

# The Aikido Eye

A Publication of Aikido Ai of  
Southern California

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Volume I  
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## **Aikido-Ai Vision**

### **Statement:**

**“Quality Students– Quality**

### **Instruction”**

Aikido-Ai will provide quality instruction  
to students seeking personal security,  
physical well being and enlightenment

through the disciplines of

Aikido, Tai Chi, Qi Gong and

Zen Meditation

### **Aikido Teaching Committee:**

Frank McGouirk Sensei

Joann Garner - Sandan

Roger Shannon Sandan

Michael Castro Sandan

Louis Celaya Nidan

Jason Oxman - Shodan

Melody Oxman - Shodan

John Wong - Shodan

## **“FIND A NEED” A NEED FOUND— A NEED FULFILLED!**

**By Sensei Frank McGourik**

**T**he great industrialist Henry J. Kaiser built his empire on a simple motto: Find a need and fill it.

Everyone knows that since moving to our dojo location on Comstock Avenue we have had a need for additional training space. That need has been filled thanks to the leadership of Suzette Hodnett and Jose Colon who fashioned a tasty and effective fund raising campaign to create Operation Deck . This idea whose time had come, quickly evolved into a movement supported by the generosity and enthusiasm of dojo members, families and friends of Aikido-Ai.

We now have a deck to be proud of as well as the pride and respect we have for each other who together found a need and filled it.!

This example pro-activity and



responsibility will now become the foundation for Dojo Rule number three.

Dojo Rules:

1. No Injuries
2. Have Fun
3. Find a Need & Fill it



# TAI CHI AS A JOURNEY: THE DISCIPLINE OF DAILY PRACTICE

By Suzette Hodnett

Don't waste time calculating your chances of success or failure. Just fix your aim and begin. (Guan Yin Tzu)

Those that follow the Tao don't seek to arrive anywhere, so their journey is never over. (Lao Tzu)

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Have you ever vowed one day to rise earlier and practice longer, only to wake up the next morning a person of a different mind?

When I first began my daily practice of tai chi, I awakened each morning with a merry-go-round of excuses parading through my mind. "It's too early. It's too cold. I need more sleep. Missing one day won't matter. I practiced a long time yesterday. I have class tonight. I've got to get to the studio and work." The passing of four years time, lots of laughter at myself, and an abiding sense of discipline later and all these thoughts still come to visit!! But now they are only clouds passing through the sky of my mind. The discipline of daily practice has become a way of moving through my life. Not thinking -- just doing, just embracing, just living.

Every day I awaken to the simple beauty of the form. Each morning I connect with the harmony of its spirit, the fluidity of its movements, the depth of its tradition, the art of its postures, the simplicity of its movements and the slowness of its pace. The

result is a deepening sense of integrity, inner strength and calm. There is something very soothing about the first breaths of each awakening day being inhaled and exhaled into the eight treasures and the tai chi form.

Daily practice is about commitment and dedication. It is about making time despite the voices in my head. It is about allowing the practice to lead me gently to a closer union with my own true spirit and beyond to the bigger picture. In daily practice, little by little, I take tai chi into my life. Each day I let myself step into the unknown, until more and more I am able to rest on any edge with a sense of solid ground and a deep-

***"Daily practice is about commitment and dedication. It is about making the time despite voices in my head".***

ening sense of trust, calm and openness.

Attending class has become, for me, only a small part of tai chi. To just show up for an hour and expect movement towards clarity and ease was not realistic. I found that the heart of tai chi is about going home and deepening whatever I have learned on the mat. Classes teach me the movements, but daily practice slowly reveals their essence to me. Discipline is the day to day just doing it, and then, at any moment, realizing just how far I've come with-

out thinking about it. From morning to morning there can be huge changes, or they can be so subtle that they only shine in the tiny nuances of the form or the hidden crevasses of my life.

To be motivated to awaken in the dark to enter the embrace of the tai chi form, it is important for me to approach my practice with laughter, curiosity, and a sense of adventure. Like my time on the mat, daily practice can be fun. It is a chance for exploration -- to take home what I have learned and play with it like a ball of clay, shaping it, and beginning to make it mine. If I don't remember a move quite right, I just go back to class to observe and chisel out the finer details. Each time I experience a move, whether on the mat or at home, I have absorbed more of its shape and substance. Each time I practice the form it more and more becomes both my teacher and my friend.

Daily practice has taught me that tai chi is not about how fast I learn the form, how many moves I pick up during a class, or how quickly I progress to the next sash. Instead, the beauty of tai chi is that fast and slow do not exist. What is time anyway but a social agreement between people? We really have only this moment. The beauty of tai chi is that there is no finish line. Tai chi is a journey without end. Like the yin-yang circle, like life itself, it is never-ending, always changing, and I am continually learning. Tai chi has. (Continued on Pg. 4)

## OPERATION AIKIDO AI: Generosity, Unity, and Sincerity

**F**rom the initial hanging of the display board announcing the launch of "Operation Deck", it was clear that a new outside training area was "an idea whose time had come." Once Jose and Suzette outlined the various fundraisers designed to gather money for the deck, it didn't take long for curiosity to turn into generous action.

Soon we all became united in a shared spirit working towards a common goal -- raising the thermometer to cover the cost of our new training space. First to emerge was the simple and elegant design of our new Aikido-Ai logo. It quickly appeared on hats, gis, t-shirts and sweatshirts of young and old aikido and tai chi students, family members and friends, (And who can forget the image of a spirited Sensei Frank leading class in his new Aikido Ai cap and t-shirt?) Raffle tickets to win a free year's membership in the dojo began to sell.

Fundraising seminars for tai chi, aikido and children's aikido brought forth a strong response on the mat. A garage sale in the parking lot of Oxman's Supply Store had us donating our unused items for sale. Individual sparks caught fire and soon the fundraising thermometer was burning upwards. Perhaps it was the unexpected generosity of both time and money that kept inspiring us to reach greater heights. Our Brea Tai Chi satellite class contributed to the pro-



ject as if it was to support their own dojo. Brand new students gave as generously as the long time members. Old students who hadn't trained in years returned to offer donations. Checks came in the mail from other dojos. Extremely generous, unexpected contributions were received from individual students.

Spontaneous offers of services in exchange for donations towards the deck emerged to touch our hearts. Tuesday nights found Sister Marilyn using her healing hands on aikido and tai chi students alike. Jennifer Higa put her massage table out back during the Tai Chi Seminar and her time slots quickly filled up. Nancy O'Brien and Nancy Parker gave private tai chi and chi gong lessons. Tom Kennedy offered leather repair service, Nina

Asano haircuts, Chris Johnson chiropractic adjustments, and Jose Colon led a very well received Self-defense Seminar. All monies collected were generously donated to Operation Deck.

In four weeks our thermometer had inspirationally skyrocketed over the top, giving us more than enough money to build the deck. In the end, 64 people went "above and beyond" by contributing \$25 or more (in addition to monies given to t-shirts, raffle, seminars, etc) to the fundraiser. In appreciation, the names of these individuals will be engraved on a glass plaque to be hung on the wall leading to our new outside training area.

On March 15, the selling of the tickets to win the free one year dojo  
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(Continued from Pg. 3) Tai Chi

now become a series of small steps, taken one at a time, each as important as the next and as the last.

And so I begin each morning with an integration breath, my hands gently raising up and slowly floating down. And each morning, in that beginning, simple movement, I am reminded to enjoy the journey, to be wherever I am, to take everything one breath, one move at a time, and to practice, practice, practice.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH OUR DOJO FAMILY?



**No news at this time**



If

membership culminated in our Dojo Pot-luck and Raffle. Outside the rain poured down, but inside the dojo it was warm with laughter and celebration. Generous donations of prizes such as artwork, gift certificates, gis, and free training made it seem like almost everyone was a winner. But the grand prize was won by Melody and Jason Oxman. Congratulations to the deserving winners! A week later we received news that the Whittier Planning Review Committee had denied our request for a permit to build our anticipated elevated deck. But, as Sensei says, "out of the mud grows the lotus blossom". In the spirit of both tai chi and aikido, soon we had redirected our energies into a positive alternative (a deck flush with the ground) with the full support of all contributors. With a little yin and a little yang, it wasn't long before we heard the sound of power tools and workers resounding out back.

