

Bu & Bun

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S. Lake Tahoe, CA



In May of this year Sensei Jen, Steve, Paula, Michael, and I will be returning to Shingu, Japan to deepen our training in Aikido. It's been almost 2 years since I've been there, and much has changed during that time. I recently received my Sandan (3rd degree blackbelt), Jen and I have integrated the teachings from the previous trip, the Bell/McGrath family has become an integral part of our community, and our student population has grown over the past 3 months. Also, our community has grown closer to our parent dojo, the Aikido Center, in Sacramento.

Expectations of us were moderately high the first time we went to Japan. But since then, my teacher has continued to build a strong relationship with the dojo in Japan and the expectations have increased considerably. Demonstrating our willingness to learn was the first step in creating a connection with Kumano Aikido Juku Dojo. Having established that tie during our first trip, we must now prove that we've been teaching and training what we were taught.

For my first trip to Japan I concentrated on fitness. I knew we would be doing a lot of aerobic activity so I trained as much as I could, especially in our 6:30am classes, and started running more often. I found that between the extra training and running, I was able to keep up on a physical level leading to fewer physical issues during my trip. However I found that mental training was the most challenging aspect of my stay.

In martial arts the concept of "beginner's mind" is used to denote a state where one is constantly learning. Long-lived practitioners often lose their "beginner's mind" and they start to think of themselves as experts or *masters*.

This is exactly the attitude that gives American visitors to Japanese dojos a bad reputation. The training in Japan can be so intense that we often fall back on technique that is safe and familiar to us, but this is a mistake that prevents us from learning. Visitors to the dojo in Shingu are expected to learn what is being taught; why else would someone spend thousands of dollars to cross the Pacific Ocean and sleep on an uncomfortable futon?

To mentally prepare for Japan, I ask myself every time I step on the mat, "What is lacking in my training, what is lacking in my teaching? How can I bring my best?" As a practitioner with over 15 years of experience, I often find it very challenging to abandon my comfort zone to become a beginner. The only way I know how to teach "beginner's mind" is to lead by example. I strive to be a student even when I'm teaching, and I approach each moment on the mat as if it were my first. Classically, Japanese martial arts were taught with little regard for explanation, and it was the student's obligation to "steal the art" from his teacher. A student can't do this while having preconceptions that will cloud his observations.

My hopes for the upcoming trip are very high. I anticipate that training will be harder than my previous visit, but I feel better prepared both spiritually and mentally. Our trip to Japan is a pilgrimage to the birthplace of our particular lineage, and should be prepared for as such. It is my desire to bring back as much of the knowledge and spirit of the Shingu dojo to help deepen our commitment to and knowledge of Aikido.

-Sensei Mark
3/26/07

Upcoming Events:

- **Peace Hero Award** Jen & Mark Sensei were nominated for *The Season for Peace and Nonviolence's* "Peace Hero" award in February. They are one of two recipients that will receive the award on Friday, **April 6th** during the closing ceremony. See Jen & Mark Sensei for more info.
- **Brown/Black belt class** in Sacramento at 10:30am-12:30pm on **April 14th**.
- **Junior's Winter Camp** Taught by Jen & Mark Sensei on **April 20-21** (Friday evening 5:00-7:30 and Saturday 9:00-3:00pm). There will be lots of training, new games, dinner, writing haiku, and community service. The cost is \$90. This year's Winter Camp theme is *connection*.
- **Promotions** will take place on **April 25th & 26th** (Wednesday & Thursday evening). Please speak with Jen & Mark Sensei if you have any questions about meeting promotion requirements.
- **Matsuri** in Sacramento to celebrate O Sensei's memorial on **April 28th & 29th**. Senseis will be doing formal demonstrations on Sunday. Please plan to attend if possible. If you are available on Sunday, please let Jen Sensei know because ukes will be needed.
- **Volunteers needed to teach** while Jen & Mark Sensei, Paula, Steve, and Michael McGrath are in Japan, **May 14-24**. The dojo needs volunteers to teach while they're gone, especially the Juniors classes. If you can help out one day a week, please let us know asap so we can prepare *together* for fun and easy classes.

April's Meditation:

Nothing in life is constant. The universe is always changing. To attempt to remain static, is to buck the natural order. Change equals growth. Choose to grow in positive, life affirming ways.

April Birthdays:

- Alex Anderton, 4/1
- Tom Smith, 4/13
- Steve Bell, 4/21
- Theresa Avance, 4/22

Editor's Note:

One of my friends passed on to me some interesting information regarding education. He discovered that MIT offers OpenCourseWare. Basically it's all their courseware online for free. It's not for getting degrees or certificates, it's simply available for the pure sake of learning. It appears that there are a number of Japanese classes available.

<http://ocw.mit.edu/index.html>

The techniques of the Way of Peace change constantly; every encounter is unique, and the appropriate response should emerge naturally. Today's techniques will be different tomorrow. Do not get caught up with the form and appearance of a challenge. The Art of Peace has no form - it is the study of the spirit.

-O Sensei

Basic Bokken Nomenclature

