

## Featured Senior Instructor, June 2008



### Teja Bell

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Division 3

合氣道  
あいきどう

I came to Aikido in 1971 under the guidance of Jeff Fox Sensei – in the Midwest. From the mid 1960’s I had studied judo and kung fu with Tatsumo Makami and further practiced raja and hatha yoga in a very intense and directed way. When I saw Aikido and learned of its teachings and philosophy I knew I was home – home with a pathway for a lifetime. Aikido’s beautiful embodiment of grace and dignity meeting the principles of flow and blending, non-harming, reconciliation and harmony, deeply resonated with my initial inquiries and exploration of Buddhist and Taoist practice.

I am grateful that I have had the opportunity to learn and practice with a variety of great teachers in Aikido, Buddhism and Taoism, internal and external martial arts and healing arts. Included with this is my lifelong love of music.

While this may seem like a broad scope of endeavor, the essence of each of these teachings is not contradictory. There have always been wonderful complementarities between Aikido and the Chinese internal martial arts, music and healing arts. These arts – music and other cultural pursuits – have always enjoyed a

fruitful confluence of mutual benefit and inspirational interdependence. Investigating these arts, I have learned to embrace their similarities, honor their distinctions and bring together the best points I find in each.

As a professional musician, Aikido offers the added resource of the cultivation of grounded – centered presence through the practice of the principles of balance, blending and harmony. These qualities *gift* the creation and performance of music with the possibility of added depth and breadth.

Aikido is unique however, in its embrace of non-violence as a universal ethical standard. Aikido offers an important shift from competitiveness and greed. This shift is actually a “wisdom” transformation into acceptance and tolerance. For this reason I feel the practice of Aikido extends far beyond the ‘mat’ in its positive impact and possibility in resolving conflict and creating relationships that work.



Presently, I practice and teach the continuity of meditation in **stillness** and in **motion**. I have the privilege to present these dharma teachings, of meditation and ‘energy’ – in residential retreats, workshops and seminars across the traditions (at such places as Spirit Rock Meditation Center, Dojos and at Zen Centers, for example). Central to these practices of the Dharma and the Tao are the teachings of O’Sensei and Aikido – informed and expanded by the teachings of Sensei Robert Nadeau Shihan – my primary Aikido teacher since 1979. As a fully ordained Rinzai Zen priest

in the Hollow Bones order, under the guidance of Roshi - Junpo Denis Kelly and Roshi Dai-En Hi Fu, the training of Zen, Aikido, qigong and internal martial arts, extends to practices of building community, caring for the planet, emotional maturity...

### ***My most Memorable Aikido Experience***

Now, among my most memorable moments in Aikido was with Robert Nadeau Sensei. One night while training at the Turk Street Dojo in San Francisco, Nadeau Sensei called me to uke. Throughout this class we had been working on opening up the ‘space’ (spatial awareness) in our inner practice. As I moved powerfully in to attack, Nadeau Sensei’s action seemed to make the floor drop underneath me, and I moved into one of those unexplainable timeless moments where the room and the conditions of time and space shifted... I felt as if I had been moved in and out of another dimension of reality. This experience changed and enhanced my appreciation of what is possible in Aikido practice – it helped to loosen my limited view of reality with the sense that Aikido has unlimited possibilities of expression – far beyond mere technique. The Practice of Aikido – on and off the mat – continues to evolve the ground of possibility for improving the quality of our lives and all life on our amazing planet.

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*True compassion is not just an emotional response,  
but a firm commitment based on reason.  
Therefore, a truly compassionate attitude toward others  
does not change even if they behave negatively.  
Through universal altruism,  
you develop a feeling of responsibility for others:  
The wish to help them actively overcome their problems.*

**His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama**