



# Enso

## Bucks County Aikido Journal

• Issue 10, Spring 2012

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

## Ha

by George Lyons

You may love Aikido now but you are headed for a crisis. And when yours arrives you will probably quit. So there you go. The hard news is out and you can't say I didn't tell you so.

You might say, "I'm ready... bring it on." But here's the thing; your crisis will be uniquely yours, tailor made and targeted right at your blind spot.

Damn! If only you could learn this without any of that. It's such a beautiful art, so noble and high minded, wonderful ideas to hear and think about. Embody? Even better!

The traditional way of organizing around this practice is so orderly. Lining up in straight lines, the rituals, the forms, can give the idea there is a promised land where all things are as they should be and all peoples and problems understood. The Zen metaphor of rowing to this other shore is a nice one but it's maybe not as neat as all that.

Picture this: Yes, some guys are rowing but for a host of reasons some are not. Some are exhausted and doing their best. Some are injured and can't help as much as they want to. Some have been thrown overboard, either by themselves or by their captain, and a few of these, still determined, are swimming along side. Some have grabbed onto ropes hanging off the bow, unable to

swim but refusing to give up. Add to this that instead of one boat there is a whole fleet, some insist on rowing alone, while others work together, lots of boats, lots of ropes, lots of swimming... chaos!

When you reach the point in your training where you see more, when things are not as simple as they used to be, it's natural to long for the days of innocent practice. Back when someone could tell you how to do it right and you could look forward to the day when you'd be able to do it.

Now there seem to be as many ways of doing ikkyo as there are arms in the world and technique feels ambiguous, subject to doubt, and full of uncertainty. The slow minutes of class and this bozo you're training with can make you wonder just where your love of the art went.

Reaching the stage of Ha is really an achievement. It's pay dirt for all of your hard work but it doesn't



feel that way. Suffering has many forms and when it comes as confusion it's pretty unsettling. Check in with yourself and listen. Confusion should not be mistaken for being off track. There's a difference and knowing what it is, is so important as to be the central issue of our lives.

*Hanging onto a trailing rope, the idea of letting go comes to mind. It takes no effort, you release your grip and the noise of all the boats, all these people, move away and you float peacefully in the water.*

*Now what?*

*Getting some distance from the clamorous noise, being free of the boat people is a solution and may be what's best for you.*

*Being with and free is possible too.*

*You see, the Boat has already landed and really, it never even left.*

## A Community Of The Spirit

*There is a community of the spirit.  
Join it, and feel the delight  
of walking in the noisy street,  
and being the noise.*

*Drink all your passion,  
And be a disgrace.*

*Close both eyes  
to see with the other eye.*

— Rumi

## Resistance

by Patti Lyons

*Resistance is futile.*

— The Borg

My inspiration for writing this article was my own resistance to writing it. I am often asked by Sensei to write something for Enso and I often resist. I claim that I have nothing interesting to say, no time to sit down and write, and so on. Why do I resist? I can't say for sure. Maybe I don't want to expose myself through sharing my thoughts. Maybe I don't want to sit quietly with myself and let my unconscious bubble to the surface. Maybe I really don't have anything interesting to say. Whatever the reason, I often resist.

Since this topic has been on my mind I have been watching myself and noticing the many situations in which I resist that which is in front of me or heading in my direction. Sometimes it is the alarm clock on early zazen mornings; sometimes it is the telephone ringing and sometimes it is the suggestion by someone else that I do things differently. What I have noticed through this self-observation is that when I resist, I suffer. I get annoyed, irritat-

ed, frustrated and sometimes even angry. When I don't resist, I hardly even notice the moment...it just flows. So, why do I resist?

