



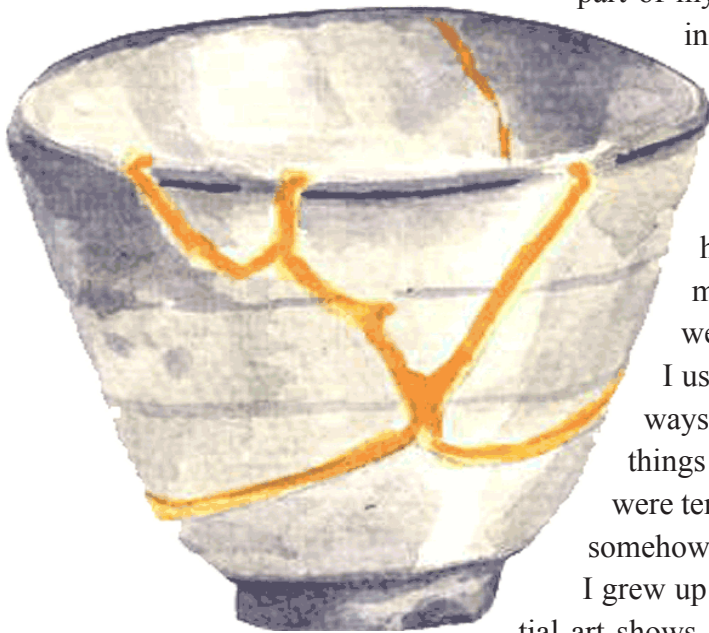
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Kitsunji



by Ester Barias

For a little over 2 months since Sensei told me I was ready to test for shodan, I began thinking about how I got this far in my Aikido practice. Me? Testing for my black belt? I do not know too many people who are black belts outside of the dojo circle. I don't think anyone in my immediate family has ever participated in any martial arts other than my niece in grade school. The summer of 2018 marks my 7th year since starting my introductory course. Looking back, it's hard to believe I've stuck around this long, I wasn't even sure I would finish the 8-week intro course! It was no doubt difficult, all this shedding of ego, constantly getting up, rolling, sitting kokyūho...but the rhythm of slams against the mat and drips of sweat became my baseline. I saw and heard metaphors all over the dojo that stretched down to the farm.

Movies and books became my source for solace in college, a chance to breathe during a period in my life where it felt like I was constantly being dunked underneath a body of water. I was only fifteen when my father died. He was killed by a drunk driver and it affected me so profoundly that I went on a journey in which I tried to find sense and meaning in my own existence. At my lowest, I attempted taking my own life. I've only told a few people about this dark time but I thought I'd include it because it is

part of my history. Luckily for me, I woke up the following morning and my first thought was, *"If dad was alive and found out what I tried to do, he would have killed me."* I had a

good laugh that day and after that incident, I told myself I needed to grow up, *"Well, if this is the lowest, then there's no other way but up, right?!"* I wiped my tears, finished high school and supported myself through college. When my mother could no longer hold it together a few years later, we lost our house too and the rest of the family drifted apart.

I used to think about how I can't seem to get a break, but I always had this inner voice that would come on to remind or point things out to me. Family life wasn't always tumultuous, there were tender and happy moments too; memories of experiences that somehow always ended up snapping me back to reality.

I grew up at a time when Bruce Lee was popular and scores of martial art shows followed suit on television. I particularly enjoyed watch-

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Singularity

by Marie Howe

(after Stephen Hawking)

*Do you sometimes want to
wake up to the singularity
we once were?
so compact nobody
needed a bed, or food or money —
nobody hiding in the
school bathroom
or home alone
pulling open the drawer
where the pills are kept.
For every atom belong-
ing to me as good
Belongs to you. Remember?
There was no Nature. No
them. No tests
to determine if the elephant
grieves her calf or if
the coral reef feels pain. Trashed
oceans don't speak Eng-
lish or Farsi or French;
would that we could wake
up to what we were
— when we were ocean
and before that
to when sky was earth, and ani-
mal was energy, and rock was
liquid and stars were space
and space was not
at all — nothing
before we came to believe hu-
mans were so important
before this awful loneliness.
Can molecules recall it?
what once was? before
anything happened?
No I, no We, no one. No was
No verb no noun
only a tiny tiny dot brimming with
is is is is is
All everything home*



After Birankai

by Pat King

I moved north from Philadelphia to Bucks County for work in 2005. No family lived there, it was a flight from the city and one stepping stone closer to the Great White North and home.

On my days off I would deliberately get lost and wander around Bucks County. I loved the light, the big river, Lake Galena, the trees and the farms. I always slowed down as I rounded the curve on Lake Galena road going west. I'd risk safe driving to gaze at the lovely lavender hillside. I finally overcame a reticence to spend money and pulled a tight left, up the gravelly drive.

