

Gradings, Grumbles and News**The Past Six Months**

Although there have been no courses or other major events, it has been a busy six months or so since the last edition of *Shunkato*. In particular, Edinburgh Aikikai has undergone a major upheaval with the relocation of all classes in the wake of the closure of the Royal Commonwealth Pool. The result is a split over two locations: Ainslie Park Leisure Centre and Meadowbank Stadium. Despite the geographical dispersion and the accompanying inconveniences, the changeover was made smoothly, with little significant falloff in attendance. Although Edinburgh Leisure (which manages all three sites) took the opportunity to impose substantial hikes in rental costs, we have absorbed this with a minor increase in monthly fees. Hopefully, we can use the changes to bolster recruitment and make up for any additional expenses. Many thanks to everyone for their continued support through this transition.

The other branches of Azami-Kai have also been highly active: reestablishing operations on a new footing at Edinburgh University, rearranging locations and schedules in St Andrews, and continuing with a drive to stabilize and expand the club in Glasgow. More about these endeavours in the respective sections later in newsletter.

With the various branches of Azami-Kai acting largely autonomously, it has become increasingly important to keep some sort of overview of the organization. Although no great fan of administrative load, this has led me to ask the representatives of each dojo or group to

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Future Editions of Shunkato

We aim to publish *Shunkato* biannually and welcome submissions. Please email any suggestions or articles to: l.a.longley@sms.ed.ac.uk by 31st May 2010 for inclusion in the next issue.

submit a summary of accounts and operations on a semiannual basis. I really hope that this will aid management clarity and transparency and facilitate timely intervention and assistance when needed.

Some Thoughts on Grades, Gradings and Seniority

Dan and kyu grades, the testing process, and the criteria and protocols of aikido's organisational hierarchies are an interwoven, complex and baffling area for many aikidoka. Beginners generally start out with the expectation that grade and seniority will correlate directly with ability—which is by no means as naïve as it may sound—only to have this image gradually eroded by experience and contradictions. I am sure we have all trained with someone of questionable ability later to find out that they were highly graded, or conversely greatly enjoyed and benefited from practising with someone who it turns out is relatively junior.

Initially, it may be useful, particularly for beginners, to summarise the system of grades and gradings. The kyu grades run from sixth kyu to first kyu in Azami-Kai and in the majority of mainstream organizations in the UK and elsewhere (from fifth kyu at Hombu Dojo). Kyu grades are internally controlled and have no *ipso facto* recognition outside of the dojo or organization by which they are awarded. At the moment, we hold kyu examinations twice a year, with a specified number of training days prerequisite for tests. To my perception, sixth, fifth and fourth kyu grades represent a fairly uniform advancement through which all beginners training with a reasonable degree of diligence should be able to progress smoothly. There is a considerable jump to third kyu, with a substantial broadening of the scope of techniques required in examination accompanied by greater expectations in general competency and commitment. At first kyu, once again, the level jumps in anticipation of shodan.

Dan grades ascend from shodan (first dan), with tests taking place once a year. As these are held with the authority of the Aikikai Foundation, we are under obligation to maintain a universal standard. In general, people

test to third or fourth dan and beyond that are promoted by recommendation, based on years of service and contributions to aikido.

Yudansha (holders of dan grades) represent the majority of the aikido community. There is often a parochial misapprehension that a black belt, or shodan, is a point of completion; in fact, it is the start of serious aikido study and responsibilities.

Beyond grades themselves, there is some confusion over hakama. In Azami-Kai we stick closely to Hombu Dojo standards; hakama are, in principle, worn from shodan by men and third kyu by women. This is something that does vary quite dramatically between different organizations. (If not a dan grade, I would suggest confirming that it is okay to wear your hakama when practising outside of Azami-Kai.)

Possibly aikido would have been better off without grades. They may well be the greatest cause of discord and rivalry and source of misunderstanding we encounter, both by the grade holder and by other people. Evidence is that O-Sensei established no such system, although he did distribute dan grades as a mark of favour in a somewhat erratic way. This is, however, an academic question. There *is* a system of grades and we all, like it or not, exist within it. I personally believe that great benefit can be gained from applying yourself to the grading system as an exercise in focusing on preparation, archiving of acquired knowledge and overcoming natural reticence to perform in front of others. In my own experience, adamant refusal to take part in the grading system is rooted in fear or arrogance, both of which need to be overcome.

I gave some opinions on how gradings fit into our overall teaching in an earlier *Shunkato* in a discussion on the relationship between expression and form:

Aikido gradings are a test of overall progress assessed through form. Accordingly, during the period leading up to a grading, the focus in classes is on the basic, or classical, forms of each technique from all the standard attacks. Between gradings, we have the freedom to explore many of the internal dynamics and feelings involved in the execution of aikido. The breakthroughs that we make in this exploration are then carried over to our execution of the standard techniques. This fluctuation, essentially between form and expression, propels our aikido forward, and ensures that the benefits of the cycle of gradings are felt by everyone in the dojo.

Satisfying your own teachers that you are eligible is prerequisite for any grading. You are required to be of an adequate technical ability, to be training hard enough (and having fulfilled the minimum stipulation for number of days training), and to have displayed sufficient commitment throughout your aikido in the broadest sense.

