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London Aikido Club News

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Hello from Wales

Llanafan Aikido Club took off in April of this year, 2011. Every Wednesday evening at the Church Hall, 9 miles east of Aberystwyth. We have a core group of 8-10 students with different degrees of experience and background. From total beginners to black belts - Welsh, Polish, Bulgarian, German and even a few English. Just like music, Aikido translates quite easily in many languages.

This group are quite a disciplined and a brave lot. Not only training regularly, courteously and seriously but, on wooden floors as well.



Extra training was required on Saturdays over the summer. Our only concern was the local vicar bringing into the hall, as we trained, a large altar cross and a bible. Last rites? But for whom? No, the boiler had gone in the church so he was going to run his Sunday service in the hall the following day.

The Hardest Grading I've never taken

A couple of years ago Sensei Andy Hathaway suggested that he thought it was time I attempted my Nidan grading. I thought 'Hey, I'll give it a go' and Janice Hemmings offered to help me prepare. Janice obtained a DVD of the syllabus and I watched it initially and thought "Hey I can do most of that, I'll just brush up on the parts I'm

We have also had 2 "Aikido in the Garden" days where Paddy Bergin taught and clearly impressed the students. The garden was a perfect battleground, not one blade of grass was on the flat. Disconcerting at first but amazing how quick one got used to it. Paddy and Phil C had constructed a makiwara for all to use although one or two were mystified about this elaborately decorated tyre in the corner of the garden?



What on earth is that? Still no one got hurt and all of us learned something that day.

What next? Aikido in the winter garden or in the waterfall?

By Phil Croskin

unsure of. This is very do-able". How wrong can you be?

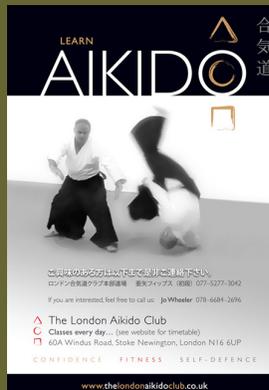
I began training with Janice on Sunday mornings and a terrible thing happened. I was finding, for me, that this was more than just the techniques. At my last grading I had worked on the syllabus, refined the techniques listed,

ADVERTISING

Lovely NEW advertising cards and A5 posters have been created for us by Simon Beer.

There are different cards and posters for the Windus Road Dojo and the Acton dojo.

If you know of a library, or sports centre or swimming pool, or café or restaurant or hospital or other public place where they wouldn't mind you leaving cards or pinning up small posters, then please collect them from the respective dojos.



taken the grading and passed. This one was different. Janice would suggest that we look at a technique, I would think "OK, this won't take long, I know this one well", then nicely, without any malice she would rip it to shreds.

Initially, I thought "OK, I need to turn more" or "I need to enter more" but as we went on, I began to notice it was none of those things.

The techniques I was doing were OK and they worked to a degree, if your objective was to throw your uke or pin them. But they lacked something. This was a different way of training, not just learning the techniques as movements, but as a whole action with a whole intent. I began working on the techniques in a different way - looking at how open I was. Would it really work? If it wouldn't work, what was I doing wrong? If it went wrong, what were my options? I can do this to them, but what can they do to me?

To train in this way had quite a strange effect on me. I would like to say that these next comments are only my very personal views and are probably different for each individual. There are too many to list, so I will just explain one or two of those concepts.

Consideration:

What has consideration go to do with Aikido? Anyway I *am* considerate - I give my seat up for old people on the bus all the time.

This is a different type of consideration. When you begin any technique, are you safe? Are you too close? As you move what are you saying to your uke? Are you in a corner? Is there anything you could pick up and use?

I feel we do look at those points, but not in great detail. I am sure you have all had the instructor say "Head up" at some point, or "Don't look at your uke on the ground". These are outlining the concept of consideration. All sounds good but there are side effects. Once your head is up and you are really looking, you notice more about everywhere. You may go home and notice that mess you have just got used to, or that bin that's overflowing. You may notice you are running out of corn flakes. When you start to notice those

small events, your action starts to change the structure of your life. These three small things that you notice means that your house is now tidy and you are not running out at eight in the morning to get cornflakes, to make you late for work. The Small Things lead to Big Things.

Actions:

When you are safe in correct hanmi, not vulnerable, only then can you proceed with your technique. This action also spreads through your life like wildfire. Once you have noticed all these new things, to not put them into action could send you Mad.

