THE KIAI

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WHAT MAKES AIKIDO AIKIDO?

"Where do those kicking techniques come from? Is that traditional Aikido?" someone may wonder when watching a demonstration of Aikido from a different style. "Are we practicing the original style of Aikido in our Dojo?" someone else may wonder after pondering on the difference between her current teacher's style of Aikido and that of a visiting Japanese sensei.

Whether they are doing pure Aikido or not is a concern that naturally troubles the serious students of Aikido. In this essay I propose a technical definition of Aikido that may shed some light on the issue. The perspective presented herein is based on personal experience and is not meant to represent an authoritative statement on the nature or essence of Aikido.

The question is particularly troubling for students of lineage schools such as ours. Especially, students at the instructor level may struggle with this question: How much can I deviate from the teaching that I received from my teacher while still honoring the lineage? Or, in short, "What's my margin of freedom within this lineage?"

If these students do not resolve this line of questioning they will not experiment and will become copycat teachers instead of allowing spontaneous expression of the art, thus stifling their inner growth.

In my experience, an Aikido technique must possess the following characteristics:

1. Three phases of the technique are discernible: the person initiating the technique must first connect with the uke's center, re-align with uke's energy then extend to a neutral ground.
2. The participants use tenkan during the blending (re-alignment) phase and use irimi or a hanmi-based motion for the initial connection and the throwing phase. In irimi, the arms, hips and legs are in triangular stance and focus toward the direction of the motion. In tenkan, the arms, hips and legs move in circles.
3. Motion originates from the feet (or part of the body in contact with the ground), is enhanced by the hips and expressed through the arms; or it can originate from the hips, be grounded through the feet and be expressed through the arms.
4. The spine and the head are generally aligned.

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5. Hands generally move up and down in the front of the body.
6. During movement, joints are never locked (especially elbows, hips and knees).
7. At the advanced level, the techniques must be initiated before the manifestation of the attack.
8. Weapons work must follow the same principles as body techniques since they are considered as extensions of the arms.

With few exceptions, a movement that does not exhibit all of the above characteristics is not an Aikido technique.

On a holistic level it would be difficult to label something as Aikido if one of the following characteristics is absent:

1. Intent to restore and preserve balance: the persons doing Aikido must have, and exhibit, the intent to restore balance in a conflict situation. If there is any intent to separate, stand out, create conflict, destroy, maim or kill then there is no Aikido.
2. Integrity of movement: in performing Aikido movement, the performer must attempt to achieve an inner alignment of all body parts and move with the whole body as one unit. In Aikido techniques this inner alignment is achieved through hanmi (triangular stance) when stationary, and through irimi (moving forward using hanmi) or tenkan (moving circularly by turning the hips) when in motion. If one body part is left out in a motion then the motion is not part of Aikido.
3. Harmonious interaction: in an Aikido practice the participants must interact with each other in a harmonious manner, alternating between ukemi (receiving) and kokyuu (extension). The energies should flow smoothly with no sudden interruption or burst. If one of the participants looses the connection with the other, there is a gap in the flow; if he does not receive when the other comes on then there is a clash. If there are gaps or clashes during the interaction then it is not Aikido.

The above discussion is aimed to benefit students at the instructor level (sandan and above) and pre-supposes proficiency in basic Aikido techniques. These students can begin to express themselves more freely using the above criteria. They should teach the Aikido that they understand and that comes forth naturally rather than repeat their teacher's teaching.

As for lineage materials, only those that are consistent with the above criteria need to be preserved; the rest constitutes personal expressions of the teachers in the lineage.

However, if someone's experiments take him significantly away from the defining criteria described above, his art has changed at the core is no longer anchored in Aikido. He should be cautious about labeling his art Aikido.

Other students not yet at the instructor level need not concern themselves with the detail of this discussion but should be aware that the term "Aikido" refers to a well-defined art. Like other arts, it has a set of basic techniques that forms its core and that every aspiring artist must learn. And like other arts, after the artist has internalized the basic forms she must transcend them in order to grow.

From that point on the art is expressed through the artist in a plenitude of colors. Then it is meaningless to look for the original art in such expressions; the art is in the artist. Similarly in the Aikido world, purity of styles is not a relevant concern for a student. What's important is how best to absorb the teaching of the current teacher. The best thing for a student to do is carry out exactly the teacher's instructions and search for their meaning in study and practice.

Hoa Newens

AIKIDO AND THE UNRESOLVABLE CONFLICT

This essay is divided into two distinct parts; first, there is a routine look at the group of Yokomenuchi techniques, and then basic principles of that group are used metaphorically in a look into emotional aspects of training. It is the author's belief that when we consider the life of O'Sensei, that along with the martial art and spiritual side of his life, however important his extraordinary training in those areas were, we must remember that he was a man with the same kind of challenges we all face. He was a man with parents, children, responsibilities to his benefactors and teachers, debts, failed business ventures, health problems. He lived in a Japan that was rapidly becoming an industrial rat race, and at an age when most of us expect to have our feet pretty solidly on the ground, careerwise and financially, he had to endure, along with the rest of his country, the consequences of the Second World War. Most people beyond a certain age would concede that, within these facts of life, there exists the unresolvable conflict. The author believes that these facts of life played an important part in the development of modern Aikido.

