



Zan Shin

Extending or Continuing Mind

By John B. Mazza

Inside this issue:

Extending or Continuing Mind	1
Restoring Harmony on the EI	1
Advice for Beginners	2
What Does It Mean to Understand?	3
The Importance of Stances	4
As a Beginner of Aikido	6
Who Is in Control?	6
The Spirit of Aikido	7
Chinkon-kishin ("cheenkon-keesheen")	8

Contributors to this issue:

- John B. Mazza
- Craig Bina
- Tom Worsnopp
- Rafael Bras
- John Ferrer
- Tom Teterycz
- Yang Zhou

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It seems that lately I've been speaking a lot about the proper use of mind in Aikido. Of course, the proper use of mind applies to all Martial Arts, and for that matter, anything we do in our daily lives.

For my frame of reference, I use the term Continuing Mind, rather than Extending Mind.

To continue is defined as: to maintain, not stop an action, while extend is given to mean: to lengthen or make larger in time and space. By my way of thinking, to continue means no beginning, no end.

In the theory of *Continuing Mind* one projects their entire being through a technique.

This point is extremely important. So many times people want to break a technique into all its parts. As a beginner this is acceptable, but this is not the way a technique is performed. The more one practices, the more seamless the movement becomes.

Continued on pg. 2

Restoring Harmony on the EI

By Craig Bina

Junior students often ask senior students or instructors to tell them stories about a time when they "used" aikido. It's a curious sort of question. They sometimes give the impression of wanting to hear about a fight, although several famous aikido teachers have noted that if you actually have to fight someone



NU Aikido Club dojo-cho Bruce Holmes demonstrates a throw in the late 1980s. (Copyright © 1986 Craig R. Bina)

you've probably already gone wrong somewhere.

Perhaps I'll tell one of my own stories in a future column, but I thought I'd start by retelling an event that happened to my teacher Bruce Holmes when I was a student in the 1980s.

Continued on pg.5

Extending or Continuing Mind

Continued from page 1

My Teacher would say one mind, one breath, one movement continuing into infinity. What this means is not to stop at any point of the technique... Not at the point of entry, nor do we stop to ponder the middle, neither do we take pause to examine our exit. The technique must flow, seamless, as each moment existing as one.

But, what are we really

speaking of, this thing that takes use through our daily life...Mind. It is this Mind that carries us, carries us through each technique as we pass through each transition. If you stop the mind you stop the technique. We have all experienced that feeling of entering into a technique, and stopping, dead in our tracks as we tried to remember how the rest of the movement went.

Over time, we realize that the less we try and force the

movement, the less we think of its parts, the easier the technique becomes. We find ourselves flowing through the movements, not holding anything back, not stopping. We begin thinking past the technique, and finally past the thinking itself. There is no attachment.

Be as a reed upon the flowing waters, constantly moving...
One Mind, One Breath.

Advice for Beginners

By Tom Worsnopp

As a new student, aikido can seem very confusing. There are many techniques, none of which are simple, and all of which have names in Japanese! This can leave students with a feeling that they "don't get it". A number of students have asked me what they can do to improve how they are learning aikido. To address this, I would like to offer the following advice:

(1) Be patient. Aikido is a complex martial art that requires you to acquire a sense of timing and distance, to relax and extend your energy, and to learn very specific techniques based on body kinematics. There is also a certain degree of "muscle memory" and awareness that you must learn by practicing.

(2) Make a conscious effort.



There are aspects of aikido (e.g., "muscle memory") that will take practice, and just being on the mats day after day, practicing the kata that Sensei demonstrates, may be enough for your body to learn them. But there are many aspects of aikido that can be greatly improved by making a conscious effort during practice. Consciously trying

to relax, trying to pay attention to the details of a technique (e.g., relative body positioning, relative hand and foot placement, angle at which to apply a joint lock, etc.), and learning the names of techniques, are just three ways to make a conscious effort.

(3) Use the Test Guidelines

and the Study Guide (both under the "Recommended Resources" section of our website) to aid you in your practices.

(4) Practice on your own. Much of aikido cannot be practiced without a partner, but rolls, falls, strikes, and weapons kata can all be practiced on your own and practicing will improve how you do aikido. For example,

given that much of aikido is rooted in swordsmanship, practicing with a boken can greatly improve your understanding of and skill with open-handed techniques. It will also raise many questions, which leads to my final piece of advice.

(5) Ask questions. There is much to be gained from exploring things on your own, and I believe you will gain

more from practicing this way than from asking a question as soon as it comes to mind. But there are many ways to look at a technique and it helps not to get stuck in one. Asking questions provides an opportunity to see a technique in a new light. However, this is not an endorsement for turning practice into a Q&A session. The only way to really learn aikido is to do it.

What Does It Mean to Understand?

By Tom Teterycz

It's been a while since I decided to join Aikido. Early in the winter of 2005, I visited the gym at NU where the Zanshinkan Dojo is located. I arrived there on a cold Saturday afternoon and, of course, with my luck, no one showed up for practice. It took me another several months to get myself together and come back to the dojo and join the school. I returned on a warm afternoon in early fall. We had changed into our gis and set up the mats when, in the air, we smelled smoke from burning garbage dumpsters. Smoke quickly filled up the gym, and in an attempt to salvage the practice, we decided to open the doors and ventilate the room. Well, we almost achieved our goal but, just as we thought we had solved the problem, the HVAC systems began to force smoke into the room. We were still considering practicing Aikido,



but at that point, we were informed that a tornado warning had been issued for the area and the facility was to be evacuated. That was my second day at the Aikido practice. Still, I was not about to quit.

The following Monday was a happy day in my life. People were there to practice, and there weren't any tornadoes, and the room was free of smoke. I finally got to

practice Aikido!

After two hours of workout, I felt the massive pain of knocked out toes, torn muscles, abraded feet, bruised back/shoulders, twisted wrists and an exhausted muscular system. In one word: I was beat. The funny part of it all is that no one did it to me. I did it to myself. Why? It's simple: I did not understand Aikido. As our Sensei likes to phrase it "Aikido is like a circle." It

may be big or small, but it is a circle. It is constantly rotating, and you need to know how to rotate yourself in it in order to become part of it. I can see now what he means by that, but I just don't know what to do. How to get into it? My circles are more like squares—well, I'm lucky when they become octagons. In other words, I have a lot to learn.

Now that I have been practicing regularly, I like to observe the mechanics of the interaction of the two bodies. It is fascinating to me how graceful it is when performed correctly. One could say it is poetry in motion, except that rhyme hurts when applied to the opponent.

Memories of my past life come to my mind when I'm trying to analyze and comprehend what I see in the Dojo. My past experience with Kyokushinkai Karate conflicts with all of the techniques that I'm learning now. Every time a new technique is introduced to me, I can see its resemblance to something I already know but, at the same time, it is so different.

What does it mean to understand Aikido?

I guess the day I'm able to answer that question will be the day I start to rotate with the rest of the elements of my universe, and then all of the rest of the questions will be simple. For now, I'm happy to

practice. The time I spend in the dojo is the only time when I don't think. Well, I do think, but not about the things that fill the rest of my mind during the day. In the dojo, my thoughts spin around Aikido, and that is important to me. I would like to expand those thoughts to the rest of my life and allow those I care about to become part of my harmonically spinning universe. It is a long way ahead of me, but I'm glad that I decided to get on my path now. Now was the right time for me. Any time would have been right, but the time I chose to begin practicing Aikido was definitely the right one.

