

The Birankai Continental Europe Newsletter

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WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

In the name of Birankai Continental Europe, let me wish you a good and happy Aikido year for 2009, and also in your personal and professional life, to all of you as well as your family and close friends.

Every teacher in his dojo transmits daily to his students a part of the aikido inheritance. In Birankai, we are singularly attached to the student teacher relationship and to the dojo as the privileged place where transmission takes place. These two concepts determine our identity in the world of aikido. We owe our keen attention to this first level of direct transmission. In the confrontation of the student with his teacher, transmission is above all a matter of communication.

All life is fragile, everything is impermanent. Thus we need also to organize a second level in the transmission of this heritage: the transmission of aikido to future generations, to those who are still to be born, beyond the time and space of our daily life. And this is where is felt the need for an organization, which beyond its actual members can insure a continuity in the future.

Birankai, at the international, continental and national level, both in the short and the long run, should have for objective the support of the job of aikido transmission. It is a matter of concrete support and encouragement to be offered to the teachers and students of today. It is also building a common house and the way to inhabit it, a calendar marking the eternal and joyful return of our seasons and reunions.

Because of all this, Birankai needs the commitment of every member, teachers and students, advanced and beginners. The functioning of the organization at all levels requires diverse skills, your skills! On the contrary, it a question of serving our common project rather than using Birankai in order to satisfy and reinforce our ego.

Also, I wish to invite everyone to make the effort to participate in the annual general assembly of Birankai Continental Europe that will take place on Saturday March 28, 2009, on the occasion of the teacher's seminar organized by the European Shihankai and hosted by Ryu Seki Kai in Lausanne. Every BCE dojo should be represented to contribute to the building of our house.

I count on you all! We are the Birankai, no one other than ourselves can say as much today. Let's make tomorrow possible!

See you soon on the tatami !

Joël Bertrand

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Thanks to Norberto for giving me responsibility for this issue, for transmitting a perfect document and for letting me express my self-freely. Suzanne



Jacek Kochaniec
SEN NEN SUGI
Wroclawska sekcja aikido

JUJUTSU, the roots

After 20 years of training aikido, I can honestly state that the art has become a key to my fascination with Japan. Obviously, it is the Japan of old, so much different from the ultra-modern nation of the 21st century. Aikido has given me insight not only to budo techniques, but also the spirit of feudal Japan. Etiquette dojo principles, mindsets are as important as the fluid technique, if not more so. These aspects have gradually become obsolete in such arts as judo and kendo, whereas aikido and iaido still effectively bridge the gap between ancient Japan and the modern times.

Certainly, as iaido is far from kenjutsu of medieval Japan, so aikido differs strongly from the art of jujutsu. Kenjutsu was the most prized way of fighting for a bushi warrior. This attitude resulted from the fact that the sword, over the centuries of Japanese history, was perceived as the principal weapon of a samurai. Even more so – it was viewed as « the soul of a samurai ». Nonetheless, jujutsu – unarmed combat – was an important aspect of warrior training. In contrast with the swordplay, this discipline was referred to as *yawara* – « the soft art ». Samurai warriors resorted to non-armed combat when the sword got broken, when caught unawares in the middle of the night or when the attacker closed the distance in swordplay. Initially, sword fight and unarmed combat were strongly linked. From historical perspective, those links are immediately noticeable. Masters of traditional arts – be it archery, spear fighting or swordsmanship – typically introduced supplementary elements of unarmed combat. All those methods intertwined, complemented each other and stimulated further development. However, after the years of peaceful prosperity and modern laws introduced by the Tokugawa family, those traditional armed martial arts soon started to lose their stance, turning into infrequent celebrations, mostly of symbolic meaning, while techniques of unarmed combat, as readily available and fairly approachable, saw the peak of popularity, filling the void after departure of *yumi*, bow and *yari*, spear.

By studying the origin and history of martial arts, I try to look for traces of jujutsu and aikijutsu in modern aikido. Going through familiar motions, I search for their original form and use. Obviously, contemporary techniques of aikido in their majority end in a throw or a hold, but their purpose lies not in brutal and ruthless overcoming of opponents, contrary to jujutsu, with its aim of lightning-speed incapacitation or disabling of the attacker. What both schools share, however, is the idea of a human body used as a weapon to be used in response to practically any attack, be it from a single oppressor or a whole group of adversaries.

For many years now, based on the following distinction, I have tried to find jujutsu roots in modern aikido techniques.

Jujutsu techniques were aimed at :

Overthrowing and overpowering by use of throws (*nage-waza*). In aikido, those correspond with a group of *kokyu nage* throws and aikido-specific *kokyu ho* techniques. This group can be also supplemented by *sumi otoi*, *irimi nage*, *shiho nage*, etc.

Hip-based throwing techniques (*kishi-waza*). Aikido uses mainly *koshi nage*, a throw adopted from a judo form.

Hand-throwing techniques (*te-waza*). In aikido, represented by wrist-turning throw : *kote-gaeshi*.

Pin down techniques (*osae-waza*). This group is best illustrated by *ikkyo*, *nikkyo*, *sankyo* and *yonkyo* finishing in a hold or a joint-lock.

Strangling techniques (*shime-waza*). These are well represented in aikido, typically in « off-the-book » techniques, but introduced by most of the aikido trainers.

Strikes and punches (*atemi-waza*). Punching an opponent is not the aim of aikido training. The role of *atemi* is to unbalance or misdirect the attacker in order to mask the true intention of a throw, joint-lock, strangling, etc.

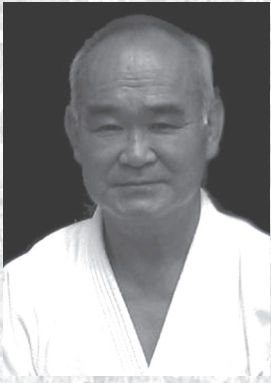
Dislocation techniques (*kansetsu-waza*). In ju-jutsu, those were used to bring permanent damage to opponent's joint. Aikido uses toned-down variants, leading to a joint-lock (*nikkyo*) or a throw (*juji nage*).

Leg techniques (*ashi waza*). Books on aikido history show photographs of Morihei Ueshiba using techniques in takedown positions, also joint-locks held using legs. Some reports from O'Sensei's *ushideshi* confirm the use of legs in aikido in Great Master's dojo. It seems that this particular line of techniques was later eliminated in the development of Hombu Dojo.

It appears that most of aikido techniques indeed have strong roots in jujutsu and may potentially be used to the limit of disabling the opponent. As Morihei Ueshiba himself used to say : « the principal aim of bu-jutsu was to eliminate the opponent with one blow – hence each technique can be deadly.

Through aikido, we can still get in touch with traditional techniques used by samurai warriors. Being faithful to the teachings of aikido, the great tradition of Japanese arts of fighting and the etiquette of dojo, this is the spirit of knowledge I would like to pass to all my students.

Jacek Kochaniec, essay for fukushidoin



by T.K. Chiba

STRUCTURE AND PENETRATION OF *SHOSHIN* 初心

Among words we commonly use and supposedly understand are those that, when paid close attention to in order to define their meaning, reveal how unclear and obscure our understanding really is.

Perhaps the word *Shoshin*, which is commonly used by martial artists, is one of these. It is understood that *Budo* (martial art) begins with *Shoshin* and ends with *Shoshin*. *Budo*, therefore, cannot be understood without first having a clear definition of the meaning of *Shoshin*.

What follows is a description of the meaning of the two characters representing *Shoshin*: 初 *Sho* means first or beginning: 心 *Shin* means mind, spirit or attitude and has been translated as « beginner's mind ». It indicates the mind (spirit or attitude) of a complete beginner when starting *Budo* training. This is marked by modesty, meekness, sincerity and purity, and a thirst to seek the path.

In Japan, *Budo* discipline is commonly recognized as, or expected to be, severe and hard, requiring many years of training to master. Within *Shoshin* one finds a spirit of endurance, sacrifice, devotion, and self-control. Why do the Japanese see *Budo* training in this way? (It contrasts to the American attitude, where, in general, pleasure and enjoyment come first). The Japanese understand that it is impossible to master the art without the determination to go through many years of training, passing through various stages, and being required to go to one's physical limit and sometimes even beyond. The Japanese also recognize that in the final completion of the physical mastery of the art, there is a spiritual realization that can take one further.

The state attained through spiritual realization, the highest state of *Budo*, is often expressed as *Mushin*, or the state of No-Mind. It is represented by the image of a clear mirror reflecting everything that comes before it exactly as it is. The state of No-Mind reflects everything that passes in front of it, whether coming or going, without interference of will or self-imposed view. However, there is an important distinction between a static mirror and this active state of mind. The active mind responds spontaneously and simultaneously to the reflected image without attachment or interference, right or wrong, gain or loss, life or death. What makes this state more difficult to attain is that it requires physical motion (technique) to simultaneously accompany the mind responding to the images reflected upon it.

The state of mind like a clear mirror, or the state of No-Mind, may be attained through other spiritual disciplines such as meditation. What makes *Budo* unique, however, is found in the simultaneous and inseparable embodiment of the mind and physical motion (the technique). This stage of training is known as the Sword of No-Mind, or the Sword of No-Form, and is even known as the Sword in a Dream. Only when this stage is attained is one's art considered to be complete.

