

Aikido Connection Monthly

February 2006

UPCOMING EVENTS

KANGEIKO

(AWA National Winter Train-
ing Seminar)

February 9-12

Instruction by

AWA Chief Instructor

Andrew Sato, Shihandai Held at
Kiku Matsu Dojo, Chicago IL.

Zen - Bodywork - Yoga Seminar

February 24-26.

Ginny Whitelaw,

Zen priest and former
Aikido sensei (sensei's first in-
structor), Everett Ogawa, Body-
work practitioner/instructor, &
Ximena Prudencio, Yoga
practitioner/instructor
Held at Onshinkan Dojo

Iaido Seminar

(Japanese

Swordsmanship)

March 24-26

Instruction by Greg Noble Sensei
(West Virginia Aikido).

Held at Onshinkan Dojo

AWA Aikido Seminar

April 21-23

Instruction by

AWA Chief Instructor

Andrew Sato, Shihandai Held at
Onshinkan Dojo.

(\$65 for whole seminar)

Onshinkan Dojo's First Shodan

by Don Honeycutt

I was asked to give my thoughts on finally earning my shodan. I guess I should start at the beginning. The path to earning my black belt started exactly 5 years before. When I started practicing Aikido, I honestly never thought I would get this far. It is not that I didn't want to, I just knew my



history. Like many people, I was always good at starting things but not always good at finishing them. OK, let's just say I sucked at finishing! I always started off my endeavors with the best of intentions, but we know what they say about good intentions now, don't we?

Anyways, the first time I ever tested I saw all of these other people testing for the higher ranks and thought, "That looks very difficult, I don't know if I can do that or not." And the first time I saw a shodan test I thought "OK, there is no way I will ever be able to do that!" I guess I did not have a lot of confidence in my potential, to say the least.

(Continued on page 3)

Dojo Meeting 2006 Recap

On Saturday afternoon, January 21, 2006, a general meeting was held at Onshinkan Dojo for all students, parents, and children. The meeting was only a few hours long and began with a 1-hour documentary from Fit TV titled "Deadly Arts: Aikido." The episode was shot on location in Japan and features, among others, Yamada Shihan, Doshu, and Saito Shihan Jr., and tracks the history of Aikido throughout Japan and the formality involved in training with a shihan. After the video, a general meeting was held to outline upcoming events, schedule changes, and general upkeep of the dojo, and to discuss how each of us can invest ourselves in the growth and success of our dojo. Etiquette was also discussed regarding new students, observers, visitors, and guests from other dojos. (A detailed outline is available in the office.) The meeting ended with pizza, pop, chips, cookies, and fresh fruit, turning the event into another great time spent with the entire dojo family.



Happy Dojo Birthdays to

January

David McConnell

February

Leila Rodriguez (5!)
 Damien Thomas (8!)
 Tanya Riveron (13!)
 Michael Griffin
 Dan Rodriguez
 Scott Hicks
 Don Honeycutt
 John McCormack

is mind really pure?

The Korean master Seung Sahn said, "Clear mind is like the full moon in the sky. Sometimes clouds come and cover it, but the moon is always behind them. Clouds go away and the moon shines brightly. So don't worry about clear mind, it is always there."

The Zen view of mind is so different from the one most of us grew up with that it comes as a huge shock. If you were brought up in one of the big three monotheistic religions you will be familiar with the idea that, at bottom, you are a sinner and that unless you are redeemed in some way (depending on which religion you belong to), there is no hope for you. The Buddhist view is that our original mind is pure. In fact, since Mind is all there is, nothing anyone can do could possibly make it impure. People may, of course, be stupid, ignorant, cruel, lustful, greedy, or hateful, but they are not evil. It is rather as if you had been rolling in straw and got your clothes filthy. There is no doubt about how dirty you look but the dirt is not you, it is something you have acquired and is stuck on to the real you which, underneath, is still perfectly clean. This idea of an originally pure mind is fundamental to Zen. It underlies all the talk of spontaneity and doing things "before thinking." It puts Zen at odds not only with some of the major religions, but with psychological theory. Freud and others may not have been convinced of original sin, but they were pretty sure that the mind was a murky and dangerous place inhabited by monsters (monsters which they, at a price, were uniquely qualified to slay). The idea that there is nothing wrong with you has come as a great relief to many people who were tired of carrying this burden of guilt and blame.

- from Robert Allen, *zen questions*



Iaido Study Group Begins

by Phil Smutko

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合
道

Thursday nights at 8pm have become the home of a new training program here at Onshinkan Dojo. Under the direction of Menning Sensei and the guidance of Greg Noble Sensei* of West Virginia Aikido, dojo students are taking their weapons training to the next level.

