

## CELEBRATING DANIEL BRUNNER'S NOMINATION AS BIRANKAI SHIHAN

The celebration took place in the city of Wroclaw, Poland, on the closure of the Polish Birankai Summer Camp in August 2007. Daniel Brunner's students presented him with a puppet made in his effigy, seen on this photograph skillfully manipulated by Chiba Sensei...

CONGRATULATIOS DANIEL!



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# IMPRESSIONS OF MY FIRST VISIT TO POLISH BIRANKAI SUMMER CAMP

BY CHIBA SENSEI

My first visit to Poland during the summer of 2007 left me with unforgettable feelings of pleasure and happiness. I attribute these feelings to not only memories of the incredibly warm welcome and hospitable care extended to me and my wife throughout our stay, but also and primarily from what I observed and experienced during training sessions on the mat.

My initial intent upon accepting the invitation to Polish Summer Camp was to see and give formal recognition to Daniel Brunner Shi-han for his contribution to Aikido throughout the last twenty-three years, and to celebrate his promotion to the rank of Birankai Shi-han with him and his students.

To be honest, with the exception of my familiarity with a few senior students visiting from Poland in the past, I truly did not know what to expect from Polish Aikido, and I was most pleasantly surprised. The strongest impression I received from the training sessions was of the unspoiled quality of their physical and mental practice. I attribute this quality to their decades-long isolation from mainstream Aikido practice in Europe which I believe helped them to remain pure and hungry while at the same time free from an excess of unsubstantial information—the fact of which I see as a poisonous tendency that often makes me wonder where Aikido is heading.

All that aside, I feel that this special quality embodied by the Polish students is largely due to their faith in and loyalty to their teacher, Daniel Brunner Sensei, and their commitment to a strong student-teacher relationship. Although Polish Aikido has been opened to the outside world in recent years, they appear to have exercised discernment in their choices of what influences they would integrate. In this way they have maintained their strong identity as students of Daniel Brunner. I do not know if this circumstance is the result of a conscious effort on their part or a natural outcome, but I praise both the teacher and the membership – especially seniors and leaders – for the product of their hard work.

It has never been my custom to indulge myself in tourism activities during my teaching trips; however, upon the invitation of the members I allowed myself a half day of sightseeing. I observed a three-dimensional re-creation of a battle between the Poles and the Russians during the 1700s that was breathtakingly impressive, and visited a tower that memorialized the lives of a few thousand ill-fated soldiers and police officers who fell at the hands of the invading army during the last war. The sight brought about a heavy feeling in my body as a drizzle of rain started to fall from the morning sky. As I witnessed the remaining scars left on the city of Wroclaw by the bombs of the last war, I sensed the strength and resilience of the Polish people that has been tested, forged, and tempered by their historical experience of being squeezed between the two powerful nations of Germany and Russia.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed my stay in Poland and the integration of the Polish members. I thank you all for the warm hospitality and care you gave to me and to Mitsuko. Special thanks go to the President of Polish Birankai, Andre, whose ten-direction eyes made me feel most comfortable during our stay. Altogether my experience of the members of Polish Birankai strongly reminded me of the Japan I once knew, and I truly felt at home with them.

Best wishes to all.

**T.K. Chiba**

November 3, 2007

P.S. I also enjoyed the cold Polish beer we drank together after training in the bar near the gym. Please give my personal thanks to the Master of the bar who gave us free marinated salada with Polish cucumber. Please tell him I did receive his farewell gift before I left Wroclaw.



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# AIKIDO: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

DANIEL BRUNNER



**AI** refers to the capacity of a person to adapt very quickly to any circumstance with which one is confronted.

**KI** is the energy that makes anything alive, vegetal or animal, microcosmic and macrocosmic.

**DO** is the way which one follows when one has a goal.

These three concepts existed from the beginning of times, at least since Man has been aware of his territory, his clan, his belongings, and of the necessity to be adapted to every thing in order to survive. Very early, Man realized that there was an energy ordering his environment. The increasing awareness of his humanity guided Man on the way to his own realization.

In Japan, these elements have been developed more than anywhere else. Nowhere else than in the country of the rising sun did the martial arts integrate these concepts to raise them on the level of philosophy. They are omnipresent in the Japanese society from its origin, and never ceased being developed since then.

The martial arts schools appeared very early, the oldest ones in the 12th century. One studied there mainly to learn the most effective way to kill an enemy.

It is from the Edo period, around 1600, that the concept of **DO** became important. A period of peace, even relative, inevitably brought a form of different thought; the study of the martial arts took a more spiritual side; educating the warriors' class beyond the martial skills became important to preserve peace and to support the government.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Zen monk Takuan had an important influence on the spiritual development of the warriors. Beside the study of the combat techniques, with the sword, the spear or bare hands, the samourais studied painting, calligraphy, poetry, and practiced meditation intensively.

Many martial arts schools emerged at that time, in which the spiritual side and the intellectual development were as important as the technical and physical aspects. Moreover, one school gives naturally rise to others, which in turn will generate new ways to interpret combat techniques. In the past, only the most effective ones remained, the test in the battlefield being decisive.

Morihei Ueshiba grew up in this historical context, studied various schools, to finally develop his own vision of the combat techniques, which was called, in its ultimate stage of development, AIKIDO.

It is thus right to refer to aikido as a traditional art, since it is rooted in the historical period.

Nowadays, the martial aspect is no longer justified because the sword is no longer an article of clothing, because the sense of honor developed during centuries became obsolete and because the swordsmen have ceased to integrate modern armies.

This led to many interpretations of aikido, in which the spiritual aspects are privileged rather than integrated into the practice, or in which the bases of the martial arts are denatured when speaking about harmony, that only partially translates **AI**. The difficulty is to reconcile the

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historical aspect and the contemporary world, to find a direction for our study of a martial art which is - it should be stressed - not useful anymore with regards to effectiveness on the battlefield.

What remains however is the personal development that was already present in the past. It deals with the physical chores of the training, the attention paid to our partners or opponents, the control of our movements and the knowledge of our body. To overcome our laziness is also an interesting challenge.

