

The Seidokan Communicator

Aikido for a Modern Way of Life

Aiki Fitness

Doug Wedell

I remember being impressed with the idea expressed in an AIA brochure back in the 1970's that Aikido promotes a more general and all inclusive type of fitness than typically developed in sports. This is because fitness through Aikido does not include just physical fitness, but it also includes mental fitness and spiritual fitness. It is fitness in a holistic sense. In this article I want to explore the idea of Aiki fitness using what I will call the ABC's of fitness through Aikido. I also want to consider how we can make Aiki fitness part of our training regimen on and off the mat.

A is for Adaptation. The idea of adaptation is that we must monitor our environment and flexibly adjust to changing circumstances so that we can maintain a healthy mind, body and spirit. If we are rigid and inflexible, we will collide with the forces of the universe and easily be overwhelmed. At a physical level, we need to maintain a flexible body that responds to the demands placed on it. If we don't keep our bodies limber, they atrophy and don't respond to changing circumstances. Along with flexibility, our bodies need to be capable of moving fluidly so that we can modulate the forces around us. Learning to move fluidly allows us to smooth out our interactions with the world. In parallel to the physical adaptation, our minds need to be flexible and fluid as well. It is easy to slip into a rigid pattern of thought or not challenge ourselves to think in new ways. To maintain fluidity of thought, we have to practice getting our minds unstuck by bringing our awareness back to the here and now. Adaptation allows our spirit to maintain a free and positive course in our lives.

B is for Breathing. Breath is essential for life. It is also essential for thought and action. Cut off our oxygen flow for a short period and we can't think or act in appropriate ways. Maintaining the flow of oxygen invigorates our bodies and keeps our minds awake and aware. Physiologically, it is helpful to conduct elevated cardiovascular exercise every day or every other day in order to keep the system functioning well. Recent studies have also shown that several of the declines in mental processes that accompany aging (such as poorer memory, attention, speed) are slowed and even reversed with regular elevated cardiovascular workouts. Of course, breathing is not just about the physiological result. Breathing is one of the few functions controlled by both the conscious and unconscious mind. Thus, focusing on the breath is a common technique in meditation. Learning to deepen our breathing enables us to achieve deeper levels of concentration and calmness.

In This Issue

- **Aiki Fitness**
- **Reflections on Lillooet Retreat**
- **Aikido After One Year**

It allows us to become in touch with our unconscious mind and develop a calm and nurturing spirit.

C is for Centering. Centering refers to establishing a stable base from which to interact with the world. At a physical level, centering requires core strength which allows us to maintain our integrity. The core starts with our hips, abdomen, chest, shoulders and neck. These must be maintained with strength and flexibility. Our secondary core extends to the legs and arms, which must be maintained in a way free from injury. The ability to generate power derives from being centered. If you are unstable or lacking a center, you cannot generate power. While we often don't think of Aikido as a way to generate power, we should note that power is an essential ingredient to interacting with the world. Aikido training increases our power by teaching ways to utilize the power of everything around us. To do this, we must be properly centered. Centering also leads to endurance. The fastest way to lose energy and fail endurance tests is to get off center so that you are flailing around. Thus, centering incorporates core strength, power, and endurance. These are not just physical attributes but reflect our mental processes as well. By staying calm and focused, we maintain our mental core, are able to exert mental power and mental endurance. These attributes also apply to our spirit. By maintaining peace at the core of our spirit, we will endure hardships and have the power to make a positive difference in the world.

Applications on the mat. So how do we train adaptation, breathing and centering on the mat? A balanced Aikido practice should incorporate all three aspects. I include here a few ideas about how I structure practice to promote Aiki fitness. We generally begin with stretching. When I teach, I have a longer period of stretching that incorporates deliberate and extended breath work along with slow deep stretching and core strengthening exercises. I pay a lot of attention to stretching hips and shoulders, as these are common areas of injury. Before proceeding from stretching to Aikitaiso, I always have us engage in focused and extended breathing. I find this empties the mind, calms the spirit, and provides the right attitude with which to begin the Aikitaiso.

