



(*continuation*) emotion, to the body's movement as the conflict is given voice.

Our training allows us to move freely and be safely present, opening ourselves to receive the message. It is only by opening the door to receive the conflict that we can hope to work with it.

You cannot step through the threshold of a new experience without first opening the door.

You cannot see what is behind a wall. Only by opening a door can you know what awaits you on the other side. It is our practice that allows us to safely open that door and begin the process of listening and molding the conflict into something new.

At the beginning of each class, we openly invite others to teach us, "Onegaishimasu." Aiki taiso opens the paths in our body and mind so that energy may flow freely. Our posture is opened so that we may breathe more deeply and learn to be solid in our stance as conflict arises around us. Our practice of tai sabaki teaches us to move freely and with balance, opening a space for our partner to enter. As technique is created, we open a space for uke to fall, a safe place for our partner to fill.

Consistent training conditions the body, mind, and heart to stand amidst the turbulent conflict in our lives, to move without constraint, to open ourselves to the possibilities that create positive change. I believe this is the true value of our training in aikido. We do not have to look far for this conflict. It is within us, as are the doors waiting to be opened.

Seminar Review: Spring Camp 2012

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In aikido, the role of *nage*—the defender—is sometimes interpreted too passively. In training, *nage* is often instructed to "wait" for *uke* to attack, and to then react with a technique. But we know that, for example, in *randori* practice, if *nage* passively waits for three or more *uke* to attack and then reacts, *nage* is most likely going to get clobbered. *Nage* must move and engage the *ukes* before they fully attack. The *ukes'* intentions are clear—get *nage*—so why wait to be literally beat over the head with this intention?

When teaching, and especially when teaching *randori* and *jiyu waza*, I've struggled to explain the difference between waiting for an attack and moving toward an *uke* before or during an attack.

I often found myself wanting to use the word "aggressive," which wrongly seemed to imply fighting, and would substitute it with "proactive," which only seemed to imply corporate gibberish. I would compromise on an idea of "assertiveness," but this too was still not the right vocabulary. And, so, it was a relief and revelation when Eiji Katsurada Shihan, at the 2012 Aikido World Alliance Spring Camp, taught his interpretation of the concepts of *go no sen* and *sen no sen*.

Katsurada Shihan, *rokudan*, is an instructor from Hombu Dojo in Tokyo, Japan, where he teaches adult and children's classes. He is the first Hombu Dojo instructor to teach at an AWA seminar—a major milestone for the organization. The seminar was held at Kyushinkan Dojo, Roswell, Georgia, from April 13–15, and with more than 170 people on the mats, it was one of the AWA's largest seminars to date. And it proved something that's likely to affect every future seminar at Kyushinkan Dojo: even with 170 people on the mat, there's enough space for all partner practice all the time!

Katsurada Shihan knows some English, and language differences are not major impediments to teaching technique. However, with translation help from Courtney Heizenrader (3rd kyu, Aikido of South Brooklyn), Katsurada Shihan was able to teach and share something deeper than gross movements. He shared *his* aikido and *his* ideas, and asked us, the students, to be open to a different way of doing familiar techniques. And this sincerity and openness was on display in Katsurada Shihan's teaching style: at some point during the seminar, he practiced with virtually every student on the mat regardless of age or rank. (*continued*)





(continuation) I'm sure everybody left Spring Camp with different understandings and memories of the seminar, but his discussion of *go no sen* and *sen no sen* particularly resonated with me. These ideas are referred to in kendo, karate, and other arts, and all with slightly different translations. Instead of a lengthy discussion of these differences, I'll only recap how I remember Katsurada Shihan discussing these strategies. (By the way, if you hadn't picked up on it, that's my "I'm-not-an-expert-and-could-have-misunderstood" humility disclaimer.)

Go no sen, said Katsurada Shihan, is when *nage* waits for *uke* to attack and then executes a defense. It is not passive, mindless waiting. Even though the body may be still, the mind and senses are active. Katsurada Shihan explained that *nage* has the luxury of waiting because he can see or sense how *uke* will attack. Most aikido practice is done this way. There's a prespecified attack, knowledge that empowers *nage* to wait for *uke* to move first and still have the time and space—the *ma ai*—to respond.

This strategy works in *jiyu waza* and *randori* practice, too. Maybe *uke* comes charging at you with a raised *teगतana* (sword hand) in preparation for *shomenuchi* or with both arms extended in a Frankenstein-like walk ready to grab both *gi* lapels. Maybe *uke* makes obvious and wide angles to circle behind you or in some other way telegraphs the attack. When *nage* can see or feel how *uke* will attack, he can wait.

But what if *uke's* attack isn't telegraphed or dictated by the instructor? What if *uke* can attack freely? And what if there's a weapon



or more than one *uke*? In such contexts, *nage* may choose to go to *uke* to either intercept *uke's* attack or to engage *uke* before he has a chance to attack. This is the idea of *sen no sen*, said Katsurada Shihan. This idea is probably most commonly practiced during *randori*, when *nage* moves toward the *uke* and intercepts them before they can attack fully and simultaneously.