In my opinion, an important component of the martial arts is still missing. Apart from those who fought for their country, we do not know the danger, comfortably installed in our dojos, away from the risks of the battlefield. Who can say, nowadays, that he was confronted with the cutting edge of a sword? It is one of the challenges that we have to face: to maintain a high degree of effectiveness without any possibility of testing it.

Another aspect, which is generally neglected, is the knowledge of the historical and cultural contexts. It is obviously not essential to be educated to carry out shiho nage, but if one regards aikido as a traditional martial art, it is necessary to have a global vision, to study other combat techniques, to practice meditation in one of the many ways, and to cultivate the spirit as much as the body, in order to maintain a balance between the two.

The lack of historical knowledge is not only a Western and contemporary phenomenon. From immemorial time, everything evolved, and our present was the future of our ancestors, who certainly believed that their contemporaries did

not respect the past and who despaired of the future.

Today, aikido is growing fast. There is a profusion of schools, which all, obviously, hold the truth. Which truth? In the absence of competition, who can claim to be the best? And for a section of the practicing Westerners, there is a great difficulty in approaching a culture, which is not ours, in understanding it without having to disown our identity.

All that is our present time, the infinite research field of the traditional martial arts, the immense richness aikido offers and the treasure that we approach by studying it.

Rising generations receive aikido in heritage. Their evolution will depend on the strength of the message we leave them, on the sincerity we bring to our practice and to the transmission of the knowledge we learned from our Masters.

The only thing we can be sure of is that things will continue to evolve. But no one can say how. There will still be different interpretations of the same message, some seeing only the spiritual aspect, others delighted in confrontation, many, like currently, will see only a kind of exotic gymnastics. The message of O'Sensei will be progressively distorted with the passing of time. Moreover, our attitudes, our struggles for power, our inadequacies and our weaknesses became part of this heritage.

This is why we must be honest, intransigent with ourselves, and never give up doing as best as we can.

In the hope we will understand aikido at the time of our last breath.

Daniel Brunner  
11<sup>th</sup> of December 2007.

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## ANN JYOU KAN

The Japanese name of our Dojo  
ANNE DUCOURET

In a letter dated 09/02/07 Chiba Sensei has given our dojo the name of "ANN JYOU KAN". The English signification of these words is: "a house of peace and prosperity", and in French, "une maison de paix et de prospérité."

This name follows my written request of February 2, 2006. We were then still in the midst of full administrative procedures leading to the creation of our dojo, whose doors finally

opened in April 2006 coming into operation in the following September. In the course of an interview that Chiba Sensei had granted me in August 2006, I had the opportunity to express my intimate wish for a name for the dojo.

**A starting dojo or the beginner's mind, "shoshin"<sup>1</sup>, applied to a committed space.**

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to an article by Chiba Sensei, Sancho, 1989

With this new name our dojo has a head start in its engagement with Chiba Sensei and his school Birankai. That means that through our common practice in the setting of this dojo we dedicate ourselves to discover, to deepen, and to “live” the values and the richness of the teachings of Chiba Sensei. I wish to thank him for this beautiful gift. I am deeply touched by this symbol of the affinity that connects me to the lineage of Chiba Sensei as a student, teacher and leader of this dojo. I am equally thankful to the Birankai teachers for their collaboration in this endeavor. I thank M. Reynald Deroche, the president of our Association, for his receptiveness and I thank all those that partake in the life of this dojo since it is only with them that we can give meaning to this adventure.

I am of course not aware of Sensei’s thoughts beyond his consent to answer to my request; I can only say what this elicits in me today. This name that I have so desired, hoped for, and unexpectedly received, I understand first of all as a perspective that we have to explore.

#### **The timing of the name**

The name arrived during the alternative of “yes” and “no”<sup>2</sup> that punctuate the way between determination and renouncement.

By way of landmarks: in October 2006 a course conducted by Norberto Chiesa Shihan, Patrick Barthélémy Sensei and Didier Hatton Sensei inaugurated the practice in this place. In October 2006 the course conducted by Norberto Chiesa Shihan and Gabriel Valibouze Shihan pointed to the fact that our organization, becoming responsible for its own space of practice, could count on its own means to be better engaged in the work of Birankai. And today, the spring course with Patrick Barthélémy Sensei and Didier Hatton Sensei gives us the opportunity to gather around this name.

But it is also the “no” that asserts and confirms the way that we trace with this dojo. Since it puts to the test our willingness to consent to renunciation. In a way, a “no and no”, because

the negation is never alone, repeats itself, changes at will, refusing impatiently to be identified with insufficiency and deficit, being both beginning and becoming, putting back space in movement.

#### **“ANN JYOU KAN”, our dojo’s name in Japanese.**

This reference to the cultural origin of our practice can be also understood as the realization on our side, of the distance, the difference of perspective that is necessary for the comprehension of the universal values contained in Aikido, as well as in all Budos in general.



ANN can be pronounced phonetically like my name “anne”; on the other hand it means peace in Japanese. That is to say that in our language, the word as surname symbolizes the energy proper to the individual, whereas the name refers to the notion of family affiliation. In this context, I take it to be the particular energy at the initiative of this dojo, and that which constitutes its identity emerges slowly through daily sharing.

In our world of today, peace appears like a utopian ideal, an inaccessible stage for our societies and for the relationship to the other. Wasn’t this very search for peace O’Sensei’s intention when he offered to the world the practice he named Aikido?

At our level, isn’t this peacefulness necessary for the creation, development and prosperity of a dynamic equilibrium, the “JYou”.

The house “KAN”, the place where we can experiment the “yes” and the “no” that structure our existence; work-out our conflicts, to calm them in order to deepen our inner wealth and partake in the exchanges.

**Anne Ducouret**, speaking at the dojo  
“Ann Jyou Kan” on March 17, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> This approach to time through “yes” and “no” comes from the fact that “Nom” and “non” are pronounced the same in French.