I have carried this inquiry into resistance on to the mat. I have been looking at myself and also looking at you. It is common for beginners to resist and understandably so. Not sure what they "are" doing, what they "should" be doing, and what is going to happen next can be unnerving. The thing is, they don't know really know they are resisting. The technique comes fast, hard, and unexpectedly. Without any skillful way to deal with it, the beginner can think "I'm not going to let that happen again." Over time and through seeing and feeling others train, the

more and more. In my defense, we did have an extremely hard mat; one inch of rubber dust on top of concrete. But that really wasn't it. I didn't feel that I "needed" to break fall. Short of breaking my arm and causing a domestic abuse inquiry, we went on. Finally, a visiting Aikidoka said something to me that changed my perception and I resisted no more. Unfortunately I don't remember what she said but it was instantaneous; I was break falling.

When we resist we close off possibilities. But at the same time we create other "openings" or possibilities. On the mat this can be physically injurious. My resisting break falls caused more and more strain on my wrists, shoulders and honestly,



beginner resists less and less; again not consciously. Developing a trust of others, a better sense of how to fall, and a growing curiosity in the practice, their resistance lessens.

Beginners, though, are not the only ones who resist. Years ago, in my early days of training, I resisted taking break falls. Sensei kept pushing me harder and harder and I resisted

everything else. Now, when a technique is applied fast and hard I can absorb it by taking a break fall...it flows. I wouldn't say I hardly notice, but I am not disturbed by it. Sensei has always said "good ukemi is the best defense."

Sometimes people resist because they want to "teach" you something; to show you that your tech-

nique is not effective. This can be problematic for a few reasons. While I might successfully prevent you from applying your “lame attempt” at nikkyo to my wrist, I have exposed my face, neck, groin, knee etc. to another possible blow or worse. Again, years ago, a visiting Aikidoka was training with me and became very “heavy” and resistant. He was nidan and I was 4<sup>th</sup> kyu. I was trying to do shihonage and he resisted. Frustrated, and not understanding what he was trying to “teach” me, I took the opening I had and bit his arm! Not my shining moment, for sure, but boy was he surprised!

Resisting can be misunderstood. We learn ukemi through technique and technique through ukemi. When we resist we can actually slow and confuse learning and even perpetuate resistance in others. I have heard many a person say: “Oh, I thought I was supposed to resist you.” When I train with Sensei, he can resist me in such a way that he has exposed no openings. His “resistance” is a cultivated heaviness that is seemingly unmovable and yet at the same time has a quick responsiveness that doesn’t get stuck. I aspire...

So, why do we resist? Fear. Fear of injury, fear of failure, fear of exposing ourselves, fear of looking stupid, fear of not being good enough and on and on. Fear. Someone recently said to me “It’s more interesting to talk about vulnerability than show vulnerability.” What happens when we don’t resist? Something far more interesting. Scary, maybe, but nothing to fear. Perhaps the Borg were right on this one thing; resistance is futile. ... ○

*“The belief in form constantly struggles with the movement of existence and that movement will always break through any false impression of stability, leaving feelings of frustration, confusion, and sorrow.”*

— Darryl Bailey

## Churn Creek Aikido Grand Opening

by Eric Soroker

On March 24, 2012, Churn Creek Aikido held its grand opening seminar with guest instructor Lyons Shihan at the brand new dojo in Wor-ton, Maryland.

On a rainy morning, 16 members of BCA made the journey south to support their brother Nick Fritz Sensei and to infuse his new space with hard training and positive Ki.

Our caravan arrived without incident and early enough that we were

able to actually start the seminar an hour early. Talk about hungry! After check in and a brief moment for “oohs” and “ahhs” about the beautiful space, we suited up, bowed in and got onto the new black mats. There were even some unexpected guests such as Dave Mata and one of his students who drove 12 hours through the night from Chicago and long time practitioner Ronald Ernest from D.C.

There is something quite exquisite about participating in the “building” of something. The energy of genesis can be very potent. How many good stories have you heard that start with; “I was there when...”

Nick taught the first class and drove us through an hour of suwariwaza. I know of several pairs of knees that were groaning after that. Lyons Shihan taught the next three classes, two body arts and one weapons class. In a show of good spirit we trained straight through lunch, instead of breaking, so that those who needed to leave early were able to experience the whole seminar. Even though I trained with many BCA members, being at Nick’s dojo



Churn Creek Aikido Grand Opening

seemed to add fresh excitement to everyone's practice. We even blessed the pristine white walls with some fresh bokken holes. Now it's a dojo!

