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Cover Art: Photograph of the Arashiyama bamboo grove, outside Kyoto, Japan.

EDITOR'S NOTE

ALLISON MUIR

As we exhaled during a breathing exercise at the closing of Friday's noon class, Darrell Bluhm Sensei invited us to extend our energy through our fingertips out into the universe as far as we can imagine. My exhale could have gone on forever, reaching towards the feeling of spaciousness both inside and outside my body. 2022 has been a year of expansion for the Tacoma Aikikai community. Physical dojo walls came down providing room for a larger training space. Figurative walls created by the pandemic were removed allowing for the revival of seminars. At Chris Mulligan Sensei's seminar, I watched old friends reunite with a hunger for something dearly missed.

Expansion comes through shared experience and is discovered as much in the act of giving as it is in receiving. Every encounter offers possibility, and the possibilities expand exponentially as we share our learning with others. Expansion is evident in Chris Mulligan Sensei's teaching of Kashima Ryu and in Thierry Diagana Sensei's description of meeting Chiba Sensei for the first time. Whether it be traveling to a seminar, joining the weapons series, or participating in Kangeiko and Gasshuku, Ea Sensei and I invite you to consider opportunities to develop and share your Aikido, to embrace the possibilities, expanding both inwards and outwards as far as you can imagine. △

NOTES FROM THE BEGINNER'S SERIES

IAN CROCKER

I arrived at the dojo for the first of our beginner sessions fresh from the afterschool music program I teach, and the contrast felt, at first, a little like whiplash. Stepping through the door, our shoes come off, and small talk quiets into the formality of new people in new places. This is a place a little apart--different practices, terms in Japanese...to whom and how often do we bow, as our tongues first trip over 'onegaishimasu'? Only natural, after shaping the attention of a rowdy 4th grade class, to wonder at the ways our attention is pulled and stretched here - at the reasons behind the routines in place in what I thought of as someone else's classroom.

Over the course of the month, we accustom ourselves to the flow of classes. Always the same rhythm: an open-



Beginner's Series cohort before and after zombie randori

er with (re)introductions and shared thoughts, stretches, then individual work like rolls, under the guidance of Senseis and more experienced students. And then, what feels most recognizably like what we came here for: instruction on the movements we are to recreate with our partners. We watch the techniques carefully--Where does a hand transfer? A foot step back?--and try to map the same motions with our own bodies.

Learning is a clunky process. Who does what, where, when? Mutual negotiation between partners is the constant refrain to instruction. Indecision, and with it, laughter (a personal favorite from a partner: "Wait...am I aggressing, or being aggressed?"). For most of us, this is the first time we've been on a mat; for some of us,

this is also our first in-person social foray since the pandemic began. We are not just re-creating movements; we are playing, joking, meeting one another as we together meet something new.

As weeks pass, faces and movements become more familiar. The what and where and how of techniques became more graspable, and 'I don't know' even begins to take on a particular shape. The same goes for

The what and where and how of techniques became more graspable, and 'I don't know' even begins to take on a particular shape.

the routines at the dojo. Bows toward other students, toward Sensei, toward the shomen pull our attention to each other and to the space itself. In just a few weeks, the chaos of after-class cleanup became something of a collective. Unsurprisingly, repeated impact breaks ice,



and I was glad to meet some new friends in conversations after class.

As the rhythms of the space sunk in, the why became a little more evident. A step further to the side can better take a partner off-balance; a slightly cupped hand helps keep fingers safe as an arm thuds against the mat. Same for the why of routines. One night midway through October, nearly everyone remarked in our opener that it had been a beater of a week. So, that night was our silliest--groups of two, then three and four all simultaneously side-rolling in circles. The funk was broken. We give our attention to each other, and if we listen, we soon learn what to do. △

A YEAR IN SEMINARS

EA MURPHY

Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in to pull yourself inside, breathe out to push yourself into the world. Inhalation – a contraction of muscles, diaphragm, even sight and sound; then exhalation - expansion as blood rushes to the surface of the skin, muscles relax, and vision widens. Contraction and expansion. One naturally follows the other in body and breath, the rhythm of life itself.

