

WANDERING WARRIOR

by Jill Roth



Jill Roth
"Wandering Warrior"

Bujutsu

The Way of the Japanese Warrior



"If there is no conflict, there can be nothing for your attacker to move against."

For this issue Olivia, one of our readers, sent me of to study the art of Ninjitsu. My adventure was shared with the folks at the Budo Shingikan Dojo. The owners are Dedeuc D'Antonoli, Kaiso and Master Instructor, and Shannon D'Antonoli Sensei, the program Director and Children's Instructor. (1) They teach the style of Ninjutsu called Tenshin Koryu Ninjutsu. This is a tradition that began many centuries ago in Japan with a direct and continued lineage. It is a balanced blend of hard and soft style techniques, as well as weapons training. Most Shinobi (ninja) learned classical Jujutsu, Kenjutsu, and all other aspects of Japanese warfare (Bujutsu) first, before their Shinobi training began.

I came in looking for Ninjitsu, but, left with a glimpse at an entire Japanese Martial Art system. The way of the Japanese warrior is actually a combination of many paths. At the Budo Shingikan Dojo the students are guided along five of them, through the system of *Bushin Ryu Aiki Bujutsu*. This literally translates as "Authentic Style of War Arts Utilizing Harmonious Blending of Energy". At first glance those concepts may seem to be at war with each other,

but as I learned, that is the beauty and balance of this art. (www.martialartsmesa.com)

From the moment I chatted with Shannon on the phone I knew we were in good hands. She asked that we arrive 30 minutes early so we could have a tour of the school and be assigned a student to "shadow". This student would help us a 'long the way through the class so that we could blend comfortably into the class and learn some basics. She then further shared that we should wear long pants and a t-shirt to be most comfortable in the class. I took Kris Costa, our favorite Editor, along for the adventure.

Entering the dojo was a study in balance. Dedeuc D'Antonoli Kaiso proudly shared that they moved into their new location about a year and a half ago. It is the perfect combination of spacious 21st century warehouse and feudal Japanese simplicity. We were only 10 minutes into the tour when Kaiso demonstrated the intricacies of his art. We were chatting about Aiki, the

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study of the marriage between body structure and energy. After carefully listening to a question of mine, he clarified with a simple demonstration. He asked me to stand in a typical martial arts front stance with my hand extended in a punch. After I complied he pushed on my extended hand. I noted the familiar concussion as the jarring energy pushed me backwards and my body attempted to accommodate by exerting pressure of it's own. Next, he asked if he could move my body a little. With my permission he then rotated my hand position about 20 degrees and bent my elbow in. Again, he struck my hand. I was riveted, as I realized my body didn't have to absorb any of the energy, and I felt his impact flow right out of my right heel into the floor. I had

read before about Japanese martial artists wanting to emulate an "immovable mountain". At 128 lbs, I didn't think I had an immovable anything. It wasn't my strength or powerful resistance, rather, the structure of my stance and body position by which the energy flowed right through me. I was hooked!

Back in the front office we were filling out permission forms when we were introduced to Jim. Jim is referred to as Senpai (sen-pie). In class, he is the highest ranking student. We were to shadow Jim throughout our class. Senpai did a masterful job of guiding us through the ins and outs of the lesson, while gently educating us on the culture and etiquette of the dojo.

The first thing I noted upon entering the dojo was the silence. Students are encouraged to remain quiet and I was moved by the centering affect this granted. Before the class the students lined up by rank and knelt in Seiza (say-za). This is a position where you kneel on both knees with your feet tucked under your bottom. We bowed in as each student mindfully placed their left and then right hand on the floor and bowed their head towards their hands. Then, equally mindful, placed their right hand and then left back onto their thighs. We bowed to the front of the room and then to the Sensei. The students recited several words in Japanese. Kaiso then asked one of the students to lead the class in warm ups. It was clear to me that this would be considerably different than classes I had been to before. Rather than warming up with jumping jacks and stretch kicks, we focused more on wrist and hip limbering techniques. Almost all of the stretches were static and each student was responsible to stay within their own limits. We stretched in unison as the leading student counted out the moves. The commands were spoken in Japanese and I was told the students are taught these through a student guide and practice. Freshly warmed up, we moved onto Ukemi

(ooh-kim-e) - tumbling. As new students, Senpai took us to the side and taught us forward rolls. I was guessing that these were designed to make me feel as uncoordinated and humble as possible! However Kaiso, explained that they are actually a very important way to teach us how to fall. He shared that living in such a safe area, we are more likely to get hurt by slipping and falling than by being attacked. Falling gracefully and without injury is an important skill. Senpai's demonstration did look like a graceful flow of skirts and limbs. My rolls, well, not so much.

