacoma Aikikai has been a delight of mine for the past 4 years since I have lived in Tacoma. After getting both of my initial covid shots, I was very excited to step on the mat once again to train in Aikido since a two-year hiatus living in Japan. I was excited to dust off my do-gi, and put on my hakama. However, before I even step on a mat, or enter a dojo that is not one I usually train in, I like to think about how I conduct myself and how to be a good guest of the dojo.

One of the lessons that came back to me from one of my previous Sensei in Aikido was, "give sincere energy, receive good ukemi, and do not be a jerk." This is advice I wish most Sensei would give their Yuudansha students at their respective dojo. This isn't to call out or shame people, but I have been noticing a trend of troubling behavior with Yuudansha who visit dojo that are not their own. I tend to notice these Yuudansha taking teaching liberties with mudansha students. They give unwanted advice, criticize technique, and even go out of their way to mess up the student to make techniques harder.

Granted, the Yuudansha may have more experience and have legitimate technique, but that does not give them license to come into a space that is not their own and lecture students as if they were the Sensei. It makes me begin to think that in Aikido, too much emphasis/importance is put on shodan or the receiving of the black belt.

Shodan means that you have just officially been accepted by the dojo as an official student, and that your trial period is over. In martial arts history, it would not usually take 4-5 years to receive your shodan because with lives being different, one was able to spend more time and energy at the dojo receiving regular instruction. Shodan is just the beginning. However, sadly, many Yuudansha seem to view receiving shodan as the equivalent to receiving a master's degree.

One of my frustrations in general with Aikido practice lately (not at Tacoma Aikikai), is that I see shodan students doling out advice to mudansha students as if they were seventh dan masters. I have even seen this done by visiting Yuudansha at Tacoma Aikikai. Every time I notice this, it makes me feel a little less happy to be training that day.

I write this because I would like to remind everyone that when we receive our shodan, it does not mean we

are masters, or that we suddenly have the profound understanding of Aikido that O'Sensei had. It merely means that the Dojo-cho has become confident that we have achieved a basic level of understanding the basics of techniques, dojo culture, and dedication to be seen as an official student of the dojo.



Some of the principles that I try to follow when visiting new dojo are:

1. This is not my dojo.
2. These are not my students. They have their own sensei to teach them basics and movements and I must respect that.
3. I am here to learn, not teach
4. I want to be welcomed back as opposed to pushed out the door.

When visiting a new dojo, I must always remember to give the Dojo-cho the utmost respect by not infringing my own philosophy on their students and come in with an attitude of learning.

Sure, Sensei may do a technique a certain way that I may not be familiar with, or even agree with. However, I was not asked to be there by anyone. I was not asked to teach. If the black belt is a symbol of anything, it should be that the expectations for me to behave and act correctly are even higher.

All this being said, I am happy to say that Tacoma Aikikai has fostered a culture of "less talking, more training" and it has been an absolute delight to train with the students here. I may sound like a grumpy curmudgeon, but I think one of the elements that has been lacking in the general Aikido world lately is manners and courtesy towards the Dojo-cho of the various Aikido dojo in the states. I write this in the hopes that I can encourage all of us to continue to train in Aikido with a beginner's mind and to not let the black belt and hakama inflate our ego but strengthen our humility.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the community of Tacoma Aikikai for welcoming me into their community and hope I continue to be a good guest at the dojo as I continue my path of Aikido training.

In Gassho △

BEAUTY OF AN INTENSIVE

ERIC GILLET

An intensive is a wonderful opportunity that allows a dojo to breathe deeply as one. For 4 days in October, members of our dojo trained together, learning from Diane Deskin Sensei, along with a few aikidoka from other dojos. This second annual weapons intensive was made feasible thanks to a grant offered by Birankai North America, which allows dojos of any size to host these types of events. If used regularly by a growing number of dojos, I believe the effects could be felt in the whole federation. This could exponentially affect every Birankai aikidoka to benefit their practice, while increasing the sense of community.

A seminar focuses on the exchange between visiting aikidokas to challenge and increase everyone's practice. A seminar schedule is usually Friday night, Saturday all day and Sunday morning, with attendance focused on Saturday. The students from the hosting dojo welcome and train with members from many other dojos and create bonds that will deepen with the years. After visiting Alameda Aikikai for Mike Flynn Sensei's seminar, for instance, the Tacoma and Alameda students decided to stay connected through Discord and develop their own relationships between both dojos.

An intensive, on the other hand, having a longer, sustained format, focuses more on the dojo members and helps to build a deeper relationship between them and the guest instructor. The instructor adapts their teaching to the dojo members' needs, and in our case, carried out that teaching for 4 days. We saw students practicing between the classes during the intensive, and see this as the beautiful thank you to the instructor. The guest instructor can see the effects of their teaching on a whole dojo, as well, and when they return, they can appreciate the long-term effects they have helped to generate.

The other benefit to an intensive is that the dojo members learn and evolve collectively. Working with a dojo member during the weapons intensive increases the possibility to "recreate" a feeling that you captured lat-

er during the regular class when you work together again. As many students practice 2-3 days weekly, the intensive, which was held in the evenings, also offered a chance to increase the amount of practice, while not conflicting with the regular day schedule that people have off the mat, demonstrating to a student that they can practice more than their 2-3 days. They may discover that their physical capacities are much greater than what they thought. Many students who only meet occasionally at the dojo due to their different training schedules, also have the opportunity to train together. In this way, dojo members together increased their cohesion, practice, and curiosity in the art.

Tacoma Aikikai was lucky to host a weapons intensive with Diane Deskin Sensei for the past two years. While focusing on the weapons work, the effects of her teaching also affected the students' body arts. Deskin Sensei spoke about "sizzling" during the encounter of our bokken and about zanshin. Those concepts should be present in the body arts training as well and feeling them through the weapons will translate into body arts. I'm confident that many other effects will keep growing within the students' practice. Later they might have an "enlightenment," on or off the mat, about something they saw or felt during the intensive. This is not specific to an intensive, but the more you train and focus, the more you increase the chance of an enlightenment.

An intensive does not replace a seminar and a seminar is not an intensive. Both are extremely valuable and great opportunities to deepen our training. △



Bokken practice at the weapons intensive

FINDING SPACE: THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OPEN HOUSE

LAURA LIVINGSTON

If you would like to collect and promptly fail at aikido trivia, I suggest positioning yourself near the door of a dojo Open House event. In the spring of 2019, Tacoma

Aikikai had an Open House to welcome the community to their new dojo. I had started practicing aikido in January 2019 when Tacoma Aikikai was a guest on the top floor of Urban Grace Church. My aikido resume at the time of the 2019 Open House included: knowing how to tie a belt in a functional (note the word choice

here) manner; being completely oblivious to the proper way to close a gi; knowing that a forward roll, somersault, and cartwheel are all different activities, none of which qualifies you to do another; and having learned that movement is practiced and not innate.

Having been warmly welcomed into the dojo, I was sure that I had the qualifications to welcome people into the dojo in its new home. Perhaps it is a hopeful thing to underestimate human curiosity. I certainly underestimated the amount of people and questions that can fit within 5 feet of an entrance door. Who founded aikido? Who was O-Sensei? How does aikido work? How does aikido compare to other martial arts? What are all the different levels of aikido? What are the different philosophies contained within aikido?

We had a 5-year dojo anniversary Open House event in April 2024. By this time, I had learned how to do a forward roll, and I would still fail an aikido trivia game.



Kids line up for demos at the Open House

ing gis and facing forward to the kamiza were nowhere to be found on the mat. The patterns of a normal aikido practice seemed hidden. However, further study of the

people across the mat could have revealed that there was an organizational principle: find space and use it.

The Open House set up different stations around the



Community class at the 5th anniversary Open House

dojo for people to experience aikido: weapons, ukemi, games, ikkyo, and scavenger hunt. The younger youth, older youth, and Senseis conducted demonstrations. The youth arranged themselves across the dojo stage to silently teach the audience how to do aikido through demonstrating techniques. The Senseis and their uke picked up where the youth left off, demonstrating weapons work and additional throws.

