

# Sword and Spirit

The Members Journal of Itten Dojo

\$3.00



— June 2006 —

## PLANNING NOTES

### *June 10*

“Introduction to Aikijutsu”  
seminar with Joseph Simms,  
at The Toman,  
Gaithersburg, Maryland

### *June 24 and 25*

Shinto Muso-ryu Jo  
seminar with Diane Skoss,  
at Itten Dojo, open to  
members of the eastern region  
of Pan-American SMR Jo

*From the dojocho...*

## A Goal for Us All

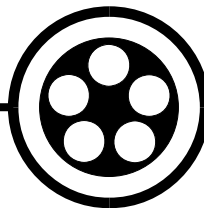
Why are you training in aikido? What do you hope to gain by the experience? How, exactly, are you going to obtain the benefits you seek? Who do you think is responsible for getting you where you wish to be? If you don't have a plan for structured, dedicated training, achieving anything significant will be more the result of serendipity than diligence.

I invested years of intense effort to earn my first black belt, in the final year of preparation for the exam training, literally, every day and twice on Sundays. I realize not everyone is willing or able to sustain that level of commitment, but the fact is without some measure of drive toward a goal neither the student individually or the dojo collectively will function as well as should be the case.

A dojo is organic, a living entity, and like any living entity either grows and develops or withers and dies. There is no stasis, no standing in place; the dojo goes forward or it goes backward, and the only way it goes forward is on the momentum generated by its individual members. By way of example, during the barely six years we trained in aikijutsu — from about 1995 through the fall of 2001 — members of Itten Dojo earned more than 20 green belts (*yonkyu*), more than 15 brown belts (*nikyu*), nine black belts (*shodan*), five second-degree black belts (*nidan*) and two third-degree black belts (*sandan*). I almost hesitate to mention that six of those nine members earning black belts in aikijutsu simultaneously earned instructor licenses in kenjutsu.

In case you're thinking these promotions must have been handouts, allow me to disabuse you of that notion. If just one person were testing, with a partner providing ukemi but not testing himself, an aikijutsu ikkyu exam

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required 45 minutes of constant motion, every step of which was memorized, choreographed and polished to military precision during countless hours of preparatory practice outside of regular classes. Aikijutsu black belt and kenjutsu license tests also required submission of a written thesis, equal in scope to a college term paper, in addition to the extensive physical exams.

We had a smaller group of people than we have in our present aikido-kai, training with me at a time I had far less experience than I do now, practicing an art that was much more technically complex and difficult, advancing by means of exams that were almost overwhelming in their expectations, and yet we amassed an impressive record of achievement. Make no mistake, we're doing very good work now and I am thoroughly pleased with our progress in the curriculum Amdur Sensei has developed for us. Still, we can do better, and when I think back to the aikijutsu days, I recognize some characteristics that are worth emulating:

1. Students clawed their way to the next rank. Not because anyone thought rank, in and of itself, was of any great importance, but because everyone in the dojo recognized the *process* of getting rank is the surest means to achieve one's personal goals in training, whether the goals be enhanced self-discipline, fitness, practical self-defense, or spiritual (in my terms) development.

2. Because students were focused on measurable progress resulting in promotion to the next rank, most

members of the class attended most practices, and open mat periods were always a bustle of activity, with several groups of students independently practicing test sets. Tuesday and Thursday practices each averaged 16 to 23 people on the mat (again, with fewer total members in the group than the aikidokai has now).

3. People preparing to test got together to practice at their homes or other facilities if the dojo were not available during their opportune times.

4. Promotion exams had to be scheduled outside of normal dojo operating hours, because there was too much demand for open mat periods, and too many tests to accomplish in the available time in any case.

5. There was an esprit de corps, a sense of the activity of training itself and one's training partners being special, that we were exceptionally lucky to have access to both, that manifested in a tangible energy and enthusiasm in the dojo that was absolutely infectious. If a prospective member took time to observe a practice, he or she almost invariably enrolled on the spot.

6. There was a distinct sense of mission in bringing aikijutsu (and kenjutsu) to central Pennsylvania, as well as in promoting our arts to the world at large — at least 10 members of the dojo I can think of offhand published articles in major magazines and journals. One of the black belts from that time period even went on to publish a book.

