UKA Collection

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Articles
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Essays

Collection 2002 Part 2

Welcome to the United Kingdom Aikikai Article collection 2002, Part 2.

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Telephone message from a friend

On 3rd June I was pleased to receive a telephone call from an old student and friend, Colin Hackett. Colin, his wife Sylvia, and daughter, Jenny, emigrated to Australia some years ago. As we talked I realised just how special our relationship was. We came together as student and instructor nearly 30 years ago. The bond we formed has grown stronger with each passing year.

Colin's dedication as student and instructor is a fine example to all. Most important, he has over the years shared with many of my students, the growth of our dojo and association. He shared the ups and the downs and was always loyal and sincere, both in and out of the dojo.

The friendship of the students of the era that Colin and Philip, my son enjoyed, is still in our dojo today.

Colin from the start was a fine instructor and I feel one of his greatest assets is the friendship and sincerity he shows to everyone. His devotion to Aikido both here and in Australia is an example to everyone.

I wish Colin, Sylvia and his family all the very best and I know that our friendship will continue to grow with the passing of time.

W J Smith - UKA Principal

The Aikido seminar of Mr. Smith sensei at Fukushinkan Dojo in Athens

I have been a student of Aikido only for a few months now at the Fukushinkan Dojo, and this seminar with Mr. Smith sensei was my first. Due to a kinetic problem I have since birth, this seminar meant for me more than just physical Aikido practice. So, as you can understand, I was expecting it with great anticipation. Even though this was the first time that I attended one of Mr. Smith's seminars, this was not the first time I meet Mr. Smith sensei. During my long association with Fukushinkan Dojo, I have been a spectator of other seminars with Mr. Smith sensei, but this was the first time that I had the opportunity to actually train with him and other members of the UKA.

The day of the seminar finally came, and the dojo was packed with Aikidoka from all over Greece. The atmosphere in the dojo was that of great excitement. As the seminar unfolded day after day, and Mr. Smith sensei shared the Art with us, I saw that even if the mat was full of students all of us moved together in a flowing manner and blended through the practice. It was like we all shared a bond with each other, by simply practicing Aikido and helping one another. I need not comment on Mr. Smith's sesnei Aikido, it is enough to say that I enjoyed immensely every minute of his seminar and begun to realize yet another way of looking at techniques and how I could work them out. If nothing else this gave me peace of mind and confidence in myself. One other thing that I personally believe to be the peak of the whole course was Pat's demonstration on the last day of the seminar. Her harmony and flowing movements earned standing ovations from the entire dojo – a feeling that one isn't likely to forget anytime soon!

After the seminar ended on Sunday afternoon, our sensei G. Koliopoulos rented a minivan and Mr. Smith sensei, his wife, Pat, David, Phillip and myself left Athens for Arcadia, a region of the Peloponese famous even from the ancient times for its beautiful green mountains, superb wine and food. We got rooms in the capital of Arcadia, Tripolis and then we roamed all the good places, where we could give our UKA friends a good taste of Greece. We were all very fortunate, because G. Koliopoulos sensei was born in Arcadia and knows not only this specific region of Greece but all of the Peloponese like the back of his hand. We stayed in Arcadia for a little while having a great time and then we drove further down to Sparti and then to the coastal city of Gythion, where we could swim and taste fresh seafood with famous Greek ouzo. The weather was sunny and beautiful, and we were all in high spirits. Our final destination was the Diro caves, in southernmost Peloponese, in the region of Mani. I cannot find the proper words to describe the beauty of those caves; it was as if each chamber, filled with sparkling stalactites and stalagmites, came out of a fairy tale. It goes without saying that all of us had a marvelous experience and I would definitely recommend the Diro caves as one of the ten most beautiful sites in Greece.



I admit that I had a truly wonderful time both in the seminar and in the excursion that followed. Without any doubt I can say that the company was more than great and that I made good friends. Like my friend David put it one day, as we were sitting at the beach: *Aikido is Family*. I am definitely going to attend Mr. Smith's sensei next seminar, and I sincerely hope that all my new friends will be there. Who knows, perhaps we will all be fortunate and arrange a little trip again, like a good family. I am surely looking forward to it!

Aris Papademetriou
Fukushinkan Dojo
Athens, Greece.

Joint Seminar – 27th May 2002, Castle Vale Community Leisure Centre

On Sunday 27th May 2002, Senseis Gordon Jones, Tony Cassells, Chris Mooney and Peter Brady got together to give us the benefit of a collective 120 years or so of training and teaching. It reminded us of the different journeys by which each had ended up in the same room on this day although we were advised to forget that it also highlighted the advancing years. As Steve Boyle commented after the seminar - *' Tony Cassells has got a plastic hip you know. At least - he has when I'm throwing him. There's no evidence of it when he's throwing me'.*

Peter Brady Sensei started with some bokken exercises, which we then tried to put into use in our body art. We focussed on cutting properly rather than 'hitting' with the sword and trying to use all of our body to execute the cuts. He stressed that we should maintain a connection through the weapon, right to its tip, raising the sword with the same dynamic energy as we cut down. We then focussed on this in our body art in the rest of the class.

Chris Mooney Sensei emphasised the importance of entering effectively and managing the space between uke and tori as well as the necessity for uke to maintain a connection to tori. By moving effectively and correctly taking our partner's balance our practice becomes lighter and less of a conflict. For this student, renowned from here to San Diego as having poor connection between my upper and lower body, I learned a great deal from this class.



Tony Cassells Sensei taught a bokken class, again focussing on the importance of connection, both with tori and with the weapon itself. As Cassells Sensei noted, 'the weapon should be part of your body - as much as your hands or your toes'. It is sometimes hard to understand what is meant when we are told to 'think with the tip of your sword - project your energy through to the end of the weapon' and yet I can clearly see this when I watch Chiba Sensei with the sword. When I trained in Tokyo with Mitsuzuka Sensei he also highlighted this perfectly. His body was weak and he was in such pain that he seemed hardly able to move and yet he cut so smoothly and gracefully that it was almost possible to see the energy from his body coming through to the tip of his sword.

It reminded me of something we did in a science class when I was a kid - we picked a flower and stood it in a vase full of water, to which we added some blue ink. Over the next few days, the water was drawn up the stem and we watched each day as the petals gradually turned from white to blue until finally the very tip of the petals changed colour. Watching Mitsuzuka Sensei one day made me think of that. The flow of his energy was almost, and impossibly, visible, just like the progression of the ink stain in the flower petals all those years ago.

Cassells Sensei explained that by focussing on the tip of the sword and cutting with that we not only maintain the distance required to successfully defend ourselves, but also create the necessary time to be able to safely penetrate inside the shield of our opponent's weapon. In Musubi no Ken we practised all of this - the key being to attack effectively and to defend efficiently and safely. Through economical movement and an awareness of where our opponent's sword was, we could cut down fully without having to pull back for fear of hitting each other, and we could create a dynamic tension between our partner and ourselves. In turn this meant that we could condition our own bodies and get the most from our practice.

The final class of the day was taught by Gordon Jones Sensei. It was an energetic finale and again it was important to focus on the connection between uke and tori. Once again we needed to focus on our response to the technique and to retain energy in our ukemi.



Overall I think everyone present agreed that the course was very successful. It was well attended by over 40 students from the BA and the UKA as well as other organisations. There was a feeling of energy on the mat and everyone worked hard together to put into practice what each of the instructors was demonstrating.

As always the seminar will have given each of us plenty to work on in the coming months. I am (painfully!) aware of the need to further condition my body to be able, as uke, to respond effectively and safely absorb technique so that, in turn, tori is able to execute their technique fully. I also need to work with my partner to ensure we remain energised and responsive with a dynamic tension in our bodies, ready to get up and attack again at any point. It is the difference between having to stop your sword cut at jodan and being able to cut all the way through to chudan.

Many thanks to all who made the course a success and especially to Senseis Jones, Cassells, Mooney and Brady for their instruction, their time and their patience.

Caroline Smith, Nidan,
Ei Oh Kan, Central England Aikikai

Weapons Training Available

For some time now some students have been saying to me and to other members of my class that they would like to know more about weapon work because they have found themselves struggling to cope if they have attended courses or Mr Smith's classes when he has had weapons in his programme. One student had in fact, been told by his instructor that he was not ready to attend my class or Mr Smith's as regard to weapons.

I feel I must point out that weapons training is for all , the only prerequisite is having weapons and wearing a Gi.

Sometimes I think that the birth of Aikido which came from weapons is sometimes put on the backshelf and is regarded a not being needed anymore, and the mother arts, the sword and the spear, must be treated as a separate entity, or even not bothered with. If this thinking is continued, then the relationship of Aikido and weapons will die.

Going back to my original comments, it is obvious that there are students who wish to know more, and that the teaching is available. It has to be said though, that because of what has been said, there is evidence that instructors themselves should consider increasing their knowledge and improving their skills, thus creating a bigger interest in their classes.

So, if I can conclude in saying that anyone wishing to start, resume or increase their knowledge of Aikido related weapons work, Mr Smith's and my classes are tailored to accommodate **ALL** levels. It is never to early to start and certainly never to late, to make your Aikido training complete, with the understanding of how Aikido was born.

As for myself, the more I study, the more is revealed. Several years ago **Sugano Sensei** said on one of our trips, as we talked in depth of Aikido study, **"now you are looking you will see",** he then drew a "Question mark" in the slight mist on his side of the windscreen, going on to say that He hadn't finished and he was convinced that **O'Sensei** hadn't finished even after a lifetime of dedicated study.

This is why I remain, and always will remain, with the original teachings as my primary Aikido study, endeavouring to build on O'Sensei's and of course Mr Smith's teachings at Ren Shin Kan.

Mike Smith.
Ren Shin Kan Dojo

Mr Smith in Serbia

The anticipated seminar with Sensei William Smith finished a few days ago. We were honoured and had great pleasure to welcome this exceptional person and great Aikido master, and the wonderful people that accompanied him. Practices were held in the Aikido Club "Zemun" dojo on a mat area of 200 square meters with about 60 participants from Serbia and abroad. Our guests were **Pat Narey** Yondan, **Philip Winters** Sandan, **Mire Zloh** Sandan, **Mark Machin** Shodan and **Rob Baulk** 1.kyu, as well as **Mrs Smith**.