I was looking for sweet smells and green space and always looking at how people came to live their lives. I met Patti and George in the

shop and immediately became intrigued by the fitness and strength they radiated. They looked at me and I felt they really saw me. They had an intensity of presence that seemed to be lacking in most mall shopping experiences. What was this place? The shop became the go-to for all gifts. I came back again and again and finally asked how they kept so fit. "*Aikido. Check the website.*" It was clear he needed to get back to work. So I did check and migrated up the stairs to the dojo.

Looking back on the 5 years I studied with Patti and Sensei fills me with so much sensation, so much stimuli I'm only now processing it all, 6 or 7 years away from the practice. During my time learning to fall, I found so many sweet smells, some stinky smells, many sweet faces and lots of gargoyle incarnations, most-

After Birankai, continues on next page

ly in myself and in others too.

I had always regarded life as one big question to be answered. Often also viewed it as one problem to be solved. One foot in front of the other, keep on walking, don't look up. My growing-up friends used to kid me that I'd put people under the microscope gaze, asking, looking, wondering.

Maya Angelou has written that we all ask each other 4 questions, non-verbally and constantly.

Can you see me?

Do you care that I'm here?

Am I enough for you or do you need me to be better in some way?

Can I tell I am special to you by the way you look at me?

Patti and George see people. They care we are there. They see clay to transform. We know we are special by the way they look at us. This is for sure.

The trouble with being seen, though, is that there is nowhere to hide.

The intentional community that is created daily at Peace Valley Lavender Farm and Bucks County Aikido stripped away all my layers of defence. Again and again laid bare delusions, turned out sets of assumptions on the mat to be examined and tested by the whole damn group, no place to hide.

Intense moments of recognition; emergence of emotions long denied.

Hard done by. Angry. Fearful. Flippant. Irreverent. Fearful. Skeptical. Fiercely independent. Fearful. I signed on for the full dunk of uchi deshi-dom at 58, convinced after 3

years practice that this might be a safe place to go through the heat of giving up. I was chafing and resistant every moment. Exhausted from questioning authority and pushing physical limits. I didn't want to give up my fortress. One day I was overcome enough by anger to throw away hard earned fitness, the kata and techniques, and most of all the love and peace of daily routine on the farm. It was a public moment. Nowhere to hide, though I thought there was. Fleeing north, the phone rang. It was McDevitt Sensei. There was no need for words. I accepted that the well of anger and self righteous indignation that I so often flung forward was a shield, "*It's why I am alone.*"

Now I can see that my whole time on the farm was about leaning into love. The most important takeaway from Lyons Sensei is just this: "*The questions don't matter so much Pat. Paying attention, waking up to the answers of the wonder all round, that's the centre of gravity we long for.*"

Loving people who are like me and not like me. Finding love and compassion every day, moment to moment. I still fail but never cease returning to the quiet of the sit, to let it go, ready to reverse, rebalance, come clean, settle down.

I have forgotten the kata and techniques of Aikido. I have not forgotten being seen and loved so thoroughly that I had to shed all the barriers I constructed to prevent me from that great, open space, call it divine, call it love. This I take to my grave with gratitude. ○

Let us be thick like thieves stealing our masters' secrets while they toil steady at their task.

My Story

by Jennifer Saltmarsh

Chiba Sensei likened Aikido to a tree and Aikidoka to the trees' many parts. This is a wonderful thing. Where I grew up there was a huge weeping willow behind the house where I spent a lot of time. And poplars that shimmered in the wind. In the front there was a medium sized ditch, complete with cat tails and red-winged blackbirds. One day as we played out in the yard, the hot sticky air was swept away by an incoming storm front, and suddenly a chill wind blew. The tall stacked storm clouds rolled horizontally in the sky. It was a thing of wonder. Looking up and seeing those fat clouds tumble across the sky with the hair rising on my arms was truly breathtaking. It was as though everything on the ground ceased to be, and all was wind and clouds and sky. And then, of course, we were all running for the front and the relative safety of that ditch. I don't remember being afraid, maybe I didn't really understand that a tornado could be forming, although why else the ditch? That willow danced like crazy in the wind; it didn't lose many branches in the twelve or so years I lived there.

These sentences I'm stringing together are an attempt to share a bit of myself. So here instead of a tree, a story. Every single person has some

My Story, continues on next page



“Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don’t resist them; that only creates suffering. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like.”

—Lao Tzu

My Story, continued from previous page

experience with a story. You may like them or not but you’ve probably been told some, likely been required to read some, and without question you have lived one, are living one right this very moment.

Stories, though, require a storyteller. Someone must tell or write or create in some way, the story to be shared. While just about anyone can tell a story, some people have an extraordinary ability to draw you into their story as it takes shape around you. Authorship, however, in no way diminishes the quality or substantive value of a story itself, and while a story may indeed take on a life of its own, or grow beyond its initial or intended audience, it didn’t spring into being on its own. A story is birthed through consciousness.