The seminar concluded with Lyons Shihan presenting Nick with a framed photo of O-Sensei for the new kamiza. Lyons Sensei also shared some words of insight and encouragement. In true BCA fashion (and now CCA fashion), there was a delicious potluck back at Nick and Mary's home. Bacon wrapped pheasant, venison, and BBQ chicken were just some of the highlights (Nick's ginger carrots were top notch). Trained and fed, we finished out the evening with some libation and some good ole story telling.

Really, this seminar for me was a celebration of a "beginning" that has been many years in the making. From our first awkward roll, we are building something in our Aikido. We build strength and coordination, awareness, technique and connection. The months turn to years and we continue to develop upon the foundation of our practice. For some this may lead to teaching and then a transition into moving on and the creation of one's own dojo.

Nick truly exemplifies this theme of building a dojo by literally designing and constructing the entire space, inside and out. It was an incredible feat that consumed him for 8 months. Several members of BCA contributed their brawn, including myself, to help him screw, lift, pull, and bend the space into shape but it was truly Nick who did the lion's share. I imagine he is immensely proud (and rightly so) for creating such a wonderful training space. I know I am.

If I could be so bold as to offer a suggestion to Nick as he begins this

next stage, it would be this: "dare" to make your dojo's daily training true to the way you want to train in Aikido. Set the character, inspiration, and direction of "your" dojo. Thanks to everyone for a great seminar and Happy Birthday Churn Creek Aikido. ○



## The Start

by Eric Wolf

I sometimes feel my reason for starting Aikido doesn't measure up to some of the other inspiring reasons some people in the dojo talk about. Looking for a martial art with a spiritual connection or some life changing desire / connection to this practice seems more important than my "it looked like fun" reason. As trivial as my reason for starting Aikido may be, what keeps me coming back are the glimpses into the deeper currents; this is more than just throwing each other around on the mat.

One important glimpse for me happened a few weeks ago. A small

group of us went out to dinner with Sensei and Patti. Somehow the conversation made its way to Steven Segal and after I made a couple of jokes at how bad his movies are I made the comment that he doesn't seem to embody the spirit of Aikido (how's that for the pot calling the kettle black? ). Sensei, with a half smile on his face, very calmly and quietly said (I'm paraphrasing here, I don't remember the exact words), "Well he's just a guy like you and me, trying to figure things out. He's done a lot for Aikido, which may be good or bad, but we shouldn't judge him." Ahhhhh, so there's the spirit of Aikido. There's the idea that this entire practice embodies. It's also the answer to the question that I've been asking myself from my first beginner's class, "is this practice really applicable in real life?"

We practice blending with each other on the mat, but that's really only a part of the practice. For me that's the easy part of the practice. Blending with people in our life outside of the dojo who we have nothing in common with or who we are opposed to is much more difficult, that is the real life practice of Aikido.

I had a dream the other night, after two days of Aikido classes where I felt lost and couldn't figure out how



to do the techniques being demonstrated. In my dream I was having yet another bad Aikido class, not being able to keep up, turning outside when I should turn inside, just generally doing everything wrong; in my dream Patti came up to me, put her hands on her hips, cocked her head sideways and asked, “How long is it going to take you to learn this?!” All my life I’ve just muscled my way through opposition. If someone disagreed with me and I had my mind set on doing things my way I would either just ignore them or drag them kicking and screaming along with me. I would not blend. Blending was something an appliance did. I see a different way now. How long is it going to take me to learn to blend? I don’t know. What I do know is I need more practice in blending, both on and off the mat.

*As soon as you concern yourself with the “good” and “bad” of your fellows, you create an opening in your heart for maliciousness.*

— O-Sensei

## Serendipitous Circles

by Ester Barias-Wolf

*It’s okay to lose your balance, but never lose your center.*

— Lyons Sensei

Summer. The beginners’ course is eight weeks long. It has been years since I’ve done anything remotely physical not counting my weekend warrior yard work. I have wanted to take a martial arts course for years and I finally stumbled across BCA while surfing the internet. There were other schools, schools that were closer to home yet I felt compelled to come, observe a class and then sign-up.