Habitat for Humanity says it takes a community to build a house. It was certainly the entire Aikido-Ai family that gathered together to raise the thermometer to create our outside training area. In the end, we built much more than a deck. We built a deeper layer of unity and commitment within the dojo.

tomorrow the City Planners ordered us to tear down the training area, the deck would disappear but the spirit of the Aikido Ai community that lies at its foundation could not be taken away. At last, instead of raising money, we began to spend money. The deck was built! Hotei, also known as "The Laughing Buddha", arrived to watch over the training area. Patron of children, Hotei is the deity of happiness, laughter, abundance and the wisdom of contentment.

Bamboo fencing and beautiful plants began to adorn the space. Soon we will have overhangs to protect us from the elements, a waterfall, and a music system. And, if Jose Colon could have a magic wand, a jacuzzi would somehow rise up from the bowels of the deck to soothe our aching training muscles.

Now it is Grand Celebration Party Here We Come! On June 14th, we invite everyone to come celebrate our efforts and baptize our new training area. Join us for bubbling apple cider, live music, and dinner as we gather on our new deck to bask in the success of our efforts and watch the sun (Continued on Pg. 5)

# Tai Chi: Black Belt Essay

By Nina Asano

Even though the literal translation from Chinese for Tai Chi is the "supreme ultimate", my personal benefit comes from its more common connection to yin-yang. Tai Chi has become a harmonious compliment to my Buddhist practice, and an important part of the life force, or the "Ch'i", that exists within me.

It has been rewarding, yet a test of my patience over the years to persevere in my quest to master this practice. I would like to thank all of my fellow students, and especially the senior students for all of their support and guidance while facing this challenge, and to help me understand why the practice of Tai Chi is truly a challenge of a lifetime.

My success, or the success of any practitioner of Tai Chi comes from the combination of many elements. One of the most important of these elements is a kind, nurturing Sensei such as Frank McGouirk, Thank You Sensei, Thank You So Much!

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set into the horizon. As you enter our new training area, pause for a moment and bow to the spirit of generosity, community and sincerity that created the space. Let it always be a reminder that, as students of Aikido Ai, we are definitely greater than the sum of our parts. And let's take this same spirit of service, enthusiasm and unity and continue to spread it to one another in the dojo, allowing it to eventually overflow out into the community and into the rest of our lives.

## Are You Preparing for the Next Kyu Examination?

Kyu Examinations are coming soon! Are you preparing? Do you have an uke? Many hours are undertaken in preparation for a Kyu exam. If you are testing, submit your application and begin your preparations. The difference between good examine and a great one is.....you guessed it, is practice.

Take the time to adequately prepare!

## New Promotions



### Aikido

None at this time

### Tai-Chi

None at this time

## SATELLITE INSTRUCTORS

Sensei Frank McGouirk  
Tai Chi, Chi Gong, Aikido  
Whittier Parks &  
Recreation  
Kaiser Hospital,  
Baldwin Park  
Brea Community Center, Brea,  
Ca.

Jennifer Higa  
Tai Chi  
Massage Therapy  
Huntington Beach, Ca.  
714 841-4151

Roger Shannon  
Aikido  
Tangent, Oregon  
Contact Aikido-Ai

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Sister Marilyn Omieczynski  
Tai Chi  
Reiki  
Orange, Ca.  
Contact Aikido-Ai

Ginny Cardenas  
Tai Chi  
Lake Tahoe, Ca.  
Contact Aikido Ai

Nancy Parker  
Tai Chi  
Chi Gong  
Placentia, Ca.  
Contact Aikido-Ai

Nancy O'Brien  
Tai Chi  
Buena Park  
La Habra  
Contact Aikido-Ai

## A DESHI'S PERSPECTIVE

By John Wong, Senior Sotouchideshi

People who are not associated with Aikido in some way will often ask, "What is a deshi?"