Yokomenuchi practice is an opportunity to explore several of the basic principles of Aiki movement and technique. Let's start with the attack itself: The attack is predicated on the idea that nage has connected with uke, as in the pre-attack stage of weapons practice. When a bokken or jo is being used, this connection is fairly obvious, and the weapon itself occupies the centerline between uchi-and uketachi, and the need for a flanking attack is obvious. Also obvious is the fact that this attack must come from the center and not stray too wide, or the defense is too easy. In taijutsu the nage must extend his awareness and intent into the center area between uke and nage, or the yokomen attack is unnecessary. Uke can just come straight in and try to poke nage in the nose. Once nage has connected with his partner's center he must maintain that connection, and not be distracted, even though the attack is coming in from an angle. If nage actually focuses on the hand and allows his body to turn towards it, he is especially vulnerable -uke has other weapons. Nage must track the strike in his peripheral vision while keeping his attention directed toward uke's center.

The progression of yokomen blends can be seen as a continuum, having as their unifying principle this initial center-to-center connection, in spite of apparent major differences in their execution. Given this original central connection of awareness, the blend begins as uke first starts to raise his hand to strike. Nage responds, ideally without thinking, by extending, from the fingertips back, his hand towards uke. There is a direct kokyuho available if nage continues this extension and follows in with his body. If nage extends in and then kokyus outward toward the striking forearm, there is a direct kokyunage available, or the foundation for ikkyo, nikkyo, etc. is set. As the extension is directed towards the center, and then flows outward, this block has a quality of expansion, much like the brake shoes of an auto that expand out against the hub, as opposed to a block which is simply placed perpendicular to the strike. The hands are alive, the shoulders are relaxed, and the extension which is created has a springy quality, like the leaf springs on a car. This extension can bend considerably and stay strong. If the hands are dead and the shoulders tighten up, the arm can collapse at the elbow and the resulting defensive posture is weak, brittle, and receiving the yokomen is a much more painful proposition. As the initial extension leaves uke's center, it is imperative to bring the second hand to center—usually with a matching yokomen. Nage's attention must stay on uke's center as well.

In order to execute yokomenuchi iriminage at this next blend phase, all of the previous conditions must be maintained - the primary receiving hand must extend out -elbow down, shoulder relaxed, hands alive, and kokyu back past nage's head. Backed up by the second hand - elbow down, shoulder relaxed, hands alive - and combined with the turn of the hips, this blend is often characterized as the meshing of gears.

The final blend phase is accomplished by stepping back and around a little bit in the same direction as the slice of the yokomen. Once again the original criteria are in force; connecting, reconnecting with the second hand, keeping awareness directed at uke's center. Shihonage, kotegaeshi, a couple of iriminages, and a spiral kokyunage are among the techniques executed from this blend.

The more you know,
the less you understand.

The Master arrives without leaving,
sees the light without looking,
achieves without doing a thing.

Tao Te Ching

It's possible to look at these technical principles as metaphor for application in looking at the emotional interactions between people, in our case especially teacher-student, sempai-kohai, and other situations involving the giving and receiving of criticism especially. The only authority the writer claims in regard to psychology is forty-three years of making, and paying the consequences for, mistakes. Also let it be noted that there are no groundbreaking new ideas or clever analytical treats to be found, just a routine look at what is best described as "common sense."

The first principle discussed is the connection - from center to center - of the parties involved. This is established before the action starts and determines the ma-ai and dictates the "line" that both parties orient themselves from. This connection creates the INTEGRITY that is the foundation for all further interactions. This connection allows a "pro-active" rather than "reactive" response to the "attack." In the physical execution of technique the second principle, the extension, flows in and penetrates the partner's center, or it flows in and then expands outward. Even in attacks that appear very direct there is a blend. If the arm comes up perpendicular to the line without that initial, split second orientation, the resulting defense is brittle, easily broken through, and there is nothing left to prevent a clobbering. Likewise the psyche with the brittle ego - the reactive, has an answer, a deflection, an excuse, an automatic response for every criticism

type of personality - is battered but rarely energized by critique or challenge. Such a person has a hard time finding and maintaining the joy of training. The difference is between receiving one into one's sphere of influence as opposed to creating a hard brittle shell around oneself. Some of us have a more brittle ego than others - the task of the instructor is to gauge this in each student. Healthy training involves a little smashing but not complete obliteration of one's defenses.

Everyone has a blind spot. That is the reason the human species can be so clever and still have so many problems. When we discover something about our-selves it is no longer in our blind spot. But the blind spot still exists. Always. It can trap us at any moment. Training with serious instructors and many different types of people, confronting fear and enduring frustration, provides growth. Correct training involves bringing meaning to our practice with each breath. Spiritual growth in the absence of emotional growth would seem unlikely. As we get older we come to realize that some conflicts are unresolvable. Unresolvable conflicts are few. But when we get trapped in our blind spot all conflicts are unresolvable.

