



Commitment

David Hill, Myo Shin Juku (Slough) writes:

At Winter School 2008, Mr Jones talked about the support some UKA students have given recently in making the trip to Hombu dojo and the application and consistency that he saw from the aikidoka they encountered there.

Indeed, from my own experiences it is clear that around the world there are many students for whom Aikido practice is a part of their daily lives.

However I would like to suggest there are other forms of commitment just as important and sometimes, if not often, overlooked.

For students who live near Hombu dojo and probably for students of, say, Ren Shin Kan where there is practice almost (if not) every day of the week it is easy to be seen and have your commitment noticed.

Most students, though, do not have the chance to practice more than twice a week between Monday to Friday yet they do turn up, week in and week out, to these two days of practice. And the instructors who run these

clubs also show similar endeavour.

I know my first instructor has, for 20 years +, taught twice a week, almost without fail and attends the vast majority of the weekend courses run either at House or National level whether carrying injuries, being ill, having work commitments, family concerns or any other claim to his time that lesser folk would succumb to.

Then there is the financial commitment to Aikido. Living locally to a thriving dojo must make things easier. But for those outside the West Midlands travel and accommodation are important impacts on the ability to attend House and National courses, celebration events and indeed Summer School.



Friends of mine with families cannot always justify the cost of a week's aikido when the children (and spouse) want a holiday in the sun. There is a balance to be kept and often family and such can be more important.

Does the fact that there is no access to daily classes make this commitment any less important? Do the smaller / newer / less well-known dojos (that often struggle for survival) mean any less commitment is demonstrated by students and instructors alike? Does the lack of free time or money detract from these students and instructors worth to the UKA?

The answer should be a resounding no. Those on what seems like the periphery, though, could be forgiven for thinking their efforts sometimes go unappreciated?

I would love to be able to practice every day. I would love to be able to afford a trip to Hombu again. Sadly it is not likely in the immediate future. I know Mr Jones was recognising students' support and commitment and rightly so.

But perhaps the UKA would spare a more generous thought to those not so much in the limelight who are also an indelible part of the organisation.

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Ask A Shidojin

Prue Humphreys sent in this question for Peter Brady and Philip Smith:

How and why did you start to learn iaido and what do you achieve from it?

Peter writes:

Iaido has no direct connection to Aikido and yet it is practised in tandem with Aikido in many Dojos throughout the world. In the UK in the early seventies Chiba Sensei who was an Iaido student of the late grandmaster Mitsusuka Sensei would occasionally arrive early at an Aikido course venue and fill time by practising Iai on his own in the corner of the Dojo. Early birds who were there would watch intently and as time went by Chiba Sensei was asked if he would teach the Art, he agreed and that was it. He always used to say that Iaido would help a student to understand the characteristics of the Japanese sword which, in turn, could not but help with the study of Aiki-ken (Aikido swordsmanship) that was always taught as part and parcel of Chiba Sensei's Aikido.

Philip Smith and I were both around in those days and developed a strong interest in Iai and when Chiba Sensei left Britain in 1976 we carried on practising. In the mid eighties we both joined the British Kendo Federation and attained formal qualifications resulting in Sandan.

Like Aikido weapons, Iaido training is not mandatory but you can learn a lot about ma-ai (combative distance), timing, coordination, weight transference and certain hand and arm movements in relation to extension and projection of energy. I have learned much about hand movements in the execution of basic katatedori techniques from Iaido.

Philip writes:

I first started Iai-do in about 1972 when Chiba Sensei first introduced it during weekend seminars.

The initial instruction was in Muso Shinden Omori Ryu and when Chiba Sensei returned to Japan I continued to train on my own receiving instruction from Chiba Sensei at Summer School.

That continued really until about 1982 or so when Kanetsuka Sensei gave me a book on Setei gata Iai-do which is the international standard form for grading.

I had been running a "class" of about 2 people at the old Cradley Dojo and decided that I needed to get at least some sort of rank in Iai-do. I discussed it with Peter (Brady) and Chiba Sensei one Summer School and as a result Peter and I began training with the British Kendo Association, first with Faye Goodman (now 7th Dan) and then with Mr. Fuji who was head of the BKA at that time.

Since about 1988, I have stuck with Ko-ryu (traditional Iai-do) and in 2006 began an association with the European Iai-do Federation based in Geneva, becoming their UK representative in December of that year. I have also re-established links with the BKA as I now have about a dozen or so students in Iai-do two of whom gained Shodan last year.

Why have I stuck with Iai-do? For me it is a continual voyage of self-discovery seeking that unobtainable quality – perfection. Each movement is different from the last and each is wrong so I am constantly trying to correct technique. I don't expect to do it some time soon but I have got a lifetime left to achieve it.





Ren Shin Kan laido

Karl Gibbons writes:

I would like to start this report by thanking all the students at Ren Shin Kan laido for their commitment, dedication and hard work leading up to their grading, ten out of ten for effort.

Eleven of us set off for Watchet in Somerset for the national grading seminar on Friday 7th March. The work was done, all we had to do was go and do it the way we had trained. There were a few who were a little tense, which is hardly surprising as they had never graded nationally before; and we were an "unknown" dojo with the largest grading group attending. So, with everybody wondering who we were, we set off knowing all eyes would be on us.

The team talks were done, Dave Green was discipline officer (if Dave disciplines you, you stay

disciplined) we knew what we had to do and how we were going to do it, all that was left to do was to slap ac/dc into the cd and hit the road. We had a good journey down and arrived early in Watchet so decided to explore the town and beach and by 4.15 we were all settled down in the pub where we were staying (need I say anymore) we had a good meal and a great night, we made a lot of new friends as well as meeting some old ones. The banter was great, I looked around me and was proud of the effort the squad had made: everybody was in their RSK laido shirts and looked really good (we were the only ones who looked like a dojo on tour).

