

Connections

Newsletter of Abundant Peace Aikido and T'ai Chi

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Editorial

I cannot believe I have been the Abundant Peace Connections editor for a full year! It has been a wonderful experience. I thank my many contributors – for all those articles, suggestions, interviews – without them, this would be a pretty boring 1-pager! Keep them coming please, your experience, knowledge, and curiosity is shared amongst your Abundant Peace Family.

Thanks to all who brought a Christmas tree ornament as part of the Potluck supper contribution! My tree sported mementos from homemade pieces to beautiful delicate artifacts! I have visited friends that have beautiful Christmas trees, not because they were decorated with blue and turquoise “this year’s theme”, but with ornaments that they can give me a memory for each piece... “Johnny did this in Kindergarden”, “Lisa’s 1st Christmas picture”. I never had that until this year! In December of 2014, when I decorate my little tree, I will have my own memories from my Abundant Peace family!

Happy New Year to you and your loved ones!
May 2014 bring you love, happiness, and good health.



Dojo Etiquette

It is expected that the experienced senior students, in both Aikido and T'ai Chi, **guide and teach** the less experienced students. It is not a burden, it is an honour. Only by teaching others will we have a deeper understanding of the art we practice.

Aikido – when you see a new student, introduce yourself and ask if they have any questions. Show respect to the dojo and higher Kyu’s by sweeping the mats. Take it as an honour that Sensei asked you to lead the warm-up or teach the new student!

T'ai Chi - when you see a new student, introduce yourself and ask if they have any questions. Teaching or assisting in teaching the Beginner’s class is a great opportunity to review your basics. Occasionally volunteer to lead a full set (or partial to 1st or 2nd cross hands).

New Students – don’t be afraid to ask us questions!

France

Promotions

We congratulate the members of our Aikido Community who were advanced in rank during the month of December:

KIDS:

Jr 14th Kyu – Kenda C., Pierre C., Ethan G., Sam G., Emma L.

14th Kyu – Victor K., Riley L., Lenard G., Dominick H., Isla M., Tidus G.

13th Kyu – Kyla G., Vivien M., Emma B.

Jr 8th Kyu – Rachel T., William H.

ADULTS:

9th Kyu – Victor B., Derek G.

Remember to take advantage of our Corporal Francisco Gamez Memorial Library, established for all to enjoy.

Teaching and Learning with Other Martial Artists

By Craig D.

Recently I had the opportunity to teach martial arts as part of Jasper Place High School's Alternative Learning Day. I taught with a Karate black belt; a Muay Thai student; his long-time friend Muay Thai Champion, Derek Jolivette; and fellow English teacher and some time professional MMA fighter. The two days were valuable to me because of the comradery and knowledge that we shared, and because they gave me the chance to see Aikido through the eyes and experience of my brother martial artists.

We began the two days with introductions and each of the instructors spoke about his personal history in the art he studied, why he was drawn to martial arts, and what he liked about them. For me, the comments about building confidence, strengthening the body, and learning to defend yourself were expected, perhaps because they are the most common and fundamental reasons for beginning study in the martial arts. I was more interested in the reasons given for continuing practice, for remaining in the dojo year after year, when other activities had come in and out of one's life.

For each of us comradery and something Derek called "leadership" were essential to our continued practice. Comradery was that feeling of friendship that comes with shared practice—the idea that we are fellow wanderers on the same path toward a goal that recedes continually before us. For all of us there was that sense that the journey would never end, and it was wise, probably essential, to have friends along to celebrate victories and laugh together at failures—the endless humbling from which no one, even the most advanced student (and we're all students always), escapes. Derek compared the classes he taught in the new Arashido dojo in Sherwood Park to leadership activities because they fostered trust, care, and a sense of responsibility for the others with whom one trains. Certainly, we instructors, after our two days were done, felt that sense of responsibility for one another that team members feel, along with the enthusiasm and positive energy that accompanies such membership.

So, if trust and comradery were results of the two days' success, openness had to have been one of its pre-conditions. It was through that openness to new experience and ideas that I had a chance to share and re-examine my Aikido. My fellow instructors and I really lived the speech we made to our students about every art being "different, not better" and about "leaving your ego at the door." After some impromptu and gentle sparring, I was told that "my style" was surprising in a number of ways. First, I circled around my opponent; second, I had sticky hands; and third, the power of my techniques seemed to arise from harmonious "flow" and the power of the "dantian".

