

THE KIAI

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Newsletter of THE AIKIDO INSTITUTE

INTERVIEW WITH DOSHU

I interviewed Mr. Ueshiba Moriteru, third Aikido-Doshu, when he visited the Bay Area for a seminar.

His honesty, naturalness and down-to-earth good nature impressed me.

Aikido has spread around the world to about 87 countries. In spite of the increased weight of his responsibilities, *Doshu* was very friendly and made me feel comfortable talking with him. At first I was perplexed by the gap between the image I saw and the image I had expected.

I had expected a martial artist surrounded by a vigorous aura such as O'Sensei was. As I talked with him I could not escape his truthfulness and his integrity. His aura was so well-rounded.

I can't imagine how difficult it is to be a grandson of the *Kaiso* (founder) of Aikido, who became almost a godlike figure in the Aikido community. He must get a great deal of public attention for it.

"Kaiso preached '*Banyu-aigo-no-michi*' (Road of Kind Treatment within the Whole Universe), which means, to love, respect, and understand each other," Doshu explained. "Kaiso pursued uniting with the universe and working through his life martially and spiritually," Doshu said. "Of course it would be nice [if I could be united with universe] but I can't say that. I would like to think that respecting each other and understanding each other through *keiko* (training) is the first priority. At its best, Aikido creates an atmosphere of harmony within rigorous training."

Extracts from the interview

About the West Coast seminar: Doshu said, "I had a wonderful time and was glad to see so many dojo members in one place."

I think that Doshu was concerned about discord in



Aikido society in our region. When I asked about his work, he said, "As the organization grew, great numbers of different individuals gathered together and that creates conflicts. That is the nature of human society. It is nice to see all these people getting together and affording deeper communication. That is one important reason I go to seminars as much as possible, because by going I may be able to create some additional communication."

Doshu grew up in an Aikido family: "Kaiso and my father, Kisshomaru, were very busy, so I don't have much in the way of family memories with them. But Aikido was always by my side because my house was at the same site as the *honbu* (main) dojo in Tokyo. I can't even remember when I first learned the *waza* (technique) of Aikido.

"Oh, one time I did *sumo* (Japanese wrestling) with Kaiso. I was 10 years old and Kaiso was maybe around 80.

He was a small person, about 5 feet tall, although he was a sturdy man with hard muscles. Of course, I was thrown.

"The first time I wore an Aikido uniform I was in the first grade of elementary school. But my family didn't force me to do *keiko* (training) then, I just did it when I felt like it. I started training seriously in my high school years.

My intention then was to become a successor to my father, and to preserve Kaiso's legacy for the future."

In addition: "I don't have any hobbies. Maybe I should have, but I am too busy to think about this sort of thing. I feel good when I drink beer with peanuts at home after I have done some thing difficult." Doshu likes sake and wine, too. But he also said that he drinks liquor of almost any kind.

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Then he continued, "I don't like to decide specifics. In many cases, I just like to keep an open mind. I think this is good for the people who associate with me, too. If you stick too much to one thing, you are bound by it."

YUKO KITaura



ANNUAL LIST OF DONORS

Over the last year, Aikido Institute/Aiki Integrated Arts has benefited from numerous contributions.

To all those who have contributed their time, care, and spirit to the dojo over the course of the year 2003:

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The preceding list is by no means all inclusive and covers only the year 2003. If your name or another's does not appear and it should, please let me know so that the name can be added.

DEBORAH MAIZELS



ALMOST THERE

With each weary step I promise my feet,
 "This next step will be the last."
 The bitter cold quite burns my cheek.
 Like my soul in winters past.
 I curse the heavens, yet to its inhabitants beseech...
 "Please save me from this earthly strain!"
 I bow my head, and there my feet
 Step once, step twice, and step again.
 I suppose the end I shall not meet.
 Life's burden I still must bear.
 I then resolve to tell my feet.
 "Don't worry, we're almost there."

ROB JONES



FROM THE DESK OF...

As I deliberate about what to write for this Kiai article while doing my laundry, a suggestion was posed to me: "Why not write an uchi deshi editorial?" My initial response was "no way!" I might be uchi deshi but in no way do I feel authorized to write an "editorial column" in the dojo newsletter. This suggestion did, however, impel me to reflect on my role in the dojo and how people view me as an uchi deshi.