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# ON HARMONY,

## EFFORTS TOWARDS EFFORTLESS BEING, AND REMEMBRANCE

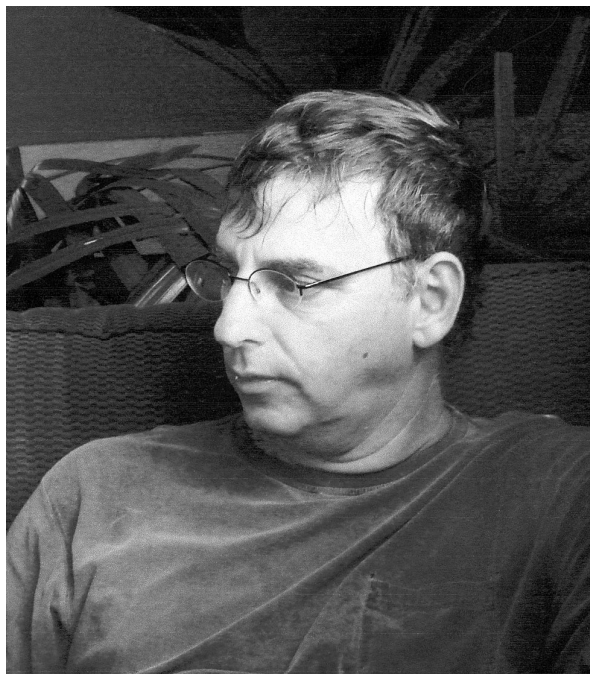
Some Notes on Chiba Sensei's Notion of Martial Awareness by **Amnon Tzechovoy**

For years a certain question kept bothering me, a question I would like to share with my audience: if the art of Aikido is inherently natural and is of harmonious flow, why should one exercise for so long, and be intensely engaged in the endless Aikido practice in order to gain the smooth, effortless motion, the so-called natural, spontaneous movement.

Now, Chiba Sensei's essay *The Study and Refinement of Martial Awareness* provides, so I think, invaluable clues for answering questions such as the one mentioned above concerning the efforts needed for gaining effortless motions. To begin with, Chiba diagnoses ailments inherent to our Western civilization, ailments which obstruct access to man's and woman's innate nature. Thus, Chiba sees in over-developed mental activity and conscious behavior a major shortcoming of our Western culture; such over-development interferes, according to Chiba, with the deep fundamental logic of nature. Such logic – manifest in the behavior of animals – becomes almost inaccessible for man and woman. Union with nature is the highest achievement and horizon open for mankind. It means among other things a good deal of forgetfulness towards many layers of conscious mental activity. One has to renounce many of the benefits offered in the West for over-cogitative, incessant rational verbalization. In my view, Chiba insists on the necessary return to instinctual way of life free of all sorts of cultural coverings which prevent man and woman to be one with nature. This oneness with nature is equivalent to Chiba's notion of complete, totally open martial awareness. As he says:

*I consider the term "martial awareness" to be largely associated with a type of instinctive spontaneous sensitivity which gives rise to action that is altogether natural.*

Thus, Chiba's ideal of union with nature is, as I understand it, *re-union* with our lost heritage and potential of self-identification with nature. As suggested above, it is so difficult – and thus in need of excruciating, repetitive Aikido train-



ing - because of the present way of things in our Western civilization.

At this point I would like to contribute a hypothesis concerning the dynamics of the Aikido return to nature and its forces, as I understand it.

For the question remains: How can we understand the process of Aikido transformation as reaching, in Chiba's terminology, true martial awareness? Since in Chiba's thought Aikido discipline is closely associated with consciousness (the concept of martial awareness is of this quality), we need to think in terms of transformation of consciousness in order to understand ourselves as Aikido-practitioners seeking to attain to our goal (martial awareness). It is of course a long way stretching ahead of us (I mean thinking of Aikido transformation of consciousness). What concepts can we use in our reflection on Aikido development? Here, in this paper, I suggest that in-depth memory, remembrance or recollection, are helpful in our preliminary effort at connecting Chiba's thought with the psychology of Aikido consciousness.

I borrow the concept of in-depth memory from the great Plato. In his dialogue titled *Meno* he says:



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*Socrates: If the truth of all things always existed in the soul, then the soul is immortal. Wherefore be of good cheer, and try to recollect what you do not know, or rather what you do not remember.*

In this beautiful dialogue Socrates brings a boy to realize that he knows a certain mathematical truth (the Pythagoras' theorem) by progressive recollection thereof. The boy is a simple servant; he has never learned any mathematics. But lo, he brings to life a deeply buried memory of a sophisticated mathematical truth! He successfully retrieves an almost inaccessible piece of knowledge. Thus, knowledge, according to Plato, is truly in-depth remembrance of being and cognitions available beneath our current behavior and awareness. This is the type of universal, deeply buried or concealed, non-individual mode of remembrance and awareness implied in Chiba's conception of martial awareness.

There are obviously big differences between the type of awareness possible to man and woman according to Plato and that type of awareness implied by Chiba. I am using Plato's theory of knowledge (or awareness) as memory in order to start thinking on Aikido practice. What matters to me is the existence of layers of being made newly accessible by various means of remembrance, layers made available to us by virtue of our real, already in existence nature. We do not create martial awareness out of nothing. Chiba recommends spontaneous, smooth, elegant, instinctual motion. As I understand it, he means to say: we Aikido practitioners move towards effortless martial awareness by means of efforts towards a very special type of remembrance. Thus, by our harsh Aikido discipline and efforts we come to remember and be who we truly are, also perhaps who we have really always been.

Amnon Tzechovoy

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## WHAT CAN WE CHANGE ?

Christophe Peytier

Being in the extremely privileged position of translator for the Birankai is allowing me (or should I say forcing me?) to chew and meditate on the texts that I am given, in order to mature the words that I will use in translation. I try to be faithful to the meaning of the original author, yet keep a fluidity so that the result does not appear cumbersome. I view it as form of taking Ukemi: accepting something while limiting interferences and seeking the center of things.

As such, I came to spend substantial time, obviously, on Chiba Sensei's text "the study and refinement of Martial awareness" as well as some texts from my friend Dr. Tzechovoy, who gives a complementary perspective on this topic of Martial Awareness.

In particular, the theme of transformation (either of the consciousness or the body) is of key interest to me. Mainly because I have difficulties to grasp this topic, and remain uneasy about it, even after several decades of martial art practice. I would like to expose my uneasiness around this notion of transformation through practice. In order to do so, it seems necessary to pay a bit of attention to some fundamental behaviors of human beings.