From a technical point of view, the seminar was colossal.

All those interested in Aikido who did not attend have a reason to be sorry for missing it. Excellent, martial and respectable Aikido had enchanted all participants. As we know, in the spirit of the old Chinese saying, once practiced is worth 100 times more than seen, and once seen is worth 100 times more than heard, therefore any further attempt to write about the technical part of the seminar is difficult :-). Luckily, the whole seminar and grading were recorded and by the end of the July, the seminar will be presented on DivX.



The dan grading was held on Sunday. The exam was different to the grading we were used to and it is possible to fail. However, the fact that everybody has passed is a good indication of exam quality and demonstrated Aikido knowledge. Shodan was awarded to **Veselin Zarić**; nidan to **Vladimir Pelegrin, Ljiljana Pelegrin, Dragan Antić, Igor Strahinić, Edin Bećković** and **Aleksandar Karišik**, sandan to **Nebojša Oklobdžija** and yondan to **Novak Jerkov** and **Saša Obradović**. This was one of the biggest dan grading in Yugoslavia and I am very pleased that I have participated in it on both sides.

Future collaborations between, Sensei Smith, UKA and Aikikai of Serbia was agreed on mutual delight and Sensei Smith has agreed to be a technical director of our organization. We can expect future seminars with him and other UKA Shidoins and many other pleasant things.

At the end, but it should be at the beginning, we are grateful to Mire Zloh whose recommendation and involvement made this possible. We have also remembered our Aikido beginnings in the "ancient" autumn of 1982.

***Saša Obradović**, Yondan so Hombu*
President of Aikikai of Serbia
3rd July 2002

The Four Brothers Seminar

G Jones, P Brady, T Cassells, C Mooney

Summer camp 2000 was a historic affair being hosted by both the UKA and BA. Four Sensei's were invited over to teach, Seneis Chiba Shibata, Tamura and Yamada. As I am sure every one will agree, this venture was most successful.

During the speeches at the end of camp both Gordon and myself noted that this had been an opportunity for old friends to work together, and in the spirit of this statement the four brother seminar was conceived.

We arrived on Sunday 26 May to find a warm welcome from over 40 students. From the first moment it was obvious that this was going to be a friendly and enjoyable seminar

The 1st class was taken by Mr P Brady who demonstrated through his technique, the connection between sword work and body art. This class set the atmosphere for the whole seminar, as it was an excellent class that got everyone moving



Mr Mooney taught next, following on from Peter's class working on ukemi and the need for connection. This class showed the depth of Chris' understanding of the relationship between tori and uke and the need for contact. Like the 1st class I found it very enjoyable.

I taught the third class, concentrating on bokken work especially kesa-uchi. I was pleased with the open mindness of the students and their determination to learn.

Finally Mr G Jones taught. What can I say, when you see Gordon teach you realise why he is respected by aikidoka from all over the country. The imagination and thought that goes into his classes makes him a first class teacher and an ambassador for Aikido and the UKA.



Everyone tried hard in every class and I would like to thank all those that attended for their hard work. I would also like to thank Gordon, Chris and Peter for their friendship over the years and for taking part in this seminar. With so much experience between us (over 100 years) the teaching was of a high standard, which everyone appreciated.

All in all the course was a great success, many people asked for it to be repeated on a yearly basis.

I would like to finish with a final thank you to all whom attended, especially Steve Boyle and eight of his students, who travelled down from Scotland; they contributed to a great day with both practice and a sense of humour.

Tony Cassells
Ei Oh Kan

Summer School 2002

Summer school really began on the arrival of Masuda sensei before the start of practice. With sensei's relaxed attitude the meeting with Sue and Keith Hayward (summer school officials) on the Thursday and the meeting of the UKA officials over dinner on the Friday set the atmosphere for the rest of the week.

With the start of his first class on Saturday, Masuda sensei surprised everyone with his warmth and sense of humour and this was to last all the week. Sensei explained every technique in detail and his classes flew by. I personally found his classes very informative as well as enjoyable as I know the students in his classes did.

The shidoins once again gave excellent classes, each one showing their diversity and individualism. Masuda sensei was impressed by their teaching and of how closely they worked together in each other's classes.

The gradings were good - the students taking shodan looking younger every year.

The social entertainment was very good and seems to be getting back to what it used to be. Mrs Smith and I smile each time we think of the artistes that performed on the Wednesday night.

I would like to thank all the people who helped to make summer school a success again this year. Sue and Keith Hayward, the officials of the UKA, Cath Davis who did a wonderful job looking after Masuda sensei, the Shidoins, the mat layers, and of course the students, who gave their time and effort.

Lastly I would like to thank Masuda Sensei who gave us a week to remember with his unique Aikido and with his wonderful sense of humour, both on and off the mat.

