

The Aikido Eye

A Publication of Aikido Ai of
Southern California

February 2003

Volume I
Issue 1

KYU EXAMS

CLOSE OUT

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

Another year came to a close at Aikido Ai, and the end of the year would not be complete without end of the year Kyu Exams. For the close out of 2002, Sensei was presented with a range of candidates from 5th Kyu ranks to the beginning preparation of the road to Shodan with two 2nd Kyu exams, and one 1st Kyu exam. As the teaching committee observed, the influences of the students who have trained with the Oxmans, in the beginner classes, to the weapon preparations, under the observations of Sensei and John Wong, clearly were shown.

As a Dan it is nice to see individuals progress in their art. As Aikido is an art that does not bring immediate and quick satisfaction by allowing its practitioner to quickly learn a defense technique, you can appreciate as an observer how far people have progressed. As I personally have not been at the dojo as much as I would like, I was



impressed at how much people have improved. I was very impressed with one young female student (I will not mention her name as not to embarrass her) who has made dramatic improvement in her art. Her center and ki extension is beginning to blossom. Those who have seen and trained with her in every class know whom I am talking about. We look forward to seeing her progress as time goes on.

All the candidates were asked to demonstrate their knowledge of Aikido's Basic Eight techniques prior to beginning their exams. These eight techniques are the foundation of our art, and

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DEEPER INTO TAI CHI: TRAINING ON THE EDGE

By Suzette Hodnett

As beginners starting to learn tai chi, we all feel like toddlers discovering how to walk again. We stumble, fall, and lean upon other students for support and guidance. Each moment we are on the edge as we begin to re-connect mind/body and breath/spirit, letting go of our self-critical thoughts and surrendering to the moment. We feel awkward, embarrassed and frustrated -- all the wonderful ingredients that make up growth and change.

But as we train longer, often the edge of the cliff turns into a comfortable plateau. We begin to get complacent doing the form and we mindlessly go through the moves. Instead of going deeper, our training glides along the surface, safe and predictable. To walk on the edge of our training, we need to move out of our comfortable box and step once again into the unfamiliar, the unknown. Tai chi is an art and, like all arts, it will take us as deep as we are willing to go. But what is it that keeps us stuck? What keeps us from going deeper?

If we are honest with ourselves, often we don't go deeper in our training because of our own fears. To walk the edge, as both beginning and advanced students, means to let go of fear -- the fear of not knowing,

the fear of not being in control, the fear of looking stupid, the fear of intimacy, and the fear of the unfamiliar. While traveling in foreign countries, inevitably I would meet people who opted to stay in the comfort and safety of their hotel rather than venture out into the newness of their surroundings. They never allowed themselves to become acquainted with the unfamiliar and so to challenge their sense of themselves in the world. How many times on the mat and in our lives have we let fear be the wall instead of our great teacher?? Yet moving

“Clinging to how we would like things to be is not good tai chi”.

through our fears is where we stretch our limitations and grow and deepen. Anything of worth in life requires effort, risk and sacrifice -- and a moving through fear and doubt.

Going deeper into our training also means facing the fear of who we really are beneath the layers of contractions and armor that gradually get peeled off as we learn to relax and let go. Tai chi asks us to soften, to become vulnerable and sensitive, and to feel more deeply.

It beckons us to stay out of denial and not become hardened and stagnant. But to do this means to open to both the pain and pleasure in our lives. There is risk in opening and safety and comfort in staying contracted. But what about the risk of staying closed off from life? The decision to learn tai chi was undoubtedly made in an opening. Questions and doubt only arise when fear closes the door. Tai chi asks us to open, time and time again. It trains us to let go, to lose the attachment to who we think we are and to connect with the mystery and magic of the moment. The deeper we are able to train, the more we discover that the slowness, softness and flexibility that tai chi nurtures creates deeper awareness, courage and strength.

Sometimes it is our own laziness that keeps us from going deeper. To train on the edge means to engage the form with our entire mind, body and spirit. How easy it is to become complacent and just go through the moves. But if we lose the vibrancy and the immediacy of the present moment, we will miss the true meaning of tai chi. The tai chi form is not fixed, but is alive and ever-changing. It is our teacher showing us where we are with each new breath in

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should be practices every time there is free time on the mat. As the saying goes, "you must first learn to walk before you can run". Okay enough preaching ...at least for now.

One of the greatest treats was the kyu exam of Elizabeth Carerra. She began her trip down the road to Aikido, by demonstrating her knowledge of , aiki-taiso techniques, ukemi and dojo etiquette. At the end of her exam when asked by Sensei, if she had anything else to present the committee, she responded with a sounding "No".