While this basically still covers my thoughts, I would like to add some comments. As a test-based evaluation, results are a combination of aikido ability, thoroughness of preparation and performance in a stressful examination environment. Thus gradings represent the first possible divergence between grade and ability. Some people excel and others underperform in examination situations. You can change this in yourself or live with it—complaining about it is futile.

However, bear in mind that your examiners will usually have considerable experience and consequently will be aware of all these criteria. Age, physical conditions, test nerves and other factors will be taken into account. A single stressful error by no means seals your doom! Ideally, examiners want to see a fairly robotic performance. Your test is not a showcase for power or individuality, nor for abilities beyond the grade being taken.

Moreover, you would probably be dissuaded from sitting the test if your chances of success were not high and your overall level not appropriate.

It is important to maintain perspective on the importance of gradings. Invariably, the first response to acquiring a new grade is a bemused feeling that nothing has changed. Treat your gradings as a tool. Neither fear nor deride them. Make the grading system work for your benefit.

The discussion of grades leads to the broader concept of seniority. The word *sempai* (senior) and its opposite *kohai* are frequently used in describing the relationships between people within organizations. Clearly, one role of grades is to answer the question: *Who are my seniors in the dojo and in aikido?* It is also apparent that grades by no means exclusively define seniority. In addition to grades, aikido hierarchies are a product of age, experience (in aikido and in the dojo), ability and other factors.

There is some cultural background to these discussions. Kyu and dan systems are fundamental to cultural and other pursuits in Japan. They cover many traditional arts, not only martial, but in such diverse areas as *shodo* (calligraphy), *go* (a Japanese strategic board game) and *ikebana* (flower arranging). It is therefore a system that makes perfect sense to the Japanese; the misapprehensions primarily affect overseas interpretations of the meanings of grades.

We have no difficulty in understanding similar hierarchies applied to academia, the military or other occidental institutions. No one assumes a general to be a more effective soldier than a sergeant, or that the dean is the smartest person in a university. But still, we tend to be drawn to simplistic interpretations of the aikido grading system, spurred by a natural desire for a numerical correlation linking ability, grade and seniority, regardless of other factors.

As children, we don new clothes as we grow. Our growth progresses at differing, nonlinear rates, and we end up as adults of varying shapes and sizes. When you outgrow your coat, you need a new one; an outsize coat cannot disguise a diminutive wearer. This is much the same with aikido grades. Your grade is appropriate to you only. If it fits you now, be contented; if you have outgrown it, then it is time to move on. It was not given as a yardstick for comparison. Similarly, you should have the confidence and courage to make your own assessments of other people's aikido without recourse to their grade, which is a product of their own personal history and progress.

I would like to finish with thanks to everyone for their contributions to Azami-Kai. Turning up for classes and courses, improving your

aikido and taking a more senior role in the dojo are in themselves contributions. However, there is an increasing amount of peripheral responsibilities to be borne—a load which tends to fall on the same familiar shoulders. I ask everyone to try to find ways in which they can help in sharing this burden. Advertising and recruitment are ongoing and the need for assistance unlimited. Courses, demonstrations and social events all require organization. The teaching load often needs support, too. Beyond these predetermined roles, the diversity of our membership is an ideal base to generate new creative ideas to propel the organization forward. Contributing to this newsletter may as good a place as any to start!

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Promotions, Jul.–Dec. 2009

3rd Dan

Andrew Rayne

1st Dan

Neil Squires

Ross Ferguson

Bradley Mackay

James Prowse

Niels Hermansson

1st Kyu

Dave Ross

Brian O'Hare

Lee MacDonald

Greg Luke

3rd Kyu

Linde Hess

4th Kyu

James Mathews

Harry Gooch

Richard Lukett

Andrzej Lazowski

5th Kyu

Michael Dewar

6th Kyu

Beata Jarosz

Mark Rhodie

Louise McKie

James Greenall

Roman Biek

Jo Clayton

Children's class:

10th Kyu

Momo Ueda

Daniel Sorokin

11th Kyu

Hector Grey

12th Kyu (yellow belt)

Jovan Polese Abramovicz

Sacha Sorokin

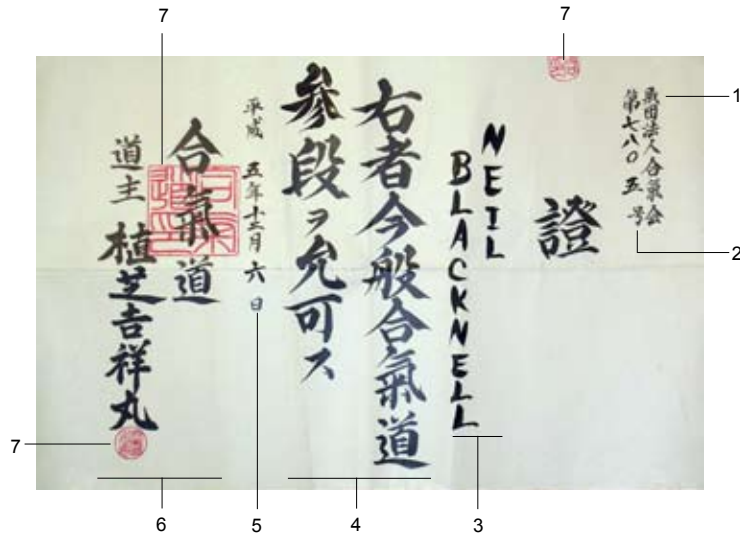
13th Kyu

Aiden

Matthew Jarosz

Michael Macpherson

Reading Your Dan Grade Certificate



- 財団法人合気会 : Aikikai Foundation
- Certificate number. This is given in Japanese numerals, which are:

一 one	六 six
二 two	七 seven
三 three	八 eight
四 four	九 nine
五 five	十 ten

 Thus, the number of this certificate is 七八〇五 , or 7805
- Name. In the case of a non-Japanese who receives certification, this is either in Roman lettering, vertically written as in the current example, or in katakana (as often used on hakama and keikogis). Various sources exist for transliteration: <http://japanesetranslator.co.uk/your-name-in-japanese/> is as good as any.
- This section basically reads: "The person listed on the right has been awarded the grade of XX dan." Kanji are used for the numbers one, two and three in the case of contracts and other formal documents:

初段	shodan
貳段	nidan
参段	sandan
- Japan uses a system of dates based on eras, taken from the names of emperors. The current era is called Heisei, which started on January 8, 1989, following the death of Hirohito and the accession of the current emperor, Akihito. Information on Japanese dates can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_calendar. Months (月) and dates (日) can be deduced from the numbers given in 2. The date on the certificate 平成五年 (*heisei gonen*) is 1993, the month being December (十二月) the sixth (六日).
- Aikido Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba (植芝吉祥丸). Certificates will either bear this name or that of the current Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba (植芝守央), who succeeded to the title after the death of his father in 1999.
- Inkan* (stamps or seals) are used in Japan in place of a signature for official transactions, such as registrations and banking business. Three stamps are used on this certificate are: the personal stamp of Aikido Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba (left); the official stamp of the Aikikai Foundation; and the personal stamp of the administrator responsible for certification.

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Japan Revisited

In July, I went back to Japan, mainly to visit Hombu and some other dojos, but also to catch up with some friends. I had bought a Japan Rail Pass for three weeks and had made amazing plans to visit places I had never been before, but only managed to visit a few of them.

For the first week I stayed in Tokyo at the Weekly Mansion Iidabashi, which was much bigger than I expected and great value for money. I didn't waste any time in getting on the mat and after orienting myself in Tokyo and working out where Hombu Dojo was, I got on with training. I wanted to do as much training as I could and after meeting up with Dave Ross after Sakurai Sensei's class, we made a plan of attack. Over the next few days I tried to take part in as many classes as I could and to work out who was who, while trying to remember everything I was learning along the way. At first, I found it quite hard training in the humidity, and there was one day that I felt I overdid it, but I was enjoying every class I went to. I think what kept me going was the search for Fanta cider in the numerous vending machines on the way home. I remember Dave and I talking about buying some in bulk and selling it over here, but I think we would have been the only people buying it.

I spent a few days with friends in Nagano Prefecture, which was very refreshing

after being in Tokyo, and took the time to go and explore with my rail pass. I went to Sendai, for the day and visited the castle of Masamune Date, one of the Japan's most famous samurai in Japan, according to my friends.



Masamune Date, Sendai

Next, I went to Osaka, another on the list of places I wanted to visit, and spent a couple of days there. I took a day trip to Kyoto, where I visited Okamoto Sensei's new dojo in Nishijin. This was a lot harder to find than I thought, and would probably suggest getting a taxi if you are planning to visit.

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Japan Trip 2010

Azami-Kai members have been visiting Japan and Hombu Dojo, individually and in smaller groups, regularly over the past few years. I personally try to make it over at least once a year; this is an indispensable part of my own training and progress.

It is now a few years since any larger contingent from Azami-Kai made a visit to Hombu Dojo. We are thinking about putting together such a trip, possibly toward the end of 2010. These plans are still at a very tentative stage. Anyone who might be interested, in the first instance let me know so that we can keep you updated.

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Japan Journal, Nihon Notes

Having received a preemptive warning that my trip would result in a *Shunkato* article on my return, I made continuous notes throughout my trip to Japan (July 2009) on my trusty iPod. The following are my ramblings on aikido days, made irrespective of jet-lag & exhaustion, so please bear with me...

Sun/Mon, July 28th/29th: Charles de Gaulle Airport

Stood in 90-min snaking line at CDG security gate before playing a half-arsed SuperMario "pick a security belt before it closes" (for no apparent reason) game while effing & jeffing at security guards—until two approached & threatened to remove me from the airport. It got to 10 mins before departure of connecting flight to Osaka before I started "Get your effing coat off, you stupid bag" and "Yes, the other 50 folk (we've just watched) had to remove their belt, so lets be having it." By this time, my protest was even starting to rub off on the surrounding (normally noncontroversial) Japanese travellers & they were starting to kick about the plastic trays (viva la revolution!). Boarded with just enough time for The Wife to find a seat as far from "that madman" as possible—very quiet flight.

