



AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES NEWSLETTER

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BALANCE IN AIKIDO TRAINING

In Aikido, we are always concerned with our balance. In how we walk or turn in a certain direction, or in how we sit down or stand up or take an "ukemi," we are always thinking of our balance or, at least, reminded to think of our balance by our instructors. In most cases, we think of balance in terms of our posture or we are forced to think of our balance in the moment we are about to helplessly tip over or fall down. The Oxford American Dictionary offers these definitions: "1. a weighing apparatus with two scales. 2. the regulating apparatus of a clock. 3. an even distribution of weight or amount, a steady position or state. 4. the difference between credits and debits. 5. money remaining after payment of a debt."

The third place definition seems most closely related to the meaning of "balance" in Aikido. In Obunsha's Essential English Dictionary, it takes second place with the definition: "equilibrium as in 'state of mind.'" It is interesting how two cultures understand the same term.

In Aikido, we consider balance from the physical perspective as in an "even distribution of weight" or "steady position" and we also think of balance from the perspective of the mind in terms of "equilibrium." In our technique, it is important to maintain our balance and posture to secure a strong position or defensive stance. In addition, mental equilibrium implies a strong, clear undisturbed state of mind essential to the execution of the technique. We often look at training as the way of bringing a balanced physical and mental state together. Some Aikidoists define this as the "ai" (harmony) of Aikido.

BALANCE AS HARMONY

Aikidoists often use this phrase in the dojo but I think we should take a minute to examine what we are saying and trying to convey

to others. How do we see balance as harmony? It is an accepted idea in the East but what about in the West? How do we see two objects coming together in harmony as a form of balance. Does it mean that the two objects must be of equal weight, value and substance? Obviously, an apple and an orange of similar size cannot produce balance or harmony in any way except on either end of a balance scale. We must try to see what Aikido means by balance and harmony.

This is an important question to answer because it directly relates to our practice and our daily lives. We strive for balance and harmony in our training but can we achieve the same balance and harmony in our daily lives as well?

Can two individuals produce some kind of balance or harmony when taking an offensive or defensive position against each other in an encounter? In a fight, how can two bodies moving in opposition against each other and two wills opposing each other somehow come into balance or achieve harmony. To simply say that we use Aikido is not enough, I believe. This is especially true for the Aikidoist who devotes his blood, sweat and tears to the art. As the opponent attacks, to simply move in his direction, or take advantage of his momentum or to lead his energy or "ki" cannot really be considered harmony in the final analysis. In reality, it is simply taking advantage of the opponent's weakness with the intention to immobilize him or throw him to the ground by dominating him. This is one human being manipulating another. Harmony or balance cannot be so one-sided or self-serving. This completely contradicts its own purpose. In another respect, simply to yield to the opposing force cannot be considered balance as well. This is a form of submission. Some Aikidoists may define Aikido techniques as maintaining one's own balance while throwing the opponent off his.

If we are trying to understand what Aikido

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means by balance and how Aikido implies that balance and harmony are related, we must try to use our brains and guts to understand this. It is not a completely intellectual process and it is not to accept another's definition at face value and merely say, "Well, that's how it is." One should devote a few minutes to think about these questions. Normally, everyone runs away from this responsibility but this is the same as neglecting one's training as well. By asking questions, by thinking about or bringing up questions to one's self, regardless whether the answers pop up immediately or not, brings greater depth and interest to one's practice. We, as Aikidoists, should probe into the question of balance and harmony because this leads to the possibility of creating balanced and harmonious lives for ourselves.

"TWO FISHES"

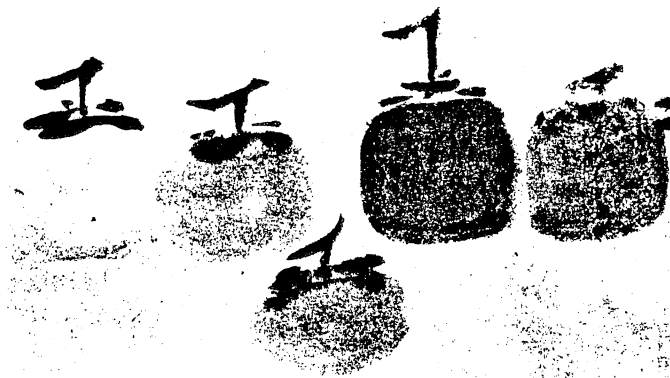
We often see a pattern of two fishes, head to tail, on many Chinese dishes, paintings, building, etc. It symbolizes good fortune and abundance and therefore a popular symbol among the Chinese.