Being Open to New Ideas:

Even if you do know a technique, is it right? Could it be better? Maybe. The only way to know is to try it. If someone suggest something or shows you something, don't rubbish it, give it a chance. You never know.

I'm sure you've all been wrong before, and if you haven't, you obviously haven't been training long enough!

I recently went to a seminar with Paolo Corallini sensei. After the seminar we went for something to eat. Whilst we were there he made a comment that I picked up as pure Aikido. He said "I hate to go somewhere in a different country, and they give me spaghetti. Wherever I am, I like to try the local dishes to see what they're like".

When you put all of these points together, plus some others, it can have a huge effect on your life. Not only have I noticed that the bin was full, and I was low on cornflakes, but I have noticed some bad people who my ACTION was to distance myself from, and some other people who have always been there, not saying how good they are, but I now realise and appreciate a little more.

Andy Hathaway is our sensei and therefore I think that he would read this, and think its old news. This is one of the most considerate and patient men I have met. I've heard comment from people who would disagree.



Martin Sealy
teaches the 7.30 till 9.30am class every Saturday morning at Windus Road.

Suitable for all early birds!

But if those people were in my class, I feel I would be shouting "PUT YOUR HEAD UP".

Also Janice Hemmings - she has turned up to help me for the past 20 years and never asked or expected anything in return. And for those of you that have seen my Aikido, I am sure you will agree that she is very patient.

Now were those people born considerate, patient & caring? Or is it the Aikido that has changed them through those more advanced concepts? Who knows? A Chicken and egg scenario.

Heroes of the dojo

The dojo is run and maintained entirely by volunteers, who see what needs fixing and then fix it.

One particularly cold evening in 2010, the dojo toilet was blocked and it was Batu and Matthew's strong stomachs and hard work and ingenuity with various items in the dojo (all of which had to be thrown away immediately afterward) that meant they won the battle of the toilet and we didn't have to pay for a plumber to come in and fix it, and no one had to take time off work to let the plumber in.

The same when the sink became blocked. - Greg dismantled it, and extracted scary amounts of unidentifiable black muck so that it worked again.

On two separate occasions the front door became so swollen from water leaking from the upstairs flat, that there was a strong possibility the key would break in the lock before we could open the door. Each time Allan Cowie brought in planing tools and shaved wood off the bottom and sides of the door so that it continued working.

The London Aikido Club is a truly special place. You can take from it as little or as much as you want. It depends on you and how much you are willing to commit.

For me it has changed my life in a mainly positive way. Why only 'mainly'? Well there is one downside. The more I train for this grading, the more I feel I will never be ready. But the journey is truly enlightening

By Greg Creese

He also cleaned out the inside of the ventilators when they stopped working.

Jochen Encke replaced the lock on the toilet door when someone broke it.

Allan Lambert and Tam paint the dojo on an ad hoc basis to keep it neat and clean.

We all help with the cleaning of the mat which should be cleaned and mopped after the last class of every day, and swept as required during the course of the day. We do generate a LOT of fluff.

We can all help by keeping a look out for small tasks that need doing, and then doing them. For example, if you think the mirror needs cleaning, then please clean it. If you think the flowers need replacing, then take money from the flower tin and go and get some more. Just leave the receipt, and any change, in the tin.

The upkeep of the dojo is no one's responsibility - which makes it everybody's responsibility.

By Janice Hemmings

NEWS

The latest dan rank promotions -

congratulations to

Aya Phipps
nidan,

Batu Onver
Shodan

Jo Wheeler
shodan,

Sam Akopian
shodan,

Simon Beer
shodan.

Aikido's practical uses

When people ask what aikido is, a question that often comes up is whether it has any practical uses.

The obvious suggestion is that it's useful for dealing with attacks - involving joint locks, strikes, throws and thrusts using various weapons, perhaps it could be useful for fending off the hordes of sword wielding maniacs we have all encountered in Stoke Newington? Maybe, but perhaps there are some other practical uses for aikido...

core balance and stability - being rooted to the ground and strong in the centre (hara) is particularly useful when standing on a moving bus or a tube train that shudders to a stop. It can also be employed when pushing a heavy object such as a car, or controlling a supermarket trolley. Also invaluable if carrying a very large cake when pregnant (so I'm told).

awase - blending with what's going on around you can help prevent disaster, such as by catching someone's beer glass before it falls over. Also handy when navigating busy roads.

ukeme (breakfalls) - being able to fall without breaking your head open must be useful!

other people - training in aikido means you meet many other people from different walks of life.