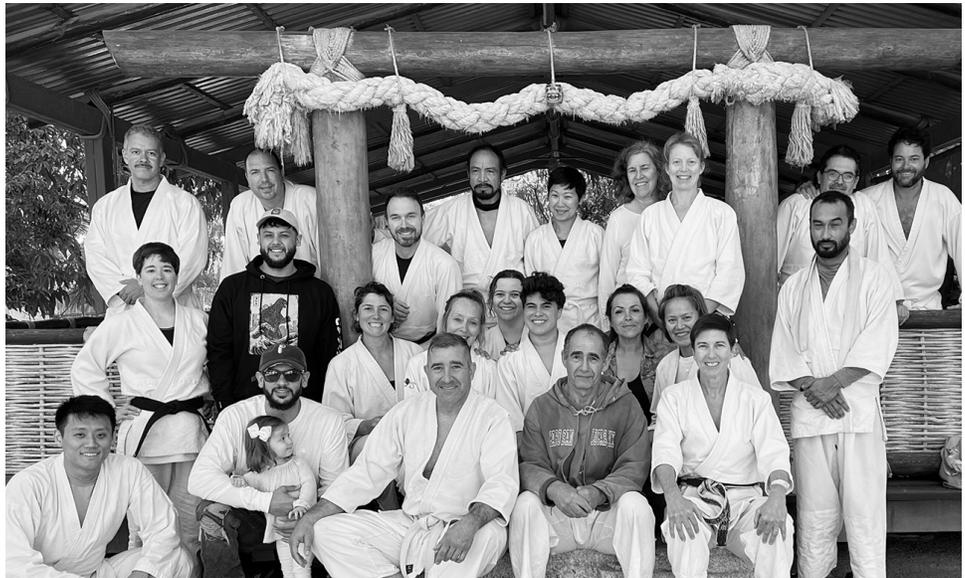
When cross-dojo seminars became possible again this past spring, the expansion was as natural as an exhalation after a long inhalation. Aikido is not a solitary art; it grows from our encounters with others. The members of a dojo and the larger aikido community are the very food for this practice. After two years of distance, there was a rush to meet our community on the mat again at seminars. We planned eagerly for the opportunities to renew connections and friendships; to see our teachers; and to find the nourishment that comes from cross-pollinating our practice.

There are no tournaments in Aikido. In fact, O'Sensei expressly proscribed Aikido as a non-competitive martial art. Instead of martial arts tournaments, we hold Aikido seminars, where practitioners gather from near and far to train. As a seminar approaches, anticipation and excitement builds. As practitioners and teachers of all levels get on the mat, I always feel a sense of elation, swimming through a sea of new bodies, all here just to train.

At a seminar, this anticipation transforms into an intensity of practice concentrated into the expanding hours between Friday night and Sunday noon. New partners offer new experiences, out of the routine of our daily practice. New teachers open a whole new perspective on a movement done a thousand times before, giving something to chew on for months and years. Coming back home, we are inspired and renewed, experiencing

the work of *tenkan*, *ikkyo*, and *irimi* with fresh bodies and minds.

Before Covid, seminars punctuated our training cycle with fiery encounters several times a year. But from February until November 2022, Eric and I attended at least one, if not two seminars a month. For me, attending so many seminars encapsulated the expansion we've all naturally experienced after the contraction of Covid times. Stepping on the mat with friends and partners I hadn't seen in years, I felt both pulled forward into a natural opening, and also a little strange to be expanding beyond the small circle I'd been living inside during the pandemic.



Training at the Baja Aikido Winter Camp in Todos Santos

In this tension, every seminar this year sparkled just a little more. The joy and excitement, and even a little trepidation, was extra palpable. What would practice feel like? What would I see or feel differently in a demonstration? How is my stamina and condition? How have we all grown and changed?

Undoubtedly, as I've travelled the West Coast and to Japan this year, our practice felt more insistent. At Baja Aikido Winter Camp in February, mornings started with training in the open-air dojo, then into the mango grove for weapons practice with Juba Sensei. Swimming in the ocean, walking the sandy trail, or preparing and eating a meal were not separate from training. In this setting, Aikido felt as urgent and as natural as life itself. Back inside the dojo, this feeling continued, with Mulligan Sensei, Osawa Sensei, Okamoto Sensei, and

Mike Flynn Sensei giving their teaching as naturally and urgently as breathing, as if to say, “time is fleeting; don’t waste it!”



Friday morning practice with Aikido Kyoto in the Budo Center

In this year of expansion, I was grateful for every time I lost my balance and for every time my technique didn’t work. These places are where I felt my training in action the most – footsteps on unfamiliar territory, throwing a person I’ve just met, and meeting each moment for the first time. Here is the world rushing to meet me, and here I am, meeting the world. These experiences surge forward like the wind in the bamboo grove I visited while in Kyoto, where the respiring trees match our breath, in and out. Contract, expand, contract. It’s not a choice; it is breath. △

CHRIS MULLIGAN SENSEI SEMINAR

On March 11 through March 13, 2022, Tacoma Aikikai was honored to host a Spring Seminar with Chris Mulligan Sensei Shihan, 6 dan. Chris Mulligan Sensei has studied Aikido for almost 50 years. He has studied with renown teachers in the United States and in Japan, including training at Tenshin dojo with Steven Seagal Sensei and at the Hombu dojo in Tokyo with Shibata Sensei. He met his wife Yoko Okamoto Sensei at Hombu Dojo. Together they established Portland Aikikai in 1991. When they returned to Japan in 2003, they founded Aikido Kyoto where Mulligan Sensei serves as Senior Technical Director. To learn more about Chris Mulligan Sensei and his remarkable Aikido journey, please read Ty Barker’s **“Interview with Christopher Mulligan: Generative Aikido.”**