Tue, July 30th: Horii Sensei

Loaded with Talisker whisky & Highland tea, set off to train with Horii Sensei. Still a bit jet-lagged; put telephone card into station turnstile & slept through connecting station to Sanda. The countryside only seems to sport the traditional "crouching tiger" style toilets; with my dodgy knees this could all end in tears. Sprinted from station to dojo in flip-flops (staccato noise in quiet town seemed to alert some locals) & just made it in time for 10:30 am start—already sweating profusely. Felt unusually young in a class full of hakama-clad octogenarians—the only person with clicking joints though. Partnered Yoshiko (Horii Sensei's wife) who is a very friendly black-belt in aikido & shorinji-kenpo (on wooden floor!). Made me wonder if there are any washing-up disputes in the Horii household—kitchen must be left in tatters. Great class; even picked as uke for the first time—well, as Neil once told me, uke is a young man's job. Having flooded the dojo with sweat & drunk them dry of green tea; I bade by *jya matta ne's* & set off 6 lbs lighter.



Sanda Dojo
Yoshiko (top) and Horii Sensei

On a relaxed & slow journey back from Sanda (& to The Wife), had couple of hours to kill in Yodobashi Camera (Umeda); it's 8 floors of high-tech gizmo geekery—I'm in heaven...

Fri, August 3rd: Doshu and Osawa Sensei

Packing three dogis, (more) whisky & tea, set off for Tokyo on board the SuperExpress Nozomi 700 (shinkansen)—the fastest seat on the ground. Departed Shin-Osaka station at 09:17 +3 seconds...some-one's getting their jotters!

Once I'd settled in at the Iidabashi Weekly Mansion, set off for Hombu Dojo to attend Osawa Sensei's beginners & Doshu's evening classes. Having forgotten my insurance book & without an Aikikai membership number there was a slight hitch at reception. However like Batman, Sugawara Sensei appeared behind me & all seemed to be cleared up very quickly.



My wheels arrive to take me to Tokyo
—Wait a minute, I was told Mt Fuji would be on my left...

Sat, August 4th: Kobayashi Sensei (beginners) and Sugawara Sensei

Sugawara Sensei's double class tonight & it was great watching a couple of other students practising together. They were absolutely going at it hammer & tongs in the middle of the mat; and this is how Sugawara Sensei seems to like them to practise. The impressive part was that their technique didn't deteriorate as tiredness set-in.

Went for a pint with Sugawara Sensei tonight. The changing-room went quiet when he came in after his class to ask if I was busy! Accompanied by a translator, we had some great food & a few sake's in his local before they gave me a lift back to Iidabashi in a taxi... Now, this is the life !

Sun, August 5th: Doshu and Kanazawa Sensei

Kanazawa Sensei is always very clear, enthusiastic & precise. The only snag is that he explains a lot in Japanese, which is pretty frustrating to miss. The mat was very packed for Doshu's class as usual.

Mon, August 6th: Seki Sensei and Sugawara Sensei (beginners)

Enjoyable class with Seki Sensei this morning. His demos are always very clear. There was plenty space on the mat (as it followed a grading) & Sensei was sweating almost as much as myself. Seki Sensei always goes round everyone & tries to clear things up before moving onto the next technique. For me, he is the easiest teacher to understand—possibly as its very close to the way we train at home.

Rounded off a perfect day with an hour of tanto with Yokota Sensei & Sugawara Sensei's beginners class. Yokota Sensei solved the problem that a few of you face: ungripping my alien fingers... he just squeezed & quickly unscrewed my wrist, as though my hand were a childproof lid. Extreme agony for a split-second but did the job. Yokota Sensei's technique is so quick & precise; I left the class thinking that I'd need something with a much longer range than a knife if I were trying to steal this man's bus-pass.



The Ueshiba Residence
and Hombu Dojo (white building)

Tue, August 7th: Fujimaki Sensei (beginners) and Kobayashi Sensei

Fujimaki Sensei's beginners class: jolly nice bloke, physically in the Horii Sensei mould. He went round the class asking people their names & where they were from & even managed to remember the names. Despite making it upstairs as quick as possible from the beginners class, I still arrived about 10 mins late for Yasuno Sensei's class & didn't have the nerve to walk in while everyone was watching a demonstration. After being very impressed with Yasuno Sensei's YouTube videos, missing this class was probably the biggest disappointment of my trip, as this is his only teaching slot at Hombu.

Other than the usual formalities, the only time anyone has spoken to me (other than Sugawara Sensei) is to: a) warn me not to stand outside the beginners dojo looking inside; & b) not to wipe the sweat off while Sensei is demonstrating. Still, at least I'm using the correct dojo entrance this year, after following a closely-cropped, grey-haired woman through the (wrong) dojo door last year. (What are the chances???)

Had the longest conversation yet with a local on a shaded bench beside the subway in Iidabashi who appeared to be drinking sake from a jam-jar. We chatted about the weather, whisky & our preference for owning a cat or a dog. He then produced his portfolio (not an metaphor) which had some brilliant drawings of cartoon cats in amusing situations. Each drawing composed of thousands of small ballpoint pen strokes for shading etc. They were very impressive. I think he was very talented but just needs a better marketing strategy.