I will use, although it is obviously rudimentary with regards to the complexity of our brain, the approach that considers three different layers in the latter:

- The reptilian brain -exclusively concerned with survival and perpetuation of the specie with, hence a notion of immediate space (survival space)

- The mammalian brain – also known as "limbic system" - mainly interested in emotions, notion of pleasant/unpleasant, and space management as a territory.

- The neo-cortex, really dealing with the rest of non-vital matters such as language, abstract things like art, etc.. It is no surprise to see that in case of extreme fear, one will lose immediately its ability to speak or even yell, since it is deemed by the brain as non-vital, hence shut down in case of emergency. It also strikes me to see animals of the same specie fighting for space (in order to increase the likelihood of finding good females able to give fine descent). That kind of ritual fight is always made in a way that hurts but doesn't inflict permanent damage, since it would be counter-productive for the specie to see young males mutually inflicting severe casualties. For example, young bucks will bang heads or intertwine horns for hours, in a linear and frontal movement, until one gives up. They are been driven by their mammalian brain to act in such a way, and the outcome of such a fight will be a winner and a loser. However, the very same animal, when put in a survival situa-



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tion, for example assaulted by a pack of wolves, will be driven by its reptilian brain, and act in a completely different manner, using its horns not to bang heads but to rip open the wolf's belly or throat as quickly as possible, in a circular, flanking motion, attempting to kill him for the sake of its own survival. The outcome of the fight will be a living and a dead. In human beings, it is extremely easy to differentiate, in a situation of conflict, whether one is in "mammalian mode" or "reptilian mode": The former will lead to trying to make oneself as tall as possible, shoulders raised up, fist clenched, red face congested by blood, usually vociferating in an attempt to impress the opponent. The objective is to hurt but not permanently damage the opponent, like an open hand could do with fingers in the eyes or the throat (hence the clenched fists). The latter, on the contrary – when the "reptilian brain" dominates- will lead to a very low posture, all the blood concentrated in the center of the body (in order to not lose balance) and thus the face very pale, no shouts (often the person cannot utter a word, as said above), the hands are open, ready to rip off any sensitive organ that comes close enough. In extreme cases, body fluids could be released under the effect of sudden change in blood acidity. This is a natural reaction to reduce weight and allow faster motion. People from the countryside know that the pig must not be frightened before being killed, otherwise the blood acidity will make the meat taste awful.

– In my opinion, this is the main reason why O Sensei was against practice of competition in Aikido: Competition leads to a notion of winner and loser, hence obliges to follow a ritual (the rules, usually meant to limit damages by prohibiting the most powerful weapons of the human body). On the other hand, in Aikido as practiced as a martial art, we must keep in mind the notion of mortal combat and not just winning/losing. I make an effort, during practice (as Nage as well as Uke) to seek any opening of my partner, noting when I could bite his ear, or poke his eyes. Please note that I put an emphasis on teeth and claws which are, like with any animal, the most efficient weapons. I find ironic that in "Martial sports" ( I don't want to call them "Martial Arts") as Judo or Karate competition, or even Vale Tudo (Brazilian Ju-jitsu whose name means "everything allowed"), it is always forbidden to bite or poke the eyes. It sounds a bit like organising a tennis tournament and saying "Every shot is allowed, but you can't use a racquet"!

Having established a basis of fundamental human behavior, let us ask the central question of this essay: Can transformation of consciousness obtained

through adequate practice, alter any of the fundamental behavior exposed previously? In the process of revelation of martial awareness, I am tempted to think that we are asked to try to get in touch with our deep survival layers, that is what I referred to as the Reptilian brain. Indeed, I recall a seminar in San Diego in the early nineties where Chiba Sensei told us "when you attack me you have to think that you may die". This has been a defining moment in my comprehension of Aikido. This is extremely frightening. Because let's face it: for the last six million years, human mind has not evolved as far as the first two layers (reptilian and mammal) are concerned. Only the neo-cortex has evolved. And rightfully so: I would think that if our reptilian brain was able to be modified like we alter a computer by modifying its program, the human specie would have probably disappeared by now! So, if we can't modify our reptilian brain no matter how many decades of practice we have, how are we affected by the process of transformation of consciousness mentioned by Dr. Tzechovoy?

Bluntly said, my question is: If I was put in the adequate survival circumstances, say facing an equally sized opponent armed with a knife and with the obvious intention to kill me, will I just try to kill him as fast as possible, or will I try to avoid his blow, control and disarm him with compassion so that I contribute to resolve the conflict elegantly and save a life, like I would love to do?

Of course, since this question has been troubling me for a long time, I have attempted some answers. At this point, I see two possible candidates to a decent answer.

The first one is to say that, although we cannot alter or reprogram the lower layers of the brain, we can *add* to that existing program. This means that once we have dropped the useless layers of accumulated dust and realized our ability to kill, we can then piggyback on it, like someone hoping on a bus to do a bit of the road, but who will jump off the bus just in time to go his way when needed. This implies two important elements:

1- We must realize that we know how to kill before we can know how to spare. This is referred to, in Japanese as Satsujin Ken (the sword that kills) becomes Katsujin Ken (the sword that gives life).

2- We need to practice constantly in a way that does not contradict the behavior of our reptilian brain. If not, we would, at best, practice for nothing, and, at worst, learn counter-productive moves in a situation of survival, which would surely decrease our chances of living.

The hope, in that case, is that under the proper circumstances, we will be able to act, as Chiba Sensei puts it, in a *natural* way, yet benefit

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from our training in Aikido that has conditioned us to add a behavior of a higher ethical value on top of our survivor instinct.