Iaido is maybe best translated as "Japanese Swordsmanship" or "The art of drawing the sword." Like Aikido, Iaido is a defensive art in which students work on building their mental focus and concentration, through subtle as well as dynamic actions with the sword and awareness of those around them. Ultimately, the goal is to develop "Instant Awareness" for any situation and hopefully to avoid the attack. Iaido sessions may not seem as physically intense as an Aikido training session, instead the workout aims more toward development of the upper arms, hips, legs, knees, ankles, and feet. Students are also learning breathing techniques when drawing and cutting with the sword, along with improving balance and coordination.

After only a few sessions, students have already begun to learn standing and kneeling bowing etiquette, how to properly carry and strike with a sword, and the first of the sword kata. Sessions are Thursday nights from 8pm to 9pm at Onshinkan Dojo, with the possibility of adding additional sessions as time and interest allow. Also, March 24-26 and June 23-25, Onshinkan Dojo will host an Iaido Seminar instructed by Greg Noble Sensei. (For more information on the seminar, fliers and information are available at the dojo.) So far Iaido for me has been a very meditative and highly enjoyable experience. So come on by and check out the class! We hope to see you on the mat.

* Greg Noble Sensei started his aikido training in 1985 and has been teaching since 1988. He holds the rank of yondan (4th-degree black belt) from the late Fumio Toyoda Shihan. In addition to his Aikido rank, Noble sensei has black belts in Tae kwon do and Muso Jikiden Eishin-ryu Iaijutsu. In addition to his involvement in the martial arts, he has taught several women's self-defense courses. Noble Sensei is dojo-cho of Kushinkan Dojo in South Charleston, West Virginia.



Onshinkan Dojo's First Shodan *(Continued from page 1)*

As the time went by and my knowledge and skill increases, so did my faith that one day I may be able to do the things I was not so sure about before. The more I practiced, the more confident I became. To be honest, for my first two or three test(s) I was so nervous I never thought I would be able to pass. I would have dreams about Aikido and I lived in fear of making mistakes and embarrassing myself. Strangely, for my last two or three test(s) I was hardly nervous at all. Now I thought for sure I would be a train wreck when it came time to test for my shodan, but it was the exact opposite. I think the reason for this is because I never rushed into it. I never started practicing Aikido with the ultimate goal of getting a black belt, so I was never in a hurry. I always told myself that if I did not know all I needed to know and if I could not execute the techniques correctly and without hesitation, then I would not test. I did not want to embarrass myself or my sensei.



Now this is not to say that I had a perfect test. When I was doing it I could tell I was making mistakes throughout the test, but the trick is to work through it and make the best of it. Technique is not the end all be all of a shodan test, a lot of it has to do with your attitude and your spirit. How does one react when making a mistake? How do we deal with different uke and different levels of energy? After watching the video of my test I thought it looked pretty decent, but I know I could have done better. I think everyone feels the same after a test.

Now that I have achieved my shodan, I always question myself. To me, this is supposed to signify a higher understanding of the art. It is not a sign of mastery by any stretch of the imagination. Admittedly, I am my own worst critic, and I constantly question whether I am truly deserving of this or not. It is hard to look into myself from the outside. The thing that gets me the most is when people ask "What are you going to do now that you are finished?" I have to explain that I am nowhere near finished with Aikido. A black belt is not the end, it is only the beginning. Earning a black belt means that you finally have enough understanding of the art to really start learning.

People tell me I deserve my black belt, and I appreciate their support. I never would have gotten where I am now without their support and energy, and especially without their bodies to throw around! Thank you all so much for everything you have done for me. My one hope is that I can help others get to this level too, and I will do everything possible to help them achieve their goals.

Contributions of Aikido-related writings and artwork for these newsletters is appreciated. No matter how silly or trivial it may seem—or how deep and meaningful—your experiences and thoughts regarding your training at the dojo—and in life—are of interest to other dojo community members. What can you share? This is your newsletter—please help make it useful and interesting! And don't worry, proofreading and editing services are available in the dojo office ...

NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED BY

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Summer Camp 2004

By Sydney Szozda, when Sydney was a 7th kyu

(or, “Sorry, we misplaced this article for 15 months!”)

I was so excited on my way to Ryoshinkan Dojo in Palatine, IL, noticing all the malls and shops that were only 10 minutes away from my destination. Wow, I can go to the seminar tonight and hit the Schaumburg Mall afterward, I’ve been needing to pick up something from IKEA, I can grab a couple of gift cards. What wishful thinking! From July 22- 25, 2004 if I wasn’t doing, thinking, breathing Aikido, then I was sleeping or taking an ice bath. Being only 7th Kyu, I had just started to learn how to do break falls at Onshinkan Dojo. But at Ryoshinkan Dojo, I quickly learned how to do them correctly, for the rubber “tatami” mat was only covering a carpet cushion and concrete. My legs and hips were so swollen and inflamed, that my only solution to survive the weekend was to take an ice bath. I must’ve made a dozen trips from the ice machine back to the hotel room to discover that I only needed to make a couple of trips. I just wanted to be capable of performing well.

