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Azami Update

Shunkato

June 2009

Shunkato Nouveau!**A Rambling Commentary and
Some Random Pictures**

A few years have passed since the last publication of a *Shunkato* newsletter. The majority of readers will actually assume this to be the first one. The nature of our operating environment is such that only a handful of core Azami-Kai members remain, even from five years ago. In preparing for this issue, I glanced over the former editions and cast my mind over the people and circumstances that featured at that time. Many people have moved on: some to practise elsewhere, others to new things. Although sometimes sad, this is part of the natural evolution of the organization and a sign of healthy development.



An early course with Okamoto Sensei
Familiar faces? Not that many...

I don't think that reflection and nostalgia are harmful *per se*. Each time I visit Japan, and particularly Hombu Dojo, I have to deal with a similar wave of reminiscences. Many of my teachers from that time are dead and friends dispersed worldwide. And Tokyo itself is continuously regenerating itself almost beyond recognition. The past is, allegedly, a great place to visit but not one to live in...

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Future Editions of Shunkato

We aim to produce an Azami-Kai newsletter approximately biannually, and welcome submissions. Please email any suggestions or articles to:
lesa.longley@ed.ac.uk by 31st October 2009 for inclusion in the next issue.





Hombu Dojo and thereabouts,
somewhere between 1985 and 1990

I discontinued the publication of *Shunkato* at that time for a couple of simple reasons: There was insufficient support in the production process and I was struggling to carry the load myself; and there was little evidence of a broad enough readership to justify this effort. These factors were grounded in the fact that the organization was neither large enough nor generating enough news to require a regular newsletter. The existence of this edition stands to the fact that our situation has evolved: membership has increased and diversified and we host and participate in a greater range of regular events.

Every strand running through our lives is in a state of evolution. The Azami-Kai of five years ago is linked to the present only by a handful of people and the aikido we practise, which in itself has changed. My own aikido is also in a constant state of flux, with an inflow of new influences and successive revelations. The process naturally takes place by a combination of supplementing and replacing existing knowledge. By letting go of what we have learned, no matter how painstaking the process, we facilitate growth. Rigid adherence to what we already know impedes this process.

Some words from the Founder, Morihei Ueshiba:

*Spring forth from the Great Earth;
Billow like Great Waves;
Stand like a tree, sit like a rock;
Use One to strike All.
Learn and forget!*

The final line, "learn and forget" is one that is often quoted, with some puzzlement.

Particularly for beginners, facing a rigid grading syllabus, the measure of progress often seems to be the ability to remember and reproduce verbatim the aikido they are taught.

"Learn and forget" is, to me, a way of telling us not to form unhealthy attachments towards our existing achievements. Today's techniques are different from yesterday's. They are not necessarily better and don't supersede or contradict what has already been taught. All is continuously new.

At its simplest, the message is 'don't live in the past'. In aikido, in life, there never was a fixed point called "the past" to idealize or reject. By all means take a cup of kindness for its auld lang syne's sake, but remember that the true euphoria is in the present.

Finally, several people have asked about the name, *Shunkato*, and its derivation. In a way, it is a joke, or at least a pun (not my own, I actually first saw it in bar in Fukushima). The best explanation I have heard was through a comparison with an advertisement by an airline a few years ago, which featured the copy: ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ. The unwritten punchline being, of course, “No Q”.

The three characters comprising the word *Shunkato*, shown at the top of this newsletter, are *haru* (spring), *natsu* (summer) and

fuyu (winter). In Japanese, “No autumn” would be *aki nai*, which also means unwearying, or never getting tired of or bored with something. Hopefully, within the ever-changing framework of Azami-Kai and the aikido we practise, we can cultivate a state of constant regeneration that lives up to this maxim.

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Course with Sugawara Shihan

Sugawara Shihan Seminar 2009

In February this year Azami-Kai were honoured with a second visit by Sugawara Shihan from Hombu dojo. The course was held in Meadowbank Stadium and was well attended by Azami-Kai students as well as other aikidoka from elsewhere in Britain and Europe.

As ever Sugawara Sensei's aikido was inspirational, demonstrating several techniques in great detail. Talking to students afterwards it was apparent that Sugawara Sensei's teachings had an immediate impact, with many students picking up points to work on over the next few months. On a personal level I learned a lot, and found several areas to work on following from this. We also have the advantage that Dave Ross has a video of the course, so if anyone wants to go through it in more detail please contact him.

Overall I feel the course was a success, and I hope we can continue to attract Sugawara Sensei to Scotland for years to come.

