

# **BATH AIKIDO NEWSLETTER MAY 2007**

## **Contents**

Ramblings from Mr Mitton  
Forthcoming Aikido courses and events  
On the role of *uke* by Jonathan Sharp  
News of Anna Sanner from Japan  
Andrew Hinge's Dan Grade thoughts

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## **Ramblings from Mr Mitton**

Our new dojo is open at Hedley Hall. We are practising there on Mondays and Thursdays. Is 6.30pm too early a start for the Thursday senior practice? Let me know.

Anna Sanner has sent us an extract from her travel journal. Her blog address is: [aksanner.blogspot.com](http://aksanner.blogspot.com) Pay her a visit and enjoy her treasure trove of writings on training and working in Japan. I still miss her wonderful fighting spirit, so I have invited her to knock another of my teeth out if she ever returns this way. It saves on my dentist bills.

Jonathan Sharp has left for London where he is studying to become a doctor. He has sent us a thought provoking analysis of the importance uke should pay to his role in the never-ending dance of Aikido. I shall miss his powerful technique. Who is going to bring out the best in me now?

Mr Yamashima should be paying us a visit in September thanks to Tony's continuing efforts as our representative in the international world of Aikido. I think he remains my favourite no-nonsense good-humoured Japanese sensei.

Gillian Boswell is recovering from her torn knee ligaments and associated damage. I hope she will be back as soon as her leg allows, before the scars fade, and relieve Cass of the burden of being our only regular female practitioner! I have a new plan to recruit more female Aikidoka. Apparently Johnny Depp now has a house in Tisbury. We recruit him and I reckon the females will come in droves. Plan B is we all pretend Tony is Johnny's older brother. I think he is. Or is he Keith Richards younger sibling?

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## **Forthcoming Aikido courses and events**

Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1330-1730, Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1030-1530; Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre, Marlow, Buckinghamshire SL7 1RT; Haydn Foster; £15.00 per day, £25.00 both days

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> September; Bisham Abbey; British Aikido Board annual gathering.

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> October; Bath University; Kobayashi Yasuo; £85 for the whole course, £15.00 for Thursday and Friday (1730-1930), £40.00 per day Saturday and Sunday (0915-1530) or £70.00 for both days.

Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> October, Nakazono memorial event, Neath Leisure Centre, South Wales

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup>, Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> November; David Lynch; Dublin

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> December; 1100-1500; Hedley Hall; Bath Aikido annual grading.

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## Understanding the role of 'uke' in Aikido by Jonathan Sharp

The following abridged excerpt is taken from "*Uchidachi & Shidachi*", by Nishioka Tsuneo. This excellent article can be viewed in full on the koryu.com website.

打太刀

*Uchidachi*, "striking sword"

仕太刀

*Shidachi*, "doing sword"

"One of the most profound expressions of *rei*<sup>1</sup> lies in the interaction between *uchidachi*, the one who receives the technique, and *shidachi*, the one who does the technique. Unfortunately, even teachers often misunderstand the subtleties of *uchidachi* and *shidachi* in *kata* training. They fail to pass on to their students the difference in intent inherent in these two roles. Particularly in the classical traditions, the roles of *uchidachi* and *shidachi* are quite distinctive. Each has its own unique psychological viewpoint. It is essential that this distinct quality always be maintained. I believe that the difference in these two roles is the defining characteristic of *kata* training. Recently, I've come to the realization that it is not even worth training unless both partners properly understand this.

When an outsider watches *kata*, it appears that *uchidachi* loses and *shidachi* wins. This is intentional. But there's much more to it than that. *Uchidachi* must have the spirit of a nurturing parent. *Uchidachi* leads *shidachi* by providing a true attack; this allows *shidachi* to learn correct body displacement, combative distancing, proper spirit, and the perception of opportunity. A humble spirit is as necessary as correct technique for *uchidachi*. Deceit, arrogance, and a patronizing attitude must never be allowed in practice. ***Uchidachi's mission is vital.*** In the past, this role was only performed by senior practitioners who were capable of performing accurate technique and who possessed the right

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<sup>1</sup> Although *rei* translates as etiquette, decorum, propriety, politeness, or courtesy, none of these terms are quite equivalent to the Japanese – think of it as the proper essence or quality of relationships between individuals.

spirit and understanding of the role. *Uchidachi* must provide an example of clean, precise cutting lines and correct targeting, and must also convey focused intensity and an air of authority.”

When I read this article it helped to crystallize some of my own thoughts towards the role of *uke* in aikido. I have in the past shied away from preciseness when asked to define this role. I used well-trodden phrases such as ‘attack with commitment’, and ‘maintain your intention until the conclusion is reached’. I would also urge *uke* not to move for their partner, but to provide some resistance for them to hone their techniques against. Although I don’t believe these comments are incorrect, I do feel they are somewhat vague, perhaps mirroring my own flawed understanding.

Although the article is written about weapons *kata*, specifically sword against staff, I believe it is perfectly transferable to *aikido*, where we choreograph techniques in controlled systematic practice. As the article relates, the role of *uchidachi* or ‘*uke*’ was traditionally held by the teacher who would guide *shidachi* or ‘*tori*’ into moving towards the correct form through their enlightened understanding of the role of the attacker. It is by far, a more sophisticated and difficult role to play than *tori*, who is essentially only ‘doing’. *Uke* is ‘doing’ and ‘being’. To be called ‘a good *uke*’ is praise indeed.

How then to learn to be ‘a good *uke*’? Often in our daily practice, *uke* plays second fiddle to *tori* in terms of importance. Often *Uke* is no more than a crash-test dummy to be dragged through the technique by the dominant *tori*. With this attitude, the aikidoka in the role of *uke* is denying themselves the technical and spiritual training opportunity that only *uke* can provide. How can this role be properly taught? The article although clearly written still assumes a high level of understanding of Japanese *budo* and culture. For the beginner a more tangible explanation is necessary, for how can a beginner be expected to perform the teacher’s role effectively?

If I was to draw up some guidelines for a newcomer to aikido to undertake the role of *uke* at the *kihon*, or basic level of training, it might go something like this:

### **Doing**

- i. When watching the teacher demonstrate, look not only at the technique performed but at how *uke* is moving. They have been chosen for their ability to take correct *ukemi*, so look to them for guidance.
- ii. When attacking *tori*, always focus on their centre line. This is your target. Your cutting line should not be distracted by movement on their part. Look to settle your body upon arrival, don’t overrun your destination.
- iii. Once *tori* has broken your posture (*kuzushi*), you must continuously renew your threat. Seek to move into an attacking *kamae* (stance) at every opportunity. *Tori* should be keenly aware of your threat throughout the technique.

- iv. If *tori* lets your movement come to a halt, allow your body to settle with as much stability as you can. Don't do *tori* the disservice of moving for them.

**Being** (by far the more difficult facet of *uke*'s role):

- i. You are recreating a 100% committed attack in slow motion. Do not allow any other aspect of your attack to be diminished. Whatever your level, at that moment you are responsible for the honesty of your partner's training.
- ii. Remember you are the 'aggressor', not *tori*. Do not adopt a victim's mentality even though you know you are going to 'lose'. Your mind should be that of a person looking to follow up with attack after attack.

There are undoubtedly many more aspects to the role of *uke*. This article reflects my current thinking on this demanding role. I hope this raises some discussion, for like *tori*, it is important to be kept on your toes, by the honest challenges of *uke*.

Nishioka sensei concludes his article with the following axiom: "Do not be jubilant in victory; do not become servile in defeat. Lose with dignity." This is the spirit we must emulate.

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## **An extract from Anna Sanner's Japan Journal**

### Finding Yawara (Gentleness)

Today, I have decided, I will not eat at home, or grab something on the go in a kombini (convenience store). I will go and eat ramen (Chinese noodles in soup). So I take the train to Hattori station, near my gym, and find a ramen place in the narrow main street of Hattori. It is tiny and hidden away behind a red flag. The shop has the usual ramen bar lay-out: It is a longish little room with a bar behind which the cook works away using several big pots, jars, and containers, and a table running around it, with tissues, spices, soy sauce, and wari-bashi (disposable chopsticks) and a jug of iced water. Inside the shop is only one customer sitting at the short end of the bar. He is wearing a North Face jacket and a kind of baseball cap with padded flaps hanging down over his ears on both sides. He looks tired, leather-skinned, and lonely. On a Sunday night, he is sitting in a ramen bar on his own, reading one of the manga books from the little shelf on the wall. On a Sunday night, there are lots of manga books on the shelf. There's a TV, on which the chef is watching news. The chef is wearing a white, slightly dirty overcoat with a towel hanging from the white bands he ties up behind his back to make it fit. He is slightly chubby and is missing one or two teeth. His face is round and gentle, his eyes surprisingly round, although he looks distinctly Japanese.

I order gomoku ramen, which has everything in it: a small hard-boiled egg, different kinds of fish, cabbage, mushrooms, carrots, soy bean sprouts, squid. He starts working on it and asks where I'm from.

"Germany!"

The news are talking about Bush taking new measures against global warming, going through a major policy change.

“Germany. Doitsu no genpin ka. (So it is a real authentic German we have here!) You have really good sausages,” he seems to speak from experience. “And beer!” “We do, the beer is very nice.”

Then there is a feature of a special chocolate exhibition at Hankyu Departments Store showing special chocolates for Valentines’ Day.

“Valentines Day!” he says. “Do you have Valentines Day in Germany?”

“Not really. It’s not really a tradition, but recently the shops do sell Valentines’ stuff.” “Your Japanese is really good!” He sounds seriously impressed.

“Not really. For example, watching the news, there’s lots of things I don’t understand.”

“If you can speak like me, you can speak enough.” He insists. “You can speak plenty enough Japanese!”

I doubt I could ever speak like him. His Kansai accent is as thick as my grandmother’s winter stew.

He takes up his thread from earlier on.

“Valentines’ Day! The women give the men chocolate. Why the hell are they so happy about THAT?! It’s all come to Japan from America. They threw two bombs on us! They destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki! The Japanese people really suffered from them. And then, after the war, we’re taking in all their traditions? The Japanese are stupid, aren’t they? What a stupid thing to be happy if somebody gives you chocolates!”

As he goes on a rant, I notice that his Osaka accent is made even more difficult to understand by his missing front teeth, giving him a lisp. It is difficult to catch single words he is saying, so I have to piece things together by catching the general flow and drift his words are taking. The manga-reading man throws in the occasional comment, too, and his accent is just as thick. I have not heard anybody speak like that since I arrived in Osaka. You obviously have to go meet the common people in a Hattori ramen shop to hear how they speak. The salary men in their suit and ties, the waitresses in their French maid outfits, the college students in their sneakers, everybody speaks sophisticated Japanese, with the occasional Kansai feature, women asking “really?” saying “sou nanya!” instead of “sou nan da!”, or “honma?” instead of “hontou?” but this is street Osaka-ben. I feel reminded of the porters and taxi drivers in Scotland.

The manga-man covers his mouth with his hands when he speaks, which makes it more difficult to understand him. He never speaks without his hands in front of his mouth. Maybe he has rotten teeth. Maybe that’s why he’s sitting in a ramen shop on his own, reading manga on a Sunday night. He orders a vase of hot sake, and the chef pours it from a big bottle and heats it up for him in one of the pots.

“The emperor was god till after the war! It was crazy. People ran into their deaths shouting ‘Tenno heika banzai.’”

“I know, it’s incredible.” I agree.

The manga man smiles at the chef’s ranting.

“But then, after the war, he had to tell people he wasn’t a god anymore. And now? Now it’s all a shambles. The person I feel most sorry for is Masako. She wasn’t born into this life, and now everybody’s eyes are only on her, she has zero privacy, and she hasn’t given birth to a son.”

"I know, I feel really sorry for her, too," I agree again.

"Do you have conscription in Germany?"

I don't understand what he is talking about at first but then get it somehow, I don't know how. I think I have talked about this before when I was in Japan four years ago. "Yes we do."

