



# Enso

## Bucks County Aikido Journal

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On New Year's Eve 2019 we had the idea to give everyone an Aikido related word or concept to contemplate in the coming year. We wrote the words on folded cards and let each person pick a card without knowing the word within. After quite a year, we asked everyone to write about their word. With a couple of exceptions, this issue of Enso reflects these writings.

Following is a list of the words:

- Flexibility
- Honesty
- Commitment
- Be Present
- Focus
- Patience
- Empathy
- Listen
- Do Less
- Face Fear
- Soften
- Sincerity
- Show Up
- Trust
- Silence
- Humility
- Tension
- Shoshin (beginners mind)
- Effort
- Precise Footwork
- Drop Strength
- Zanshin (remaining mind)
- Fudoshin (imperturbability)



Patti's conditioning class

## What's in a Word?

by Patti Lyons

*Commitment.* I had to laugh when I drew this word from the remaining cards spread before me. How much more committed to my practice could I be? *Commitment.* It seemed like I should have put the card back in and drawn another. This word surely belonged to someone else, someone whose practice was occasional or conditional and who could use a boost to make a greater commitment to their practice. No, this word was for me to ponder. *Commitment.*

***“Commitment is an act, not a word.” Jean-Paul Sartre***

We make commitments every day. Some are short term, like lunch with a friend; some are long term, like a job, marriage, home ownership or Aikido. Committing to something: an idea, a cause, a belief system, a relationship, means giving something else up. Whether it is time, money, physical comfort, freedom of choice or a combination of these, there is sacrifice.

I recently had to call the PA Department of Revenue. I spent 50 minutes on hold only to get cut off. I called back and spent another 25 minutes on hold all the while listening to the most annoying music you could imagine. Eventually, someone answered my call and we worked out the issue to our mutual satisfaction. I was committed to resolving the issue, but it required

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giving up my time (and a bit of my sanity). The result of my commitment and sacrifice was the resolution of my problem.

Commitments require sacrifice but offer reward. Sometimes the reward is tangible like the results gained by my phone call. Other times the reward is less tangible. That lunch with a friend requires giving up time and money, but what is gained in return are the positive health effects of social connection. Sitting on your cushion takes time and can be very physically uncomfortable, and though Sensei would say there is no reward, there is the opportunity to connect with the stillness within ourselves even if just for a moment. Intangible for sure, but worth the sacrifice.

These benefits or pay offs are not only for you but for others as well. Donating your time or money to a charity will provide a material benefit for someone else but will be emotionally rewarding for you.

Showing up for your job rewards you financially and allows you to support yourself and your family (fleshy, furry or feathered). Over the years, several spouses of our students have told us that they liked their partners more when they were practicing Aikido regularly.

Practicing Aikido is a big commitment. For some, like me, it is a long term, lifelong commitment. I have had a near daily practice for almost 30 years. There is no question that I have made sacrifices: thousands of hours that I could have spent doing other things; although I don't pay monthly dues like others, I have made other financial sacrifices like building a barn to house the dojo or closing the lavender shop during a seminar or sesshin weekend; I have suffered injuries: a separated shoulder, broken toes, dislocated joints, countless bruises and contusions. I have also sacrificed my privacy and personal space, giving over my kitchen, bathrooms and all available beds to care for and accommodate

Aikido visitors from near and far.

What is the reward for all these sacrifices? There are tangible benefits like daily exercise, a deepening understanding of Aikido techniques and how to apply them effectively against an opponent, a sense of community and friendship with others on the path. But the greatest rewards are intangible. A self confidence that I carry with me every day. An ability to listen with my eyes and hear with my body. A sense of purpose in my life that comes from having a practice; an ongoing conversation with my inner self that is deepened by the challenges of training. A knowingness that when life knocks me down, I can get back up again and again.

What I have learned after all these years is that being committed means showing up, even when you don't feel like it; even when it's inconvenient. Because you don't get the reward without the sacrifice.

*Commit.*



*"When we  
have reached  
the outposts of  
the mind, we  
are ready for  
the journey to  
the heart."*

Francis Lucille



# Giving Up Aikido

by George Lyons

Whether we like it or not, the day will come when we practice Aikido for the last time. The fact is it's happening all the time. People come and go from the practice. Until now, it's been one of us at a time, but the pandemic has given the feeling that it could very well be all of us at once.

Under the circumstances, it's not surprising for the mind to wander. Are we ever going to train and sweat on each other again? Even if we weren't infected with COVID-19, we have all been affected by the uncertainty that spread with it. To me, this past year has given us a chance to contemplate the day that will eventually come. What will all our years of training mean when we hang up our gi for the last time?

## GATELESS GATE

We all knew when we signed up that this practice was physical. If that's where our interest stopped, we quit early. We had to figure out that the difficulties encountered were food for the spirit, that setbacks were not admonishments for shortcomings, that accomplishments were not for personal aggrandizement. Stepping through this initial gate, the training began.

## Go

The early days were supposed to be hard, and they were. Feeling sore and beat up was par for the course. So much to learn, along with a lot of Japanese etiquette we didn't grow

up with. But the dojo environment encouraged honesty. You grabbed, you got thrown down. Pretty simple. The training forced another kind of honesty. If we wanted it, we had to cut through any and all self-deception and keep showing up. It was too hard not to be fully committed, and no one cared about our excuses anyway.

## JYU

As the days and years passed, it was more and more obvious that something remarkable was happening. It wasn't immediately evident that within strength, there could be an ease of being that was not just powerful, it was adaptive. To watch it done well was awesome, but it could also look like nothing at all. The feeling came from within, so it was possible to completely miss it if we didn't know something about it from experience. We got our first glimpse through ukemi. Any tension we held, from projecting into the future or dwelling in the past, showed up in our nervous system and always got us into trouble. We had to be open, alive, and present. The immediate feedback loop of the training encounter was a relentless taskmaster and an amazing incubator for a new possibility.

## RYU

With time we started to realize that we over credit our brain for its problem-solving capacity. It was usually our thinking that was getting in the way. A serenity came from lessening the importance of our thoughts which made it easier to

relax under any circumstance, difficult or otherwise. It was a revelation of subtraction. Like dropping a heavy weight we were unknowingly carrying around.

## KI

We always hoped that the practice would help us put down everything 'extra' and, in so doing, allow us to see the wisdom that pervades all things. Arriving here, we understood that all is one. There is no separation, no other to confront, fight, or even harmonize with. Nothing to do, nothing that needs to be done, everything is perfect as it is.

The stages of development in Aikido chart a course through a lifetime of training. GO: hard training in the basics. JYU: soft application of techniques in dynamic situations. RYU: flowing practice where the mind no longer gets stuck. KI: formless spirit that is free.

Whether we realize it or not, what is present throughout is KI. Just a sliver of this intuition can be enough to pull us through difficult times. If we have some sense that everything is fine as it is, we can not only accept ourselves as we are, but we can also do what seems counterintuitive; freely and positively let go of our efforts. Such an attitude helps us to see the art anew with each passing day and gives rise to a feeling of gratitude just to be.

It's not easy right now when cynicism is so prevalent and seeing with a jaundiced eye is the norm. The mind is fragile and easily per-

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sueded towards negativity. We get thrown down a lot in our practice. But then what happens? We get up. Pretty simple. It makes the body strong, and even more importantly, it makes the spirit resilient.

It's hard to see a gift in this pandemic. I hope that we return to some kind of normal soon and practice in the dojo resumes again. But, if nothing else, this past year has given me a palpable feeling of the day I will stop training and hang up my gi. It makes me sad to think about it, but I also know that on that day, I will be filled with gratitude. I know, because I already am. ○

## Synonyms for Egypt

by Eric Soroker

Many years ago I had the opportunity to observe a Torah being created—a laborious practice that has not changed in thousands of years. The Torah is considered to be God's direct communication through the written word. Sitting with a small group of people, we observed the rabbi painstakingly work on a small portion of the year-long project. Hunched and rarely looking up, he gave us a meandering, though passionate, lecture as he scribed. I could not help but notice how similar the experience felt to a sesshin Teisho—including the sore back and legs.