Really hot & sunny day; Kobayashi Sensei's class was the warmest yet. Kobayashi Sensei is all hair & sweat and his technique is very quick & close-knit. He definitely sweats more profusely than I do, although I've been told it's pure sake.

Walked to the dogi shop after class where the old woman at Iwata Shoten cleaned me out of all my yen. She must have better knees than me, judging by the smooth way she climbed the steep ladder to the stock room.

Wed, August 8th: Kobayashi Sensei, Miyamoto Sensei and Sakurai Sensei (beginners)

Kobayashi Sensei's class was very similar to yesterday only not so hot. Trained with a friend of Neil's, who called Sensei over for introductions. After I'd exhausted my shoddy Japanese, I said I had some whisky for his throat, which he seemed to understand, & it lifted his spirits.

Training in a kind of solitude for almost a week, I thought I was hearing things when someone called "Dave" in the Hombu changing rooms—the equivalent of an audio mirage. After a double-take, I looked up to see Big James towering above the crowd.

Both armed with an iPod Touch (collectors item compared to most mobile phones here) we managed to find a free WiFi location (for internet access) outside a local supermarket—there didn't appear to be any cafe or shop corresponding to the WiFi name we were using. Looking back on this incident, I can't help imagining the company supplying this "facility" scratching their heads in the office (above the supermarket) wondering why their internet connections had suddenly all ground to a halt & they were losing yen fast—while two Scot's blokes browse in the street below.

The evening class with Miyamoto Sensei was the toughest yet as regards aikido rather than conditions. Trained with a French Sensei who exposed a lot of weaknesses & wouldn't budge if my movement was wrong. (Strangely enough, this Sensei was also very rude to Big James in the following beginners class about removing his sandals from the dojo corridor.)

On our return to Iidabashi, I introduced Big James to a delicacy found in vending machines: Fanta Cider. Sold in 500ml cans for ¥120, this (nonalcoholic) nectar is a must for post-aikido recovery. Subsequently, we turned our nose up at vending machines if they failed to stock this necessity.

Showing Big James the ropes around the Iidabashi Mansion, we met in the basement for a laundry gig. I was wearing my hotel robe (in order to wash as much as possible). Thinking this was a smart move, Big James decided to go topless in order to add his T-shirt to the washing load.

The building was very quiet anyway. Sods law, our lift stops at the ground floor to allow a Japanese family of four to join us. Witnessing "Lenny & George" standing at the back of the lift, scantily-clad, chatting to each other in a strange accent, the family stayed against the doors clutching the kids as far from the dangers behind as possible... "Don't look round children, we'll be out in a minute." I was tempted to put my drying-cycle change (a couple of ¥100 coins) over Big James' nipples, but I thought it might makes things worse. The situation was right up there with the outtakes from the lift-scene in the Pink Panther when Clouseau is badly disguised as a gangster & one of the heavies breaks wind & they all try not to laugh.



Weekly Mansion Iidabashi

Thurs, August 9th: Kanazawa Sensei (beginners), Osawa Sensei and Seki Sensei

Final day at Hombu, so decided to fit in as much as possible—on a scorcher. Another good class with Kanazawa Sensei & again frustrated that I couldn't understand any of the explanations. Going straight to Osawa Sensei's class was a mistake: James & myself were broken men by this time & the only saving grace was that we were late & partnered each other. We struggled through the class at a snail's pace. We were located in the old-gents' corner & it reflected in our display.

Another couple of classes in the evening, separated by a walk to the dogi shop (to collect my order), completely finished me off. During the final hour in Seki Sensei's class, a French guy pummelled me into the mat. I was breathing very heavily for the last 20 mins & when I thought 8 pm would never arrive, Sensei ran the class through to 8:15 pm. Half the class were just watching by this stage—some just to see if the Scot's guy would collapse with exhaustion. With kokyūho at the end, Seki Sensei indicated that I need to relax my shoulders—that just about completes a full-house of senseis telling me this.

Tue, August 14th: Okamoto Sensei

Set off at 6 am from Suita City, Osaka, on board the Hankyu Rapid Express to Kyoto to train with Okamoto Sensei. The Nishijin dojo was a small building cramped amongst some very narrow streets—too narrow for the taxi to get near. Temperature up to 34 deg today—don't seem to be sweating as much, though. Probably just the swine flu upsetting the balance. Lots of fans on full-power all around the mat in an attempt to keep the temperature down (the houses in this area are so tightly packed that they can't install an air-con as it will pump hot air out into their neighbours' houses). Very mixed class, where locals just managed to outnumber Europeans. But enjoyable & the 90 mins flew by. Quite a few European members teach English in the evenings & attend classes during the day—not a bad lifestyle at all. This was my final aikido session in Japan. I just hope it has prepared me well for facing the relatives—a few of The Aunties look pretty useful.

This was my second trip to Hombu following quite a disappointing visit last year. The first trip (only four days) was really to see as many sensei as possible & to become familiar with how everything worked. This time, I only attended classes that I'd enjoyed last year & was more experienced in choosing my partners. Experiencing the teaching range in Sanda (Horii Sensei), Kyoto (Okamoto Sensei) & Tokyo (Hombu dojo) is invaluable. If you ever have the chance to train in any of these places, then I thoroughly recommend going for it!