W J Smith - Principal UKA

Summer School 2002
Seishiro Masuda sensei 8th dan

Here's a question for you – why is it that he UKA summer school seems to get better and better? This year started with a bang and the pace kept going to the end of the week. Our guest instructor was Seishiro Masuda sensei 8th dan so hombu. Sensei brought a combination of abilities to the mat that we had not seen before in one person with a genuine and friendly teaching manner combined with softness and power. Sensei only had a basic ability at the English language, however his ability to communicate via his inspirational teaching methods got round this obstacle together with help from several visiting translators.

Highlights of Sensei's teaching include a superb lesson on the importance of timing in dealing with Shomen-Uchi (one-two!) and the colour that Keith Hayward's face turned when Sensei picked him off the floor with sankyo. If you take the tuition from Sensei Masuda, together with excellent support from the Principles and Shidoin of the UKA, the standard of teaching at summer school must be comparable to the best in the world.

The social side of summer school seems to be coming back to the fore. It felt like we barely had an evening off this year. Both the karaoke and the social nights were well attended and produced many memorable performances (Gordon Jones as Matthew Kelly-inspired!).

My own answer as to why the UKA summer school seems to be going from strength to strength is that when quality aikido is taught in a progressive manner and combined with an active and friendly social scene then you get happy and hard working aikidoka.

Fred Stevens, Fukushidoin
Te Shin Kai House Aug 2002

The Big 3 2002 + Guests

On 8th & 9th June the **BIG 3** took place once again at the Waveney Sports Centre Lowestoft. This year celebrated my 30th year of Aikido. It was a great honor to bring together for the first time my 5 Sensei's, those who I have studied under and have been very influential in my training and development.

The weekend began with the arrival at Heathrow Airport of Htun Han and Obata Sensei's who came in just for the weekend landing at 8.15am and 8.30am on the Friday. They both flew out at 3.30pm the Monday afternoon. Thanks to Dunken for putting me up on the Thursday night and taking me to terminals 3 & 4 to meet the sensei's. As this was Obata sensei's first visit to England he wanted to see some of London so it was off to town and a trip on the London Eye followed by a walk to Trafalgar Square down the mall to Buckingham Palace before returning to Uxbridge where Dunken picked us up and took us to my car for the trip home. We arrived in Lowestoft at around 6.30pm. At the request of both sensei's, after a rest, something to eat and a quick shower it was off to meet Tom Moss sensei in surprise, surprise a pub. We didn't make it a late night honest.

Saturday began with taking Htun sensei & Obata sensei to Ness Point the most Easterly point in the UK then it was off to the course which once again saw some great teaching and inspiration to all.



Foster Sensei opened and closed the course showing body techniques and throwing techniques with the Jo much to the surprise of not only those watching but an even bigger surprise for the uke's, Dunken and Brian.

Obata Sensei 6th Dan – Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, Toronto Canada followed and began his teaching with a very warm and complementary speech, expressing how pleased he was to be there showing yet again his great generosity towards me as he has always shown throughout the years I have know and trained with him. He then went onto explain his thoughts and way of Aikido giving a great explanation of the principles. At several point sensei drew applause with his demonstration and showed his unique sense of humor. It had been 17 years since I left Toronto and last saw sensei about 4 years ago his foot work, body movement left all with their mouths open. Several said to me that they just wanted to sit and watch him. For several it was the first time they had seen a Japanese sensei.

Smith Sensei taught the basics on Ushiro techniques and then bravely got all to learn a 9 move Jo Kata. Ambitious I thought at the time but with his sense of what students are able to do he got us all to do it. At one point he got various students to lead the kata and asked for a volunteer to lead, Rachael from Petra's dojo in Colchester got up and lead the way, this made many experienced student feel self conscious as Rachael has only been practicing for a short time.

Moss sensei once again taught his small tight body movements and his rather unique Jo work which at one point Richard Perring had been suckered in to picking it up only to be thrown before he could get hold of it this drew great applause.

Htun Han Sensei, 3rd Dan - my first Sensei who now lives and works in the USA taught the basics of Ikkyo

concentrating on the importance of the circle, it's power and the direction.

At one point when demonstrating the big circle I was put on my head which raised laughter, I didn't see what was funny. Since leaving the UK sensei has only been on the tatami once this being about 5 years ago, this surprised many so much that it was suggested that I was exaggerating, I'm not. I was very privileged to have a very special sensei to start my training with.

The weekend finished with a very special event, that of Moss sensei being promoted to 6th Dan. The certificate indorsed by Sensei's H. Foster, K Cottier and W. Smith was presented by Foster sensei. Much congratulation to sensei Moss for this long overdue recognition of his talent, dedication and promotion of the art of Aikido and as Foster sensei repeated the art of Aikido.

Once again we had great weather, now I've said that I guess next year the weather will be bad.

The following Friday saw another very special recognition, Smith sensei being awarded the M.B.E. Much congratulation Mr. Smith this I feel is well deserved. The Queen did ask me to have it presented at the Big 3 but I didn't want to spoil it for her on her jubilee year.



This was a very special weekend not only for me but I feel for Aikido. It has taken some time for me to come down from such a high. Thank you all for being there and helping. 150 from 7 associations. Thank you to the senseis for helping me celebrate, a special thank you to Htun Han & Obata sensei's for travelling such a long way for such a short time, what an honour and thank you Trevor who travelled all the way from Singapore to be there and represent Philip Lee sensei who was unable to attend. Thanks to Petra for her support, to Louise for making the tea and thank you to all Broadland Aikido Club members who worked so hard before and on the day.