The AAA summer camp was my first seminar. Being only 7th kyu, I found myself among a lot of colored belts, and surprisingly, a lot of black belts. But I didn’t feel the least bit intimidated because everyone I met, from every belt rank, made me feel comfortable. Fellow Aikidoka—including senseis and blackbelts—were introducing themselves to me, asking me for my name, asking how I was doing. During *shomenuchi iriminage*, “Hey, I’m Sean.” “Hi, I’m Sydney.” “Pleased to meet you”... BOOM. During *katatetori nikyo*, “Good morning, Sydney, how are you doing?” “Very well, thank you, and yourself?” “Good thanks”... BOOM. It was just so refreshing. I may be only a 7th kyu in Aikido, but I’ve an additional 9 years of martial arts training under my belt. I took and taught Taekwondo and only a little bit of Hapkido. And in all those years, I still don’t know the names of my fellow Taekwondo-ists; we never talked, because it’s understood that every person is for him/her self. The people I could get close to were my black belt crew, but even then, it was all ego and competition. And I just didn’t fit in with the guys who just like to kick the living

crud out of each other. Aikido is just a breath of fresh air, no ego involved, just movement and constant joy.

We got really lucky with the weather; it was beautiful and cool considering the smoldering and humid week before the seminar. It was so nice that we started our weapons training outside on Friday morning. We practiced the two-person choreographed weapons training, my first time trying it. Then, we’d go inside so we could finally get to the throwing and falling with weapons. The night before, Thursday night, when attendance was smallest, we went over techniques just to feel each other out—who knows how to do what, and what were their restrictions. As the days went on, the techniques got trickier, longer, and more brutal-looking, and the pace was always fast. But each day, our focus got better, and our Aikido more fluent. Our bodies became more flexible, and I learned that after a few hours of doing Aikido, our bodies just want to keep going (like running). That’s how I felt at least, and I don’t think I was the only one feeling it. When you stop running after so long, you feel like you’re still running—same feeling with Aikido.

It was fun to watch Sato Sensei and Germanov Sensei do demonstrations, just seeing how different their attitudes were, and they both had their individual attitude thrown into each move. Sato Sensei has a solid presence about him, but his movement was big and fast, fluent all the way to uke’s fall. He would demonstrate each move several times, then he’d show us in slow motion as he explained it to us. Germanov Sensei’s display seemed effortless and involved more impacts. He would repeat the techniques over and over without verbal instruction. Well, maybe he did; his voice was so soft, he was hard to hear. From what I was able to hear though, I can tell he has a good sense of humor, “All you need to do is move your hips... just move your butt,” and “Don’t be stupid, don’t raise with your back, you lift with your knees.” The workouts were nothing like I’ve ever experienced: so many people trying to fit on the mat all at once, constant activity, and techniques

ranging from weapons, to long puzzle-like techniques, to short and quick techniques, and my forever favorite break falls. As we’d leave the mat for a two-hour lunch break, the most painful moans filled the dojo. It’d take a whole 5 seconds to stand up from *seiza*, and everyone would pass the Sports Gel and Arnica in the dressing room while talking about how much they were enjoying the seminar. Then, somehow, we mustered enough energy after lunch to go train for another 3 hours. We trained for 3 hours on the 22nd and 25th, and a total of 6 hours on the 23rd and 24th.

The main reason why I agreed to come to the seminar was to witness the blackbelt (dan) testing; I figured I wasn’t going to get the opportunity very often, especially with James Landry Sensei testing for nidan. It’s probably early in my Aikido career to worry about dan testing, but I was curious, what would I need to know? (*Actually I was surprised how much of the presentation I recognized.*) How long would it last? (*Maybe 20-30 minutes, a little longer than the average test.*) And who’ll be there? (*A whole lot of people.*) Everyone who tested for black belt did very well; watching them test was inspiring, because they trained so hard to earn that belt, and it’s worth all the soreness, bruises, blisters, and broken toes (things a lot of us experienced at the seminar).

All in all, though, this had to have a perfect or near perfect weekend; if I did it again, I wouldn’t change a thing. I think the best part about the seminar was meeting so many people--Aikidoka from all over: Texas, Utah, and Bulgaria for example. And I learned a couple of tips for other seminars in the future: bring a first aid kit (just in case), and bring at least two more gi’s. Also, just because we trained for a total of 18 hours is no excuse to get lazy, because laziness brings on injuries. Hate to admit it, but I learned the hard way.

To everyone who was at the 2004 Aikido Summer Camp, it was a real pleasure working with you. Thank you very much. I will see you all again soon!