Saturday morning study in kokyunage (Photo Credit: Russ Gorman)

(<https://guillaumeerard.com/aikido/interviews/interview-with-chris-mulligan/>)

Further reading: In “A Look at the Similarities Between Language and Body Arts (Aikido),” published by Aikido Journal, Chris Mulligan Sensei applies his expertise as both a linguist and an aikido instructor to make connections between language acquisition and Aikido development. (<https://aikidojournal.com/2020/06/16/a-look-at-the-similarities-between-language-and-body-arts-aikido/>). △

THE JO

PHILLIP L. GREENWELL

I was lucky enough to attend Chris Mulligan Sensei's seminar in early March. After taking entirely too much time away from the dojo (and everything else) during the pandemic, and trying to bounce back from a knee injury, I was ready for a challenge. I was not disappointed. I was able to work with a few people I'd never worked with before, which I find equal parts fun and worrying. Friday evening started out with introductions, a brief warm up, and some great body work. Our guest Sensei had a way of injecting humor into his instruction that I quite enjoyed. Saturday morning went much the same way; Sensei would model a maneuver and set us loose to practice, walking among us and

demonstration, I was hooked, and after the weekend, I researched the jo, and found some interesting information on it.

The jo of today owes its origins to the early 17th century, after a duel between two legendary martial artists. (It should be noted that there is debate over the locations, weapons used, and results of the duel.) At the beginning of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the now famous Muso Gonnosuke was traveling around Japan engaging in duels as a test of his martial prowess. A large, imposing ronin, well-trained in sword, staff, naginata and spear, he was also considered arrogant and brash. While in Edo, (or possibly Akashi), he happened upon another traveling ronin, Miyamoto Musashi, and challenged him to a duel. One source has Gonnosuke using an iron-bound staff, others say it was an excep-



Saturday's group photo, representing aikidoka from nine West Coast dojos (Photo Credit: Russ Gorman)

giving individual pointers. Sometimes he'd stop everyone to clarify a particular part of the technique, other times he'd move us on to another technique. My favorite part of the seminar came Saturday afternoon, when we were instructed to grab a jo (a wooden staff), which I'd never worked with. While we were milling around before starting, I watched Ea Sensei engage in (what I was later told was) Sansho, an exercise with the jo that is meant for two opponents, though often modified to use with just one. From that first impromptu

tionally long wooden sword. Musashi's weapon(s) are also debated; one source mentions him using the two-sword technique that made him famous while others say he had a half-carved wooden sword or staff. Regardless, the agreed upon result was Gonnosuke was handily defeated, and mortified, he went into seclusion to meditate over the loss.

While in seclusion he trained heavily, as well as meditated, and was eventually divinely inspired (although how this occurred is also debated; aren't myths fun?).



He modified a staff to be slightly longer than the typical swords of the day, as well as developed techniques for use to counter and defeat swordmen. It is further believed he developed techniques to defeat Musashi's trademark jujidome, or X-shaped cross block. The out-

come of the second duel, or whether there was a second duel at all, is also up for debate. The school Muso Gonnosuke founded, Shinto Muso-ryu, says there was a second duel, and Gonnosuke was either victorious or at least forced to a draw. Sword fighting schools claim that Miyamoto Musashi, considered Japan's greatest swordsman, remained undefeated in dueling throughout his life.

Though the writing of this is months after the event, working with the jo during Chris Mulligan Sensei's seminar really stood out for me. I worked with Ben Garren quite a bit that day, and with his help and Sensei's instruction, I was more easily able to digest the scope of practice for that afternoon than I usually do. It's been a rocky couple of years, but it was this seminar and that particular afternoon of training that helped me become reinvested in my training, and for that I'll be forever grateful. △



On Sunday morning, Sensei asked us to stretch our training with practice from Kashima Ryu, a sword style new to many of us (Photo Credit: Russ Gorman)

SPRING SEMINAR THOUGHTS

MISHA JONES

Chris Mulligan Sensei's seminar was full of useful information and tips. I learned so much within such a short span of time. He was very thorough and creative when conveying concepts and movement in the seminar. He was also filled with humor and enthusiasm. I really enjoyed the tanto and bokken teachings of the seminar (I personally gravitate towards weapons training :)). It was an honor to learn from a teacher who Ea Sensei studied with. I absolutely enjoy and favor the way Ea Sensei and Eric Sensei teach. However, it is nice to deviate from our practice structure and instructors from time to time. △



THIERRY DIAGANA SENSEI SEMINAR

From August 26-28, we were thrilled to host a long-awaited seminar with Thierry Diagana Sensei, Chief Instructor of Gasshuku Aikikai and long-time friend of Ea and Eric Senseis. The seminar, postponed since 2020, brought together a committed group of aikidoka from the Pacific Northwest for an enriching weekend of training. Allison sat down with Thierry Sensei after the seminar to learn more about his path in Aikido.