Sweat oozed out of my pores then slowly trickled down from the top of my head down the side of my forehead and into my face. The past few days have been brutally hot, made even hotter by the weight of our cotton gi. We start every class with a series of warm-up exercises. We’ve been practicing how to roll and learning techniques ikkyo, nikkyo and sankyo—what have I gotten myself into? Most evenings I feel lost, I’m not getting these techniques and I am frustrated at myself for not getting them. “Stay with it!” a voice in my head demands, “No! This sucks!” the defeatist in me replies. After class, all my body wants to do is rest from the physical workout and summer heat but mentally, I replay what we did in class over and over again. Why DO I come?

*Failure is the key to success; each mistake teaches us something.*

— O-Sensei

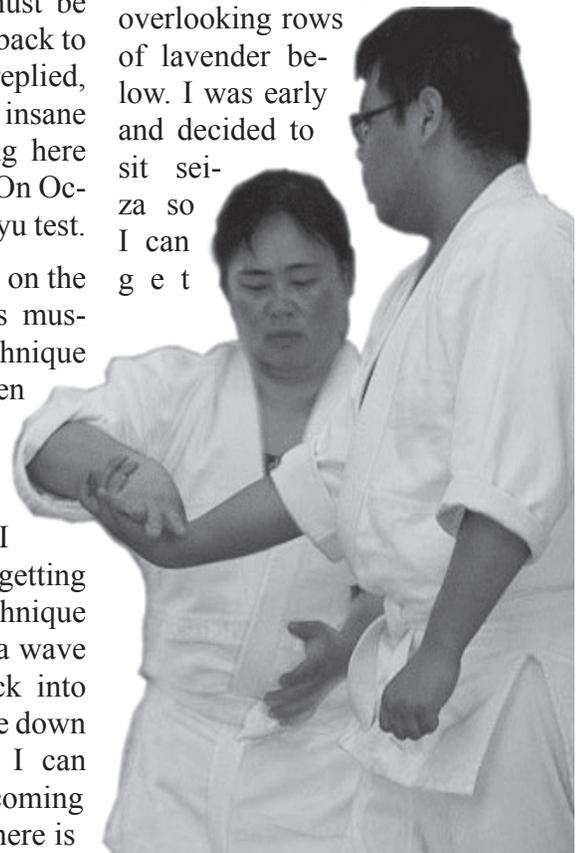
Fall. One night, at the dojo, one of the senior students said I must be crazy because I kept coming back to class every week to which I replied, “Then you must be totally insane because you’ve been coming here for years.” [shared laughter] On October 27th, I passed my 5th kyu test.

My partner and I were sitting on the floor, doing kokyuho. I was muscling my way through the technique again. There were nights when it felt like I was not getting even one technique right no matter how many times we repeat the steps. Just when I thought I was at the brink of getting something right another technique gets introduced. It was as if a wave that just barely receded back into the ocean was back to drag me down underneath it again before I can catch a breath. Yet, I keep coming back to shore—the dojo. Where is

this voice in my head coming from that it successfully convinces me to come spend another hour or two falling and being thrown onto the mat time and time again? Am I becoming crazy?

“Why Aikido?” a friend of mine asked and the answer is just as elusive as this center Sensei mentions. Perhaps this is part of the pull, finding this center. There could be a million other things I could be doing yet I chose Aikido. When I stumbled across BCA’s website, the welcome page headlined with: Start by Assuming Nothing. “Hmm, this sounds familiar,” I murmured. I took subsequent clicks and read through the dojo’s website, its content echoing some sentiments I have been trying to apply in my life. Aikido has relevance to my life and I didn’t even know it? What else can Aikido offer me?