What is an uchi deshi (pronounced *oo-chee* (like in cheese) *de* (like the e in net) *-shee*)? The Japanese dictionary defines *uchi* as inside or house (one's own) while *deshi* is pupil, disciple, apprentice, adherent, and follower. Literally, uchi deshi is an inside student. Researching uchi deshi on the web I discovered this: "In Japanese, the term "Uchi Deshi" refers to the tradition whereby certain dedicated students of the Martial Arts could become live-in students of their chosen Teacher. This arrangement was rather like an apprenticeship allowing the student to study all aspects of the art at first hand." Our own dojo describes uchi deshi as such: "Uchi" means home, inside or inner."Deshi" means apprentice or personal student. An uchi deshi is traditionally a student who learns by shadowing the teacher in all activities."

Ok, so I am an inside student who is studying aikido up close and personal. What does that really mean? The dojo describes the purpose of uchi deshi “is to allow a dedicated student to achieve accelerated growth through total immersion in the practice of Aikido during a specific time period.” There are four major responsibilities to perform:

1. Focus personal life on aikido practice.
2. Participate diligently and actively in all classes and dojo activities.
3. Help the sensei, sempai and fellow students in all aikido endeavors
4. Help to maintain and improve the dojo.

The guidelines are simple and self explanatory. I had been uchi deshi once before and I knew what I was expected to do and what I was plunging into. My primary objective is to learn as much about aikido from all aspects... ukemi, executing a technique, principles behind the technique, etc.

Now that I am almost to my half way point in my term, I am happy to report that I have been learning more about aikido, on and off the mat. On the mat, I am beginning to feel more connection to the technique with regards to uke and nage. As nage, I have learned more about how to execute the technique a little bit more effectively (i.e. keep my elbows down and my head up). As uke, I have learned to receive more by absorbing the energy of the technique. After all, it is all about blending. Aside from learning aikido, I am also now intrigued with the idea of teaching aikido. With this brilliant influx of new members, I find myself learning aikido in lieu of teaching it. This raises many questions such as, how to effectively teach, what is the best way to teach to efficiently learn, and if it is better to have more repetitions and less verbalization and vice versa. The questions are endless and unfortunately an entirely separate Kiai article.

Off the mat, I have learned bigger lessons. Take for instance the time I was compelled to take time off from the mat. Due to an elbow injury, for one long week I watched aikido from the sidelines. Even though I felt very anxious to get back to training, I learned that you do not always have to be on the mat to learn about aikido. Without the ability to rely on my arm, I am learning to engage my whole body more than when I did have a healthy arm. Being on the sidelines, I was able to observe the importance of moving off the line, extension, and engaging the hips.

I am also learning how to blend with people, both young and old alike. Many times I find myself on the brink of pure exhaustion. Yet, to my surprise, the minute I walk into the dojo and put on my gi, I loose sight of my fatigue and I am able to interact with people with good energy. It might be adrenaline, it might be ki.

There have been numerous uchi deshi before in this dojo, including our own Kim Sensei. I strive to learn all that I can from this experience and apply it on and off the mat.

As I began this journey in aikido, I uttered this vow to launch me into this way of life:

I always look, listen and learn.

I bow with humility to receive from O’Sensei, the Sensei and my fellow students.

I do my best, share and persevere in my practice.

My daily life is my practice.

I am fully enjoying this experience. Like other uchi deshi, I am challenged to my limits. There is nothing quite like it. Many have thanked me for helping them. Really, it is I who express my gratitude, for it is all of you who are really helping me.

(Current stats: presently there are two uchi deshi at the Aikido Institute, Jen and Mark. It is hard to miss us. Come say hi sometime.)

JENNIFER VELASCO



SOME THOUGHTS ON KIAI

I love to sing and studied singing for many years. One thing that all singing teachers say is that breath and tone are connected. I’ve frustrated myself a lot seeking that elusive breath-tone connection, occasionally finding it only to lose it again. You have to be really unanimous with yourself to sing well. So very often, I haven’t managed to get there.

When our instructors say that kiai is a way of unifying body, mind and spirit, they are connecting to that experience. I cannot say I fully understand kiai or how it is used in Aikido, but I sense there is a lot more to it than just making a sound at a certain time.