David DeLong

MEMORIAL DAY GASSHUKKU

Sixteen members from the Aikido Institute made their way to Tahoe at varying times on Friday, May 22nd, ready for a long weekend of training. After spending the morning running last-minute errands with a very nervous Dave DeLong, I drove up to Tahoe with Beth Sempai at noon. Because we left so early, Beth and I arrived at the Ride Out Elementary by 5pm, where we met up with Maggie and Dave. After testing our stomachs on the outside swings, we helped to set-up the gym for the weekend's events. While I offered to help merely to be of assistance, I soon discovered how auspicious this help would prove to be. Based on the thickness and condition of the mats that Beth, Maggie, Dave, and I helped to set up, we gained insight into which mats would be most and least comfortable to train upon. I used that valuable information through out the weekend, and am convinced that my body faired so well because I knew where to train!

Hoa Sensei taught the first class of the Gasshukku, at 7:30 pm Friday night. While I am privileged to train with Hoa Sensei regularly, there was a special energy in the training that night that helped me to appreciate how lucky the Aikido Institute is to have him. After starting the class with tai-no henko and only forty rolls (a break for those of us from the Aikido Institute, but many people around me complained that they never have to roll that much), we spent most of the evening doing various ushiro techniques. After a lively class, we bowed out for the evening at 9pm. Soon after class, people departed for their various homes for the weekend, while Maggie, Geoff and I remained at the school and slept on the mat.

Saturday morning training began at 9am with Bill Witt Sensei. Witt Sensei stressed the basics, and spent most of the class instructing on morote dori kokyuu ho, and shiho nage (from katate dori, both ura and omote). I was fortunate enough to train with Kim Sensei for part of the class, and after much struggling, was able to throw a one-legged Sensei from morote dori kokyuu ho (it's harder than it sounds)!

Hans Goto Sensei, who taught an ever-increasing kaishi waza series that began from shomen uchi ikkyo, taught the second class of the day. Every few minutes, Goto Sensei added another blend to the original base, until all were confused as to who should attack, and when. The final series was: shomen uchi ikkyo-kote gaeshi-shiho nage-sankyo-nikkyo-irime nage. Whew!

After Goto Sensei's class, there was a short break, and then three dan tests. There was a shodan test for a member of Fresno Aikido, a sandan test for a member of Tahoe Aikido, and a sandan test for our own Dave DeLong. All three tests went well, but none were as exciting as Dave's, where he continued to train despite a bonk on the head from Maggie's bokken during a randori. The blood dripping down his forehead added a dramatic flair to the conclusion of his test. After the tests, Tahoe Aikido provided us with a terrific picnic-style lunch (in freezing weather!) that enlivened us for the afternoon classes.

Dennis Tatoian Sensei taught the first class after lunch. He taught a tai-no henko technique in which the uke attacks with an irime nage type attack, that the nage then turns into a kote gaeshi throw. Tatoian Sensei also spent some time discussing ikkyo, specifically that the ikkyo pin is ineffective, but used because of etiquette.

> The path is exceedingly vast... just head for the light and heat, learn from the gods, and through devoted practice become one with the divine.
>
> Morihei Ueshiba

He then taught a more effective pin for ikkyo, in which the nage uses his/her inner thigh as leverage to pin the uke's shoulder.

Kim Sensei taught the final class of the day. He had an amazing amount of energy for the end of a long day of training, and inspired the entire class to remain energized and focused. As with Hoa Sensei, I experienced a great deal of pride watching him teach, knowing that the Aikido Institute is truly lucky to have such excellent senseis. Kim Sensei taught ten-chi nage, and three kokyuu nage techniques from morote dori. He ended the class with kokyuu doza.

Sunday's training was exclusively weapons. Bernice Tom Sensei taught the first class, where she instructed on the first and second kumijo. Once we had practiced both kumijos, Tom Sensei showed us how to incorporate them into one technique.

Patrick Cassidy Sensei taught the second class. Most of the class was spent doing the 5th suburi awase (with variations). Cassidy Sensei spoke at length about how important it is it blend with your partner, and to "be on time" when meeting ken strikes. Cassidy Sensei said that the uke needs to anticipate the nage's strikes, and to be a little bit ahead of the strike.

Pat Hendricks Sensei taught the third class. She taught the new thirteen jo kata kumijo. Every one was pleased with the changes, and it was a lot of fun to practice. We practiced this kumijo three times in the week that we returned from Tahoe.

Kayla Feder Sensei taught the final class of the gashhukku. She taught the 2nd and 3rd kumitachi with variations. She mirrored much of what Cassidy Sensei instructed about being present with your partner, and of "borrowing" your partner's energy to propel your strikes.

After bowing out for the weekend, everyone gathered their belongings, and readied themselves for their various journeys home. Tahoe Aikido's legendary hospitality made every one feel at home, and made the weekend a success. With a little bit of sadness, Beth and I left for home by 2pm (after we snacked on the leftovers form Saturday's lunch). Tired, sore, and happy, we returned to the dojo Sunday evening.