There is no direct translation for deshi, it falls somewhere between apprentice and disciple. A deshi, either "Uchi" (living inside the dojo) or "Soto" (living outside the dojo) holds in their mind, that the greatest service of all is the service to others. In this way, a deshi you see, is a close cousin to the samurai. The word samurai means "to serve." And a samurai swore loyalty to their lord or master.

A deshi commits themselves to "The Way" and devotes themselves to their teacher or sensei. For this commits, this devotion, the teacher or sensei commits to the deshi their teachings, beyond what others may receive.

A deshi is vital part of any organization. Every business, every group, every dojo has someone in a deshi role, either formally or informally. There's always someone you see at work or school, or that group that your apart of, that you always see. And for all the times you've seen them your thoughts run from, "Wow, they must really be dedicated" to "Don't they ever go home?"

This person in the group, when comments are made, "that really needs to be taken care..." or "would it be nice if someone..." And some timelater, you never notice how things have gotten done, simply that have or that the plans are in the works.

You never notice how preoccupied they are, always keeping an eye on the chief instructor, the boss and the situation. Always checking the door, as if they're expecting someone to walk in, or seemingly taking mental notes, but on what? Yes, they do keep their eye on the chief instructor, just in case they need something. The front door, well...just in case a visitor stops by and has questions. Ah yes, those mental notes? Well, just a few things that need to get done. And then some time later, are done. Thus lays the rewards for a deshi. That unspoken thanks, the smooth operations, the opportunity to serve others. This is greatest service to them.

But the unassuming nature of a deshi means they do not seek fan fair or reward. A deshi shrinks from lime light of notoriety, or anything that sets them apart from others. They are the face in the crowd, one of many in the dojo. But if you feel the need to express your appreciation, do not do so by thanking them openly. For this would only serve to make them uncomfortable and the meaning of your words, your high praise would be lost in their embarrassment.

The best way to thank a deshi is to be happy that a job was done or something needed was taken care of. To make good use of something made available. It is the look in your eyes, the nod of your head that tells a deshi what is in your heart. That is thanks enough to a deshi. It warms their hearts and for a moment sends their spirits souring. *(Continued on Pg. 7)*

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Until once again, we are needed, we will fade into the background. This is the commitment, this is the way, this is the life of a deshi.

“We are here to serve”

Aikido Uchi-Deshi's &  
Sotouchideshi  
(Past & Present)

*Uchi-Dechis*

Sandan Robin Lee— 1980 - 1990  
Nidans Mike & Elena Castro Early  
1990's - 1999

*Sotouchideshi*

Shodan John Wong - 2000 -  
Present



## Etiquette.... It Sets the Tone

By Louis Celaya

I am not sure if I have already written an article about this, but after hearing that Sensei has recently observed a slack in this area, I felt it was necessary to revisit the issue. As I Dan, I have also observed a few etiquette no no's.

First let talk about its purpose. Dojo etiquette establishes a tone in the dojo that advises members of the do's and don'ts (...the rules). It also serves as protection for new members who begin their aikido journey, demonstrates our respect toward Sensei and the organization he has dedicated a life-time of training to, and also demonstrates to visiting instructors, and dojos you may visit in your travels, that students have been taught properly by the Chief Instructor. Without proper dojo etiquette, the internal organization (our dojo) would soon begin loose its solid structure. As a Dan who was instructed properly by my siempis, it is my responsibility (an I believe I can speak for all the Dans of Aikido and Tai Chi) to insure there is not a lapse in etiquette.

Many of you did not have the pleasure of training with or knowing Horace Koga. Siempi Koga was an excellent Aikido instructor, student and great ambassador of Sensei's etiquette teaching. I remember watching him observe new students and instructing them on proper mat sweeping etiquette, bowing, and was always one the first students to be seated when Sensei “clapped” to indicate the next lesson (technique) was about to be presented. In the spirit of

Koga-san, and the foundations established by Sensei, here are few things we all need to be aware of.

### *Bowing*

When entering and leaving the dojo, entering and leaving the mat or training areas, perform a “sincere bow”. Many times I have observed half bows, “quick shot” bows, and sometime no bows at all. For any colored belt, this is unacceptable! Your bow should be sincere, showing respect for a (great) place to train, a mat to train on, and for the founder of art. We are not bowing to O-Sensei in a religious connotation, but a paying respect for his lifetime's work and the opportunities he has presented to all who wish to train in the art of Aikido.

