



AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES NEWSLETTER

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July 1, 1988
Number 3. Volume 7.

SUMMERTIME IN THE DOJO

For most people summertime means hot weather and vacations. In the dojo, we see many people come and go; students especially go home for the summer vacation and we don't see them again until the fall. One of our students, Mr. Stephan Stephanides, a student at USC, will be going to Japan for ten months to study in an exchange program at Waseda University. Since his finals, he has been commuting to the dojo from his home in Laguna Beach. It is nice that his Aikido training has stimulated his interest in Japan. The university is only a ten minute walk from the Aikido World Headquarters where Stephan plans to continue his training. Congratulations.

For the dojo, summertime also means demonstrations. Many demonstrations. For an Aikido dojo or any martial arts dojo, as a matter of fact, I think we must do a record number of exhibitions every year. Most of these demonstrations happen in the summertime. On June 11th, we demonstrated at the Martial Arts Expo in the San Fernando Valley. On June 11th and 12th and again on the 18th and 19th, we demonstrated Aikido at the Arts and Crafts Fair in the Japanese Village Plaza in Little Tokyo. This consisted of two half-hour demonstrations each day totalling eight demonstrations in all. I am not surprised many of our senior students are so tired. (They performed three demos in one day on June 11th.)

We are scheduled for two more demonstrations this month on July 9th and 10th for the Tanabata Festival in Little Tokyo. And, we have our Annual Nisei Week Aikido Demonstration in August at the Little Tokyo Plaza in the Yaohan Mall. This year, in addition, we will be demonstrating Aikido at the Nisei Week Coronation Ball which is the biggest event of the Nisei Week Festival.

We usually think that demonstrations publicize the dojo and is the best way to attract students but I like to take a different view. I think representing Aikido and participating in the cultural activities of the community is very important: I also think demonstrations offer an excellent training experience for the students. I know it is not easy for students to get up in front of many people and exhibit their skill. In many ways it is very much like taking an examination.

We had many people helping on the sidelines passing out flyers, carrying the mats back and forth, and

taking many photos of the students.

It is so nice to see people working together and sharing. I hope, in the future, more and more students will take part in these demonstrations. It is a big commitment of time and energy but, in addition to the experience, it is well worth the effort to bring Aikido to the general public.

I would personally like to thank the following students who participated in and helped present such successful demonstrations:

Assistant Instructors:

Mr. Douglas Firestone
Ms. Kathy Heinemann
Mr. Kazuho Nishida
Mr. Victor Rodriguez
Mr. Blake Ashley

Adult Students:

Mr. Tony Gonsalves
Mr. Manuel Almaguer
Ms. Mitsuko Yoshimoto
Ms. Carol Almaguer

Children's Class:

Jonas Youngstrom
Gabriel Youngstrom
Malcolm Quon
Danny Rocha
Christian Rocha
Ryoji Yamada
Timi Ito
Ken Hokama
David Hokama
Daphne Yamasaki

I would also like to thank everyone to took photos and videos of the demonstration. Mitsuru Cafe in the Village Plaza also very kindly lent us the microphone system.

WELCOMING NEW STUDENTS

We have many new students coming into the dojo recently and it is very important for the older students to introduce themselves to them, make them feel welcome and at home, and guide them in the protocol of the dojo.

Everyone should remember their first day in the dojo and how strange or uncomfortable it must have felt. I can remember the first day I took Aikido. There was no explanation or anything because my teacher could

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not speak any English at all. He simply started to throw me around until he thought the first class was finished. In the second class, he started to show me a few exercises like bending my wrists. That was it. Why I fell in love with Aikido with an introduction like that I will probably never know but, I am still doing Aikido today.

Today, in our dojo, we try to explain a little more and we try to take it easy on the beginners until they become more comfortable with the training routine. However, I don't think it is a good idea to try to explain everything, new students should go through that same experience of strangeness and wonder. We may even call it confusion. But, it is the confusion and the many unanswered questions that should encourage the new student to explore and struggle with learning the art. Students commit a kind of "educational suicide" when they come into the art with too many personal expectations or too much confidence in themselves. Recently, a new student joined our dojo because he wanted to get into better physical shape. After the first class he was very enthusiastic and gung-ho about Aikido. About a week later, I didn't see him anymore but received a letter from him one day. He said that he was going to take up running for a while to get into shape so that he could continue his tough training in Aikido to get into shape.