Please share a little about yourself and how you first became interested in Aikido.

I was born and raised in France. Interestingly, France has a huge Aikido community. Actually all martial arts in France are very popular, judo, karate, aikido. Weirdly enough, I did not start in France. I actually started in the U.S., but when I was young, I always had an interest in martial arts, but never realized it because I was good at track and field, so I spent most of my high school and college years running and never really got to do much martial arts.

When I moved to San Diego, I wanted to find a martial art to get into. A friend of mine was a karate guy who was a post-doctorate where I did my post-doc at the Salk Institute, and he recommended Aikido. I had no idea what Aikido was, so instead I checked out a few karate dojos and didn't like it. It focused on striking and was very competitive. I just didn't get the good vibes. Then I tried a kendo dojo, which was a little bit better, but still not what I wanted. Eventually I asked my friend, who he thought I should go to. He said, "there is this incredible legend of an Aikido teacher that you should go check out." It was Chiba Sensei, and so I did. We went together.

I remember it was a seminar with some of Chiba Sensei's students. George Lyons was there, Chiba Sensei, Yahe Sensei. All of them were doing demonstrations. I was just amazed. I saw them and thought, "that's worth trying". Just watching those guys doing it, watching Chiba Sensei's teaching and the way he was interacting with his students. I signed up that day. Mitsuko Chiba, Chiba Sensei's wife, signed me up and got me a gi.

Nearly 30 years later, I am still here; I'm still doing it. Still loving it. Why? Why is it that I love it so much? There are plenty of answers and they keep on changing. That is how I fell into Aikido. I obviously got very lucky that the first dojo I stumbled into was Chiba Sensei's dojo. I still kind-of can't imagine the good fortune that was watching over me, especially not knowing anything about Aikido prior to this experience. I owe it to my friend that was a very serious karate person. He had heard about Chiba Sensei and knew he was really something quite unique. When I tell people that I stumbled upon Chiba Sensei's dojo, no one believes it, but I did. In retrospect, it's incredibly fortunate, and I'm so grateful that I had that opportunity.

Besides Chiba Sensei, are there other teachers or inspirations that you want to highlight?

There have been so many teachers that have been inspiring to me. Gloria Nomura Sensei was my second teacher after Chiba Sensei - very different but so strong. Actually, I had lunch with her yesterday, and, you know, she is going to turn 89 in a couple weeks and still has a presence, a mindset and attitude towards life, which I'm very impressed with. She raised four kids essentially as a single mom because her husband was not very present. She earned a pharmacology degree back in the days when it was very uncommon to see a woman take a Pharm. D.,



and she is a Shihan, 7th dan. Not too many people get to achieve one of those things, let alone all three.

I think Chiba Sensei was very impressed by her, actually. She had to find another way to express herself because, well, first of all, she's a woman. So that's one thing. Second. She has a much smaller frame than most people. It is easy to fall in love with using power and strength to do the technique, but she has to use her body in a very different way because she doesn't have that. She has to find other ways to do it, so there is so much to learn from her. She influenced me quite a lot.

I've been privileged to encounter many extraordinary teachers. Darrell Bluhm Sensei, who was a teacher of Ea, whom I traveled with, has always been somebody I looked forward to. Iseri Sensei from Ventura Aikikai, who passed away, was also an amazing teacher. Murashige Sensei in Chiba Sensei's Dojo, who again, had a very, very different style, was an extraordinary human being with an incredible heart but also phenomenal techniques. Shibata Sensei. I've not studied with him directly, but I've been exposed to his art. When he was part of Birankai and working with Chiba Sensei, I practiced with some of his students, and, obviously, Eric is one of his students, and I got to know him through Shibata Sensei.



Miyamoto Sensei was also quite amazing. Okamoto Sensei, of course. How could I not mention Yoko Sensei? I met Okamoto Sensei when I was 5th or 4th kyu. Diane Deskin Sensei, who was my teacher,

my senpai, when I was in San Diego told me, "you absolutely have to go check her out. I don't know what you're doing this weekend, but she's coming, and you have to go. It's going to be amazing." So, I did, and I was absolutely floored. I'll never forget practicing kokyudosa with her and the feeling of power that she had, she moved effortlessly but with so much conviction. She is definitely another teacher that interests me a lot.