A soft autumn breeze brushes strands of hair away from my face as I sit near the dojo’s sliding door overlooking rows of lavender below. I was early and decided to sit *seiza so*  
I can  
get



used to it. I have come to realize that it is not one voice but a collective voice (and events) that draw me back. Years ago, I read this quote: “For when you climb it is the mountain as much as your own legs which lifts you upwards, and when you paint it is the brush, ink and paper which determine the result as much as your own hand.” Without Sensei, without my classmates, without the dojo I cannot be nage or uke—positions that allow me to apply or take techniques so that I’m afforded a chance to unfold what I have learned or yet to learn. It dawned on me that I come not just to learn about techniques, but also a chance to learn about myself through others, through my mistakes and from past experiences.

*A good stance and posture reflect a proper state of mind.*

— O-Sensei

Winter. My shoulder ached when I swung my arm at certain positions. I messed it up in class while trying to roll. It was my left shoulder again. I am now convinced that this is one of my weakest points. I should be more attentive to it. I had an accident some years back, catapulted off a scooter and landed hard on pavement. I had deep scrapes and bruises: ribs, leg, arm—all of which were on my left side.

My state of mind was all over the place—I confess to this. Right before my partner applied the end of *jujinage*, I remembered my mind not being in the now and was preoccupied with the dull pain I was experiencing on both my arms after a session of practicing blocks. “I’m going to get some good bruising tomorrow,” I remember thinking to myself; then—SLAM! By the time I got back in the moment I landed incorrectly and jammed my shoulder

into the mat. Sure it is weak, but that is not the reason I injured myself. I simply wasn’t in the moment. If the true reason was because it is weak, then I would continuously re-injure my left-side, but this was not so. I needed to be mindful or risk more injuries.

*The circle symbolizes serenity and perfection, the source of unlimited techniques.*

— O-Sensei

Spring. One more week (as I write this) and it will be the first day of spring. The end of March marks ten months of figuring out puzzles in the form of twisted limbs, pins and blocks. I’m still watching out for the elusive center, but I am not upset I haven’t found nor comprehended it. In due time it will come. “Patience,” I remind myself. In the meantime, like the cycle of the seasons, I will no doubt make more mistakes, experience more pain, frustration, on the edge of quitting, lack mindfulness interlaced with breakthroughs and feeling of accomplishments. I am learning to embrace this journey. Slowly gaining insights to lose myself in order to blend where there is no longer a distinction between a beginning and an ending. Who knows where it will take me, I only know where it has taken me so far.



## Sansho: The Continuing Journey

by Dwight Epps

Through the years, I have often wondered what it would have been like to grow up a young boy in Japan. Playing samurai, beating my playmates with limbs cut from trees. Becoming an *uchi deshi* to a Great Teacher and learning Kendo, Judo and maybe even Aikido. Carrying O-Sensei’s bags, cleaning his home, working in his fields, and taking *ukemi* for years before he would let me practice. Having peers like Tohei, Abe, Saito, Yamada, Kanai and Chiba.

The training practices of O-Sensei have been described by Chiba Sensei as “*katai-keiko*” (vigorous training without holding back). Chiba Sensei has many times said the practice left the students bruised and bloody. *Katai-keiko* included intense conditioning exercises, which O-Sensei would often observe. There was also, general farm work that *uchi deshi* at the Iwama dojo were required to participate in. Both Morihiro Saito Sensei and Chiba Sensei spent time at the Iwama dojo training.



O-Sensei didn’t have a teaching curriculum for weapons and body arts. He would order an attack with *bokken* and in an instant, *uke* would find himself on the floor and O-Sensei would have the *bokken*. He would order a strike to the face, and suddenly he would strike with an *atemi*, throw and pin so hard that people reported feeling that their chest was going to explode. Or O-Sensei would direct a strike with a *tanto* and...well...I’ll leave the result to your imagination.



*Morihiro Saito Sensei*

I have been fortunate to have learned weapon concepts from many artists of the Japanese sword, staff and knife. O-Sensei never documented his weapons so his uchi deshi had to interpret their understanding of his weapons. My training has been influenced by three schools; Saito's methods, Yasuo Kobayashi and now Chiba Sensei.