The second candidate, as answer to this question, is to say that by regaining consciousness of our “animality”, we understand better the triggering factors, thus we are in a position, through acute perception, to feel when we are getting into a survival mode, or a mammal mode. This means that one becomes able to anticipate the surge of a particular emotion or behavior. I think it is reasonably credible to say that one could avoid falling into a “bar fight” situation, just with willingness of de-escalating the tension through simple body language (such as opening the hands in front of the potential adversary, which in mammalian language signifies “I mean no harm” ). Indeed , in that typical situation (usually triggered by intruding in the other person’s space), there are some progressive signs of escalation of conflict, hence there is predictability. However, I am very doubtful, based on personal experience, on one’s capacity to control a surge of such emotions in a survival situation. I have been put a few times in situations where “someone else in me” was taking control of my behavior. In one occurrence, although it was not a life-or-death situation, it was definitely a threatening one, with four people waiting for my wife and me in a dark metro station at midnight. I sensed right away that something was not good when I saw these four guys in leather jacket just waiting in front of the subway ticket gate. After I had lead my young wife to cross the ticket wicket first, in front of me, as I pulled my subway ticket from my bag left pending slightly in my back, one of the men rushed in my back and snapped my purse from the bag. As he immediately pulled his hand back in his own jacket to hide what he had stolen from me, I recall vividly staying sticky with his hand, snapping back my own purse from his hand faster than he could

react, without even looking at him (he was behind me). My wife turned at me and asked “To whom did you say Thank you?” . I replied “this guy just tried to steal my purse.” pointing to the man who was left motionless, his three acolytes also stunned in absolute stillness: They seemed ready to back-up their colleague in case of fight, but there had been no fight here. Obviously the situation was not part of their usual drill. Of course the whole thing lasted less than 2 seconds. As of today, I do not know who in me was able to a) see the man in my back flashing his hand to grab my purse, b) guide my own hand to the inside of the man’s jacket to grab my purse back, and c) say “Thank you” to him. Is this the “Ten direction eye” that Chiba Sensei refers to? Or the “you have to see with your skin” that the tradition of martial arts teaches as far back as Kalaripayat, the ancestral martial art from Kerala, India?

One thing is clear: Something in me took control of the situation, I acted with no consciousness of acting, and certainly don’t know why I said “Thank you” to my aggressor. I was 1<sup>st</sup> Kyu then, and I am incapable of determining whether that behavior was influenced by Aikido or not.

It was a humbling and reassuring experience. Reassuring because I felt that, if and when needed, I would be able to “do the right thing”. Humbling because I was left with the sentiment that, as a person, I could snap out of control given the proper circumstances.

I am still not sure if Aikido practice has or will alter the potentially lethal behavior that lies in us like nuclear power lies in a pebble of uranium, and turn it into the behavior of highest ethical standards that we are relentlessly training for, or if it will still let us behave like many of our ancestors have behaved until now: Kill to not be killed.

Christophe Peytier

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## TO MOVE NATURALLY

Some thoughts on the occasion of the 4<sup>th</sup> dan examination, spring 2007

Ursula Schaffner

During the first years of my Aikido journey I appreciated the opportunity to discover and try new techniques. I traveled a lot and studied under the direction of different masters in different countries. Today, I have a full repertory of techniques and I am confident that facing an opponent the technique appropriate to the situation would appear spontaneously. What interest me now is to explore the different layers of a movement in contact with a partner, and to discover and live the “natural” movement beyond the form.

### Living in the country

O’Sensei said that our way ought to rest on three pillars: the daily practice of Aikido, gardening, and spiritual search. Unfortunately, I have hardly heard anything concerning the meaning of gardening related to the practice of Aikido. Neither have I found written texts or oral tradition on the subject.

In this essay I would like to explore this subject. All the more since I live in the country for some years now, in a small house with a large vegetable garden and an abundance of

flowers and trees. Gardening is now part of my life and my life appears to me more natural and wholesome than my early dwelling in the city. Working on my garden I often reflect on the common aspects of Aikido and gardening and their mutual enrichment.

O'Sensei preferred life in the country to urban life. We know about his attempt to create a self-sufficient farming community in the island of Hokkaido when he was young. The experiment failed for different reasons. Since 1935 Morihei started to buy land in Iwama with the intention of building a dojo. Even though he and his family lived very modestly at the beginning, he was happy living in contact with life-giving Mother Nature. There was a vegetable garden and a rice field in the Iwama land. O'Sensei did the gardening; he knew when to sow the plants, how to thin and harvest them. He also enjoyed admiring their beauty.

Later on, when the students lived in the Iwama dojo as uchideshis, gardening was an integral part of their daily life as well as Aikido practice.

There is a very beautiful photograph of O'Sensei taken in the garden of Iwama showing him watering the flowers. His attitude is relaxed; the expression in his face is innocent, almost like a child's. He appears united with the ground and the environment. I would say that he is totally naturally driven.

### **Leaving forms behind**

Many masters, from the legendary sword master Yagyu Munenori (1571-1666), to Morihei Ueshiba and today Chiba Sensei to mention only a few, advocate leaving the form behind and moving naturally.

But, what does it mean to move naturally? This seems obvious but the notion is nevertheless hard to grasp. Kisshomaru Ueshiba says the following concerning the subject: "...I believe that it means to understand precisely and directly in ourselves the action of nature, throughout the universe, and through the influence in our bodies and lives." (Kisshomaru Ueshiba, from

the German version "Der Geist des Aikido", 1993, p. 106). He says elsewhere: "If we are wholly aware of the way in which natural phenomena and their transformations affect man, we also know that in a certain manner they are connected to our own concept of the meaning of life" (p. 107).

It is an obvious fact that we are part of nature. Nevertheless Kisshomaru's words demonstrate that we do not apprehend this truth in its deepest sense, neither naturally nor consciously. We must instead engage ourselves in a continuous process of making efforts in that direction.

### **Off the Ground**

When I refer to "us" in this text, I am thinking in particular about the inhabitants of rich, industrialized countries. Many people live today in towns and congested cities. Few are those that are still in touch with the production of food or the cycles of nature. We constantly find in the shops fruits and vegetables that have been produced in other continents, under different climatic conditions and in seasons other than our own. We are offered in January asparagus from Peru, in February the first potatoes from Israel, throughout winter

pears from South Africa. We consider the time and the seasons to be no more than a disturbing factor in the planning of our leisure activities. In parallel we "make" our own seasons escaping in Christmas to the Caraïbes, of fulfilling the dream of an eternal summer acquiring property in the South. In January, we try by magic to put summer in our plates with tomatoes, even though these fruits of paradise, as they are also called, have no taste because the plants had no roots on the earth and the fruits did not mature under the sun. They grew off the ground under artificial light.

Modern life is literally detached from the earth and natural conditions. We lack real roots and therefore we do not have a sensual contact with the places we inhabit. We increasingly live in a world so called civilized and cultivated—



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which means a world controlled and modeled by men— and far from natural life.

