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## **SENSEI'S BLOGS:**

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### **Taking a Grading**

What does it mean – taking a grading? In our Dojo there are 10 Kyu levels (steps). When we commence training we are considered 10th Kyu. The first four levels (9 / 8 / 7 / 6) are designed to be taken approximately three months apart. They are aimed to develop good and safe training habits (appreciating the nuances of partnered training), basic falls, build self management skills (maintaining posture, balance & extension) as well as sound basics around introductory techniques and introduction to weapons. During this time focus on studying how people function in a Dojo environment – be respectful and active in learning. Your body is growing stronger, more flexible and better connected. The Teacher is looking to gain an understanding of your potential as a serious student.

The next two levels (5th and 4th Kyu) introduce us to extending our self management skills to include the body weight (still mainly non-resistant) of a partner. They expand our technical skills through core techniques while reinforcing the learning from the first 4 levels. Functioning in a Dojo environment should be second nature yet we need to be cautious of over familiarity. Even at this early stage we can unwittingly set an upper limit on our achievements.

3rd to 1st kyu involves building upon the foundation established over the previous 2 years or so. There are more techniques with increased complexity. Focus shifts to include distancing, timing and targeting. Our falls will have reached a good level allowing us to train freely. We will be exploring the range of our extension and power. Our partners will begin to test us and we need to lift to assimilate this new challenge. General fitness is at another level now and our 'spirit' is high.

With about 4 years behind us, now we enter again into a larger world of technique in preparation for the 1st degree black belt (Shodan). The Aikido that seemed to be getting simpler takes on another level of complexity as well as physical & mental demand. This is a time to begin to experience using our partners' power and to produce our own power from correct form – that combination of centre-line, breath, weight transfer and focus. Falls become more effortless and there appears to be a much greater degree of effortlessness in our movement. The movement begins to generate the technique. We are beginning to connect weapons and taijutsu.

In a world that tends to focus on development or growth as if this was a natural endless progression, through gradings we are exposed to cycles of learning. Trees don't continue to grow. Mountains don't continue to get higher. Summer will always be followed by Autumn and Winter. Decay and death are as natural as growth and youth but because we humans harbour such a fear





of death and decay..... we all too easily worship youth and growth. Through grading preparation the benefits of self doubt and questioning - of challenging ourselves – of failing and starting again - become more apparent. This path, like life, is not a gradually upward, always improving one. We must grind and polish.... grind and polish. Changing shape along the way and leaving behind the unnecessary or useless excesses. Testing and refining our spirit by victory over small weaknesses.

What looked like a mountain when we first commenced, we realise is much more a foothill. And we are well prepared to continue toward the horizon.

**David**