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Azami-Kai Dojo Roundup

Edinburgh Aikikai

In July, the Royal Commonwealth Pool closed its doors for a scheduled two-year refurbishment program. For some five years, this had been the principal location of our classes in Edinburgh and the hub Azami-Kai's activities. Overcoming many difficulties, we finally rehoused our classes with minor schedule changes to Meadowbank Stadium and Ainslie Park.

As I mentioned earlier, the transition went smoothly, and in many ways it has had a positive impact, shaking us out from our comfortable little lair, where we could well have continued in isolation forever. The two venues provide very different environments: peace (in the mornings, at least) and abundant light at Ainslie Park, with refreshingly clean and modern facilities; plentiful space at Meadowbank, making every class feel a bit

like a course. I certainly respond to the two differently and am enjoying the contrasting types of class that result.

Otherwise, attendance remains stable, on a steady upward gradient. The spread of grades in Edinburgh has changed over the past few years. As the current batch of first and second kyus graduate to shodan during the next couple of years, we will have a very healthy showing of hakama on the mat. However, this in turn necessitates an escalating need to recruit a substantial beginner base to maintain a balanced structure for the future. Looking forward to everyone's help in this forward drive.

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Ainslie Park Leisure Centre



Meadowbank Stadium

Edinburgh Aikikai Children's Class

Summer's over: back to school, back to aikido. Numbers survived both the summer break and the relocation. Only two kids seem to be lost to the new place and another one due to upgrading—he moved up to the regular adult class. Compounded by new recruits, we're almost even. We are currently working towards the next grading, sometime in December.

Currently, we are trying to get things clearer in term of basic posture and taisabaki, for what's being taught one week can easily be forgotten the following one (a downside of a single weekly class). A good thing that has

started to emerge during the past few weeks is that senior students are increasingly directing or helping out their junior partners, showing a more responsible side. In a way, the class starts to look after itself. Still, we are searching for some other ways to optimise the teaching and encourage juniors catch up with the more experienced kids, rather than slowing down the progress of the class overall.

Thanks again to all parents and kids for following the dojo.

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Edinburgh University Aikido Club

The university aikido club has seen a few changes over the last couple of months. This semester has been a relaunch of sorts due to the fact that there were no students from last year still attending the club.

Through a fantastic team effort—by Lesa Longley, Dave Ross, Neil, myself and others—we managed to get through the initial university paperwork and organized the sports union fair. A big thanks is given to everyone who gave up their time, left work and rearranged their days to come and man the aikido stall. We had two unexpectedly entertaining days pretending to be students.

We have been doing actual training for a few weeks now and things are slowly developing. We currently have several students as full members of the club, supplementing the regular Azami-Kai members attending the classes. This has created a good mix of

experience in the class that could otherwise take years to achieve.

Thanks also to Stoil Ivanov and Laurence Baldwin, who have agreed to be on the club committee as President and Secretary respectively, taking on the role of liaising with the University Sports Union.

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St Andrews Aikikai

Since the last edition of the *Shunkato*, St Andrews Aikikai has gone through a number of changes. Two of our core members, Toni Carruthers and Harry Gooch, have moved on to greener pastures. Toni has taken a job as a laser physicist in Bristol (but assures me that she is already looking forward to when she can return to Edinburgh) and Harry has moved to Edinburgh (but continues to train in the Edinburgh and St Andrews dojos). We wish both the best of luck with their new



endeavours. Lee MacDonald, Greg Luke, Robert MacKenzie and Mark Rhodie continue to hold the fort, with frequent visits from Edinburgh aikidoka accompanying Neil on his weekly run up to St Andrews.

The St Andrews dojo has been meeting twice weekly on Sunday afternoons and Wednesday evenings at the Kilrymont Road Madras College since its founding three years ago. However, with membership fairly constant over the past three years, we have taken the decision to give up the Sunday afternoon session and move it to a Tuesday evening session (7:30–9:00 pm) at Bell Baxter School in Cupar. The aspiration is that this will give aikido more exposure in North-East Fife and reinvigorate our membership drive.

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Glasgow Aikikai

Having seen a few waves of new students swell, only to break and disperse, Glasgow Aikikai currently has the nucleus of a potentially excellent school. We have half a dozen people with great attitude: intelligent and eager to learn, there is no ego on the mat. Although some of the beginners are still at the stage of memorising the steps, I encourage them not to think too much about what they are doing.

Always keep your mind as bright and clear as the vast sky, the great ocean, and the highest peak, empty of all thoughts.

—Morihei Ueshiba

Or, "Just bloody get on with it," as my Mum would say. While it's good to be mindful of higher issues such as ma-ai and balance, you can't learn aikido by discussion. By acting without thinking, the techniques become intuitive and you get much more practice per lesson. Students often find that what they have done is a legitimate move, even if it is not the technique we were practising. The only incorrect thing to do is remain stationary.