Beth Hall and Megan Sweet

DOKA

(5-7-5-7-7 syllable poem)

Red, wings low southward
Black, soars high silently west
Green, arches the north
Rose on Blue, colors the east
Hearts of songs, songs of all hearts

Richard S. Garcia

THE TRAINING IN NOT TRAINING

I walked into a class this week and saw people I didn't recognize. I find myself the object of "well if you trained more often ..." humor. I am beginning to feel clumsy and uncertain on the mat. My ukemi, which has always been tough for me, is falling apart. Even forward rolls feel kind of angular and stiff.

Well, it's true. I have been traveling frequently, working unexpected hours, and often face a dreary commute. Which means I don't train very many days each week. Since I often train with small groups in the morning, I also miss out on the energetic buzz I get from evening training with lots of different people.

While feeling a bit of a stranger in the dojo is pretty grim, what's most troubling is losing touch with core Aikido strengths and lessons.

What an irony. Work is extremely challenging, and I'm confronted daily by an exhausting variety of people, issues, complications, deadlines and big-company politics. I've often observed and relied on the power of the Aikido paradigm in business situations. Blending. The client's demanding and unappreciative; blend with him, see things from his perspective, walk forward together. The people at the corporate headquarters have implemented something I don't agree with; blend. Something becomes a problem and I'm involved; blend.

So now, just when I need Aikido's firm roots, I am instead pulled away. I always keep Aikido in my heart and on my mind. But the lack of physical connection and practice is causing my Aikido to regress, the way a dry, untended garden sucks life right back out of the plants.

There's a solution, I hope, and it will take two paths: the physical and the intangible. From a physical standpoint, there's suburi. Suburi runs like the huge wooden beam under our house, providing support and stability to hold up my Aikido. Bokken strikes are both exercise and meditation for me. Even far away from the mat or a partner, doing suburi brings Aikido into a place that's present, immediate and unambiguous.

The bokken goes up, the bokken goes down. Breathe in. Breathe out. Ki flows, my mind clears.

For me, practice with the jo is like reciting poetry. Suburi are so fluid and precise, the katas create a stream of

consciousness and movement that is incredibly powerful and blissfully purifying. The jo kata even bring the spirit of a partner to the practice.

Also, I've found that shadowboxing (visualizing and executing techniques on my own) is very powerful and really fun. Like tai chi or yoga, it's about the fine detail of the movement, paying attention to angles and center and kokyu. Moving slowly and deliberately, or speeding through quickly as possible are both interesting and productive. I'm going to try doing that pretty often.

Doing a two-step, or 8-direction cutting can bring me back to center, give me a chance to breathe, focus and relax. When I'm off-center, it's immediately apparent, and easy to come back. The stuff out there isn't real, it isn't substantive. It's other people and their issues and dissatisfactions. My body, my breathing, my center and my movement can exist on their own. They can both isolate and liberate me.

That, I guess is the intangible. To keep an Aiki mind in the midst of a very un-Aiki world. I find it really tough to blend with someone who seems to be intentionally aggravating me. But I think that flexibility and awareness is what Aikido is all about. On the mat, it's a punch or a grab. In the workplace it's a political end-run, a difficult co-worker, manager or client. An Aikido partner sends physical energy; a stranger delivers foul energy. My experience is that it's easier to blend with a punch, because you can see it, judge the intent and moderate your response. On the street, it's more subtle and much harder to recognize; it's often hidden in the midst of misleading language or action.

But nobody can rob me of my integrity, breath, physical or spiritual center. Aikido is the package in which to develop and preserve myself, and it's my commitment to retain it.

Now I have a meeting. Onegaishimasu.

Richard Levitt

WRITING ABOUT AIKIDO IS PART OF AIKIDO TRAINING

The underlying precepts and values of the society that we live in are based on rationality. Concepts of fairness, efficiency and reasonableness are governing principles in all of our social structures. We are all conditioned to rational behavior and our whole social system including the education system supports such behavior. Therefore, it is natural for someone raised in this society to learn by thinking, asking questions and accepting what seems logical or rational as part of worthy knowledge.

In the spirit of Aikido, we should lean on this support system in the pursuit of knowledge, even knowledge as exotic as Aikido. We should raise questions, think about what makes sense and proceed with what makes the most sense in the practice of Aikido. In other words, we should involve the intellect in the study of Aikido. We should study it as we study any other formal sciences. We should verbalize our thoughts and organize them into comprehensive logical edifices. We should write papers and theses to express this knowledge. In that way, we can share it with other people and at the same time test the validity of our understanding.

This mental activity will reinforce the knowledge accumulated by the body through physical training. For example, knowing the reason for doing a specific movement will help the Aikido student to see the logic behind the movement and accept it as a worthy goal for the body to strive for. By doing so, this student will have aligned body and mind behind learning the move.

We should note that this logical approach to learning might not apply in other parts of the world where social behavior is governed by religious beliefs or social hierarchy and authority rather than rationality and individuality.