When I was in Singapore with Serge Beraud Sensei, I was exposed to other teachers that I didn't know, like Tissier Sensei and Yamashima Sensei, who were students of Yamaguchi Sensei. I also got to practice with Horii Sensei who visited our dojo in Singapore and brought some very unique insights on the importance of basic techniques.

That's what I love. This is the beauty of the art. Of course, there are my main teachers Chiba Sensei and Nomura Sensei, but then there are so many others as well. Aikido is all about the interpretation of the art, and it's so rich when you get the chance to see so many different ways of practicing and teaching.

When did you know you wanted to become a teacher?

The true answer is I never thought this is what I want to do. I have the good fortune to have tried many different things in my life, and there are very few that stuck the way Aikido has. But I never really had a conviction that I was going to be a teacher. I just realized that I was so fortunate to have been exposed to those teachers that I felt compelled to pass it on. To me, it's not that I feel like a teacher; it's just that I've been given a gift, and it would be a shame if I didn't share it. You know, honestly, sometimes I feel guilty that I didn't spread it enough or give it to enough people, just because of life circumstances, like kids, family, work, all kinds of other things that get in the way. Sometimes I feel like there is more that I could be sharing. I never really had that conviction that I was going to be an Aikido teacher, but I'm glad I'm now sharing it for sure. No question. It was never something that I looked for. It is just something that happened after many years of practice that I felt I needed to do. That's the honest answer, it's not something that I really thought I was meant for or that I desired, but something that I feel compelled to do.

You seem intentional in how you thread themes through your instruction. Is that something that happens naturally for you or is it something you are intentionally thinking about as you plan for a class?

It's interesting because on the one hand, it's very selfish because I have these moments like at the grocery store or at dinner or driving or doing some errands and all of a sudden I see a particular movement and it somehow resonates with something more philosophical. What does it mean to meet your partner? What does it mean to make a connection? What does it mean to get off the line? What does it mean to absorb? What does it mean to do tenkan and look at the perspective of another? So there is a moment like this that happens, and then I just get curious about it. What happens a lot, though, is that I get to class and I think that's what the theme is, and then students do something else. Then, I watch, and it's completely different from what my intention was. I usually pivot when that happens because then there is something even more interesting here than what I thought. I try to dig into whatever I see during the class.

I feel like when we are practicing together, there is a crowd effect, and we somehow synchronize. Of course, we're all doing the same movements, but there is a lot of synchronicity that I see. All of a sudden we do something well together or we do something wrong together. We just kind of misinterpret something in a very similar way, and we all go in that direction. When I see this, I think, "Wow, that's something very interesting. Why don't we pivot and go there." So, it's intentional and situational. I come with an intention, but then the situation often takes over, and I just go with it.

How would you say that Aikido informs your life outside of training?

I think a lot about this. I mean, there is the aspirational, what I want it to be and then there is the reality of what it is. Right? Sometimes they come together and sometimes they are further apart. I just want to make that qualifier because I think we can get very lofty with words when it comes to these things and to "big Aikido", and that's not my intention, because I also appreciate that we're just humans and we do what we can with the one life we have. Having said that, I can really say that Aikido has profoundly changed me. I feel it. I hate to speak of it because I always feel like I'm shortchanging it.

The first thing for me is to learn how to quiet my mind and my ego and tone down those impulses that inevitably come. Not to say that I'm perfect; I have my flares, but for sure there was before Aikido and after Aikido, and I feel like after many years of training, I have learned to recognize the body when I get tense, when I get stressed, when I get angry. I have much deeper connections with my body. The body first tells me, "Be careful here. There is something that is brewing that may make you do something you don't want to do." So recognizing the body is the first thing. Connecting with my body and saying, "Oh yeah, I know, I'm angry. I feel it in my tummy. I feel my breath getting shorter. I feel my abs tensing." That awareness of the body and how it connects to my emotions and then developing some ways to keep them in check and controlling them, not always successfully, but I think in many instances I've been able to control it because of the practice of Aikido.