The pattern that was evident throughout the Open House was the presence of aikido students everywhere in the dojo. In 2019, the dojo was a place that we had moved to. In 2024, the dojo was a place that we had practiced in. I encourage you to do your own math; however, if you are willing to accept some out of thin air estimating, the mat absorbs five thousand of our falls a week. The dojo provides classes and hosts seminars and annual events. The calendar is full so that we may continue to be students, learning and re-learning our techniques. We can celebrate this organization and what it teaches us: to find space and use it well. △

THIRD KYU AT GASSHUKU

EVA MARINO

One of the things I'm proud of this year is that I passed the 3rd kyu test. It, obviously, wasn't easy and there was a lot of stress building up to it. I believe Ea Sensei told us that we would be testing at Gasshuku at the beginning of June. I certainly didn't feel ready to test for my 3rd kyu yet. The 4th kyu test was still fresh in my mind. But when Ea Sensei says to do something, you are go-

ing to do it. So began the preparation. Staying for open mats on Saturdays, coming before class as often as I could, drilling the entire list over and over and over. The week before Gasshuku started, I dared to feel confident in my skills.

Then I actually got on the mat. Everyone was giving their best. It was amazing to practice with such intensity. Every move broken down and rebuilt into something better, smoother, and often with a more aggressive hip

3RD KYU, CONTINUED

shimmy. Doubt started to set in. Sure, I had practiced, but was it enough? Little mistakes compound on each other, and I was figuring out a lot of little corrections with each new exercise. Overextending here, not lunging enough there, too much upper body here. Then Av-



Eva training at the Gasshuku Retreat

ery happened to helpfully point out that not only were we going to be doing our 3rd kyu in front of people not from our dojo, but we were also going to be testing in front of Ea Sensei's sensei. Oh joy. It would be an understatement to say it was a lot of pressure.

As we practiced on the day of the test, I hurt my ankle. To be quite honest, I'm not sure exactly when or how I

even did it. One moment I was practicing, stood up and something twinged, but I ignored it. Ten minutes later and every step I took hurt. Really hurt. I was practicing with Ea Sensei when I finally caved and asked for help which she was quick to give. Later, Francesco donated his own ankle brace.

Now, my ankle was supported, but it still hurt. Yet, the test was tonight. The test I had been preparing and training for literally months to do. I wasn't going to let this stupid injury stop me.

So, I did my test. Again, to be quite honest, it was a blur. My ankle hurt, my chest hurt, my breathing was ragged. All that existed was the next move. On and on it went. When it was done, it almost didn't feel real. Was that truly it? Did we all do good enough?

We did. We all passed and officially became 3rd kyu.

I can't entirely describe the sheer relief that went through me at the announcement. All the stress of the past months and the day seemed to just melt away. I might have cried.

Then, with the test done, I iced my ankle, had a drink, and went to bed.

Having my 3rd kyu test at Gasshuku was a stressful experience, but one I wouldn't trade. I hope next year's Gasshuku is just exciting, only without injury to any of my joints.△

2024 YOUTH LEADERSHIP YEAR IN REVIEW

DANIEL HASSELL, RACHEL HASSELL

2024 proved to be a very successful year for the teen leadership project. From seminars to leading classes and creating the second community service project there has been a lot of development in the project and much to review. In this section we will be reviewing all the advancements the team has made in the past year.

The beginning of the year was very full and much was to be done. We began by introducing our new members and reviewing everyone on how to teach others. After this we immediately started work on planning the next community service project. Although many ideas were passed around, the idea of helping with Pierce Conservation District to remove invasive species and re-plant native species stuck. After many weeks of planning and getting members from the dojo to help

it was finally time to execute our plans. The community service project was very successful, and with total volunteers numbering 18, we were able to accomplish a lot. After this great success we went to some of the earlier seminars in the year.