### **The garden— key to nature**

In my garden I live with the cycles of nature. All my senses, my feelings and my emotions are being solicited: the eyes and the ears, the nose and the mouth, certainly the sense of touch as well. What I see, hear, breathe, taste and feel, changes during the day and the night and in the passing of weeks and months. My moods also change throughout the seasons.

In spring, I feel pulled to the outdoors by the increasing light. The moment to start work can change from year to year. Sometimes, in early March, the earth is sufficiently warm and dry to prepare the beds for the first planting. Sometimes, I have to wait until April to avoid sinking in the muddy soil. One has to be attentive and be ready at the right time to execute the necessary action, to take the next step. I cannot compel nature to my wishes. My disappointment and impatience in March will not dry up nor warm up the earth, even if I have planned to take a week off six month in advance to work in the garden. I may not like to admit it, but the earth will not produce the salad or the fennel, the grains will simply not sprout and the plants will perish.

This is relevant all along the year: time and again you must observe how things are, examine the humidity, the wind, the heat. Through my experience in previous years and the knowledge of my elder, more experienced neighbors I learn which plants go well together; which are the most suitable tools; how much space the plants need to grow well; when is the proper time to thin, to feed, to water, to harvest. Finally, there is pruning to be done to make room for the new shoots and the preparation of the soil waiting for the winter rest.

### **Understanding the laws of nature, to live them and transcend them**

With the daily work in the garden I learn about the laws of nature, I trust them, I live them, and I feel I am part of nature— I live naturally. I get up when the sun rises, I go to bed at sunset, I live in accordance with the cycles of nature. The more I experience nature by direct contact, the more I am fascinated by the incredible marvels that nature creates in the complex interaction of its elements.

The smell in the morning is different from the smell in the evening; the perfumes change

when the weather is dry or humid. In spring, when the plants are in flower, the scents are subtle and charming. The taste of the first herbs is fresh, acrid and exciting. In summer, beans and tomatoes nourished by the sun are refreshing to the body. In autumn, celery, beetroot and carrots are predominant with their earthy taste; they can be over wintered in a cellar to feed and warm us during the period when the soil and the vegetation are at rest.

Through gardening then, I learn about the laws of nature with all my senses, I absorb them with my food, and finally I transcend them.

### **Becoming and dying**

After a period of calm, of apparent death, year after year nature enacts the miracle of becoming. My respect towards nature grows as I become more familiar with my garden. I have a real experience of the periods of calm, of the periods of activity, of the periods of waiting. I learn to observe better and better and I realize the importance of time and space in creating the necessary conditions for the growth of life. Only that which has roots can develop. Thanks to the work on the land, what was apparent before penetrates my body, my conscience and my spirit. I feel the *Ki* of nature, the perpetual becoming and death.

All along my Aiki life I have heard that the meaning of Ai was harmony and love. Today I realize that I have integrated these two words with “life”. For a long time I pondered on the apparent contradiction existing between the notions of love and life and the connection to death inherent in the practice of martial arts, Aikido in this case. Through gardening I learn precisely that life and death are not in contradiction; they are instead in correspondence with the cycles of nature: there is no death without life and no life without death. More and more I perceive life and death, becoming and extinction as natural events.

I recently learned from Daniel Brunner Sensei that in its original sense, “Ai” meant optimal adaptation to given circumstances in the pursuit of survival. In our civilized world with the security it brings, this faculty is perhaps not so vital as in the past. Nevertheless, what I try to do in my garden as well as on the tatami is to adapt myself the best I can to the circumstances.

In Aikido, we try to take the place of the other, or stop the other from invading our space. When I work in the garden invading nature and

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shaping it, I am also taking my place. In this process I must respect the laws of nature, I have to adapt as well as I can. Without my intervention, nature would quickly take my place, the garden would become wild and the vegetation would rapidly take over. A garden is a fight and a constant search for balance between nature and cultivation.

#### **Final remarks**

What is thus the meaning of “moving naturally” after reflecting on my garden?

To move naturally implies living naturally, in harmony with nature. I know the place where I live. With gardening I am constantly, physically, really united with nature. Each moment is new and unique. I am always attentive, trying out things, drawing from my experience and the knowledge of my neighbors and preceding generations. Knowledge and physical fitness are needed to begin with, and simultaneously, they must always leave room to questioning and to

new possibilities. All this requires time, since skill and competence do not develop overnight; moreover, they are not acquired forever. It is a constant process, you must learn time and again. Each stage of gardening comes in its own time. To be ready for the right time becomes a profound experience; it is life itself, it is living naturally.

To move naturally is the result of the transformation of physical work outdoors in contact with the elements into an inner attitude. To move naturally means then to move in order to adapt to existing conditions, it means awareness and understanding of the laws of becoming and dying” precisely and directly in oneself” as Kisshomaru put it.

**Ursula Schaffner**

Original text written in German

Second reading in French: Jacques Pictet

English version: Norberto Chiesa

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## **WRITTEN FOR FUKUSHIDOIN CERTIFICATION – UZÈS 2007**

Christophe Brunner

Teaching is my job for such a long while that I am unable to find an academic synthesis of what 20 years of practice represent, moreover when teaching aikido is concerned.

The form of this essay allows me to better reflect the complex relations and links of the notions I transmit – one at the time – through the classes that I am entrusted with.

Of course this does not mean that I master these notions that are dear to me, that I love studying and transmitting. Writing down their definitions forced me to think about them as a whole, it helped me understand their present state and how evolving they are, changing and altering until – ideally – becoming simpler, clearer and eventually, until they will just be.

As far as names and titles are concerned, they are to be considered mostly as clues.