Fundamentally, Aikido has a movement element that helps with understanding the body. For me, that is primary and that's why it's so important to continue to work an Aikido that's physical, that's vigorous and helps get that element out. When we remove this, we are not helping Aikido. The physical element, the bodily element, is critical. And then you get to the mind and there is no question day to day every time I get into some sort of "conflict" or "tension" I always think about tenkan or irimi. It's like, they're getting really angry about something. What can that be? So, you tenkan to see their perspective, to imagine what goes on in their heads. Other times it's time for irimi. Maybe I'm just going to enter here because I think this is too much of a threat. There is too much urgency in the response. Whether it's with my kids, with my wife, with my coworkers, I feel like I always bring this. And, of course, trying to get to harmonious resolutions where nobody gets hurt, where we all end up respecting each other and finding ways to move forward without permanent damage. All of those things are with me all the time now. The more I age and the more I practice, the more I see the value of the training and what they call big Aikido outside of what I do on the mat.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

The one thing that I love about Aikido is that it keeps on changing, so don't be afraid of that, that would be a mistake. Change is good. There's nothing wrong with finding something new in your practice. On the contrary, it's what you want. You want to keep it fresh. Be curious. Try to dig into these corners that you think you have looked at, but that, actually, you haven't looked at them very much. This is what keeps my practice fresh. I love the fact that I have the privilege of teaching and learning from beginners. When I work with them, they point me in a direction that I take for granted or allow me to look at something a little bit more carefully and discover something new. I think that's the beauty of practicing. Your body is changing, your mind is changing, and your attitude is changing. It's wonderful. △

SUMMER SEMINAR REPORT

BILL PRATT

Tacoma Aikikai hosted a three-day summer seminar with Thierry Diagana Sensei on August 26-28th. Thierry Sensei is the chief instructor of Gassaku Aikido in El Cerrito California.

This was my first time attending an Aikido seminar as I am a relatively new practitioner with less than 2 years' experience. I attended the Sunday session with a high level of excitement and some nervousness, since this was my initial experience and the first time I attended a class instructed by someone other than Ea Sensei or Eric Sensei.

One of the main attractions for me to attend this seminar was to see what it would be like to study under a different instructor and to experience their teaching style. I also wanted to have the opportunity to practice with other students from other dojos.

I was surprised to discover how different and yet familiar many of the exercises and techniques seemed when taught by a different Sensei. The session enhanced and complemented the physical and mental challenges I normally experience through the practice of Aikido. Attending this seminar afforded me the opportunity to see new variations of techniques. Two techniques, Ikkyo and Iriminage, already familiar to me, were demonstrated by Thierry Sensei with different hand placements and footwork than I was used to. It was interesting to see these different variations, and I realized that there is always more to learn even at the more basic levels of Aikido.

I also felt that another wonderful aspect of the seminar was getting to meet and practice with other students of all different levels. I was excited to see that students traveled from dojos all over the Northwest to attend.

Practicing with students from outside our dojo brought a different energy to the session. I had the opportunity to talk with several attendees from Eugene Aikikai who generously invited me to visit their dojo and attend a class the next time I am in town visiting my daughter. As a greener student, I was also grateful for the patience of the more advanced students that came from other dojos while working together.

All in all, attending the seminar made me realize how



important it is to connect with other dojos through seminars or joint classes. Doing so enhances the sense of community throughout the world of Aikido. I learned that the practice of Aikido could be an even more dynamic experience than I had previously imagined.

One of the most valuable lessons this experience taught me is that attending seminars such as this provides a newer practitioner with another look at how enriching the study of Aikido is. I look forward to attending future seminars with great anticipation. △

OSAWA SENSEI INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

Over Halloween weekend, Tacoma Aikikai and Clallam Aikikai members travelled together to Vancouver, Canada, for an international seminar with Hayato Osawa Sensei, 8th dan Aikikai Shihan and one of the main instructors at Hombu Dojo in Japan. Osawa Sensei also serves as the technical director of the Canadian Aikido Federation, and we are lucky to have the opportunity to study with him every year so close to home.

SEMINAR REPORT

JAMES BURTLE

In October, I had the good fortune to travel with friends from Tacoma Aikikai to Vancouver, Canada in order to attend the Canadian Aikido Federation's 2022 Fall Seminar with Hayato Osawa Sensei, 8th Dan, of Hombu Dojo, Aikikai World Headquarters, Tokyo, Japan.

Traveling to attend aikido seminars is always a special experience; traversing distance to commune with friends and practitioners new and old has a unique way of adding value to training. This trip was especially exciting for me because of the high level of instruction being generously offered by Osawa Sensei and because of the fact that I knew very few of the one hundred and twenty or so aikidoka in attendance, an aspect of traveling to train that I enjoy.

The weekend long seminar took place in a pleasant gymnasium facility on new roll-out tatami and included a wonderful mix of aikidoka of varied ages and experience from all across Canada (and a few of us from the United States.) There was even a fantastic youth demonstration shared by Aikidaily International Academy of Squamish, BC, as well as a number of dan tests that concluded the training schedule, which were enjoyed by supportive aikido practitioners and a good number of spectators.

Osawa Sensei presented a warm demeanor and a no-nonsense attitude towards our time on the mat. He consistently exemplified through action that training

time is limited and valuable, so we should make the best use of it. The pacing of physical instruction was crisp and intensely energized while verbal instruction (translated from Japanese into English) was clear, logically presented, and concise. I greatly appreciate this particular style combination in an instructor and could not have been happier with the amount of content that was demonstrated and thoroughly explained.