In many parts of Asia for example, learning an art consists mainly of copying exactly what the teacher does for years and years without any questioning. This approach is natural in that part of the world and it works there because it is aligned with the local social system. A person raised in traditional Asia will readily accept any statement or instruction from the teacher as a worthwhile goal to strive for, irrespective of its logic. Such an approach would not work in our society.

Aikido was created in such a traditional Asian milieu and was propagated through mechanisms which retain the ancillary social baggage. It is important for an Aikido teacher to discern what constitutes the social baggage and what constitutes Aikido. This teacher should then re-package Aikido using the current prevalent social concepts and make it part of mainstream education.

In summary, if education means questioning, reading and writing then let's do some of that also in learning Aikido.

Hoa Newens

WEAPONS WORKSHOP IN REDWOOD PARK

In March , Hoa Sensei led a group of students from the dojo in a weapons workshop in Redwood Park. It was a peaceful, early morning as we all converged in the parking lot. We then hiked into the park, looking for a suitable spot for training and picnicking. El Nino was threatening more rain that day, but we were fortunate only to have a cold morning mist to contend with.

We soon warmed up with stretching, tai-no-henko, and jo suburi. Sensei then introduced some partner practices with the jo, which we carried out with enthusiasm, our kiais ringing through the foggy stillness of the park. In between kumijo, we took turns doing tanren-uchi, a practice of striking a tire with an over-sized bokken. It was a great opportunity for intense strikes with focused extension, and was especially exhilarating in the fresh pine air of the park.

Sensei followed this practice with a romp over to some nearby logs, where a spontaneous, outdoor practice ensued. We focused our jo strikes and thrusts at pinecones, sending some flying, and missing others entirely. We practiced short katas while balanced atop the logs. We threw pinecones and wood chips into the air for each other to strike at. It was great fun to use our weapons in such new and novel ways.

Next, we had an opportunity to experience partner practices in new and novel ways. Sensei led us up a very steep, grassy hillside, then instructed us to parry our partner's strikes all the way down and back up the hill! We laughed and careened as the slope and gravity challenged our practice.

Finally, happy and exhausted, we set up our picnic and enjoyed an outdoor lunch. Sensei's sons, Richard and Ryan arrived and joined in the fun with games of frisbee and tag. It had been a great morning of training, filled with opportunities to experience our daily practice amid challenging obstacles and surfaces. I always find this type of training to have a renewing effect, alive with spontaneity and fun, and set in the beauty of nature.

Beth Hall

THE DOJO MISSION - SOME PHILOSOPHY

The stated mission of the Aikido Institute is "Personal Growth Through Aikido Practice".

This brief essay takes a brief look at "growth" as it relates to Aikido.

All biological entities, all life, grows (at least, until it dies). Plants and "lower" animals have, we can imagine, relatively straightforward methods. They follow instincts, in the case of the latter, or some directive even more basic, in the case of the former.

Humans don't have it quite so easy.

Taking our cue from Aristotle, we can divide the human into the vegetative aspect, the animal aspect, and the rational, or human aspect. The vegetative aspect controls all basic motor and digestive functions, the animal aspect provides what we might call "instinct" and will to survive, the human aspect provides meta-level observation, abstraction, and perhaps a greater or lesser degree of governance (benevolent or otherwise) of the entire organism. It seems that humans have been blessed (cursed, as well) with the ability to observe and direct their own individual and social growth.

This makes things a bit more subtle. Growth is good. But towards what? And in what way?

One can grow in physical strength, one can grow in moral strength. One can, over time, become more or less psychically balanced. I think we've all seen examples of these sorts of growth, and many other sorts as well, around the dojo. It's an interesting moment (hour, day, month, year, or lifetime) when one steps back to ask where one is going, and in what way, and why? The possibilities can seem almost overwhelming.

Aikido is an excellent practice for giving the body-mind clues about where it needs to go. The communication between human organisms which occurs on the mat is quite profound. Receiving a technique from someone, or executing it and feeling their level of engagement, of tension, etc., is often a more fruitful exchange of energy than could result from 5 hours of conversation. Add to this "keiko communication" all the verbal communication, and more or less subtle off the mat non-verbal communication, from sempai to kohai, vice versa, and kohai to kohai, and that's a lot of data to work with.

Hopefully, the net result is something we might call balance, in the members of the dojo, and the dojo itself. Hopefully the individual organisms in the dojo have their roughest spots moderately smoothed out, their weak spots relatively well filled in. Concomitant with this growth, it seems to me, is the growth of the entire social organism.

A philosopher or two might question my assumption that balance is of value. I might question it too, intellectually. It's more difficult to question on the mat.

As for weak spots, my capacities of abstraction are light years ahead of my ukemi, so I think it's time to do a few rolls.

Alex Gutterman

TAISAI DEMO & CELEBRATION

In late April, we traditionally commemorate the date of O'Sensei's passing. This event is known as"Taisai." On the day of Taisai we place certain offerings and flowers on the shomen. We also celebrate O'Sensei's life by training, which was his gift to us. As part of this year's training session, we gathered in a circle and listened to a reading of O'Sensei's sayings, meditating on their meaning in our daily practice. We also included a public demonstration as part of our event.

