
Itten Dojo *Update*



— July 2005 —

PLANNING NOTES

July 16

Dojo cookout at the home of John & Melanie Butz in Boiling Springs.

July 17

Road trip to Shutokukan Dojo for Shinto Muso-ryu Jo.

August 4 through 6

Pan-American SMR Jo Gasshuku in Ohio.

Itten Dojo crew will depart Wednesday the 3rd and return Sunday the 7th.

From the dojocho...

How Much is Enough?

I'm often asked by persons considering joining the dojo — and sometimes by members — how often I think they should try to train. Typically, I point out that while there are four opportunities to train in aikido at our dojo each week, most people attend no more than two practices; some make it to three. Almost nobody routinely gets to all four.

My objective in explaining the matter this way is to encourage people to try to undertake training, even if they are uncertain of the level of commitment they are likely to manage. After all, it's possible to make progress in budo attending formal practices at a dojo only intermittently.

But only to a certain point.

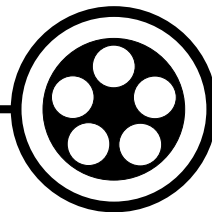
This applies to limited regular training, as well. In my experience, and I've seen this many times, it's possible to reach yonkyu (green belt) in aikido training just twice a week at the dojo, and doing nothing outside formal practices. The same, by the way, was true in karate. Getting beyond that level, however, is going to demand greater commitment, at formal practices and on one's own time, at home.

If you're aiming at a brown belt, let alone at a black belt, you'd best come to the understanding as quickly as possible that you're facing a considerable investment of time and sweat on your own, conditioning yourself with the *aiki ki ho* exercises (and maybe some serious weight training), studying the *taikyoku kuzushi*, performing solo repetitions of techniques, and getting together with a partner to polish test sets.

So, how much practice is enough?

Really, when it comes to training, we do the best we can. But there's no such thing as enough.

— Bob Wolfe



No, This Isn't the New Dojo Journal

You may have heard me talking about bringing our dojo journal back to life. That's going to happen this fall. In the meantime, welcome to the enhanced dojo monthly newsletter, *Itten Dojo Update*.

Old-timers will note that the format for this newsletter is very similar to that of *Koryu Budo News*, the in-house journal we published prior to taking on publication of *Koryu Budo* for the organization to which we belonged at the time. For a number of years we put together a 32-page journal each quarter, as well as an eight-page newsletter in the months between. I'm not planning to undertake anything of that magnitude any time soon, but with the present advantages of PDF files and electronic distribution, I'm thinking I can readily manage to do something a bit fancier each month than just pop out an e-mail with the calendar attached.

Consequently, I'm going to try a three or four-page newsletter incorporating the calendar (by publishing electronically I don't have to accommodate the

requirements of hardcopy printing and can size the newsletter each month according to the amount of information I need to convey).

You can print these newsletters if you like, but bear in mind that the PDF will be optimized for viewing on your computer screen, to make the file size as small as possible, so photos may be somewhat pixelated when printed.

As for the new journal, it will be titled *Sword and Spirit*, and will be distributed in January, April, July, and October. In addition to technical articles addressing aikido and other arts, each journal will feature philosophical topics (including provocative essays by Ellis Amdur and translations of Ueshiba Sensei's *DoKa*, "poems of the Way," courtesy of John Stevens) and advice on healthful training from Dr. Mike Nickels, as well as contributions from other of the multi-talented members of Itten Dojo.

Sword and Spirit will be a 32-page, print publication, and will be available by subscription or in single copies, with an anticipated price of \$5.00 per issue. ☺

Training Tip of the Month

Especially when just starting in our system of aikido, it's absolutely critical to recognize the importance of the taikyoku kuzushi and the fundamental exercises Amdur Sensei has developed to convey these principles. As described by Amdur Sensei, the taikyoku kuzushi represent five "themes," or manners of receiving and dealing with attacks: receptions operating in a vertical plane (ikkyoku — first theme); receptions operating in a horizontal plane (nikyoku — second theme); receptions operating in an upward spiral (sankyoku — third theme); receptions operating in a downward spiral (yonkyoku — fourth theme); and receptions operating to a point in space (gokyoku — fifth theme).