Finally next year WILL be back to the regular BIG 3, with good weather I hope.

Thank you

Frank Burlingham – Yondan Broadland Aikido Dojo

Aikido and Friendship

I have never written an article for the newsletter before but this year's Summer School at Harper Adams has prompted me to do so regarding the theme of "friendship and Aikido".

I am a member of Shun Poo Kan dojo and have been practicing regularly since the New Year after eight years of "once in a blue moon practicing" due to University, the shock of working for a living, the loss of my father and studying for a Masters Degree. No matter when I came back I was welcomed with open arms by my friends at Shun Poo Kan and Mr. Burrows who has a great deal of patience with me and is very supportive in both my Aikido life and personal life. Since then another dear friend suggested I train with him at Ren Shin Kan and more specifically with Mr. Jones and Mr. Bailey. Both Mr. Jones and Mr. Bailey have made me feel extremely welcome and now I feel a real part of these classes, not just a visitor and have made more friends.

This Summer School I stepped into the dojo and felt so much warmth being surrounded by friends from Shun Poo Kan and Ren Shin Kan and also happy at the prospect of meeting new people. One person I met from London turned out to be someone I went to school with many years ago in Wombourne!

On the Sunday of Summer School Sensei Masuda said that we should practice with people as if they were a friend – to keep your face the same (Sensei Masuda had great fun demonstrating this point with various people). To me this is very important in the way I train. People respect friends, will give advice to friends, will tell friends when something is wrong or right, will forgive friends and want the best for their friends. If we treat people as friends and bear the last sentence in mind, then everyone has got something to give as well as to learn, as Mr. Mike Smith said to me at Summer School, "Everyone is learning and when we don't think we need to learn we should stop practicing Aikido".

We are constantly working, as uke to respond effectively and safely so that we can absorb a technique and as tori being able to execute a technique. Surely, if we approached this as friends wanting the best for each other then the harmony would be easier to work at.

Many of us have very busy lives, which include work, families, a social life, other hobbies and pastimes but I am very fortunate to say that some of my "Aikido Friends" from different dojos are also close personal friends. Even though we "belong" to different dojos, practice for different reasons, commit various degrees of time we all belong to the family of Aikido and therefore should automatically share a friendship.

Rebecca (Recca) Kelly Shun Poo Kan Dojo

The Motivation to Grade Beyond Shodan

UKA Nidan Grading Essay – Philip Cooke, Gloucester Dojo

The Shodan examination is probably the most important and significant watershed in the life of an aikido student. Promotion to Shodan indicates that the student is no longer a beginner and it is rewarded by being permitted to wear the coveted black belt and hakama, both of which are highly visible status symbols.

The motivation to obtain the Shodan grade is therefore extremely powerful. It is the threshold of aikido maturity and the moment when the aikido child (Kyu) becomes the aikido adult (Dan). It is the first major goal that all aikido students aspire to and each Kyu grading is an incremental step along the road to Shodan.

The nature of the Shodan examination is also extremely symbolic. The student goes onto the mat in a white belt and a white gi, without any visible sign of ability or status. If she is successful, she is then able to wear the black belt and the hakama and immediately becomes equally indistinguishable from all other senior grades. She becomes a member of the aikido elite.

There are many spiritual metaphors for the Shodan examination that compare it to other inductions or initiations, such as Baptism, for example, and which are usually far more significant than following progressions, i.e. Confirmation.



You enter the Shodan grading in white and, if successful, leave permitted to wear the black hakama. It is interesting that black is not a colour- it is the absence of any colour - and it does not possess any of the emotional content that true colours possess. This is why it has a spiritual or unearthly effect and why it is associated with power and authority. 'Men in Black' (i.e. police, referees and priests) are indeed to be feared.

These associations ensure that the Shodan examination is an unforgettable event, marking the crossing of a frontier or the conquering of a mountain summit, whilst both the Kyu gradings that precede it and the Nidan, Sandan and Yondan examinations that follow it are perhaps no more than milestones on a long road. It is for these reasons that this essay attempts to explore the motivation for undertaking grading examinations beyond the Shodan threshold.

Measuring Progress Without Competition

The absence of competition in aikido separates it from most, if not all, other martial arts and provides it with its ethical foundation. Competition has no place anywhere within aikido and progress is not determined by victory over another human being in competitions, in tournaments or in any other circumstances. The only victory within aikido is the victory over oneself, as revealed by O Sensei.

There is no competitive structure and no competitive hierarchy in aikido; therefore there is no focus on the ability to 'beat' another as a test of ability or progress. Many of us forget this when grading. Indeed, the opposite applies and competition is replaced in aikido by harmony, compassion and a form of love for each human being that is encountered through the practice of aikido and the grading situation.

Aikido has no seasonal competitive calendar to provide a timetable structure for training. Nor should it. You have to be ready to protect yourself and others every day of your life. There is no closed season for self-defence, no relegation or promotion table and no cup-final. Instead, we are told that we should train every day – every single day of our lives.