"From what age do people have to serve? 18?"

"People do it after school. But if they don't want to do it, they can write a letter to the government and give their reasons why not, and then they can do some sort of community service instead, and work in a social institution."

"I see. Do you think conscription is a good thing?"

"Well, luckily I'm a woman, so I don't have to go, but..." "Yes, but what about your boyfriend? Would you want your boyfriend to go?"

"No, of course not. I think they should have a professional army with people who want to do the job rather than forcing everybody."

"Yes, right? I don't think it's a good idea at all, and Abe wants to change the constitution!"

He warms up another vase of sake for the manga-man, who throws in more comments now, participating actively in the conversation, but he still speaks covering his mouth with his hands. I'm thrilled I've met a real left-wing Japanese chef in a Hattori ramen bar, and gratefully slurp my hot soup, and shovel the long noodles into my mouth with the dark-tinted wari-bashi.

"Where do you live? Do you live near here?"

"I live nearer Sone station, but I go to the gym here in Hattori, so I'm here tonight." "Ah, over there. What kind of sports do you do?"

"Actually, I like budo, so I train karate and aikido, but I haven't found a dojo yet, so at the moment I'm only doing weightlifting and running."

"Wow, so you're strong. That's scary. Women are so much better than men at winning with words, so if they also get strong spirit and a strong body, they can win every time."

I tell him I have just found a temple in Toyonaka where I can train aikido, and next Friday, I'm going to a karate dojo in Sone. He wants to know where the temple is, and I show him the map. The manga-man has a look, too, and tells me, actually, I don't have to take the train, I can walk that distance quite easily in ten minutes. That is good to know for future reference.

"When I was little, I did judo. I wasn't physically strong, but still, I didn't lose. Muscles don't mean a thing. Everybody had to do judo at school."

"Yes, I talked about that to somebody else the other day, but she said only the boys had to do judo, and the girls had to dance or something. I'd be annoyed about that!" "No," the chef says, his eyes searching somewhere towards the ceiling for a far away place in the past, "When I was little, the girls had to do naginata!"

"Halberd fighting? Wow! I wish school was like that in Germany!"

They both laugh. The manga-man gives the chef back his empty sake vase, and the chef warms up another load for him.

"Do aikido," the chef says. "I've never done it before, but I think I get the gist of it. Use your opponent's own strength to topple him. Do aikido. You're somebody who just goes for things directly and without swerving, aren't you?"

"I really don't know. I'm not sure where I'm going at all. But I do want to practise budo. And I want to become strong."

“But physical strength is not real strength. You have to make your spirit strong.”

“I know, but you can train that kind of strength in budo, too, can’t you?”

“Yes. Do aikido.”

“I will,” I say and gratefully slurp down my last spoon of soup.

“You can walk there from here,” the manga man assures me again.

“Yes,” says the chef, “and if you get lost, phone them. I’m sure they’ll come and pick you up.”

The manga-man laughs at this impossible suggestion.

“Well, she’s German!” says the chef.

“That’s special enough to go and pick her up, isn’t it?”

He hands the manga man his hot sake.

“In Japan, it’s really shocking. You see girls and women walking around in the middle of the night! Don’t they know it’s dangerous? There are so many perverts around! They touch women on the train! Bloody chiha!”

“I have to walk around at night, too, because I work late,” I say.

“But I think foreigners are safe.” He says.

“You should see those Japanese girls. They wear string tangas you can see sticking out above their trousers, and skirts so short you can see absolutely everything! It’s really dangerous! But you’ll do aikido and become strong, won’t you?”

“I will.”

On this note, I realise it is already after seven, and the gym closes at nine, so I tell the chef I would like to pay now because I want to go to the gym. I pay 600 Yen instead of 580, and say good bye. He thanks me three times. I want to take a picture with him and the manga-man, but stupidly, I think it would destroy the authenticity of the situation, and make do with taking a picture of the inconspicuous red lantern glowing in front of the dark shop.

