



AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES

NEWSLETTER

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CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEW BLACK BELTS

On January 14, 1990, four candidates took the black belt examination for shodan or first degree black belt and passed. Congratulations on a job well done.

The new black belts of the dojo are:

Mr. Richard Eloriagga
Mr. Yasushi Matsuki
Mr. Sukko Lee
Mr. Morgan Weisser

The next black belt examination will take place in July, 1990. The current candidates for this examination are: Mr. Mark Moore, Mr. Ron Hill, Mr. William Gillespie and Mr. Ken Watanabe. Other candidates may be added according to individual progress and qualifications.

All black belts of the dojo are immediately registered with the Aikido World Headquarters in Tokyo, Japan, and, in effect, become members of the main dojo and students of Aiki-doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba.

THE MEANING OF SHODAN

Everyone should be proud to pass the black belt examination and qualify to wear the black belt and hakama. It means that you are fully initiated into the family of Aikido students. Everyone should wear their hakama proudly and be aware of its meaning and the responsibility of representing Aikido.

However, the black belt is not the final step in Aikido. "First degree black belt" is read as "shodan" in Japanese. "Sho" means "first" or "beginning." "Dan" means "step" of "level." Thus, "shodan" literally

In Memoriam

We mourn the passing of Sadao Yoshioka Sensei, 7th Dan, of Hawaii. He visited our dojo once in 1987.

means "first step." This means that "shodan" is only the first step in your training. It is only the beginning. When one enters the dojo, he first wears the white belt. After several years of regular training when he begins to gain skill and knowledge into the basics of Aikido techniques, its proper etiquette, and the proper state of mind or attitude for training, he qualifies to undergo the black belt examination. Once he passes, he is entitled to wear the black belt and hakama. However, from shodan, one begins his serious or committed training in Aikido. It is only the beginning of the beginning.

This is very similar to the method when one enters a training temple for monks in Japan. One is isolated in separate quarters where he must sit in meditation for several days to several weeks. In the early days, it was to test whether the monk had enough conviction to undergo training. It still has this meaning today, but during this period, he is instructed in all of the protocol and various routines of the temple. After this initiation period, he is then allowed to enter the main quarters where all of the other monks train. At the origins of this tradition, monks were required to sit outside the gate, awaiting approval to enter. Some got in and some didn't. It all depended on their conviction and spiritual strength. "Entering a school" in Japanese is read as "nyumon" which means to "pass through or enter the gate."

We don't have this custom in this country, but each time you pass through the entrance of the dojo into the training hall, there is a special meaning. It means that you are here to learn and that you are a student undergoing training or "shugyo." This is not the same as our attitude to public education or attending school or a university. This type of training has a spiritual meaning as well. It means that you are not only gaining knowledge and skill but you are developing yourself as a human being. You are maturing physically, mentally and spiritually. In traditional Japan, this was considered sacred. Nowadays, we have probably lost this feeling but I think you should try to understand it as much as possible. We have very little in our culture today which encourages us to refine and train ourselves. We have very little today which brings us awareness of our spiritual nature. I don't think you can find it in books or in a church or temple. I don't think you can find it by searching for a "guru" or taking drugs or running away. In Aikido, you face yourself as you face your partner. Your partner is your mirror and you continually polish yourself to make that reflection clearer and clearer. This only happens in correct Aikido training.

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THE MEANING OF SHODAN continued:

Some students think that shodan is the end of the line and quit thinking that they have "finally arrived" or they have "finally mastered Aikido." Of course, this is incorrect. As I said before, it is only the beginning of our training.

In ancient days, students studied with so much conviction that we can hardly imagine what they went through in their training today. Bodhidharma crossed over into China from India in 520ad. and became the first patriarch of Zen Buddhism. He meditated in a cave for nine years facing a wall. A student came to study under him but was continually refused. Finally, as a gesture of his conviction to study, he cut off his own left hand and offered it to his teacher.

Of course, no one expects people to cut off their arms or legs, especially in the dojo. And, I certainly wouldn't know what to do with it anyways. However, one should try to understand that kind of conviction. We should appreciate the spirit and conviction of that student who later succeeded his teacher. Compared to him, what I do, what you do, is very, very easy.