In my first year of Aikido practice I couldn’t kiai very comfortably and rarely tried, but I became aware of habits such as holding my breath, panting raggedly in my throat, or having my breath completely unfocused as in a yawn. I concentrated on knowing where my breath was going, sending it out in a controlled, even stream, in harmony with my body movements and under light pressure. This might not make much sound at all, but some people turn it into an intense whisper (“whssssh”, “ffffff”, “bahhht”).

If we engage our vocal cords, the whisper turns into a grunt, a light tone or an intense tone. In our dojo I hear people using voice at certain points in a technique, or occasionally all the way through the motion.

Learning to use my breath, and sometimes voice, in Aikido has let me experiment with getting rid of some constraints of Western music practice. For example:

--What if it doesn’t matter what note I sing?

--What if it doesn’t matter what vowel I sing?

--What if my voice doesn’t have to sound beautiful?

- What if it doesn't matter whether my voice is loud or soft, or if I make a sound at all?
- What if the cue for making sound comes not from a piece of music, but from within myself?

Discarding these constraints is fun and liberating. When the kiai does emerge, I mean if it does, if it chooses to happen, it's on the breath with a relaxed throat. It's not like shouting. It doesn't hurt and I don't feel hoarse the next day. I'm quite sure that this has helped me a lot as a singer.

I find it harder to identify just how this helps my Aikido practice, but I'm going to try. My kiai started to happen when practicing in motion. It's something I can do that helps me feel more fluid and more centered.

I also used kiai to help get up my nerve to do a high fall. I found I was holding my breath before going over, and I started doing a kiai just to make sure I was breathing. The sound would come along with the slap of my hand on the mat. If one was connected, the other would connect also. Somewhere along the line, Peter Sempai suggested beginning the kiai when I sprang off my back foot. That's when the extra energy is needed; if I wait until I hit the mat, it's too late. The resulting sustained yell seems to express the will that it takes me to do a high fall at this point. If it sounded "over the top," well, that was where I was trying to get.

JUNE MELCHIOR



THOUGHTS FROM OFF THE MAT: A Beginner's Take on Aikido

An Elephant in the Dojo: More Than Just a Trunk or a Tail

Sometime back in the days when there were such things, a European king received a present from his counterpart in India. It was a sizeable thing, and he wasn't quite sure what to make of it, so he called his five oldest and wisest advisors to consider it. A short time later, they arrived at the courtyard where the present awaited them. Each was led by the gentle touch of an attendant, for all five were blind in their age and wisdom. Taking hold of the present's tail, the first advisor declared, "The king's present is a broom with stiff bristles." Running a hand over its leg, the second disagreed. "No, it is a thick tree with gnarled bark." "I find the present to be much like a large fan," said the third advisor, taking hold of its great ear. "You are all mistaken," declared the fourth as he tested the present's tusk, "It is a sharp spear." With both hands tugging on the present's trunk, the fifth advisor stated firmly, "No, I am quite sure the king's present

is a great rope." None the wiser, the king sent his advisors to their dinners.

A mere three months into my experience with Aikido, I feel very much like one of the king's advisors, having touched just a small portion that (unlike the advisors) I know to be part of a larger whole. It is not simply that I have begun to learn only a few of the many techniques that I have seen practiced, though that is a part of it. I see that as analogous to having only touched a single leg, while there are three others yet to discover – and while they are foundational, they are not the whole picture.

It is the nature of Aikido as a *do*, a way of experiencing, thinking, and living that I have this sense of, but haven't yet found a way or the opportunities to consider and explore. I know that larger principles and ideas will emerge as I train and interact and learn, but right now I only have the haziest sense of what they are. At the same time, I've already started to look for the Aikido philosophy and principles to emerge in other parts of my life. As a science teacher, for example, I have a choice as to how I address my students' misconceptions in class: I can look at them as problematic, root them out, challenge them directly and forcefully as inaccurate ideas, and try to replace them with my own; or I can move to look at the concept from my student's perspective, determine what ideas they have that we can use and build from, and work together, blending my ideas with theirs, to construct a new understanding that is not in conflict with conventional understandings. Which approach is more in line with the philosophy of Aikido? It is also, incidentally, the one that has shown greater success with helping students to achieve functional understandings of important ideas.

