



Ensō

Bucks County Aikido Journal

■ Issue 7, Winter 2011

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

Having a Practice

by George Lyons

What you don't realize is that most of your life is unconsciously determined.

- Milton Erickson

So starts one of many books about the teaching stories of Milton Erickson. With his unique way of working with people, Erickson told stories that communicated on many levels and helped people change their lives. He often felt his stories were more potent when the listener didn't take them as lessons at all but rather developed amnesia about them and completely forgot them.

Some research has shown that our conscious attention can only hold about 10 bits of information at any one time. That's not much. Like having a flashlight in a dark room, our illusion is that we feel we know our environment because we are free to shine our limited perspective in any direction. We count only what we see as "knowing" and would like to think of the fact most of the room is dark as unimportant and maybe even irrelevant.

What did your face look like before your parents were born?

- Zen Koan

Acknowledging the darkness is, of course, terrifying. Like fighting blind, what can one do with this



apparent lack of "knowing"? As soon as we direct our attention to one thing we expose ten thousand openings. When our training brings us to this problem we may find it as difficult to answer as a Zen koan.

Koans are intended to baffle the conscious mind and trying to unravel them can sometimes make you wonder if you are wasting your time. Maybe. But if you are one who senses that an insight is needed to penetrate these questions, you probably realize that a small viewpoint won't help. Shaking loose habitual focus and narrow perspective is a difficult practice. Even with the best intentions we often fall back into set ideas of what we think practice is or should be. When this happens something is likely to come and hit

us on the side of the head in some unexpected way.

It is possible to perceive the entire world in a single glance.

- Morihei Ueshiba

So, if most of our life is unconsciously determined what can we do? Whether we realize it or not we have a practice where the opportunity to change perspectives is regularly presented. Through all of the suffering and sacrifice we practice to stop trying to save ourselves, to hold more in our care, even the safety of an assailant. To expand our view until there is no enemy at all. Day after day, we come to the dojo so that when we are frustrated, we can be encouraged; when we get stuck, challenged; and when we

won't budge, exploded. No status quo here. Beyond ideas of, good and bad, right and wrong, light and dark... we have a practice that challenges us to sense beyond borders, break down barriers, and give up self, so that we might break through to a wider view than we ever thought possible.

When Erickson's method worked his listeners didn't imagine that their breakthroughs came from listening to his stories. One thing we could say about them though is that they were engaged. Our task, our practice, is the same; remain open minded and engaged. If we can do this we might also be surprised to discover that insight, growth, and maturation come in unexpected, unforeseen ways from seemingly unknown sources.

One does not need buildings, money, power, or status to practice the Art of Peace. Heaven is right where you are standing and that is the place to train.

- Morihei Ueshiba

The capacity for us to expand is ultimately within us. We don't have to check our flashlights at the dojo door, but if we cling to them it's limiting. For each of us the manifestation of this lesson will be different. For some it will be harder than it will be for others, but potential is there for all of us.

If all of this sounds too mystical for you, don't worry. Just keep in mind that when your practice brings you to the end of your rope, let go.

We think we are alive by doing whatever we like to do, with infinite freedom and unlimited creativity inherent in each of us. But actually we are confined and limited by

a particular life style, which arises because of our taste and ideas, our habits and self-centered tendencies. We bite at only a certain aspect of life, and cling to it like an insect.

- Zen Master Hogen ○

The Peacock

by Patrick Kelly

A couple years ago I was living in an apartment on a farm. The owners had some peacocks who would wander around the property, eating bugs and doing peacock things. At night they would fly up into a tree to sleep, safe from predators.

There was a week during the winter when we had especially harsh weather. The sun was hiding, the wind was blowing, it was cold, and freezing rain and sleet were plentiful. Everything was covered in a layer of ice, including the peacocks.

The male peacock, due to his abundance of feathers, had it the worst. For days I would pass him, crouched in a corner under an awning, looking for refuge from the elements with minimal success. Weighed down by

his suit of ice, he looked far from comfortable. Because of the weight of the ice he was unable to fly and had to sleep on the ground, exposed and vulnerable. Each time I saw him I wished there was something I could do to end what looked like pure misery.