If we do not measure ability or progress through competition in aikido, how do we measure it? What is being measured beyond Shodan grading and how does a Dan grade know how good she is and if progress is real?



Measuring the Whole Person – the Relationship Between Student and Teacher

Chiba Sensei explained in the December 1997 UKA Newsletter that *"each candidate should be examined on his or her own human condition as a complete individual, based on a close understanding between teacher and student…. Without this the Aikido test is likely to be false."*

Chiba used this article to explain that the overall principle that he applies to any examination is the *"degree of cultivation of the body. The important thing is to see the liveliness of the body, not the forms. Whenever the body is alive, in its original mind, the forms also come to life."*

It is clear from these words and from observation of aikido practitioners that gradings – and especially those beyond Shodan - are essentially based on the

recognition of a transformation in the way in which the student moves, his presence and posture on the mat and his behaviour, both inside and outside the dojo. Unusually, the instructor judges his own student.

This is rarely permitted in sport and hardly ever in competitive sport, where the idea of a coach judging a student's performance is anathema.

Motivation for gradings beyond Shodan may be based on the recognition within oneself of these changes and a need to demonstrate that something substantial has happened – the feeling that the time is right to submit oneself to the judgement of peers (the Shidoin), simply because it has happened.

Chiba Sensei is very concerned that the development of the student should be recognised, otherwise it can *"fade away, or go to sleep."* and this is the prime reason why away aikido practitioners should continue to grade beyond Shodan. Something has happened to them.



The Need to Recognise Physical Transformation

Promotion beyond Shodan is essentially about recognising the transformation in the way the aikido student moves and the life or energy within him or her when practicing the art – at the time it is present.

The student will have experienced subtle changes in the way in which she moves: the improvement in her posture and the development of her power. She may feel this strongly, but she can never actually measure this progression because a) it is minutely incremental and b) she is not able to objectively observe herself. So how is it to be confirmed?

Beyond Shodan, the only way to measure progress is to submit yourself to the judgement of your instructors - the Shidoin - in a formal grading situation and to do this you have to train, train, and train, and through this training, develop the close relationship with your instructor that Chiba Sensei says is needed for a truthful examination.

If the Shodan trains hard for a number of years, he will feel himself drawn towards the Nidan examination, as a natural response to this training. In this sense, training alone creates the motivation for grading beyond Shodan.

It may be as simple as that. Train and you will naturally feel a need to subject yourself to the judgement of your instructor and your instructor's peers, because of the special relationship between the student and the instructor that is to be found in aikido.

The Shidoin will assess you in the same spirit of compassion that is the foundation of aikido, not according to your ability to hurt people.



Training Is Everything

Chiba says: *"What I look for and how I judge when promoting is whether a students aikido carries something substantial, or is superficial. A student's aikido is superficial when that student tries to be something other than he or she really is. This person has not come to experience her original face through training."*

Training again. The motivation to grade beyond Shodan is the natural response to, and the natural consequences of, training. It is a self-fulfilling cycle. The student will experience self-transformation through training and will want this confirmed by those who she trusts and respects. They will confirm that something substantial has occurred in that student's life

Aikido is founded on 'basics' and it is perhaps the most basic truth of all that the journey is more important than reaching the destination. It is better to travel than to arrive and it is better to grade beyond Shodan than to stay Shodan.



Postscript – Motivation Beyond Yondan

Shodan, Nidan, Sandan and Yondan are all achieved by grading examination, but there is no examination beyond Yondan, and from 5th Dan onwards promotion is by conferment only.

Those who have reached the rank of 4th Dan will probably teach more than they train and they will no longer have the grading examinations as targets to work towards. So where does their ongoing motivation come from? And how do we really know how good they are.

Trust is a two way street. Members of the UKA trust and empower the Shidoin to judge us at gradings and the Shidoin trust the Membership to respect their ability, commitment and motives – without proof.

The financial rewards of instruction are meagre or non-existent, so there can only be one form of motivation

for Shidoins and that is the relationship between them and their students and the intrinsic pleasure to be found in the practise of aikido, as a group of people. It is the fellowship of those who have found, or been found by, aikido.

Like so many other things in life, the more that is put into aikido, through training for a grading or in assessing a grading, the more that is given back.

Philip Cooke

Growing Up

In the many years I have been practising and teaching I have experienced many changes. Changes in practice and in teaching. The biggest change I have found though is in the growing up of teaching, which means the maturity of the teachers themselves.

To explain the differences in teaching we first have to look at the art of Aikido itself. O'Sensei gave Aikido to the world in 1947 but it was not until the early sixties, when his students left Japan to go to different countries that it really started to expand. I think even now, that Aikido is still not fully understood by a big percentage of students as well as the general public.

Starting Aikido in the early sixties, I have seen a lot of changes in the Japanese masters, both in teaching and technique. The growing up, from Aikido infancy at dojo, association and country level does not mean getting bigger. It means learning and experiencing the many aspects of life. In our working careers we begin by someone teaching us and through hard work and dedication we find that we ourselves become expert and can teach others. We earn respect and respect ourselves only by our own effort. Aikido learning is very similar - we begin as students, work hard for ourselves and the dojo and sometimes we are able to become teachers, being lucky to harmonise careers, home life and teaching. Unlike our work, Aikido practice takes our leisure time, which means more self-discipline to make progress.