The Importance of Stances

By Rafael Bras

I often find in aikido that I have learned something several times before I even realize it. Following the joint aikido/karate practice last weekend I was chatting with one of the karate students. He



said that the most unusual thing about Aikido to him was sitting in our standard kneeling position or *seiza*. I sit *seiza* so often that it has become quite natural for me and a normal part of my aikido experience. I forget that to many new students it is unnatural and awkward. Part of this is just that in modern life, kneeling is rather unusual. The rest comes from a misunderstanding of what *seiza* actually is. *Seiza* is not simply kneeling on the ground. It took me thinking about it

the rest of the evening to remember that *seiza* is in actuality a stance. It is a ready position from which one can attack or defend, applying almost any aikido technique.

In my experiences with karate and tang soo do, both traditional striking arts, stances are the first thing that is taught. Maintenance of a good stance is emphasized as a major component of proper attacks and defense. In aikido, stances are just as important and are an integral part of the very first belt test. We tend not to emphasize stances quite so much, as even the most basic aikido techniques rely on fluid movement in addition to stable positioning. That we do not explicitly focus on

stances so heavily in our training does not diminish their importance. As with many other aspects of aikido, I find stances are one of those basics that can easily be lost when trying to grasp all the subtleties of a new technique. This is an aspect of my training that I struggle with constantly.

So the next time you are on the mats, I invite you to pay extra attention to the different

stances and the stances of those around you. Keep your chin up, your shoulders and back straight, and everything in-line with your hips. Your body should be relaxed, but ready. Pay attention to the positioning of your hands and feet, your balance, and movement. Every technique should begin and end in a stance, whether it is *shizentai* (natural stance), *Hanmi no kamae* (half-stance), or *seiza*

(kneeling stance). Keep your hands at the ready, even when they are at your side. The physical is, as always, accompanied by the mental and your mind should be just as relaxed and ready as your body. All these things are harder than they sound, but I think most of us are pleasantly surprised when we realize the difference a good stance can make.

Restoring Harmony on the

El

Continued from page 1

Holmes-sensei had been returning to Evanston from training with Toyoda-sensei in Chicago one evening, and he was changing trains at the Howard Street El station. While waiting on the platform, he saw a small, angry man chasing around a larger man. The larger man escaped, but the angry man then turned his wrath on an even larger man, chasing him around the platform, too. Then the angry man leapt into the air and loudly punched the Howard El sign with his fist.

Holmes-sensei was growing a bit concerned at this spectacle, worried that someone might get hurt, but at that moment the two-car El train to Evanston pulled in. The angry man got into one car, and everyone else on the platform nervously piled into the other car, everyone except

for Holmes-sensei. He quietly got onto the otherwise empty car with the angry man, and he sat down directly across from him. The angry man looked up at him and said: "Bet you think you're tough, don't you!"

Now, this is the moment when, in a bad film, a character might say: "Yeah, I'm a black-belt aikido master, and I can kick your ass." Holmes-sensei, however, said nothing of the sort. He calmly replied: "No, but something sure seems to be bothering you." The angry man replied: "Yeah, I've just been robbed! Two guys came up and stuck a gun in my face and took everything I had!"

Holmes-sensei responded with sincere feelings of how terrible this was, how he had never had such an unpleasant experience, how humiliating it must feel, etc., and he had a

calm and cathartic conversation with the angry man. By the time they reached his station, the man's anger had dissipated and he was simply sad. They bid each other a friendly good-night.

This story made a profound impression on me. Of course, it is probable that Holmes-sensei's years of practicing aikido techniques contributed to the self-confidence that enabled him to calmly interact with that angry man. If the man had tried to harm him, he probably would have been in little personal danger. But at the root of this story is a fundamental fact that we sometimes forget. Aikido is the way of harmony, and "using" aikido entails the preservation or restoration of harmony. Holmes-sensei certainly dispelled some disharmony that evening.

As a Beginner of Aikido

By Yang Zhou

Born in a country with Kung Fu, martial arts were all around me before I came here. Although this traditional technique is being transferred more and more into shallow commercial shows and its mass base being basically nothing but old people's morning exercise, deep respect of it remains, and even rises in some occasions. I have to say, my curiosity and interest in martial arts kept in a "normal" level compared with other subjects.



It is a great experience to live in a huge country, in which spending all your life in one cultural system is easy. But it is also a great pity if all your knowledge about the rest of the world develops primarily on mass media. This is what drove me to join the Aikido club, when I found this might be a good chance to learn something genuine about Japanese. So, practicing Aikido is, I hope, an entrance for me to the Japanese world.

Who Is in Control?

By Tom Worsnopp

For a long time, one of my unstated assumptions about aikido was that when performing a technique as nage, the idea was to *control* uke. Stated more bluntly, I believed that if uke was uncooperative, nage should be able to force a technique upon uke. Complementary to that, I believed that uke's goal was to realistically attack nage, which ostensibly meant to *fight* nage, as one would expect someone on the street to fight (tense and resistant). I believe both of these concepts are fundamentally flawed and should be consciously challenged.

When practicing a kata (form), nage and uke should not be *fighting*. I believe the goal of the kata is to provide nage with an opportunity to practice a technique and uke with an opportunity to practice receiving that technique. If uke lacks the intent of the attack (e.g., uke is pulling when s/he should be pushing) then neither uke nor nage has a genuine opportunity to practice the technique. Rather, nage ends up forcing the "technique" upon uke, or being unable to perform the technique.

To this end, uke and nage must work together.

I haven't done the practicing for long, so it remains too early for me to conclude something about Aikido. Yet relaxation is an emphasis undoubtedly. To me, philosophy of martial arts depends on how beautiful, how profound, and how "right" it is. So boxing will never be my choice because it looks too much muscle based to me. We human beings have chosen a different way of evolution -- mentally rather than physically. And that's why a super tough guy can hardly beat a chimpanzee, who were similar to us millions of years ago. So personally, it is a comparison between rolling back and fighting against the trend of evolution, or relaxing and following it.

The Spirit of Aikido

By John Ferrer

Aikido is an activity and a discipline that I find difficult in terms of the concentration and effort required of this practice. Meditation is another activity and spiritual discipline I find difficult, and for the same reasons. Meditation also demands an effortlessness, a letting go, and a learning to just be, rather than a constant doing. We human beings are very good at doing, but not very proficient in just being. This factor of effortlessness, paradoxically, characterizes the practice of meditation, while distinguishing from Aikido, which needs enormous effort. I once asked Akira Tohei Shihan if Aikido was a form of meditation, and he remarked that both meditation and Aikido have the same goal. It seems that yoga also has the same goal. What these three have in common as their desired end is the integration of the body, soul, and spirit with the Source, the Divine, or Ultimate Mystery. Every art, practice, area of knowledge, even craft in India is regarded as a yoga precisely because they are ways to this condition of integration. Meditation, as a contemplative practice, a highly experiential form of knowing, has awakened in me an awareness of the divine energy, the kundalini, the chi, or the ki, also called the shakti, and the prana, or the breath. This awareness dawns quite naturally as our spiritual senses develop. These senses

are the capacities for receptivity to the subtle presence of the ki, shakti, the divine energy, and to the Source, or the Divine itself. I experience it most of the time as a spiriting presence, a breathing reality that is a vast intelligence enveloping everything, including us. Even while doing Aikido I am frequently aware of it, especially if there is sufficient quiet. The ki, the divine energy is itself consciousness. Consciousness is the inside, outside, nearside and farside of reality, life, the cosmos, and our experience. There is no reality, life, cosmos, and experience without consciousness. Everything happens in consciousness, in awareness, but not merely there; it is actually happening. Our bodies are known to us because we are aware of them. Everything depends on this awareness. You and I have a body first because we know it in our self-awareness of it. This point of the nature and role of consciousness is vital in understanding the inner, mystical nature of Aikido, or reality itself. Take for example Quantum Physics. There is a phenomenon called quantum non-locality; it has been verified in particle accelerator experiments. What this phenomenon demonstrates is that a particle, say an electron in our galaxy, is able to communicate instantaneously with another electron in a far-off galaxy without the need of physical signal or medium.