Definitely extending her ki. Jose Colon and Don Brown had the task of presenting their knowledge of second kyu requirements. Each demonstrated that their understanding of the more detailed advance techniques, while at the same time beginning to demonstrate some moments of flowing techniques and non-force application. That right gentlemen, there were moments...now it is time to begin to turn those moments into longer durations.

Another great moment was watching sotoushideshi, Mi-

chael Paparo, continue to develop toward his Shodan rank . Michael treated the committee to his passion toward this art as he demonstrated thorough empty hand and weapon techniques. Keep up the hard work Michael, the road to Dan rank is paved with sweat and dedication.

All in all, the kyu exams were a great showing. We look forward to 2003 to see who else will blossom. I have several people I will be watching closely.



合氣道

time.

Another block to training on the edge is our attachment to our own expectations. Expectations, on the mat as in life, are a wall to our growth. If we can allow learning to unfold without a concern for where it is going our tai chi will deepen. It is very easy to get attached to our own pace while doing the form and also while moving in the outside world. How often when on the mat are we internally complaining that someone is moving too quickly or too slowly?? How often in life does the car, the salesperson, and the line at the supermarket move at a rhythm we don't like?? Yet, tai chi teaches that it is US that needs to blend, take a shorter or longer step, and adapt to the pace around us. Clinging to how we would like things to be is not good tai chi. To go deeper into our training is to become part of the flow rather than the resistance, on the mat and in our lives.

For me, training on the edge means to take personal risks on the mat. It is positioning myself on a corner where I must lead with what I know and reveal what I don't. It is volunteering when asked or being willing to try a new technique. Deeper training comes when I embrace a new move without attachment to getting it right and an old move without attachment to thinking I have mastered it. Training on the edge means to go home and struggle with what I have learned on the mat. It is weav-

ing practice into the tapestry of my life as a daily discipline, not just as part of a group class. It means to breathe with the form, to keep my mind empty, and to be in the moment. It means to remember that tai chi is not about how many moves I know, but how I hold my spirit in the dojo and in the world. For me, going deeper into my tai chi is to allow myself to feel the emotions that come up while on the mat and in my life. It is in being willing to put myself on the line where my vulnerability (but also my sincerity) is clear. Training on the edge is to look for ways to assist and deepen the life of our dojo. It is in the reaching out to new students with enthusiasm and guidance and the long time students with respect, friendship and support. It is to appreciate that assisting a beginning student is as much training as working on my latest form. It is in extending my arms and heart out wide enough to embrace the entire Aikido-Ai family. Training on the edge is to also deepen my gratitude for this amazing art that has been passed down from master to student for countless generations. And it is in not taking for granted the gifts of Sensei's teachings and the dojo where I have the opportunity to train.

Tai chi is a place to open and feel more energetic, more alive, and more loving. It should be fun, passionate, and challenging. Ultimately going deeper into our training is to go deeper into ourselves, then outward to connect with every-

one and everything, with no separation between the dojo and our lives.

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH OUR DOJO FAMILY?



Bill Smith— Finished his Master's Degree in Sociology in December 2002

Laurel Mend—Going to Panama for a family vacation on January 16-January 27th!

Marty Wilson—Recent participation in a Whittier Art Association Group Show. Won two honorable mentions. Currently has a painting on display at the Whittier Hilton.

Sister Marilyn— Gave a 6 hour workshop on the Eight Treasures and Prayer Wheel in November at the Mary and Joseph Retreat Center, Palos Verdes. This is the 2nd year and hopefully it will be offered again next year!

Carol Rogers— Recently began taking glass blowing classes and enjoying it's similarities to tai chi-- "always moving, losing myself to the glass, nothing else matters, just me and the movements bringing the blob of glass to a work art". Watching the first breath of air grow, the piece comes to life -- much like beginning to practice, (Continues on Page 6)

As I See It: Aikido Ai - 21 Legal & Healthy

By Sensei Frank McGourik

New Promotions



Happy Birthday Aikido Ai! Twenty One years old on December 13th.

Aikido Ai is not an adult! It is the child of some imaginative and creative people who were studying aikido at Rio Hondo College in the 70's. Only Joann Garner and myself are the remaining active members of that electric group. Here is the story. I was asked to start an Aikido class by Mya devi who was teaching yoga at Rio Hondo College.

Launched from that success, we started a small dojo inn Santa Fe Springs. Two years at that location prompted us to move to the large Dojo located on Milton Street where we remained for 18 years. Our move to the current Comstock location was divine intervention result from unsuccessful negotiations with the Milton building owner. *Out of the mud grows the lotus!* There have been so many wonderful and generous people that have contributed to Aikido Ai that naming them all would exhaust my typing skills, but their image is forever imprinted on my mental hard drive. Thank you all, teachers, students, juniors, guest instructors, Deshi's, parents and family members.....

Thank You from the bottom of my heart!!



"Be patient with yourselves, as I am patient with you!"

*Sensei Frank Doran
Doran Sensei Seminar
Aikido Ai
Whittier, CA
January 25, 2002*



Aikido

Joann Garner	Sandan
Jose Colon	2nd Kyu
Don Brown	2nd Kyu
Alex Carril Sr.	4th Kyu
Juan Paniagua	4th Kyu
John P. Paniagua	4th Kyu
Alex Carril Jr.	4th Kyu
Emily Carrera	4th Kyu
Duong Do	6th Kyu
Monique Do	7th Kyu
Daniel Ashdown	7th Kyu
Joshua Guerrero	7th Kyu
Nicolas Zavala	7th Kyu
Joseph Hernandez	7th Kyu
Elizabeth Carrera	7th Kyu
Christina Gonzales	7th Kyu
Anna Schmahl	7th Kyu
Monica Schmahl	7th Kyu
Samantha Hahn	7th Kyu

Tai-Chi

Nina Asano	Shodan
Marilyn Omieczynski	Shodan
Akiko Heurich	1st Kyu
Suzette Hodnett	3rd Kyu
Meg Rottman	3rd Kyu

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slowly, the chi tingling in my hands, my mind becomes clear, and I'm in the moment and alive with energy!

Suzette Hodnett—Received a grant to spend from March 31st to April 15th as an artist-in-residence in Park City, Utah working with at-risk youth to create two 10 ft. by 10 ft. fine art originals for installation in their new Courthouse and City Hall Buildings

Louis Celaya— In amazement with wife Alisa that their daughter, Alanna, will be celebrating her first birthday in March....how time flies

LET US KNOW WHAT GOING ON IN YOUR OR YOUR FAMILIES LIVES... Pass on the info to John Wong or Suzette Hodnett or Louis Celaya

Tai Chi Black Belt Essay

by
Marilyn Omieczyski

My first introduction to Tai Chi was a segment in a television program, which explored interesting phenomena of several different cultures. I was intrigued by the beauty and grace of the people doing Tai Chi. Not long after that I was speaking with my counselor about my inability to "fight". He suggested that I take up martial arts. (Continued on Pg. 7)

My Advice to Tai-Chi Beginners

By Nancy O'Brien

My advice to the beginners is to allow themselves time to learn Tai Chi Chuan. Unless they have done another martial art, they are learning on five levels at one time. When they were in school, it was mostly mental work.

Tai Chi starts with the eyes, the mind, the body, the breath and the spirit. The long and short of it is what are my hands and feet doing? I look where my body doesn't want to move that way! How can this be a self defense move? What do you mean breathe? I was holding my breath! Relax. Be soft. Let the tension drip off my elbows and shoulders -- what does that mean? Oh, my shoulders are up.

There is something about being with the group. I can follow along and feel like know what I am doing. That's the group energy or chi? What's that? So, you can see lots of tension, lots of concern about making a mistake, lots of judgment. Learn to let it go. Even the more senior students forget or make mistakes. Oh, a new group has come in and everything Sensei goes over makes more sense. Usually you can identify with the things he says and more importantly you can do a lot of the things he says. Take a deep breath and love yourself enough to keep trying, soon achieve the form

and keep your compassion for yourself and others, only go straight and save all beings from suffering.

COMBAT TAI-CHI

Combat Tai chi is a news concept class offer from 6—7 pm. The class started January 7th. The focus of the class will be to provide the best elements of Aikido and Tai chi for adult members green sash/ belt and above.

Participants are asked to sign up in advance and adhere to strict dress and etiquette requirements. Aikido students will be expected to learn the more assertive forms of Tai Chi and in return assist the Tai Chi students in fundamentals of weapon work, ki development exercise, and falling skills.

We will start the class with the chinese two person push hands and sahn shou and the Japanese kumi-jo two person staff form.

(Continued from Pg. 6)

While at the library researching the various disciplines in martial arts I came across a brochure from the local junior college. An introductory class in Tai Chi was being offered at Aikido Ai. From the very first class I knew that I was embarking on a journey far beyond “fighting” that would have profound effect in my life as a person and religious. Even then I could see many parallels with a life of prayer, meditation, and service. After about six months of diligent practice of the Eight Treasures and the Short Form, I began to see differences in my everyday life both internally and in relationships. Internally, several things were happening. I felt more centered, relaxed, peaceful and aware. My doctor took me off blood pressure medication, which I had been taking for twenty-three years.

Things were also changing in relationships with others, especially with one Sister with whom I was living at the time. She was a very aggressive person who used to throw verbal punches. Since I lacked the ability to engage in verbal fighting, I simply endured her assaults. One evening after returning from my Tai Chi class I met her in the kitchen. She began one of her attacks. That night in class we had been practicing “Grasping the Bird’s Tail”. Sensei showed us some of the applications of the moves. In the middle of Sister’s verbal punching, I mentally performed “Peng” and

“Lu”. To my amazement the energy of punch went right by me. That defining moment, so simple and yet profound, showed me how important Tai Chi can be as a tool of discovery of the self, not only physically but mentally and spiritually as well. Paying attention to the movement of chi within makes it possible to respond to situations instead of simply reacting.

As the weeks of that first class progressed, I also began to appreciate the value of the discipline of the body mechanics in Tai Chi for my work as a massage therapist. The strength and depth of massage does not come so much from the physical strength of the shoulders and arms, and hands as from the intention of the therapist and the correct use of body coming from the center. The discipline of Tai Chi continues to help me deepen my understanding of this concept. Several times I have asked clients to tell me what difference they feel in particular moves of the massage when I do them in a way I learned in massage school, and in the way I have changed them since learning Tai Chi. Without exception, the client has been able to describe a qualitative difference. When moving in the center, relaxed, and intentional way of Tai Chi, the clients experience chi moving within their bodies gently but much more deeply. They describe subtle feelings of warmth, tingling or a sense of rightness within. Many times they have come back to say that the sense of rightness

within their bodies has stayed with them for days. There has also been a complementary experience of Tai Chi with meditation. Doing Tai Chi before sitting in meditation allows my body to sit quiet and relaxed attitude, which allows the meditation to move into a deeper, quiet awareness of the Spirit. Doing Tai Chi after meditation allows me to extend my prayer into movement. The Liu Ha Ba Fa is particularly well suited to this experience. Performing the various movements with the intention and awareness allows me to experience the effects of contracting and expanding my chi with a certain rhythm that then extends into relationships with those around me. One friend who was watching me to Tai Chi wrote the following:

“You’ve integrated Tai Chi into every aspect of your daily life, mind, body and spirit. Your “chi” is the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is your “chi”. Your subtle compassion and forgiveness heart overwhelms me at times. Your deep-seated inner quiet has a calming effect on everyone you come in contact with. Watching you do the different forms of Tai Chi brings me to that same inner quiet, meditative place. Then there are times when I watch you that I’ve caught myself looking away, because I felt I was intruding on the most intimate prayer. But, I continued to watch you....and was drawn into your prayer. No longer being able to do the forms myself, I can’t explain to you what that means to me”.

Over the years, there have been

Aikido Ai Follies 2002

many more insights into the meaning of chi and how it operates both within the body and in others around us. In the last two years, I have discovered an even deeper application of chi in the study of Reiki, chi used purely for healing. Reiki is based on the assumption that shi is universally available to everyone without limit, except that set by a person's own ability to receive it. Reiki also teaches that an individual can be attuned to the universal chi in such a way that it is possible to pass it that chi into persons who need it and are not able to receive it by themselves. Not only has the regular practice of Tai Chi deepened my understanding and use of Reiki, the practice of Reiki has deepened my understanding and practice of Tai Chi. When I activate Reiki before doing a form, the chi moves more forcefully through me and removes the blocks that hinder chi. There has been a tangible effect in the healing and strengthening of my left knee which has been damaged in a cross country skiing accident over twenty years ago.

I am extremely grateful for this opportunity to study Tai Chi. It is amazing to me how every day with every reception of the movements, there is something new to learn. My intention is to practice Tai Chi for the rest of my life.



The end of the year dojo party would not be complete without the return of the 2nd Annual Aikido Ai Follies. The brainchild of Jason and Melody Oxman, this year's follies brought out some new talent. This year we were all treated to the dual emcee's Suzette Hodnett and Michael Pararo. Aikido Ai's answer to Martin and Lewis (okay...I know I am stretching it a bit), they guided us through an array of talent for 2002.

Our dual emcees started off the 2002 follies with a friendly discussion of the differences between Tai Chi and Aikido. I think Michael found out that Tai Chi can be quite an effective discipline. After their friendly discussion, the members were treated to a blending presentation of dual Tai Chi and Aikido movements. We all found it to be quite beautiful and those who have been training a while saw some very close similarities.

Unfortunately, the return performance of the Tai Chi-las did

not happen, but we were treated to the return of the Schmahl Family's talented kids, and their version of the kids show Blu's Clues. Somehow, Blu was too happy with the subject and boycotted. Being the troopers they are, the Schmals continued on in true showman's fashion. The follies also brought out two very nice Tai Chi presentations, one with the Tai Chi Fan, and we were all treated to Tai Chi Long Form presentation.

This year's show also introduced some classical music from Beethoven by the Paniagua family. However, as the audience listened closely, it kind of began to sound like age that age old favorite "Tequila". The 2002 Follies also brought inspiration poems, a floral arrangement creation done to music, a family piano arrangement, and many others. All in all, my favorite was the Schmal's Blu's Clues skit. True aikido practioners going with the flow. So thanks to everyone who participated and we will see you in 2003. It only eleven months away and will be here before you know it!

Aikido Ai Follies—2002



Push Hands Workshop

It was a true expression of the Aikido-Ai family as over 35 people -- beginning and advanced members, aikido and tai chi classmates, visitors from other dojos, and students from satellites at Kaiser, Brea and Sequoia -- all gathered together to participate in our First Annual Push Hands Workshop at Penn Park on September 28th.

The workshop was led by Sifu Toni Demoulin from Santa Barbara. Toni has trained for over thirty years with Grand Master Tung Kai Ying. Helping other students and teachers discover and enjoy Push Hands has been one of her ongoing interests.



Push hands is a two person cooperative exercise embodying the basic principles of tai chi. This exercise teaches a greater understanding of the movements and applications from the tai chi form. It is based on the classics of tai chi which reveal that "a force of four ounces deflects a thousand pounds." Push hands provides tai chi practitioners with a format to test and improve their relaxation, timing, balance, and rooting while in contact

with another person.

Toni, along with four of her senior students, taught the traditional push hands form as used in China, incorporating the ward off, pull down, press and push applications from the tai chi form. She also led us in exercises in rooting, centering, sticking, yielding and attacking. The group seemed to

really enjoy the free play exercises where, with closed eyes, they were able to experiment with becoming one energy connected at the wrist.

Carol Patterson, beginning tai chi student of only a few months, wondered if she should participate in the workshop, but decided to embrace the challenge.... "The instructors were all very patient, especially with those of us who forgot their right hands from their left and drifted into our version

of push arms, elbows, knees, feet and whatever." She commented that the study of push hands was a wonderful extension of her own belief system and a challenging exercise in learning how to yield and go with the flow.

Nancy O'Brien, assistant instructor and 18 year tai chi student, was inspired by the great

turnout and how it "showed that our outreach to other communities was successful." She commented that the "push hands exercises that were presented were unlike anything we had ever practiced before, with new challenges and new ways of moving."

A full and rich pot luck lunch brought everyone back to

the dojo for food and conversation, along with spontaneous push hands practice. A special thanks once again goes to Debbie and her supportive and hardworking crew for making it such an enjoyable and relaxing time for all. Debbie, your generosity of spirit and energy never goes unnoticed!!

Like tai chi, the lessons of push hands practice go far beyond the form itself. In the constant interplay of yin and yang, we learn that there really is no op-

position in life, just never-ending change. Push hands can teach us to let go of our preconceived way of reacting to outside force (physical or emotional) with pressure and resistance. Instead we learn to yield, unify with what is offered, and redirect the energy.

In the end, it was an inspirational day as one united and spirited Aikido-Ai family connected in training, trust and friendship. As Nancy O'Brien commented when it was all over... "Everyone enjoyed themselves... and I'm sure there is interest in participating in another push hands workshop!!"



Push Hand Workshop Participants

Something to Share?

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

l.celaya@worldnet.att.net

Thanks!

NOTE OF THANKS

I just wanted to take a moment to say thanks to Suzette Hodnett for her hard work in bringing the Tai Chi element into our newsletter. When I first came to Sensei and expressed my intention to create this newsletter, the intent was to have everyone contribute, both Aikido and Tai Chi of Aikido Ai.

The Aikido Ai family is a special one if you have not noticed, and this newsletter has always been about the "dojo", although in its initial stages Aikido articles seems to be more predominant. I was very glad, to see both Aikido and Tai Chi information. Suzette was the driving force in getting this started and when you see her say Thanks Suzette!

I look forward to seeing more Tai Chi articles in the newsletters to come. Everyone has something to contribute, both Tai Chi and Aikido students. As I have always said, all articles will be included with Sensei's approval, but sometimes not all at once. As with Aikido and Tai Chi we always look for a good balance.

Louis Celaya