



Bucks County Aikido News • *Issue 1 Winter 2007*

BucksCountyAikido.com ■ 802 New Galena Rd., Doylestown PA 18901 ■ (215) 249-8462

Dear Members and Friends,

Recently I was going through some old things and came across a dojo record book from the early 90s. Patti and I had just started training here in Pennsylvania and as usual there was a journal entry for every practice, what we did and who was there. There was a surge of interest in Aikido when we first arrived, but gradually the class size started to get smaller as romantic ideas about this mysterious art were replaced by the reality of daily training. Soon most of the classes were just the two of us, and if Patti couldn't be there, the class was marked "No Show." I remember resolving myself to working with one person at a time if that was how it was going to be.

Nearly 15 years later it's nice to see that the dojo membership has grown. Though still a work in progress, this dojo/farm is a realization of a dream. A place where people can come train, work, live. A center for the practice of this art and cultivation of our spirit. A chance to plant a seed in ourselves to last a lifetime.

Every person who has trained with us over the years has contributed in some way. I have a large file of applications from people who have started with the best intentions but have faded away. The "in your face" nature of Aikido training is not easy. For those of us who continue, the rewards are many. We sometimes form bonds with the most unlikely people who we probably wouldn't have known otherwise. Like old war buddies who have saved each other's lives, we may not have the same taste in movies, but we



Students (from left) Andy Cleff, Ben Bowles, Paul Fricker and Bob Izzo take a short break from digging a gas-line trench to the uchi deshi (live-in student) quarters on the grounds of Bucks County Aikido.

know we owe each other a debt.

When you open your doors, you never know who will walk in. We don't just meet these people; we grab hold of them and throw them around the room, and they us. It's much safer to stick with people more like us, but this practice won't allow it. We are pushed to meet a diverse bunch, and there will be more to come.

"We are all farming something. Best to be mindful of what we are cultivating."

With more members, communication is more difficult. You may know that we've been working on an uchi deshi quarters that will also house a dojo shower. I sent out an e-mail asking for help to dig a trench for a gas line (this shower will have hot water)

and received a couple of e-mails back asking, "What's an uchi deshi house?" Maybe it's time for a dojo newsletter to help everyone keep informed of what's going on. We just recently had a meditation seminar with Janaki Pierson; there was our annual sesshin that you might be curious about; and we have frequent seminars that for whatever reason not everyone can attend.

So here we go. Our first newsletter from this community that has formed around Aikido. O-Sensei's advice was to harmonize Aikido, farming and spiritual discipline. I have read very little as to why he included farming in this list, save that he felt farming's natural lifestyle was conducive to a spiritual life. What an incredible opportunity we have. We are all farming something. Best to be mindful of what we are cultivating. This will be our chronicle.

— GL

Bucks County Sesshin: Two Months Out

“Oh, how wonderful — another opportunity to practice.” It’s been two months since I participated in the sesshin held at Bucks County Aikido, and I hear Genjo’s potent words while I’m sitting in my car. Just moments before, my mind was a sea of anger, frustration and a dash of personal distortion. When I had left my home, I was already late



by Eric Soroker

for an appointment, and now I was barely crawling along the highway (delayed by some sort of unknown situation). My head felt hot and flushed and I was squirming in my seat. There was a fiery knot of anxiety the size of a cantaloupe stuffed inside my upper chest, and my shoulders were almost touching my ears. That’s when I remembered to breathe.

I’m not sure exactly how long I had been holding my breath, and I found my body laboring to take in this next inhalation. My exhale came out as a long sigh. As I took in a second full breath, my shoulders dropped and the cantaloupe of anxiety had shrunk down to the size of a golf ball. That’s when I reflected on Genjo’s words. In this life we are always practicing, and so you might as well appreciate these opportunities to train (because there are lots of them). Practice awareness. Practice breathing. I missed my appointment, by the way. Oh, how wonderful...