Classical stories of old carry with them a weight of earlier times. Fables for the young and old, of knights and dragons, of gods and demons—all speak from beyond our time from a place of human experience that still finds an audience in our modern psyche. It is the old stories that can most easily be understood as a metaphor for Aikido. Aikido is O’Sensei’s story. But it is an old story that began long before him. The ancient story of budo.

Each teacher is given this Aikido, this story, they are to nurture and share. If you are from my teacher’s dojo, you already know that this is an Epic story with more endings than you might ever learn in a lifetime; probably this is true for all Aikido dojo, I do not know.

So let’s say you and I know of the same story (we do) and we are to have a discussion about it (we sort of are). Except you and I have drastically different experience with the story. We haven’t heard all the same parts, the part that makes me laugh—you are bored with that part; and your favorite part—I don’t even know about that yet. I would tell you all about the story I am learning at the dojo but you come and experience it too—in your own way. The zazen part of the story (for me) is crazy. You would never believe that part! Sometimes when we are training body arts or weapons or Iaido, Sensei will remind us how the feeling of our body at any particular moment is just like sitting zazen “you could just sit down on your cushion” the feeling is just the same; but from such a different place in the story. The very first time I came to sit zazen and chanted and sat for an hour I had a very remarkable sit. I am surprised that I

sit zazen at all but it seems to me an important part of the Aikido story. But who am I to say? Maybe you are fully occupied with another portion of the story at this time. I guess it’s like reading a bunch of places in an epic at the same time. Maybe they are or aren’t related and one you read on some days and another is for different times.

The same story told by a different story teller is never the same (except it is).

My Aikido is barely just begun. I have learned that being martial is a skill that can be cultivated with effort over time. Just come and train. The beauty of being a beginning student is that you follow the form as best you can and let the rest go. I was telling my children just today about how when I was a child, I was taught: you only get to be a kid this one time, so relish it! Take advantage of being a kid. Wonderful advice. I remember soaking up the thrill of being ridiculous, of being silly and strange and without self-consciousness. Beginner’s mind is cultivated in Aikido; a gift for the taking. Imagine if we approach life always carefully, attentively, taking correction without offense and allowing others to express themselves as is their way. ○

Navigating the Seas of Life

By Adam Bash

Although we may prefer to believe we live our lives in a manner which we have a degree of control and predictability, Life, by definition, inevitably manages to become daunting, unpredictable, and quite formidable. As if sailing through a sea and weather blows in, the surf becomes rough, the water rises up and although it has no personal vendetta against you, it appears to focus on you, as if it is only for you that the waters have risen. In these times of adversity, navigating the rougher seas of life, we find ourselves searching for tools, a rudder, a sextant, a compass, another set of oars, something, anything, to help negotiate the storm. Something to navigate the waters. I believe we all face trials and tribulations at some point in life. It is unavoidable. It is inescapable. And it is imperative. For it is by which tools we utilize and how we utilize them that defines who we are and what we intend.

When seas are calm, how hard do we search for such tools realistically? Do we prepare for the storm that is unseen beyond the horizon? A storm most of us would prefer to believe will never transpire. In a perfect world we may. But even if we did, how could we prepare absolutely? How can we know from which direction the wind will blow, from where the water will rush? It seems to me that each storm presents itself with different intensities

and potency. Each is unique. So, as we attempt to weather these storms what tools do we use? What do we have to utilize? For me, after much consideration, deliberation and introspection I decided to utilize the practice of Aikido.

I was looking for a tool that would help me harness my inner strength as well as challenge me physically. Something that would help provide me with peace I had longed for coupled with the coordination and physical exercise I required. The discipline and direction that I felt was needed. But it was not with a light heart that I obligated this practice. I knew it required much dedication. Much commitment. Much sincerity. All of which themselves are additional attributes. More devices that can only make a person stronger. Healthier. Better.

Every storm is different for every person. Every person responds different to their particular storm. Thankfully, Aikido and this particular dojo was attainable. A dojo

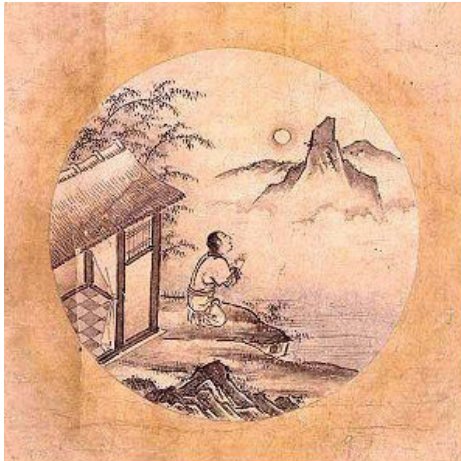
which is fortunate to have been blessed by very knowledgeable and devoted teachers. And the students, all being as resolute and committed as the next, have managed to feel as though they are a second family. All present for the same basic reasons as myself. To excel, to be dedicated, to learn a disciplined practice and not only to be good but be proficient. And of course, to believe, to be strong. Mind and body.