Within your own training, create a strong, unified community of students within the dojo who all have a single purpose of working together to train in Aikido. This is the most difficult aspect of training. Just read your history books or look around you in the world today to see just how difficult it is for people to get along with each other. This may be why O-Sensei established this as a requirement to Aikido practice. "The whole family of man is one." he said.

Roles constantly change in the dojo, when you first enter the dojo, you don't know what to do and you are not skilled in the techniques. And, you must always look up to or admire your seniors. Eventually, things get easier and you begin to recognize the techniques more quickly, somehow, they become easier to do and you see newer students looking up to you for help and guidance. Part of maintaining harmony within the dojo is to understand that you must continually change from one role to the next. Sometimes you are a junior and sometimes you are a senior. Generally, we only think that: "I am me." and that's it. One must learn mental flexibility.

I hope everyone will continue to train hard and help each other to train hard. Please keep a regular schedule of training, whether it is one day a week or seven days a week. Keeping the training going on and on, continuing your training is the final requirement to successful, correct training.

Training Schedule:

Beginning and Open Classes

**Monday through Friday
6:15pm to 7:15pm**

**Monday-Wednesday-Friday
7:30pm to 8:30pm**

**Free Practice: Monday through Friday
8:30pm to 9:30pm**

**Saturday Mornings
10:15am to 11:30am**

**Sunday Mornings
10:30am to 11:30am**

Advanced and Weapons Classes

**Tuesday and Thursday
7:30pm to 8:30pm**

**Saturday Mornings
11:30am to 12:30pm**

Children's Classes

**Sunday Mornings
8:00am to 9:00am**

Announcements:

We are changing the roll sheets, please continue to sign in on the blank sheets until the new forms are made.

For kyu promotions, a fee of \$25.00 is required. Please make this separate from your monthly dues.

New black belts must complete the registration form to the Aikido World Headquarters as soon as possible.

Uniforms are now \$40.00.

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NIHON NO KOKORO:

"The Japanese Mind."

By Kaneko Magoroku, Chief Instructor and sword smith of the Magoroku Kanemoto Nihonto Tanren Dojo.

Reprinted from "Kokoro." Published: Young Buddhist Association of Gifu Prefecture. Winter, 1989.

I am just a swordsmith who preserves and guards the Seki tradition of Japanese sword forging which has been handed down to me through a history spanning 750 years. Please allow me to relate a few of my thoughts in this article.

As a swordsmith, to make just one blade requires about ten different jobs and about twenty days of preparation. From beginning to end, I go from step to step using my "kan" or intuition. I don't know how to explain my work, I was taught the secret tradition transmitted from heart to heart, but truly this was an encounter of minds between myself and my teacher.

In this, there is no curriculum or words. I watched my teacher's face and eyes and each time wondered if this was correct or what should I do now. As I came to understand what to do in any or every circumstance, I, at the same time, gained my own independence. I think I can call this communicating from heart to heart.

This is truly difficult to understand even a little. But, if one stakes his whole life into the Way of training, he can somehow understand this quite well.

I was taught that in order to make a fine blade, I had to forge my "soul" into it. One day, a reporter from America visited my dojo to interview me. We talked of many things until he asked me about "forging my soul into the blade." I didn't know how to answer him and this was very troubling for me. Finally, I replied that "soul" (*tamashi*) means "heart" or "mind." I answered that to make a blade we must put our whole energy, mind and body, into it. I don't think he understood what I was talking about. I believe that "heart" is the most important element in making a blade. My life is devoted to making blades with heart.

The history of forging blades has come down from the past over 1200 years ago to our present computer, highly technical, age. This thousand year old tradition still has relevance to modern people today, I believe.

From the sand iron to the iron lumps, forging this into four types of steel, skillfully folding this over and over into a blade which does not bend, or break, and cuts well and, at the same time, is a beautiful work of art, is a magnificent art handed down by such gifted and devoted craftsmen. Even today, I am impressed with their skill and genius.

We make a fine blade and hand it over to the warrior who stakes his life upon it. There is a great responsibility and trust here which communicates from the heart of the swordsmith to the heart of the warrior. I believe this is the "Japanese mind."