The rabbi asked us, if you could boil down the entire contents of the



Sensei and Eric working on the dojo filter project

Torah into one word what would it be? After an uncomfortably long silence I called out “Love” (interestingly enough at exactly the same moment someone else blurted out “revenge”). No, he shouted. It is “Egypt”. I sat there slightly dumbfounded and more than slightly annoyed. Internally, I contested his claim. I might have been persuaded to accepting Israel, but Egypt? The rabbi clearly enjoyed our confusion, as he gleefully spent the remainder of the lecture explaining the connection.

He proposed that we should look upon the word “Egypt” not just as a place but also as the symbolic hub of a great wheel. All the events and insights that transpire in the Torah radiate either out from this central “Egypt” hub or back towards it. Back and forth, all these threads that makes up the universe of things. Egypt is an instrument that allows us to recognize these threads of existence and their interconnectedness. I wish I could say that I left the ceremony with some

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greater understanding of things but in reality I didn't grasp what he was saying.

Naturally, I wasn't even remotely thinking of any of this as I waited my turn to select my particular 2020 New Year's word. Patti had the collection of gray cards fanned out like a magician's card trick and I scrunched my face and narrowed my eyes in concentration. I was willing my card to somehow announce itself. I drew the card and quietly departed to a private spot on the mat.

Maybe it will be "warrior", or "explosiveness", or simply "mastery". It's funny what we think we want. Opening the card, I almost had an outburst. But then I couldn't quite settle on what kind to have. It read "Soften". I looked up at Patti to see if maybe she had rigged the deck and I half expected to see her grinning. No such luck.

This was not my first relationship with the concept of soften and what I thought it meant. Three years prior, as I was leaving the dojo, Sensei handed me a copy of an Aikido Journal magazine featuring an interview with Endo Sensei and he said he thought it would be good for me. While reading I immediately honed in on the part where Yamaguchi Sensei had told Endo Sensei he was too strong. Endo Sensei was already 4<sup>th</sup> Dan at this point. Confronting the critique, Endo Sensei basically started all over again and ultimately rediscovered Aikido. And it wasn't easy.

I discerned that Sensei must have been saying the same thing to me. Like a good student I tried right away to follow suit. Too much muscle and force. I committed to be less strong. Got it. Just like Endo Sensei I will rediscover Aikido and make a breakthrough. Having a direction, I thought the undertaking shouldn't take too long. The harsh reality set in when Sensei called me into his office a year or so later and gave me the same magazine and said that there was an article in it he wanted me to read.

I pinned the gray card onto my office bulletin board right at eye level, where it still sits today. Ok universe, I hear you and I will re-triple my efforts. I obsessively focused my attention on a very specific idea of "soft". Unwittingly, I was creating a dualistic rule for myself. I'm too strong. Strong is hard. I need to be soft.

One of the many amazing gifts of Aikido practice is the instantaneous feedback you get from daily training. I was attempting to be softer on the mat but now it seemed like my partners were responding even harder. At first I thought I was just becoming more aware of how prevalent the issue is in all of us. In reality I was being disingenuously gentle and had actually become technically ineffective. My self-created "softness" was going in a wrong direction.

To compound things, I wasn't really accepting or blending with the situation; I was just enduring. Eventually, my little charade broke down. One charming ex-

ample of this occurred at a large seminar. My partner had been executing strong atemi before every technique; one of those slightly imbalanced situations that takes advantage of uke's genuine attack. I too had feigned the same atemi but had chosen not to make contact. During the third round of their fist to my nose, I snapped. I started off my next turn as nage by smashing them in the face with the edge of my hand—hard. It was a spiteful strike that was all the more effective as my partner had assumed I would not connect.

I tried to convince myself that this was an appropriate response, but standing across from them as the snot and water poured down their face, I deeply regretted it. The rest of our training went flat and was a sort of polite non-training. I found them later and apologized for the strike but I could tell that we were still not ok. Chalk that up to a big fail.

As I continued to contemplate what it means to be soft or soften, I looked for places in my life where I already embody this state. Interestingly what came to mind were creative endeavors. When I'm making something I have an ease of being, physically and mentally. I am not slack. I am not tense. I'm fully present and energized. I am beyond confidence and reproach. It is joyful. In this place there is no hard or soft and therefore *there is no need to "soften"*.

Some insights appear like the images in a column of smoke. By

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# Effort

by Beverly Sessegolo

When I was given that small piece of paper with the word “effort”, I could not help but believe it was carefully chosen for me. This word has been the cornerstone of my personal practice. Having 3 languages which my brain struggles to discern one from the other as more dominant, the words are often lost and what remains is the meaning, the feeling it evoked and all the mental consideration which then takes me for a journey into a rabbit hole. But nothing more authentic truly remained, in the end, than the feeling. Effort encompasses the essence of the path, and every aspect of life. I spent the next few weeks reflecting on what this word meant and felt like every time I came to the dojo, after deconstructing and decluttering the mental interpretation. When practicing with my uke, it was extraordinary and quite simple to see the nature of effort, an ever-changing thing: to be intentional in positioning my feet, to be aware of my uke’s movements, to sense the tensions in my shoulders and let go, to try to move gracefully and abandon the judgement when I lacked grace. There is a feeling that accompanies this kind of effort, one that requires a willingness to sacrifice the ego for the sake of serving something of a different quality, a simpler, more spacious and quiet state. With the unique circumstances presented by the pandemic, an even more keen awareness of what form effort would take was required. It deepened the question even more. A new fire is lit. Perhaps now, my effort is to rekindle this fire every day as our practice takes different forms. Perhaps my effort now is to take responsibility for the role I play in my beautiful dojo community and as far as the ripple may extend in the art of Aikido. ○

## *A flash of sanity*

The momentary realization that there is no need to come to certain conclusions about persons, events, conflicts, trends, even trends toward evil and disaster, as if from day-to-day, and even from moment to moment, I had to know and declare (at least to myself) that this is so and so, this is good, this is bad. Either we are heading for a new era or we are heading for destruction.

What do such judgments mean? Little or nothing. Things are as they are in an immense whole of which I am a part and which I cannot pretend to grasp. To say I grasp it is immediately to put myself in a false position, as if I were ‘outside’ it. Whereas to be ‘in’ it is to seek truth in my own life and action, moving where movement is possible and keeping still when movement is unnecessary.

*Thomas Merton*

*E. Soroker, continued from page 5*

the time you identify and name the shape it has changed into something else. It seems so simple; I just need to make a bridge from one art I already own over to my art of Aikido. Truthfully they are the same anyways, of the same source. I can taste the importance of this but it also seems tenuous to hold.

I wish I could detail how I applied this new perception and how it worked out for me but this is when COVID-19 happened and training, as we knew it, stopped. How difficult it is that we haven’t practiced body arts for almost an entire year. My particular New Year’s word has arrived again to remind me to “soften” my views as to what constitutes training. To soften my opinions on what are my training goals. To soften what I thought was my role in the world of Aikido. And to soften my vision of what the future holds.

It was while trying to draw a circle around these personal experiences that I realized what the rabbi was saying all those years ago. Look upon the word “soften” not just as a concept but also as the symbolic hub of a great wheel. All the events and insights that transpire radiate either out from this hub or back towards it. Back and forth, all these threads that makes up the universe of things. “Soften” is an instrument that allows us to recognize these threads of existence and their interconnectedness. Feel free to insert your own particular 2020 New Year’s word into this formula. I guarantee it will work. ○

# Trust

by Karl Bernhardt

Words have power. Words convey our thoughts and make them tangible. They affect us, and what we say matters. What we think and feel we attempt to capture and convey with the limits of our words. I find there are times when words fall short.

“Trust in the form.” Sensei teaches us that within the form there is a freedom only trust can reveal. There is much more to learn and discover in that truth than words can translate. There is a structure in trusting that the “form” holds us perfectly and securely. We can see it, but not always. We sense it when our movements are just right. More often, we can only trust that the form is guiding us and our part is to remain faithful to it in our own practice. Having said that, allow me to share just a small part of my journey with the word “Trust.”