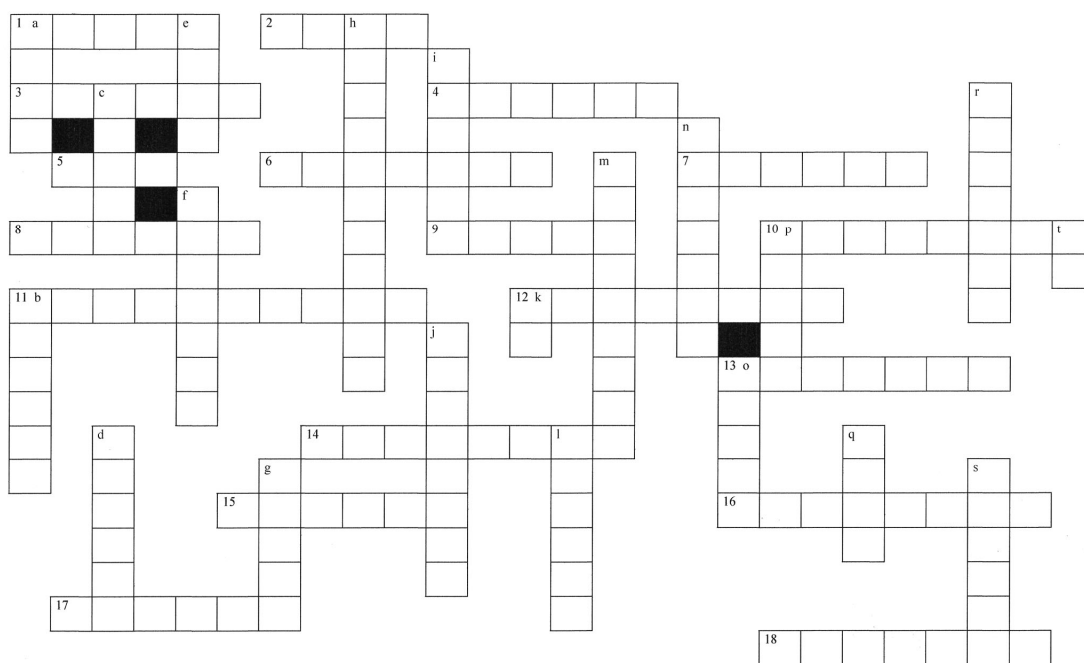
Wishing you as much pleasure with theses lines as I have had in creating them, I remain

Yours truly,

#### **HORIZONTAL**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. who started practicing after the <i>sempai</i>                                     | 7. martial art that, according to his founder, can not be explained through words but through practice  |
| 2. deadly and sexually transmittable illness  | 8. who teaches teachers   |
| 3. third level of batto ho  | 9. to transmit the interpretation, the result of the study – without which this process could not wholly exist; to propose a study basis, a direction, to arouse or stimulate the desire to learn. It is creation every time, based on the human relationship, a unique and fleeting moment, the opportunity to learn while adapting and renewing oneself |
| 4. second level of batto ho   |   |
| 5. without it, there's no “no”  |   |
| 6. what we should give to anyone, anything, any place ... and especially to ourselves |   |

10. the meditation way that best corresponds to me, closer to Buddhism than shin-toism. According to Sogyal Rinpoché, it is a state, the primordial, fundamental state
11. “supreme antidote to distraction”, according to Sogyal Rinpoché. The practice of “letting go” that helps preparing for death. There are many varieties of it (zazen, dzogchen, vipassana), which way being less important than walking on it. One can practice it within a group or alone, for one hour or a while.
12. founded by T.K.Chiba sensei
13. title of a teacher
14. is needed for teaching as well as for studying. Losing it can get on one’s nerves but is a nice opportunity to recovering it
15. who started practicing before the kohai
16. who has decided to study; is allowed to wear a black belt
17. action of saying no, highly inadvisable
18. who is initiated by the master, who then studies; the relationship between these two is vital in Birankai. Can eventually surpass his/her master without becoming the sempai, however



## VERTICAL

- a. what one should forget if one wants to learn
- b. the initiator of the student. Is not inevitably a teacher, no more than a teacher inevitably becomes one. His / her relationship with the student is a basic element of Birankai
- c. when one takes it, it is an opportunity to learn about absorption but above all about how to stand up again
- d. our own true house; when one lives in it, one can radiate without dissipating one-
- e. the first one may be the best, and maybe not; to be sure, one needs to realize it
- f. the study of the sword – not only the movements but also its history; belongs to the cursus within the Birankai
- g. if you want it, prepare for war ... because “*si vis pacem, para bellum*”
- h. title of teacher assistant
- i. action of saying yes, highly recommended for *tori* as for *uke* and that can lead to harmony



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- |    |  |    |  |
|----|--|----|--|
| j. | essential to forget the preconceived ideas, to study as well as to teach; to pride oneself on it shows its absence   |    | Joined together, the hands thus indicate its link between body and mind                      |
| k. | ... or not, that is the question   | o. | essential to teaching; each aspect of life could be its subject                              |
| l. | transition between two states; inherent in anyone, anything, any place and of all times  | p. | to what life aims; meditation prepares for it and so does life                               |
| m. | connection, union of two things, people or notions; inherent in the fusion of be and do; unifying force that allows to create a whole; logic linking of the parts that teaching is made of | q. | the greatest incapacitator; sometimes panic, irrational, it can result from misunderstanding |
| n. | the result of one's adaptation to any situation, be it violent or peaceful, intense or diluted, spontaneous or not.  | r. | the attention; the tension   |
|    |  | s. | first level of batto ho  |
|    |  | t. | without which "yes" would not exist  |
- Christophe Brunner  
Lausanne, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2007
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## LEARNING TO TRANSMIT AND TRANSMITTING TO LEARN or the nature of transmission

Accompanying Essay for Fukushima Grading in Uzès, July 2007. Stephan Corsten

***Learning the Way and transmitting it to others are not separate processes, but are fundamentally one and the same, for without learning, there can be no transmission; without transmission no learning.***

(Extract from **Notes relating to Shido in / Fukushima declaration by T.K. Chiba Sensei**, 5. Understanding the importance of the transmission of the way and your relationship with your own students)

For quite a few years I tried to copy the techniques showed by the teacher. And like we all do (at least in the western culture), when you don't know, you ask a person that does know. So logically, you train as often as you can with advanced students if you want to learn. And it works, but only to a certain point. Then we have the Sempai – Kohei system which demands to care for and explain to less advanced students. We all have experienced in our daily life that we have only understood what we're able to explain. I don't want to enter the matter of ability to explain, but just simply the understanding of the topic.

But up to this part, I only talk about understanding the technical/ physical and intellectual elements of the art.