Saito Sensei was the first and his commitment to carrying on O-Sensei's legacy and preserve O-Sensei's teachings as Saito had learned them was evident whenever he spoke. In the many Saito seminars I attended, I often heard him talk about how the principles of swordsmanship formed the basis of Aikido techniques. These principles are very evident when you view Chiba Sensei's swordsmanship. However, while the principles are the same, the interpretations are different.

When I first viewed weapons training at Bucks County, my impression was that they were the same principals. Kumi Tachi as taught by

Sensei and as taught by Saito Sensei looked and felt alike. Yes and no. The 36 jo movements (Chiba) and the 20 jo suburi (Saito) are foundation movements, very similar, the names are different but then Japanese words usually have different meanings depending on the concept the Sensei is trying to convey. Herein lies the dilemma.

We usually think of the levels of Aikido understanding in terms of form, function and effectiveness. Chiba Sensei describes his goal as being able to face a trained swordsman with an empty hand and take his sword. Most of us would be killed. If you train all your life with sincerity and purpose, you may be able to achieve aiuchi (mutual death). The practice required is Katai-keiko as demonstrated in the Sansho katas. The ability to take the sword from a trained swordsman is that of an artist.

Saito Sensei believed that striking techniques (atemi) are a "vital element" of Aikido, and advocated training to deal with the attacks from other martial arts, such as the kicks practiced in karate. I know firsthand the devastation of atemi delivered by Toyota and Kanai Senseis. Saito

Sensei believed that the basis of all empty-handed, sword, and staff techniques was the mastery of Aikido's hanmi (basic posture) and mai'ai (proper distance). Saito also believed in the development a proper Kiai (spirit shout) which when you heard it, was enough to disarm you (cutting your Ki).

Recently, at noon class, Lyons Sensei has been working on Sansho. I always thought I had a strong foundation, patience, technique to stop most uke and the ability and relaxation to take ukemi from anybody and not get hurt.

The Birankai methodology is intense. In the moment of truth, time stands still, and the technique is explosive and devastating. It is not like the overwhelming technique of Yamada and Toyota, or the precision of Kanai and Tohei. It is well suited for Lyons, Champion and Nour Senseis; Chiba's influence is clear.

Sansho is slowly revealing its subtleties to me, exposing my openings. I feel the need to go back to the 36 jo movements and the 20 jo suburi to polish my sword and discipline my spirit. It will no doubt take many more years of dedication.



*Dwight and Nafis practice Sansho.*

I may never be able to take Chiba or Lyons Sensei's swords. But that does not matter. I am on the path. My journey continues.

## Atemi – the Lost Component?

By Nafis Nazir

As I enter into my 18th year of training, I find myself searching for the many seemingly small components of Aikido techniques. One of these components is the use of atemi. In my opinion, atemi has become one of the lost components of Aikido. But you may ask yourself, what is atemi and is it really part of Aikido?

In order to answer this question, you must first understand what atemi means. atemi literally means strike, but in Aikido it has a more specific meaning and usage. atemi is used to strike at your partner's openings, not to inflict injury, but to take your partner's mind and affect or lead your partner's ki. In Aikido, energy is neither lost or destroyed. It is merely transferred from one person to the other. Many times, it is the use of atemi that allows this transference of energy. And it is during this time that the nucleus of the technique is formulated into what will become the moment of victory over transgression. Saotome Sensei taught us that "every throw you do is a strike which you are choosing not to do." In other words, in Aikido practice, atemi can be implicit rather than explicit.

"What forces an opponent to keep his energy dispersed so that you can apply a given technique is the possibility at any instant that nage can throw an atemi." This quote was posted by Sensei George S. Led-

yard during a discussion about the importance of atemi. The dispersal of energy that Saotome Sensei speaks about is the moment when you lead your partners ki, at which time his mind and body are separated from his ki. It allows you to take his ki, the moment of the transference of energy, and redirect it as you see fit. This is a much different concept than merely throwing a strike to hurt your partner or to even simply disrupt his attack. It goes beyond this idea. To disrupt his attack would mean to conflict with it. This is not Aikido. Rather, the use of atemi allows you to join him, to join his energy and to become one with him in that very moment. It is through his own aggression and ill intent that he separates himself from you, thus causing his own ruin.