If ideas and principles central to Aikido show up in the high school science classroom, how do they manifest themselves in other parts of our lives? Politics? Environmental issues? Personal relationships? The way we make our everyday decisions? Even as I stand here clutching at a tree-like leg, I find myself imagining what the other parts of the animal might end up looking like.

I look forward to discovering the king's present along side my training partners, both those for whom it is as yet as great a mystery, and those who have encountered parts of it that I have not. I have no doubt that it will be an ongoing process, one demanding both patience and persistence, but I welcome the opportunity to practice both. I wonder if it is even possible to discover it all?

Thank you for training . . .

ANDREW FALK

YOU LOOK MARVELOUS, BUT CAN'T MOVE or Adventures of a 3rd Kyu

There I was minding my own business when suddenly, during the spin cycle, I started a flash back to my fifth Kyu days and my first Aikido experience with weapons. Actually with a Bokken. I still didn't know what a Jo was.

It was a beautiful sunny Saturday and Sempei was being her usual elegant self and giving me my first instructions with the Bokken. What a wonderful feeling. I was using my upper body and counter balancing with my lower body. I felt pumped and alive.

Being completely inspired, I ran out and bought a cheap Bokken to practice at home, I even went to class the following Monday morning so that I could continue the feeling of being pumped and alive. I practiced my Suburi and my strikes in eight directions. Every time I made a strike, I counter balanced by flexing my legs as hard as I could. It was beautiful. This was a body builder's dream. I can pose, and I have a prop, and I looked Marvelous.

Then, about two weeks later, I found that I couldn't move. The pain in my legs was so intense that I could barely walk. I couldn't lift, I couldn't walk, and I couldn't do Bokken strikes. It was as if the blood in my legs were boiling and kept going up and down through the quads. My legs just kept shaking. What was wrong?

It could only be one thing and one thing only. I bowed my head and accepted God's will. I HAD POLIO. That was it. This is how it begins. All those sugar-coated vaccines they gave me as a kid didn't work. I was going to spend the rest of my life in a wheelchair. Move over FDR.

Needless to say, I stopped doing Bokken strikes and the polio went away. Actually, I stopped flexing and my fear of polio went away. After a few more weapons classes, I realized that you're really not supposed to flex when doing Bokken strikes. You're supposed to be balanced and relaxed. How about that? What a concept! Ah, the wonders of Aikido.

To Touch or not to Touch.

I don't like being touched. Never did. I'll bop good friends on the head, but other than that, I really don't touch people. I'm very formal stuck-up individual, or maybe just very New York. And there is nothing more formal than Aikido.

So one day during class, sempei is showing correct technique for Kokyuu ho. One of the things that catches my attention is his use of his hips. He is so close to his partner that his hips actually touch his partner's hips. **YOU WANT ME TO TOUCH THE HIPS OF MY PARTNER? I DON'T EVEN KNOW THESE PEOPLE. THEY ARE PERFECT STRANGERS. YOU'RE TAKING SUCH LIBERTIES!**

So before I grab my gi and leave this place of decadence,

I have to analyze the situation. To do a technique properly, you really do have to be very close to your partner. I've tried doing a technique by being very formal and keeping my partner at a respectful distance, but that just does not work. You get no leverage and your partner does not lose his balance.

So how do I keep the formality and still get very close to my partner? **I DON'T KNOW. YOU FIGURE IT OUT.** Actually, when we bow to each other on the mat, we ask our partners to borrow their bodies in order to train. My mom always told me that when you borrow something, you shouldn't break it ("I never touched the stereo!"). So if you borrow someone's body to train, and if you keep the formality of being very careful not to break anything, you can still get very close to your partner and keep the formality of Aikido. Sounds like a plan. Oh, but I do love Aikido.

