

NEWSLETTER

No.318 February 2022

AIKIDO YOSHINKAN BRISBANE DOJO

Dojo: <http://yoshinkan.info> Facebook: <http://bit.ly/dojofb>

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|--|----------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| January Report | | | |
| New members 0 | | Total number of adults training 23 | Total number of children training - |
| Results of Getsurei Shinsa on 28th January | | | |
| 3Y6 step | Janna Malikova | 3Y6 step | Vladimir Roudakov |
| Events in February | | 2. This Month's Holiday | |
| 1. Getsurei Shinsa | | • Dojo's Holiday 28 th Monday | |
| • Training starts, Friday 18 th 7.15pm~ | | | |
| • Steps, Friday 25 th 7:15pm~ | | | |
| • Shinsa, Saturday 26 th 1:00pm~ | | | |

Sharing the feeling of Black Belts

Nidan

What's in a grade?

It's taken me 6 years to go from Shodan to Nidan, which by any measure is a long time. It's not like I don't enjoy the grading itself, but I have always been a bit suspicious of any grading as a measure of ability. What do grades really mean anyway? Is Nidan supposed to be twice as good as Shodan? Surely your ability to do the technique is the most important thing, not how many certificates you hold?

When I first started doing martial arts I was 17 and joined this hash-up called 'Fu-Su' back in the UK, created by an American who had fought over in Vietnam then studied martial arts in Korea. Looking back it wasn't the most authentic back-story, but I really got into it and dutifully worked my way up through the grades over 1 year or so.

Then one day this new student, an older guy who joined after me, was suddenly promoted from white to black belt, overnight! As you can imagine that was very disheartening and made me question the whole belt system, it appeared that the school valued commitment to the institution over study of the art. This is where I first developed my distrust of the grading concept.

I was still interested in the martial arts though, and started looking for another martial art and reading up about the different approaches. I found Wing Chun, a Chinese martial art popularised by Bruce Lee and that involved a lot of very dynamic techniques (sticking hands or 'chi sao'). Wing Chun really focusses on close contact fighting and it also appealed to me because I had read that it wasn't traditionally based on a rigid grading system.

I found a local Wing Chun school, started training and really enjoyed it, but to my disappointment they also had a rigid grading system that focussed on static 'kata', not the really fun sparring bit. So with the infinite wisdom of a 22 year old, I decided not to waste time with their grading syllabus, and just focussed on the sparring, speed and power training. This worked for a while but I eventually reached the point where students with the same experience as me, but who had done their gradings, were hived-off to

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study the advanced techniques, and I was stuck repeating the basic techniques.

Lesson learnt: If you're going to study, you have to trust the teachers teaching method, not just aspire to his technical ability.

Fast-forward 20 years to when I started Aikido, and I obviously knew I should commit to the grading system, and that the best way to learn would be the way Sensei wanted to teach us. When I started the step grades that come after Shodan I set myself a target to do a step grading every two or three months but every time I got to grading time the same things would happen;

I would start the training with a few things I was happy with and a few I was less happy with, and during the training sessions I would polish all the techniques to a point where I was confident that I knew how they all worked. I would get to the point where I was happy with all the techniques, a couple of days from grading, looking forward to doing the grading, just about ready to sign up.....and then I'd spend 10 minutes training with one of the seniors.

They would show me a glimpse of how I could make the technique 50% better just by making a simple adjustment, but it would only be a glimpse! I'd practice the improvement and maybe one time in ten I'd get a nebulous hint of a feeling of how it could be better, so slight that I couldn't reproduce it, but enough to know that 90% of the time I WASN'T doing it anywhere near as good as I thought!

That would be enough to cancel any thoughts of grading that month, and I would spend at least the next month focussing on just that one simple adjustment and trying to perfect it. You can guess what happened next? I'd get the hang of that adjustment and be ready to do the grading, and then they would show me something else and I would delay grading again to focus on this new thing.....

I don't know if this means I am a perfectionist, or just easily distracted like a kitten with a ball of string, but sometimes it felt like the only way I would get to do an actual grading was to train with blinkers on for the last few sessions!

My wife, Mary, finally solved this for me when she pointed out that as the list of techniques for all the dan gradings are basically the same, how can you expect to be perfect at everything at 2nd dan? I think she was just bored of waiting and wanted to see the Nidan grading!

Anyway, thank you Sensei for your patience with all of us, Shuko-san for looking after everyone, and the senior students for giving me new 'balls of string' to play with – don't stop doing it!

I promise to try and not get so distracted when training for Sandan. Osu!

OSU!

Dean Jones