Patti Sensei gave us each a word to think about last year. There seemed to be no particular task to it, just a word to consider in the coming year ahead as a kind of walking meditation or a point of reflection. Simple enough at first, but in time the deeper meaning of things, that often hide in plain sight, begin to reveal themselves.

In the context of practice is where the word “Trust” first began to tease at my mind a bit. On the mat, in the dojo, practicing Aikido is a place and a moment that our trust for one another abounds. Uke trusts nage and nage trusts uke. It is not often spoken and yet under-

stood, that we must allow ourselves to commit fully to the actions we take without fear and without recklessness. We trust, that each one of us is acting from a place of honesty and care. We seek a harmony between one another and ultimately, to share a genuine love for humanity with one another. That is a lot of trust to enter into as we quietly rei before class.

Before long, the time comes to bow again and walk out the door to encounter and engage with the rest of the world. A world that often works to gain our trust simply to exploit it. It seems that with few exceptions, trust is something that we take part in creating with others. We build it and care for it. We share it and give it. We also receive it and endeavor to keep it. We value it tremendously. We depend on it, consciously or not. Trust can be a fortress of strength and yet so fragile it can shatter like glass.

Trust leaves us entirely vulnerable and yet equally protected. Trust appears to exist between two worlds, one of stone and steel, the other as frail as a flower. Trust can be tested, and perhaps should be, for once it is broken, it is never easily repaired.

Trust is somewhat of a third part between two things, an invisible thread that ties us to our truth, to our commitments, our promise, whatever that may be. We are never alone in trust, but rather, a part of it. When we trust, we are a part of something else. Especially when we must trust in ourselves, because it is then between our word and our deeds, our actions and our intentions. Trust lies between our best and less than best selves, and from ourselves, we cannot escape.

There are of course countless examples of trust in our lives every day. We trust that the sun will

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Karl, Sensei, and Jennifer set up mats in the parking lot

# Silence

by Jennifer Saltmarsh

I've been thinking about it for a year now. Silence is the absence of sound. Life isn't silent. So maybe death is silence.

Silence can be relative. The stillness of a sit. The feeling of physical space. Even overwhelming noise creates a kind of silence where nothing else can be heard.

Silence is deafness. Imagine there are other senses we don't have organs to observe. To the stimuli we are unaware of, we live in utter silence.

Silence the verb is another thing entirely.

I might need another year for that. ○

# The Dojo

by Erich Bass

"That is a much nicer version of the dojo," Sarah said commenting on the summer picture of the dojo I had set as my virtual background for our Zoom zazen session. Maybe it was my oppositional defiance, or my love of the cooler temperatures in the dojo regardless, my immediate thought was, "The dojo is always the same." That is one of the appeals of the dojo, the unchanging sea of tatami, the simple weapons, and ever shortening list of techniques.

This seemingly simple structure allows for a depth of self-reflection that is rare to find. The perceived changes in the dojo are changes in one's self. It is much easier to place the blame for the negative moments elsewhere and claim the triumphs for yourself. However, the dojo has no regard for either. It is the clearest reflecting pool. Showing you who, what, and where you are both mentally and physically. Therein lies the challenge, going, looking, and addressing what you see.

"The dojo never lies to you. You can be told you are great or awful. The dojo will always be honest with you, occasionally even curt. The dojo is the great reference point, the all-knowing perspective giver. Always there like a beacon in the pitch black. The dojo never freaks out or runs away. On a given day training may feel difficult or easy, but tatami will support you just the same." —An adapted excerpt of Henry Rollins, "The Iron" ○

*"The Iron never lies to you. You can walk outside and listen to all kinds of talk, get told that you're a god or a total bastard. The Iron will always kick you the real deal. The Iron is the great reference point, the all-knowing perspective giver. Always there like a beacon in the pitch black. I have found the Iron to be my greatest friend. It never freaks out on me, never runs. Friends may come and go. But two hundred pounds is always two hundred pounds."*

K. Bernhardt, continued from page 7

rise tomorrow and that the world will keep on turning. We trust that the cars on the highway will stay in their lanes. We trust that we made the right decision, and that you and I both, are doing the right thing when we are out of the others sight.

The word trust carries with it much weight and has many attachments. It ties and binds. "In God We Trust" is an important enough idea that we print it on our currency, for what it's worth. Trust connects us to hope, truth, faith, love, confidence and reliance and the dangers of disappointment in any one of them falling apart. It is a word of great power not because of all the things we can think to say about it, but because of all things that we cannot completely express. It can be a calculated assumption, a mathematician's proof, a leap of faith, or all that we're left but to do. Perhaps there is a moment, I know there is for me, a moment when our words and our knowing fail us, and in those moments we trust, not blindly, but wisely and confidently. In those moments, I for one, will continue to "Trust" in the form. ○

**"The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."**

Nelson Mandela

# Zazen, Nihilism and The Collapse of the Cosmos

by Michael Leaver

Like most of you, when I sit zazen, I contemplate emptiness. I count to ten. I relax my mind and try to think nothing at all. I count to ten, again.

There's a lot of counting.

This is one of many meditation methods, but it's the one I was taught and the one I've found the most interesting to explore.

During meditation, I've noticed two "voices" in my mind. The first voice is my conscious mind—we all know it—the internal monologue, the one I usually think of when I think of "me". I call it the "Upper" mind.

The Upper mind is the decision-maker, the thinker, the Cortex; loud and direct, calling the shots, steering the ship of my actions and my life. It's booming and hard to ignore, which is probably a good thing, when a conscientious decision needs to be made or the bills to be paid.

It is the voice in my mind that counts to ten during zazen—over and over. But on a good day, when I'm not too distractible, the Upper voice can be lulled—or at least occupied—by the counting, until it becomes like the sound of a machine in the distance: always there, but able to be ignored.

The second voice is opposite: quiet and elusive, and when the loud voice is working, the soft

voice is completely drowned out. Only sometimes the loud voice will be silent enough for me to notice the quiet voice: during a walk in the woods, intuitive thoughts during a morning shower, moments of artistic inspiration, and of course, during meditation.

During meditation, I'm surprised by how active the Lower voice is. While the loud Upper voice is busy counting, the quiet voice will flit from one distraction to another. I try to observe the thoughts and let them flow past, like sticks on a stream, or to silence them completely, but the quiet voice is much harder to control than the other. If I can ever let go enough that it is silent, it is for such a brief moment that it's back again before the next breath.

Although this voice is quiet, it is not subtle. It is not civilized and self-censoring like the Upper, but obvious, intense and passionate. In quiet moments of meditation, the Lower voice puts any basic thought it has right in the forefront of the mind. Sometimes profound, sometimes silly—and very often inconsequential—the Lower voice is constantly going. Silencing this voice is far more difficult.

The Lower reminds me of an embarrassing mistake I made years ago, and for a moment I'm cringing at my past blunder. A moment later, it may whisper an inspiration for the next painting idea. This is why, at home, I sometimes keep a notebook nearby to jot down a particularly good

idea for later, and then let it go. It can be very intuitive when it wants to be.

All this time, I breathe and the Upper voice counts "one, two, three."

Another time, it makes some insightful connection about what a family member said at dinner and what perhaps they'd actually meant, and maybe I should call my sister and make sure she's—stop it. "...**Four, five**".

Sometimes it recalls some random fact like, "Didn't I read somewhere that there were potentially six thousand rats on the Titanic even though it was only in service for 13 days when it sank?" and maybe I should look that up and—"...**Six. For real, this time, I'm gonna quiet my mind. Sev-**" sssshhhh...

"But isn't it kinda crazy that there's this giant, bright, burning ball in the sky at all times and we're just never supposed to look at it?" —"**-en. ...Almost. Eight. Nine.**"

It's an exercise. I get better at it with practice, but I can see it is still a very long road for me before I'm anywhere near emptiness.

"**Eleven.**" Damnit.