EDUARDO GUARDARRAMAS



AIKIDO AND SELF-DEFENSE

One of the newer martial arts invented within the last century is a style called "aikido", translated as "harmony spirit way" in Japanese. The style was developed by a man named Morihei Ueshiba, a Japanese man who stood around five feet tall (Stevens, 8). He developed the art of aikido so that the user of the style would not need to use very much physical force in order to throw or control a much bigger attacker in a seemingly nonviolent way (70). When observing aikido in action, one may become mesmerized by the movements and spiraling motions. From personal experience, I was drawn to this art because of these movements and wondered just how successful this art would be for self-defense. Aikido has already won recognition from around the world (Shishkin, par. 4) and is also being used by police (par.8). According to the article Experts battle over effectiveness of Aikido by Philip Shishkin, "Since aikido is based on natural body movements and joint-bending, it doesn't inflict any permanent injury on the attacker, which is crucial for police officers who could otherwise get sued for abusing the suspect" (par.8). It has also given rise to some doubts about its effectiveness in real combat (par. 4). However, it is from personal observation and experience that has led to my opinion that aikido is not necessary about protecting one's self from a violent situation or even a life or death position; aikido is about avoiding conflict and steering clear of instigating problems that one can potentially make worse.

When one walks into an aikido dojo, a training hall used to practice aikido techniques, he or she may notice a kind of friendly and non-competitive environment at first glance. For most styles of aikido there is no competition for

students, nor do students practice technique for recognition. As mentioned in the article *The Way of Harmony: Aikido is Known as a Spiritual Martial Art* by Craig Froehlich, in aikido “We do not compete with each other. Competition is not what Aikido is about” (par. 9). It is a completely humble style of training.

Although there is no competition, one may ask how a student can expect to gain experience from actually protecting him or herself. This is a fair assumption; however, from observation, it is through hard work in practicing aikido techniques and having your partner feel committed to attacking you that will help with the experience required for self-defense from violent situations.

Nevertheless, not only can aikido be meant to teach one how to defend from attacks, it can also teach a student how to avoid problems and not even get into a fight at all. JR Richards, an aikido student I train with over at the Aikido Institute of Oakland said “Thankfully, in the physical fighting way, I’ve never had to use it. But it sure has kept me out of fights.”

According to Cynthia Lorie, another student from the Aikido Institute, she too was involved in a situation that was resolved using nonviolence thanks to the training from aikido. “One Sunday night I was working very late - about 2am. I was in the office building by myself and kind of crept out. I walked out of my office and there was a strange man standing in the hall. I gathered up all of my aiki courage and walked toward him - very calm and centered - and asked in a loud voice who he was and what he wanted. I think it freaked him out that I wasn’t scared of him and he actually ran out the front door. I credit my aikido training with allowing me to remain calm and centered and to have dealt with the situation in a peaceful way. I always thought that was the true meaning of aikido - not having to resort to violence... it sure worked for me and I totally felt like I did defend myself.”

Another situation involved one of the instructors of the Aikido Institute of Oakland. According to instructor Peter Slote, an angry man rammed his bike against the front window of the dojo. One of the senior students rushed to the outside in front of the school to confront this angry man. These two men were face to face and seemed that in any minute, the angry outsider would be tossed in the middle of the street, only to get run over by an oncoming bus. Struck by this realization, Peter ran to the front of the dojo to confront the man, not in a threatening way but in a peaceful way. In a calm but serious tone, Peter simply said to the man

“Respect”. Suddenly the man realizes his faults and apologizes for his actions. With the training that each of these students committed through a great portion of their lives, they were able to realize that with the outcome of a fight, only disappointment would prevail.

In conclusion, it is true that aikido can protect one’s self by defending against an oncoming attack. However, it can also protect one from even getting involved in a fight and prevent that oncoming attack from happening in the first place. This, based on my observations and interviews, seems to be the most important aspect when it comes to learning and using aikido.

MICHAEL HUFANA

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CARTOON CORNER



ANDREW FALK



Mendocino Gasshuku: The Lineup

MENDOCINO GASSHUKU

The annual Mendocino Gasshuku took place recently on the first weekend of April. It was led by Kim Sensei in conjunction with the Mendocino dojo, which is headed up by Jenfrey Sensei. The Mendocino dojo, while small, has a history that reaches back into the early 1970's.

The drive to Mendocino is quite scenic, taking Hwy. 101 to Cloverdale and then to state route 128, which winds for about 60 miles, first through scenic wine country and then through redwood forests, as it snakes along the Navarro River to the magnificent and rugged California coast. The 3 and ½ hour trip did not seem long, and was a good way to attain a state of mind separating us from our mundane routines in the Bay Area.