The fish represents food and successive offspring. The archaic meaning of the symbol is "life in balance" or the "yin" and "yang" (positive and negative) forces of life.

Life is seen as an interaction and balance of positive and negative forces. These forces are in constant motion and ever changing. This total process is called the "great, absolute Nature."

This process of change is studied in the "I Ching" or "Book of changes," a well known Chinese classic. Nowadays, we tend to assign everything their own independent value. "An orange is an orange." We never think in terms of "an orange is an orange

and a non-orange as well." This is a little silly. However, people did think in terms of an orange and the "empty" space around it. When we look at a Chinese or Japanese painting, especially ink paintings, we see a great deal of empty space. This empty space is as meaningful as the drawn elements.



"The Five Persimmons"

In Western painting, we are almost always obliged to fill up all the spaces. Someone once joked to me about filling up all the spaces to hide the numbers.

This idea of "emptiness" is interesting because it implies a oneness with everything around us. It implies that we are not just separate and independent entities wandering around on this planet with no connection with anything about us. We are sometimes obsessed with our individuality or what we consider our uniqueness. Actually, or rather perhaps this emptiness around us is really not a void separating us from others but is a meaningful part of ourselves. If we think in terms of oneness or harmony, there can be nothing separating us from each other. We don't think like this in the West. In the East, this non-separation despite the emptiness around us defining us as individual entities, is called the oneness of Nature and is the meaning of harmony. They consider everything in harmony when every-

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thing expresses its oneness.

From the "Tao Te Ching;"
"We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel;
But it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the wheel depends. (hub)
We turn clay to make a vessel;
But it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the vessel depends.
We pierce doors and windows to make a house;
And it is on these spaces where there is nothing that the usefulness of the house depends.
Therefore just as we take advantage of what is, we should recognize the usefulness of what is not."

(chapter 11) "The Way and Its Power," trans. Arthur Waley, George Allen and Unwin Press, 1965.

This empty space is what we call "ki" or "vital energy." It is what exists all around us and enters and leaves our bodies as our breath.

Again in chapter 35, we see further discussion of the subtlety of this emptiness. "Tao" (which is "do" in Japanese) refers to Nature or life. The "Great Form" refers to the laws of Nature and how "ki" works in the universe.

"He who is holding the Great Form goes about his work in the empire.
Can go about his work, yet do no harm.
All is space, quietness and security.
Sound of music, smell of good dishes
Will make the passing stranger pause.
How different the words that Tao gives forth!
So thin, so flavorless!
If one looks for Tao, there is nothing solid to see;
If one listens for it, there is nothing loud enough to hear.
Yet if one uses it, it is inexhaustible."

When our breathing is normal, we don't notice it at all. It is only when we have a bad cough or catch a cold that we notice. It is also like going to the beach. When

we first arrive at the beach, the roar of the ocean sounds quite loud, but, after a while, we don't think of it at all. Our lives are like this when everything is in order, we don't notice much of anything. But, we have become such a materialistic world that we intentionally go out of our way to find something sensational. We believe that we must continually search out these experiences or high points in our lives to continually re-affirm our selves. This is known as "life out of balance" and the source of our suffering. Because, much of the time, we cannot get everything we want. And, the happiness does not seem to be the happiness of tomorrow.

From the "Huai Nan Tzu:"
Before heaven and earth had taken form all was vague and amorphous. Therefore it was called the Great Beginning. The Great Beginning produced emptiness and emptiness produced the universe. The universe produced material force (ki) which had limits. That which was clear and light drifted up to become heaven, while that which was heavy and turbid solidified to become earth. It was very easy for the pure, fine material to come together but extremely difficult for the heavy, turbid material to solidify. Therefore heaven was completed first and earth assumed shape after. The combined essences of heaven and earth became the yin and yang, the concentrated essences of the yin and yang became the four seasons, and the scattered essences of the four seasons became the myriad creatures of the world. After a long time the hot force of the accumulated yang produced fire and the essence of the fire force became the sun; the cold force of the accumulated yin became water and the essence of the water force became the moon. The essence of the excess force of the sun and moon became the stars and planets. Heaven received the sun, moon and stars while earth received water and soil.

When heaven and earth were joined in emptiness and all was unwrought simplicity, then without having been created, things came into being. This was the Great Oneness. All things issued from this oneness but all became different, being divided into the various species of fish, birds and beasts. . . Therefore while a thing moves it is called

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living, and when it dies it is said to be exhausted. All are creatures. They are not the uncreated creator of things, for the creator of things is not among things. If we examine the Great Beginning of antiquity we find that man was born out of nonbeing to assume form in being. Having form, he is governed by things. But he who can return to that from which he was born and become as though formless is called a "true man." The true man is he who has never become separated from the Great Oneness."

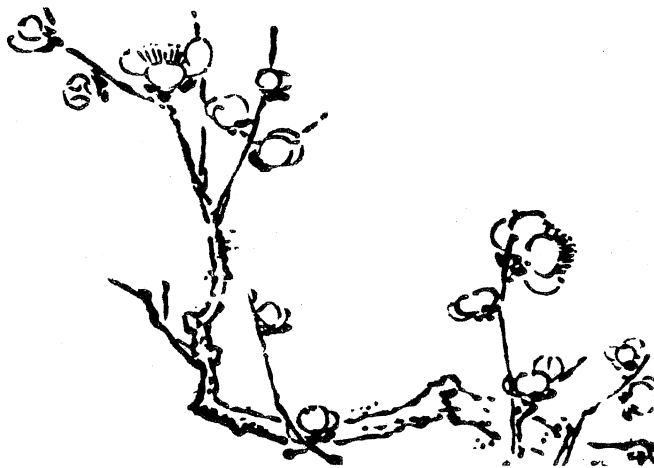
Although this particular passage about five hundred years before the birth of Christ, it is still a prevalent concept of the universe today in Eastern thought. It forms the basis of modern Asian medicine and acupuncture. This "oneness" is a view that everything in the universe or Nature, including man, has come from the same single source. They don't give it a name or define it as an entity or god. It simply happens. "That" which makes it simply happen is the working of what is defined as "ki" energy. This is referred to in: "The universe produced material force which had limits." This means that "ki" energy came into being with the creation of material objects and the "myriad creatures" including man. This also means that "ki" energy is subject to physical form. The "Great Beginning" and "oneness" mean balance in Nature and life. It is from this tradition of thought that the idea of harmony and balance in Aikido arose. The oneness is harmony in Nature and balance is how the laws of Nature operate. This type of view is quite different from our Western thinking but it may give the student an idea of one of the traditions from which Aikido finally grew.

"TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK"

The Bible says to "turn the other cheek" when struck. Someone once said that, in Aikido, we turn the cheek as well but just before he strikes. Once, a student asked Confucius, "There is a saying of repaying evil with goodness. What do you think of that?" Confucius said: "It is incorrect. Repay goodness with goodness. Repay evil with justice." On this subject, the poetess, Chiyo (A Buddhist nun) wrote:
"Te-oraruru hito ni kaoru ya, ume no hana."

This is roughly translated as :

"The flowering branch of the plum blossom gives its fragrance to he who broke it off."



It does not take any special school of philosophy or any particular religion to understand this sentiment, I believe. In whatever we do, we should not hurt others. This is especially important for the Aikidolist. It is important to develop strong and effective technique but not at your partner's expense. Sometimes, we meet a training partner who insists on proving their strength to you. This is always a difficult situation to handle but it is an essential part of our training to understand how to deal with the situation or request that he go easier. Without changing or distorting the technique, Aikido training always cultivates mutual understanding and compassion. Sometimes, we can only "turn the other cheek" as difficult as it may be.

MONTHLY DUES

As of February 1, 1988, the dues will change from \$50.00 a month to \$60.00 a month. This was agreed upon during the membership meeting held in December of 1987. Our membership must still grow a little more and we must still meet the ever increasing costs of maintaining the dojo. This year, our insurance was increased by \$1,050.00 and our rent went up by 7%. These have been our major expenses along with our Yellow Pages ads. The Yellow Pages ads will decrease as each ad runs out.

Our landlord has requested that the rent be paid by the 6th of the month. Before it was the 10th with no penalty. Generally, we pay

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on time, but now there will be a penalty which we cannot afford. Please pay your dues within the first three days of the month. Thank you.

SEMINARS FOR 1988

We have several seminars tentatively planned for this year but exact dates are not yet available. Yamada Sensei, Kanai Sensei and Sugano Sensei will be coming for certain this year.

In other parts of the country it is common to see several hundreds of students participating in a single seminar. There are no financial problems and in a "more the merrier" atmosphere, everyone has a great time. The situation in West Coast is much different because there are so many independent dojos. Because of this, it is always difficult to have seminars in this area. For lack of participation, these seminars become a burden to finance. However, these seminars are extremely important for the students' training and developing the dojo. It is important to have these instructors visit and instruct us. Although it may be difficult for a while, it is important for as many people as possible within the dojo to support and participate in our seminars. Please try to participate in our seminars to further develop your practice and skill. Sometimes, we don't appreciate how difficult it is to get these teachers to come and how much benefits we derive from their instruction.

CALENDAR FOR FEBRUARY 1988

February 6th	Final Open House meeting. Nantenkai.
February 7th	Special Guest Instructor: Senta Yamada Sensei from Fukuoka, Japan. 10:00am to 11:30am
February 14th	Dojo Open House.
February 20th	Yudanshakai Instructors' Meeting.
Planned:	Yudansha Kai party for new black belts.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR MARCH 1988

March 5th Yudansha Kai meeting.

ZEN LECTURES

The Zenshuji Soto Mission on 123 South Hewitt Street will be sponsoring the following lectures series. Interested parties are welcome to attend.

March 5th. "Zen and Beauty" by Dr. Herbert Plutschow. 10:00am. \$10.00.

May 13-15th. Tassajara Retreat with Rev. Hakusho Okamura. \$100.00 donation.

July 23rd. Lecture by Tozen Akiyama of the Milwaukee Zen Center.

September 24th. "Shobogenzo Genjoan" by Rev. Hakuyo Maezumi. \$10.00 donation.

November 12th. Zen lecture and Rakushu workshop with Rev. Dainin Katagiri. Lecture \$10.00 and workshop \$10.00.

READING LIST OF RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Aikido. Kisshomaru Ueshiba. HOzansha Press

The Spirit of Aikido. Kisshomaru Ueshiba.

Refining Your Life. Kosho Uchiyama.

The First and Last Freedom. J. Krishnamurti
Harper and Row Press.

The Sword and the Mind. Hiroaki Sato.
The Overlook Press.

Zen and the Ways. Trevor Leggett.
Routledge and Kegan Paul Press.

Zen and Japanese Culture. D. T. Suzuki.
Bollingen Press.

The Way and Its Power. A Study of the Tao
Te Ching. Arthur Waley. Grove Press.

Sensei regularly contributes articles to Martial Arts Weapons, Martial Arts Training magazines. He also contributes to the newsletter of the Japanese Sword Society of the United States and the Southern California Sword Society.

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CONGRATULATIONS!

On January 24, 1988, Mr. Victor Rodriguez and Mr. Blake Ashley successfully passed an extensive examination for the first degree Black Belt. Congratulations are in order for them. They immediately become members of our Yudansha Kai or Black Belt Committee. Everyone should help them to train hard to become good Black Belts in our dojo.