The implication of this discovery is that there is a more basic medium in the universe than matter or energy, and that medium is consciousness. Consciousness is the unified field that keeps everything together.

The inner nature of this consciousness, its content, or animating life, is infinite Love, compassion, and sensitivity in a boundless now that transcends and includes past, present, and future. All is present to it and in it is now; it does not perceive, or know in a successive fashion as we do in our present state bound by time, and so, by succession. We do not know reality as it is, but only as it appears in our mode of knowing through successive acts of the understanding as we perceive events before us. There is this higher, more mystical perceiving and knowing that is direct, experiential, and unitive, that passes beyond the linear mode, and begins to experience as the Source does.

Aikido is happening in consciousness, that is, it is bounded by awareness, and it is simply not possible unless there is awareness, self-conscious intention. To be we first have to be aware. To be is to be self-conscious, that is, a person that knows that he or she exists. In consciousness, we exist, know, and reach our potential. Aikido, yoga, and meditation gradually transform our mode of perception so that we

experience and know the inner nature of that ultimate awareness directly, spontaneously, effortlessly as harmony, the perfection of order and Love. The long term commitment to practice leads to the realization of Love, compassion, and sensitivity that inspired O-Sensei. Aikido is, as he so eloquently says, “the way of Love”. The Love, compassion, and sensitivity are themselves awareness, and this awareness grows from any practice that firmly sets aside egocentricity. The ego, the false self, and the false self’s system of trying to possess happiness in its own way, and through its own selfish projects, are the obstacles to realization of that ultimate harmony that is Love in its transcendent totality through the presence, power and grace of the Source, the Divine.

It is necessary to recognize that each one of us has hidden motives that originate from early infancy and childhood, motives that are formed from unmet needs for security, control, and esteem, or love.

They shape the egoic program, or the false self system that operates below the surface. All of us need to be freed of that system that hides behind the front of the ego. When O-Sensei exhorts us to victory over the self, he has in mind the whole problem of the false self, even though he does not express it in this way.

Aikido, when it becomes a spiritual practice is inevitably transformative. It changes us radically, and frees us from our illusions about ourselves. It transforms our character, understanding, will, emotions, and memory by establishing them in the harmony of Love. It works on the unconscious level by purifying us from our hidden agendas that are essentially destructive of relationships because of self-preoccupation. Then it operates on the conscious level by calling us beyond ourselves in a kind of self-forgetting as we become more sensitive and caring to others through practice and relationships. Love, compassion, kindness, and mercy come to characterize

all our relationships. Aikido eventually awakens us on the superconscious level by uniting with the Source. The essence of the consciousness is Love, compassion and sensitivity.

Aikido is yoga, a spiritual path through practice, It is, as some people observe, “meditation in motion”, like Tai Ch’i. I am convinced meditation itself is important in order to achieve, or strive for the ultimate awareness, that embodied O-Sensei incarnated in his presence and example.

Aikido awakens and nourishes community, but it is a community not simply of martial artists, but of exquisite human beings who finally can love in a much fuller sense, transforming the world in the process. Aikido is a great resource to change the world by changing ourselves, but to do so we must experience Aikido in its depth, height and ultimacy. O-Sensei says, “To truly implement the Art of Peace, you must sport freely in the manifest, hidden, and divine realms”. That is the path of the mystic sage.

Chinkon-kishin

(“cheenkon-keesheen”)

By John Ferrer

Chinkon means “settle down and calm the spirit.” Kishin means “returning to the source.”

The term chinkon-kishin thus means calming the spirit and returning to the source. The result of which is a deep contemplative state in which one is grounded in the divine.

O-Sensei had performed these practices since childhood, and they were an integral part of his being, but he never made them obligatory for his students and in fact encouraged them to select and develop chinkon-kishin exercises that were appropriate for their own backgrounds and needs. He emphasized, however, that some kind of meditation is essential for the practice of Aikido: “If your chinkon-kishin is good, you can understand everything.”