(Continued on page 2)

Aiki Fitness (continued)

The Aikitaiso should be conducted in a way that promotes fluidity and centeredness. I find that by increasing repetitions, these movements can build up core strength as well (especially with the Ushiro exercises). In structuring classes, we typically do some exercises in exploring the flow of ki and how one can blend with conflict. This can often be done within the context of ki tests and applications of Aikitaiso. It is also useful to work in a cardiovascular element into practice. One way to do this is after working on several techniques in the usual manner, have students run through these more continuously without any talking. Just 10 or 15 minutes of continuous workout can be a challenging cardiovascular workout. Finally, I like to close classes with five minutes of warming down. This includes more stretching, core strengthening poses, and meditation.

Applications off the mat. Naturally, the vast majority of our Aikido training takes place off the mat in our everyday lives. Applications of these principles to our social interactions are an important part of our training. In addition, we need to maintain Aiki fitness through deliberate exercises off the mat. For example, I try and walk a mile and a half every day, climb the steps as often as possible, get in 1 to 2 hour bike rides regularly, meditate, practice yoga, and engage in strengthening exercises regularly. Additionally, nutrition is a key aspect of Aiki fitness. If we eat a lot of processed, high-carb, high-fat foods, we will be placing a tremendous strain on our bodies. We need to eat right, exercise regularly and apply the principles of Aikido in our daily lives.

I hope you will think about Aiki fitness and how you can incorporate training exercises on and off the mat to increase your Aiki Fitness. Kobayashi Sensei emphasized that Aikido begins with making the principles a part of our daily lives. By training the body, mind and spirit according to the principles of aikido, we can become healthier and make a positive difference in the world.

The Aiki Taiso on Youtube

This summer I took on a project for myself, which consisted of filming basic instruction for the Aiki Taiso and their applications. These video shorts are now on YouTube and I encourage you to check them out. Of course, one cannot learn the art from simply watching videos, but these class segments can provide the viewer with another example of the way the exercise might be taught. They can also give you ideas for teaching, testing and applying the aiki taiso in techniques and in daily life.

<http://www.youtube.com/MasaKatsuAiki>

Click on "Playlist" to access the 14 Aikitaiso videos

Doug Wedell

Reflections of Seidokan Retreat with Crotty Sensei in Lillooet

We were very fortunate to have Crotty Sensei visit us in Lillooet this summer. He was my first instructor when I started training in 1990, and he has continued to be one of my most influential instructors during the years I trained at AIA in Los Angeles. It was an honor and a delight to be able to introduce Crotty Sensei to my students and for all of us to receive his insightful, inspirational instruction seasoned with his good humour and anecdotes during our first Seidokan Retreat. With precision, he guided us through the basics of Aiki-taiso and demonstrated methods for effective waza (techniques). One of the weekend highlights was our hike to a beautiful dipping hole where a group of six jumped in for Misogi (purification)! We also enjoyed a few social circles with Sensei after practice, sharing hearty dinners prepared with fresh organic garden harvest and our local Fraser River salmon.

The altogether 8 sessions on the mat during the weekend was a challenging and refreshing reminder of the need for meaningful and consistent training for our dojo in the months and years to come. I am grateful to everyone who attended the weekend and especially to all my students for their commitments and support over the last year since we opened our practise here in Lillooet. I give special thanks to Susannah Tedesco, who was instrumental in securing funds for our club to purchase additional mats and to cover some costs needed to make the Retreat happen this summer. I much appreciated the mentoring that Crotty Sensei provided me that left me with many references to techniques. Thank you Sensei for your strong spirit, encouragements, your time, and for opening the channels of learning for all of us at Lillooet Seidokan Aikido.

Mariko Kage



Joe Crotty Sensei in Lillooet.

Lillooet Retreat (continued)

My experience with the Lillooet Aikido retreat was great and Sensei Joseph Crotty was very inspirational and influential in understanding Seidokan Aikido who demonstrated a good sense of humor. I would like to thank Sensei Mariko Kage for organizing such a great event.