When I saw him again, after the ice stopped falling and the sun came out, he looked reborn. He was standing on a wooden fence bathing in the sun's rays. His colors had never been so vibrant. No longer huddled in a corner, he looked larger than ever before and he displayed what I can only imagine is perfect peacock posture. He had weathered the storm and emerged stronger and more beautiful for it.

In a lot of ways, I've usually avoided challenging myself. For that reason I'm sometimes surprised that I've continued to practice Aikido. It seems like the kind of thing that I would have walked away from long ago. My practice is regularly difficult, uncomfortable, and frustrating, both mentally and physically. Often I feel like I'm not cut out for it.



Fortunately, at Bucks County Aikido I've found both an art and a community that make me want to keep coming to practice and challenging myself. Even when I feel like I'm not making any progress and I'm frustrated, I never leave class wishing I hadn't come.

The process may be slow, but during any class one small element of a particular technique might suddenly make more sense, and in that instant it was worth all the frustration and discomfort. Maybe I've started to learn that those little victories are born directly from the struggle it takes to achieve them. That doesn't mean I'll be less frustrated in the future, but knowing it helps me to endure the more difficult times.

Those little victories gradually add up to learning more about Aikido and about myself, one small step at a time. I find myself not giving as much thought to where I have to move my feet. My body seems a little more relaxed than it was when I started. I notice myself getting up off the mat faster than I used to, even though I'll be picking myself right back up in about seven seconds.

Coming to Aikido class is far from the ordeal that the peacock had to go through, but my time here so far has made me feel stronger as a person and capable of enduring more than I thought I could. Early on, I questioned my own capability to stick around and train this way, to continue to push myself night after night, week after week. I find that I question myself less these days. I've proven to myself that I can do this, and that might be my biggest victory so far. Not so long ago I might have run from this challenge, but now I find myself embracing it.

Maybe someday I'll be as strong and beautiful as that peacock was after the sun came out. ○

The Arrival of Ki

by Grace Rollins

It took me a while to warm up to laido. In my experience the Way of sword drawing can be a lot like seeing yourself lit up with fluorescent lights and reflected in a department store dressing room mirror. You would never know you had so many flabby spots, wrinkles and blemishes. Am I really that clumsy, that out of control? Why can't I execute a simple movement that I've seen a hundred times? Will my arms and hands ever be strong enough, my hips flexible enough? I'm not supposed to be bored, it's not very zen or martial. Ouch my kneecap, ouch my elbow... will I be ok if I keep doing this? My fears and insecurities ebb and flow with each batto and noto, and would eventually drown me were my head not made of wood.

The self-satisfaction can be just as disabling as the dissatisfaction. Nice, that cut made such a great wooshing sound, probably looked awesome. Nice, I remembered all of that kata on the first try. Ah, my wrist's at the right angle, aren't my feet looking proper,

aren't I doing a good job, I must be getting the hang of this. I heard that lately the chain stores have been improving the lighting and quality of their dressing rooms in order to enhance their shoppers' reflections, and hence their willingness to buy the new clothes. That's what you get with false self-esteem, I suppose—more cheap junk to clutter your closet.

Self-assurance and self-doubt, the forward and backwards steps of my conceit, march on and on. If you don't do laido, I'm sure you can relate to the same dance in Aikido and Zazen practice, and I assure you I do the dance all day long in my acupuncture practice as well. Executing healing miracles has as many pitfalls as never being able to help enough,



Continued on page 4

and I routinely do both, sometimes with the same exact patient.

Still, no matter what's going on in my head, the sword... just... is, the cut... just... is... There's a calm eye somewhere in that ceaseless storm of inner dialogue, which also... just... is. A flash of feeling can emerge from it that belongs to the moment as surely as the sword, the cut, the kata.

