

## Accepting Change Sandán Paper

"Why do you come to the Dojo so often?" I recall being asked by another student in my earlier training days. "To get good." I replied. Having grown up participating in competitive sports what I really meant was to be as good as or preferably better than anyone I trained with. Looking back I am grateful that I have had the opportunity to continue training at Aikido North, for the guidance of Sensei and the generosity of my fellow students for providing an environment that has helped me to change and grow both as a person and an Aikidoka.

I recall my first impressions of Aikido as ones of confusion. Sensei would demonstrate a technique while every one watched. Students would pair up and begin training. Smiling, Sensei would walk around the mat talking to the students and giving corrections when needed. The relationship between training partners was one of co-operation and enjoyment. It was a very relaxed atmosphere. Coming from a wrestling background, I had never trained in this manner, as my previous training focus and emphasis was always on winning. I was taught to train as hard as possible and necessary to take advantage of your partners and to improve and eventually better them. I never considered helping any of my training partners for fear that one day the techniques I shared would be used against me and quite possibly to defeat me. In my mind second best was not an option. In that competitive environment my opponent was waiting to take advantage of any mistake, consequently when I found techniques that worked I was reluctant to modify, improve, or share them whether or not there might be an easier or more efficient way. "If it's not broke, don't fix it," was the attitude that prevailed in my daily training.

Although my competitive spirit occasionally shows itself during my Aikido training, through instruction, and the positive interactions with my partners at the Dojo I have in time come to understand the emphasis of training is not on who wins or loses or who has the "best" technique. We train co-operatively, not only to improve our Aikido, and ourselves, but also the Aikido of our partners, which subsequently affects the entire Dojo. Training co-operatively in the relaxed atmosphere of Aikido North has helped me to realize that it is okay to make and embrace my mistakes as well as share what I have learned. We all make mistakes and it is through the acknowledgement and acceptance of these mistakes that we learn and grow as people. I understand the importance of accepting my mistakes and the mistakes of others and to help others when I can, by seeing myself honestly. We should not arrive at a place where we are comfortable with ourselves realizing that we are constantly in a state of becoming.

Through Sensei's teaching and the interactions with my partners, the focus of my training has changed from an attitude that losing is not an option to one of focusing less on the outcome and more on enjoying the process of change. Although I always train to improve my Aikido, I have come to realize that how I train has an impact not only on my growth but also on the growth of each person I work with and the Dojo as a whole.

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