A FEW WORDS OF SENSEI

I would first like to welcome the many students who have joined the dojo since the New Year. I hope everyone practices hard but enjoys himself as well and benefits from the spirit of Aikido we try to cultivate in our hearts. It is important for everyone to learn how to work together. We must learn how to share with others and understand that sharing with others is the best way to develop ourselves.

In a world which is changing so rapidly, we are trying desparately to hang on to what is left of our humanity and our compassion. This is our link with nature and the only way, I believe, we can hope to achieve peace in this world.

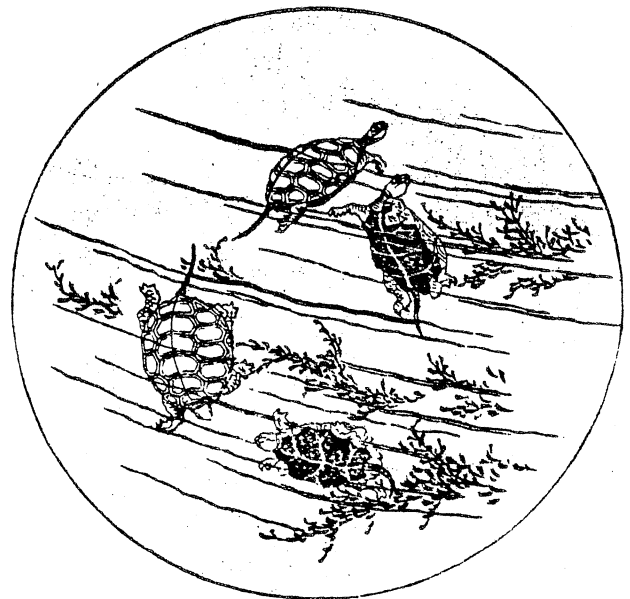
Aikido is not an easy road to choose. It is not easy because it tries to rediscover our true selves. This is hard for all of us to face directly. It takes time and patience. We always feel that we don't have enough time and we continually try to keep up with everything that speeds by us in this highly fast-paced world of ours. There is no way to keep up, especially when we don't really know where we are going in the first place. This is why we become so tired and frustrated. It is not important how well we can keep up in the social race as it is to continually cultivate and nourish our spirit and energy. We have wasted and polluted our natural resources and this is a big problem which we are facing now. Isn't our humanity and energy a natural resource as well? We should not waste it. This is something to think about in our training.

I am so happy to see so many people coming to the dojo for practice. I know many cannot come often because of their work and family lives. Aikido is not just something

we only practice on the mats. We carry it with us through out the day, every day. We try to be strong, balanced and clear when we practice. We should try to be strong, balanced and clear in our daily lives as well.

We cannot accumulate Aikido; it is not like a bank account. Like brushing our teeth, we cannot brush for 15 minutes one day and forget the rest of the week. We must brush a few minutes everyday. We cannot sleep for one day and go without sleep for the next three or four days. We cannot live like this. The body will die. It is not like saving pennies in your bank account. Just as we wash our face every morning and have a nourishing breakfast to maintain our bodies, we practice Aikido to cleanse and nourish our inner self as well.

Mr. Steve Stephanides, one of our members, is a student from USC and will be going to Japan later this year to study at Waseda Univeristy in Tokyo. Luckily, it is only a ten minute walk from Hombu Dojo. He brought an article the other day which states that Aikido is some kind of "cult." Our idea of a "cult" or religion is quite different from the East. I will be making a rebuttal in the March issue. Aikido is not a cult.



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MINUTES OF THE MEMBERSHIP MEETING. JANUARY 17, 1988.

By Brian Reverman

The general focus of the this meeting was to set up the OPEN HOUSE scheduled for February 14, 1988. After some discussion about what form the Open House should take it was decided to establish committees to organize the various aspects of the event. Below are different committees and their responsibilities.

GENERAL COORDINATOR - Kathy Heinemann

PROGRAM - Set up to determine the scheduled events of the day.

Tony Gonsalves - Chairperson

Kaz Nishida

Allan Hardy

Douglas Firestone

David Pascal

ADVERTISING/PROMOTION - To issue press releases, create and distribute flyers, contact media, etc.

Mitsuko Yoshimoto - Chairperson

Brad Radar

Steve Dawson

Andrew Dawson

Lee Hart

Douglas Firestone

Brian Reverman

DOJO COORDINATION - Responsible for refreshments, equipment, decorations, etc.

Victor Rodriguez - Chairperson

Steve Dawson

Andrew Dawson

Sherry Eaton

Dan Eaton

Bill Heath

Nels Israelson

If you'd like to help out, please see the Chairperson of your area of interest. We need everyone to be there on February 14, 1988 especially, so please plan ahead to keep this day free so you can help out.

(Note: Final meeting is scheduled for February 6, 1988)

There will be a meeting of the committees on January 23, 1988 at 12:30pm to finalize the details of the OPEN HOUSE. Everyone is welcome to attend.

In addition to the discussion of the OPEN HOUSE, some other matters were wrapped up.

As per Sensei's request, we voted to adopt the name of NANTENKAI for our student organization.

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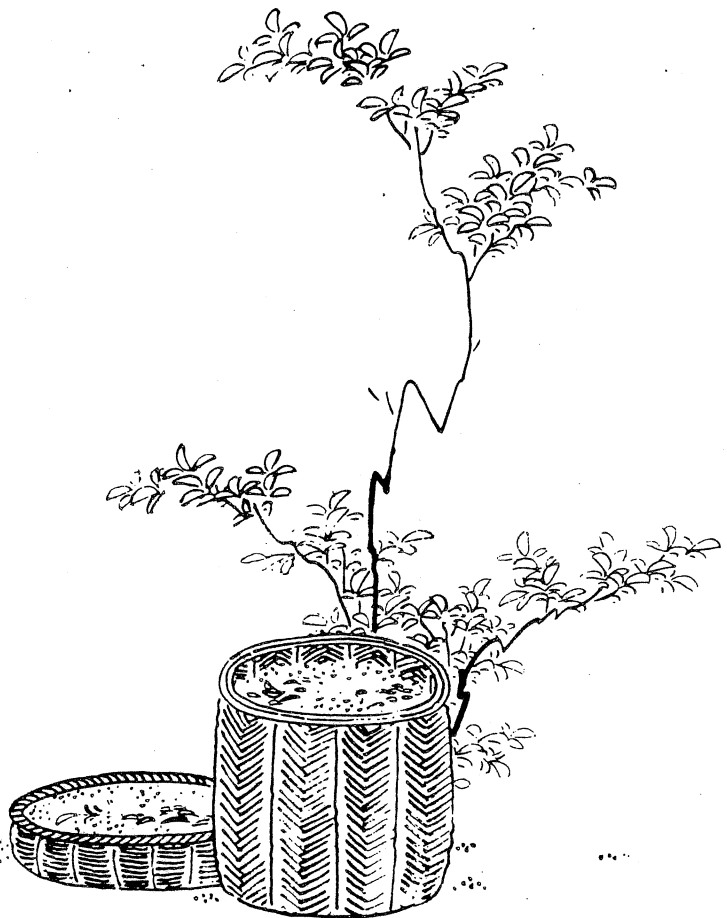
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Bill Heath offered to host a pot-luck PARTY FOR THE NEW BLACK BELTS at his house. Final date has not been set.

Blake Ashley has taken over the duties concerning ordering the dojo uniform patches from Kathy Heinemann. Please see him about ordering patches. They are \$5.00 each and need to be ordered on a pre-paid basis.

Dan Eaton volunteered to type up the student directory and it should be ready for distribution soon.

Twenty one students attended the meeting.



The AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES NEWSLETTER is published monthly and is free of charge to dojo members. Non-members may send in their name and address plus a \$15.00 donation to cover postage and printing if they would like to receive a copy each month.

The editor apologizes for the diminished look of the Newsletter but we have lost our printer, Mr. Eric Stout, because of his busy work schedule. We hope to find another alternative to typesetting the newsletter in the future. Thank you for your patience.