Saturday was a long hard day, sore hands, feet and legs were experienced by all, but everybody felt the benefit of 7 th dan instruction, especially Philip who was training with Sensei Chris Mansfield, head of

laido UK. I could see the confidence building in the squad as they realised that although nobody knew who RSK were yet, we knew we were up to the standard and, dare I say, better than a lot of the other candidates.

Sunday morning, and this was the day we had been working towards for the last six months, I was tense, not for me but for the others, we had a good breakfast and a bit of a laugh then off to the dojo to grade, as we registered all seemed relaxed and calm but as we entered the dojo you could see the faces change, the eyes harden, as RSK WENT TO WAR. It was great to see: everybody was focused and ready; and I must say every one of them stood out in their grading.

They were very, very good and I was very, very proud of them.



Congratulations to: -

Barrie Aldridge	Nidan
David Green	Shodan

1st kyu:

Steve Davies; Hanna Davies; Andy Davis; Dale Hipkiss; Gareth Bowen; Hayley Perkins; Mario Di Paola

Finally, it was a huge honour that I, Hannah Davies, Andy Davis and David Green were invited to attend British Squad Training.

laido classes at Ren Shin Kan are on Tuesdays 6.30-8.00 and Fridays 6.00-8.00. Beginners are welcome – no sword needed.

For more information, contact me on karlgg@fsmail.net





Weapons in Aikido

Philip Smith, Shido-in, Ren Shin Kan writes:

Every so often somebody will ask the question "How important is weapons practice in Aikido?"

Well from a personal point of view I think it is as important as you want it to be, it can either dominate your understanding and practice of the art or it can play no part whatsoever.

So, how can both of these points of view be correct? After all they sound completely contradictory. In order to explain this seeming contradiction we need to understand the relationship between weapons and Aikido and people's motives for training in weapons.



It is often said that Aikido was developed from weapons, particularly sword work, and that all techniques can be traced back to sword forms. To an extent this is true in that O Sensei and many of the other Aikido pioneers such as Yamaguchi Sensei, Nishio Sensei and so on were classical swordsmen before they began their Aikido careers and so their earlier experiences and expertise in-

formed their Aikido development. In contrast people like Saito Sensei and Chiba Sensei began their weapons practice after or as part of their Aikido training and so have different perspectives and emphases on weapons.

To take the examples of Yamaguchi Sensei and Saito Sensei as a contrast: Yamaguchi Sensei practiced Ka Shima Shin Jyu Ryu sword work which is characterised by diagonal cuts with the hands kept below shoulder height and mainly linear footwork, whilst Saito Sensei practiced Aikiken with its full arcing cuts and emphasis on diagonal footwork. Therefore Yamaguchi Sensei's Aikido was in one sense very direct but flowing with the emphasis on suppressing (or cutting through) uke's centre from the instant of initial contact. In contrast Saito Sensei used taisabaki to get either himself or his uke into a position where he could cut his centre. Both approaches were equally effective or even devastating for the receiver but felt somewhat different in nature.

OK, but both of these masters used weapons so it just shows how vital they are right?

Well I'm not sure that that is a valid conclusion.

I was quite shocked to learn that weapons were never taught in any systematic way by O Sensei (in fact Saito Sensei was the first to formally codify the weapons system in the early 1970's) and that it seems he simply used weapons to illustrate a principle or point; not as an end in itself. I well remember my stunned surprise when I heard Asai Sensei (an uchideshi at the same time as Chiba Sensei) say that "Weapons are not real Aikido training" In over the years the vast majority of instructors that I have seen do not regularly teach weapons and place no special emphasis on them during training.



So, why do so many instructors in the UKA see weapons training as important? Well I think there are two main reasons. Firstly the influence of Chiba Sensei during his time as technical director of Aikikai of Great Britain (now the BAF) and the UKA and then Mr Smith's deepening study of weapons particularly in his latter years.

There is no doubt that weapons teaching and practice can be used to

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further Aikido study and to help to develop a greater understanding of Aikido principles such as mai-ai, timing etc but I think many instructors use weapons teaching in particular for more selfish reasons.

Teaching weapons shows students that you know more than they do, either in terms of kata or of "deep understanding" of martial arts. Some instructors appear to consider themselves as expert swordsmen; perhaps equal (or even superior) to Kendoka or lai-doka. This in my opinion is pure egotism as both Kendo and lai-do are clearly defined arts - as indeed is Jo-do - requiring separate skills and abilities. To me, this way of thinking is as mistaken as a high-ranking Judoka considering themselves capable of practising Aikido at the same level.

Secondly I think many instructors use weapons

teaching as a means of avoiding physical involvement with students. As we get older physical effort becomes more draining and there is a perception that this does not matter to the Aikido teacher. However, in truth there is always a certain amount of physical effort involved in training and teaching and sometimes teachers struggle to cope physically with very strong or non-compliant (or both) students who are often labelled as "difficult" In fact I know that, as his health failed, Mr Smith increasingly used this option so that he could continue to participate in his weakened condition.

So what place should weapons hold in Aikido training?

In my opinion we should concentrate on basic weapons training only, particularly as teachers, and allow individuals to follow their own path in

terms of weapons training. For myself, I only practice the basic suburi, awase and kumi-waza for both bokken & jo with the three basic jo kata. I find that this informs my Aikido practice sufficiently to allow my continued Aikido development which, after all, is what they were designed for.

The other thing to remember is that Aikido is primarily a body art and should be practiced as such. There really is no substitute for regular physical contact between tori and uke.

My advice? If you like weapons and want to really study them then do Kendo, lai-do or Jo-do, but don't kid yourself that Aikido weapons are anything but a training tool.