Once when I was observing my acupuncture teacher, I was struck by the bright, fiery energy she brought to her smallest movements. Boom, boom, boom... Even with a technique as subtle as lighting a tiny cone of moxa or vibrating a needle I could sense she was bringing her whole being into action. Back in my own clinic, amidst my mind's little conceited dance, I try to recall it. Boom, boom, boom... light the moxa and pinch it out. Place the needle, manipulate, pull it out. *Batto, noto.*

Recently I switched out my old iaito for a very, very sharp sword. I really didn't know metal could get that sharp. My Iaido is now mandatorily deliberate in a way that goes beyond just trying to look good. Amazingly, being in that state of concentration helps to mute the mental chatter that before seemed so inseparable from Iaido. *Awake! batto, awake! noto.* It's a matter of practice to draw on that same sharpness in any context. The live blade is just one dragon to ride among many.

In acupuncture we talk about the "arrival of ki," a certain sensation the practitioner must seek when needling a patient. One of the oldest classics of Chinese medicine, the *Ling Shu* (Spiritual Pivot), teaches:

The essence of acupuncture is that the effect comes with the arrival of ki. The sign of this is like the wind blowing the clouds away. It becomes clear and bright as if looking into the blue sky.

The arrival of ki is usually said to be something felt through the hands. I'm also discovering the aspect that must be felt in the hara: that bright spirit which allows the true nature of things to shine. It's my own to reveal. ○

Responsibility

by Sebastian Brown

Responsibility is required with maintaining any practice. In aikido, it is necessary to ensure a safe, productive environment. Training under martial circumstances, we take ownership of our partner's welfare—our actions dictate outcome. Thus, responsibility can be likened to its hyphenated homonym relative, response-ability. Their relation is that being truly responsible requires executing appropriate actions.

Aikido has also provided me with an opportunity to learn responsibility more fully.

Beyond the training, it's about recognizing what needs to happen and what I can do to help. Taking care of tasks effectively makes everything run more easily. This concept seems so simple yet prior to joining the dojo I was lacking its application. Now every time I go I engage in many responsibilities, all of which help enrich me.

Practicing has undoubtedly made me more cognizant of my actions. When I first started training I would fall awkwardly during certain techniques due to thinking rather than reacting. My nervous system's initial response to getting thrown was a stress-induced tensing of my body resulting in a very inefficient style of absorbing a fall. It occurred to me then that I had to practice with intent and be very conscientious of my partner. My uke relies upon me to an extent in that I don't make a regrettable mistake while performing a technique.

Responding to difficult situations is a daily reality. Our practice prepares us for exceedingly trying situations by pushing us to our brink. It's our responsibility to respond ably, for ourselves and others. ○



Acquiring Knowledge

by Sarah Davis

One goal that I hope to fulfill every day is acquiring new knowledge; about myself, nature, the world, and all of the intricacies involved with each. I try to utilize every source available to me. There are infinite ways to be educated, but there are four main veins that I frequently tap into. One way is through balancing my thoughts. Another is through learning from the exteriorization of my thoughts as well as the destiny I have created for myself. A third way is by pushing myself physically and mentally until my mentally constructed facades are knocked down. And finally, I use the power of self-suggestion to gain valuable insight. Aikido and Zen have been crucial to achieving my daily goal; they are the structure that gives me the strength to discipline myself and thereby fuel my determination to perpetually dig deeper.

In the morning I use the power of self-suggestion to help my physical well-being. I read aloud a passage from an author that I both admire and respect:

Every atom in my body, thrill with life to make me well.

Every molecule within me, carry health from cell to cell.

Cells and organs in all systems build for lasting strength and youth,

Work in harmony together by the Conscious Light, as truth.

- Harold W. Percival

When I read this excerpt aloud the sensory impressions come through the optic as well as the auditory nerve and their reception initiates a

subconscious adherence to the practice set forth. My belief in this practice is reaffirmed with the positive feedback I can feel manifested throughout my body. I accredit this in part to my heartfelt utterance of those words, which are honest in statement, true in thought, and simple in practice.