Accommodations for the Oakland and Reno contingents were in a large and picturesque Victorian farm house at the Jughandle Creek Farms, which is just a stone's throw from the sea. Jughandle, in addition to being a lodge, is also a botanical and ecological learning center. It features a library and offers many children's programs centered around the beautiful overgrown nurseries and greenhouses which surround the main building. As part of our stay, we performed some gardening, weeding and other chores around the grounds both Saturday and Sunday.

Gasshuku is a special time devoted to training, and those in attendance—including Mendocino, Oakland and Reno students (with one attendee coming all the way from Japan)—were not disappointed on that score.

Kim Sensei opened the Gasshuku Friday evening with multiple variations of katate dori and shomen uchi irimi nage. Saturday morning's 6 - 7 am class was devoted to the second kumi tachi and its variations. Saturday's 10 -12 am morning class was devoted to multiple sankyo techniques

while Saturday afternoon's 2 - 4 pm class concentrated on the first kumi tachi and four variations. (This class was held in a field adjacent to the Mendocino dojo to replicate the battlefield conditions of the ancient samurai.)

For our final day of the Gasshuku, Sunday morning's 6 -7 am class coincided with the time change of spring forward. This meant our body clocks were at 4:30 am for our wake up call. Kim Sensei, knowing our special plight, was kind enough to provide us with a completely unexpected "alarm clock" of blaring taiko drumming, that was as startling as it



Martha, Jen, and Tom debate the finer points of eschatological theology while checking out a cool dead



Mendocino: Richard and Martha do warm-ups

was loud, filling every corner of the large house with the pounding drumbeats of the appropriately titled “tsunami”. This kindness, of course, was meant to prepare us for perhaps the single greatest challenge of the weekend. As we walked outside, all was completely dark, unlike the previous early morning when we had practiced in the light. We formed a circle in the misty morning fog and dew, illuminated by a glowing moon, and completed a thousand bokken strikes in first suburi, alternating from right to left side after every hundred blows. Kim Sensei was then ready to begin the next thousand in second suburi, but took pity on us mere mortals who were suffering from sleep deprivation and still recovering from the late night beach party from the night before. As we had completed the 1000 blows in a record time of twenty minutes, the remainder of class was devoted to the third kumi tachi and its variations.



Mendocino: Aki practices ki extension

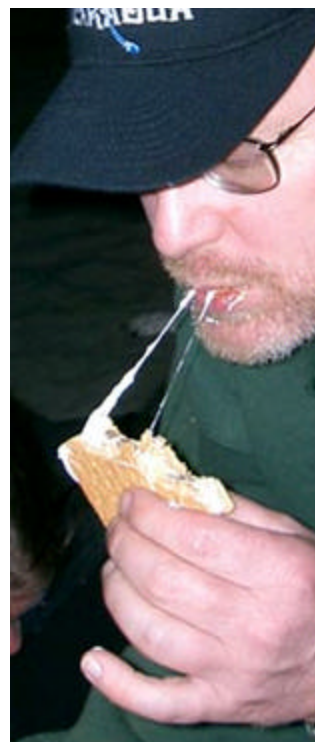
Our last class, from 10 – 12 am on Sunday was devoted to yokomen attacks, principally ikkyo and kote gaeshi responses. At one point, Kim Sensei, with a spirited and enthusiastic black belt from Mendo (as the locals call Mendocino) named Guy (no relation), attempted to set a distance record for a high fall throw from kote gaeshi. (In multiple back to back throws, each at a greater and greater height and distance, the final toss was approximately high and far enough to clear maybe four or five cows, although we were not practicing out of doors, and could not independently verify this distance in the field.)

One prominent theme of the seminar was around the idea or concept of timing — the importance of instantaneous movement upon touch or at a precise moment — a philosophy

and practice that is crucial to the successful completion of many techniques. This can take several forms.

For instance, picture your partner with a bokken attacking you, empty handed, with a shomen strike. As you are entering to her side to complete a tachi dori technique, it is critical not to move before your partner is committed to the downward portion of the stroke. Any sooner and your partner could track you as you move to her side and easily change the direction of her strike to follow your movement. The same would be true with an open handed mune-tsuki attack; an attempt to blend to your partner’s side before the last possible moment allows your partner to track you and change the direction of her strike to match your movement. Turn or move too soon, and your partner can change their attack to respond to your movement. Turn or blend too late, of course, and your partner’s attack will be successful.