It is very common for new students to try much "too hard" and burn out right away. In Aikido, it is important to grow gradually and naturally. Take a little at a time and develop a little more day by day. Don't hurry. It does not mean to become lazy, it means that we must, in every aspect of our training, come to know ourselves better, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Many people call the dojo nowadays and ask me: "Which is better? Aikido or Karate?" My answer is: "if I thought Karate was better, I would be doing Karate right now." What a strange question to ask! I do not want to compare martial arts. There is no comparison and that is an important point to understand. Comparing Karate and Aikido is like comparing basketball and soccer. Or football and tennis. There is no comparison.

Many new students, ask me: "How long will it take before I get good." Or, "how long will it take before I can use Aikido on the streets?" I wonder why people ask this question when no one asks: "How long will it take before I can be a neuro-surgeon or concert

pianist?"

New students are making remarkable progress in the dojo. I asked Douglas one day in class that we should promote several of those students because they are doing so well. He said, "Oh no, Sensei. They have only been practicing for two weeks." I was so surprised.

New students never think of themselves as making progress. They only see their own struggle to understand this technique or manage to get through that technique without Sensei yelling at them. And, this seems to go on in every class. I see many students making excellent progress but sometimes it is not a good policy to be generous with the compliments. When I was a very young student, I can't remember one time when my teacher told me I was doing well. There is a purpose for this. Compliments lead to self-confidence which destroys the rhythm of learning in the student. This is very important for the teacher to watch in training his students.

For some students, a compliment is like a strong medicine which makes them stronger and more energetic. For some students, a compliment is like a potent drug which deludes them and makes them lazy.

What is a mistake?

This may seem like a silly question to ask but I wonder how many students have ever given it a thought and how many really know the answer? When I am teaching the class, I often see students making expressions of disappointment or anger on their faces because they did this wrong, or their footwork is off, or for what every reason. How do they know they have made a mistake? Well, it's obvious. The Sensei or one of the Assistants comes running over to correct or scold them.

We are always making mistakes. I myself average a thousand a day, at least, and that is a good day. I suppose we must suffer the consequences of our mistakes. I suppose we must be humble when we are scolded. But, we must not accept our mistakes negatively. A lazy student will look at his own mistakes and think less of himself or try to put the blame on others. "It's not my fault!" A worthy student will look at his own mistakes constructively and utilize them to further his progress and training. That is in tune with the spirit of Aikido. Indeed, this is what we call, "spiritual training."

One time, I met a very high ranking, very famous Aikido teacher and I was so impressed with his skill

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and strength and really hoped that someday I could become like him. So, one day, I asked him: "How did you become so good?" He told me something which I have never forgotten.

He said, "Take your faults and make them into your strong points. Take your weakest techniques and make them your strongest techniques."

In other words, we should look at our mistakes or faults and see how we can transform them into good points. If we are always late, we should, as a part of our training, work to be become early or punctual in every aspect of our lives. If my posture is very bad, I should practice, always keeping in my mind, to correct my posture at all times. If I need work on my footwork, I should work to make my footwork the strongest point of my techniques. If there is a technique which I am not very good at or don't understand completely, I should train to make it my best technique.

This is an excellent way to develop our skill. Take your weak points and make them your strongest points. In constructive, positive training, a mistake is no longer a mistake.

CLEANING-UP

Has anyone ever asked you to: "Clean up your act?" That, I think, is an interesting phrase. It can mean that you are hanging on to too much garbage. Why do we hang onto it and why don't we throw it away? Why don't we get rid of all that burdensome waste?

Everyone hates to clean-up. It's hard enough to clean-up after ourselves without cleaning-up after everyone else. Cleaning is menial work for servants or slaves. For many people, it is humiliating. So why must we clean-up the dojo everyday after practice?

The spiritual tradition in Asia began in India almost 5000 years ago. Kings and the common people, every level of society, relied on the blessings and teachings of holy men who walk all over the countryside practicing their yoga or meditation. Although these holy men were not allowed to own anything except for a single loincloth, everything was provided for them by their believers. Wherever they went, they were brought food, provided with shelter, and practically anything they wanted. This tradition is still carried on in India today.