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of Itten Dojo

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# The Abs Conditioning Set

By Bob Wolfe

Illustration by Rosanne Wolfe

Photographs by Kirsten Yuhasz



Aikido is a matter of controlling an opponent, not by means of what we do to the opponent, but by means of what we do with ourselves. For this reason, integration of the component parts of our bodies and coherence of the patterns of movement we generate are critical to the success of technique. The *Taikyoku kuzushi* and our conditioning exercises work together to develop strength, coordination, and a high degree of control over our own structure.

While we address neck, arms, torso and legs with strengthening exercises, in many respects the three exercises in our abdominals set form the centerpiece of the conditioning routine we use each practice. Close

attention to the quality of these exercises will improve every aspect of training. To better understand why this is so, let's start with a quick review of the structure and function of the abdominal muscles.

The importance of strong abdominal muscles becomes obvious when you consider the physical construction of the midsection of the torso. Other than the spine, there are no skeletal supports within the abdominal cavity; this area is entirely dependent on the abdominal muscles for support.

Three layers of muscles form the sides of the abdominal wall. The outermost layer on each side is the external oblique muscle. Underneath,

and running perpendicular to the external oblique, is the internal oblique muscle. Both the external and internal oblique muscles compress the abdominal cavity and assist in flexing and rotating the trunk of the body. Beneath the external and internal oblique muscles lies the transversus abdominus muscle: its fibers run horizontally, encircling the abdomen, and serve to compress the abdominal cavity.

The front surface of the abdominal wall is formed by the rectus abdominus, a narrow, flat muscle running vertically from the pubic bone to the ribcage. The rectus abdominus both compresses and flexes the trunk.

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# Self-defense in the Info Age

By Bob Wolfe

The samurai might have faced death on a daily basis, but at least they didn't have to worry about being victims of identity theft. (Well, except for the time there were at least three individuals running around claiming to be Miyamoto Musashi. I'm guessing that situation was kind of self-policing, though: See "faced death on a daily basis.") In our time, however, we do need to be cognizant of threats other than physical attacks, and one of the most serious situations in which anyone can find himself or herself is to have had personal information stolen and used in an unauthorized fashion.

One of the fellows in my office recently received an e-mail with very good advice from an attorney who had been a victim of identity theft, summarizing important steps anyone can take to preclude the same thing happening, or at least minimize the consequences of such an attack.

Here are the suggestions:

1. The next time you order checks, have them printed with only your initials (instead of first name) and your last name. If someone takes your checkbook, the thief will not know whether you sign your checks with just your initials or with your full name, but your bank will know what you do.

2. Do not sign the back of your credit cards. Instead, mark the cards "PHOTO ID REQUIRED."

3. When writing checks to make payments on your credit card accounts, DO NOT include the complete account number on the "For" line. Instead, just put the last four digits of the account number. The credit card company can readily identify the remainder of the account number, while anyone else who might be handling your check as it passes through all the processing steps won't have access to the information.

4. List your work phone number on your checks instead of your home phone number. If you have a post office box, use that instead of your home street address. If you do not have a P.O. Box, use your work address. Never have your Social Security Number printed on your checks — you can add it manually if it is really necessary, but if the number is printed on your checks, anyone can get it.

5. Make photocopies of the documents you carry routinely in your wallet or purse, being certain to photocopy both sides of each license, credit card, etc. By doing this, you maintain a record of what you had in your wallet or purse if either is lost or stolen. Most important are credit card account numbers and the phone numbers needed to cancel cards. Keep the photocopy in a safe place. Another good thing to keep is a photocopy of your passport if you are traveling domestically or overseas.

The attorney who circulated the above suggestions developed this strategy the hard way, after the theft of his wallet. Within a week, the thieves had ordered an expensive monthly cell phone package, applied for a VISA credit card, had a credit line approved to buy a Gateway computer, received a PIN number from the Department of Motor Vehicles to change his driving record information online, and more.

