

# NEWSLETTER



No.186 February 2011

AIKIDO YOSHINKAN BRISBANE DOJO

Dojo: <http://yoshinkan.info>

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## January Report

New members 5

Total number of adults training 58

## Results of Getsurei Shinsa on 28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> January

<b>Jun-Godan</b>	Emmanuel Economidis	<b>9<sup>th</sup> Kyu</b>	Matt Hede	<b>2Y1 step</b>	Oliver Bradshaw
<b>Jun-3<sup>rd</sup> Kyu</b>	Justin Charell Cameron Blake	<b>4Y1 step</b>	Matthew Watson	<b>S5 step</b>	Choi Sukchul Genevieve Sargent
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Kyu</b>	Mai Bui	<b>3Y1 step</b>	Francis Hollingworth Lawrence Monforte	<b>S4 step</b>	Peter Hills
				<b>S2 step</b>	Jocelyn Fergusson

## Events in February

### 1. Getsurei Shinsa

- Training starts, Friday 18<sup>th</sup> 7:15pm~
- Steps, Friday 25<sup>th</sup> 7:15pm~
- Shinsa, Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> 1:00pm~

### 2. This Month's Holiday of Adults' class

- Dojo's Holiday – Monday 28<sup>th</sup>

## Sharing the feeling of Black Belts

Shodan (1)

### **Returning to the beginning.**

In recent times many of my good friends at Brisbane Yoshinkan have asked me why I decided to study Yoshinkan Aikido and return to the beginning as a white belt.

As a young 15 year old I began studying a Korean martial art – Hapkido and over a period of 30 years I practiced and taught Hapkido in New Zealand. As a teacher you learn from your students and often you learn the most from the beginners who have an uncluttered and simplistic view of the study.

For a time I was also fortunate to study Kendo under a visiting sensei from Japan who was in New Zealand on business for a two year period. During this time I recall as a younger man with no responsibilities, I was happiest in the dojo when nothing else mattered except the way. I also recall with great fondness the intense smell of incense – sandal wood which our kendo sensei would have drifting through the dojo when we arrived for training. The formality and the rituals of training in the Japanese dojo were for me a wonderful thing that I remember fondly and it was this tradition that linked us to the past that I realise now was very important to me. The other aspect that stayed with me was the importance of the element of training the spirit – koryo no shugyo (spiritual training).

When I left New Zealand in 2006 – the governance of New Zealand Hapkido was in a confused state as the New Zealand Hapkido Founder had effectively retired due to health challenges. This left a leadership void in which many people struggled to come to terms with the situation including myself. Simple martial arts life balance and a sense of belonging had been lost and I realised that I needed to find a new way. I missed the old order and balance of things and I missed the guidance of my New Zealand mentor.



I began searching for a path forward and I realised I needed to return to the simple life of learning, tradition and the feeling of belonging. I needed to return to the beginning and I decided that in the near term I needed to step away from Hapkido knowing I might never return to it. In 2006 I moved to Brisbane with my family – it was time for life change and I wanted a better life for my family.

I visited a number of organisations in Brisbane where Hapkido was taught and I realised that I was from a more traditional Hapkido way – “old Hapkido”. It was this feeling of tradition and martial way – the fighting spirit - that I was looking for and I soon concluded that this was no longer present in the Hapkido that I was seeing.

I visited many Brisbane Hapkido dojo's as a white belt – I did not wear a black belt because I sensed a degree of unease from Australian Hapkido instructors. I was really looking for a place to build a new life and a martial path to travel. I grew used to the idea of returning to simple life as a white belt in a sense of renewal and I also needed to un-clutter my training and refocus on important core principles which I knew were common to Hapkido and Aikido. I also knew I wanted to find a new home to practice the traditions and the formality I had enjoyed in the kendo dojo without departing from the core practices of Hapkido and so Aikido was the way forward for me. I determined that I needed to return to kihon – foundation basic which I knew was the same for both Hapkido and Aikido – and so I made great effort to find the best school in Aikido I could.

In September 2008 I arrived at Brisbane Yoshinkan and I was greeted by a smiling Mori Sensei. I began in the dojo as a white belt – returning to beginning. Starting out is challenging for everyone in learning something new – Yoshinkan Aikido was no exception. One of my goals was to build strong basic understanding of the principals of Yoshinkan – the most important I have found to be strong spirit. Another huge benefit for me was to break down my own ego – something common to all martial arts and ever present as we gain in skill. Old habits took me time to break as I occasionally slipped into an old technique – an unnecessary punch after a leg sweep during a yonkajo technique.

The friendliness of common learning and studying of the way of Yoshinkan make our Brisbane dojo a place to be valued and I wish to thank every member of our dojo – all of whom have helped me. The unassuming nature of everyone in the dojo and the willingness to help are elements of the highest quality of learning environment that we are privileged to enjoy and which contribute to the shared sense of belonging in the dojo. The generous guidance and understanding of Mori Sensei is special – many schools do not let beginners have direct access to a principal instructor – I am deeply aware of this privilege.