Katsurada Shihan illustrated the idea with several techniques. *Munetsuki kotegaeshi* stands out in my memory as a clear example of Katsurada Shihan's idea of *sen no sen*, as well as an example of his personal approach to aikido. In this version of *munetsuki kotegaeshi*, Katsurada Shihan entered as *uke* began to punch, preventing the strike from reaching full extension by stopping *uke's* elbow and dropping his weight on the elbow joint. From there, Katsurada Shihan took *uke's* fist into both of his hands, forming a two-handed *kotegaeshi* grip. He extended *uke* outwards, in the direction of the strike, and around to his opposite knee. Next, he lifted *uke's* arm, making a wave-like motion and pivoted. The timing was such that as *uke* was coming around, off balance, *nage* was pivoting in the opposite direction. *Uke's* wrist went one direction while his body was traveling in another.

“Go no sen is when a *nage* waits for *uke* to attack and then executes a defense. But what if *uke's* attack isn't telegraphed or dictated by the instructor? *Nage* may choose to go to *uke* to either intercept *uke's* attack or to engage *uke* before he has a chance to attack.

This style of *kotegaeshi* was facilitated by Katsurada Shihan's very wide, deep *hanmi* stance, something he specifically talked about at the opening of the seminar, along with the importance of keeping weight underside. The progression from these skills to *go no sen* and *sen no sen* followed a clear narrative, and, along the way, Katsurada Shihan also emphasized the importance of individual control over each part of the body. He most memorably illustrated this by breathing: first into his chest, then the abdomen, and then the pelvis. If you watched carefully, you could actually see each segment of his body sequentially expanding and contracting with each breath.

Since April, I've discussed Katsurada Shihan's teachings with friends, teachers, and students from around the country. Everybody remembers something different: throws that required *nage* to literally dive to the floor, slapping your partner on the back (a refreshing type of *atemi waza* practice), *tanto dori* done with water bottles, unusual approaches to *nikkyo*, and Katsurada (continued)



(continuation) Shihan's approachability and openness. And that's the short list. That so much could be remembered and so much forgotten is a testament to the depth and breadth of the 2012 Spring Camp. ●



The Aikido Dojo: A Model of Educational Accessibility

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In the United States, public dialogue about K-12 education can reach fever pitches, infused with polemics centered on educational accessibility, funding, and who is (and is not) getting "left behind." While the inequities of our educational system have deep historical roots, and are not easily or quickly solvable, the study of successful learning environments, particularly informal learning opportunities or free-choice learning communities can reveal some ideas that could be applied in more formal learning environments. More particularly, the aikido dojo, as I have experienced it through the UNCW Aikido Club/Kure Beach Aikido, teaches some valuable lessons about creating an open community of learners.

Cost can be a significant barrier to learning. In my work as a professor at a midsize public university, I encounter students who have to go to great lengths just to get to the classroom; they work long hours at low wages, borrow beyond their means, and get extraordinarily creative about child care so that they can pay tuition and therefore attend class. Having been one of the undergraduates who paid for education with a series of minimum wage jobs, I understand how these life circumstances affect intellectual development. Pulled in different directions and exhausted by work, these

students have much on their minds when trying to study. In many cases, cost keeps people from pursuing advanced education all together, and some of the same economic circumstances that keep people out of higher education can also keep them out of the dojo.

Cost is an artificial impediment to education, one that, in my dojo, has been almost eliminated by its organizational structure: senseis volunteer their time and expertise and modest dues support rented space at community centers and gyms. In these spaces, aikido is enough; the amenities are not necessary if they raise the cost of training and limit who can afford to train. Upper kyu grades take seriously their responsibilities as teachers, and they volunteer a great deal of time for individual tutoring. A survey of dojo prices online reveals that our dojo is exceptionally affordable. This, along with the support structure provided by individual tutoring, allows students, families, and others with limited incomes a chance to learn aikido. Eliminating cost as an artificial barrier to education has helped to produce a vital community of learners and a shared sense of respect for teachers, not just because they know more than the rest of us and have more skills, but because they have chosen to give *freely* of their knowledge, skills, and time. This sets the tone for the group, and the rest of us contribute what we can through ride sharing, cleaning, or donating to student scholarships for seminar attendance. We commit to training out of the desire to learn but also because our successes are compliments to our teachers. This sense of shared purpose is often missing in more formal learning environments that emphasize individual achievement over shared goals, and it is supported by a structure that requires commitment, not high fees. While the practice of volunteer teachers is certainly neither feasible nor desirable in formal educational environments, a true community commitment to everyone's learning would help to alleviate some of the educational inequities brought about by the high cost of education.

"You much find the aikido that works with your own body."

One thing that seems to be more recognized in K-12 than in higher education but always recognized in the dojo is that different people learn differently, and aikido instructors who respond to diversity in learning are more apt to build an open dojo community. Some students easily grasp concepts that are abstract, while others pick up on ideas that are expressed more concretely. Some hook onto the analytics of a new technique, while others find a technique "clicks" when presented with the practical or traditional application of the movement. Each of us has various skills and challenges we bring to a learning situation.

Early in my training, my sensei taught a class without (continued)