Another aspect or view of atemi is that it is also used to project the energy of an attacker. This is evident in techniques that are seen as touchless throws. When the attacker strikes, the nage can enter with an atemi, and with perfect timing, gather the energy of the attacker, redirect it, and project it in several other directions. You can view videos online and see O-Sensei doing such techniques. Therefore, you should understand that atemi doesn't always mean that there must be contact. There is a plethora of information on atemi available online. You can read many articles from students of O-Sensei on the subject of atemi. This information will give you insight into the true meaning of atemi from a physical, psychological and physiological viewpoint. The use of atemi should be an very integral part of your Aikido training. It should be practiced daily and taken seriously as a very important aspect of budo.

## Commitment

by Ea Murphy

Within the first year of training in Aikido I made the decision that I would keep practicing for the rest of my life. That innocent decision, naïve in what it would actually entail, provided relief from the constant judgment of progress and attainment. I could train as much as I wanted without worrying about whether or not I was achieving martial skill, about whether my innate abilities were enough to "really" do Aikido, or about whether my training would actually prove useful in the "real world". I would, I reasoned, be doing this for decades, surely at that point I would understand something about Aikido.



At some point, I realized that just walking onto the mat was not enough. Without conscious permission, my life began to change. I started eating better to hold up to daily training. I had to make more money in order to eat better. I had to take jobs that didn't interfere with class. My philosophies changed and my aggressions softened. Slowly and surely, life became structured around Aikido.

And at some point I realized that structuring a life around Aikido was not enough. Leaning into this training and this commitment required something more, and, at the same

time, required something less.

The original decision to train for the rest of my life was an escape into comfort, which excused the attention to every moment on and off the mat that a commitment to martial arts entails. Above all, a committed martial artist cannot become comfortable and must continually meet each new day, encounter, and each moment without expectations. From my limited experience, I see that there is always a deeper, more challenging layer to martial training and commitment. Comfort keeps us from seeing these new aspects, caught in the box of “I am” instead of continually opening to our true natures in the world.

A committed martial artist does not require a mat, and training in a dojo does not necessarily make a martial artist. A dojo is a luxury—a physical space to house the spirit of training and keep the fire burning. Our art becomes life beyond the dojo, when our commitment to Aikido translates into a commitment to continually learn how to truly respond.

If faced with combat in the world outside the dojo, as a martial artist, I don't know that I would respond with combat, despite the fact that the term martial arts literally refers to the art of war. The beauty and the gift of training in the art of war is that we come face to face, on some level, with life and death. The deeper we go in our training, our sincerity, our faith, and our doubt grows stronger. The deeper we go in our training, the choices become clearer and the consequences less important. The blade against our skin becomes more live and we are cut.

I still believe that daily training is a vital part of a commitment to martial arts, but despite my younger self, who thought that merely train-

ing would make me a martial artist, I see I must go beyond the mat, the dojo, and training to truly find what it means to be martial. The vigor of training in a dojo helps immensely in this endeavor, but ultimately, a martial artist drops these attachments to truly cut and be cut in the world.

*Ea Murphy trains at Siskiyou Aikikai and is the new Birankai registrar.* ○

## On Self-Pity

by Cathy Thomas

*I never saw a wild thing  
sorry for itself.*

*A small bird will drop frozen dead  
from a bough*

*without ever having felt sorry for itself.*

— D.H. Lawrence

In the Asian arts, there is always this talk of balance – balance of the mind, body, and spirit. Very noble statement, but with pain and injury come mixed emotions culminating into questions. How can you have balance if you can only concentrate on the body? How can you purify yourself with poisoning thoughts? How does spirit compete with mind and body? How can you move beyond the physical self?