Mori Sensei – thank you for your continued patience and support. I am pleased and honoured to be a member of the Brisbane Yoshinkan and I can happily say that I found the things I was looking for.

The tradition of the Brisbane Yoshinkan dojo is special – we must treasure this – and never let it fade.

Murray Booth



Shodan (2)

## **All part of the process.**

It feels like I was wearing the brown belt for so long that it was becoming a permanent part of me! But now I find myself wearing a black belt and thinking “How did this happen!?”

I don't remember exactly why I wanted to learn martial arts, but I knew the only choice for me could be Aikido. There's a strong philosophical dimension to Aikido that really resonates with me and, what's more, I'm one of the least competitive people you're likely to meet! When it comes to interacting with others I don't feel the need to “beat” them at something, or prove myself better than them because there's always someone better, right?

So I did some intensive research (i.e. the Yellow Pages) and soon found myself at the Aikido Yoshinkan Brisbane Dojo's 10th annual demo in 2005. Watching the graceful and powerful movements of the students on the mats, I thought to myself “Wow, I could never do that”. And that's exactly all the reason I needed to give it a try! Without a doubt, this is one of the best decisions I ever made. I could see immediately that there was something different about Yoshinkan Aikido.

2 weeks later I was on the mats and Lee Stemm was patiently guiding me through the first steps and etiquette. Thanks Lee for being such a dedicated teacher over the years! Interestingly, I don't remember feeling very nervous about being a beginner because life and work had already been teaching me what it means to be a beginner - it means expect to feel awkward and make many mistakes! It's all part of the process, as long as we keep learning.

During the first couple of years of training, I went mostly to day classes because I was a shift worker. I have great memories of this period and I'm very grateful to all the regular day class students who trained with me at the time and taught me so much. Unfortunately I possess a strong work ethic and soon I was working my guts out, being stretched to my limit and still training a lot. Something had to give and I went through a long period away from the dojo, devoting my energy to work commitments. When I explained my situation to Sensei, I remember him saying “Well, you are human”. So true-we have to work! I reckon we are very lucky to have a dojo that offers such a big choice of class times to suit different lifestyles. This is one example of how dedicated Sensei and Shuko-san are to this dojo and to Aikido.

Learning Aikido seems to be a lifetime journey and I had barely scratched the surface of this experience. Times change and I've been able to resume training regularly, enough to complete my Shodan grading at last. Wow! It has dawned on me very quickly that there's a whole lot of new techniques and expectations upon me. I really do feel like a beginner again! So I can expect to feel awkward and make mistakes, as long as I keep learning. It's the same as in life and work, we must keep moving forward and try to improve our character.

I really am grateful and feel privileged to be a part of this dojo. Through my own experiences I feel that Sensei is keeping the true spirit of budo alive and it's not aggressive or dominating but generous and selfless, which seems to me to be the key to a strong spirit. I sincerely thank Sensei, Shuko-san and everyone at our dojo, from beginners to seniors. My new black belt feels a bit stiff and uncomfortable...it will have to be hammered soft by more training in 2011!

Osu!

Jim Stanley



Nidan (1)

## **The Journey continues.**

Where to start, I think the most appropriate place in my circumstances would have to be by saying a very big **thank you** to Sensei for actually allowing me to continue training so soon after my big injury. So, Thank You Sensei, **OSU**.

For those who are not aware of what is meant by the above, I was involved in a high speed Motocross racing accident back in early Sept 2009. This left me with a right shoulder broken into 4 pieces. However, sensei allowed me back onto the mats after only 3-4 weeks, even with the shoulder still very much broken. I was not able to do very much except help with the beginner's course, but it did allow me to be back on the mats.

Now to some this may sound rather unusual as to why this is so significant or even why I would want to be back on the mats so soon. Well the answer is quite simple, by being back on the mats I was able to maintain some normality in my life and it also managed to keep me in touch with Aikido. What I didn't foresee coming from this was that it would in many ways improve my Aikido and start to give me greater perspective on not only my Aikido but Aikido as a whole.

By having this injury which has pretty much turned into a permanent one, has retrained me in many ways (focus on technique & not strength, using the body in a different way due to no use of right arm, constant relearning/adjusting as shoulder improved). In whole this has given me a totally new perspective of how Aikido really is a way of life no matter what your body make up or abilities/disabilities.

I would also like to thank every student I've trained with. Especially Lawrence and Jo for being great training buddies leading up to the grading and also Julian for the extra time given to throwing you around. I also need to thank Michael Bannah for being my uke on the day, even it was only organised by a number of us just to ensure he was out of the house to set up his surprise 21<sup>st</sup>.