While it's good not to have an inflated ego on the mat, the opposite is also to be avoided. Sometimes I get the impression that people are afraid to look good: perhaps they lack self confidence or they worry that they'll be seen as pretentious. However, it's important for your aikido to look good. If it looks good, it's probably correct. If it doesn't look good, it's definitely not correct.

A good stance and posture reflect a proper state of mind.—Morihei Ueshiba

Students can be too humble when it comes to evaluating their contribution to the class. As the nights draw in, it's easy to think: *I'll not go tonight. It won't make much difference anyway. The class will be fine without me.* In fact, every individual changes the entire dynamic of the class for everyone without realising it. My hope is that this latest wave will not dissipate, but will consolidate and gain momentum. It would be a joy to see the Glasgow aikidoka progress together, and to progress with them. Likewise, Edinburgh aikidoka are always welcome to come and train with us on Tuesday and Thursday nights. The Glasgow dojo is easily accessible by car or public transport, being adjacent to an underground station, or I could meet you somewhere if you prefer. I could even show you some proper culture afterwards.

You must continue to train daily with your friends and students and progress together in Aikido.

—Morihei Ueshiba.

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In August, a large contingent from Azami-Kai were able to attend the UKA's 24th annual international aikido summer school, held at Harper Adams Agricultural College in Shropshire. This year, the guest instructor was Kobayashi Shihan from Hombu Dojo. It was the first time I had had the opportunity to see Kobayashi Sensei and I was looking forward to it a lot.

Andy and I drove down on the first Saturday of the course, unfortunately arriving just too late to train in Kobayashi Sensei's first class that afternoon. As both of us could only make it for a few days of the course we decided to forgo the relative luxury of the college's student accommodation in favour of camping. This seemed like a fantastic idea, right up until we'd actually pitched the tents and realised we'd managed to pick a spot right beside a wasps nest. Some yelping and several sachets of vinegar later, we moved the tents further away and went in search of dinner.

The first night of the summer school apparently always includes a karaoke night, something the others who had been before neglected to tell me. After watching some far more talented people have a go, some of us, fortified in some cases with a little too much Dutch courage, decided to do our country proud and treated the thankfully thinning crowd to a rousing rendition of the Proclaimers' "500 miles" in what Andy described as the best* karaoke he's ever heard.

*Worst

There were a couple of green faces on the mat the next morning (and one that was conspicuous by its absence), but the pace of the training soon took care of any lingering hangovers.

Kobayashi Sensei took two classes every day, with others taken by senior instructors from the UKA, including Gordon Jones Shihan. The number of classes and different instructors meant that it was possible to pick a level of training that suited each person and to learn from a variety of senior people with different teaching styles. Kobayashi Sensei's classes in particular were very well attended, resulting at times in the class being split in two to train.

I greatly enjoyed all the classes I attended, finding Kobayashi Sensei exceptionally inspiring. Individual techniques that were studied in depth in the classes provided me with immediate technical details to work on, and in the longer term I came away from the course with a renewed enthusiasm, as well as several areas to work on in my own training. It was also very interesting to meet and train with a variety of different aikidoka from other organisations and areas of the UK, people I hope to see and train with again on the mat at future summer schools and other courses.

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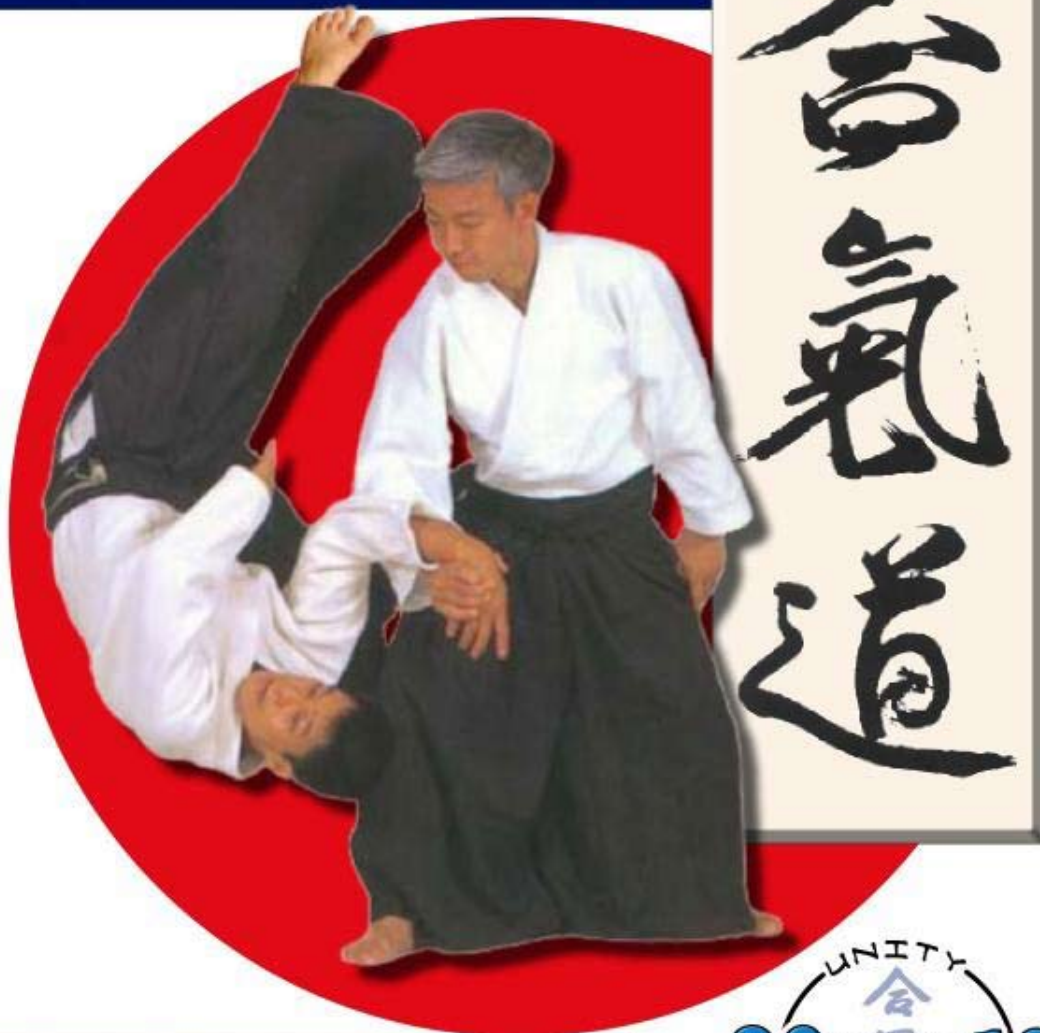
あざみ会



