

Nidan Essay – Kieran O’Donoghue, Tatsu Gi Kai Aikido, Rotorua, New Zealand

“All of Life is a circle, endlessly revolving, and that is the center point of the Art of Peace. The Art of Peace is a seamless, inexhaustible sphere that encompasses all things.”

O’Sensei, *The Art of Peace*, p.119. Shambhala, 2018.

Over the last four years, my aikido journey has taken me from focusing on the self-victory over mind and body and choosing my response to experiencing aikido at the center of my life. The following incident is one example of this. The incident involved four young men attacking my youngest daughter’s boyfriend in front of my daughter and outside our home. I went outside and did a Kiai “STOP” and stood between my daughter’s boyfriend and the four young men. I made eye contact with them and dropped into my center. Then did a second Kiai. “GO” the young men turned and ran away. It is hard to explain, I was calm, yet my experience of what was happening was in slow motion, and through the Kiai and in my body, I felt an energy and connection with everything.

The last three years of the pandemic have been challenging. Throughout lockdowns and the periods when we were unable to train, I would do solo training regularly. This would help me be calm, regain balance, feel more centered, feel connected to the earth and be aware of my surroundings. The pattern of regular practice has been the oasis of calm in a storm of uncertainty, turmoil, and challenges. Practising Aikido has helped with living through the grief of my father’s death in Feb 2020 and that of Carl Bradley Sensei, who was a friend and role model for living an Aikido life. Aikido has been my center point as I have lived between maintaining and losing balance, giving and receiving, engaging and disengaging, and intention and action. The art of aikido continues to teach me about being present in the here and now, present in relationships, and about the presence of the universe. It constantly reminds me to pay attention to what is happening, feel where I am, attend to who I am with and the world around me and respond from the center.