Next, Kaiso gathered us back into a straight line kneeling in seiza. I noted that if students became uncomfortable in this position that they would bow and then quietly move into a cross-legged position for more comfort. Kaiso asked Senpai to come to the front of the class and they demonstrated an attack with it's counter move. It was an artful escape and countering control technique one could use if an attacker had both hands held behind you. D'Antonoli Kaiso demonstrated that it wasn't a tug-of-war between you and your attacker. If there is no conflict, there can be nothing for your attacker to move against. He flowed masterfully out of the grab and Senpai ended up on the ground.

Beautiful!

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We paired off and attempted to emulate the technique. This was my favorite part of the entire experience. Sensei would visit each pair and make minute changes that made all the difference in the world. He would gladly repeat the technique with you until you could see the differences. In other martial arts schools I have practically felt the testosterone rolling off my instructor as he made the students “comply”. Often times it seemed to me that the students would submit just to stop the pain. This was not like that. Never for a moment did I feel negative energy flowing from Kaiso or Senpai. It was clear that their goal was to share this knowledge until you truly “got it” and without conflict. I felt as if they were effortlessly guiding me through the lesson. It was like the gentle swish swish you feel and hear as you ski down a gentle mountain slope.

Each time we partnered up to practice we would say “Ome gai shimasu”. This is a way of saying that you are trusting your partner with your body and your theirs. You are both sacrificing your body’s security for the potential learning of your partner. Before returning to the line up, each partner says “domo arigato”. Which means “thank you, very much.” After each technique I felt the pride of victory and achievement. Not because I had overpowered, or outmatched my partner, but because we had travelled down this path together.

Later, as Kaiso was demonstrating a technique to me, he explained “I then help my partner to the ground”. I laughed at this, and joked about “how kind he was”. He acknowledged my mirth, but then shared, that this is actually an important point. “Forcing” your opponent to the floor holds a much different feel and energy than “helping” them to the floor. Practitioners of his art, always strive for the absence of “fighting mind” and internal centering is a big part of this. It was interesting to me that there wasn’t any “ki-haps” (yells) in the dojo. Ki-haps are used in other martial arts to harness and release your energy during the time of impact. Of course in Bujutsu there is no “point of impact”. The dojo is flush with quiet and centered energy.

Kaiso then called us back to line up and showed us what to do after we had “helped our opponent to the floor”. Again, we paired off and practiced the technique. And, again Senpai insured that I actually understood it. There was no veil of mysticism that would be raised after years of study. He helped me understand it right. Fantastic!

D’Antonoli Kaiso called us back to the line up to have a chat about Chudo (chew-doe) -- The way of the middle. He asked the students to put this into their own words. I heard, “balance”, “no extremes”, “taking the center path”. Kaiso expanded upon these definitions. In the martial arts you may have two extremes. For example, you may have one martial art that is teaching you to rip someone’s arm off and take it home for dinner. At the other extreme, a martial art that is completely defensive and would never hurt another. Rather, he spoke of taking the middle path. Not constantly moving through life looking for, and interpreting, signs of an attack. And, not moving through life shying from all attacks and cowering. Rather moving through life with expectations of peace *and* a willingness to defend oneself if necessary.

D’Antonoli Kaiso had explained during our introductory tour that there are five tips that each student must demonstrate to earn their next belt rank. And, like a star, each of these five points need to be equally developed in order to be a complete and well rounded Japanese warrior. They are: 1. Yellow Tip – Koppo Jutsu – punching and kicking techniques, 2. Blue Tip – Jujutsu – grappling/joint locks and chokes, 3. Purple Tip – Aiki no Jutsu – internal components, body mapping and body architecture (structure), 4. Brown Tip – Kobujutsu – weapons – they focus on sword, staff and knife, 5. Black Tip – Martial concepts, principles and philosophies.

