



**Northern Virginia Ki Aikido (NVKA) / Virginia Ki Society (VKS)**  
**Newsletter for September, 2021**  
[www.novakiaikido.org](http://www.novakiaikido.org)

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**This Week's Topics**

- I. Dojo calendar (incl. upcoming events and children's class message)
- II. Clarity: Proprioception and Reaction (short essay)
- III. Upcoming events
- IV. Weekly Shokushu: The Unity of Calm and Action
- V. Book of the month
- VI. Question (click link to answer): [Why do you practice Ki Aikido?](#)

---> One person replied to last month's question. Their answer: "Presence/Being"

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**Dojo Calendar**

**Current Classes (Adults)**

- Monday, 7:15 pm - 9:00 pm
- Wednesday, 7:15 pm - 9:00 pm
- Thursday, September 16 and September 30, 7:15 - 9:00 pm (**Intermediate/Advanced: for 4th kyu and above**)
  
- Saturday, 11:00 am - 1:00 pm

**Current Classes (Children)**

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

**\*Note:** All adult classes are now contact classes, including ki testing and techniques. The children's class will be no contact for the time being.

**Message from Children's class teacher, Marion Sensei:**

We restarted our children's program the first Saturday in June. We have class from 10:00 - 11:00 am every Saturday morning. With all our students under 12 years old, and therefore unable to be vaccinated yet, we use masks, have no contact, and keep a 3 foot distance. Although we still can't do many things (no throws, ki tests, and some of our favorite games), we are still having fun and enjoying being on the mat together. We do

stretches, hitori waza, ukemi, jo, bokken, games, and shadow box techniques. We had some returning students (one who turned 13 in July and has moved on to the adult classes), and we have several new students, who have been learning to roll, knee walk, and use weapons. We are very pleased that the children's class is back.

## Upcoming Events

- EKF Zoom Training: **Special training with Ohara Sensei** on Saturday, September 18 (8:00 am - 9:30 am EST) -- **RSVP Required to Fryling sensei**

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## Clarity

### ***Proprioception and Reaction***

Last month, a new word was introduced into the English lexicon courtesy of gymnast Simone Biles at the Summer Olympics. This word is "twisties." So, what does it mean and how could it possibly relate to Ki Aikido?

Olympic-level, elite gymnastics is generally second order awareness in action (see this week's shokushu). It requires complete oneness of mind and body, complete trust that the body and the unconscious mind know what to do without the conscious mind intervening with what it *thinks* the body should do. If the gymnast does not have mind and body unified, severe injury or even death could occur given the highly dangerous nature of the activities he/she is performing.

When this happens, it looks something like this (from *The Washington Post*): "...suddenly you're upside down in midair and your brain feels disconnected from your body. Your limbs that usually control how much you spin have stopped listening, and you feel lost...When gymnasts have the 'twisties,' they lose control of their bodies as they spin through the air. Sometimes they twist when they hadn't planned to. Other times they stop midway through as Biles did. And after experiencing the twisties once, it's very difficult to forget. Instinct gets replaced by thought. Thought quickly leads to worry. Worry is difficult to escape."

From the same article: "As Sean Melton, a former elite gymnast who dealt with the twisties throughout his career said, 'Simply, your life is in danger when you're doing gymnastics. And then when you add this unknown of not being able to control your body while doing these extremely dangerous skills, it adds an extreme level of stress. And it's terrifying, honestly, because you have no idea what is going to happen.'"

We have what has been called a sixth sense: proprioception. It was made famous in a story by Oliver Sacks in his book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* in which a young, very healthy woman suddenly and mysteriously lost her ability to know where her body was in space after she took antibiotics to treat a sinus infection. Overnight she could not do any basic function of living in daily life, including feeding herself because her arms were not her own anymore but rather just some floating appendages that she had no affiliation with and, therefore, no control over.