Students have to realise and accept the changes that growing together means - from the adulation and putting "their sensei" on a pedestal - to believing that their teacher and therefore themselves are
the best and are "doing it right". As students mature they begin to understand that the sensei that could do no wrong, is human, makes mistakes, and is also growing in experience.

This understanding must not overlook the fact that their sensei has made sacrifices and above all has shown compassion and sometimes love in the effort of doing their best for the students.

Teachers must also realise, accept and indeed be proud of their students' maturity and progress. They must lead by example and not with ego and high mindedness. Working together with other instructors and students is the only path for progress, peace of mind and contentment.

From this growing up, and as Principal of the UKA, I regard every member - teacher and student alike - as my student, to be guided by example. Whatever class or dojo they attend, whether beginner
or long-standing student, trying to be responsible and caring for their future and thereby ensuring for the future of the UKA.

W J. Smith

Shodan: Beginning or End??

I enjoyed reading Philip Cook's thoughtful nidan grading essay. Something in the first paragraph caught my attention and has prompted me to put a few thoughts on paper.

Philip said:

"Promotion to shodan indicates that the student is no longer a beginner….."

It may not have been Philip's intention to convey this quite as literally as I have read it, but a **"beginning"** is exactly what attaining shodan is about.

Shodan does not mean "1st Dan", in the way that nidan means "2nd Dan". The word shodan is made up of 2 kanji:

Sho



meaning beginner or beginning *and*

Dan



meaning step or level.

One source I have read gives **dan** as referring to a step up or on a mountain: giving a sense of an ascent. Surely progression beyond shodan is an ascent – or should be if one's aikido is to develo

To continue with the mountain / ascent metaphor - on any ascent much effort is needed. This is a combination of physical stamina and also technical ability. As the climb gets more arduous greater and different skills are needed. If the skill level is not developed, then although the climber may keep going around and around on the same horizontal plane on the mountain (thus giving an illusion of travel) they are not actually moving forward. The following phrase encapsulates this:

It's not how long you've been travelling, but how far you've travelled that counts

My first instructor, David Bushell, used to say that attaining shodan is like passing your driving test: you pass your test and *then* learn to drive. It takes a few years before driving becomes instinctive – the state of mind "mushin" (lit. no mind) where you arrive at your destination and can't remember every set of lights or each roundabout.



It is only natural to be proud when you first tie your black belt: it *is* a great feeling! When I was a new shodan - under the misapprehension that, as a black belt, I was really something – I remember being frustrated (and, if I'm honest, cross with myself and humiliated) that a kyu grade I was training with kept on countering my shiho nage. What was wrong with him? Didn't he know I was a black belt??! Maybe it takes a few years past shodan to realise, and accept without a trace of irritation, that the technique doesn't always work and that that's OK.

Linked to this, is a state of mind named **shoshin** (lit. beginner's mind). It is too easy to never get beyond the *"I'm shodan and am, therefore, a skilled martial artist capable of dealing with any number of opponents whilst blindfolded with one hand tied behind my back….. (and if I can't it's the uke's fault)"* state of mind. Shoshin requires the student to continually look afresh at each technique every time it is taught or practised: to look with beginner's eyes. I believe it also requires humility and an openness to learn from everyone on the mat. O Sensei said:

You must have shoshin, a beginner's mind, a mind of pure white paper on which to see the moving images of aikido's secrets. You must try emptiness. A mind that is filled with opinion and prejudice has no room for the truths of the universe. If a cup is always full, the water becomes stale and spoils. To be refreshed, it must first be emptied. If your ears are always filled with the sound of your own voice, you cannot hear the rich harmonies of God.

To move beyond shodan (and indeed every level beyond that) we need the mind of a beginner and the physical and mental ability to take the next "step on the mountain". If we do not have these things our journey will have ended. We will be forever travelling that horizontal plane around the aikido mountain, with the illusion that we are going somewhere.

Cath Davies
Fukushidoin - Myo Shin Juku

A Celebration in Toronto

For those of you who attended this years BIG 3 where treated to the teaching of Obata sensei from Toronto who I studied with throughout my eight years of living there. This year is very special as not only did I celebrate 30 years of Aikido study, but Obata sensei also celebrates 30 years of teaching at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre (JCCC). The following is brief account of my trip to attend Obata sensei's celebrations.

On Monday 9th September Vince Hammond one of my students and I flew to Toronto arriving early evening. The Tuesday was spent taking Vince on a sight seeing tour of the city which included a trip up the CN tower some 1815 feet high; the weather was hot in fact the hottest September in Toronto since 1958. That evening we were off to the dojo to train with Obata sensei who greeted us with great warmth.

The JCCC is now housed in a new building which has two dojos along with many other rooms dedicated to the teaching and promotion of Japanese arts and culture, one dojo has a permanent area set out with 120 mats set on a highly polished floor. The other has a highly polished floor and is dedicated the Karate and Iaido.