The last subject I wish to talk about is just how lucky we are to have Sensei here and the level training we receive. I recently journeyed to Japan where I not only spent a fair amount of time training at the Honbu dojo I also was able to see a great number of students from all over the world that were there training and competing. There were a number of things that I learnt from this, 1. If you ever get a chance to see or train with other dojos around the world, then do so. There is so much that can be learnt by others. 2. By doing this I have got to see just how high a level of training we actually have here. and 3. The extreme amount of respect and awe people have from around the world for Mori Sensei.

There is a little bit of a story to number 3, in that I very quickly found that when asked what dojo I was from there was a very similar response from everyone every time. (You train with Mori Sensei) then normally followed by them wanting to watch everything you do and try at every chance to train with you. I believe this really showed me just how lucky we are and how much of a legend Sensei really is.

To finish with I'm not sure if I can express enough my heartfelt thanks and admiration to Sensei and Shuko san for their training, support and encouragement. I believe I will continue to appreciate every second of it.

OSU!

Francis Hollingworth

Nidan (2)



## **A night of training.**

SEIZA!!!

At this strong yet clear command the students reply with OSU!!!

A line is formed with the senior student who so strongly yells SEIZA!!! Positioning themselves a mat ahead of the rest of the class, whilst the other students quickly and sharply make their way into organised and neat lines.

It is now time to focus, every student lining up with their eyes closed have five minutes to let their distractions dissolve, let their minds and bodies focus into one and empty any heavy thoughts. Three minutes past and some students start to feel the slight onset of pain from sitting in seiza but it does not deter any single one of them from the training that lies ahead. Four minutes past and everyone is very aware that class will start soon they are just waiting, ready...

The sound of their teacher making his first bow onto the mats is the indication that class will soon begin. Upon their teacher ever so smoothly and flawlessly kneeling in front of the shinza, the senior student strongly and spiritedly yells SHINZEN NI RAY!!! There is a silent bow from the students behind, the teacher turns around to face the prepared students and again the senior yells a command to the teacher himself.. SENSEI NI RAY!!! This time there is no silent bow from the students, as the teacher lets out a strong OSU!!! The students return the universal word OSU!!! In strong spirit and making the sound of thunder slap the mats then springing to their feet, finding their positions for taiso and very happily and eagerly begin their training session.

Whilst the senior heavily counts out loud ITCH, NI!!!! They here the echo of SAN, SHI!!! And there is no mistaking; everyone is ready to train with all they have, until they have taken two steps outside of the Brisbane Yoshinkan Dojo's door...

I believe that we all know what happens in the next forty-five minutes of class and it is definitely full of challenges ☺ It has now been four years since starting Aikido at this dojo and is the first time of ever doing martial arts and it has been one of my best experiences in life. The first part to this article was trying to set the scene of how much depth there is to how we train and how our attitudes could best be served for our training. The best way for us to train, I believe is to train with a strong spirit, a spirit of yes I can even though after finishing a technique we may sometimes think NO I CANT! ☺

This is such a good opportunity for us to take a look at ourselves, because it is surprising when we take a look at ourselves from an outside perspective there is so much natural doubt, that we may or may not be conscious of (this is strong in me) ☺. When we are training we start at a level, but to me we do not always need to grow up, sometimes we need to grow deeper. To explain this better, when our levels go up we our technique becomes stronger, our balance improves and our knowledge grows. To grow deeper means to look into the technique's themselves and not only see our body movements, but also to see how and why the techniques work. Why move to this or that angle? Why is Sensei saying this? These are good questions to ask ☺ watching is not our only tool to practice aikido, we are also blessed with the sense of feeling, this is especially evident when getting thrown... hard ☺ It is a major bonus to pay attention to what your shite is doing and for shite what uke is doing. To gain deeper insight, we have to dig ☺ and the deeper we get the harder it is to dig, this is lucky because we are forced to learn more and find new ways to grow. So please do not be discouraged when these challenges arise because if Aikido was easy we would all have world class Dojo's like this one.

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Now in facing doubt our strong spirit is needed, just like to face the challenges and obstacles of training, we need spirit and please believe me when I say we all have a strong spirit within.. Everyone!! Just like we need to find the essence of our technique by travelling deeper, we also need to find the essence of ourselves, of what's in our hearts by delving deeper and deeper into whom we are. Like we hone our skills in techniques to be strong and of a pure nature, we must also hone ourselves into having light and clear hearts.

This is my mission in life and Aikido, and man do I have a lot of work ahead ☺

It is also important to say that the value of having everyone who trains there is priceless, to train with you all has been a great pleasure, because by us all being at training, we all contribute to each other's development as Aikido-ka and human beings ☺

And it goes without saying that Sensei and Shuko's dedication to the Dojo and us students is limitless, Thankyou ☺

OSU!

Lawrence Monforte