Since the Lower voice doesn't mince words or sugar coat ideas, it shares the highest highs and the lowest lows vividly and intensely. I think this is because, when the mind is relaxed, those most extreme and rogue thoughts—the ones we've learned from society to tuck away in the recesses,

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all reigned in and caged up, the thoughts from the far opposite ends of the spectrum—are free to come out: “One day you’re going to die,” it says. “One day, that giant burning ball in the sky will swallow the earth and everything you’ve ever loved. One day, the entire universe will cool and die, and nothing can ever be or happen, ever again.” I think meditation opens up our minds and lets these otherwise suppressed thoughts rise to the surface.

I’ve cried during zazen, when this hopelessness descends on me.

We all know that we’re mortal, but sometimes mortality seems like such a far-away thing that it’s easy to ignore in our daily lives. Mortality is usually just an idea for later. Perhaps humans even evolved to ignore our mortality as a coping mechanism or as a behavioral influence in mate selection—which may be why young people are more likely to take risky behavior. But if we truly understood that our days are numbered, I think we would behave quite differently. We wouldn’t waste time waiting for opportunities, or daydreaming about our goals. If we knew—not feared, but understood—that someday we will die, we would take action sooner, we would drink deeper and fully suck the marrow out of life.

We’ve all seen people who have done exactly this. I wish I could ask them about their motivations. Is a great artist simply driven by the love of their craft or the spark



Outdoor laido practice by the lavender

of the creative process? Or sometimes, are they motivated to create something that lasts long after they do? Is their work intended to immortalize the subject or perhaps even its creator? Like the Medici family of Florence who had themselves painted into religious scenes, and many of those pieces still hang in churches today. Or in the sonnet, “So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee” immortalizing whoever he thought was more lovely than a summer’s day. We want to be remembered.

I’ve felt it too. I’ve imagined my painting hanging in a museum centuries after I’m gone, and it’s a pleasing thought: to have contributed to the field of art I love so much and to be remembered in it. It has a nice ring to it, and I know a young artist who specifically told me he wants to “win” and be immortalized on the walls of museums. When I thought about it later, if that’s his biggest motiva-

tion, isn’t it a meaningless one? For even if it happens, he won’t be around to enjoy it, or to even know if he succeeded.

It’s well known that even the Earth is temporary. In eight billion years, the sun will have fused all its hydrogen and grown to engulf the orbits of all the inner planets before shedding its outer layers into a nebula and revealing a white dwarf star.

Unless humankind has expanded to other planets or solar systems, all of planet Earth, its inhabitants and everything we’ve ever made or done will be destroyed. Humanity must save itself and carry with us our greatest achievements, our most sacred literature, art, music—and as many people as possible—in a galactic ark that could save the population. This is clearly all science fiction for now, but perhaps someday this is how life as we know it will save itself from destruction. I feel a mild peace knowing this

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# Listen

by Cathy Thomas

So on December 2019, Patti offered everyone a folded, sage green card that had a single word on it (I think it was a single word on each card). For lack of an official name, I call it the Word on the Card exercise.

I wasn't there for the original explanation of what these cards were all about, if there was one. All I got was something to the tune of—there's a word on your card. You may choose to tell someone or keep it to yourself. It may have immediate meaning to you or not. Something for you to think about for the next year—something, something, something.

She didn't exactly give them out knowing each word the person would get. In fact, I think part of the thing was that she didn't know—whatever. Each card was folded in half, so you couldn't tell what was written on it. Each person got to pick one card from many. All except me.

You see, I got the last card.

First thought—everyone else got to choose their card and I was somehow coerced into having this card. I am now bound to this sage green-colored card because I was last in line. All those happy faces were opening up their lovely cards that they chose and nodding, frowning, smiling, looking around sheepishly—doing the dance. It's that thing of when they ask for volunteers and everyone else takes a step back and you're left standing in there. You were “volunteered”.

I thumbed open the card. There

was one word written there—Listen.

You see, irony is a dish best served sideways—slapped at you like a wet fish handshake. Most of you who know me likely also know this about me—I talk more than I listen. I talk like my story is the most important, like my joke is funniest, like I have some sort of compulsion to vomit information on you in an effort to show you how intelligent I am. It's all true and it's an old tragedy that I'm in therapy for and you are all spot-on right.

What's your favorite flavor of Pop-Tart? Struggle-berry.

I was going to talk here about my experience with “The Purge” in some detail and how bad 2020 was, but I think that's beaten to a pulp. Everyone is suffering, right? So I won't make you suffer through my suffering like it's some big deal. I will say this—I used to be able to just write these articles for Enso with some thought, but mostly little effort because ideas just flowed. But as I write this now, I notice that the words that used to come so easily to me are labored, like creativity has been clipped by isolation.

At this point, solitary confinement is my own fault really. Regardless, why do I talk-talk and not listen-listen? The truth of it is that like any of you, I want to fit in, to contribute. However, socialization was never my strong suit. Overkill and I are very closely related. An unfortunate and shallow gene pool.

And we are social animals,

aren't we? I read somewhere that the little interactions that we would have with the checkout person at the grocery store, with the person who gives you your coffee, with the ticket taker at the movies, with the people you see on the sidewalks and say hello to—that the lack of these interactions have a profound negative effect on your psyche. People's actual smiles I have seen in the past year—I can count on less than ten fingers with no exaggeration. I know that part of that is that their masks are hiding their smiles. I also think that part of that could be that the way life has changed is hiding their smiles. How profound.

It was a Tuesday that I was sitting at my desk when my boss called me and said we were to work from home until further notice. They thought it would be a few weeks, a month maybe. I took the essentials, thinking I would be allowed back to work at my desk relatively soon—or to at least come back to collect my belongings. It's been nearly a year since they sent us home that day. The sage green card everyone “volunteered” to me that I mentioned at the beginning—I left that card with the one word on my desk. I wish I had it with me. Not because of the word written on the card, mind you. I remember the word. But because it is a physical manifestation of the voices of all of you. And because it was grounding.

And maybe that was the intent of the Word on the Card exercise after all. ○

# A Year in Pandemic



The computer became a fixture in the dojo. Patti and Lily Zoom a Feldenkrais class with David Zemach-Bersin



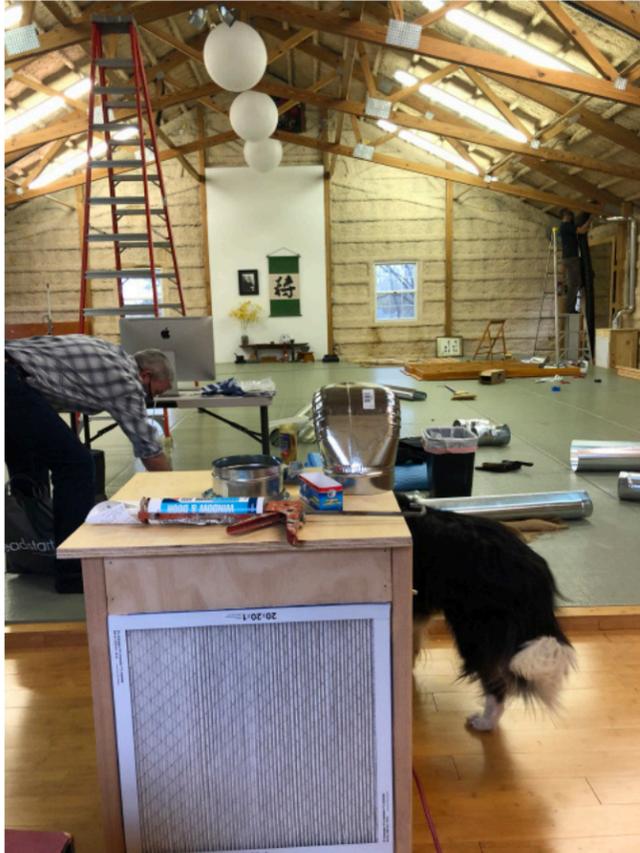
Parking lot Zazen



Setting up for a socially distanced movie night



Mystery Instructor



Building the filters trashed the dojo



How many Aikidoists does it take...