Our final lesson of the evening was one in energy. Kaiso invited Senpai up to the front of the class to try and “push him over”. They were both kneeling on the ground, facing each other, with

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their knees planted wide. Senpai would push against Kaiso and Kaiso would flip him around on the floor with little or no effort. D'Antonoli Kaiso explained that he had no conflict with Senpai. That his mind was actually behind him and that he let the energy flow right through him so there would be no "point of conflict." Dutifully impressed, we set off with our partners to practice this mystical art. Guess what? It worked! Again, I had that feeling of complete immovability. I wasn't "fighting" against Senpai's force. Rather, I just focused my energy behind him. And, when it was my turn to push against Senpai, it felt

absolutely useless. Because I could tell I was actually just pushing him harder into the mat. The only one pushing was me. Awesome!

We lined up by rank a final time and knelt again in seiza. Kaiso made a couple of school announcements and we mindfully bowed out. What an amazing lesson! After class each of the classmates came up and shook our hands and introduced themselves. It was clear that the dojo was a family and we were welcomed in with open arms. What a wonderful adventure.

YOUR QUESTIONS?

MSSD: Will I get hit/kicked in the face?

Kaiso: No, in our art a beginner would not get hit in the face. As a student's training progresses we want to increase their "warrior spirit". As they move through the ranks and belts they will increase considerably in their confidence and spiritual development. Ultimately, they will find that it wouldn't faze them if they got hit. But to start? NO, a student would not be hit in the face.

MSSD: How much time per week? If I have a family and a job, can I realistically do your art?

Kaiso: Absolutely! You can come one day a week or every day of the week what ever works best for you. You obviously will progress faster the more often you come. But, slow progress is still progress.

MSSD: What are the benefits of this Bujutsu for women?

Kaiso: There are so many benefits for women! Physcially, psychologically and spiritually. *Physically* it is a perfect match for women because size and strength are of no concern in this art. In fact, I often find that women excel at the Aiki arts because they are less prone than men to "force" a technique. *Psychologically* – Let's say for example that someone grabbed a women's wrist. Mentally, most of us are then fixated on the wrist that the attacker has possessed. Bujutsu leads us to remember our other weapons e.g. our other hands and feet are still free!, Another point of interest is that when most men attack a woman they usually grab them. The majority of techniques that the feudel Japanese studied were against "grabs". Back then, of course, it was because the attacker would most likely have a weapon and disarming that weapon is paramount. Though the weapons are usually not swords today, controlling the arm holding a gun is still a grand idea. *Spiritually* – as you gain confidence in your art you will lose your fear of the attack and be more effective in your response.

MSSD: Can women in their 40's start?

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Kaiso: Absolutely. I was originally drawn to the Aiki arts because I was looking for an style in which I could grow throughout my life. In many martial arts the “young bucks” rule the day. The 18-25 year males are the kings of the sport. In the Aiki arts, the 60 year old practitioners are actually better than the 20 year olds. It doesn't rely on high kicks or brute strength, but rather, on non-conflict, internal peace, and good structure. The mastery of movement will win the day every time. This is the perfect warrior's path for folks in their fifties.

MSSD: Is it competitive like Karate?

Kaiso: No. In the way of Budo there is the belief that we can only be as good as the warrior sitting next to us. We all excel by moving the *community* towards perfection. Therefore, bujutsu is diametrically opposed to competition.

MSSD: What kind of health benefits/results can I expect?

Kaiso: There are, of course, cardiovascular and weight loss benefits from the warm ups and Ukemi (tumbling) in the beginning of class. But, mostly it is an internal art. Therefore stress relief and increased focus are huge benefits of the Aiki arts.

Jill's Note – Kris and I also noticed how in tune you became to your “center of balance” and how your body moves. It is a very “centering” art.

MSSD: How invasive is it on the joints (knees)?

Kaiso: Seiza (kneeling with your feet tucked under your bottom) can be a stress on the knees. But, all students know to bow and move to a more comfortable position if necessary. Bujutsu can be adapted to many physical challenges. Many students start in their fifties and sixties and the moves can be modified to accommodate your body.

MSSD: What are the levels of expertise (belt system)?