To limit the damage in case this happens to you or someone you know, follow these steps:

1. We all know we should cancel our credit cards immediately following loss or theft, but the key is having the toll-free numbers and account numbers handy, in order to know who to call. Keep that photocopy where you can find it. In addition, call the Social Security Administration Fraud Line at 800-269-0271.

2. File a police report immediately in the jurisdiction where your credit cards, etc., were lost or stolen. This action proves to credit providers you were diligent, and is also the first step supporting an investigation (assuming there is one).

3. Most importantly: Call the three national credit reporting organizations immediately to place a fraud alert on your name and Social Security Number.

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# News and Notes

## So, Where's Ellis' Article?

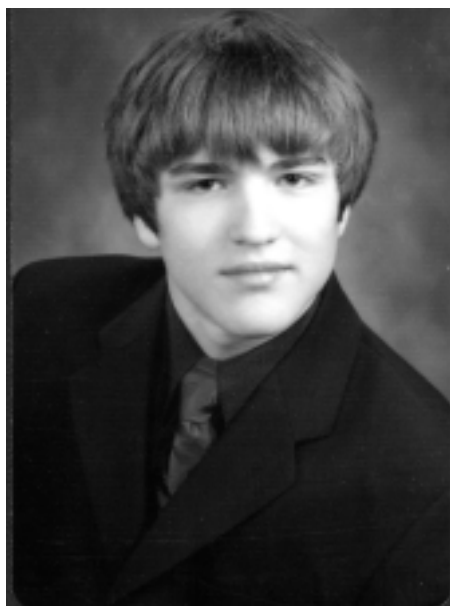
Well, as it happens, I kind of decided it doesn't make a lot of sense to reprint material that is readily available on-line. To read Part II of "Aikido is Three Peaches," visit the *Aikido Journal* web site (the URL is [www.aikidojournal.com/?id=752](http://www.aikidojournal.com/?id=752)).

If you look around a little from there, you'll be able to find Part III, as well as numerous other essays written by Amdur Sensei. Many of the most valuable insights to the topics addressed in these articles are found in the comments and discussions that follow, and for that reason I think we should utilize the on-line resource in most instances.

## Congratulations to Caleb

Jodokai member Caleb Cossick graduated from Bible Baptist High School on June 2nd, 2006. In addition to training in Shinto Muso-ryu, Caleb is an accomplished pianist and baseball player, and will be attending college in Indiana this fall.

Good luck, Caleb — we'll miss you at practice!



## Other Congratulations Due

Mick Sternick is now a proud papa, and although we'd like to give him credit, it was actually wife Sarah who did all the work to welcome Noah Sternick into the world on the 6th of May.

Noah and parents are doing very well, and Mick is back at aikido practice without missing a beat.

## "Spiritual' Budo" Pulls Visits

In most weeks, visitors to our dojo web site, [www.ittendojo.org](http://www.ittendojo.org), download PDF copies of back issues of *Sword and Spirit* at the rate of 30 to 50 per week. The December issue, however, with the essay on spiritual considerations and budo, is seeing downloads in the range of 250 plus per week. Evidently, word of this essay has spread, and either other web sites are linking to it, or people are sharing the link by e-mail.

Although it's possible to track traffic to the site and browsing paths through the site, it's not possible (at least with the reporting utility available) to back-track to sites linking directly to the download folder. I'd be very curious to see what comments might have been made in response to the essay.

## Mike Nickels Opens Practice

Long time dojo member, black belt and physician Mike Nickels has opened his own medical practice, Nickels Allergy & Asthma, PC, at 717 Market Street in Lemoyne, (737-3472). Mike is being assisted in getting the practice up and running by fellow aikido student David Tyson — David is currently working on a nursing degree at York College

and is handling the administrative duties at Nickels Allergy on a part-time basis.

That this spring has been about the worst allergy season on record is bad news for the residents of central Pennsylvania, but very good news indeed for Doctor Mike, and both he and David spent the better part of May racing to keep up with the demand for their services. That did interfere with getting to the dojo, so while we wish Mike much success, we also hope the pace will slow enough that he can get back to class.

