

Why go on courses?

The simple answer is - you need to attend courses in order to be eligible to grade. However, there is a lot more to it than that.

When you train regularly, in your local club, you get to know everyone very well.

There is the student who winces every time you touch them, the big guy who powers you into the mat, the scary instructor who applies a wicked Nikyo and there are your mates who you like to train with as often as you can. It doesn't take long before you become very comfortable and you start to be selective as to which partners to choose for which techniques.

Some people can progress a fair way along their Aikido journey, training in this comfortable and protected environment. However, please be aware, this can give you a false sense of security and an overestimation of your ability.

Unfortunately, if you don't attend courses, you are missing out on a huge part of your Aikido development.

We learn Aikido by studying forms. We have prescribed attacks and specific defences, all executed in a safe and controlled environment. This is essential for the learning progress. However, as you progress there is a need to start breaking free from the cotton wool wrapping and to start testing yourself.

By attending courses you will be studying the same techniques, with the same attacks, as practised within your Club, but with a different instructors. You may feel unsettled by his/her approach, the techniques may be different to the way you usually do them, the method of correction may be different to what you are used to and very importantly your partners will be different and unpredictable.

These unfamiliar partners will move differently. You may not know their grade and they may be harder or softer than you would prefer. They may have an injury or physical restriction. Basically you will be outside your comfort zone. Learning how to deal with the unknown is essential for your Aikido development and can only be experienced on courses (It's a bit safer than trying out your Aikido in the local shopping centre on a Sat night).

Being outside your comfort zone brings a level of fear to your practise. Managing this fear and staying relaxed throughout a technique is a skill that needs to be learnt by regular practice with different partners.

Regular attendance at Lancashire Aikikai courses is essential - but also attending outside courses with different instructors and experiencing different styles of Aikido is also important and useful for your development. When you visit outside courses please remember the following rules - do it the way it is taught on the day, absorb it, think about it, take what you like and discard what you don't. Let these experiences mould your own Aikido but make sure you keep focused on your Club & Association principles. In our case, going forward – those of our Technical Director - Mimuro Sensei.

Having stressed the importance of placing yourself outside your comfort zone, the dojo (whether club or course) is still a safe and controlled learning environment with plenty of people around you that you do know.

You will get the chance to train with more Dan Grades than you would in your normal Club and Dan Grades should be the safest partners to train with. We are a friendly Association and pride ourselves on making sure people from all clubs feel welcome on courses.

If you are wondering about whether or not to attend a course, please remember, you cannot progress your Aikido properly without experiencing courses. This is why it is a condition of grading. It is important at all levels but increasingly so as you progress towards Dan Grade, and beyond.

Also, your Club is part of an Association and if we are to survive and flourish, all members need to support their Clubs and attend as many courses as possible, each year.

As an interesting exercise, I wondered how many courses an old fogey like me had attended over the years.

Next July, I will have been practising Aikido for 25 years (is he really that old?), 19 of those as a Dan Grade instructor.

I have attended over 240 course days (70 of these with an external instructor). Averaging over 6 courses per year as a Kyu Grade and over 10 courses per year as a Dan Grade. I am sure that many of my High DG peers have similar stats.

How many courses have you attended this year?

Finally a note for Instructors on courses

We may only see our Technical Director (Mimuro Sensei) once a year (unless of course you visit Japan). All instructors, therefore, have a responsibility, to try and impart as much of Mimuro's Aikido style and principles as their knowledge allows. This should be done either when teaching or practising with lower grades.

The absorption of the Mimuro Sensei's principles will not happen overnight, it will take time to cascade down through the grades.

One attribute of the Lancashire Aikikai is its 'broad church' of styles of practice across our clubs. This diversity should be seen as beneficial and will continue. However, the aspiration of our main core principles must progress towards those of our Technical Director.

Attendance on courses will give you a great breadth of exposure to the great breadth of Aikido within the Lancashire Aikikai.

Thanks to Christine Shepherd for suggesting I write this, following our chat in the car on the way home from the last course which was great fun and very well attended.

Hope to see you on Sunday 29th January, in Preston, for the first course of 2017.

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