



Essay for 2nd Dan

Titel:

A New Beginning

Written by

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1st Dan



1. Introduction

2015 I passed successfully my first Dan exam. It was a very important moment for me, because the first Dan represents a major change in my aikido carrier. The black belt, specially the first Dan, does not represent the end of learning but continuous development of mental and physical skills. If we do not seriously develop, we will not be able to arrive a higher level. Therefor it is from time to time necessary to get out of one's conform zone to gain new experience and knowledge.

A swift from the junior to the senior ranks also means a higher responsibility towards students/ members in the Dojo and my Sensei. The teacher student relationship is the core element to successfully study the way of Aikido. It needs understanding and respect from both sides to start and continue the relationship. As student we support our Sensei as good as possible to keep his back free thereby, he can teach us as good as possible.

In this essay I would like to try to explain what happened on my way to the second dan. The experiences on this journey have left a lasting impression on my understanding of Aikido.

2. Life Challenges

During the last six years I had many up and downs which influence my life in different ways. I started a part-time study program, therefore I had to reduce training lessons to manage the whole academic workload. During that time, I was not able to study Aikido perfectly also I could not support my Dojo. Beside the stress (study program, private life, and work) my weight increases also.

The extra bodyweight limited my flexibility on the matts, so I was much harder to take Ukemi for Sensei. For a long term Ukemi my fitness was in an horrible condition, and I lost very often the connections during the exercises. My body condition was influences by stress too.

A challenge was the impatience with me and my environment on and off the matts during that period. It was a frustrating time because I could not notice any increasing

with me. And I'm sure my environment recognised my frustration too. Sensei often says: "Bevor you step on the mats, empty your minds." I was not able to empty my mind every time, and put my stress on the mats too. That negatively influenced my movement, relationship with the members, and in end the connections and understanding of Aikido.

After two years I successfully finished my study program and was able to focus on my Aikido studies again. Therefore, I hired a dietician and did more sport to lose weight so that I could move quicker. Also, I wanted to increase my fitness too. Shortly thereafter, the first successes became apparent. I could feel that my skill level increase and the passion for Aikido returned.

Despite the positive development, fate confronted me with a new completely unexpected challenge. That challenge seriously forced me in the one hand to rethink my relationship to Aikido and helped me to find my way back to Aikido in the other hand.

During a training lesson I had an accident on the matts. Sensei demonstrated with me as uke how to perform Ushiro Ryotedori Technik correctly. Suddenly I was not able to move my right leg and just in time my knee buckled sideways. I recognised that something has come loose in the knee area.

3. Rethinking

On the following day I received a brief medical repot in the hospital. Suspicion of cruciate ligament rapture. After additional examination I got the exact result. Cross and side ligament were raptured and cartilage damaged.

The doctor told me, that a surgery was necessary to repair the injurie. Also, a six-month break before I could start a combe back to the mats. The diagnosis shocked me and for a moment I had no idea how I can handle the situation.

Special one question has been on my mind: "Can I continue Aikido without a handicap after the surgery and the long-term break?" Fear is a bad advice, so I decided to answer the question only after the surgery and rehab progresses.

After the accident and the medical report my frustration has reached a new high, because i had to stop all my sport activities and could only wait. A few days later I recognised that I had to change my daily procedure.

The questions “What shall I do with my free time?” followed me since my accident. Also, in my mind the question arose more and more whether I should stop Aikido. Till my accident Aikido took a lot of space in my weekly time schedule, and it was difficult to follow other activities and interests.

Now there was an opportunity to break out from the usual life course and to make new life experiences. After the successfully surgery, I decided to learn to play guitar first.

4. New Experiences and the connection to Aikido

In the beginning I thought that I had chosen activities without points of contact to Aikido but in retrospective I was wrong.

I started with my guitar lessons and learned my first steps to handle my guitar. I was highly motivated to train a lot, partly until I had blisters on my fingers During the next lessons I also got to know the participants better and their reasons why they started playing the guitar. Their reasons were completely different and ranged from brushing up skills, entertaining kids to surprising loved one for an anniversary. We had a guitar teacher who was passionate about making music and taught us well how to use the guitar.

After I had completed the first part of my physiotherapy and slowly ventured back into sporting activities. One of these activities was dancing lessons for salsa. The dance lessons had an unexpected positive effect on my recovery, as I got back much more flexibility in my operated knee. Another advantage was that I got a better sense of timing, correct distance and connection with the partner. Here, too, you could feel the passion of the dance teachers, who see dancing not only as a sport, but also as a way of life.

When I compare the experiences with guitar and dance lessons with aikido, I think there are overlaps. It takes a lot of time, training, and patience to see the first results.

Especially with the teachers, I noticed that they don't see their passion as a pastime, but as a way of life.

Passion (AI) for an activity affects the soul (KI) and inspires and motivates us in good and bad times. For this we challenge ourselves and are willing to walk a long, winding and steep path (DO).

Before the accident I had a narrower view of Aikido and its meaning for me. The different activities opened up a new perspective on Aikido. The new experiences helped me to rekindle my passion for Aikido. The time off for recovery also showed me clearly how much I missed Aikido and that I want to continue on this path.

A few months after the accident, I entered the dojo again for the first time. I was not yet able to participate directly in the training. But my sensei had motivated me to do my physiotherapy exercises in the dojo. This kept me in contact with the members and unconsciously increased my desire to come back sooner.

When I returned to training on the mat, I still had to take care of my physical limitations. therefore, I could not perform every technique as uke or tori. Especially for Suwari Waza, I had to invest some time and training until the knee could do the techniques.

5. Summary

Looking back, the accident helped me to rediscover Aikido. Giving up training showed me clearly how much aikido really means to me and motivated me to push on with my recovery. The confrontations with the accident and the experiences during my recovery phase have led me to a new beginning with Aikido. I have also noticed that my Aikido has improved since I restarted. Sometimes you have to give up something that is completely self-evident in order to understand its significance.

Aikido is not a route from A to B, but a journey that has no predefined destination. on this journey, different challenges may arise that have to be overcome in order to progress.



I exactly know that my Sensei teach a pure and clear Aikido, because he understands Aikido as Martial Art and not as soft washed gym lesson without any kind of spirit and knowledge. His passion for Aikido is not only felt on the mat, but also off the mat. He lives Aikido. It's a hard and difficult way to learn Aikido as Martial Art, but I have chosen that path and follow my Sensei.

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1. Dan

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