Christian Riley
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Seminar with Okamoto Sensei

In October 2008, we held another successful seminar with Okamoto Sensei from Aikido Kyoto (www.aikidokyoto.com). This was her sixth visit since Azami-Kai's founding, with steady growth in attendance year on year. As a result of this ongoing commitment, Yoko has a unique perspective on Azami-Kai's development and has been a huge influence on the aikido we practise.

Okamoto Sensei was my senior at Hombu Dojo when I arrived in 1985, and a mainstay student of Yamaguchi Sensei and Shibata Sensei. Thereafter, she founded Portland Aikikai, which is flourishing independently under her direction, before returning to Japan and setting up Aikido Kyoto.

Despite the pressing demands for Sensei to teach elsewhere in Europe and the U.S., she has continued to make time for Scotland and for Azami-Kai. In addition, several of our members have trained at Aikido Kyoto. Hopefully, this exchange will continue and we will be able to host another Okamoto Sensei seminar in the near future.

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Promotions, May 2009

Kyu gradings were held around the beginning of May, resulting in the following promotions.

6th Kyu

Mike Dewar
Ronald Birrell

5th Kyu

James Mathews
Harry Gooch
Richard Lukett

4th Kyu

Linde Hess
Lesla Longley

3rd Kyu

Deborah Sheringham
Toni Carruthers

2nd Kyu

Dave Ross
Vince James
Brian O'Hare
Lee MacDonald
Greg Luke

1st Kyu

Paul Fleming
Niels Hermannsson

In addition, permission was given for the following people to wear hakama within Azami-Kai:

Brad MacKay
Neil Squires
Deborah Sheringham
Toni Carruthers

In December 2008, Eric Archer was also promoted to nidan.

The next kyu gradings are planned for around October (date to be announced nearer the time) with a dan grading to follow in December.

Training Trip to Japan

At the beginning of April, I got the chance to head off to Japan again for a bit of a training trip. Neil and I flew from Edinburgh early in the morning to Tokyo, via Paris. Air France managed their usual blend of thinly veiled indifference and culinary “mastery”. Overall the trip was pretty effortless and we arrived in Tokyo the next day in fair shape.

We once again stayed at the weekly mansion in Iidabashi which provides a nicely self-contained mini apartment at a reasonable price for Tokyo. The next morning we started training at Hombu Dojo, attending Doshu’s morning class. It was good to be back on the mats in Hombu again. I am starting to develop a picture of who is who and where to go looking for a specific type of practice. The morning class is well attended and means you need to have a lot more awareness when throwing your partner and taking ukemi.

The days in Tokyo soon settled into a rhythm—morning training followed by breakfast, a bit of rest then more training. Repeat as necessary.

At the beginning of the second week a couple of familiar faces turned up at Hombu Dojo. Ken and Linda from London arrived for a couple of weeks training and a holiday. They have often traveled to our courses in Edinburgh and it was nice to see them in Japan. On the Wednesday night we all went out to dinner with Kobayashi Sensei and Sugawara Sensei, joined by two more aikidoka from the UK.

After about 10 days in Japan Neil, Naoko and Momo left Tokyo for a few days to visit relatives and left me to my own devices. I would love to tell you that I seized the opportunity to be let loose in Tokyo on a Friday night by myself, and indeed that was the plan. The reality was being fast asleep by about 9pm, exhausted after the week.

Fully refreshed I awoke on Saturday morning and decided I would get out of the city too. I jumped on a train to Kamakura, politely buying a normal ticket and mistakenly sitting in the first class cabin almost all the way. Kamakura is a great day trip from Tokyo and well worth seeing for the beach and Big Buddha.



Kamakura Daibutsu, Kotokuin Temple

On Sunday afternoon we had one of the highlights of the trip. Hombu Dojo was holding a seminar with Tada Sensei (9th Dan). This was someone I had wanted to see for a long time; as he no longer has a class at Hombu I have missed seeing him each time I visited. The class didn’t disappoint. Although he is 80 years old this year somebody must have forgotten to mention to Tada Sensei that you are meant to slow down! He started with a 40-minute lecture on various complicated topics that I fear I would really have struggled with even if my Japanese was perfect. Then we moved onto some “basic” breathing exercises designed to develop Ki. Sensei mentioned about half way through that he was probably going to run over by about 90 minutes. I got the impression that he was struggling to give us what he considered the absolute minimum amount of information that we were going to need to work on these things. I left in a daze.