Tuesday night's practice centred mainly on a rehearsal for the demonstration which was to take place on the Sunday afternoon after the weekend course. Thursday night saw the second practice this time Tanaka Shihan 9th Dan had arrived and taught the class. Tanaka sensei was Obata sensei's teacher in Japan. Vince and I had to leave the practice early, with Tanaka sensei's permission to meet his brother John and wife Donna who were on honeymoon having got married a few weeks earlier and postponing the honeymoon in Canada in order to attend the celebration.

It was good to see Tanaka once again as I have met and trained with Tanaka sensei 3 times in Canada and once at his dojo in Japan. Tanaka sensei had brought with him 5 senior students and around 25 very young fit 21/22 year olds all holding 1st or 2nd Dan

On Friday Vince, John, Donna and I joined Obata sensei, Tanaka sensei and all the Japanese students on a coach trip to Niagara Falls. The day included a trip on the Maid of the Mist, lunch in the Skyline Tower overlooking the falls, wine tasting in Niagara on the Lake and finally dinner in Toronto at a restaurant owned by a student at the JCCC Aikikai.

Saturday was the first day of the two-day seminar, the first class being taught by Obata sensei who took no time at all in having me up to take ukemi for what seemed to be days but have been reliable informed was 10 minutes. This was very nostalgic but a little disturbing for me as one of the JCCC students commented how well I did for my age. The second class was taught by Tanaka sensei with the third class being taught by Kiyotaka Takayanagi.

Saturday night was the dinner; here I met up with many old friends some of which I haven't seen since I left Canada in 1986. Many speeches were made probably the best being made by George Hewson a long time student of Obata sensei and a good friend to me, George now runs his own dojo in Toronto set up with the support and encouragement of Obata sensei. There were many messages of congratulations from such people as the Prime Minister of Canada, the Premier of Ontario, the mayor of Toronto along with messages from the head of the JCCC and Japanese Ambassador for whom Obata sensei works.



Sunday saw three classes; the first taught by Obata sensei, I got off light this time, with two classes taught by Tanaka sensei who finished off his teaching with some very unusual, novel yet full of fun techniques. The finale was a 1½ hour demonstration which was well attended and recorded on film by a local multi-cultural television station. Well over 100 attended the celebration. The training was serious, energetic, and inspirational but fun and a great joy. Obata sensei was as on the Big 3 outstanding. Vince, John and Donna were particularly pleased with the warm welcome and reception al of the JCCC student expressed towards them; this is typical of Obata sensei and is what he expects of his students.

Monday was spent taking John and Donna around Toronto before they left for the UK. Vince and I returned on the Tuesday.

Obata sensei is not what you come to expect of Japanese he has taught as a volunteer at the JCCC since his arrival in Toronto some 30 years ago. In the early days we where told to call him simply Sam. Prior to his coming over for my celebration I E-mailed him to check whether he had been promoted in any way, his response was "I hold 6 Dan, that's all" This not being quite the case as upon my arrival I was to find out that about 2 years age he was made a Shihan.

I must repeat that I feel greatly honoured to have studied under him and to be considered a friend, after the Big 3 he travelled back on his birthday. I would like to finish with some more good news, Obata sensei has agreed to come over next October and teach a course, It is planned that this time some of the JCCC students will travel with him I will keep you all informed.

Frank Burlingham
Broadland Aikido Club

Aikido Master Celebrates 30 Years in Toronto

Osamu Obata leads a double life. By day, he wears a shirt and tie, working in the consular section of the Consulate General of Japan. However, he is also one of the leading masters of aikido in Canada, a pioneer in spreading the teachings of this Japanese martial art in Toronto. And it was this side of his personality that was in the limelight September 14 and 15 as the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre's (JCCC) aikido club celebrated 30 years of instruction by this dedicated *sensei* (teacher).



"I *am very happy to see my valued staff member honoured here today for his long-term commitment to furthering the understanding of the ancient art of aikido among Canadians," said Consul General of Japan Takashi Koezuka at a reception and dinner held in Mr. Obata's honour.*

To celebrate the anniversary, the members of the JCCC Aikikai were joined by a delegation of aikido experts from Senshu University, as well as Shigeho Tanaka, 9th degree black belt and Honourary Director of Meji Shrine Shiseikan, a greatly respected aikido school in Tokyo . Mr. Tanaka and Mr. Obata impressed the crowd gathered at the JCCC with a demonstration of their mastery of aikido techniques.

The JCCC Aikikai was founded in 1969 with just eight students. Mr. Obata came to Toronto from Japan and became the club's instructor in 1972. He has been teaching aikido strictly as a volunteer ever since, and over the years, many of his students have gone on to found their own schools. At the same time, Mr. Obata and the JCCC Aikikai have hosted visits by numerous renowned aikido masters from around the world.



In recognition of his dedication, Mr. Obata was presented with a certificate from JCCC President Marty Kobayashi. The staff at the Consulate General of Japan would like to express our heartfelt congratulations to Obata Sensei, and wish him continued success in spreading his art here in Canada.



Congratulations to Sensei Obata from the membership of the UKA

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