As J.L. Taylor explained in *Encyclopedia of Neuroscience* (2009): "Proprioception is the sense that lets us perceive the location, movement, and action of parts of the body. It encompasses a complex of sensations, including perception of joint position and movement, muscle force, and effort. These sensations arise from signals of sensory receptors in the muscle, skin, and joints, and from central signals related to motor output. Proprioception enables us to judge limb movements and positions, force, heaviness, stiffness, and viscosity [(i.e., resistance to flow)]. It combines with other senses to locate external objects relative to the body..."

This sounds a lot like the elements that comprise Ki Aikido: ma'ai, all Four Principles of Mind and Body Unification, all Five Principles of Practice, working with different parts of the body (muscle, skin, joints), etc. Could it be that we are strengthening our sixth sense through this practice?

But there is more. Ki Aikido trains the ability to respond to perceived threat rather than react to it. According to Dr. Stephen Porges and his Polyvagal Theory, the vagus nerve is THE primary structure/system in the central nervous system that mediates our fight/flight/freeze reactions based on perceptions of safety in the environment. If safety is perceived then the "vagal brake" stays down and we respond with equanimity to environmental cues through the parasympathetic nervous system. This includes mobilization without fear.

But, if there is perceived danger then the vagus deactivates -- the "vagal brake" is released incrementally but FAST -- and our sympathetic nervous system employs the fight/flight/freeze mechanisms, releasing stress hormones such as cortisol to mobilize with fear. This mobilization includes thought.

In this way, you can think of the human body as a car whose engine is always turned on and in Drive but the brake is pushed down all (in a default safety mode) or most of the way (mobilized without fear) but when there's perceived danger the brake is quickly lifted and the car moves fast (mobilized with fear). Ki Aikido trains the ability to move the car without fear.

But, what else does the vagus nerve directly affect? You guessed it: proprioception. So, perhaps strengthening our sixth sense simultaneously strengthens our response capacities, and vice-versa? Perhaps when the gymnasts temporarily lost their sense of proprioception, it meant their (internal bodymind) environments had changed enough to where they had on some level perceived an immediate threat to life and body that *was no longer integrated internally* and the vagal brake lifted enough to react to that threat, releasing stress hormones and thoughts to mobilize with fear? This vagus deactivation could have then led to the loss of proprioception and bodymind awareness they had experienced. Perhaps this is why their response is to practice skills in the "pits" when this happens, maybe to reintegrate the skill into the changed bodymind environment?

We can understand how stressful this must be for anyone. Think of it like grabbing a glass of water, a skill that is largely unconscious and depends on your proprioceptive sense. But, instead of it working there's something going on where you don't know where your hand is relative to the glass. Oh, and if you don't grab the glass perfectly you could die or be paralyzed. Do you still try to grab the glass right away? How do you learn to manage that stress and perform with confidence?

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## Shokushu Reading

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

### 13. THE UNITY OF CALM AND ACTION

Just as a top spinning rapidly becomes steady, the most rapid movement results in calm. Like the eye of the typhoon which is always peaceful, inner calm results in great strength of action. Calm and action are exactly one.

Only when we keep one point and unify mind and body, can we find spare time even when busy. Keep a calm mind and you will be able to perform to the best of your ability even in an emergency or when facing important tasks.

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## 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 *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion.

This book chronicles the circumstances leading up to and the year following the sudden death of Ms. Didion's husband and fellow writer, John Dunne. Death is an important topic in Ki Aikido and, of course, in life. It has touched many of us directly in the VKS dojo this year, beginning with the sudden loss of Jerry Billingsley and including the loss of at least four members' fathers.

One passage narrates Ms. Didion's apparent preoccupation with having to *do* something in the initial aftermath. This reminded the author of the concept of non-doing, or *doing* nothing, how our minds automatically move to action to fill emotional pain and emptiness and to defend against the perceived threat of death, the attack of dying. It reminded the author how important a practice actively *doing* nothing is to fully allow this threat/attack to be *as it is* and follow its Ki to its natural end.