Following a high-energy morning of training and remembrances of O'Sensei, visitors began to arrive and we conducted our demonstration. Excellent demos were given by all the participants. After an introduction to Aikido for the guests, the demo started as Leif led the children's class in a fun example of what they've been learning this past year. Next, Leif and Bruce demonstrated progressions of basic to flowing techniques. Josh and Ted were up after that with a demonstration of suwari-waza and hanmi-handachi techniques. Maggie and I then showed a variety of techniques with nage's hands tied behind the back. Hoa Sensei gave a demonstration with his feet tied, amazing us all as he kept his balance in spite of Leif's high-energy attacks. Maggie then conducted techniques with her eyes blind-folded and Megan doing sneak-up attacks. Next, Kim Sensei did a high-powered randori with Leif, Ted and Vanessa flying around. Peter then showed tanto-dori with Leif attacking. Kim Sensei and Vanessa did an impressive demo with the live sword. Kathy and Ted followed this with ken-tai-jo and kumi-tachi. Peter and I closed the demo with a flowing 31-kata kumi-jo. Everyone put a lot of work into their demos and it really showed.

At the conclusion of the demonstration, Hoa Sensei answered some interesting questions from our guests. We then invited everyone to join us for refreshments. I'm pleased and proud to say that the event was well-attended and a good time was had by all! It is always wonderful to remember O'Sensei with strong training, and a pleasure to open the dojo to guests to share Aikido with others.

Beth Hall

KI

The following calligraphy, one of my accomplishments in an afternoon at a Brushwork Workshop with Kazuaki Tanahashi, is a stylized ideogram for the Japanese word "ki". The following quote from the workshop materials presented by Kazuaki Tanahashi is very compelling:

"In my own understanding of brushwork, ki has little to do with intellectual analysis and intentional creation of effects, also little to do with struggling and forcing. It is a gentle and natural flow of energy that is open to spontaneity and lies largely in the realm of non-thinking. It is a relaxed but highly focused and concentrated force that manifests in a non-hesitating, decisive, and unbroken stream. Rather than being found in the dualistic realm of judgement as to whether it meets the artist's expectations exactly or not, ki manifests as a kind of wholesomeness – an organic unity of seemingly contrasting elements such as 'perfect and imperfect,' 'beautiful and ugly.' "

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Richard S. Garcia

AIKI NEWS INTERVIEWS BILL WITT ABOUT SAITO SENSEI

Published by Aiki News in September 1974 in Monterey, California
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AIKI NEWS: When did you first come into contact with Saito Sensei, Bill?

WITT: I started training in July of 1967 and after I had been in Japan a couple of months, a friend, Julian Jacobs, asked me if I ever went to the Sunday class. I was training six days a week and resting on Sunday, so I told him I hadn't. "You ought to go to some of Saito Sensei's classes because he does some very good basic Aikido," he said. That seemed interesting, so I started going and whenever Saito Sensei taught O Sensei would seem to come out too. I was really impressed right from the very first because here was a guy who was not too flashy but nice and solid with good basic technique who was willing

to help beginners and who seemed very friendly. I attended his class for about six or nine months. One day, I walked out of the dojo and Saito Sensei was standing in front and he said to me: "How long have you been training? I told him and then he said: "How do you like Aikido?" I said: "I like it very much, but I don't understand it." Then he said, "Neither do l." I thought that was a pretty significant statement coming from an 8th dan. Then he told me that if I wanted to systematize my training I should make a chart where on one side I put down all the attacks I could think of and on the other side all of the throws. As you learn them you start checking them off and you begin to see that there are parallels. You start breaking them up into attacks and defenses instead attack-defense techniques.

AIKI NEWS: A chart like this appears in one of Saito Sensei's 5 books, doesn't it?

WITT: Yes . . . it made learning for me a lot easier. You could see that you can do this technique from here, here, and here, but not from here. So I continued going to his classes. This was of course when O Sensei was still alive. I came back to the States in 1968. Then I returned to Japan again in 1969 five months after O Sensei had passed away. It was while you were there, and that was when I went out to Iwama for the first time. That was when Saito Sensei was starting to teach JO (the Aikido stick) at Hombu Dojo and I thought that was pretty interesting. The time you and I went out to Iwama Saito Sensei mentioned that if we wanted to get together a special group to come out and train all we would have to do would be to give him the price of a bottle or something like that. So I got a small group together, Terry Dobson, and a few other people and we went out to Iwama for a couple of weeks to train. Then I started going out a little more periodically because I had decided at that time that he was the person I wanted to train with.

AIKI NEWS: What is the atmosphere like in the dojo when Saito Sensei teaches?

WITT: V-e-r-y traditional. The first time I saw Iwama, I felt that this must be a significant center . . . O Sensei lived here, the Aikido shrine is here. There is a top teacher who lives here . . . The dojo itself has a Shinto shrine rather than a simple TOKONOMA like at Hombu Dojo. There are festivals every month on O Sensei's birthday anniversary, on the 14th . . . O Sensei was born December l4th. So when Doshu comes out, there is a little festival where the food is cooked up to offer to the KAMISAMA (deities) and then you eat it and drink SAKE. So there are all these traditional Aikido customs that have grown up over the years that O Sensei started and which are still held.