But, when they came to China, this practice was not

accepted by the Chinese. It offended their sense of propriety that people could walk around naked, begging for food, etc. As a matter of fact, it was illegal and one could be put in prison or executed for such a "crime." Priests began to organize themselves into communities (monasteries) and became self-sufficient in order to continue practicing their faith. In such monasteries, where priests provided everything for themselves, the chores of cleaning, cooking, repair of the temple, carrying water, etc. were delegated to every priest regardless of their rank. This became an important aspect of their spiritual discipline and training.

There is a story of a old, high ranking, priest who went out every day in the hot sun to work with the younger priests in the fields cultivating vegetables for their table. The younger priests begged the old priest to take it easy because of his age and high rank but the priest refused to listen to them and continued to work hard everyday. One day, the younger priests decided to hide his tools, thinking that if the older priest had no tools he could not work. That morning the priest had no tools so he retired to his room. In the evening, however, at dinner, the younger priests were shocked that the old priest refused to eat. This went on for several days and everyone was afraid for his health. Finally, one of the younger priests asked him what the problem was. The old priest simply said: "No work, no food." The next day, the old priest found his tools just where he had left them several days earlier. "No work, no food" has become one of the great spiritual traditions which has carried into the tradition of martial arts of the samurai warrior.

Self-sufficiency teaches freedom. In the case of the priests, spiritual freedom. This is why it has become such an important tradition in martial arts. Unfortunately, it is a tradition dying in modern society today.

The formation of monasteries in Europe during the same period eventually lead to a commercial and industrial revolution inspired by the priests who organized themselves into groups, delegated chores and became self-sufficient producing their own milk, cheese, butter, wine, bread, meat and cloth.

Cleaning-up the dojo is not a chore. It is spiritual training. In the Japanese tradition, it is not simply an expression of self-sufficiency or freedom but an act of personal purification as well. It destroys our egotistical delusions, it teaches us to respect all things however humble, and it provides the opportunity to work and cooperate with our classmates. When I was in Japan, I was not sure if I spent more time

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cleaning or training.

Everyone is impressed when they read in Aikido books about how O-Sensei would venture out every morning at 5:30am to pray to the sun and nature. Few people appreciate how his young students were up several hours earlier to clean the Aiki Shrine and prepare everything for O-Sensei's arrival.

When students clean the dojo, they should "clean" their minds as well. Not only the dojo but everything should be treated carefully and with great respect. When we clean, we should do it with the proper mental attitude. When we clean the floor with the proper mental stance, the floor becomes truly clean. If we clean the floor with a sloppy mental attitude, the floor does not become clean, it becomes dirtier. This is hard to understand, I think. In the Christian tradition, we should see God in everything and in every person. In cleaning the floor, we are, indeed cleaning our own faces.

I would prefer to wash down the front of the dojo in the morning when it is cool. But, generally, I try to wash down the front around five o'clock just before the students arrive. When everything is just slightly wet and clean and all the dust is gone from the air, it is the most appropriate welcome to students for training. The clean atmosphere of the entrance should make one more energetic for training. This is also the proper practice in the tea ceremony; the entrance, just before the guests arrive, is always washed down to create a welcome air of purity and cleanliness.

In a larger view, we must become more sensitive to our environment. Less than 400 years ago when the first Europeans came to America, they thought it was a paradise. Nowadays, we must get clean water out of a bottle and we have forgotten what clean, fresh air smells like. Many of our forests are gone and our great, great, great, great grandchildren will not be around to see them come back again.

When we built the dojo, we used many antique furnishings. The carpenter from Japan was so surprised because wood used several hundred years ago and the wood today in Japan has completely changed. He said the older wood has very nice grain, takes a good finish and is easy to work with. But, the wood today is very inferior because the trees are grown too quickly and too much of the pollutants have soaked into the ground creating changes in the trees themselves. This is something to think about. Caring about things is part of our Aikido training.

UNIFORMS

The last several shipments of uniforms which we purchased are a better quality and much more expensive but we are selling them at the same price of \$35.00 each. We will be getting the regular uniforms again when they arrive in three weeks. Those who wish to get one of these higher quality uniforms should purchase them now while they last.

T-SHIRTS

The t-shirts and polo shirts are going very fast and we only have a few of the extra large sizes left. The next batch of t-shirts will most probably have a different design. The t-shirts are \$8.50 and the polo shirts are \$13.00. Some students suggested that we print sweat shirts for the next time. We would like to know how everyone feels about printing sweat shirts.