Later that same day, as I sat in a restaurant jotting down some of my thoughts, the waiter walked up and asked me what I was working on. I told him it was some ideas about Zen meditation. He sat down in my booth

and told me he was curious about meditation and how it worked. I did my best to describe what it means to me and the benefits I receive from practicing. The waiter then shared with me how these days he is in an almost constant state of anxiety, that his numerous thoughts (often negative) mentally paralyze him and that he wished he could just stop the chatter. Listen-

ing to him, I recognized some of my own similar patterns. It seems that the nature of our minds is to run progressively wilder if left unchecked. I told him I hope he would give meditation a try.

The cushion is my laboratory. Zazen provides me with a controlled environment in which I can hone the skills of centering myself, quieting my thoughts and exploring being in the moment. It’s a time to focus on my breath and to seek that often-elusive state of being purely present. Like any skill, the more I practice, the more I cultivate my experiences. I can take my cushion’s knowledge and can carry this

with me into the “real world.”

Sesshin takes this training to the next level. The concentrated experience of a sesshin creates and/or adds to the “tension” needed to push us beyond our comfort zone and stretch us a bit. It’s through this stretching that we have the opportunity to truly confront ourselves. The form(s) of this “tension” can continually change from sesshin to sesshin (hence the phrase “every sesshin is different”) and also moment to moment during the sesshin itself. Each sesshin is tailor-made for the participant. Whether you are aware of it or not, your experience is dictated by what you bring to the party.

Entering this year’s sesshin, I was unconsciously on a mission. Recent changes in my personal life had left me raw and exposed, and I was feeling downright ornery. I was looking forward to three days where my only job was to be present. In the back of my mind, I also wanted to suffer. Not emotional suffering (though some of that popped up on its own) but that burning physical pain that has the potential to purify.

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Genjo Marinello Osho (front center) led the annual sesshin (a period of intensive Zen training) at Bucks County Aikido, October 13-15. The weekend included several hours of weapons training by Robert Savoca Sensei and George Lyons Sensei (left and right of Genjo Osho, respectively).

Reflections on Meditation Workshop with Janaki Pierson



by Lisa Naples

You know how it is when you're not really paying attention... You're just going about your life and some bit of information keeps crossing

your consciousness? This is what happened to me with meditation.

For the past few years the benefits of meditation were repeatedly brought to my attention via disparate sources: a segment on NPR, watching a friend's path take her there, advice from a mentor, etc.

When Janaki's workshop was offered, I was ready to learn more. It was the "making it a daily practice" aspect that particularly appealed to me.

Since the workshop, I've practiced meditation nearly every day at least once. It's been about three weeks and I'm enjoying the subtle changes I feel. Somehow, I'm more centered and grounded. I take the few seconds necessary to think before I speak or act more than I did before. For me it's directly connected to the breathing. I take a deep breath into my diaphragm and my mind relaxes and opens.

A dear friend of mine who also participated in the workshop told me with such surprise and gratitude on her face that she hadn't had a single fight with her daughter since she began meditating. Before then and for the past few months, she'd been struggling in her relationship with this bright and challenging nine-year old. The child even kept a folder in her room labeled "The Mommy Files," which was full of my friend's "wrongdoing" according to her daughter. My friend reports that



Janaki Pierson (front row, third from left) facilitated the two-day "Introduction to Meditation" workshop, November 11-12.

through her practice of meditation, she realizes that those fights were only able to happen because she was reacting to her daughter and taking things personally. Since then, she listens more and reacts less. Consequently, they rarely conflict now.

It seems to me that everything we experience in life is understood and made manifest in our minds through our filters. The practice of meditation is the quieting of the mind, and somehow, the more I practice quieting my mind, the more space I leave for being open and present. If my mind were a linear spectrum, then at one end there is experience through filters and at the other is open, present experience — things as they are — reality unadorned and untransformed by embellishment or interpretation. This includes quieting all judgment.

It's all a lot easier said than done. Especially shutting off the judge. Meditation brings to consciousness for me the simple fact that she's there. I try to make friends with her. I know she thinks she's working in my best interest, so I pull up a chair and ask her

to sit down — tell her that I don't need her right now. In the past, I'd offered to move her and her people to the Bahamas for an extended vacation but it never worked. She's very controlling and doesn't want to miss anything. So, the chair image is working better for me. She seems pretty content to sit there and observe without comment.