Shawn A. Scotchman

I found the workshop material to be very well presented - logically organized and inclusive of everyone. My practice, Sun Do, is a form of Chi Kung, and, as such, has in common with Aikido the focus on the lower abdominal energy centre. The demonstration of its power while a person is walking and meeting an obstacle was new to me, and appreciated.

*Wendy Larman
Sun Do Instructor*

I really enjoyed the Seidokan Aikido Retreat. Joe Crotty Sensei shared his incredible knowledge of the advanced techniques as well other aspects like the poetry and philosophy of O'Sensei. I am really interested in learning more about the techniques that were introduced like the Jo and the Bokken. I will definitely continue my training in Lillooet and attend other retreats.

*Norm Leech
National Centre for First Nations Governance
Lillooet BC, Canada*



This summer, the new Lillooet Seidokan Aikido Club was privileged to have Joseph Crotty Jr. Sensei make the long journey into the burning heart of the southern interior of British Columbia, and share with us, some of the fruits of his many years of studying and teaching Seidokan Aikido. We are a young club, not quite a year old, with a small but growing core of committed members. We are blessed with the enthusiasm, guidance and unflagging energy of our Sensei, Mariko Kage, who conceived the idea for this retreat and was instrumental in arranging for Crotty Sensei's visit.

I have had experience of seminars and summer camps with the previous form of Aikido I had studied, but being a newcomer to the Seidokan Family, I didn't know what to expect from this Retreat. I was excited, but also nervous and a little intimidated to meet and train with the Head Instructor of the AIA. I wondered, would he be a severe and aloof instructor, quick to reprimand and impatient with the bumbling mistakes of beginners, as were some high ranking Aikido Instructors I had met?

Such questions were quickly put to rest as I entered the Dojo before the first class of the Retreat to find our visiting dignitary down on his hands and knees helping to put our jigsaw mats together, and when he shook my hand and introduced himself to me as Joe, I had a palpable understanding of Calmness in Action. I began to feel calmer myself.

We began the Retreat with a welcoming circle that involved a smudging ceremony. Dried Sagebrush leaf is lit and each person in turn can let the smoke wash over their bodies, arms, hands and face to purify their mind, body, heart and spirit so that we may come and be together in a good way. Lillooet is situated in S'tat'imc First Nation Territory where it is customary for gatherings to begin in this manner.

From the first class onward to the end of the retreat I felt my heart swelling with the joy of practice and gratitude for Crotty Sensei's incredible way of teaching - relaxed and funny, but purposeful and serious at the same time. He was patient and kind with all of us, particularly the newcomers, but also pushed us to be focused on the principles and mindful of what we were doing in every moment. There wasn't an instant of the Retreat where I wasn't learning something new or gaining a greater insight into familiar exercises and techniques. I also began to really "get" the Aiki Taiso. How they truly are the building blocks of Seidokan Aikido, not just exercises we do by rote, but carefully designed to help our bodies and minds really integrate the fundamentals of Aikido. Although I never had the good fortune to meet Kobayashi Sensei, I could feel his spirit shining through the teachings and I felt thankful.

The Retreat was intensive throughout the weekend, with two classes of technique each day, as well as a class each of Ki Development and Aiki Ryoho, and training with bokken and jo. In addition, Crotty and Kage Senseis conducted examinations for 5th kyu (Susannah Tedesco) and 3rd Kyu (Daniel Kerlake); gave an Aikido demonstration open to the public to further interest in Seidokan Aikido in Lillooet; and attended our 6am hike to a

local waterfall where we did our own version of misogi by each plunging three times into the frigid emerald pool at the base of the falls. Pretty brave for a guy from LA!