Tacoma Aikikai and friends after Osawa Sensei's Sunday classes.

Sensei began each class with tai no henko, emphasizing for uke that the thumb and first finger should attack the top of the wrist with slight downward pressure applied. Nage's fingers then soften and drop before entering. Body position at completion of the turn featured forward pointing feet that are also parallel with each

other heel-to-toe. Another point made was the importance of maintaining soft knees not overcommitted to the ground, thus preserving mobility. Sensei instructed that in other scenarios where it does not make sense for the feet to be parallel with each other heel-to-toe, the position of the foot should always correspond to the position of the hand on each side of the body, respectively. This preserves the maintenance of a unified half-body through proper alignment. Additionally, the armpits should be close, but not closed tight, and the lateral body tissues engaged.

Throughout the weekend Sensei mentioned several times that nage may find themselves in a symmetrical posture with feet parallel and implied that this was a natural and strong way to position oneself at various points within tai sabaki and waza.

Proper *maai* was consistently emphasized through demonstration by Sensei's real-time acceptance or rejection of his uke's engagement and by the accompanying quick corrective signals he would give uke until the intended attack position was presented. This example was then complimented by repeated emphasis on working closely with sincere attack. In an egoless manner, *shomen uchi* was received so closely that a block occasionally resulted, or even a glancing blow. Such willingness to practice sincerely in front of students is, in my opinion, a very admirable trait in an instructor. On blending with *shomen uchi*, Sensei repeated several times that the receiving arm should raise "straight up" while entering and not interfere at all with completion of the strike. *Irimi kaiten* blending with *shomen uchi* was practiced on both sides of the body without *nage* changing *hanmi*.

In *morote dori kokyūho*, Sensei demonstrated how the legs, hips and back work together to rise, roll and fall, very much like the motion of an ocean wave. His initial movement was a symmetrical, energized squat oriented essentially perpendicular to the line of attack. With pressed palms at about shoulder level, position was adjusted so that uke remained in front of *nage's* body as the technique is applied.

Being fortunate enough to attend such a seminar and receive instruction from a master of aikido like Osawa Sensei is a real privilege. It is something for which I am truly grateful. My writing here represents only my effort to share a few observations made exclusively through the clouded lens of my own experience. Please consider traveling to aikido seminars yourself; they are incredibly enriching compliments to regular training. Speak with your instructors about opportunities. And if you do travel to train and are moved to do so, please let us know what you learn! △



The road trip crew discovering Washington's largest pumpkin

GASSHUKU 2022

In 2022, we held our second annual Gasshuku summer retreat, once again at the Cispus Learning Center outside of Randle, Washington. Because of the Center's scheduling restraints, we gathered in mid-June over Father's Day Weekend. Unlike the blazing hot August retreat of last year, this cool and drizzly weekend fed our spirits with a warm fire, toasted marshmallows, and the warmth that comes from community and training in a Northwest June. We'll be back in August once again in 2023 at Camp Indianola, a wooded gem of a retreat center just an hour from Tacoma along the shores of the Puget Sound.



GASSHUKU REPORT

AMY WEINER

On June 17th-20th, Tacoma Aikikai held their 2nd Gasshuku. About 40 people of all ages and ranks attended the event at the Cispus Learning Center in Randle Washington, which is a beautiful site surrounded by awesome scenery. The Center, located near the Cispus River, was originally built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps under the New Deal program and has been modernized over the years, including having hot water (yeah!). Apparently, last year the weather was so hot that people were swimming in the river. In contrast, the temperatures this year were in the 40s and 50s—not particularly conducive to playing in the water! That being said, the river was a beautiful place to observe and enjoy the natural surroundings as was viewing the most amazing rock face nearby called Tower Rock.



The Aikido training led by Ea Sensei, Eric Sensei, and Malory Graham Sensei (visiting from Sweden!) was, of course, inspiring. Classes started Friday night and ended on Monday morning. Lots of great energy and dedicated practice. We lucked out with the management giving us access to the large gym, which was airy, spacious and minimized the outdoor training in the mist and rain. Monday morning weapons class, which focused on Sansho 1 part 1, was outdoors—a perfect last class of the Gasshuku!