I go to the gym and lift some weights, taking turns with two weightlifting men wearing white towels on their heads. Then I cycle the last twenty minutes away. I’ve had lots of potacho, potato chips covered in chocolate. They are unbelievably delicious. I got them as a welcome present from a very sweet student at my welcome party on Saturday. He is not even my student yet but hopes to become it in the future. Yoshi-san. He is 27 but looks like a little hamster. And I can’t stop eating potacho. But when I finish with them, I will adhere to German February tradition and, though I won’t fast, I will cut down a bit on all the unhealthy Japanese sweets I’ve been feasting on in a three week surge of honeymoon attraction. Today is the first day of abstinence. It is sunny. And the plum trees are blossoming into white wonders of February spring.

Today I’m off to Umeda to go to the manga shop in Hankyu Grand Building and buy “Yawara”, a famous manga by Naoki Urosawa, about a girl who does judo☺

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## Andrew Hinge's Dan Grade thoughts

My story about me and my Aikido started some 16 years ago. I had a business and one day in lifting something the ‘proper’ way ,I grated two lower vertabae against my Sciatic nerve thus bruising it.

Anyone who has had some form of sciatic damage will know from experience that it is a very extreme painful injury. There were times that I could hardly walk to the Chiropractitioner.. But after several visits and his pressure point manipulation and spineal stretching I could easily walk for some days afterwards... At sixty five pounds a go this was altogether getting to be a bit expensive so I kept my eyes on what he did , asking about these pressure points where they were , how would I know when I found one etc etc. I started doing this at home on myself.....anyway the upshot of this was Me asking what could I do to help this along ... his answer was to find some kind of sport that would offer me flexibility and stretching .

I started looking locally for something that appealed to me .....I was having some difficulty in finding this .. it had to be something that would attract me instantly I had already tried most of the usual ....karate: judo: kendo: iaido: keep fit: jims: rugby: cricket: and I definitely was'nt football material...

Then one week I saw a local ad for new starters for

**Aikido.. the martial art that would offer you flexibility,cardio vascular exercise and self defense all within your capabilities whether you were old or young fit or unfit....you do what you feel you were able to...**

This struck my cords straight away its some thing I did have a little experience at albeit some 20 years earlier in Bristol for about 6 months till girls , nightclubs etc came along....

Aikido: Its unusual,.. something not everyone knew a lot about,.... and very obscure for such a small town..

I went to the Sports Centre in Midsomer Norton.. finding some 12 people doing all sorts of things I'd long forgotten.

The Trainer or Sensei introduced himself and ask me was I interested and how fit was I, did I have any medical ailments that would restrict my movements etc etc.

I told him about my Sciaticle problems and how they came about and that I wanted to help allieviate the pain....his answer was that this would certainly help you in that and would probably in the longer term make you more flexible and fitter , if you want to you can sit in on the sessions and when you feel your ready you can join in etc. After some two or three weeks I was ready to try.

I thought that this would have a life of some couple of years or so and would then fizzle out like all the other sports/fitness regimes I tried.

(Little did I know how long or how hard a road this was going to be)....

Well after around 4 months later of just lying on the floor stretching, or standing up on tiptoes for something like nearly an hour oir so I actually got to do some 'Ukemi' (hehehe and I thought I was flexible !!!!)... well because my business was Concrete products all my chest and arms and shoulder muscles were muscle locked., the first couple of forward breakfalls were something like roly pollies and I kept hitting my shoulders on the floor where I couldn't get my shoulders rounded enough.. that hurt .. and I had to stop the forward rolls for a while till the bruising went...oh and and that 4 months of stretching and limited Tai Sabaki did more for my Sciatical problems than the Chiropractitioner and the 65 pound sessions did.. I could go easily till the next Monday without any major painfull sessions .

From about six months into practicing I was hooked .. my body was relenting .. getting more flexible as time progressed ... this was also helped in that I continued this at home also I would never sit in the easy chairs or the settee anymore ... I would sit on the floor and stretch while I was watching telly or reading or using my laptops.....all this was helping my back problems and making me so much more flexible.....it was then that I got onto a much more friendlier footing with John (my Sensie) he was a strange character quiet and seemingly reserved, you had to know him to know how to take him, if you know what I mean.

