



Northern Virginia Ki Aikido (NVKA) / Virginia Ki Society (VKS)
Newsletter for December, 2021
www.novakiaikido.org

This Week's Topics

- I. Dojo Calendar (incl. upcoming events with **announcements**)
 - II. Clarity: Nothing Matters (short essay)
 - III. Financial Update / Annual Appeal

 - IV. Upcoming Events
 - V. Weekly Shokushu: The Mind That Seeks Truth
 - VI. Book of the Month
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Dojo Calendar

Current Classes (Adults)

- Monday, 7:15 pm - 9:00 pm
- Wednesday, 7:15 pm - 9:00 pm
- Thursday, December 9 and December 16, 7:15 - 9:00 pm
(Intermediate/Advanced: for 4th kyu and above and only fully vaccinated)

- Saturday, 11:00 am - 1:00 pm

Current Classes (Children)

- Saturday, 10:00 am - 11:00 am

***Note:** *All adult classes include physical contact, including ki testing and techniques, **and now require everyone to be fully vaccinated with a CDC-approved vaccine.** The children's class will remain no contact and continue as it has for the time being.*

New! message from Children's class teacher, Marion Sensei:

With vaccines now available for 5 through 11 year olds, we are moving towards having normal, pre-Covid type classes. I've been communicating with parents, and all have either already gotten their children vaccinated, are in the process of it, or plan to do so.

When enough children are two weeks past their second vaccine, Thursday night from 6:00 - 7:00 pm will open up as a full contact class, with ki testing, techniques, and some

games that we haven't been able to do. The students can begin working on their tests for rank.

When Thursday classes begin, we will keep Saturday class as is (no contact, distancing, and masks) for a short while to give the last couple of students a chance to complete the vaccination process.

Upcoming Events

- **There will be no January EKF seminar at the dojo this year.**

Clarity

Nothing Matters

This last essay of 2021 will complete a trilogy begun in October's newsletter. We have explored the concept of entropy and how our ability to allow and even welcome painful experiences (as opposed to suffering) may be the way of *life* in the Universe. Last month connected entropy to the breath, one point, and time.

This month we will resolve all of this in the phrase "nothing matters." Of course, this is not meant to be nihilistic, flippant, or dismissive. It does not mean we see no meaning or purpose in living or devalue life itself or individual concerns within this life.

No. Though the phrase has many constructive meanings, for this essay we will take it to mean no *thing* matters -- no single thing deserves all of our attention or represents all of life. This is a natural extension from last month in that as bodymind awareness goes from third to first order, density of objects of attention and experience of time goes to zero.

As human beings, we have a choice: expansion or contraction. In the author's house, we call this the "chair topple choice" (coined from our attempt to learn from an incident when one person reacted and sent another toppling backwards over a chair). As we saw last month, there is always both happening: when ego expands, our sense of presence and true self (i.e., essence) contracts, and vice-versa. Hence, as Shinichi Tohei Sensei suggested, by moving the mind to the one point before we do anything, we choose expansion of presence. But, even noticing the different expansion and contraction present with egoic reaction can be a path to expansion of essence on the never-ending road of experience.

The word "horizon" represents everything the Universe gives us at any moment, within which there are infinite details on which we can choose to focus. But we can hold the "horizon" in awareness without a focus on one particular thing. This is what it means to *do nothing* -- do no *thing*. An example of this in Aikido is the practice of "soft eyes," where we relax the muscles and focus of our eyes to take in everything in the dojo.

For the author, a real-world example of this practice came in the form of gallstone attacks, which the author would get every couple of months and which were extremely painful. The author learned to manage this pain by not focusing on it exclusively but rather allowing it as only one element within the "horizon" and holding it all in awareness. Shaner Sensei gave a [Zoom talk \(starts at 11:37 to about 23:30\)](#) about how this practice cuts the mental loop that perpetuates pain. Child psychiatrist and

attachment/neurobiology researcher Dr. Daniel Siegel calls this "[staying on the 'plane of possibility.'](#)"

There is a paradox here. The only conscious choice we have is to move from 3rd to 2nd order (2nd to 1st happens unconsciously), which by definition means a focus on one thing. But that one thing becomes a focus on nothing (i.e., no thing) if we are to move to 1st order. To open up (i.e., focus on nothing) when one is in pain and wants to collapse/react around it is an act of genuine vulnerability. By choosing no thing one chooses everything (i.e., awareness of horizon). Hence, the paradox.