These astute observations were the more illuminating because they did not quite fit my understanding of what I was doing on the mat during that sparring. I didn't think I circled my opponent, but my opponent did. Why? I wasn't going around, I was going in. What my opponent described as "circling" was my going along the edge of his guard to get to his centre. Alarm bells ring in the mind of a fighter when he feels the presence of his opponent on this edge and moving in, so he moves what Derek call his "fight line" (the centre line of the body extending into an attacker's range) and guard to protect himself. He feels like he is being circled as you continue to enter and move along the edge of power. If the adjustment of his fight line crosses yours, then your entering shifts to his other side and he feels like you are circling him the other way around—but you're not circling, you're entering.

Similarly, when we were gently sparring again, I was not "sticking" my hands to my opponent's hands, though that was what he perceived. That sense of stickiness resulted (I'm speculating here) partly from continuous entering around my opponent's guard and from the aikidoka's practiced love of connection. Aikidoka don't clash or block, they connect to the centre and blend. Earlier in the day, receiving roundhouse kicks, solar plexus high against a handheld foam blocker, made me aware of how painful and dangerous merely blocking or building a wall (as I thought of it at the time) against in-coming force can be. One kick snuck a little under the blocking pad and the tip of it connected with my abdomen. I felt a star of pain, then the force of the kick welling up in my midsection on that side, then light-headedness and nausea. That experience was a eloquent warning against building a rigid wall against an opponent's force. There really is no wall sturdy enough to protect against the kind of force that can be launched at you by powerful, well-trained fighters.

Kid's Section

Editor's Note:

I took 2 weeks off during the Christmas holidays and I thought I'd get some extra training by helping out during the Kid's Aikido class. The Kid's program has 14 Kyu's including Junior ranking. Every Kyu has at least 6 techniques you need to know, I've noticed some have as many as 12.

The techniques are all in Japanese and breaks down terminology for body parts, directions, movement, and of course application. I can honestly say that I comprehend only a fraction of their program, it is overwhelming! How do they remember all those movements and the Japanese words?!

I was lucky one night to be the Lead instructor. Needless to say, I was a little nervous. I felt better when I noticed the group was going to be small (only about 12 young students) and Keith and Don were there to assist. In the end, my young students were instructing me! Thanks go out to the 13th Kyu students for guiding me!

To the Adult Aikido students, if you want to improve your Aikido learning, check out the Kid's class!

A few pictures from Dec Kid's Class Tests!



Teaching and Learning with Other Martial Artists

Continued...

Even the last observation regarding harmonious flow and the power of the dantian, though more part of our way of thinking and vocabulary, jarred just a little with my sense of what worked that day. Demonstrating tai no henko, expecting a straight punch rather than the usual wrist grab, I moved off-line, blended with my partner's right punch, did tenkan, and made a conscious effort to take his balance with my spiraling left hand at his right forearm and elbow. I realize now that my partner felt what I wasn't really even conscious of—that his centre had been taken away and projected in the same direction of his punch, like (as I described to the kids) two rivers becoming one and flowing in the same direction. So, really, my brother in martial arts, a Karate blackbelt, was more conscious of the dynamics of my tai no henko than I was. What he noticed—the integration of the body around the movement of one's centre—had been trained into me to the point of my not being conscious of it. The flow and dantian power of which I was not really aware had become natural.

What a great learning experience I enjoyed those days with friends in the martial arts.

I want to thank them for their illuminating observations, their genuine openness, thoughtfulness, and the sincerity of their practice. Also, I would be remiss not to mention how incredibly energizing and inspiring were the vigor and power of their attacks and martial intention.

Editor's Note:

Ages ranged from 15 to 18 yrs, approx 50 male and female students were in attendance

TAI CHI: ONE HUMAN ADVENTURE
PART FOUR:
THE SECOND CLASS - WHAT IS GOING ON?

By Scott

After experiencing a series of serendipitous events leading up to my first “free” Abundant Peace Tai Chi lesson, and a “realityquake”, or at the very least a seriously strange perceptual shift at my first lesson, I was headed back the next day for lesson number two. Filled with anxiety, apprehension and an unsettling disquiet that was difficult to understand, I was nonetheless driven by my curiosity, a need to know things that has motivated me ever since I can remember. A number of years ago I had completed a values inventory to learn that the number one value in my spectrum of core values was knowledge. I value knowledge higher than all other values in my belief system. And this curiosity was leading me back to the dojo.