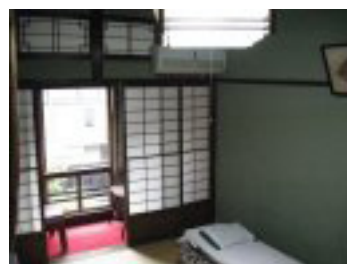


Ninnaji Temple, Kyoto

Our second full week saw us all leave Tokyo and head to Kyoto, to train with Okamoto Sensei. These classes were great and we trained in Sensei's new full time Dojo in a rather funky neighborhood of Kyoto. The second night in Kyoto Naoko had managed to book us into Ninnaji Temple. This was a great and relaxing place to stay. Everyone agreed that a slightly longer stay, of say 40 or 50 years, would be totally acceptable.

After our flying visit to Kyoto we made our way back to Tokyo for one final night before flying home. All in all a busy trip, hectic at times but well worth it for anyone who has a chance to go.

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Azami-Kai Dojo Roundup

Edinburgh Aikikai

Edinburgh Aikikai classes, based at the Royal Commonwealth Pool, form the core of Azami-Kai's activities. It is still the home dojo for the majority of students and provides by far the fullest and most flexible schedule. Moreover, it serves as a hub where members of other Azami-Kai dojos and visitors from elsewhere can drop in to train with a broader range of aikidoka.

But to speak of Edinburgh Aikikai is, in effect, to speak of two dojos. In an interesting parallel with Hombu Dojo, *asageiko*, or morning classes, take on an identity of their own. Needless to say, there is a considerable overlap, but many *asageiko* devotees tend not to attend other classes, and a significant number of other students decide that mornings are not for them.

To assess overall numbers is difficult. I find it more honest to report average class sizes than unrealistic registration figures. The mornings have stabilized over the past two years or so, and generally attendance is

between six and ten. This may not seem a huge number of people, but bearing in mind that I was often told at the outset that to make a success of a regular—never mind daily—class at that time day in Scotland was impossible, I consider this an excellent record.

Indeed, I don't know of any other dojos in the UK to have achieved this, and only a handful in Europe and elsewhere.

Evening and weekend classes are larger and have a more diverse core membership, with a substantial throughput of newcomers. The retention ratio in the martial arts generally is very low. This is simply a feature of our environment. Of ten people coming along to try out aikido, one may stick.

Accordingly, while we generally have between 10 and 20 at classes, this will include faces never seen before (and often never again), so the atmosphere is radically different from *asageiko*. Ideally, I think that students should try to find a combination of the two types of class to maximize their training potential.

Royal Commonwealth Pool—Relocation Update

Many of you will be aware that the Royal Commonwealth Pool is closing for refurbishment at the end of June. After Azami-Kai's first two years, we managed to centralize our classes at the RCP. The dependence of Edinburgh Aikikai on this venue has therefore been absolute. The closure is by far the biggest upheaval in our training to date. At this point in time, nothing is finalized. It seems very likely that *asageiko* and some of the weekend and evening classes will move to Ainslie Park, with a possibility of Meadowbank Stadium housing some other slots. Please keep a close watch on the Azami-Kai website for updates on the situation.

This move is going to boost our rental costs significantly. In order to absorb these expenses and to ensure continuity of as

full a schedule as possible, I have decided to increase the monthly fee to £45. This is the first rise in prices for approximately five years, and should be largely offset by the fact that we should no longer have to pay the (extremely irritating) one pound entrance fee to reception as we do at the RCP.

For the time being, our priority is continuity of the organization, but I am hoping that the relocation will actually serve as a stimulus and gateway for expansion, enabling us to reach new potential markets and consolidate the loyalty of our existing membership. I look forward to everyone's cooperation through this challenging transition.

Neil Blacknell
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Edinburgh Aikikai Children's Class

It's now been over two years since we started the children's aikido class. This wasn't the first attempt, but we built on a new foundation with a new time slot on Sunday mornings (11:00–12:00). The minimum age for training is five years old. We have abandoned the drop-in system, and fees are paid monthly to ensure at least one month's commitment. We introduced a membership card similar to the one at Hombu dojo, to be ticked at the beginning of each month, and for a little extra you can get your name written in Japanese. After a little advertising we waited for the bus loads of kids eager to discover the way. But which way?

It started slowly but steadily, and thanks to parents' support very soon we could rely on a reliable turnout of at least one child per class. Two years on we now have 12 kids attending the class regularly, out of a total of 25 who have continued since the beginning. That's an interestingly low drop-out rate, and once again thanks to the parents and carers for their commitment.