## Welcome to New Members

The aikidokai has been fortunate to add to the roster several very good people lately, including:

- Keith Badger, who trained at the old dojo back in the late 90's. Keith is a technician with the 193rd Air National Guard unit in Middletown (the most-deployed reserve unit in the country).
- Jeffrey Jones, proprietor of Loose Ends Studio hair salon in Harrisburg. Jeff has previous experience in Korean martial arts.
- Dustin Palmer, an agent with Jack Gaughn Realty. Dustin's interest in training derives from exposure to martial arts during a stint in the Air Force.
- Peter Sohn, a full-time student attending Dickinson School of Law in Carlisle. Peter is another Korean stylist deciding to try aikido.
- Jeffrey Aranos, a Marine officer, reservist and occupational therapist at Holy Spirit Hospital in Camp Hill. Most notably, Jeff was involved in the Marine evacuation mission to Liberia in 1990.

## Training Tip of the Month

One of the keys to training with optimal efficiency and effectiveness is picking priorities. It's impossible to pay equal attention to everything all the time; instead, the best way to accomplish steady improvement is to focus on just one or two elements of a technique or principles of movement at a time. An excellent choice for students at any level is special attention to moving from the vertical axis.

Aikido techniques in general either radiate out from the center, or spiral in toward the center, and in both cases the motive power is rotational. This applies equally to tai-sabaki, nage-waza, and atemi (both striking or kicking). One of the most notable characteristics of Amdur Sensei's patterns of movement is the way he keeps his hips and shoulders in motion, oscillating in such a way that he can reverse instantly at the first hint of resistance. I call this his "tick-tock" pattern, and you can see it in virtually everything he does.

I've found it hugely useful to try to emulate the tick-tock pattern, researching it in the *Taikyoku kuzushi* and applying it in every technique. While the tick-tock pattern is most obviously apparent in techniques like *Iriminage* or *Kaitennage*, it is critically important to subtle applications in techniques such as *Nikyo*.

Develop a sense for rotational power by standing in a natural stance, with your arms hanging at your sides. Keeping your hips and shoulders configured in a box (which is to say, in line), pivot from the hips in the oscillating pattern, allowing your arms to swing. Start with a full range of movement, but then experiment with partial arcs, and with allowing your feet to "slip" with the hip rotations and shift your position on the mat. "Skate," rather than step.

Make the tick-tock pattern the source of power for movement and technique, and you will see immediate and dramatic improvement in your aikido. ☸

• Philip Strong, recently relocated to this area and involved in sales of agricultural products for industrial applications. Phil has a background in aikido and found our dojo while preparing to move.

### Alan Starner Performs on CD

For the second time in barely a year, Alan Starner has been involved in the production of a Christian contemporary music CD, this time *Pain, Passion, & Peace*, the debut album of vocalist McCall Tucker.

His last project was *So Much to Say*, with vocalist Susie Andrews. For that album, Alan wrote and performed all of the music to accompany Susie's lyrics.

On *Pain, Passion, & Peace*, Alan was invited by producer and song writer Jeff Feltenberger (formerly of *The Badlees*) to provide backup

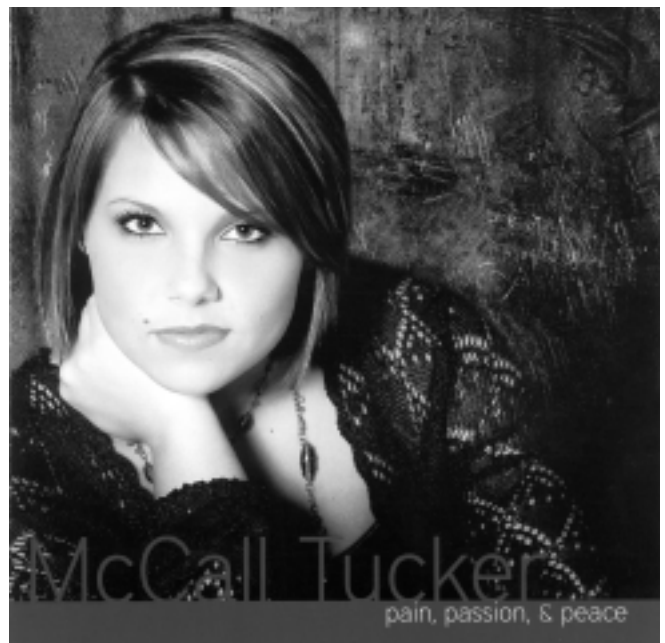
vocals and play a variety of instruments, including the mandolin.