Birthdays happen pandemic or not

# Get Rhythm

by Aaron Goldfinger

The first (and only) Enso article I wrote discussed the rhythm of our lives. We wake up, go to work, go to the dojo, etc. It sounds boring on the one hand, but it can be beautiful if you can see through the minutia, and find the beat and let the rhythm get you.

When I joined the dojo in early 2010, I managed to get a rhythm going. Three days a week, for the most part was all I could commit. But I was able to make it happen. Even that was difficult many times but I wanted to keep the rhythm going. And I kept it going even during times when I probably shouldn't have. Then due to unforeseen family issues, the rhythm was broken.

I wrote that first Enso article in 2011. Lately I have been wondering, what if you can't find the rhythm again? It's been two years since I stepped onto a mat to train. First, I stopped to help with family issues and a new job. Then COVID-19 came along. The last time I was at the dojo was to talk with Sensei about taking a break.

Aikido for me has been a double edge sword—without it, I wouldn't have the skills needed to deal with some of the challenges I have faced. But cultivating it in the dojo requires time that I don't have. Or a sacrifice with serious consequen-

es. Sensei has spoken about how the pandemic has just given us a new form of practice. He is right. I believe it. But I'm missing rhythm. Or maybe the rhythm is just muffled and more difficult to feel. Or maybe the orchestra is still playing and I can't catch up and find where we are in the sheet music. Anyway, without the rhythm, there is no feeling. It's lifeless.

When I was in my training rhythm, when I was feeling good, I felt like a kid on the mat. Rolling around. Flying through the air. Even the sweaty, disgusting August evenings felt amazing. What a feeling! But then there are those crappy days when your entire body seems out of sync with your brain. I realized that both the highs and lows just become part of the rhythm.

My driveway is pretty large but I refuse to get a snow blower. I choose to shovel it by hand, no matter how deep the snow. It seems like an enormous undertaking. So you just take it one scoop at a time. This scoop. Then this scoop. Listening to the scraping of the shovel against the blacktop. I imagine the sound of the water fountain in the final scene in Kill Bill when Oren Ishii faces the Bride. So I just let the rhythm carry me through. When I was younger I would have tried to speed shovel my way through. Now that

I am older I know to pace myself. Likely a technique I learned from Birankai seminars and training through oppressive summers on the top floor of the barn at Peace Valley Lavender Farm. The ability to pace myself requires me to find that rhythm.

At this time in my life I am constantly spread too thin. Everything always seems to be accomplished just in the nick of time. Work. Family. It's the randori of life. No time to focus too long on any one thing. Train your body to respond and move on. But that's the thing, even when the pressure is on there is still a beat. It's just more difficult to find it because there is so much noise that needs to be filtered out. But it's there. And it can carry you through the toughest moments if you can find it.

I recently told Sensei that I imagine the day when our pandemic fattened bodies stuff ourselves into our gis. Uke will wrap their fingers around their nage's pudgy wrists and we'll wrestle each other to the ground. After five minutes we'll be out of breath and exhausted. We'll be a hot mess and it will feel amazing. We're going to get the band back together and rock the dojo. How is this for a cliché. The other day my daughter opened a fortune cookie. It read, "The cure for grief is motion." All I can say is "Let's dance." ○

**"To begin with, it seems like an effort to keep returning to the welcoming presence, but at some point, it is so natural that it seems to require an effort to leave it. It feels like home. We no longer feel that we need to be entertained." *Francis Lucille***

# Showing Up

by Sebastian Brown

Upon receiving our “words” for 2020, there were satellite conversations occurring all around as people had started processing what they meant. As I looked down at mine, it said simply “Show up”. Whereas others required some deciphering, translating or perhaps inspired some immediate discussion, mine was thrust back in my pocket for further digestion. This phrase embodied one concept I tried implementing for the tumultuous year that followed. Although basic in its directness, this “word” cuts as deeply as the sword and has served as an apt koan that has continued in my life.

For me, it was obvious that to fully embrace the multitude of the meaning behind “showing up”, I had to take it beyond its superficiality. Pertaining to my Aikido practice, it clearly means more than just coming to the dojo, something

I have been able to do with great consistency, until this year. As Covid-19 erupted, with classes temporarily closed per public health requirements, suddenly even the easiest interpretation of my word was seemingly in jeopardy: how to show up when there is nowhere to show up to?

As we transitioned to remote Zoom sessions, while training resumed, it lacked the stimulating interactivity of in-person. It goes without saying how much I love practicing with other people: I thrive off of dynamic energy. From feeling the initial contact/connection to the technique going through my body all the way to the pin—there’s nothing else like it. It cannot be properly simulated alone. After one down-trodden Zoom session where I was particularly frustrated and isolated, I sat down and thought: am I showing up? If I go through the motions for an hour, that’s not really benefiting myself or anything. This moti-

vated me to examine in what other areas of life I could apply this.

After a short reprieve from work as humanity grappled with understanding Covid-19’s culture, my schedule was chaotically upended from being unemployed to back to working six day 50+ hour weeks. As a result, my attendance suffered. Never before had my training been a casualty of my profession. For years I maintained jobs that enabled my practice. This was my introduction to the service industry and it quickly occurred to me that I was no longer the primary object in determining how my day went. My daily routine of leaving abruptly at 5 pm to attend 6 pm classes was gone.

As I turned my attention back to my word, I realized that if I could not “show up” for class, then I had a responsibility to “show up” in other areas of my life. I took it as an opportunity to apply this mentality in my work, and rather than be disgruntled at the lack of Aikido, I looked for it in the daily grind that presented itself. I started focusing on my hara when using shovels and pitchforks, practicing knee walking when weeding, and my breathing when driving in the truck to and from job sites. This thread may seem tenuous however this is the consistent, persistent message that Sensei reiterates to us in taking what we learn on the mat, internalizing it and then broadcasting it out to the world.

To me, showing up means being engaged. Not just merely be-



Happy crowd, weapons training

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The most famous of all zen gardens in Kyoto is Ryuanji, built in the late 15th century. In the garden are fifteen stones of different sizes, composed of five groups: one group of five stones, two groups of three, and two groups of two stones. But you can only ever see fourteen stones from any vantage point. You can never see all fifteen stones at once just as you can never fully see yourself. It is said that the number fifteen represents perfection, but being unable to see the last stone, indicates that it is an impossibility. It makes you realize to be thankful for yourself as you are.

## Humility

by Kim O'Malley

*"I don't think much of myself, but it's all I think about."*

I remember first reading the card Patti handed out at the start of 2020. The shock—how fitting. The moment I saw my word, I knew it was something I always struggled with, and I was determined to get busy, be better, and work harder on myself. However, when I sat down to properly define it, I didn't feel as though its true meaning was conveyed through the dictionary definition. I also latently knew it wasn't as simple as an antidote to selfishness; however, there was no other starting point for me.

In order to combat my own self-importance, I realized I needed to shut down my thoughts of jealousy and yearning. These were caused

by my insecurities, which made me innately self-aware, needing to feel validated. All. The. Time. In order to feel the least bit adequate, I first had to be seen. Yet my shyness and introversion prevented me from ever wanting to be put on display. It's hard to admit, but I've always felt invisible—as if the moment I stopped thinking about myself, I'd be forgotten by everyone. Thoughts like—when I say something, does anyone listen? I often feel like the background in a room—my words just somber music playing in a café. And because of that, I've always battled with envying others my whole life.

If I don't stand out—if I'm not flamboyant, I'll just vanish. Even if it goes against my timid nature, I try to speak out even if I'm not heard. I try really hard to find the spotlight for myself to check in and see if maybe I can shine for a mo-

ment too. I really want to shine. I really want to be something. I want to be loved by the people I love. I try to approach every moment with an, "I'M HERE!!" But where is the humility in that? Pushing through and breaking through the stigma I have involves thinking of myself for myself when others won't or don't remember to. Will I disappear? Will everything I've worked on become meaningless if I let myself go? How can I discover humility in this—do I stop having a need to be validated altogether? Will I be able to achieve anything, including my own happiness, by eradicating that desire to be seen? How will I become anything if my self-encouragement is dropped? Or is there a fine line between having humility and still maintaining self-worth that will keep me happy? In this life, we at least need to be happy, otherwise,

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what's the point of living?