To keep focus and interest high we introduced a grading system quite similar to the one for adults. We've doubled the number of kyu up to twelve and children are given coloured belts to mark their progress. There will be another grading at the end of June.

Teaching helps your own understanding of a subject, and teaching children is no different. Starting from scratch we had to define priorities and emphasis which hopefully are not too different from our own adult practice. We try to put ukemi and cooperation with one's partner at the centre of each class. Through language and etiquette, aikido also provides a good framework to diversify a teaching where the main difficulty is to be repetitive without being boring. It's surprising how much children can take on board in a short time. For that matter a few students are already fluent in Japanese.

In the last few months we have recruited two young teenagers in the class; before that the class was quite even in terms of age (5–8 years). This new blood raises the question of a teenage class—although one of the most promising age groups, teenagers are almost nonexistent in our dojo. An extra hour for the kids would be a bonus as well. Still the future remains uncertain. With the RCP closure eminent, we hope everybody will follow the dojo wherever the relocation will be.

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Edinburgh University Aikido Club

The University Club was founded over four years ago, with initial core members of Azami-Kai students who attended the University of Edinburgh. Over time the composition of the class has changed, so that the majority of students are training in Aikido for the first time. As students gain more experience they are encouraged to also train at Edinburgh Aikikai, with some notable successes.

Due to the class being semester-based there is a lull over the summer months, followed by a fresh influx of students each new academic year. Classes start up in September

and normally kick off with the university martial arts fair, where we give a demonstration to freshers. Classes are on a Tuesday evening (18:00–19:30), so if anybody fancies sharing their Aikido experience with the students please turn up. Alternatively if you just want an extra training class in the evening, you'll always be welcome. Hope to see some of you on the mat.

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St Andrews Aikikai

The club meets twice weekly on Wednesdays (20:30-22:00, 23:00 if you include the customary pint at The Central!) and Sundays (15:15-17:00) at Madras College, Kilrymont campus. Blacknell Sensei teaches most Wednesdays—doggedly traversing Fife in the Suzuki, often with Andy Rayne riding shotgun. Club senior and stalwart Brad MacKay has taken over Sunday teaching duties since Professor Iain Munro's departure to Austria in February (where he is reportedly injecting some Azami-Kai flair into the local Aikido).

Regulars Lee and Greg travel from as far afield as Cupar and Kirkcaldy, and their religious commitment has recently paid

dividends in the form of successful 2nd Kyu gradings. The duo is famous for demonstrating the same focus in the pub after class as they do on the mat.

We have recently seen the arrival of a number of new and promising beginners joining us as we head into the summer.

Harry Gooch
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Glasgow Aikikai

I never intended to settle in Edinburgh's evil twin but as "summer" comes around again, Glasgow Aikikai is already in its second year. It was founded on a solid core of Azami-Kai ex-pats but after a diaspora, we now have members in such exotic places as California, New Zealand and Nottingham. Fortunately, we also have three very experienced aikidoka who have been invaluable to the class, and once they even let Ron stick his head through the wall of their private dojo. Internet advertising has attracted some unusual interest: I made my radio debut broadcasting throughout the whole of Govan; and an architect visited the dojo to draw us, giving us muscles and good posture. We've had a high turnover of new students so we are having a major recruitment drive this summer. I would encourage anyone from the

Edinburgh dojo to come through on any day beginning with "T" and train with us. I could pick you up from the station or if you're lucky Sensei might give you a lift from Edinburgh. It's an easy way to fit in some extra training if you're not up to anything that evening and your presence would be valued. There have been many landmarks since the inception of Glasgow Aikikai and I hope that September will see our third crop of 6th kyu gradings.

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UKA Summer School

As we move into the monsoon season known in Scotland as summer, thoughts are turning towards the UKA Summer School in Shropshire. The summer school is held at Harper Adams University College (full details are at http://www.ukaonline.co.uk/uka_online/summer_school/summer_school_main.htm).

Azami-Kai students have been attending the UKA summer school for over half a decade now, and the week of Aikido is always good, with exceptional teaching coming from either Sugawara Shihan or Kobayashi Shihan (alternate years). This year Kobayashi Shihan will be the guest instructor and I encourage anybody who is interested to make the effort and head south. This year there are

several students from Azami-Kai attending, and it's a good opportunity to train with aikidoka from outside the Azami-Kai dojos. Hope to see you there.