AIKI NEWS: And the training in the dojo itself?

WITT: Saito Sensei has three things that he always does during training. TAI NO HENKO, the basic blending exercise, then he does KOKYUHO from the two-hand grab, and finally KOKYUDOSA. He considers those to be the three basic exercises that you should always do. He always finishes the practice with KOKYUDOSA and begins the practice with TAI NO HENKO and KOKYUHO. He believes also in balancing TAIJUTSU training with training with the stick and sword, because, of course, a lot of Aikido techniques were taken from the sword. Understanding how to swing the sword for instance should result in better technique.

AIKI NEWS: Does Saito Sensei talk about Aikido movements in terms of mechanics or use more abstract explanations?

WITT: He uses a lot of O Sensei's words. O Sensei had a series of teaching patterns. He had a great number of sayings that he would use when he would teach, some were poems, and some were just statements. For example, he would talk about doing HANMI HANTACHI IRIMINAGE from SHOMENUCHI. He would say as you step aside and enter in you have to fold your partner up. Always make sure you fold your partner up. Some of them got a little more abstract in terms of being a little more poetic. I think some appear in Saito Sensei's first book. Talking about IRIMINAGE, there is something like . . . "My enemy stands before me brandishing his sword ready to attack, but I am be-hind him already." Some of them like his KUDEN, KUDEN is like an oral teaching rather than a written one. For KOSHINAGE (hip throws) he would say "Make your body and your partner's into the shape of a cross, or the Japanese character for the number ten. Extend your hand and your partner's hand up to the top of the pillar," in other words right up to the ceiling. And then as you swing down you let your eyes follow the arm down. That of course makes the whole body rotate. It's like taking your partner down over a rotating barrel. So he has quite a number of these, and Saito Sensei uses them all the time. He believes in doing what he calls KIHON WAZA or basic techniques. And that's really all he

teaches in class. He has a lot of different patterns and different techniques and a lot of pretty far-out techniques, but basically, working with him is like being in a laboratory. He's after you to move properly and correctly and be precise. When it comes time for you to develop into the next phase of technique that he calls KI NO NAGARE, ki flow techniques, then you're prepared. He believes he's teaching you only for the first step. He can get flashy, but normally you only see him do the basic techniques.

AIKI NEWS: I saw Saito Sensei perform at an exhibition in Japan several years ago where he was attacked by a man with a stick, one with a BOKKEN, another with a knife, all at the same time. He handled them just beautifully. It was a work of art.

WITT: One day during a foreigner's class last year, Saito Sensei said: "You know, the basic techniques you learn here comprise only a little of what you'll ultimately learn. You will build from these techniques. For example . . ." and he called over two of the Swedes. He was standing up against the wall. One was holding his left hand with both hands like this, and Saito Sensei had a sword in his right hand. The other guy had a sword in front of him and attacked him with it. He defeated the one with the sword and threw the other. And it was a weird technique, something that you'd never see. He was showing that if you know your basics well, it's like applying a formula in a clinical or laboratory situation. Saito Sensei went on explaining; "Imagine you're standing on a bridge one log wide and there's somebody coming down the other way who wants to throw you off. What are you going to do? You've got to be able to do Aikido in this situation, too." In other words, he was demonstrating that you didn't have to move off the line. And he had another UKE come up and attack him, and the guy was orbiting around him like a planet. He would come in to attack with strikes and thrusts, grabs, everything. And Saito Sensei would stand in that one spot and do things like SHIHONAGE, IRIMINAGE, KAITENNAGE, KOTEGAESHI, IKKYO, all the basic techniques. He was throwing off this side and off that side, around in back of him . . . We were all sitting there like this agog. But it's something you rarely saw him do.

AIKI NEWS: How does Saito Sensei approach training with the JO and BOKKEN?

WITT: He believes, and O Sensei said this, that you should not depend on any particular weapon. You should feel comfortable with them all. Saito Sensei feels that movements of the JO and BOKKEN and TAIJUTSU are identical, and that training with one is as good as training in another. What he is really after is that the weapon become the extension of your hand, which, after all, is what a tool is. If someone hits the sword out of your hands and you say, "Oh! What do I do?" You have to know what to do. It really makes itself plain in some of the movements that the two go side by side . . . the sword and TAIJUTSU, even the JO and TAIJUTSU. The techniques for taking a sword or a stick are the same as TAIJUTSU. But not many people see that. They see the stick as anew system of moves that they have to learn.

AIKI NEWS: Would you tell us something about Saito Sensei the person?