### *Bowing to Training Partners*

All in all this is very good. However, once class is dismissed and we bow to those we train with, do you face your fellow dojo member and both to him or her? Or do a combination half-bow while turned to the side. Face you fellow member and show them you are thankful to them for training with you. This would be the same as holding a one-on-one conversation with some and not truly facing them. It does not demonstrate true sincerity.

### *When Sensei and/or an Instructor are Teaching, are you Teaching while Training?*

Unless Sensei has indicated that it is okay to provide feedback, training should be done with minimal

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conversation. Sometimes the best advice is done through actions. You can demonstrate a lot better with action than words. Sometimes people concentrate on the words being spoken to them rather than the movement.

### *Sweeping*

The mat should be swept before and after each class. Sensei should never enter a mat that has not been swept. If a senior is sweeping, a junior should ask to relieve him or her. Seniors, when asked to be relieved, please allow relief. I can recall a time when I was asked to be relieved and declined (wanting to simply sweep). After Horace took me aside and told me "Louis, how can the juniors learn dojo etiquette if we as Seniors do not show them". I never forgot that lesson.

### *Focused during Training*

When you are on the mat, you are on mat! What this means is that your focus, mind and thoughts are on training and what is being presented. Outside business should be left outside. Your eyes should not be wandering or looking around, only watching what is being presented. This also provides you protection. If you are training and not focused, you may end up directing uke into non-safe place, struck by a strike from your training partner, and possibly hit with a weapon if you are not aware. Being focused tells Sensei and visiting instructors that "you are there, ready to take in what they have to present".

### *Crossing in Front of Sensei*

Avoid crossing in front of Sensei. When you do this you are demonstrating that you do not understand the dangers that exists. As our empty hands represent blades, you are crossing in front of

a blade. Not very wise. Always go around him or wait until he passes you. This one is hard to remember, I have been guilty of this a few times, but the more we practice the easier it will become.

### *Being Used as Uke*

If you have been used as uke by Sensei to demonstrate a technique, when he has concluded and releases the rest of the class to train, always, drop to seiza, face him and bow. It is a privilege to be used by Sensei or any other instructor to demonstrate a technique. They are telling you that they have confidence in your ability to protect yourself (your ukemi). You in turn are expressing your gratitude for the opportunity to be used.

### *Return to you Place Quickly*

After Sensei or an instructor has given the signal to return to your place (clap, verbal command, etc), return to seiza quickly. Many times I see people kind of hum back to their spots. Dans and seniors should be the first ones back. Juniors, you should be close behind. This demonstrates to Sensei and others that we are ready for the next presentation.

### *Do Not Lean on Your Weapons/ Control your Weapons*

Never lean on your weapons and use the mat to support you. This is one of Sensei's biggest heartburns. As he recently stated, "for any one with a colored belt, this is unacceptable. If you need something to lean on, we will provide you with a cane. If a cane is not enough, will provide you with a wheel chair".

You should always have full control of your weapons. Dropping them is not permitted. Lack of control of a jo or bokken will result in an injury to someone.

These are some dojo etiquettes I have seen loose their polish recently. Although my personal training has reduced recently, they have been still observed when I have trained. Aikido Ai has always had the reputation of students who are well versed in ukemi skills and proper etiquette. Our students as a whole are very good and very very loyal. Please help me and the other Dans continue to keep Aikido Ai's reputation in these areas shining. So, if we happen to mention something to you, please do not take offense. We are only preparing you for your road to Shodan and the responsibilities that come with it. Sensei has been my instructor for well over 12 years, and I (and I think I can safely speak for the other Dans) will see that his teachings continue in the manner in which he intended.

## **Something to Share?**

Submit articles or questions to The Aikido Eye (MS Word/handwritten). Send to:

[l.celaya@worldnet.att.net](mailto:l.celaya@worldnet.att.net)

Thanks!

## **DECK DEDICATION JUNE 14TH**

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR!!**