So, Aikido has proven to be a valuable tool to help me navigate the sometimes rough waters that rise up. A tool that I will employ throughout my life. A tool that I will utilize to help me prosper and thrive and emerge from the other side of said seas better than I had entered. And, even more importantly, it will prove to be a tool that will help me navigate, as best I can, around future storms before they even manifest. Leaving me in brighter skies. Placid waters. In a better place.

And for that I am thankful. ○

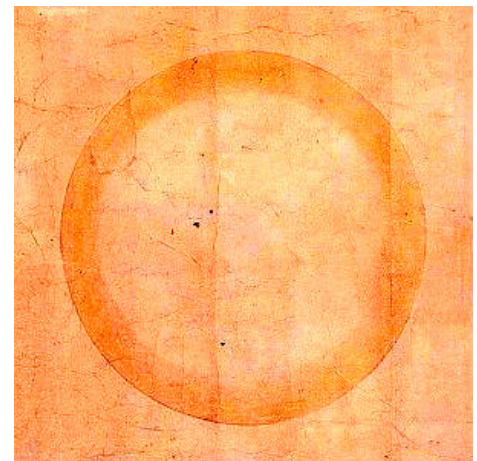
Jiddu Krishnamurti

"What is needed, rather than running away or controlling or suppressing or any other resistance, is understanding fear; that means, watch it, learn about it, come directly into contact with it. We are to learn about fear, not how to escape from it."



The Bull Transcended

Finding “The Way” gives meaning and a contentment not previously known. A gift to be alive, you feel like somehow, someone has unlocked a potential in you that you previously knew nothing about. Colors are bright, sounds crisp, even sorrow is sweet. Nature is amazing and people are interesting with all of their flaws and idiosyncrasies. Life is full and wonderful in every way. Of course there is suffering but it is seen in a larger context and it’s understood now that it’s not personal.



Both Bull and Self Transcended

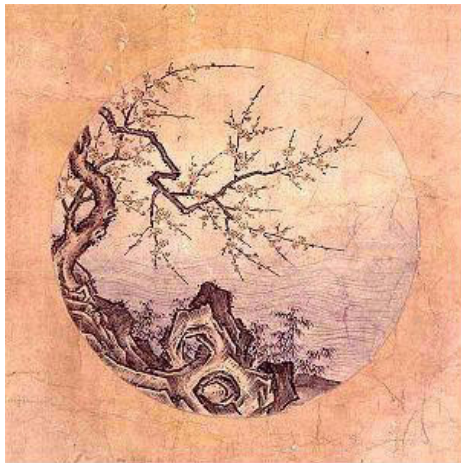
The realization of Ox and rider as one set in motion the inevitable; divisions are arbitrary. What part of practice is not part of life? What part of life is not part of practice? Lines fade, boundaries loose meaning and breakdown. You now know that you and your precious Way are not special. There is nothing, no-thing, to hang on to. Not finished with you yet, the insight drills down until you wonder what you’ve been doing all this time. At the bottom of this hole you find a startling truth; it’s all empty.

Original paintings by Tenshō Shūbun (1444–50), a Japanese Zen Buddhist monk and painter of the Muromachi period. Source: wikipedia.org.

* <http://buckscountyaikido.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/enso-12.pdf>

NG THE OX

on by G. Lyons
(ue 12, Winter 2015*)



Reaching the Source

Life goes on with or without you. Nature is indifferent to us personally which is no longer appalling just obvious. Previously it seemed you were the protagonist; hero or victim makes no difference, you were alive to direct and/or react to a world you were at the center of. Now it's seen for what it is: life is all around, you partake in it but are not master of it. More than surrendered, self importance is transcended. You are everywhere and nowhere and finally understand the Zen saying; nothing to do, nowhere to go. Freedom!



Returning to Society

You didn't die (well sort of) you're alive, so what's next? Returning to ordinary life you meet with the challenges of everyday existence (did you think you'd be exempt from them?). Maybe you plan to teach your new found wisdom. Good luck with that. Even when they think they are, most people are not looking for a teacher. You have the chance now to mature your prized selflessness in the marketplace and the world is all too willing to help by reminding you of your insignificance. In some corners you may meet with appreciation, even adoration (which could be a problem for you), in others dismissal, even disdain. Keep in mind that what you have found is not special. Everyone has it whether they know it or not so in that sense it is the very definition of ordinary. Maybe you will meet some who are interested to uncover it. Maybe. But if you think you have something to teach you'll find yourself grabbing at things again. It is not yours personally, nothing is. So unless you enjoy chasing oxen don't get too hung up on it. If you do, you will find yourself back at square one.