Around March we were invited to go on a tour in the Seattle Asian Art Museum guided by the performance artist Anida Youe-Ali, which all the members enjoyed. The next great seminar that the team leaders got to go too and help with was the annual Gasshuku retreat. The teen leaders helped by leading and prepping meals. Along



Blackberry removal at the community service day

with participating in the intense, long, and fun training, one of our members even successfully tested for 3rd kyu. The last seminars that the team participated in were the Multnomah Aikikai seminar and the Portland



Saturday workshop discussion

Aikikai seminar where we all learned a lot and had a lot of fun. We are very grateful for everyone who participated in making these seminars happen. Between all

the seminars and the community service project the teen leaders were working non-stop to help people on the mat.

From introducing people to aikido and the mat to leading our own classes we are constantly helping and guiding others to the love of aikido. By introducing new people to the mat it is much easier for them to get to know people and to want to continue studying aikido. This year our members led their first classes which were rough but still accomplished and are constantly being refined. We hope that by next year we will be able to lead classes easily and effectively.

Through all the seminars and the constant teaching and leading it is easy to see that this year the teen leadership project members have made an incredible amount of progress. We have learned a lot and are going to continue to help and teach others. We once again would like to greatly thank everyone who volunteered to help with the community service project, and everyone who helped to make the seminars happen.△

2024 KIDS CAMP

ZITA MCGEE

In early July, the kids summer camp at Tacoma Aikido took place. There were 17 kids ages six to nine and three mentors from the teens class, including myself. Many of the kids had trained at the dojo, but there were also some kids who had never had any experience in aikido, or who had trained in a different martial art.

Camp was four days of exploration and adventure. We learned about other countries, cultures, and languages because the theme of the camp this year was Countries of the World. We each got a little passport booklet to log the techniques, animal walks, and facts we learned about. There were four groups of kids. Each group was assigned a country that they got to learn about. The group made a presentation about their country and designed a new flag for it. We also got to learn how to count to ten in lots of languages that were new to us.

In addition to learning about lots of countries, we learned how to use a tanto, jo, bokken, and light saber. We learned how to be safe and focused and still have fun. We all enjoyed the bento box style lunches made by Eric Sensei and Rory. We got to play lots of fun games, including shiko tag, fireball, and blindfold tag.

The last day of camp was the highlight of camp for many of the kids. We had lunch in the dojo then set off to the park. We walked to Franklin Park where we

began the activities by doing a partner exercise with boppers. Then we had an epic game of capture the flag with pool noodles to tag people with which was also a great way for everyone to use the footwork they learned. Even Ea Sensei joined in on the fun. The last activity was certainly not the least. The moment everyone had been waiting for... the watermelons! We used a bokken



Animal walks at Kids Summer Camp

to smash the watermelon. Earlier in camp we had learned how to use a lightsaber and bokken, so that was how we smashed the watermelons. Once all of the watermelons had been smashed, we got to eat them! Kids camp ended in the spray ground at Franklin. It was so nice to cool off in the water after the hot day. As someone who was both mentoring and learning, I feel that the kids camp is a great experience for anyone and everyone.△

UPCOMING EVENTS

KANGEIKO WINTER INTENSIVE

JANUARY 6-10

KANGEIKO SEMINAR

JANUARY 10-11

YOUTH LEADERSHIP ORIENTATION

JANUARY 31 (FRIDAY), 5:30 - 8 PM

TACOMA DOME DEMONSTRATION

FEBRUARY 15 (SATURDAY), 1:30 PM

SELF-DEFENSE FOR EVERYONE

FEBRUARY 22 (SATURDAY), 2-6 PM

SEMINAR WITH MIKE FLYNN SENSEI

TACOMA AIKIKAI, MARCH 7-9

SPRING BEGINNER'S SERIES

MARCH 20 - APRIL 24

CAMPS & RETREATS

BIRANKAI SUMMER CAMP

UC CHANNEL ISLANDS

JUNE 25-29

YOUTH SUMMER CAMP

HALF-DAY (MON-THURS)

AUGUST 4-7

GASSHUKU SUMMER RETREAT

CAMP INDIANOLA

AUGUST 21-24 (THURSDAY-SUNDAY)



View from Camp Indianola. Photo Credit: Ea Murphy

Tacoma Aikikai

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NOURISH
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