There was lots of time to enjoy excellent food, including a delicious salmon dinner, and socializing with each other in the open air, covered pavilion that had an enormous, and, thankfully effective, stone fireplace. Especially in the time of COVID-19, the pavilion enabled safe social interactions and the fresh air was certainly stimulating. Special thanks to everyone who participated with set-up, cooking, cleaning, and bringing/preparing food. Looking forward to next year! △

MICHAEL NESTER

Gasshuku is something I look forward to each summer. The first Gasshuku in 2021 was the most memorable martial arts experience I have had, and Gasshuku 2022 was no exception. We all live busy hectic lives at times, and being able to come together as an Aikido family and train and camp in the serene setting of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest is a dream. The training schedule takes the intensity to an elevated level, and the atmosphere and comradery at the end of the day was an excellent team building experience. An integral part of Gasshuku for me was being able to harvest the knowledge of other well-known instructors and receive techniques from a diverse group of people of all experience levels. I hope to be able to take part in Gasshuku every year, as I feel like it is a wonderful grindstone on which one can sharpen their abilities. △



Beth, Chris, and fresh salmon at the Gasshuku BBQ.

ANNOUNCING THE YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

We are thrilled to announce the inaugural pilot session of the Youth Leadership Program, which will start in January of this year. The program, open to youth age 11 and older with a rank of orange belt and higher, will offer additional programming to enrich aikido training through mentoring, teacher training, and youth-led community service.



Aikido training provides a unique opportunity to train not only the physical body, but also to develop internal qualities integral to finding our own potential, and with it, the ability to give back to our community. For a long time, we've wanted to offer a space to foster these additional spheres of martial arts education for our young dojo leaders, and are more than excited to develop the program with our first cohort. To learn more about the program visit www.tacomaaikikai.com/aikido-youth-leadership-program/, and contact Ea Sensei if you would like to get involved. △

FIRST ANNUAL ALL-DOJO MEETING MEETING SUMMARY

Tacoma Aikikai's first annual all-dojo meeting was held on November 4, 2022, drawing approximately 25 dojo members and parents for an evening of food and discussion. Ea Sensei began by saying that the purpose of the meeting was to get to know each other and to help shape the dojo in 2023. She emphasized that we are a community, and each person has a say in how the dojo is shaped.

Ea talked about the importance of making training available to everyone and underlined the dojo's commitment to sliding scale tuition. Ea and Eric also gave updates on the state of the dojo: 1) Our current membership totals 75 students and growing, consisting of 45 youth and 30 adult members. 2) The building remodel is almost finished, and a final push in early 2023 will rebuild the mat and finish the interior. 3) The dojo soft launched its new website in January and would love members to share the site and give google and facebook reviews.

With the physical space nearly done, Ea discussed wanting to further develop Tacoma Aikikai's vision of a dojo founded on rigorous training, nurturing community, and an inclusive environment. Towards this end, Charley Emlet announced the initiation of a Code of Conduct committee to develop the dojo's anti-harassment, anti-discrimination, and grievance procedure policies. Interested volunteers are encouraged to reach out to Charley, and we welcome input from all our members.

The meeting ended with food (of course) and a group brainstorming session, as members added ideas and voted (with color coded sticker dots) on initiatives in four areas of development: Dojo Community, New Member Outreach, Programs and Classes, and Events. Luckily youth and adults had no shortage of great ideas, including "hanging ropes from the ceiling" and the mysterious, "painting vines on the wall". Many of the suggestions that came out of the meeting have already led to action. Certainly, 2023 is shaping up to be a great year. △



Dojo 2023! Group brainstorm and dot voting

UPCOMING EVENTS

**see our annual member event calendar, updated monthly at www.tacomaaikikai.com/member-calendar*

KANGEIKO WINTER INTENSIVE

FEBRUARY 6-11

LEAP NIGHT / PARENTS NIGHT OUT

FEBRUARY 25 (SATURDAY)

SEMINAR WITH CHRIS MULLIGAN SENSEI

PORTLAND AIKIKAI

MARCH 11-12

RANK TESTING

YOUTH: MARCH 21-22 (TUES/WED)

ADULTS: MARCH 23 (THURSDAY)

SPRING COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE

MARCH 25 (SATURDAY)

KIDS (7-11 y.o.) SUMMER CAMP

JULY 11-14 (TUESDAY - FRIDAY)

TEEN/JUNIOR (11+ y.o.) SUMMER CAMP

JULY 18-21 (TUESDAY-FRIDAY)

GASSHUKU SUMMER RETREAT

AUGUST 18-20 (FRIDAY-SUNDAY) @CAMP INDIANOLA

2023 WEAPONS SERIES

MONDAY EVENINGS

Six week progression through weapons curriculum. Each session requires a 6-class commitment. Register by reserving the first class of the series on Zen Planner, or by email.

JAN. 9 - FEB. 13: BOKKEN

MARCH 6 - APRIL 10: JYO

MAY 1 - JUNE 12: BOKKEN

JULY 10 - AUGUST 14: JYO

SEPT. 11 - OCT. 16: BOKKEN

NOV. 6 - DEC. 11: JYO



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