

NEWSLETTER

No.285 May 2019

AIKIDO YOSHINKAN BRISBANE DOJO

Dojo: <http://yoshinkan.info>

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April Report New members 0 Total number of adults training 45					
Results of Getsurei Shinsa on 26th & 27th April					
5th Kyu	Shane Baptist	9th Kyu	Roy Chan	2Y5step	Louis Chatfield
6th Kyu	Danielle Gravalin			2Y3 step	Duong Thai
8th Kyu	Michael Mader	3Y2 step	Stephen Cuthbert	2Y1 step	Kerry Nicholson
	Ayumi Mori	2Y6 step	Greg Burley	S1 step	Ana Cuthbert
Events in May					
1. Getsurei Shinsa			2. Aiki-waza Class		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Training starts, Thursday 16th 6:00pm~• Steps, Friday 24th 7:15pm~• Shinsa, Saturday 25th 1:00pm~			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saturday 18th 1-3pm• Please take this special opportunity to feel and learn Aiki-waza from Sensei!		
			3. This Month's Holiday		
			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Labour Day 6th Monday• Dojo Holiday 27th Monday		

Sharing the feeling of Black Belts

Godan (5th Dan)

Well, it's almost twenty years since I first walked through the doors at the Brisbane Yoshinkan Aikido Dojo. I still remember it as if it was yesterday. The first class I did focussed on *hijiata kokyū nage*. I remember thinking how nuanced the movements were – how such a slight angle change created such a difference in the affect to uke - and how intrigued I was in this magical art from the onset!

Now, I hold a 5th Dan rank, teach this wonderful art and continue to graciously follow the path laid before me by Mori Shihan. I'd like to begin by thanking Sensei for having the belief in me to start a dojo and teach this wonderful way of life we call 'Aikido' to a standard he is happy with. This is my first aim for the Sunshine Coast Dojo.

Amazingly, it has been through teaching that I have been able to solidify *kamae* and the *kihon* (basics), which I feel has improved my technique personally and helped develop a better understanding of the centre line. In turn, this has allowed me to begin to explore deeper into Aikido movement and the control of *uke*. I remember a conversation with Sensei years ago, after completing my 3rd Dan and not long after relocating to the Sunshine Coast. It was about progressing one's technique. It went something like this:

"A lot of people train from shodan to 3rd or 4th Dan and stagnate in their technique and their understanding of Aikido...", pointed out Sensei.

To which I replied, *"Yes, I feel this myself in that it's like I've plateaued or my progress is not as rapid as it once was when I was a shodan."*

Sensei continued, *"Most find further growth once they begin to teach."*

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Now, I know that most at the dojo already know that Mori Sensei chooses his words wisely and very rarely says something without greater meaning or suggestion. Therefore, I walked away from this conversation considering the idea that Sensei might think I'm ready to teach – i.e. my technique must be 'basically adequate' to teach the fundamentals of Yoshinkan Aikido at a level that which Sensei would be content and endorse. Then the questions and self-doubt began... *How can I be ready to teach this? I'm only a lowly 3rd Dan. I don't feel ready to teach. What does ready feel like? I'm only beginning to really learn this art, and don't teachers need more experience? Better skill? Deeper understanding? What if my students' technique isn't any good? Isn't this an indication of my teaching? Of course it is! What if my dojo doesn't uphold the reputation and standard of 'Yoshinkan' dojos around the world? I can't let Sensei down! ...* And so it went. Yes, self-doubt can be paralysing for anyone if fed, watered and nurtured. But I used Sensei's confidence in me as strength on which to base small steps in building the dojo over the following years, and I simply applied myself to realising the opposite of every one of those questions above. After all, if I was ever going to achieve Gozo Shioda 'Kancho' Sensei's ideal of '*aiki soku seikatsu*' (aikido and life are one), I first had to make Aikido my life!

I've always lived my life by the maxim, '*The easier you make life, the harder life becomes. The harder you make life, the easier life becomes*'. I've found this to be true from my early twenties to how I live my life today in my forties. In my twenties I was working full-time as a butcher from midnight to midmorning, studying at university full-time from midmorning through to the evening and training in Aikido 3 to 4 times per week at the Brisbane Dojo. I trained in day classes at lunchtime as a break from study and evening classes on my way home from university (when possible I'd try to make day and evening classes on the same day). Yes, it was hard, but I knew it would get easier once my body allocated the necessary energy and my skill developed over time. That is to say, life got easier because I became used to the hardship; I guess I was now training for any further difficulties I would confront later in life!

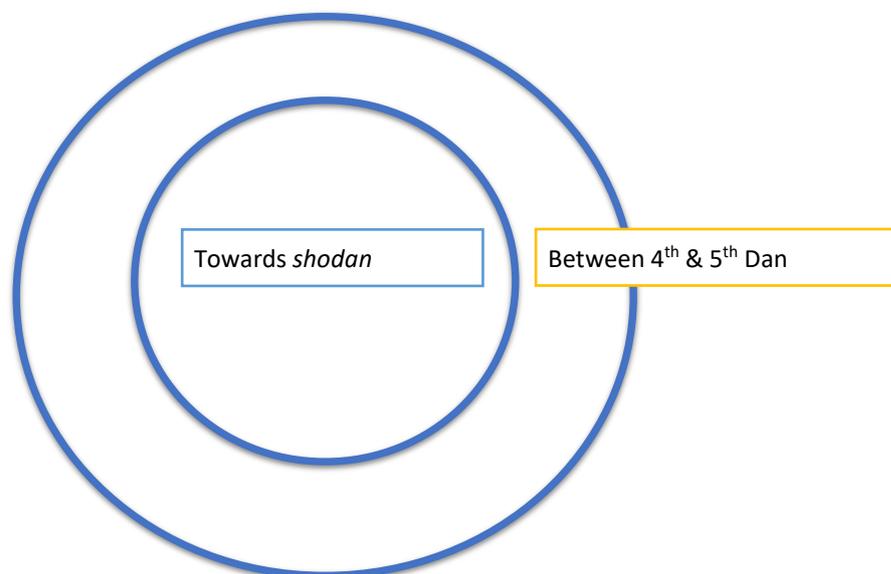
Whilst finishing my degree, working and training in Aikido, Cindy and I had our first child Zara. After losing our first child Renee at 20 weeks, Zara was a gift. However, she was born with cerebral palsy and we began the journey of supporting and providing therapy (Botox injections twice a year; regular physiotherapy; daily stretching routines; regular plaster casts on both legs etc.) for a child with a disability. I don't mean this to sound like a sop-story for sympathy, I simply want to make the point that difficulty just became life for us, but it had its peaks and troughs like any parenting journey. Now, thirteen years on, our life with Zara is easy – the harder it became in the earlier days, the stronger we all became and the easier life has become now as a result ☺ Zara is one of the most caring, compassionate, loveable and able human beings I have ever met, and Cindy and I are both better people for being her parents, thanks to her. Needless to say, after graduating as a teacher and beginning work in high schools I needed to continue work on weekends as a butcher to pay the bills so that Cindy could stay home to support Zara. Again, the earlier maxim set us up for this and life didn't remain hard for long. You probably wonder why I'm writing all this... and question what this has to do with Aikido? I apologise for digressing into my personal life so much and I'll now bring this back to Aikido - it is all related in the '*aiki soku seikatsu*' manner. I'll return through Gozo Shioda 'Kancho' Sensei and let him provide insight here and bring my musings to a point. When asked by Aiki News just a few years prior to his passing about what he thought of today's Aikido, Kancho Sensei's response was that,

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“Today’s aikido is so dimensionless. It’s hollow, empty on the inside. People try to reach the highest levels without even paying their dues. That’s why it seems so much like a dance these days. You have to master the very basics solidly, with your body, and then proceed to develop to the higher levels... Now we see nothing but copying or imitation without any grasp of the real thing...”

In other words, training in one’s early stages needs to be hard, rigorous and arduous. It needs to be felt in the body. In Kancho Sensei’s view, many people are doing what they think is Aikido, but it has no substance, no strength, no centre. It hasn’t been developed through hardship and rigour. This is why in the twenty years of training at the Brisbane Dojo under Mori Sensei I’ve always sought to attend as many classes as possible (advanced, general, Hajime, and double classes where possible) even when things already felt difficult in other areas of my life. I believed that this would give me the opportunity to feel the most rigour possible and deepen my Aikido development and understanding. I guess it’s the same in all aspects of life. To pursue a life of happiness without ever exposing yourself to hardship, compromise and complex emotion felt in the body, will lead to what Kancho Sensei terms ‘dimensionless, hollow and emptiness inside’, just as in our Aikido technique. Those who know me best, know that in other aspects of my life, I always strive to complete difficult tasks to further enrich my life, develop my humanity and possibly provide a good role model for my children and my students young and old. This is how I strive to live out ‘*aiki soku seikatsu*’ within and beyond the dojo.

Looking forward into my future in Aikido, I first reflect on the significant moments over the twenty years that I have experienced most growth. As I mentioned earlier, I feel I experienced the greatest growth around the *shodan* stage (the real beginning) and between 4th and 5th Dan. Therefore, I see my training so far in two concentric circles:



For me, it felt as if doors opened at these two significant times to ‘unlock’ Aikido knowledge or insight, I guess it’s much like unlocking new levels in a video game. It has been at these moments after extensive training, I believe, that I have been able to overcome SOME faults/blocks/shortcomings/errors in my technique and gain access to a greater understanding of Aikido than I had previously. In wonder where and when the door exists in the third concentric circle? Nevertheless, none of this would have been possible had it not been for the prompting and pressure

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offered to me by Mori Sensei. For this I am eternally grateful. And while I am thanking significant people, I'd also like to thank my wife Cindy as without her support, my recent 5th Dan, the Sunshine Coast Dojo and any of my initiatives in life would always come up *'hollow'* and *'empty'*. I guess I need to also thank the 'big fella' too. Thanks Lawrence, for all your support and generous giving of yourself! I look forward to reciprocating the gesture!

I now look to the next stage in this journey: what happens after 5th Dan? In one respect, I am excited to see what quality of student I can produce at the Sunshine Coast Dojo – both in terms of their level of Yoshinkan Aikido technique and development of their humanity. On another level, I am excited to follow further where Mori Sensei may journey and explore deeper into the world of Aikiwaza – where seemingly less is always more. I just hope to continue to develop sufficiently what Kancho Sensei termed *'paying one's dues'* so that I master *'the very basics solidly, with my body, and then proceed to develop to the higher levels'* and avoid at all costs *'dimensionless,' 'hollow'* and *'empty'* Aikido, or should I say life!

Osu!

Ryan Slavin