The weekend, while devoted to training, was not without it’s other highlights. Fabulous breakfasts and Friday night’s spaghetti dinner were kindly prepared for us by Kim Sensei’s wife, Gayle, and Reno blackbelt Joe’s wife, Lonny. A truly special occasion was Saturday night’s magnificent beach party barbeque at the mouth of the Big River. The Mendo contingent treated us to a great feast over a roaring fire that



Mendocino: Mark stretches



Mendocino: Richard demonstrates correct hakama waza

lasted well into the night. Jen and Martha were especially entertaining in their preparation of s'mores. In addition, Sara completed an astounding daredevil dip after dark in the chilling Big River, showing her metal by responding to a dare that no one thought she would seriously consider, let alone do. Some of the more foolhardy Oakland male contingent took a canoe ride up the Big River after the completion of the training on Sunday, adding several more days to their recovery period from the weekend.

Be sure to mark your calendars for next year's event!

MARK GUY

PHOTOS BY SCOTT McCORMICK



APPLYING AIKIDO

Mike's question about applying martial arts training was an interesting one [see Mike Hufana's article "*Aikido and Self-Defense*" on page 5 of this edition of the KIAI]. It gave me a chance to reconsider a number of experiences in light of why I chose to act the way I did when confronted by conflict. So many people out there are pushy, mean, rude, inconsiderate, unaware or just plain clueless. Many of them would probably benefit from a good beating, or at least a little humbling. But then who couldn't. (No doubt in an alternate universe, someone is writing this essay and seeing my face very clearly in the "deserves a beating" column.) Besides, whose job is it to hand out those lessons? Not mine, that's for sure.

Still, conflict at some level is practically unavoidable. There are too many people, all vying for limited time, atten-

tion, space and resources. Who's going to get that parking space? Who got in line at the deli counter first? Who's going to get the bartender's attention? Who will look better at the meeting? Who's going to take the blame? At home, among a loving and considerate family, conflict arises. Among friends and allies. And certainly among business associates and competitors alike.

So really, how you cope with conflict can determine how you get by in the world. Certainly, how you are perceived by others. Are you happy and comfortable? Balanced and centered? Ill-at-ease? Angry and contentious? Do you always give in or always assert yourself?

I have three anecdotes to share; each involves being confronted by a jerk, and none involves a fight. (Apologies to everyone in the dojo who's already heard these stories.) In some cases I created the situation, in other cases not. For perspective, I've been training well over 20 years in various martial arts including Tai Chi, Wing Chung Kung Fu and Tae Kwon Do, so I have experienced the full spectrum of martial training, from soft and yielding, to highly aggressive, to straight ahead fighting. I've had the daylight beaten out of me on the mat. On the other hand, the last street fight I had was with my best friend, Carlos DeVillavilla, and in took place outside Limerick Avenue Elementary School in about 1968.

1. Karen and I are walking down College Ave. in Rockridge one night after dinner. Guy comes staggering toward us and begins yelling at us about "using too much of the sidewalk." He begins a tirade about what an (expletive) I am and gets in my face. Clearly he's drunk. About six of his friends are yelling at him, saying, "Dude, c'mon ... you're blowing it." He doesn't get the message. I'm thinking, "As long as he doesn't touch us or the car, it doesn't matter." I unlock the car ('76 BMW 2002) and he begins calling us 'yuppie scum' and hassling us about the car. I try to ignore him as we get into the car, but he says something to Karen and she tells him off. He then looks right at me and says, something absolutely horrible about her. I felt my hair stand on end. I remember looking at the plate glass window of a store and wondering how far through it I could throw him. I was so agitated, I actually felt a pulse in my eyes. Anyway, his buddies reeled him in and we got in the car and drove away. That night I took a hot bath and still had the jitters. Okay, so I blew the calm thing, but still knew better than to get involved physically. His friends didn't want him to be an idiot, but I don't think they wouldn't have let him lose a fight, either.

2. I'm in a crowded airport bar, waiting around for a new flight after mine had been cancelled. About five business associates are with me. At the bar, I notice about four people being really loud and demonstrative, two guys and two

girls; clearly they'd been drinking and were having fun attracting attention. Personally, I thought they looked like a bunch of poseurs, but that's beside the point.