This idea of *doing* nothing conjures the geometric discovery called Fractals (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=pCpLWbHVNhk>). Fractals are "pictures of chaos" and came from mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot in the 1960s, who having all his life seen the world in terms of geometric shapes recognized that even in what seemed like chaos there was an underlying order to the universe where self-similar patterns existed infinitely at all scales (i.e., infinitely small and infinitely large). As he said, "clouds are not spheres, mountains are not cones, coastlines are not circles, and bark is not smooth, nor does lightning travel in a straight line." Common examples of fractals include trees, rivers, leaves, hurricanes, snowflakes, flowers, people, etc.

There is no such thing as a static "something" -- everything exists at infinite levels of self-similar patterns. We can think of this complexity within an individual system as a "vertical horizon." Consider the first observation of gravitational waves. Super-sensitive equipment detected an event 1.3 billion light years away from Earth where two massive black holes, each about 30 times the mass of the sun, spiraled around each other at almost the speed of light until they combined into a super-massive black hole 50 times the mass of the sun. This merging produced an energy spike equivalent to the energy of three solar masses and power higher than all the light in the visible universe, which rippled through space-time as a gravitational wave that we could barely detect only because we were looking for it.

Now consider how human beings interact in similar ways where our unconscious aspects of self (i.e., black hole) spiral around and merge with others' unconscious aspects of self such that an energy is produced that is subtly detectable only with super-sensitive equipment (e.g., well-trained clinician) and only if we're looking for it. Detecting this energy is the only way you know this interaction ever happened and that you're operating on an unconscious level by, say, enacting a prior relationship. This same phenomenon exists *similarly* at the subatomic level (e.g., heat from electron interactions). This is an example of a self-similar pattern replicating from the infinitely large down to the infinitely small.

Focus on vertical or any horizon (i.e., infinite depth/understanding of a single system or across multiple systems) means "doing" a continual process of awareness and understanding, as opposed to tunnel vision where there may be an exclusive focus on the surface evaluation of a single object.

Reaction happens when we don't make the chair topple choice to shift attention to a horizon and instead put all attention on the (re)action the ego *wants* to take. Responsive action emerges naturally from needs based on given conditions as opposed to want. The chair topple choice means prioritizing connection with one's essence (i.e., one point) over whatever is going on that is demanding one's attention, and then responding naturally to those conditions to meet everyone's needs.

One important note: In all of these essays the unspoken assumption is that 1st order awareness is preferable all the time. But, it is also really important to our wellbeing that we preserve our ability to think critically. While 1st order awareness and flow states may

be desirable for optimal performance, because it requires a cessation of conscious thought it leaves us vulnerable to mind control and manipulation, as in entities that thrive on coercive control such as dysfunctional families or cults. Please be aware of this dynamic. Shinichi Tohei Sensei's direction to keep one point only when about to perform an action and not all the time recognizes the importance of an available capacity for critical thought to guard against the danger described above.

Financial Update / Annual Appeal

We so appreciate all of your support, financially and otherwise, throughout this year of continued recovery from the pandemic. We are happy to report that we are in a much stronger financial position as we continue to welcome back returning students and renters and add new classes, students, and renters to the dojo. One-time and ongoing gifts from generous donors like you have kept us afloat during this difficult time, and we cannot adequately express our gratitude for that support.

Though there are still financial challenges to face in the year ahead, we do so from a position of greater stability. We are in a much different place today than we were this time a year ago. Thank you for seeing us to this day. We hope you are healthy and safe, and wish you more of the same in 2022.

As we near the end of 2021 and you contemplate your year-end giving, please consider making a renewed commitment to Virginia Ki Society. To make a monetary gift, click this [link to our website](#) and click the Donate button about half way down the page.

THANK YOU! We hope to see you soon on the mat.

VKS Board of Directors

Upcoming Events

EKF Zoom Training

The 2021 training schedule has been completed. Shaner Sensei and EKF leadership are working to determine additional training offerings for 2022. Stay tuned!

Shokushu Reading

Read the "Clarity" essay above for an exploration of this reading.

18. THE MIND THAT SEEKS TRUTH

We call the mind that wants to make the way of the Universe clear and to put it into practice, the mind that seeks truth.

However clever a dog or monkey may be, they cannot realize the Universal Mind. Only human beings have the privilege and capacity to realize it. If you have the mind that seeks truth, you are happy because this is proof that you are a real human being.