The author once had a question that he could not formulate during an entire weekend seminar with Curtis Sensei years ago. As the author was leaving on Sunday morning and getting into his car he saw Curtis Sensei and the question suddenly came to him:

"How do we make death and dying our partner?" Curtis Sensei replied, "Keep them close, as close as you can."

Shame is known as the most painful emotion, perhaps because we associate shame with death (e.g., being "mortified"). To the egoic or False Self, shame = dying because by definition connection is suddenly severed and the ego is thereby diminished. Our minds do the math and extrapolate this diminishment going all the way to zero (i.e., annihilation or, more apropos, dis-integration = death). "Death by exile!" as the Scarecrow says in the movie *Batman Rises*.

Shame is hard to keep close. We react to it through myriad resistant, avoidant, and passive behaviors and emotions including varying degrees of anger, fear, and sadness.

But True Self is by nature one with the Universe, so there can be no possibility of dis-integration or diminishment from shame. This is the dichotomy of daily life. In Ki Aikido, we practice living from True Self or essence. By developing the ability to tolerate attack without resisting it, we cultivate this essence and allow attack and threat to diminish of their own volition by *doing* nothing to change them in any way.

Anyhow, a friend sent the author this book. It's not for everyone. I wouldn't have chosen it. But, now this author is passing it along to his friends and sending plus Ki, healing energy, and love to all.

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## Upcoming Events

### EKF Zoom Training

Two emails from Rich Fryling Sensei, Head Instructor, NYKA:

Hi All,

As we prepare for our special online class with **Ohara Sensei on September 18<sup>th</sup>**, I wanted to forward more detail on the class itself. Most importantly, there are no plans to distribute a recording of the class. So it's a live event only! I'm sure it's something you won't want to miss.

And if that wasn't enough to pique your interest, here is a brief agenda for Ohara Sensei's class.

- Feel the whole body using as one
- Feel a sense of calmness of mind
- Aikitaiso: Tekubishindo (relax taiso), Udemawashi Waza, Ikkyo Waza
- How to lead your partner: Munatsukikoteoroshi, Shomennuchikoteoroshi, etc
- Question and Answer



I've received many confirmations from those planning to attend the class. Many thanks for that. If you're still interested, please let me know, so we can keep an accurate count. As I mentioned in the previous note, EKF will cover the 2000 yen class fee for all EKF Students and Instructors.

Excited for our training together,

Rich

Hi All,

I am thrilled to announce a special online training opportunity with **Ohara Sensei on September 18<sup>th</sup> 2021 @ 8:00am ET to 9:30am ET**. Ohara Sensei is Head Instructor of the Seishinkan Dojo and Administrative Head for all of Headquarters.

As many of you know, the Eastern Ki Federation has a special relationship with Ohara Sensei who has traveled from Japan to attend multiple EKF seminars, most recently during our 2015 Summer Seminar with Kaicho Sensei. Ohara Sensei also accompanied Mrs. Iwao Tamura in 2004 for an EKF seminar titled "Setsudo", honoring the life and teaching of Tamura Sensei.

Not only has Shaner Sensei enjoyed a long personal relationship with Ohara Sensei that spans over 40 years, but additionally our very own Matthew Attarian Sensei has had the unique opportunity in training closely with Ohara Sensei since moving to Japan in 2017. This began when Attarian Sensei first lived in Fukuoka. Attarian Sensei later moved to Tokyo in 2019 where he has since become a full-time student and instructor at Seishinkan Dojo. Ohara Sensei is Attarian Sensei's visa sponsor.

While online classes offered in Japan typically come with a fee, EKF is pleased to pre-pay for all EKF students attending this class. To help with the administration of this, please let me know if you would like to attend this class, and we will put you on this list.

I will provide more information and reminders about this special training opportunity as it approaches. I hope you are able to make this class. It will be a wonderful experience for sure.

Stay tuned for more communication. And I look forward to hearing from you if you're interested in attending.

My very best,

Rich

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## 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](mailto: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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