Every technique in our curriculum commences with one of the taikyoku kuzushi, and may incorporate applications of several different themes in the course of executing the waza. Recently, Shannon and Cindy were having difficulty with ikkyo, and when I demonstrated a solo exercise they could work on to improve the technique Cindy chimed in with, "Oh. That looks just like two of the taikyoku kuzushi done together."

Exactly.

The sooner a student is able to see the techniques in terms of the taikyoku kuzushi, the sooner new techniques will become just variations on themes instead of completely unfamiliar entities. But this insight will come only after extensive practice of the taikyoku kuzushi outside of class. The applications must become second nature.



News and Notes

• Itten Aikidokai

The focus of aikido practices in July will be the gokyu test set, which consists primarily of six techniques from the *honden waza* (core curriculum): Kosadori and Juntedori Ikkyo, Kosadori and Juntedori Iriminage, and Kosadori and Juntedori Shihonage. In addition, the taikyoku kuzushi are examined at the beginning of the test, along with kagi (hook) and uwate (uppercut) from the tehodoki (releases). The test concludes with a demonstration of kokyuhō.

You'll note that all "attacks" in the tewaza portion of the gokyu test set are simple grabs, either a cross-grab (kosadori) or a same-side grab (juntedori). While many styles of aikido include thrusts and overhead strikes in even the first exam, we believe this practice can — due to the complexity of establishing a connection to more dynamic attacks — lead to a bit too much collusion between partners that continues into later training. Our tests can be said to be demonstrations of kata, true, but by allowing the connection to be established by means of uke's grab we permit nage to work against measured resistance right from the start and benefit from the feedback provided by the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of his or her technique.

It goes almost without saying that July should prove exceptionally valuable to the newest members of the aikidokai, since everything we do will be targeting the skills they need to pass their first rank examination. But more experienced students should find much to challenge them, as well. The core curriculum is arranged to emphasize the interrelationships of techniques and foster the ability to shift between techniques as *henka waza*, recoveries used when an initial technique fails or is countered. While the pass we made through the *honden waza* in the first half of the year built our repertoire, during the next six months we should all be paying particular attention to achieving the ability to transition seamlessly from one technique to another as the situation demands. This will require a lot of repetition and attention to detail. ☸

• Shinto Muso-ryu Jodokai

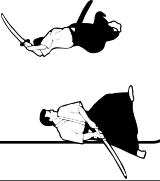

In preparation for the Pan-American Gasshuku in August, members of the jodokai should be focusing on three things this month: kihon, kihon, and kihon. You can bet that Relnick Sensei will spend the first day of the seminar closely examining the kihon of those in attendance, and much of what we ultimately do during the course of the three days will likely be determined in those opening hours. The fact that Nishioka Sensei is slated to be on hand only increases the need to do well by an order of magnitude or two...

We'll have just one more visit to Shutokukan Dojo prior to the Gasshuku, so make the most of it and watch intently everything demonstrated by Meik and Diane. When practicing sotai kihon on our own at Itten Dojo, it's imperative we recall the corrections or points of emphasis called out to us, and do our best to reproduce the finest examples of techniques we managed when in the presence of our teachers. When working tandoku kihon outside of the dojo, check footwork using the reference positions given to us by Relnick Sensei.

Remember: the goal is to avoid, at all costs, hearing Sensei say, "Where did you learn *that*?" ☸



Itten Dojo Calendar of Events — July 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31	 <p>Independence Day - Itten Dojo Closed -</p>	<p>Available for sale on the Dojo Bookshelf: <i>Old School and Dueling with O-Sensei</i>, by Ellis Amdur - as well as - <i>Classical Warrior Traditions of Japan, Vol. I - III</i>, by Diane Skoss and a variety of other books courtesy of Koryu Books (www.koryu.com)</p>		1	2	<p>Aikido (9:30 - 11:00 am; Wolfe) SMR Jo (11:00 am - 12:30 pm)</p>
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Planning News and Notes:

- Our focus for aikido classes this month is the gokyu test set. If you have a bokuto and/or jo, please be sure to bring your weapons to classes on the 12th, 13th, and 14th, for aikibuki (aikido weapons) week.
- July 16 — A summer cookout for dojo members, families, and friends at the home of John and Melanie Butz, in Boiling Springs. Details and sign-up sheet are posted at the dojo.
- August 4 - 6 — Pan-American Shinto Muso-ryu Jo Gasshuku at Kenyon College, in Ohio.