Upcoming Events

Aikido

DOSHU U.K.



18th, 19th, 20th June 2010
Welsh Institute of Sport Cardiff
www.doshu.co.uk



あざみ会

Azami-kai Aikido
Eighth Hogmanay
Practice

合気道

December 31, 2009

2:00 to 3:30 pm

Meadowbank Stadium

www.azamikai.co.uk

あざみ会

Azami-kai Aikido presents:

Hombu Dojo Shihan

**Shigeru
Sugawara**

7th dan Aikikai

February 19~21, 2010

Edinburgh

Meadowbank Stadium & Sports Centre
(<http://www.edinburghleisure.co.uk/detail-243>)

Friday February 19th, 6:30~7:30* & 18:00~20:00

Saturday February 20th, 10:00~14:00

Sunday February 21st, 10:00~14:00

Saturday/Sunday £50 or £35 per day

Friday £20; All sessions £60

10% reduction for advance bookings (by end of
January) or concessions

*At Ainslie Park Leisure Center

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www.azamikai.co.uk

A Martial Art for Health and Wellbeing

The reasons for my choice of topic are two-fold: first, while we enjoy good health we may take it for granted, even to the extent that we don't notice when we are actually doing something positive about it; and second, because of my experience as an undergraduate student in physiotherapy and a graduate student in movement sciences and skill acquisition. From both these perspectives, I suggest that those who are fit and train in aikido are doing themselves a good turn and that many of those who have musculoskeletal problems would be well advised to join in.

There may well be a link between aikido and modern physiotherapy. Both emphasize the relationship between posture, functional balance and integrity of core strength. These are all essentials for quality in movement. I shall give a few examples of this in the practice of aikido.

One of the key elements in aikido is the change of direction. We turn and twist our bodies along its longitudinal axis. In other words, we turn a great deal and quickly around our spine. To do this effectively, we simply have to stand straight. Performing this in motion while standing on our feet and manipulating our partner with our hands, the training effects go to the very core of the spinal musculature. This means that every joint of the spine is strengthened, because the muscles of the innermost layer are short and link adjacent vertebrae. Furthermore, as the direction of these innermost muscles is oblique, they are active in the rotation of the spine.

The symmetry of aikido—training equally on the left and right sides—is particularly important for both health and development. This is crucial for children and adolescents who are growing fast and shaped by how they use their body.

What about balance? In aikido you fall all the time, and falling well requires extremely good balance, flexibility and

strength. You fall because you are manipulated by someone else. When it is your turn to manipulate, you exercise your own balance and your partner practises a break fall. We alternate between these two roles; the thrower and thrown, *tori* and *uke*. Although there is no competition, neither role is passive. There is a constant commitment to contact in both roles. This requires balance and integrity.

Furthermore, when you throw someone for a high fall, you are temporarily responsible for the balance of both yourself and your partner, which is an interesting exercise in responsibility by one and trust by the other.

Aikido is training in a complex and demanding skill. Quality of movement and skill are intertwined in many ways. They are a part of an equation. Strength and precision are other variables in that equation. The more precision used, the less strength is needed; the less strength needed, the less energy is spent and less fatigue results. One really interesting aspect of this interplay is the resulting muscle tension and the adverse effect that tension has on the sensitivity of our touch. In order to acquire and apply our skill in aikido, we must sense our partner's movements. Much of that perception depends on the sensation of the hands. Consequently, the less muscle power we use, the more sensitive we are to our partner's movements; the more sensitive we are, the less muscle power we need to succeed in manipulating his or her body. To succeed in gradually tipping this balance between sufficient force and acute sensitivity in the right direction, in the direction of true skill, we need all the above-mentioned elements. That takes time. But it is time spent having great fun in good company.

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