I'm not the best at being a person, especially around other people. I become nervous to speak up, fearing I'll say the wrong thing or not represent myself well when I do. If I had humility, would that still happen? I always feel judged, and I'm fully aware that even more judging happens by me before the words or actions even enter the world. I first have to filter myself based on my assumptions and my opinion of how I deem I should look and act around others, and I've been wrong...a lot.

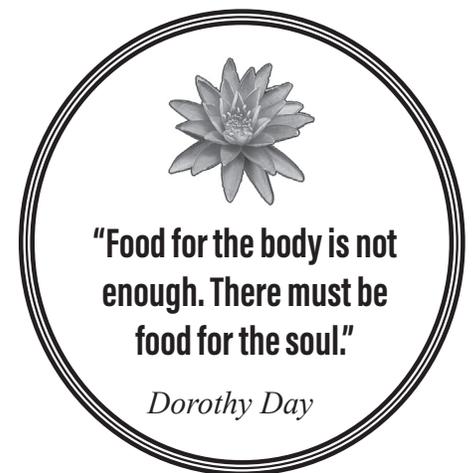
At the end of the day, it's just me wanting to not make too many mistakes and ruin my relationships with the people I love. Any self-satisfaction comes from the reflection of other's acceptance and approval of me. At Garrison once, Sensei quoted, "A good general receives no applause." I hate this passionately because I feel it's similar to asking "If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around, does it make a sound?" Tell me, who determines if the general is good? Who is the one saying they're good—theirself or the observer/s? If there's no one around to clap or appreciate the general, can they even be defined as good? Yet the point is that the general didn't do it for *anyone's* acceptance or for their approval or attention. That's the takeaway. It's that it doesn't matter if they decide themselves they are good or if others do—it takes personalization out of the equation entirely and just simply looks at what they accomplished.

Going through the quarantine

with these thoughts flitting around in my head along with my quarter-life crisis, made me confused, especially when I was already trying to rediscover myself and my purpose. I started to not only doubt myself but also found my self-hate had become uncomfortable—the me that wanted to be seen—I saw it clearly and crushed it. And I don't know if this was done unconsciously, but I stopped wanting to appear in front of other people because I didn't want to try so hard anymore to be perfect. Doing this was way too easy, especially with social distancing. I wanted to forget myself—not even be around anyone. In going that far, I eventually realized this wasn't *it*. No, humility was exactly *that*—the unknowing oblivion. In the same realization, I discovered humility as an unseen truth I could never know and never imagine—the embodiment of beginner's mind—the arrival of never fully knowing the self.

Humility is beginner's mind in how we engage with the truth in the world, rather than being stuck worrying about our own view of self-worth. Yet it also isn't moving past the self either; it is simply accepting the ever-changing you. In always trying to be better than the impoverished way I saw myself, I ended up obscuring the beauty of my own truth—blind to the fear of no longer being loved or seen. I arrived at a place where I felt a need to relinquish that control, trusting others would see it for themselves—would seek to include me in their lives. Being unattached to my own con-

clusions and leaving that space to learn is how I see humility. If we can't detach from our own truths, we can't hear the world speak—we can't know that there's always a fifteenth stone. ○



S. Brown, continued from page 15

ing there and arriving on time for whatever it is. It means if I'm spectating, actively spectating. If I'm talking on the phone, being with the person on the phone rather than multi-tasking. Being earnest in what I'm doing moment-moment; this is how showing up evolved. Not just going into work but going into work energized and committing to making it productive.

I have trained many hours, but what significance were those if not properly engaged? Admittedly, I have dozed through zazen, suffered through momentary drifts of consciousness mid-demonstration and spent part of iaido class wondering when it was going to end. The best we can all do starts with emphasizing "showing up" and really being engaged with whatever we're doing, anytime and all the time. ○

is so far in the future that perhaps options may be available by then to carry on all that we know. But even this solution is futile.

It is known by cosmologists that the universe is expanding. Distant galaxies we see are all travelling away from us, and the farther they are from us, the faster they are receding. The universe will not fall back in on itself, crunch and reemerge. It will grow faster until space is expanding faster than the speed of light. Distant galaxies will become invisible. Distant stars will disappear. They will still be out there, but their light will never reach us, and ours will never reach them. The sky will become black only except for the stars of our own galaxy.

As the universe expands, it will also cool. Over the next  $10^{106}$  years, all the energy in the universe will disperse and fade into the inevitable heat-death of the universe. Stars will flicker out. Whatever life remains will huddle on planets or space-stations around the last remaining red stars, that burn the longest, but also the coldest. Eventually all remaining energy will be spent, and all potential activity in the universe will be nonexistent. There will be no one left to watch as the final chemical reactions of the universe sizzle out.

Everything that could happen will have either happened already or never at all.

This is my interpretation of Nietzsche's "Void". This is my

Abyss, and when I gaze into it, I feel the fear and meaninglessness of our short existence.

Throughout history, we've found peace and meaning through our stories and traditions. Religions gave us an external validation for everything from moral values to existential meaning and told us that if we do good deeds, believe this tenet, perform this ceremony, we will be rewarded and extended past the inevitable end of our world to carry on in paradise. We were taught that without the external source of meaning, or even an objective morality rooted in nature, humanity would be left with nothing but his drives and instincts to decide how to act. Reason would be downgraded to a tool and morality whittled down to a matter of preference. Directionless: the blind leading the blind.

Honesty demands that we face the absurdity of our existence, accept our eventual demise, and dismiss religion and metaphysics as happy hedges against death. The mature person accepts this and slogs through anyway, manufacturing meaning through projects chosen for their own reason—or no reason at all. They must provide their own reason for living and for the particular life they choose.

In choosing for ourselves how we live, and taking action for the change we can affect in the world, we move the source of meaning from the external and make it internal. Choosing for ourselves who we will help—who we will

love—we take ownership and responsibility for our own lives and our own meaning. We discover that to be finite and time-bound is no cosmic disaster but simply the character of our life in the world. The philosophy of nihilism can help us to acknowledge and accept our finite state by forcing us to give up the age-old dream of attaining a God's-eye view of things. It's not about giving up. It's about finding fullness through emptiness, meaning from the meaningless.

Nihilism and Zen go well together.

I won't be here, the quiet voice reminds me, but someday—in about four billion years—our Milky Way galaxy and the Andromeda galaxy are coursed to collide, and what a sight that will be! The night sky will be a tie-dye of billions of stars, swirling and churning too slow to perceive, but a marvel to look at. And for those viewers here, perfectly safe for life on earth. So why fret only for the day the last stars will go out, when there will be such a spectacle to see all those stars while they last?

It says, don't forget that the moon's orbit is receding, and in about 600 million years, the moon will no longer size up to the sun from our perspective enough to make solar eclipses. It was a cosmological fluke we got to see them at all. But wasn't it spectacular?

Niagra Falls, eroding about an inch every year, will be gone by 52,000 A.D, having pushed all the

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# Empathy

by Roman Lowen

In the beginning of last year, Patti Sensei gave us each a word to ponder, mine was Empathy, been carrying it around ever since.

At first, I mistakenly thought my word was Entomology, the branch of zoology concerned with the study of insects, what's bugging her, I wondered, confused.

Perhaps it was Empire, archaic absolute control over a person or group. Fitting, but not it. Entropy—that's it, lack of order or predictability; gradual decline into disorder, that may be true, but they don't know that. Besides the selected words were given randomly. Neither was it Endoscopy, Ebony or Ivory.

I found the note card, the word was EMPATHY

At first I was OK with Empathy, thinking it was about people having empathy for me and my lot in life. NO, it was the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

I was supposed to give a Shit about You, the other!?

Sorry, I'm busy with my own shit...but OK, let's give this a try.

Turns out other people have hopes and dreams and fears and all sorts of problems, as well as really cool parts to them...Who knew?!

I like people.

I'm a big picture guy, meaning I love everybody, but often I just don't want to deal with other people's problems, don't even want to hear about it. It's easy to have Empathy when in a good mood, but when agitated, it's hard.

It's obvious, I have to work on this.... Is that the reason this word was gifted to me?

A turtle, I am, so don't expect good results overnight. I am sincere however, I'm working on it.

I'm taking it to heart.

I was caught off guard, the other day, when I saw that someone had attached plastic flowers and a placard, with a Cross on it that said "*Billy 30 years*" at the end of our driveway.

Agitated, I felt strangely violated and noticed myself instinctively ripping them off, taking them to the back of the house, putting them on top of the trash can, but not in it, feeling something unfinished.

My neighbor Jack, who pissed me off recently by unfurling a large *T...P* banner in his yard, needed a ride to the doctors. He is 90 years old, doesn't drive anymore and takes care of his wife, who he says is losing it.

I agreed to help. I love my neighbor (it's a commandment not a suggestion)

Double masked and the window partially opened, we were on our way. I took the opportunity to ask him why someone would attach plastic flowers and that note to my Utility pole.

Jack remembered that a kid, not sure if he was wearing a helmet, came around the bend and crashed his motorcycle and split his head open. Neighbor Debbie had remarked, "Yeah, his brains were all over the road."

Later, after I dropped Jack off, I noticed myself doing a bee-line to the trash cans, gently picking up the flowers and the love note and returning them, doing my best to remount them adding a silent prayer, and crying in solidarity with the parents.

No doubt, my Empathy lacks development, I promise you that I'm working on it.

Clearly. We're in. This. Thing. Together.

Are ya feelin me? ○



# Fudoshin

by Laura Esposito



SCULPTURE OF FUDO MYOO / SHOSANJI TEMPLE, JAPAN

*“Mental calmness, not skill, is the sign of a mature samurai.”*

*-Tsukahara Bokuden,  
Japanese swordsman*

## FUDOSHIN & THE SPIRITS OF BUDO

As I reflect on my word, “Fudoshin”, I can’t help but think of the path I’ve traveled and the five spirits of Budo. My feeling is that these spirits live in all of us, and our training can help to strengthen, practice, or uncover them. Fudoshin, or imperturbability, is something I’ve always struggled to uncover within myself, whether I knew it or not. Internal conflicts like anxiety, fear, and doubt create a cloud which can make any spirit hard to reach; but it’s the small moments where I have tasted or attained this strength in myself that let me know it’s always there no matter the storm.

**Shoshin (Beginner’s Mind):** The mind of a beginner is immaculate and open to processing. Every new knowledge acquired is

valuable because a beginner has no or little prior knowledge. The mind is hungry for information and receives the information as it is (without applying any filter). In this state of mind, the learning process is most active. In short, Shoshin can be defined as a desire to learn new knowledge, regardless of one’s experience in that field. The more knowledge you acquire, the harder it can be to see with an unfiltered beginner’s mind; the harder it can be to let go of the attachment to the knowledge in order to reach your Shoshin spirit.

**Zanshin (Remaining Mind):** You’re always ready to react, in a state of relaxed alertness; ready to do what is needed when it’s needed. This spirit connects you to the awareness of your environment and surroundings. It is the connection between nage and uke before, during, and after a technique.

**Mushin (Empty Mind):** Mushin is a state of mind free of all emotions and thoughts. Without ego or judgment. In this state, the mind is clear and ready. During training, Mushin ensures that new information is obtained quickly and without getting stuck. On the battlefield, Mushin allows the immediate application of combat techniques without the influence of any thought. The Mushin situation is often described by the still water metaphor. Our reflection on still water is instant and error-free. However, a ripple (thought) in water will eliminate this smoothness. For me, Mushin usually showed up at seminars and summer camp. It

was like being in battle: focused, open, giving over to what comes. At my first summer camp, after a couple of days, I was amazed to find that I could stretch completely flat on the ground with my legs outstretched: like my whole body had surrendered.

**Fudoshin (Immovable Mind):** Composure under pressure. Three years ago my dad had a stroke and I suddenly found myself as his sole caretaker: I would sit with him and fill out necessary paperwork and talk with doctors, nurses, and therapists to make necessary decisions. I made him workbooks to remember his family members’ names and relationships, and how to read a clock and count money. It really wasn’t easy. One day, I was touring a nursing home where he would be moved to, answering questions, and filling out paperwork when the woman giving me the tour finally said “You are being so calm about this. If I were in your position, I would be a wreck.” Immediately, I realized it was my Aikido training in action, but I didn’t spend a second thought there, I kept my mind moving and didn’t allow it to stop in any one place.

Fudoshin is the manifestation of fortitude (courage in pain or adversity), and has its origins in the guardian deity, Fudo Myoo, the war god in Japanese Buddhism. He converts anger into compassion and cuts the ties of negative feelings and demons to liberate us from suffering through self-control. The Fudoshin spirit rep-

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resents the highest level of focus. In the case of Fudoshin, the mind is not affected by any external factors and cannot be stopped on the way to its destination. The person is completely confident and has no fear in his soul. "It receives and yields lightly, grounds to the earth, and reflects aggression back to the source." (*senshin-mind.blogspot.com*) There have been moments on the mat where my partner has been worked up, frantically going at me, and somehow I was able to use their energy to ground myself and become more calm in order to deflect their wildness.

Takuan, the Zen buddhist, said "Completely forget about the mind and you will do all things well." Fudoshin spirit is thinking in a way where there is not the slightest doubt you will not succeed. It is hard only because your mind is fighting an internal battle. You can talk in your head and try to reason all you want. The only solution is action, and a firm 'no' right away. Don't even let your brain try to argue with you. As soon as you've mentally allowed it to take root, it will be stubborn. From day one on my Aikido journey, I began building Fudoshin and I didn't even know it. I made a pact with myself that I will go to every beginner's class. My mind would fight with me that it wasn't worth the anxiety and effort, but I would tell myself it's only 2 hours/week, I can do it. If any doubt started to come, I wouldn't allow an internal ar-

gument to even begin. I simply showed up.

Fudoshin serves as a shield of the heart. In Japan, there is a concept of Shikai: the four sicknesses of the mind that a budoka has to avoid at all costs:

- Kyo: surprise
- Ku: fear
- Gi: doubt
- Waku: confusion

**Kyo:** If you are surprised, time stops for you. You may actually stop moving, hold your breath even, while your mind catches-up with what happens around you. With Kyo, one's concentration breaks. In that split-second of broken concentration, defeat can be upon you.

**Ku:** With fear comes a distorted sense of reality. The attacker may seem bigger, stronger and more fearsome than he really is. Hence, fear may have one mentally defeated before the conflict begins. There is no chance of victory when one's mind is already defeated.

**Gi:** Doubting your expertise leads to fatal consequences in a martial situation. The way to safeguard against doubt goes through incessant training. As a result, doubt is the back-stabber of belief. One cannot respond to an assault properly with a lack of conviction stemming from a mind that doubts. Above all, indecision will cause your defeat.

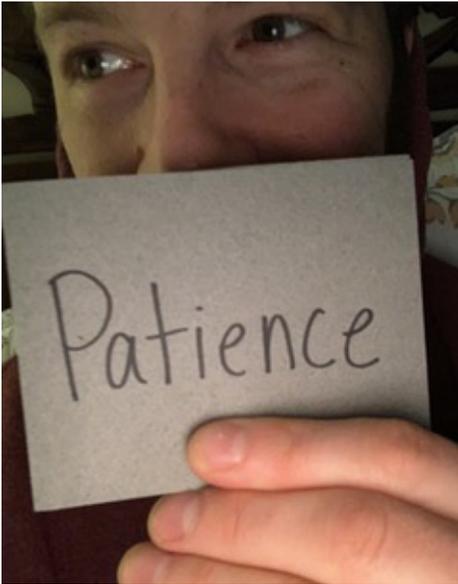
**Waku:** Mental confusion stems from a lack of focus. The mind wanders and tries to consider too many things. Movements become unrefined, timing suffers, and reactions stifle. A lack of focus makes you

surprised. Surprise may cause fear, and fear sows the seeds of doubt. As a consequence, confusion follows soon. And to be confused is to be overwhelmed. (*the-dojo.org*)

While I may have my moments of stillness, mostly I struggle with all four of these "sicknesses of the mind". Unfortunately, I had learned very early on in life to hide and protect myself, to bury my anxiety and depression, and to give others what I thought they expected of me. This has not proven easy to unlearn.