Jessica Starner, Alan and Deb's daughter, even played an important role on the CD, lending her violin to the song, "Girl Like Me," and her voice to backup vocals on several other tracks.

Alan joined Jeff Feltenberger and other members of *The Badlees* on stage for McCall's CD release party on May 26th, at Daybreak Church in Mechanicsburg. The performance was spectacular, a real testament to the professionalism of the musicians and the spirit of McCall, who

at just 17 has real presence and an important message to share.

Visit McCall's web site to hear sample tracks and order the CD: [www.mccalltucker.com](http://www.mccalltucker.com). ☸



7. It was not at all unusual to have nearly the entire membership of the dojo participate in special seminars.

8. The willingness of individuals to sacrifice both time and treasure for the benefit of the group is the only thing that enabled us to acquire the dojo we now enjoy.

We can surpass the spirit and achievements of our earlier days by building on the best elements of our previous practice. Here, as clearly as I can state them, are my expectations of members of the aikido class, things I strongly recommend each of you adopt as personal goals:

First, and most importantly, prepare to test. If you are not actively pursuing your next promotion, I might be tempted to assume you have no long term interest in training, or that you do not wish to take on additional responsibility for the good of the group, or that your individual goals are different from the stated, collective purpose of the dojo (which is to build black belts, in all the connotations of the term).

Second, show up for practices distinctly more often than not. In order to make any real progress in this art, you simply must attend at least two practices per week.

Third, take pride in your practice, and in yourself. The “martial” in martial arts means “military,” and there should be an element of spit-and-polish in everything you do. A bit more attention to this aspect of training will serve as a spirit-pump, generating a more vibrant atmosphere in the dojo that will kick both the intensity and benefit of practice up a notch or two.

Fourth, help each other. As you train for your next test, you should also be helping at least one other person prepare for his or hers. It might be that the two of you are testing together, or it might be someone other than your regular test partner. Regardless, make it happen.

Fifth, avoid investing undue time on techniques not directly required for your next promotion. Stay focused on the task at hand.

Sixth, if you’re wearing a black belt, you had darn well better be able to demonstrate each test set in the curriculum without reference to a cheat-sheet.

Seventh, take advantage of special seminars, most especially when Amdur Sensei is here.

Eighth, invest time in aikido outside of class. Read books (particularly Ellis’ *Dueling with O-Sensei*), study the translated writings of

Ueshiba Morihei in the works published by John Stevens, acquaint yourself with the philosophical underpinnings of aikido and the historical/cultural circumstances that influenced the creation and evolution of the art.

Ultimately, everything comes down to training, and the quality of your training both inside and outside the dojo. If you approach budo simply as an occasional workout and not as a quest, as an adventurous journey toward a goal to which you are dedicating yourself, you will never get anywhere or accomplish anything other than wasting your time and mine.

Compared to our experience of practice five to ten years ago, it’s fair to say our present aikidokai has been gifted with an art that is far more practical and effective for the average student, much easier to learn, possessed of an unimpeachable lineage, and sufficient to provide all the elements for a lifetime of challenging and meaningful practice.

It’s time — past time — to expect, no, demand, far more from ourselves and to live up to the promise and potential embodied in our dojo and our aikido. Treat every class as a gift, because that’s exactly what it is.

Let that be a goal for us all. ☸

The alert insures any company making a check on your credit — as would be the case if a thief applies for credit in your name — is informed your personal information was stolen. The company will have to contact you by phone to authorize new credit.

Phone numbers for the three credit reporting organizations are:

- Equifax 800-525-6285
- Experian (TRW) 888-397-3742
- Trans Union 800-680-7289

Physical self-defense is and has always been a matter of preparation to take whatever steps are necessary, alertness, and attention to details. Protecting oneself in the information age is really no different. ☸