Janaki's presentation of the concepts related to meditation were completely accessible. She's quite a lovely human being in that she exhibits her humanity with each story she tells and each interaction she has with others. I felt that she taught by example as much as by imparting information through words. ○

NATURAL FOODS CO-OP

Interested in participating
in a food co-op through
Neshaminy Valley Natural
Foods?

For more info, email Helen Tai:
htai1@cpcus.jnj.com

Bucks County Sesshin

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You see, I was angry. Angry about things I could not change or accept or let go. I had unconsciously covered up my hurt with a nice thick shell of anger. And when you do that, what you think is your anger is really just a distortion of something else. Armor protects but it keeps the good stuff out also. What I believed about myself would change in a span of hours. By the end of Friday night, I had used up all of my anger's fuel and the shell started to break down. (A well-placed shomenuchi strike from Genjo during dokusan helped accelerate the process.)

That Friday night I did something that I had not done in a long while: I slept deeply. In fact, I was sleeping so deeply on the zendo floor that I needed a friendly wake-up tap Saturday morning (thanks, Betsy). I woke up feeling lighter. There was this nice warmth inside me and a strong sense of both my self and my community.

This is the part where I'd love to say, "My whole life came into focus" and "I just cruised through the rest of the sesshin" and "See how meditation can change your life." But I can't. The truth is, sitting for long periods of time is painful and challenging. There were times when my thoughts were so thick

that I have no idea how long I had been running on auto-pilot (Fellini would have been proud). During Saturday's teisho, I did not set myself up solidly on my cushion and experienced the most physical pain I have ever felt while sitting. I even slipped back into some anger for a little while.

And yet, something was different. An integration had taken place. I experienced longer periods of awareness. It was as if the picture got bigger. During one sit, I had an experience where my consciousness was surfing just in the front of the moment. It was like watching a clock and the feeling you get that instant just before the clock's hands move. And I realized that life is one big sesshin.

So where am I now that it's two-plus months out from the sesshin? Well, the cookies don't taste as sweet (though I still notice them). My food's flavor is not as savory (though I still taste it). Hearing a woodpecker does not make me want to burst out into pure uncontrollable laughter and glee (OK, maybe a little). What I feel is connected. Connected to my thoughts and also to everything else. Yeah, I still find myself beating my head on the steering wheel from time to time, but at least now I'm aware that I'm doing it. Oh, how wonderful... ☉



Two-Month Introductory Course Begins February 6

A true martial art, or budo, Aikido cannot be reduced to a simple category or intellectual idea. It is a path through which we encounter ourselves.

Regular practice broadens our perspectives in life and deepens our experience of even the simplest moments.

Aikido is not only a practical art for self-defense, but a philosophically satisfying art to last a lifetime.

Classes meet twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6-7 PM.

The cost of the course is \$150 and includes one uniform (do-gi).

Classes are open to teens and adults. No prior experience is necessary.

For more information, visit www.buckscountyaikido.com or call (215) 249-8462.

Spring 2007 Schedule, beginning February 1

(January Schedule: Mon/Wed/Fri 6-7 PM & 7-8 PM, Sat 9-10 AM. All classes open to everyone.)

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
AM		6:30-7:30 Mixed		6:30-7:30 Mixed		9-10 Mixed 10:15-11 *Weapons Free Practice	8-9 Zazen 9:30-11 Free Practice
PM	6-6:55 Mixed 7:05-8 Mixed	6-6:55 Intro 7:05-8 *Weapons	12:15-1 Mixed 6-6:45 Mixed 6:50-7:10 Zazen 7:15-8 *Weapons	6-6:55 Intro 7:05-8 Mixed	6-6:45 Mixed 6:50-7:10 Zazen 7:15-8 Mixed		

* Weapons classes open to 5th+ kyu or with special permission. Commitment to attend all or most classes required.