In the evening I have begun sitting before I go to bed. My ultimate desire is to sit until my mind calms and I embody stillness, although the progression is typically characterized by a shifting of awareness from the usual chatter inside my mind to a calmer state. I sit until I can separate myself from the thoughts that amass in my mind. I remind myself that these thoughts are not me, but merely attached to who I am. I wait for a certain feeling to settle over me, and then I reflect on my day. I begin by reflecting on my day as a whole and focus on the overall feeling that the day gives me. Then I go back through each event of the day and focus on the thoughts, interactions, or desires that stand out. I try to pinpoint the unbalanced thought that caused my attachment to it. If I can find that thought and realize why my conscience disapproved of it at the time I created it, then that thought will become balanced and disappear. This practice of sitting and reflecting in the evening has helped me to realize that I control my own destiny by creating it.



As many of you are aware, I am in the fifth month of recovery from knee surgery, and along with the expected physical changes there have been immeasurable mental alterations as well. Although tearing a ligament in my knee has temporarily taken away my physical ability to train at the dojo, it has given me training in a much different facet. At times, not being able to participate in body arts has made me feel very isolated from the Aikido community, but at the same time I could feel the warmth and encouragement from my peers to continue to come and watch. Through my many hours of watching my skills of observations and visualization have greatly increased. Since my injury, my borders of patience have been broken open far beyond anything I thought I was capable of. It has retaught me that life is lived morning to evening to morning again, one moment at a time.

Perseverance through this harrowing

Continued on page 6

part of my journey in life has given me an all-encompassing sense of compassion. Not only compassion for others but learning of the importance of having compassion for myself. I have traveled down treacherous peaks and ascended staggering slopes throughout this recovery. It has all helped me to realize that I am fiercely committed to learning more about myself through the art of Aikido. Despite all of the hardship this injury has wrought, I am truly grateful for everything that it has helped me to realize about myself and the community that I am engrained in. It has been a true gift. ○

Having a Practice

by Jonathan Kugel

Aikido as activity: I conjure a clear mental picture of teacher and students lining up and bowing in. This concept of aikido practice is, for me, the simplest way to envision my relationship with aikido. Go to the dojo, do aikido, go home. I admit it, I also think about aikido outside of the dojo. I imagine an attacker around the next corner, straighten my spine while in the car or at my desk, and wonder what nearby object could be used as a weapon. But that's just for fun. As easy and comfortable as it is to leave it right there... I know it is a forced simplification; the first line of defense employed by my small-self against an idea so overwhelming it refuses to be ignored. This is why I'm here, isn't it? The answer was clear when the question was rhetorical. Now here it is... right in front of me, all around me, inside of me, waiting for me to say yes. Is this really what I'm struggling with? What am I holding on to?

mu



Aikido as work: I have a bigger idea about my practice of aikido. The practice of aikido is like the practice of medicine. Similar to a doctor's practice, the dojo is an aikido practice. A 'practice' is the activity professionals engage in as they go about the business of their profession: operating a business, building a clientele, gaining and maintaining the respect of their peers, applying the skills and experience gleaned from an intensive study of a generally accepted body of knowledge.

MU!

Aikido as life: Having a practice is letting aikido pervade our life. Taking responsibility for our own training is only the first step. We must then sustain the commitment across the changing circumstances and attitudes that impact our life. Training is not a matter of convenience, it is an imperative. We no longer merely survive the difficult seminar, the dressing down, or the

obligation. We allow it to penetrate our defenses, grind down the rough edges, and expose even more of our raw self. Most importantly, our practice is the firm ground on which others may stand to begin their own journey in the art and nurture their own practice. ○

No one can become a saint or a contemplative merely by abandoning himself unintelligently to an oversimplified concept of obedience. Both in subject and in the one commanding him, obedience presupposes a large element of prudence and prudence means responsibility. Obedience is not the abdication of freedom but its prudent use under certain well-defined conditions. This does nothing to make obedience easier and it is by no means an escape from subjection to authority. On the contrary, obedience of this kind implies a mature mind able to make difficult decisions and to correctly understand difficult commands, carrying them out fully with a fidelity that can be, at times, genuinely heroic. Such obedience is impossible without deep resources of mature spiritual love.