Centripetal

by Erich Bass

“We have seen that the proper manner of physical action is such that the lower abdomen is the origin of movements of the body, or more precisely, the point that moves the least relatively to the ground at the crucial moment of any throw...”

—Moshe Feldenkrais, Higher Judo

One night during class, Sensei brought up the word centripetal. *“The closer your uke is to you the easier it is to influence their movement. Bring them into your orbit.”* —G.Lyons Sensei. At the time, I was working with centrifuges, and began to ruminate about this rotational energy that we all experience on a daily basis.

Let’s start with defining the force that is generated during rotation:

cen·trip·e·tal force—a force that acts on a body moving in a circular path and is directed toward the center around which the body is moving.

cen·trif·u·gal force—an apparent force that acts outward on a body moving around a center, arising from the body’s inertia.

The captivating thing about this concept is that centrifugal force, the outward force that seems to fling us from a carnival ride or our nage, does not exist. The feeling arises from our own mass wanting to continue in a particular direction (inertia). We have all experienced this sensation, and it feels quite real. However, much like during a carnival ride the uke is not generating the

force. It is the rotational energy of nage and uke’s desire to hold on that generates this powerful energy.

What is your axis?

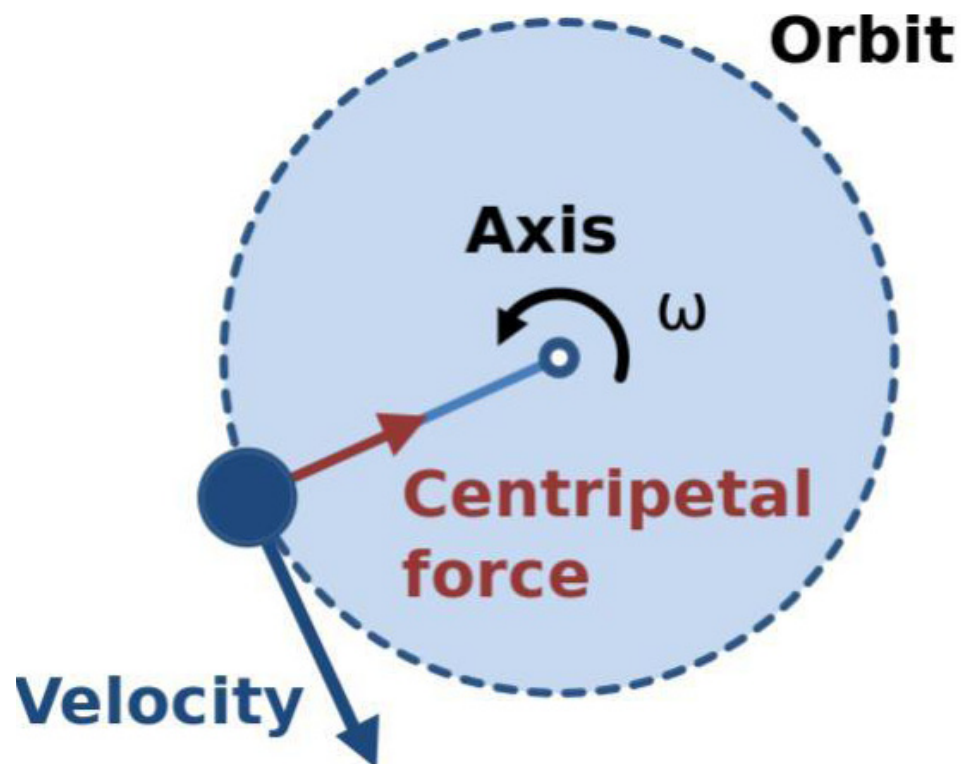
The imaginary line at the center of an object around which rotation occurs is that object’s axis. As it directly relates to the physical art of Aikido, your axis is your center/hara and spine. These parts of the body are essential for creating rotational energy. As we extend upward from the lower abdomen, we rely on our spine to translate the rotational energy through our upper body. It is essential to enable the translation of energy to the upper bodies that we have organized control of the spine. While the spine is comprised of thirty-three relatively small bones, when erect and organized in conjunction with our center, it can be a very stable axis. Put another way, we can have thirty-three vertebrae, or one spine. The convergence of rotation, a stable center, and the in-

ertia of the uke can create a very powerful throw that feels nearly effortless.

What does a centrifuge need? A stable center, an organized point of focus upon which to rotate.

There are seemingly countless examples of these rotational forces in our world. Storms, carnival rides, and centrifuges all derive their power from a strong, stable center. In the eye of the storm, or at the center of a carnival ride, these rotational forces seem to have little influence over objects. However, move slightly away from rotational axis, and the influence of our inertia can be felt immediately. This is not to say that you need to be large to have a strong center, only to be well organized. Some of the fastest centrifuges that I worked with were held up by and driven by a quarter inch hollow shaft. Maybe a more relat-

Centripetal, continues on next page



able and beautiful example is a pirouetting ballerina.