Occasionally there are "Advanced" or "Dan grading classes" on Sunday afternoons? What are they, and who goes to them?

There are two main types of "special" class.

The most regular is the "dan grading class" where people who are taking a dan rank, or are thinking about future gradings come along to practice the sequences of techniques from the

If you need a good lawyer (or even meet a good lawyer), someone who will lend you a good book (or write a good book you can read); you'll meet people who will make you laugh and help you decide what to have for lunch!

hanmi and hito emi - flexible and ready stances that allow a change of direction easily, or make the body thinner, can be particularly helpful when moving through a crowd, or squeezing through small spaces. Ok, also useful when being attacked by a bunch of sword wielding maniacs...

zanshin - can help you notice in time to move out of the way of a stampede of commuters running for a train - a state of awareness and relaxed alertness is one of the best forms of 'self defense'. If you sense danger before it happens perhaps you can avoid it.

One student recently admitted to practicing Kokyu while pushing a pram... If you have experienced your own unexpected aikido applications send them in for the next newsletter.

By Jo Wheeler

syllabus and find out for themselves more about how the techniques are inter-related.

It is a chance to review techniques and sequences which are already known, and it is more of a workshop than a taught class. If, for instance,

**DIARY
DATES:**

Next Kyu Grading

**3.30pm
25 February
2012 at
Windus
Road Dojo**

the class is covering shomen uchi kihon, you need to be able to do the shomen uchi kihon omote and ura without too much bother as you will be practicing it as a sequence, not being taught individual techniques.

The last half hour is usually a careful exploration of jiyu waza including tanto tori and jo tori, that is practicing your aikido against single and multiple attackers, armed and unarmed.

The other type of "special" class is where a technique or category of techniques, not usually taught in general classes, is taught in the usual

Aikido isn't a real martial is it?

Aikido is a twentieth century development of a centuries old Japanese tradition of battlefield training. Aikido has very many aspects to it and can be a lifelong study for committed students.

However, the thing which is being practiced in Aikido which makes it different to most other martial arts is that the training is not about 'duels'. The training is to prepare one person against multiple attackers. Imagine a samurai on a battlefield, knocked off his horse, lost his sword, outnumbered and surrounded by people who will work together to finish him off. That's where it starts.

This means that a lot of popular attacks and defences are never used because we always have to assume that our main problem is NOT the person in front of us - it's the unknown amount of people closing in behind or to the side of us that we can't see which is the problem.

Directly kicking or attacking the person in front of me is a bad idea when there may be someone right behind me. I will have my leg in the air, leaving me off balance with my back to an approaching danger.

This leads to a completely counter-intuitive system of movement which

way to a restricted audience. This is because the techniques are complicated and require certain levels of experience and familiarity to avoid becoming completely confused by them.

Generally speaking, the classes are aimed at hakama wearers, but if there is one coming up, and you would like to know more about it, just ask someone

By Janice Hemmings

is rigorously logical once you get to grips with it. You can only start being 'intuitive' with the movements once you have unlearned quite a few natural reactions and done a lot of aikido training, usually well into the dan (black belt) grades.

There are many popular myths.

Q: You use people's strength against them don't you.

A: Sometimes. Not as much as you think.

Q: It's entirely defensive isn't it. You don't attack.

A: We don't use defensive movements; we use simultaneous counter attacks and redirection of our partner's movement. Some of the moves can look defensive if you have never been on the receiving end of them. Do we initiate? If you give an opening which is an ambush, who attacked?

Q: You don't punch or kick do you?

A: Yes we do. Admittedly not brilliantly, but the scope for using punches and kicks when moving are

If you have an article, or a photograph, or a piece of **news** that you would like to appear in the **newsletter**, please email it to mfon@eolasbio.co.uk.

If you would like to **discuss writing something** for the newsletter, either speak to your instructor, or, again, contact the web site and we will point you at the right person, depending which **dojo** you are in.

If you are a dojo student and you would like to **advertise your business** in the newsletter, please let us know.

limited. We use the word 'atemi' which means a strike to a vital point, and this is incorporated into the movement. For instance, an Aikidoka might not start by punching you in the face with a fist, but they would certainly use their elbow on your nose or your throat as they turned by you.

Q: Aikido's not a real martial art is it?