One day in second grade, our teacher had us arrange our chairs in a circle so that we could have a discussion about feelings and ways that we can be alone and have time to ourselves. I was seven. Talking about my feelings made me really uncomfortable. It wasn't something we ever did in my house. My parents were young and liked to party with friends. They would argue whenever they were together, and a lot of the time I just felt like I was in the way. Classmates began raising hands and openly sharing, and I began squirming in my seat. Finally, I raised my hand and asked to use the bathroom. The teacher smirked and began slowly, "Yes...I suppose the bathroom could be a good place to have time to yourself..." Because I was so shy and quiet the teacher mistook what I said and thought that I was offering "the bathroom" as a place to be alone. A classmate spoke up for me: "No, she has to go to the bathroom!" Everyone laughed. I could barely walk, I was so humili-

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Bobby and his word

## Patience

by Bobby Cerruti

Patience. A fitting word for the present state of the world but not a state of presence. Perhaps, one of the most paradoxical words. A perfect mirror into the void. If you choose to play the game, this word is excellent for so many worldly applications; endurance, delayed gratification, the ability to remain calm. Peace. The nature of nature itself. But I find a hidden world inside this word. An enlightened world, or so I theorize. In this world there is no such thing as patience because there is no time and nothing to wait for. Everything we have is in this present moment. It is here. NOW. What are you waiting for? What do you need? Do you need patience? What in this world do we believe is not already here? Mmm...maybe some ice cream dessert. ○

*L. Esposito, continued from page 21*

ated. While in the bathroom, the internal dialogue began. "I'll just stay in here until the whole thing is over. But then they might think I'm going number 2 and laugh at me again. Maybe it's over already. Maybe I can just go back extra quiet and no one will notice me." This dialogue only grew louder as I got older. I grew to be even more shy and quiet, and never raised my hand until college (only because I forced myself due to expectations from the professors). I did my work, got straight A's, and became invisible, afraid to do anything that would upset this superficial path I was coasting on. Meanwhile, the internal dialogue was beginning to lead to anxiety (worry, distress, fear) and panic attacks. This overwhelming fear and feeling of detachment from the world would suddenly choke me and I'd lay in my room, unable to move, feeling like my heart would beat out of my chest. I learned to attach an imagination to what was happening to me, in order to get through it. It felt like an army of tin soldiers were marching over me, so I would just close my eyes and watch them pass. I never told anyone, because I didn't want to seem strange, or like a problem, or a failure. By high school, it was beginning to become more of a problem. During my presentation on my senior project, I suddenly became very aware that everyone was looking at me, and it caused my mind to immediately go blank. I tried to stumble through my notecards, but I was

completely detached from what was coming out of my mouth. I was scared and in shock that it happened, and then even more so when my teacher gave me a lower grade for "not being prepared". This continued through college, and I had the realization that I wasn't able to function as an adult in the world without working through all that I had buried myself under. When I was 19, through some karma, I discovered Aikido and even tried a few classes, but knew I wasn't ready yet. Around that time, I found a book titled, "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind". Most of it went right over my head, but it was the beginning of my journey. "If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything." This sentence from the prologue stayed with me. I wrote it on my wall, next to my bed. I began signing myself up for things that scared me, but that I knew intuitively would help me break through some limitations I had developed. I had an introduction to meditation through some of my yoga classes, so when I discovered a donation-based meditation retreat existed, I signed up without much thought, otherwise I would have talked myself out of it (a glimpse of my Fudoshin spirit). On my 28th birthday, I caught a ride with 4 strangers from Portland, Oregon to the forests of Washington to sit in silence for 10 days. It was the most difficult, yet life-changing thing that I had ever done. Afterwards, my internal dialogue became more

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like a whisper, and I could finally make space for other things in my life. Six months later, I began my Aikido journey. During that initial 10-day sit, we were reminded daily to remain “equanimous”. This was the first time I actually ever interacted with the word “equanimity”: a calm and quiet mind, balanced emotion, the awareness that things may come and go and are constantly changing, so let them. I have since come to find myself surrounded by the constant practice of this balance in all areas of my life: a teacher to push me outside of my limiting thoughts, a partner who asks me to question what I really need, and a job that forces me to be present, mindful, intuitive, and constantly working towards being “soft, but firm”. All my life, I was worried about what others thought, which has led me to feel like I’m a let-down for not being able to fulfill their expectations. But I’ve come to realize that no one’s journey is anyone’s but their own. “Fudoshin represents a peaceful state of total determination and unshakable will. It is the state of a spirit that is determined to win, and that is filled with courage, endurance, and determination to surmount every obstacle that comes in its way. Fudoshin is associated with a feeling of invincibility, of a mind that cannot be disturbed by confusion, hesitation, doubt, or fear.” While I feel Fudoshin may live in my spirit, in all of our spirits, I also feel that it is a life-long practice.

Every stage of life brings new

challenges in order to practice, and we are not immune to becoming imbalanced by our emotions. Although, I have found that I am capable of bouncing back much quicker than before. Mastery of your mind is a journey, just like everything else in Budo, (or the “martial way”). We don’t get there all at once.

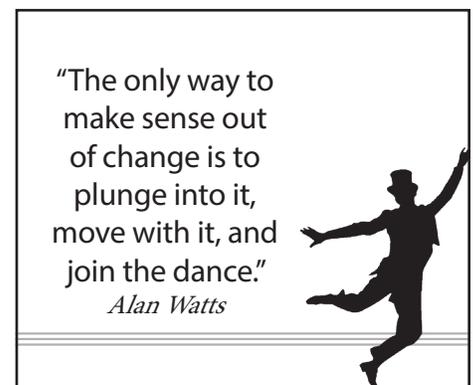
Lastly, the ultimate striving is **Senshin (Enlightened Mind)**: Senshin is a spirit that transcends the first four states of mind. It is a spirit that protects and harmonizes the universe. A spirit of compassion that embraces and serves all humanity and whose function is to reconcile discord in the world. It holds all life to be sacred. It is not exclusive, but all-inclusive. It is the Buddha mind and O-Sensei’s perception of the function of Aikido. (*budodojo.com*) Each of us has our own measure of pain; sometimes it is great and obvious, sometimes subtle. “As a result, we often feel that we have been cast out. To survive we have to cover our heart, build up a layer of clay, and defend ourselves.” (*Jack-Kornfield.com*) Compassion reminds us that we do belong. When we shift to compassion and self-love, a shift in identity comes; a return to our original goodness. My path has been made up of gifts to practice compassion, tolerance, and kindness towards others. With this past year of reflection, I’ve realized that my ultimate goal is to practice uncovering these spirits of Budo in all aspects of my life, and to fiercely believe in my Fudoshin spirit in order to love unperturbed. ○

way up to Lake Erie. That’s not so long, in the grand perspective of Humanity. In other words, be glad you got to see it while you could!

Someday my favorite painting will be dust. The last Beatles record will be scratched and discarded. The last photo I took of her will fade. But we won’t mourn because it ends; we’ll smile because it happened.

So I sit and contemplate emptiness, despite the fact that the giant glowing thing in the sky that we’re not supposed to look at will someday burn all we once loved. I’ll continue to count to ten, and gently silence the Upper and the Lower voices, until someday, maybe I can just...be. “**One, two...**” ...no distractions ...“**three, four...**” I’m just...here. Now.

And if sometimes I feel like I’m just a tiny rat chasing table scraps on a sinking ship with a fancy name, I’ll remember I’m not alone. We’re on this ship together and we’ve all shared these fears and hopes. And maybe if we try together, we can add some small meaning to our existence, to understand our lives backwards while we live them forwards. ○



# DEDICATION



...SHOULD HAVE BEEN A WORD.