And again, while driving through the cold, black February night, my inner voice was chattering away with a hundred reasons to turn around and go home.

I arrived on time and stepped into the already crowded foyer. Removing my winter gear, speaking with Stuart a moment, I moved into the main gym and with the other beginners, began doing the warm-up exercises that we had learned the day before. A new instructor came to this end of the gym and introduced himself as Bob. He began by introducing us to a new warm up exercise, then he worked us through the other ones. After the warm up, he reviewed a concept that Judith had taught us. It was called “hanging out” A posture that felt unnatural to me, especially the feet positions. Bob indicated we were to be like a marionette, hanging from a string that ran through the crown of our head and down through our spine and that we should maintain this posture as much as we could throughout the moves we would learn. Then after a review and practice of commencement, he introduced us to the “second” move in the first set. We learned Left Grasp Birds Tail (Mind Chatter: R-i-i-g-h-t...where do they get these names?)

Well there were no reality shaking events that occurred to me, but strangely enough I found it very easy to utilize the “water” image during commencement. Throughout the rest of the lesson it was watch Bob demonstrate, try it, practice it, ask questions, correct it and do it all over again. Feet motions first, weight shifting, left arm here, right arm there, weight

shift, feet movements, arm movements, over and over again. And then we would go right back to the beginning and do it all over again. By the time the break came, my mind was filled with the movements we had learned. My thoughts were awirl in a flood of instructions. And strangely enough, the mind chatter that was constantly in the foreground of my thoughts, had diminished significantly to a whisper.

After the break, when we had reassembled ourselves into rows in the prescribed fashion, Brad came over to address the group. The messages that he conveyed to us, in his quiet, reassuring manner were: “You do not have to remember everything because we always go back to the beginning, Concentrate on the footwork and weight shifting, relax and enjoy it, just hang out and don’t forget to breathe” Now breathing might seem like something you would not forget but I had noticed that while concentrating so very hard on the moves and their sequence, I would hold my breath...in fact many students did this, so Brad was reminding us that breathing is an important part of not just Tai Chi, due to its mind calming and relaxing effects, but living itself.

Although I did not know it at the time, Brad and the other instructor-students were introducing Tai Chi principles to us...right from the first class forward, and in every class since. Specifically they were, in these early lessons, Relaxation and Verticality. He also explained to us the “martial” aspect of the first two moves...Cool! Then he dropped the first of many Tai Chi bombs on us.

“When you have learned the mini-set, you will have learned 60-70% of the entire set”. What? My mind reeled...I suddenly had many more questions.

Before I could put a voice to my questions he started speaking again, emphasizing the benefits of Tai Chi. I wasn’t really listening...my skeptical inner voice was jabbering away then very loudly posited the question: “What is going on here?”. I could not believe that by learning the mini-set, I would be in possession of almost three quarters of the full set...the full set that Brad had demonstrated to us the first lesson and the full set that was filled with graceful movement and elegant motion. Since regaining the joy of movement in my life was a primary motivation for coming to Tai Chi, I realized then that I was going to get way more than I bargained for...IF I persevered.

He finished up by reiterating that our primary goal is to relax and enjoy the learning, not to worry about memorizing everything...and breathe. He then turned and went back to the intermediate class before I had a chance to ask my questions.

Dojo Announcements

Classes were held during the Christmas Season. Brad Sensei asked that I extend his thanks to all from T'ai Chi and Aikido who helped!

Noodle-Nite celebration is Sat, Jan 11th. Our current Tai Chi Beginner Group continues to progress nicely along their path to learning the traditional long-set, recently arrived at '2nd Cross Hands'. Congrats!

Special Training - Friday, Jan 17th 6:30 - 9:30pm

Theme: Using various fun and innovative drills, we'll be exploring Connection – including "Sticky Hands", Kuzushi – balance taking, and spontaneous action. We'll be doing fun two-person drills that are not typically done in Aikido and using them as vehicles to practice and study our Aikido techniques and principles.

Start of a new T'ai Chi Beginner Class Saturday, Feb 1st. Let your friends and family members know they can come and try some classes for free.