A: There are a lot of different styles of Aikido and lots of Aikido federations, all emphasising different aspects. In common with all other martial arts most of the federations think that the other federations don't know what they're doing. Some groups light candles and contemplate the universe, some groups try and kill each other, get drunk, then go back and do it again. It depends what you mean by 'real'.

Junior Aikido - the benefits of aikido for young people

Twice a week the London Aikido Club runs a junior aikido class. We have a regular group of committed students and always welcome new members.

Here are some of the ways young people can benefit from aikido training.

fitness and confidence - in aikido we learn how to fall safely on the mat, as well as a range of techniques to improve balance, stability and fitness

concentration and learning - aikido improves concentration and coordination through observing and learning a range of body movements. The techniques also foster a sense of awareness and focus on what's going on around you

cooperation - aikido is non-competitive and encourages a spirit of helpfulness in training. Our older

Q: Don't you do lots of fancy break falls?

A: A lot of falling, only occasional fanciness. No one wants to be on the floor in a melee. Go down, land safely, get up fast and never hurt yourself in icy weather again.

There is no sparring; we have jiyu waza (free practice). There are many reasons for not sparring. The practical considerations are that many of the techniques, exercised without care, cause permanent damage. Many techniques would have to be removed, leaving the exercise pointless. We don't do 'duels' and we don't score points. We do 'grateful to get out alive'.

By Janice Hemmings

members help out the new and younger ones as they learn techniques and the group is a mix of ages and abilities

achievement - as juniors progress they will have the opportunity to take gradings to demonstrate what they have learnt

fun - aikido involves disciplined training but is also a great way to have fun, meet other people and stay fit

We also teach a range of movements with the Jo (wooden staff) that help with balance, stability and coordination. **For more information** : <http://www.thelondonaikidoclub.co.uk> . Classes are Thursday from 6.45-7.45pm and Saturday from 2-3pm. Price : £5

By Jo Wheeler



Greg Creese

**teaches the
10 till 12 am
class every
Sunday
Morning**

**Friendly
class
suitable for
beginners**

Zen and the Martial Arts: Zanshin

This is a big subject and has been the topic of many books written by people far more experienced in either martial arts or Zen Buddhism than I am. I have been practicing aikido and Zen Buddhism for about twelve years and can agree with those who find common points in both. Rather than try to make an exhaustive survey and potentially exhausting read I thought it might be useful to pick a couple of interesting points of where Buddhist practice and martial arts training meet.

One idea I have always found very interesting is Zanshin. I cannot tell you exactly what it means because I don't know. I know that the second part of the word, "Shin" refers to the heart. If you look up a dictionary or glossary of terms you will see that Zanshin means something like a calm or still heart. We talk about using Zanshin in aikido most often at the end of a technique. We are encouraged to stay with the technique for a few seconds of stillness after the flow of activity. As a raw beginner you are sometime just told to count "One, two". After a while you might even be able to pull this off without moving your lips or obviously counting in some other fashion. I do try. You cannot help feeling after a while that there is more to this Zanshin, this stilling of the heart.

"Stilling the heart" is what Buddhism is all about. Shin or Kokoro does not simply mean the physical biological organ that pumps blood around the body. Stilling that would be a fairly foolish and pointless thing to do. Some people therefore prefer some combination word such as heart/mind to convey the sense of what "shin" really means. It is what beats faster when we are excited or afraid. It is what churns when we think of things we do not like. It is not the airy "mind" of logic, it is the turbulent heart of visceral emotions and private thoughts. The purpose of Buddhist meditation is to observe this

heart/mind in action. In meditation we see not only the way our thoughts flit all over the place but how we also respond emotionally to these thoughts. With meditation comes the insight that it is not what is out there in the world, beyond our skin, that makes us happy or sad, it is this constant churning of the mind and our reaction to it. We can be told this a million times but it is only in practice that this becomes real to us.

Likewise our instructor may shout, plead or use any technique in the arsenal to try to teach us Zanshin but it is not taught, it is realized. As I practice I might occasionally notice that I "forgot the Zanshin" as if it was the optional bit at the end, the count One-Two. We concentrate on getting our hands right, our feet right, we might even think about hamni, or kiai. We put on our best hurt face when the instructor asks "where was our Zanshin". We might think, "I only was trying really hard to get my hands/feet/posture or whatever, right." No matter how many times we are told, we treat Zanshin as an optional extra.