By the end of the weekend I felt full with so much to digest, in both the figurative sense, from all of Crotty Sensei's teachings, as well as in the literal sense from all of the delicious home-cooked potluck meals we had together! I look forward to our regular practices and being able to work on integrating the many lessons we received throughout the retreat. I want to sincerely thank Joe for making the journey to Canada and honoring us with his presence, experience and generosity, as well as his complete openness to experiencing the recreational activities Mariko had in store for him! I also want to thank Mariko for all her work in organizing the Retreat, her wonderful teaching, and for bringing Seidokan Aikido to Lillooet; Susannah for all the work she has done raising funds for the club and the Retreat; and all of the other amazing Aikidoka who make practicing such a pleasure.

Daniel Kerslake



Promotions

Sandan

Uri Landau 04/20/09
Seidokan Aikido Heisei Dojo

Jason Coskey 10/10/09
ASHA Aikido

Nidan

Stephen Spargur 11/08/09
Aikido Institute of America

Shodan

Hanan Rosenberg 06/12/09
Aikido Institute of Jerusalem

Michael Dwyer 11/08/09
Aikido Institute of America

Elio Medina 11/08/09
Aikido Institute of America

Congratulations!

Calendar

12/31/2009: Bokken Shugyo held at Aikido Institute of America on Thursday from 9:00 - 11:00am.

01/09/2010: Misogi Barai and New Year's Opening Practice held at Aikido Institute of America on Saturday, from 7:00 - 10:00am.

01/16/2010: Annual New Year's Potluck Party held at Aikido Institute of America on Saturday from 5:30 - 9:00 pm.

01/31/2010: "Protecting Your Firearm So It Can Protect You" Seminar held at Aikido Institute of Michigan, 551 E. Michigan Ave, Battle Creek, Michigan; 2:00 - 4:00pm.. This is a seminar in applying Aikido to your everyday life situation. For more information please contact 269 965-5500.

03/19/2010 - 03/21/2010: Seidokan Aikido of South Carolina will host a workshop featuring Dan Kawakami Sensei. For more information email Wedell@sc.edu.



Aikido After One Year

By Lana Cosic (12 year old student)

When I had first heard of aikido, my dad had been surfing the internet. A few youtube videos of some men in skirts throwing each other around was enough to get my brother to go to a preview. It had been a Wednesday in early September, 2008 when we first saw the class in action. I sat in one of the first three chairs, all the while watching my brother's leg twitch like it only did when he was playing video games. He nodded with huge approval, and commented, "That person should have punched a little more to the left," or, "He almost threw him into the wall!" Michiyo's class had been practicing Munetsuki hijiotoshi, I now recognize. My only concern for the class was there had been no kids my age, and my Dad suggested getting some of my friends to join. They all declined, claiming they had never heard of "tai-chi-do". We started our first class the following Friday, and we had been catching on fairly well by the time we had to split into pairs. A kid about my height with black glasses and an orange belt bowed to me. He said his name was Jacob, he was in 7th grade, and he could make a sound that sounded like water dripping. "Bloop." We have been best friends ever since.

Earnest, realistic, sincere, and goofy goes on in the dojo. The sensei's give us new ways to see the techniques and movements so we are able to use them to their fullest potential.

Completing a full year with aikido has made us feel more and more like family. We've bonded so much that I can just as easily call Newton the Ninja my little brother as I can my own. We've all grown on each other and we've become amazingly close. The dojo is the one place where you *can* be friends with anyone. I can now spend more time with any of my aikido buddies than I can with my school friends! Aikido has given me a great sense of real friendship and has helped me progress so much with it. I would never regret taking up the opportunity. Ever.



Some of the kids class members at AIA right after completing their exams.

Welcome Lillooet Seidokan Aikido

We would like to take the time to welcome our newest Seidokan Dojo located in Lillooet, British Columbia, Canada. The Lillooet Seidokan Aikido dojo is run by their chief instructor, Mariko Kage, Shodan. She is formerly a student of Victory Dojo and the Aikido Institute of America and has been working hard with her devoted group of students. Exciting things have been happening for them over the past year such as holding their first kyu exams during Joe Crotty Sensei's visit this past July. We welcome all of you to our Seidokan Family!!!"



Pictured above are scenes from the Thanksgiving workshop held at AIA.