Is your center/axis where you want it to be?

During World War II, centrifuges were used to purify uranium to make weapons of mass destruction. Nearly seventy years later, our team is using the same model centrifuge to purify proteins to make vaccines for infants. The same centrifuge has the ability to make atomic weapons, or life saving vaccines. The choice of where we put our focus is critical.

Have you ever noticed that it is easier to come to the dojo as frequently as possible, as opposed to a more sparing schedule? As the frequency of attendance lessens, the further we get from the center of the dojo and the harder it becomes to hold on. However, when we attend practice as much as possible, we are closer to the center of this particular rotating body. Attendance becomes a matter of fact, rather than a decision to be contemplated.

Zen practice tends to focus on letting go, but what about bringing something closer? Hold on to the things you want in your orbit, and overwhelm your capacity with the things that are important to you. Bring them closer to the moment of inertia, and they will be easier to hold. While simultaneously, forcing ourselves to let go of the trivial things in our lives due to our limited capacity. Open yourself up to the possibility that we can watch the trivial portions of our lives be whisked away by their own weight.



Being with The Group

by Kim O'Malley

When two people collide, you're not always taught softly. Like beating the imperfections out of a sword, sometimes the straggling parts of your personality need to be stripped off so that you may connect on an entirely different level. And it's not like a level up; more like a level forward that leads you into a different place of you. To find it, all you have to do is open your heart.

To put it bluntly, sometimes you open your heart and get abused, and sometimes, you can open it too much. Everyone will react differently: because if they don't like what they see, you can't help that. Sometimes you'll be shunned from the group—left out. Other times, you'll be welcomed before you've changed anything about yourself. How does that work? It's not like you can change your spirit or how receptive you are of them, but perhaps it has to do with how afraid you are of welcoming them in.

"This is me. I'm sorry it's not refined, but I'm a person too, and I'm here to support all of you however I can." When you aren't just there to support yourself and your own growth, you might sometimes find yourself creating the environment for someone else to grow instead. It's not just about you; it's about us collectively in this art. What can we all become together in this pursuit? Can't train without a partner; can't work on yourself without someone

to show you who you really are.

And the people you encounter on the mat won't start out as your brothers and sisters; they aren't your family. You may be accepted, but you won't grow close to them overnight or maybe even over the course of many years, depending also on how much they open their hearts to you, and how willing you are to accept them point blank.

Much like how techniques breathe, so does working with people: you might connect seamlessly some days while other days, you or they might be shut off. Keeping in mind sometimes space is part of opening your heart, and other times it's part of closing yourself off.

The group dynamic is fierce; it can make or break a person into a million confused pieces. And there's nothing that you or anyone can do about it. The group isn't you, and you're not part of the group. You are the group, otherwise you're just there not really learning about yourself or being the mirror for someone else to learn about themselves.

This was the case for me the first time I went to France. Everything was off, and to this day, I struggle with trying to explain it. Initially, all I was thinking about was Brian. I was in a place in my life where things were already changing so drastically. And on top of it all, was my unwavering determination to change the course of his life. Showing someone the world was the one way I knew how.

From Iceland, after a minor incident with Brian and I's rental car, we

Being with The Group, continues on next page

showed up in France late because our train tickets and the time zone didn't match. From the get-go, we were already screwed; I just didn't fully understand what was happening at the time. It was like I was uncontrollably trapped in a cycle of one thing after another. Regardless, the 7hrs/day, five-day seminar began, and I faced the trial of being partnered with "the punisher." I found out later that was what the girls in Strasbourg called him.

It was suwariwaza ikkyo ura; I was pinning him, and he was resisting me and not going down. To me, that translated as put more weight on him. Then suddenly rokyo happened; he got ahold of my left elbow, hyperextending it and permanently damaging it.

I went off the mat crying, and that was when I noticed I felt more like a burden than a member. I was dealing with feelings of shame because of it and trying to find my way back. Sensei came over, and he told me the injury was my fault—told me that I wasn't one of "his guys" and asked me if I was just "collecting things".

In retrospect, it felt like the world was ending with those words. It felt like Sensei too was pushing me away; I just didn't realize he was pushing me to grow. But sometimes growing groundbreakingly hurts.

Flashes of everything to do with my incompetence was smothering me, and no one could or wanted to help pick my smeared self back up off the pavement. I had to do it myself. But even then, I struggled to be a part of the group because they weren't letting me help—they weren't letting me in. At some point, I took Eric aside and told him this, not because I wanted to, but because I was desperate to get out of the feelings that were gnawing at my whole self. How could I do anything—how could I be a part of the group if they didn't leave any openings?!

Just as the tide, that trip came and went. Two years later, I went again. Aside from pointing at the moon, I can't tell you what exactly changed, but it felt settled; it felt strong; it felt safe. There were no questions—no splitting off. We were Bucks County, and it was a lot different being the tsunami than it was drowning in it.

What was different? The change that came was not only attributed to being receptive, but it was also the acceptance from those that were surrounding me. In this place where I could open up and also be a support for them, I believe we all were able to overcome the boundaries of what separates us from each other, and ultimately from ourselves. In finding not only a reason, but a way to connect with the group, I was able to see inside myself and find comfort knowing they did too.

Situations still came up, and when they did, we bounced them off each other. Finding our Airbnb at midnight, suffering through the "cardboard house," finding food, getting revenge—all of these memories could have turned sour—could have been suffering or lead to fights, but instead, we can laugh about it because we all supported each other. Connection doesn't just go one way or even two ways; it's a web. We are all entangled, whether we try to escape it or not—whether we are comfortable being naked or not. All you have to do is open your heart to it.



He who learns must suffer.

And even in our sleep, pain that cannot forget,

Falls drop by drop upon the heart,

And in our own despair, against our own will,

Comes wisdom to us, by the awful grace of God.

— Aeschylus

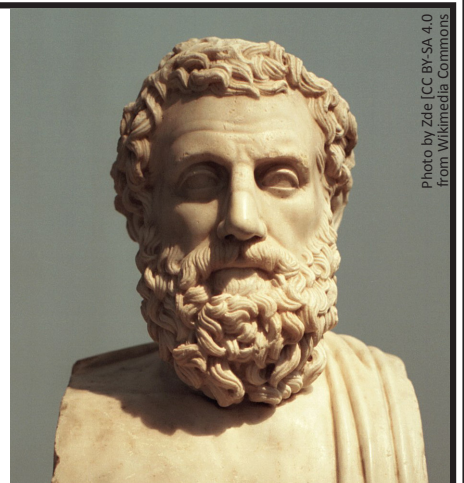


Photo by Zde [CC BY-SA 4.0
from Wikimedia Commons

ing the series *Kung Fu* with David Carradine because it always included some life lesson at the end. I accidentally stumbled across a movie, *Ikiru*. It was so moving that I watched it again soon after. I knew little about Akira Kurosawa at the time, but after telling other people about *Ikiru*, I learned more about him from them which led me to finally watch his classic, *Seven Samurai*. I was so inspired by the spirit of the farmers and the samurai (I have a copy if anyone wants to see it)—*if I could save a life, would I be able to do what they did?*

I was drawn to Aikido when I came across a documentary about different styles of martial arts. At the time, I was studying Buddhist sutras from the Theravada tradition, volunteered for the Buddhist Publication Society digitizing learning materials and tried to be diligent in meditation practice. Since childhood, perhaps from watching too many episodes of *Kung Fu*, it somehow got embedded in my head that I needed to do martial arts and this desire to learn never wavered despite all the things I went through. When the segment about Aikido came on in this documentary, it caught my attention when the host interviewed a Zen priest who also taught Aikido. The priest explained O'Sensei's philosophy of harmony and peace, that the practice emphasized the importance of meditation. It never occurred to me that the two seemingly opposite disciplines could work side-by-side. It completely shattered my superficial per-

ceptions of what I thought martial arts to be, "*How can you have peace when someone is trying to kill you?*"

Now or never. After turning 45, that yearning to get myself on the mat rekindled. I actually enrolled in an Okinawan-style martial arts when I was 30, but I had a bad accident and moved around so I couldn't continue my studies but I vowed I would return. I didn't think it would take 15 years though! I couldn't find the same school in Pennsylvania, but after learning about Aikido I felt it was better suited for me. I looked up schools nearby, but the ones I found somehow didn't resonate—I was looking for something more meaningful than building up brute strength. I knew I was a work in progress and I wanted to learn more of my potential. Besides my short stint with the Okinawan school, I've never done any rigorous sports before so it was a brand new frontier. I finally found Bucks County Aikido.

Unfortunately, my mother became sick and went into a coma before I started my practice but I think she and my father would have been proud. I often wondered why I kept coming to class even after going through some worrisome injuries. It sure wasn't because I was trying to impress them. Over time and more reflections later especially during my long drives to and from the dojo, I slowly realized that it was my way of honoring them. As I said in the beginning, I do not know too many people who are black belts or studies martial arts. I think those who do have to have some sort of craziness

in them in the first place to willingly agree to be tossed and risk injuries. I suppose in some way, my honor is the journey itself. That what little time I had with them and what they tried to instill in me, I try to apply and the life that I am trying to save is really my own. I saw my parents as heroes who were just as "crazy" for uprooting my brothers and sister from one country to a working-class suburb in California for a chance at a better life—a new frontier. My parents *were* the struggling ordinary people in Kurosawa's movies.