New Years Special!! All family members of our present Aikido students are able to attend one month of Aikido classes absolutely free! One month free to try Aikido for any of the Tai Chi members as well! Including the parents of our Aikido Kids! This special also includes 1 month of Tai Chi classes for family members of either art! This offer ends Feb 28th, so act now!

TAI CHI: ONE HUMAN ADVENTURE PART FOUR: THE SECOND CLASS - WHAT IS GOING ON? Continued...

Bob sent us back to the beginning, and for the rest of the class we practiced what we had learned...over and over and over again. At the end of the class, and this was a part of Bob's teaching style that I really grew fond of, he demonstrated the next move in the sequence that we would learn in the next class, and told us it's name: Grasp Birds Tail. (R-i-i-i-g-h-t).

As I moved toward the foyer to prepare to leave, with no insight as to what had happened to me in the first lesson, determined to speak of it with no one, my mind buzzing with the new learning, I was aware that I was curiously, again, physically calm.

After bowing and exiting the mats, I turned and Brad was standing there writing notes. He looked up, looked straight at me, smiled that inscrutable half smile with the partially squinted eyes and asked me: "What do you think?"

I was about to launch into a tirade about his unbelievable assertion that learning the mini-set would teach me a significant amount of the total set, but for some reason just responded with the mumbled statement "It seems to be a lot, almost overwhelming what we have learned so far." He then, again, reassured me that I don't have to get everything right away and that we will always go back to the beginning."

Then his smile increased ever so slightly, his eyes squinted a tiny bit more and he says to me: "...Think of yourself as a Tai Chi newborn, a Tai Chi baby". Then his name was called out by a senior student, he turned to address the person and I beat a hasty retreat from the building.

While driving home processing my second lesson, his last statement kept repeating in my mind. Then that feeling returned to my stomach to be expressed shortly after as a deep, rolling laughter. I was incredulous... "What is going on here?" I loudly asked the windshield... Now that the mystery had deepened, I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I would be going back for more...because I had to know. And I laughed all the way home.

More Dojo Announcements

Upcoming Seminars, Workshops, and Events:

Northern Alberta Aikikai Cyndy Hayashi Sensei Seminar

(Edmonton) Jan 31st and Feb 1st. More details can be found posted on our bulletin board (dojo entrance).

George Ledyard Sensei Feb 7, 8, and 9th hosted by our school!

This will be our second seminar with George Ledyard Sensei at our dojo. This is a major event for our school and an extremely important training and learning opportunity for our students. Ledyard Sensei is a major instructor within our ASU organization. He is among Saotome Sensei's first students when Saotome Sensei came to North America in 1975. Beyond that, Ledyard Sensei is highly articulate and straight-forward in his instructing. He is a virtual storehouse of critical historical and technical information. His seminars are always extremely helpful in elucidating and clarifying the roots and principles of our Art.

Don't miss this opportunity to advance and deepen your Aikido.

Various help is needed during the seminar. See the posted Duty Roster sheet on the entrance bulletin board or ask Reg.

Abundant Peace Aikido is on Facebook!

Information is shared immediately on facebook that you may get eventually through the dojo "grapevine". Videos are often posted from tests or particular practices. Send us a request to be added to this dynamic group!

For direct emailing of this Newsletter, please send email to apeditor@hotmail.com.

Wisdom

"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn."

— Benjamin Franklin

Christmas Potluck Supper!

Despite the horrible weather (freezing rain!) we had on our Christmas Potluck supper Dec 14th, I played host to about 30 people! There were people from both Aikido classes (Adults and Kids), and T'ai Chi.

There was so many yummy dishes brought over! Home made bread, hand made Imperial rolls, chicken, pasta, salads, deserts, oh my! So much left-overs... shucks!

One of the dishes brought by Robyn was a particular success and I wanted to share this with you. It has **bacon!** A newsletter isn't a "real" newsletter without a recipe... right?

Brussels sprouts dish

Ingredients:

15-20 brussel sprouts (washed, ends cut off and sliced/chopped)
1 cup diced bacon
2 Tbsp. butter
½ cup chicken broth
½ Tbsp. honey or agave nectar
Pinch of salt if desired
Handful of lightly roasted pine nuts

Directions:

Cook the bacon (drain if needed). Add honey/agave, butter and chicken broth. Once heated and blended add Brussels and pine nuts. Bring to a boil stirring semi-frequently until Brussels are done and liquid is evaporated.

Enjoy!