I started going to the Bristol club at Chalks Road (which by the way was where I did practice Aikido some 20 years earlier)as well as Midsomer Norton and going to other clubs events in Wales and around the country with John. That was four or five times a week, loads of practice.

I was finding that I was getting quite some differing experiences training with all these different types of people.

There were guy's (and some girls) that were built like brick s\*\*\*houses, lots of gentle flexible easily lead types, awkward, hard to lead into techniques types, and lots of helpful black belts that would help you and lead you into a technique and show you what you should be doing, ...me...? I was taking notes....sometimes a techniques would work and sometimes not..... often I think they allowed you to complete the techniques (as is the general rule with in Aikido till you get lots more experienced).

One thing that I did find was that although I often did a technique sometimes it did not work correctly...and I often wondered whether I would get it right .... Then by some miracle something would click... it may have been something so small or simple that you would easily have over looked it or put too much power into it , but once I found that secret ingredient I would never forget it ... in fact I often felt proud of my self that I found that secret elliment that was elusive (as is for everyone).....

This was the pattern of my life then for some number of years. I took one grading as this was really obligatory.. but to be honest I just enjoyed my Aikido and the I felt I did not need to prove to anyone how good (or bad) I was.... I just did it ...and enjoyed it..

Within this period I also started to find that Aikido was entering my life in general

It was making me a much more confident , amiable and matter of fact type .

Life was taking a much more relaxed and diffident role...I was finding that things that mattered a few years ago did not have the same sort of priority now....I was taking life easier..but one thing has always stayed the same..... I always tend to push myself in my Aikido..... I don't feel that I have done anything unless I come off the mat in a sweat....because I am now fitter and more flexible now than I ever was in my twenties I have to push myself further.

And no matter all the few injuries I have suffered .. I have got off lightly compared to a lot of people. In fact I have only ever been winded twice .....

**once by Kanetsuku in a Koshi Nage**

## **and the other time by Eddie in a punch to the Diaphragm**

To put a finer point on embracing Aikido .. I am a Director of the local football club and I help out behind the bar on occasions.. I used to do every Friday and Saturday nights.. the busiest obviously and when there were parties etc we would have several 'Bouncers' all hard men and ex rugby guy's, roughly 18 stone plus.....One in particular said to me one night, I can see you do your Martial Arts...(he came down to a demonstration we had one weekend and saw me there) you always look as if your ready for something ...the way you stand.... the relaxed way you look,  
after that viewing the other weekend I really respect you and I would think twice of attacking you.

That comment I really took as a compliment to the way I have taken Aikido as a part of the way of my life.

I have seen people with various incapacities and disabilities practicing Aikido and this impressed me greatly as these people have taken Aikido into there life just as I have..

so even in time if I were to suffer from any form of disability or injury I know that I could still have my Aikido ...Practice My Aikido. It may not be in exactly the same way you train but it will still be My Aikido.

One of the many little secrets that I have discovered is that once you have learnt those basics and can utilize them efficiently and somewhat expertly that you can use them in any way possible... that just because you are being shown techniques those are not just the only techniques available to you, they are the basis for your use of Aikido and can be used any and every which way possible. There is No wrong way of Aikido.

No two people will attack you in exactly the same way...

No two people will kick you in exactly the same way...

No two people will punch you in exactly the same way...

No two people will run at you in exactly the same way...

## **AIKIDO IS YOU , HOW YOU USE IT.....HOW YOU APPLY IT**

My reasons for asking to take this Grading is that I have a club in Midsomer Norton that is currently Dormant and I have a number of people who are waiting to utilize it.

These are people that don't have a readily available transport .. or they don't want to travel to Bath to practice... I have encouraged anyone that has contacted me to come to Bath and in fact several have... but they say there is nothing like their own local club.

Because of this I have been in a catch up situation with regards to Gradings as the Governing Bodies and Insurers are now pretty hot on club officials and trainers now .

Even though I intend to re-activate Midsomer Norton.. I will still come to Bath Aikido,

It is a great club and some great people...and its great practice.

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