Kaiso: The belts progress from white, yellow with white stripe, yellow, blue, purple, purple with black stripe, brown, brown with black stripe and of course black. It takes about 5 years of practice to become a black belt if you are consistently coming to class twice a week.

If you wished to advance your skills even further, you can expect it to take 10-12 years to reach 2nd Dan (2nd degree black belt) and 20 years or so to reach 4th Dan or higher. (4th degree black belt or higher)

MSSD: Are there Katas (forms) and one steps?

Kaiso: There are no set Katas (forms) but you do often practice with a partner like in one steps. There are Aiki-Taiso which are exercises developed to learn basic Bushin Ryu motions. They help the student get proficient at moving their hands and feet simultaneously.

MSSD: What if the first class is too much for me?

Kaiso: First, tell your partner that you need a break. If it is an emergency, leave the mat and do what you need to do. If it is not an emergency, raise your hand to get the Sensei's attention. He or she will then excuse you. This is not only good etiquette, but as the leader, Sensei needs to be cognizant of any safety issues with his/her students at all times.

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MSSD: What respectful behavior is expected of me?

Kaiso: Each student bows at the door and before entering the mat. They raise their hand and wait to be acknowledged to ask a question. There should be only limited talking on the mat. A student should never teach another student, but rather wait for the instruction of the Sensei. Students should address the leader and head instructor and highest ranking student as Sensei and Senpai, respectively. Be respectful of all students and instructors at all times. The proper way to sit is in seiza. (see description in article)

MSSD: What footwear do I use? What if I don't want to go barefoot?

Kaiso: Usually students will go barefoot. If this is uncomfortable for you, you can purchase mat shoes or wear socks.

MSSD: Is everyone in the class a beginner?

Kaiso: It depends on the class. Specific classes are set to teach philosophy and principles. These are open to all ranks. There are other classes that are rank specific. Currently your class would range from white belt to blue belt.

MSSD: Does a total beginner even have a belt?

Kaiso: Yes, You start as a white belt and we consider this your "introductory belt". You would then test for your yellow belt with a white strip after *at least* 10 hours/1 month of training time.

MSSD: What can a student do for homework in between classes? Is it good to do this on one's own?

Kaiso: Great question. Because Aiki martial arts are defensive in nature, our skills are only as good as the attack that we practice defending against. I encourage my students to practice their kicking and punching at home so that they offer an "authentic" attack to their partner in class.

In addition, practicing your Aiki-Taiso (harmonious foot and hand movements) is always a good idea.

THE STATS

Required uniform:

Yes. Beginning students can choose between a light weight or heavy GI. (see photos) Brown belts and higher are transitioned to adding Hakama. These are the flowing skirts that hide the movement of your legs. (see photos)

What is the flooring? Nicely padded floor.

Nationwide Price Range: \$100-\$150/month

Are there women at the school?

Yes! Women excel in this art as they are less likely to want to "force" things and they listen well to details. This is definitely an art of finesse.

How physically exerting is it?
(On a scale of 1 to 10)

Can you accommodate physical challenges?

1 = sloths were confusing me for a tree
10 = there may have been gasping.

Yes!

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I found myself breathing a little heavy during Ukemi, but the whole point of the art is to learn how to make your body most effective with the least amount of energy. Of course, in the higher ranks when your partner is tossing you around, you are probably breaking a pretty good sweat.

Kaiso specifically mentioned a young lady that was unable to “twist” her spine. So they adapted all the Ukemi to accommodate this. Therefore, she was still able to fall smoothly and safely.

“MARTIAL” versus “ART” scale

1 = ART completely and internal art no combat to 10- MARTIAL – this is down and dirty combat moves only

Age limit?

None.

The greatest masters continually improve with age.

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This is the perfect balance between war and peace. Remember one of Bujutsu key concepts is Chudo – *taking the middle path.*

**Kaiso is the title given to the highest ranking member of an organization. In this case he is Kaiso of Budo Shingikan Kyokai. Sensei translates as “teacher”. So technically both D’Antonoli’s are also “sensei”. For simplicity I kept the titles separate.*

NEXT ISSUE

Where will you send me next month? Email your request to jroth@mindsetselfdefense.com



Budo Shingikan
School of Japanese Martial Arts

OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

www.MartialArtsMesa.com
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武真流合気武術