

# Nidan Essay

## Struggling in Aikido Searching for that "Something More"

By Ed Morin  
July 2006

Being inspired this morning, for reasons unknown, I decided to write my nidan essay early. It is 7:38 A.M. this February 4, 2005 and with 460 plus hours toward my nidan exam it is still a minimum of 18 months away, if of course, my body doesn't shrivel up and die of Ibuprofen poisoning first.

Softness. It seems to be such an allusive concept. Aikido is described as the soft martial art. During the first five or six years of my training, to some degree, it has seemed to me to have been a "blend and thump" type martial art. I was unaware of softness anywhere in the dojo. Even when I worked with upper rank students and some yudancha, I can't say I felt anything I would recognize as soft.

As a lower rank aikidoka I rarely had a chance uke for sensei and feel softness. Even though he talked about softness, I had no experience in feeling softness. It was hard to relate it to the verbal lesson. The eventual feeling of it made the verbal lessons more understandable.

My first real encounter with softness in aikido came one day from a visiting student. This student, a Nidan I believe, we'll call him Jack, came to workout with our class. I was only a 4<sup>th</sup> kyu, maybe a 3<sup>rd</sup> kyu, at the time and I saw something different about his movement, something I had not really seen before. I decided to bow in and see what he had to offer. I saw nothing but the floor. It is what I felt, or didn't feel that astounded me. I felt nothing and I was totally at his mercy. My balance was totally gone and his control of my body was complete.

After class I approached this young man and inquired as to who his instructor was and where he studied. He suggested we go out for a beer.

During that evening of conversation, Jack passed on information to me that his instructor had told him. It goes something like this: There are many very very good, high-ranking instructors that are very good at basic Aikido. They are extremely proficient in the application of their techniques but it is basic Aikido. There is "something more". The softness, the lack of conflict or the not being able to tell something was being done to you, that I felt was that "something more".

There is no rigidity in nage's arm and no feeling of being forced off the line. I was just uncontrollably at his mercy. That is the struggle, to find the understanding and the control to apply aikido in that manner. For me, not having felt it before did not allow me to understand what softness meant. Uke can still hit the ground very hard or very softly but how uke lands after a technique is applied really has nothing to do with how soft the Aikido was applied. With this soft application of a technique it then allows nage to decide just how hard or soft uke hits the ground.

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Jack’s visit to Aikido North and his explanation of “something more” was a turning point in my understanding of softness. I have thought a lot about it and I believe his explanation to be accurate.

Today, less than 2 weeks before my nidan exam I have had many opportunities to uke for Sensei Koshiyama and rediscover the feeling of softness. He has spent countless hours teaching these concepts to us all, not to mention the numerous hours of individual attention he has given me.

We at Aikido North are extremely lucky to have a dojo-cho who understands the soft application of these techniques and is trying very hard to teach us this “something more”.

I want to thank all my family and friends at Aikido North for their help and support. I especially thank my sensei, Calvin Koshiyama and my uke Derek Hedstrom for their unending patience, support, and their continual quest to make me a better aikidoka.