I knelt down to reach into my carry-on bag. As I pulled whatever it was out of the bag, my elbow knocked something ... it was one of the poseurs, I bumped him on the leg. So I looked up and said, "sorry." I noticed he looked over to his friends who were smirking back at him. "Oh, yeah ..." he said, "how do you know you didn't hurt me?" I said I bumped his thigh and made a joke about it, at which point he started hassling me about something else entirely.

Getting up, I pushed my face into his and said, "I apologized. I hope that's okay. I don't want to talk to you anymore ... Then I moved a little closer. He backed off, smirking and saying something like, "Oh you should be more careful ..." By the way, my associates turned and shuffled away as soon as this guy reared his head ... thanks for nothing.

3. I'm pulling onto a busy street, trying to make a left across two lanes. My vision is blocked to the left by a big truck parked at the curb, so I pull out one lane at a time and see that I can go from the left, I look right and go, and SMACK some old beater car in the rear quarter panel. He'd tried to go around me as I turned and didn't make it. So we pull over and this 275 pound, sweating, red faced dude piles out of the car and starts yelling at me and calling me names and saying all the things most people think in a moment like that, but don't say.

He's huge, with big hairy hands and little beady eyes and patchy red hair, and he's marching toward me, completely pissed off. He gets right in my face and continues the string of profanity. He wants to pound me so badly I can smell it. When he pauses and stares at me, I ask "Are you okay? Is anybody else in the car? Wow," I said, "that scared the daylights out of me." Clearly expected a fight, and didn't know what to do about me now.

If I had so much as raised my voice or said anything threatening back, he would have been all over me. In fact, I was thinking at the time that I had control of the situation ... all I had to do was say something like, "You idiot, watch where you're going ..." and we'd be fighting. He was completely out of control. "Man, I'm so sorry that happened," I said. He started yelling at me again, while a woman and small boy got out of the car. I looked at them and sort of mouthed "You O.K.?" and she nodded. After a minute he ran out of steam and we swapped info.

As it turned out, he was emotionally and financially troubled (I learned this while settling the claim, because he got my phone number and began calling nightly in a drunken stupor, to babble about his childhood), and would have pounded the living daylights out of me (at least tried!) without a second thought. I actually avoided conflict with someone that lives for it.

Interesting. In re-reading these anecdotes, I know they are all relevant to my Aikido practice, yet none involve throws or pins. All my years of training have taught me that it's better not to fight. All those skills add up, but not always in a demonstrable way.

I don't fear the conflict, and I think that shows. I certainly avoid it, but also know that nobody is going to hurt me so easily. At one time, I was very afraid of conflict and of being hurt; oddly enough, I was hassled quite often. That doesn't happen so much anymore. After years of living and training, I've learned that conflict doesn't just happen, it escalates. So when someone gets in my face, I'm blending. Trying to dissipate their anger or aggression. Sometimes it's about absorbing their energy and other times filling energetic spaces left by them. Doesn't mean I wouldn't like to give them a smack, but toward what end? That would just promote the violence and incivility that's already over abundant in our society. In the whole world, really.

On the other hand, I also know how easy it is to get hurt. I've been injured in the dojo, training under controlled and good spirited circumstances. It's a little unsettling to imagine what could happen when an attacker is actually hostile and mean spirited. Once someone stops caring about himself or others, the danger is incalculable.

Every human transaction is an exchange of energy, physical or non-physical. In conversation, I offer up energy through my voice. If I hand you a book, energy is being transferred through a physical object. If I strike you, all that energy is being delivered directly, violently and destructively. A hand isn't so much different than a voice, a punch not so different than an insult when it comes to distributing energy outward. Anyway, I think it's about blending right away, not waiting until it becomes physical. That's the point about Aikido. The paradigm of blending applies to what someone does as well as how they are, or what they project.

By the way, all this works in pleasant or non-threatening situations, too. Sometimes a person will give you a nice opening to fill, like inviting you to be friends or to chat or dance or work together. Perceiving that opening is blending, too. I've noticed it in business and among family. Long meetings or resolving difficult negotiations are all blending exercises. Job interviews are a blending exercise. Standing in line at the movies. Being comfortable as assertive or receptive in those touchy situations (Who was here first?).

Driving on the freeway is a blending exercise, merging may be the ultimate blend. Maybe some morning instead of doing suburi, we'll all drive to the city through the 580/880 maze.

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