About a year ago, I was driving to work, taking back roads to avoid traffic and save time. On a two-lane road, traffic slowed down a bit, and I wondered if there was an accident ahead. I crawled with the other cars and saw nothing until the car in front of me pulled away. I stopped my car because something to the left of the road caught my eye. It was a goose.

This goose was standing right on the white line on the side of the road, head held high, somehow resolute to do something. Cars stopped

coming and going for this determined bird, and I prayed that nothing would harm it. I was just a little panicked as I watched the goose. I felt it say to me, “I am going to cross THIS road.”



He began to walk across, and I noticed he was limping. It seemed his right foot was damaged somehow, had healed, and made him lame. He limped across the road and stopped in the middle, on the yellow line. I thought, what is this he is doing? I felt so worried for this lame goose limping across the road, and wished he would hurry so that traffic would not kill him and he would be safe – and that I would not have to worry anymore.

So, he was stopped in the middle of the road. At this point, he looked over his back and made a small honk noise. His mate and two goslings came out from the bushes. They joined him, and he limped across the road vigilantly, escorting his family protectively. I had a front row view of this amazing scene. He ensured their safe passage, and I never was the same.

We all suffer damage in Aikido. I challenge anyone to show me someone who is dedicated to the practice that does not have an injury of some kind. I have had many injuries – psychological, emotional, and physical damage – suffered during my practice of Aikido.

It would be very easy for me to practice self-pity. Every day my left knee reminds me that it is damaged. Every day my right shoulder reminds me that it will never function the way it did before. I get so frustrated and scared doing technique because of my fear of further damage. It would be easy for me to say, “poor hurt me” and “why me” and “feel sorry for me”, to think this way would be poisonous to my spirit. Instead, how can I have the feeling of courage through the balance of body, mind, and spirit?

Me...injury...disfigurement...living with it...courage...the goose.

I had never seen such bravery against the odds in my life. This goose walked in a way to accommodate his serious injury – still he walked. He did not stop living or stop taking care of his family – still he was a father and provider. That goose with the lame foot stopped traffic – so highly dangerous, something that kills so many animals – still he did this. He held his head so high, so bravely. Did he know he had no self-pity and only courage?

Did that goose feel sorry for himself for one minute? Did he have any doubt about taking care of his family, about going from one side of the road to the other? Did he feel like less of a goose because he was physically damaged?

Did he set out that day to change my thought process about self-pity?

It is very possible for a teacher to

teach a student without the student realizing that she is being taught. I was looking for answers, and I was waiting for someone to teach me. I didn't realize I was being taught, but when the lesson began my mind was open and I was receptive. I did not know that my teacher on self-pity would be a goose. Find balance, it said to me. Do not carry the heavy burden of what has damaged you in the past. Do not worry about what could happen in the future. Only concern yourself with what must be done now. ○

## New Hope Aikido

by John McDevitt

I love the depth of Aikido -- the idea that there is no end to it. How wonderful it is to have the opportunity to practice Shoshin at every step along this endless path. With that in mind, I am off on a new Aikido adventure. Helen and I have started teaching an Aikido class at The Community School of New Hope-Solebury (New Hope-Solebury High School,

180 West Bridge Street). We roll out the wrestling mat every Thursday night from 7-8:30 (March 15 - May 10). If you are in the area, stop in and practice with us. ○

*“There is something incomparably intimate and productive in the work with an actor entrusted to me. He must be attentive and confident and free, for our labor is to explore his possibilities to the utmost. His growth is attended by observation, astonishment, and desire to help; my growth is projected onto him, or, rather, is found in him – and our common growth becomes revelation. This is not instruction of a pupil but utter opening to another person, in which the phenomenon of “shared or double birth” becomes possible. The actor is reborn – not only as an actor but as a man – and with him, I am reborn. It is a clumsy way of expressing it, but what is achieved is a total acceptance of one human being by another.”*

— Jerzy Grotowski



BCA practices zazen regularly. Sebastian readies the dojo.