

"Love one another" -- Jesus Christ, John 13:34

"With a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings." -- Buddha, The Metta Sutra

"God is Love" -- The Apostle John, 1 John 4:8

"God Loves" -- John Coltrane, A Love Supreme

"Budo must give happiness and joy to the partner. It must be the budo of love." -- Morihei Ueshiba O Sensei, quoted by Michio Hikitsuchi Sensei.

Earlier this year, I had a devastating depression. It interfered with all my life activities, including teaching and training in Aikido. I was off the mat for about three months. When I returned, I surprised myself and those around me. I kept my breath for the entire class, and my technique was actually kind of decent. One fellow student called my kokyu nage "awesome" and though, I humbly disagree with him, it was better than what I think it should have been after a three month absence.

After class, he asked me how my technique was as good as it was after such a long break. My mind, heart, and mouth answered with barely any hesitation, "I've spent the past three months cultivating love." I had not realized this myself, until my whole being had spoken it.

I was diagnosed as manic-depressive when I was 15 years old, after being in and out of hospitals for depression for about a year. Today they call the disease Bipolar Disorder. I take medication to treat my condition, but it is only that – a treatment, not a cure. Sometimes the medicine fails me, and I have severe mood swings. I have lived with this condition now for more than half my life.

This latest depression was one of three or four life-altering depressions. All others landed me in hospitals, suicidal. But there was something different about my life this time. When before, I had no one to be accountable to, suicide seemed a viable option, this time I had a wife, a son, and a best friend that I was not willing to abandon. I was told by a friend who works in psychiatric hospitals, that he notices that suicidal people are focused on themselves, I on the other hand was now focused on other people more than myself. As I loved them, they loved me in return, and I discovered the life-saving ability of love.

The love of those around me, and the love I gave in return eventually saw me through my depression and 3 months after it had come on me, I could finally begin to live my life again. I came through this experience a changed man. The true power of love before this time was academic to me, now I had experienced its reality in a depth I had never imagined.

This love has stayed with me, I can feel a light in my chest that I think is the touch of the divine. It is a Love Supreme.

Before my depression my Sensei, John Smartt and I had a short chat as to what "real Aikido" was. I voiced the supposition that a technique that was truly non-violent, non-injurious, and non-resistant was true Aikido. He told me it was a good insight, but the real

answer was that real Aikido happens when your motivation is love. I accepted that, and thought it was academic. Love on the mat was difficult, so I thought I would still work on non-violence, non-injury, and non-resistance. When I returned to the mat, it was no longer just a theory, I discovered how to love while doing Aikido. When my motivation was love, the non-violence, non-injury, and non-resistance manifested with no effort from me.

I think I may have discovered the “budo of love” O Sensei told Hikitsuchi about. I may have discovered the love supreme that Coltrane knew. I may have discovered the God of John the apostle. I may have discovered the boundless heart the Buddha spoke of. I may have discovered the love for others that Jesus implored. Maybe I have discovered that there is no difference between any of these. All I know for sure, is that I am not yet finished discovering what this heavenly love light in my chest is all about.