When we meditate for a while we see that we create our own problems in our head. Buddha taught meditation as a way to solve our problems. By this he did not mean that if you have a problem, go away and meditate and it will go away. He taught that once we realize that our so-called problems are our own creations and that once we realize this we are never held prisoner by our fixed views and opinions ever again. We cultivate an awareness to see things as they really are, without all of the emotional and intellectual baggage that we carry around in our heads. A still heart/mind allows us to see things as they really are. That cultivated awareness begins to sound a lot like Zanshin.

In training we are constantly urged just to practice wholeheartedly, forget

**NEXT
WEAPONS
COURSE
START DATES
AT
RUSHMORE
SCHOOL :**

**JO
(Stick)
Tues
10 January
2012
8-10pm
KEN
(Sword)
Sunday
19 February
2012
10-12am**

about the outside world, forget even about the minutiae of technique and just give ourselves body and soul into the technique. That means that Zanshin is not something tacked on at the end, it is the spirit in which we practice a technique, it is the spirit in which we practice aikido.

A lot of people who come to aikido say that they do so because they want to learn self-defence. Many of those people ask how long it will take before they will be able "to look after themselves" in the street. Such a person might be lucky. They might learn to breakfall so well that one day if they trip they might execute a perfect mae-ukemi and walk away

from what might otherwise have been a nasty fall. With decades of training and a lot of luck they might take a knife from an assailant. But if they practice Zanshin they might never have stumbled in the first place, never have put themselves in a situation where they end up being confronted with a naked blade. As my attempts at jiyu waza (free practice with at least one attacker) have taught me, technique, is often the first casualty of an even mildly stressful situation. I try not to imagine what it would be like if the notorious, hypothetical combination of a disaffected youth and a dark alley, were to arise.

By Michael O'Neill

The joy of getting it wrong

Have you ever trained with someone who got increasingly upset because they couldn't get the technique right? Have you ever (oh no!) been that person?

It's natural of course to want to get something right and it would be pointless to stay content with a bad technique. But we are so saturated with competitive spirit in our everyday lives that we can get embarrassed or even angry when things don't go well (as we think) on the mat. No one makes the mistake of thinking they are competing with their training partner in a combative sense, but we easily slip into competing in how well we do the technique. Or we just compete with ourselves, with our imagined ideal of how well we should be doing. We are all afraid in some degree to be the one who can't get it, to lose face. We even start to resent being corrected, to feel angry or ashamed because we are singled out for what we see as criticism.

As soon as we stand back from the heat of the moment it's obvious that our emotions have carried us away in these situations. After all, what on

earth are we practicing for if our techniques are perfect already? We could just sit on our Aiki-clouds and beam serenely at the world. We train to get better, which means we constantly make mistakes and edge forward as best we can towards different mistakes. To compete with anyone, even ourselves, in the quality of our techniques is probably already far worse aikido than a botched technique could ever be, but it also misses that point. As for criticism, it is a privilege when we are corrected, a gift which we should treasure because it has the potential to change something unhelpful in us which might otherwise remain stuck.

Where I live, out in the country, there are lots of people who ride horses. I know nothing about horses, but I have noticed that there are two methods to try and catch a horse in a field. One surprisingly common way is to chase the horse, which doesn't work because the horse just runs away. The other is to attract the horse's attention and then walk away, whereupon the horse will follow you to see (I suppose, I have no idea what horses think) what is going on. Maybe this offers a better model of

Contributors

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**Tony
Wilkinson**

what training is about than the idea of edging (or running, if we are in a hurry) along a road to some faraway point called perfection. The point of practice is directed change, but what creates the change is to do what we can do now and wait for the technique to come to us. That requires patience of course - but we can practice that as well, as we train.

But there's a further point. One of the great beauties of Saito Sensei's legacy is the emphasis on basics. What that implies among many other things is that aikido is never a matter of mastering one bit and moving on to the better, more interesting, more advanced stuff. It is a constant revisiting of matters we thought we understood, only to find that they are

far deeper, more subtle and multidimensional than we ever realised. In my own experience, it keeps happening and it is one of the reasons why aikido never gets dull. If I presume to project my own experience to the far horizons of the discipline, maybe there is no such thing as perfection. There is progress, of course, but no end point because, to mix metaphors wildly, the onion always has another layer.

So getting it wrong is not a cause for angst or anger. It is a sign that something rather good is happening. Maybe today, but very soon in any case, a bit of aikido will reveal itself and we will get a tiny bit better at it. That is the joy of training

By Tony Wilkinson