Our school is based on the teacher - student relation. This relation brings everybody to the point to discover a deeper content in Aikido practise then form and knowledge.

The article I cited above continues with the lines: *The relationship with one's teacher should also apply to one's students. This is an essential requirement for learning the way and for its transmission and preservation. Furthermore, a spirit of sacrifice, compassion, love and unselfishness is the first and foremost requirement for an Aikido teacher, together with a readiness to help his/her students with that openness of mind that comes from an understanding of the diversity of human circumstance.*

I was lucky to experience this sort of relationship for many years with my teacher. But I have to admit, that it was because of his lead. And I am also aware, that there is something like a positive 'chemistry' between the two of us. (This might be only a German language expression that means as much as: my molecules have docking spaces with the conditions that my opposite's molecules do fit)

About two years ago I started my own class in the Aikikai Dojo in Zurich. Friday evening, at about the exact time where everybody else goes for beer and fun. My major goal was to study the exact forms of Chiba Sensei's School, since the Aikikai of Zurich follows officially Tamura

Sensei. I desperately needed a platform where I could repeat and practise what we saw during the Birankai seminars. Advanced teachers will read in this phrase already that I wasn't ready at all. But I was lucky. Almost none of the small Birankai group of the region of Zurich, except of my friend Matteo, found regularly the way to this Friday Evening Class, but almost only beginners with no Birankai – experience. So I had to start at the very beginning trying to find out the major needs of this group. We started with basic basics, or with what I thought was basics. Soon I found out that they didn't come to study the exact way of Chiba Sensei's technique. They were thrilled by the content of these techniques, the principals. And they were motivated to come on Friday evening, not because this was the only date they could make it for, (in Zurich we have every day at least 2 trainings) but because they recognised a difference in the way of practise. (Of course, doing lots of weapon work helped too, since there were very few other weapon classes.)

I'm grateful for their trust and commitment to Friday Evening Class, because it gave me the possibility to understand about studying Aikido. They function like a mirror to me, where I find elements my teacher had seeded. I see them growing in the Friday Evening Class Students. Today we still practise basics. But besides polishing the techniques, we mainly use them as a tool to work our way to topics like the five Pillars Chiba Sensei is repeating us over and over again. (Centeredness, Connectedness, Wholeness, Liveliness and Openness) I know that we are far away from mastering these elements, but I see big passion, commitment and patience in

the work of the Friday Evening Class, and I hope this might be a slide reflection of this mirror I have mentioned before. As in this hope I wish to fulfil the *foremost requirement for an Aikido teacher: a spirit of sacrifice, compassion, love and unselfishness.*

By starting to transmit I have started to understand what I learned. I'm convinced that learning to transmit will teach me to understand our surroundings, human beings and nature or the so-called oneness. Because the constant interaction of student and teacher will guide us, that's my believe, to Aiki

*Remarks of understanding:*

1. *I talk about the Friday Evening Class Students, in purpose to emphasise that these students are students of mine for that class, but not my personal students. Since I believe not to be in position to have personal students yet.*

2. *learning to transmit I understand the task of a Fukushima, since for me the translation Assistant teacher is connected to western culture where highly trained people have to learn how to use their knowledge properly as for example doctors, lawyers, architects etc.*

This time my thanks for this understanding do not only go to the founder O'Sensei, T.K. Chiba Sensei, Daniel Brunner Sensei and all the other great Senseis of Birankai, but also to the very beginners and especially to the Friday Evening Class.

Stephan Corsten  
Zurich, 13th July 2007

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## **“ZEN” MEANS “TO BITE THE BULLET”**

Ulf Paritschke

The third international Birankai Germany Aikido seminar this year took place in Landau/Pfalz, on 10th and 11th February 2007 with Gabriel Valibouze 6th Dan, Shihan, Aikikai de Strasbourg and Chris Mooney 6th Dan, Shihan, Birmingham UK. The Aikido Dojo “Gen Ei Kan” Landau Aikikai was hosting the event. As was expected, there were guests from Great Britain, France and Switzerland as well as Munich, Münster, Sigmaringen, Maxdorf, Karlsruhe and the Rhine rift. The gym in Landau of the Thomas-Nast Primary School was used as the Dojo for this purpose.

Having ZAZEN on the agenda and celebrating it was the highlight of this seminar weekend. ZAZEN is pure self-awareness by sitting still, listening to your inner voice and allowing the universe to act upon yourself, an attempt to support the ceiling with your head – just sitting there allowing it to happen (whatever it may be). This kind of meditation is practiced while sitting on your feet. Those who tried it for the first time had their legs and feet hurting, no doubt. But that was not the only aspect. Actually, it had been the first time for me and I was very surprised about its effect. This spiritual experience

was a great experience for me and did indeed give me the impulse for the following day.

The 'path' as to how Aikido is achieved was also argued of course. Aikido is not only a type of self-defence but also a 'path' everyone doing Aikido has to both find and take him/herself. In Aikido we regard our training partner as an opponent (Uke), yes, however, we really train with ourselves.

Despite the scrutinising gazes of Shihan Gabriel Valibouze and Shihan Chris Mooney under the examination guidance of the Fukushima-doin, Alexander Broll 4th DAN Aikido Dojo Gen Ei Kan, Landau Aikikai as well as Fukushima-doin Sadek Ketthab 4th Dan, Cronenbourg Aikikai 3 Münsteraner and 4 people from Landau were able to do the 5th and 4th Kyu examination. All examinees successfully passed and received not only Shihan Gabriel Valibouze's and Shihan Chris Mooney's approval but also any necessary criticism regarding their performances. It goes without saying that Shihan Gabriel Valibouze and Shihan Chris Mooney gave the seminar a personal touch. They put over a great deal of basic knowledge to both beginners and advanced and we would like to express a warm thank you at this stage.

Such a seminar is not only about hardship and examination values but also about meeting others and making friends. This was not only possible during the training sessions but also in the evenings when sitting together in a relaxed environment.

Last not least, a mention for the dedicated work and organisation that went into this seminar is due. Such a seminar is only feasible due to the input of every individual. A big thank you is due here for the organisers and everybody that helped with regard to the success of this seminar.



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Aikido Dojo Gen Ei Kan,  
Landau Aikikai (D)