DOJO PATCHES

The dojo patches are on order and will be ready in about four weeks. The patches are exactly the same as the old patches and are worn on the left shoulder of the uniform. The patches are \$5.00 each.

EAST COAST SUMMER CAMP

The New England Aiki Kai is sponsoring their annual Summer Camp again this year. Their special guest instructor is Ohsawa Kisaburo Sensei, 9th dan, of the Aikido World Headquarters. Other instructors teaching will be Yamada Yoshimitsu Sensei, 7th dan of the New York Aiki Kai, Kanai Mitsunari Sensei, 7th dan of the New England Aiki Kai and Sugano Seiichi Sensei, 7th dan of the New York Aiki Kai.

Ohsawa Sensei is one of the top instructors in the world today and formerly the Chief Instructor of Hombu Dojo until his retirement and the post was taken over by Ueshiba Moriteru Sensei, grandson of the Founder of Aikido.

We are proud to announce the following members who will be attending this year's Summer Camp.

Mr. Douglas Firestone
Mr. Kazuho Nishida
Mr. Tony Gonsalves
Mr. Bill Heath
Ms. Mitsuko Yoshimoto
Mr. Dan Eaton

Good luck and congratulations.

Note: Since many seniors students will be away for Summer Camp, we will need all the help from the other senior students during their absence. Please adjust your training schedules to help out with our

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NISEI WEEK AIKIDO DEMONSTRATION

The Annual Nisei Week Aikido Demonstration will be held on August 6th and 7th at the Little Tokyo Plaza/Yaohan Mall on the second floor. This is located at the corner of Third and Alameda Streets in Downtown Little Tokyo.

We need volunteers from the dojo to pass out flyers, help carry the mats and take photos and/or videos of the event.

This is one of the most important demonstrations of Aikido in Los Angeles so we need everyone's help to make it a big success again this year.

DOJO PICNIC

On August 27th, Saturday afternoon, we tentatively have planned a dojo picnic. This will be our summer social event. We are looking at Griffith Park near the LA Zoo where they have a very nice location and bar-be-que facilities. We do need volunteers to prepare a few salads and some deserts. The lunch and the drinks will all be supplied by the dojo.

HAPPY FOURTH OF JULY

The dojo wishes all of its members, students and friends a safe and happy Fourth of July Holiday.

The holiday training schedule is as follows:

Morning Class 8:00am to 9:00am

Evening Class 6:30pm to 8:00pm

Please note this on your calendars.

DOJO TRAINING SCHEDULE:

Monday-Wednesday-Friday Mornings
7:00am to 8:00am

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

Monday-Wednesday-Thursday Evenings
7:30pm to 8:30pm

Saturday Mornings
11:30am to 12:30pm

Sunday Mornings
10:15am to 11:30am

TRAINING SCHEDULE (cont.)

Advanced Classes (3rd kyu and above).

Tuesday Evenings
7:30pm to 8:30pm

Saturday Mornings
10:15am to 11:15am

Children's Classes

Sunday Mornings
12:00pm to 1:00pm

Muso Shinden Ryu Iaido Classes

Wednesday Evenings
8:45pm to 9:45pm

Saturday and Sunday Mornings
9:00am to 10:00am

LEAVE OF ABSENCES

Students taking a leave of absence for any reason such as vacation, work, sickness, etc. should fill out a Leave of Absence form and/or communicate with one of the Assistant Instructors to let them know that you will be away from the dojo. Sensei worries why some students come and go or are suddenly not coming to practice. Please let us know when and how long you will be away.

YELLOW PAGES AD

We still need more volunteer contributions for our Yellow Pages ad. Any amount is fine, please make your pledges with Ms. Kathy Heinemann who is in charge. We would also like to thank everyone who has been contributing regularly every month to this fund. It has been a tremendous help to the dojo. Thank you again.

For regular contributors, Sensei will be planning a special "thank you" party sometime in the fall after the busy summer schedule settles down.

WEEKDAY SECOND CLASS

As our classes are becoming larger and larger, we hope more students will stay for the second class on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays (7:30pm to 8:30pm) for additional training. Advanced students should especially try to arrange their schedules to help the new students in the first class and train harder themselves in the second class. We will try to direct our schedule in this way for a while. Everyone, please continue to train hard. Thank you.