According to Wikipedia, Kintsugi is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. Many walk around this planet broken, but there is this resiliency within that somehow binds us so we can continue on to the next step, whatever that may be. We don't need external expensive materials to help us heal, but genuinely find this resiliency first, in others and then, within ourselves. I've learned so much the past 7 years. Aikido has opened and given me lessons in the power of letting go, of speaking out (although I still prefer listening) and it enabled me some room so I can cultivate what I still need in hopes that I can grow old gracefully and maybe be a bit wiser. We are all on the same journey, whatever led us to the edge of the mat, let us all bow, be thankful for our heroes and as Sensei would say, "*get to work!*"

"Teachers open the door, but you must enter by yourself." —Chinese Proverb



Solipsism

By G. Lyons

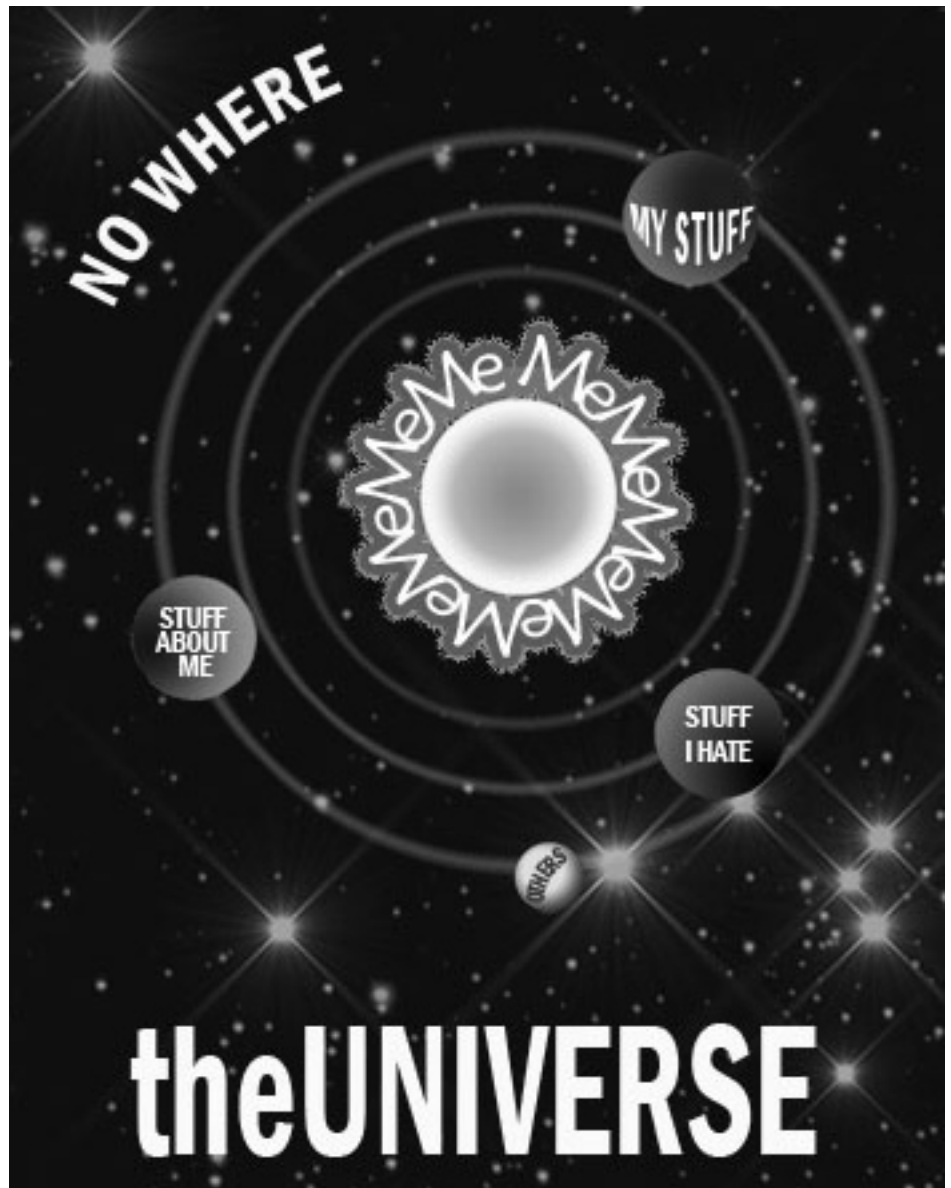
–No one is coming to save me. I know there are some who have my back but they have their own battles to fight. I have to rely on myself.

–I’m lucky to be a part of a larger group that gives me strength and a sense of purpose. It’s good to have something to believe in.

–Day to day I’m on my own. Practicing mindfulness I use increased awareness to avoid being taken advantage of and, when necessary, to manipulate to my advantage.

–Deep down I know people are just like me. I extend empathy and compassion to others and even if I don’t receive gratitude in return I know my actions are virtuous.

There are moments in the dojo when the self can be thrown away. It’s likely to be intense; we may not be willing otherwise. ○



“You indulge in self improvement and all you have to show for it is an improved self.”

–Ram Tzu

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