WITT: Saito Sensei himself is 46 years old . . . that means he was born in 1928. He started training in July, 1946. I asked him once how he started Aikido training. The story he told me went like this: "After the war ended there wasn't much for the young people to do. They were frustrated, very frustrated. Those that were too young to go into the army or didn't get called up yet were old enough to be frustrated over the defeat would take out this frustration by fighting among themselves." Thus, Saito Sensei got interested in the martial arts. He started taking Judo, Kendo, and Karate. I think he did mainly Karate. However, he doesn't hold a belt in any other art except Aikido. At that time he was living in Iwama and going all the way into Meguro to train. One day he heard about O Sensei and came out to see him. O Sensei saw his knuckles and said, "Oh, you do Karate. Hit me! He reached out and struck at him and of course he got thrown. Then O Sensei said, "What else do you do?" Saito replied, "I do some Judo." And O Sensei said, "Throw me!" And of course he got thrown again. And then Saito Sensei said, "Well, I also do some Kendo." O Sensei said, "Well, here's a sword. Hit me!" And of course the sword was taken away from him. By this time he realized that O Sensei was somebody pretty special. And so he asked to become a student and O Sensei said, "Well, do you have any money?" He said, "No, I don't." O Sensei sent him away. Then, I think, when I first heard this story it was a long time ago and my Japanese was not that good, but I think that what happened was that he volunteered to come back and be an UKE for the students that were training. Then, finally, O Sensei accepted him as being serious. Also, he was able to pay for his training, too. So then he became a student. For the last 30

years Saito Sensei has been working at the train yard in Tsuchiura in the switch house coordinating traffic through the station. A good job for an Aikido man! He works three 24-hour shifts a week, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, although the schedule varies sometimes. As a Hombu instructor he has the whole northern end of Japan, the Tohoku district. He regularly teaches up in Akita, Aomori, and Sendai. Saito Sensei comes across as a pretty humble person. Not much glamour to him at all. Yet he comes out with some pretty strange things. For instance, Dave Alexander, who lives in Iwama about a block and a half away from the dojo, told me the following story. The first time Dave went out there Saito Sensei gave him a little party at the house and he was sitting next to Sensei and I guess Sensei had been drinking quite a bit and it looked like he was weaving around kind of having a good time. Dave thought to himself. "I bet I could attack Saito Sensei right now and get away with it." Just after he thought that, Saito Sensei turned to him and said, "practice is practice, but this is a party."

AIKI NEWS: Does Saito Sensei talk about his early years of training, about what it was like to be with O Sensei?

WITT: No. Very seldom does he talk about the early days although he does talk about the days when Tohei Sensei and Waka Sensei (the present NIDAI DOSHU) were there. One day he was admonishing us to train more. He said, "What you should be doing is working on NIKYO with each other after class to get the wrists good and strong, and besides, that's a good way to learn." Then he told us the story of how he would be in the little four-mat room with Tohei on one arm and Waka Sensei on the other, both doing NIKYO on him. They would spend an hour after class doing NIKYO on each other and saying, "This one hurts. Now why does it hurt? And this one doesn't hurt. Now, why doesn't it hurt? What's the difference." That way he perfected his own art. If you think about it, it is a very logical way of training. It's not just up and down. You've got to put a little bit of intelligence to it. Training in Aikido at the dojo in Iwama is very strong. Saito Sensei works mainly from a static position because he stresses basic techniques. He'll do KI flow techniques some of the time, he's not locked into any one particular way of teaching. He thinks that UKE, the attacker, should really firmly hang on to the defender. That way when the throw occurs the guy is really thrown. He doesn't just take a floating forward roll so that it looks pretty. In spite of the heaviness or firmness of the training, people are seldom hurt. He's mentioned himself that he's never seen any broken bones there and he was with OSensei for 24 years.

AIKI NEWS: How did you approach convincing Saito Sensei to make a visit to the United States.

WITT: We had talked about it a long time ago, about three years or 50 ago. I said, "I'd like to have you come to the United States some time to see what we're doing." And he said, "Well, maybe. I work, you know." Then, this last year when I was over there he told me that this year was going to be his 30th year with the railroad and he was going to hit them up for a long vacation and that this would be a good time for him to come to the U. S. That's how that came about.

CIRCLE, TRIANGLE, SQUARE

O-Sensei, once conveyed that "Aikido embodied the circle, triangle and square." My thoughts of this concept reflect the following understanding rooted in the experience that I have gained in practice at the Aikido Institute:

The circle is the two dimensional outer perimeter of the Aikido sphere of influence and awareness. The sphere encompasses the omnidirectional radii inherent in every Aikido technique.

The triangle is the two dimensional outline of the Aikido trilogy of receiving/ blending, energy control/direction, and the resolution to harmony. These three basic elements of every technique, action, reaction and resolve, circumscribe the form of the most compact and stable geometric shape, the tetrahedra.

The square is the two dimensional outline of Aikido's creative balance. This balance is represented by the eight corners of a cube defined by points along eight continuous lines emanating from a central point within the cube. These points can be likened to the eight forces sustaining creation, as ascribed to by O-Sensei of: movement and stillness, solidification and fluidity, extension and contraction, unification and division.

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The Dojo Code

I always look, listen and learn.
I bow with humility to receive from O'Sensei,
the Sensei and fellow students.

I do my best, share and persevere in my practice.