Book of the Month

This is a space we will periodically use to highlight a favorite book that has helped deepen our understanding and practice of Ki Aikido. This month's book is *Shape: The Hidden Geometry of Information, Biology, Strategy, Democracy, and Everything Else* by Jordan Ellenberg.

Dr. Ellenberg is a Professor of Mathematics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Full disclosure: the author has known him since the 3rd grade, although Jordan was doing college-level math at university since they were in 6th grade (the author was most definitely *not*), so I guess you could say we *kind of* grew up together.

As you may have gleaned from the Clarity essay above, Ki Aikido has a deep connection to math and, specifically, geometry.

Here's an excerpt that seems analogous to the difference between merely knowing and doing techniques and operating on the level of feeling and energy (p24):

"We need to know how to do geometry by purely formal deduction; but geometry isn't *merely* a sequence of purely formal deductions. If it were, it would be no better a way to teach the art of systematic reasoning than a thousand other things. We could teach chess problems, or Sudoku. Or we could make up a system of axioms with no relation to any known human practice at all and force our students to derive their consequences. We teach geometry instead of any of those things because geometry is a formal system that's not *just* a formal system. It's built into the way we think about space, location, and motion. We can't help being geometric. We have, in other words, intuition." [emphasis his]

Dr. Ellenberg doesn't discuss fractals, *per se*. But, he spends a lot of time giving the reader accessible ways to understand concepts like symmetry and geometric progressions, differential equations and chaotic dynamics. These concepts provide a deep foundation on which to build a better understanding of the natural universe, chaos, and therefore, Ki Aikido.

I won't lie: there is a LOT of math in this book, and it's a bit much at times. But, there are also lots of fascinating stories and easy to understand examples of real-world phenomena that, with simple language and humor, reify the mathematical concepts by applying them to our daily lives.

Here's another excerpt (p205-206), this one from Chapter 9, which at once speaks to the idea of "difficulty" (e.g., Ki Aikido is often described as "difficult") and intuition:

"A couple of years ago, Lisa Piccirillo, then a PhD student at the University of Texas, solved a long-standing geometry problem about a shape called the Conway knot. She proved the knot was "non-slice" -- this is a fact about what the knot looks like from the perspective of four-dimensional beings, but for this story it doesn't matter exactly what it

means. This was a famously difficult problem. Though even here, the meaning of the word gets complicated; is the problem difficult, because many mathematicians worked on it and failed, or easy, because Piccirillo found a crisp solution that took just nine pages, of which two pages are pictures? One of my own most cited theorems is of the same nature, settling in a six-page paper a problem I and many other people had been wrestling with for twenty years. **Maybe we need a new word that conveys not "it's easy" or "it's difficult," but "it's difficult to realize that it's easy."** [emphasis mine]

"A few years before Piccirillo's breakthrough, a topologist named Mark Hughes at Brigham Young had tried to get a neural network to make good guesses about which knots were slice. He gave it a long list of knots where the answer was known, just as an image-processing neural net would be given a long list of pictures of cats and pictures of non-cats. Hughes's neural net learned to assign a number to every knot; if the knot, in reality, were slice, the number was supposed to be 0, while if the knot were non-slice the net was supposed to return a whole number bigger than 0. In fact, the neural net predicted a value very close to 1 -- that is, predicted the knot was non-slice -- for every one of the knots Hughes tested, except for one. That was the Conway knot. Hughes's neural net returned a number very close to 1/2: its way of saying it was deeply unsure whether to answer 0 or 1. This is fascinating! The neural net correctly identified the knot that posed a really hard and mathematically rich problem (in this case, reproducing an intuition topologists had already arrived at). Some people imagine a world where computers give us all the answers. I dream bigger. I want them to ask good questions."

Maybe Artificial Intelligence (i.e., AI, robots) will someday be more -- or at least as -- proficient at Ki Aikido than humans? Then we could have all the partners we would ever need, regardless of who shows up to practice! ;-) That would be a positive scenario. The darker ones resemble Skynet from The Terminator. We're not in either place...yet.

Member Feedback

We would love to hear from you with any suggestions, concerns, questions, etc regarding anything dojo-related. Please don't be shy. Is there anything you're liking or not liking about the dojo? Is there anything you wish was different or don't want to change? Want to tell us what you LOVE about the newsletter (or would like to change)? Just want to chat? Please feel free to send us an email at vkdojo@gmail.com with anything on your mind. The door is always open!

THANK YOU! We hope to see you back on the mat soon.

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