Thomas Merton

Doing Nothing

by Amelia Perkins

Author's Note: I wrote this essay for my college applications, assuming an audience with little or no knowledge of zazen or aikido.

“We’ve been doing nothing, and boy are we bad at it,” Serge said. I had to agree. We had just finished a three-day Zen meditation retreat, called a sesshin. Doing nothing, it turned out, was one of the hardest things I’d ever tried.

Zen meditation involves sitting absolutely still on a cushion and mentally counting one’s breaths, from one to ten, over and over, for about an hour at a time. Five minutes before the opening of sesshin, it hardly seemed like an insurmountable task. I lined up with everyone else and we knelt in front of our cushions. Genjo, the Zen priest, walked up the aisle between the two rows of cushions and began the ritual that would open each ‘sit’. He lit a tall candle and a stick of incense, then bowed to the altar at the front of the zendo. Following along with my neighbors, I bowed to the altar, then stood up and turned to bow to the person across from me. I sat down on my cushion, crossed my legs, and arranged my hands in the approved fashion, left thumb tucked inside the right hand. Genjo smacked two wooden blocks together (we called them the clackers) and then rang the

bell to start the sit.

I closed my eyes and started counting my breath. I had reached ten perhaps twice, when I realized something was not quite right about how I was sitting. My right foot was tucked slightly under my left leg, and my toes were starting to fall asleep. It was a small irritation that wouldn’t have bothered me if I had been able to shift my weight off the leg or move the foot away, but we were not permitted to move: I was stuck for a full hour in this exact position. Instantly, every other little discomfort began making itself known. My nose was itching. My left foot was digging into my right shin. My shoulders were cramping up. My hands were starting to go numb in my lap. A veritable chorus of complaints came pouring in from all directions, and I squeezed my eyes shut tighter and soldiered on with counting.

Finally, the bell rang to signify the end of the sit. I bowed to the front of the zendo along with everyone else, then gratefully scrambled to my feet. I wiggled my numb toes and waited for instructions on what to do next. We continued to stand. And stand. I realized with sinking heart that this was all the break we were going to get: five minutes of standing in silence, directly in front of our respective cushions. There was barely enough time for my foot to revive before everyone began arranging themselves on their cushions again. I sighed and sank back down.

Forty minutes later, the bell rang again. We got up in an orderly line and started trotting around the rows of cushions for kinhin, or “walking meditation.” Genjo started at a reasonably brisk walk but then sudden-

ly slowed to a snail crawl. For the next several minutes I concentrated on my feet: in order to avoid overtaking the person in front of me, each step had to be imperceptible—a millimeter at most. It was hardly better than sitting. No sooner had that thought crossed my mind than Genjo took off at a flat-out sprint, the trailing sleeves of his monk’s robes flying behind him. Everyone dashed around the cushions again and again, wheezing and stepping on one another’s heels, and narrowly avoided a cartoon-style pile up all along the line when Genjo abruptly slowed once more.

After one more sit, we were finally given a break—a real break where we could stumble off the mat and stampede downstairs to stretch our legs and exchange sheepish grins. Though we were theoretically free to talk now, the people I passed in conversation were whispering, their faces close together. After hours on end of unbroken silence, the habit was hard to break. I had no interest in talking to anyone; I was dazed. I felt like I was moving through thick molasses. I wanted to run around the parking lot, or perhaps take a nap. When we filed back upstairs for the next round of sits, I was almost relieved to have a purpose again.

By evening, I had memorized the view out the opposite window. My angle gave me only the slightest glimpse of pure sky, so I missed the sunset, but I saw twilight come and go as the blood pooled in my legs and hands and the burning spread down my left arm. The confused tangle of trunks and branches finally vanished into the darkness and I was instantly restless. Surely it had to be nine o’clock now—time for kinhin? Time to stand up for a few minutes?

Nevertheless the flowers fall
with our attachment
And the weeds spring up with our
aversion.

Dogen

Continued on page 8

It had to be time for something, anything, to disturb the silence that had settled down like a thick blanket.

Dokusan, when my turn finally came, was a glorious break—an opportunity for one person at a time to leave the building and walk (actually walk!) a comparatively long way across the yard to the cottage on the property in order to have a private audience with Genjo. Perhaps you would also receive a koan, or Zen riddle, which would help focus your sitting and open your mind. Allegedly, I had never pondered a koan, and was not particularly expecting one while I waited on the porch. I was entirely focused on worldly matters, specifically the wind, which came howling around the corner of the cottage and chided me for not wearing enough layers. Phil, in front of

me in line, turned and whispered, “I forgot my koan.”

The bell rang inside the cottage, signaling my turn. When I opened the door for Phil to back out, a blast of warm air hit me in the face. I closed the door behind me, dropped to my knees and touched my forehead to the floor. Two more steps forward (right foot first) then kneel and bow again. I was so focused on remembering the ritual I hadn’t even registered Genjo’s appearance, but as I sat up, he came into focus. Kneeling in his flowing robes, he was the very picture of a stern Buddhist monk, despite a huge pair of glasses that reminded me of my grandfather. The glow from a tall paper lantern in the corner reflected on his bald head. As I stared at him, wondering what was supposed to happen

next, Genjo looked back with wide eyes and quirked one long, bristling eyebrow. Somehow, that changed the atmosphere in an instant: it was like a quick, comforting prod in the right direction, bypassing all ritual and tradition. Stumbling a little over the words, I introduced myself.

We spoke for a while, and Genjo asked about my aikido practice—he studied himself, and considered aikido to be closely intertwined with Zen. I told him I had been training for almost nine years.

“My goodness,” said Genjo. “Well, for all those nine years, can you tell me this: what is the essence of aikido?”

I have spent my entire life explaining aikido to the people I meet. Without thinking, I opened my mouth to give a pat and rehearsed answer. He clarified before any sound escaped.

“I don’t mean an answer in words. I’m talking about a simple gesture. What is the essence of aikido, in a simple gesture? This isn’t something you figure out. The answer should present itself after you have meditated while holding it in your consciousness.”

Oh. It was a koan.

I was confounded. Never before had I been explicitly instructed not to figure out a problem. Figuring things out comes naturally to me, and I enjoy it. When I studied calculus and physics, I loved working my way through equations, and was quick to see new options emerge as I finished a particular step. But I had no idea how to override that impulse to “figure it out”... to let a question sit and age until the answer revealed itself.

Genjo saw my confusion, smiled, and rang the bell signaling the end of the interview. I walked up the hill and back to my cushion.

Hours later, I was still wrestling my subconscious into submission. There were cramps in my shoulders and numbness washing up over my entire lower body, but worst of all, I kept catching myself picking away at the koan. It was difficult to “hold it in my consciousness,” as Genjo had instructed, without turning it



over and over and trying to figure it out. How could a single gesture be the essence of aikido? What did essence mean, anyway—did a recurring movement count? I knew that the semantics of any koan are vitally important, so I had to assume Genjo meant exactly what he said.

At eleven, the final sit of the evening concluded. I rolled out my sleeping bag on the mat. It was a joy to move as I pleased, to straighten my aching knees and roll my head around on my stiff neck. It was a joy to leave my koan alone for the moment and fall asleep.

A loud, arrhythmic clapping startled me awake. The noise rattled around the inside of my head and was a far more effective alarm than the quiet radio I woke up to at home. The source turned out to be another pair of clackers, snapping at us from under the stairs. All around me, people were sitting up bleary-eyed and tousle-haired. It was four a.m. and pitch black outside. By the light of the paper lanterns I rolled up my sleeping bag and stowed it away. After ten minutes of hurried stretching, it was time to sit and meditate again until breakfast.

Sitting still was harder in the morning chill. During each break, people went downstairs to retrieve more layers of chunky sweaters and scarves, their silhouettes getting increasingly rounder. The cold seeped into my bones. My posture, which had improved the day before, suffered as I hunched over and conserved warmth. Through the condensation on the window across from me, I watched the sky turn gray and wondered what on earth I was doing. What kind of a person would voluntarily subject themselves to this?

Yet despite all my doubts, I was getting better at it. Each time the bell rang, I was surprised at how short the sit had been. I no longer had to fight as hard not to fidget. Settling into the position took less time and fewer readjustments. The trauma of the day before had paid off: I had learned how to be still. I began to feel an inkling of pride over my accomplishment, and then the koan dropped like a stone into my consciousness.

Teaching my body to do nothing was easy compared to teaching my mind to do nothing. I couldn't resist the urge to think. I tried to push the koan out of my mind entirely, but how could I return to Genjo not knowing the answer? There had to be a solution, a simple solution, and I didn't know how to find it without looking.

On my second visit to the porch, I didn't notice the wind. I was racking my brains for an answer—any answer—to give to Genjo, despite my suspicion that a last-ditch attempt was almost certainly the wrong way to go about it. "I forgot my koan again," Phil whispered.

"So?" said Genjo, looking at me kindly. "How's it going?"

"Not so good," I said, and to my relief, he didn't look disappointed.

"That's normal. Ordinarily it takes about three days of sesshin before you can really settle in and not be distracted—I'd be surprised if you solved it already."

Oh. In the silence that followed, I realized that Genjo had never expected me to come back with an answer. He just saw that I needed to

learn to think without thinking. He wanted me to go forth with a question—any question—and just live with it, without busying my brain. The essence of aikido was not the point. The point was the essence of thinking.

Several months have passed. I'm now living at the dojo where I train in aikido, and three days a week I get up at five-thirty and meditate for an hour. The koan is still with me. I can't say I'm any better at clearing my mind, but at least I understand that it's not just about finding answers, which had always been so easy for me. What's difficult is living with a question... and doing nothing. ○

Recent Promotions

Sandan

Helen Tai

Nidan

Grace Rollins

Shodan

Jon Kugel

3rd kyu

Pat King

4th kyu

Brian Loughrey
Sebastian Brown

5th kyu

Serge Mikhailov
Aaron Goldfinger
James Dator

Provisional Spring 2011 Schedule, beginning January 25

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

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
		6:30 - 7:30 Zazen	7:00 - 7:30 Uchi Deshi	6:30 - 7:30 Zazen		8 - 9 am Zazen
					9 - 10 am Mixed	9:15 - 11 am Free Practice
	12:15 - 1 pm Mixed	12:15 - 1 pm Mixed			10:15 - 11:15 Iaido	
5 - 5:45 pm Free Practice	5 - 5:45 pm Iaido	5 - 5:45 pm Free Practice	5 - 5:45 pm Zazen	5 - 5:45 pm Free Practice		
6 - 6:45 pm Mixed	6 - 7 pm Intro/Basics	6 - 6:45 pm Mixed	6 - 7 pm Intro/Basics	6 - 6:45 pm Mixed		
		6:50 - 7:10 Zazen		6:50 - 7:10 Zazen		
7 - 8:30 pm Kenshusei	7 - 8 pm Mixed	7:15 - 8 Weapons	7 - 8 pm Mixed	7:15 - 8 pm Mixed		

Making Shoes

You know, somebody once told me that in France in medieval times, if you wanted to go on some kind of spiritual journey, if you were really lucky you would meet somebody who might have been a teacher (you were never quite sure), and that person would say to you, "What is it that you wish to do?"

And you would say, "Well, I want to be a shoemaker." He'd say, "There's a wonderful shoemaker in Lyons who may be somebody quite spiritual. I'll send you to him and you can apprentice with him. The only rule is that you must never, ever discuss anything spiritual with him."

And so you would go off and work for this person for four or five years as an apprentice, and then you would really get to know how to make shoes, and he would say, "You know, you really know how to make good shoes now. There is an opening in a partnership in Dijon with a very special man who makes shoes. I can get you that partnership, but you must never, ever discuss anything spiritual with him. You must concentrate on making very beautiful shoes."

And so off you'd go to Dijon and work for years, and shortly before his death the old man would say, "Well, soon this business will be yours. You've become a really fine shoemaker. Now, one of these days, someone who is younger than you may come wanting to learn something spiritual from you. Only tell him about making shoes."

André Gregory