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Sugawara Shihan



Kobayashi Shihan

Doshu UK Visit 2010



The Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba, is to teach a course in the UK. It will be his first visit since 1999, and his first ever since assuming his current position. The seminar will be held from Friday June 18 to Sunday June 20, 2010, at the Welsh Institute for Sport, in Cardiff, South Wales. Doshu will be accompanied by his son, Waka Sensei (Mitsuteru Ueshiba), who is also scheduled to teach at the event. For more information, see www.doshu.co.uk.

Moriteru Ueshiba was born in 1951 and is the Second Doshu of the Aikikai. He succeeded his father, Kisshomaru Ueshiba in 1999, and is the grandson of the founder of aikido, Morihei Ueshiba. In 1986, he became Dojocho, or director, of Hombu Dojo.

Doshu teaches *asageiko* every morning at 6:30 in Hombu Dojo, in addition to Friday evenings and Sunday mornings. Much of the aikido practised throughout Azami-Kai derives directly or indirectly from Doshu. The course in Cardiff is a rare opportunity to see the Doshu without travelling to Japan. A group Azami-Kai trip is currently being planned.



Rei ni Hajimari Rei ni Owaru

Aikido—as with other martial arts, the tea ceremony and other traditional Japanese culture lessons—is said to “start with courtesy and end with courtesy” (*rei ni hajimari rei ni owaru*). “Rei” in Japanese means bow, but also refers to the etiquette and sentiments behind this gesture. In the case of aikido, this means showing respect and humility toward O-Sensei, the sensei of the class, the group’s members and your partner. Accordingly, when entering the dojo, stop and bow. After walking onto the tatami (mat), sit straight and bow to O-Sensei. Reverse this process at the end of the class.

The bow originates as an expression of one’s non-hostile feelings towards one’s partner. By showing your neck, you make yourself vulnerable and exhibit trust.

I would like to explain how to bow in Aikido. *Rei sansoku* (the three steps of breathing during a bow) is key to a proper bow, originally taken from traditional Chinese etiquette. Breathe in as you bend your upper body forwards, hold your position and breathe out at the lowest point, then breathe in as you return to your original position.

In general, place both hands together on the tatami when bowing. However, in aikido and other martial arts, formally the left hand is placed on the tatami first, followed by the right hand. This is because the bow in aikido is based on samurai sword movements, so the right hand is left available to draw the sword as a reaction to sudden attacks.

It is also important that when sitting seiza and bowing that you do not turn your back to O-Sensei and the kamiza. This is also true during the rest of your practice. If you watch your teachers, they will avoid demonstrating with their backs to O-Sensei. Only Doshu faces the class with his back to O-Sensei.

To finish, I want to add some other points of dojo etiquette:

- If you are late, wait at the edge of the tatami until your instructor invites you to join the class.
- If you leave in the middle of keiko (training), ask the instructor’s permission.
- Always present yourself in a clean and tidy manner.
- Remove accessories and avoid wearing perfume and makeup (eye-shadow and lipstick, etc.)

The important thing is to culture mind and body through not only learning techniques from keiko, but also by having courtesy.

Preserve good manners,
enjoy aikido!!

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Breathe in as you bend forwards



Hold your position and breathe out



Breathe in and return to seiza



Video Clips on YouTube and DVD

In mid-January 2009 an [Azami-Kai channel](http://www.youtube.com/azamikai) was created (www.youtube.com/azamikai) on YouTube displaying clips from our classes and seminars. To date, our videos have been watched almost 10,000 times from Alaska to Australia. After the UK with 21%, Estonia, Mexico and Italy have watched 11% of the

Azami-Kai demos. The favourite clip by quite a margin is [shomenuchi iriminage](#) with more than 500 views. New videos will be uploaded regularly. If you would like to automatically receive an email when a video is uploaded, complete the following steps:

- Create an account on YouTube by clicking on the [Sign Up](#) page.
 - Once you have created an account, you will receive a confirmation email.
 - Click on the [Confirm your email address](#) link in this email message.

This will confirm your account and open your YouTube page in a web browser.

- In the YouTube search field, type "azami-kai" and click the [Search](#) button.
- Click on any of the Azami-Kai videos displayed.
- Click on the [Subscribe](#) button in the "Azamikai" channel box. You will receive a confirmation message [Your subscription to "Azamikai" has been added](#).

If you have a medium or fast broadband connection, the videos can be displayed in high definition. Clicking the [HD](#) button below a video will display it in high definition widescreen format.

The Sugawara Seminar (February 2009) clips which were posted on the Azami-Kai YouTube channel have almost all been removed. If anyone didn't receive a copy of the free (demo) DVD, which includes all these clips, please let me know.

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Screen shots from YouTube