Shoshin is the mind or attitude required to follow the teaching. This contains sincerity, modesty, meekness, openness, endurance, sacrifice, and self-control unaffected by self-will, judgment or discrimination. It is like a piece of pure white silk before it is dyed. It is also an important condition for the first stage, in which a beginner learns to embody the basics precisely, point by point, line by line, with an immovable faith in the teaching.

Shoshin, however, is not only the state of mind required for a beginner, but must be present throughout every stage of training. The manifestation of *Shoshin* therefore varies depending on one's status, whether a beginner, mid-advanced, or advanced student. What is most important is that one becomes, ultimately, one body inside and out, finally developing into the Mind of No-Mind. This is the completion of *Budo* training.

One's determination to hold firmly onto beginner's mind is a key factor in the completion of one's study. But how difficult this is to do! That determination is very vulnerable to being destroyed by fame, position, or rank, or being lost through haughtiness and conceit.

Like everything else, *Shoshin* encounters and experiences various challenges and can retreat, weaken, decay, or break down. It can also become clearer and stronger.

It is vital to maintain a strict self-reflective attitude throughout study to prevent *Shoshin* decaying or breaking down. It is necessary to be decisive, crawling out from a crisis not just once, but twice, three times, to keep on going. Loss of *Shoshin* means the stopping of growth and this almost always happens where and when one does not recognize it. This is a characteristic of losing *Shoshin*. It is both a sign and a result of human arrogance.

If arrogance is the main cause of losing *Shoshin*, modesty, its counterpart, is necessary to maintain it. A modest mind is one that recognizes the profoundness of the Path, knows fear, knows the existence of something beyond one's own reality, while continuing to grasp one's internal development.

Shoshin is also an idea strongly associated with self-denial, while arrogance is founded upon uneducated self-affirmation and superficial self-assertion. In many senses, self-denial works like a mid-wife to stimulate the birth of a true richness of heart. Paradoxically, while self-denial broadens, the reflection and understanding of human nature deepens.

In general, the difference between Americans and Japanese lies in whether hardship or pleasure/enjoyment can be expected in the study of *Budo*. This seems to be largely due to the differences between the two cultures.

There still remains a strong influence from medieval ideas within all the Japanese traditional artistic discipline, including *Budo*, as well as within the present day Japanese consciousness.

It is largely due to Yoshikawa's work on Miyamoto Musashi that Musashi's life is deeply appreciated by the Japanese people. He has now become a long-standing national hero. This is not only due to an appreciation of his accomplished swordsmanship, but also to an appreciation of his austere way of life, which deeply moves Japanese consciousness. A similar respect can be found in the attitude of the Japanese people towards O'Sensei, the founder of Aikido. Despite the differences between Musashi and O'Sensei (the Zen influence strongly characterized Musashi's life, while Shintoism influenced O'Sensei), what is common to these two gigantic individuals is the depth of their self-denial.

It is necessary to pay strong attention to the profoundness of this self-denial because it contributes to the birth of an even stronger self-affirmation.

Self-denial is a vital force that contributes paradoxically to the development of man. Through self-denial, one can attain cosmic consciousness and achieve greater self-recognition by transcending the restraints of the ego.

This process is basic to the progressive development/structure that is commonly understood within the traditional artistic disciplines, including Aikido. However, before I enter more deeply into this subject, I would like to touch briefly on the meaning of *Kata*.

The study and disciplines in *Kata* are the fundamental and common methods found throughout the traditional Japanese arts, such as the tea ceremony, flower arranging, painting, calligraphy, dancing, theater, and *Budo*.

Kata has been translated into English as Form. However, form seems to cover only one part of a larger whole, superficially limiting it to the physical appearance of *Kata*.

While form covers only a physical part of the whole, the visible part of the *Kata*, there is another element that works within, which is invisible in nature. It is the internal energy associated with the flow of consciousness, *Ki*. There are schools to be found in the old records of *Budo*, describing *Kata* as the Law of Energy (or Order of Energy). *Kata*, therefore, does not limit its meaning merely to its physical appearance. This can be taught and transmitted physically with reasonable effort, as it is visible. However, the internal part requires a totally different perspective and an ability to master it. Since it cannot be seen physically, it cannot be taught but must be sensed and felt.

Ki, for instance, as a manifestation of control and flow of consciousness, works jointly with physical energy inside and outside of the body within *Kata*. It is sensitively associated with the quality and combination of opposite elements that integrate and exchange: purity and impurity, brightness and darkness, wholeness and emptiness, contraction and expansion, positiveness and passiveness, hardness and softness, lightness and heaviness, explosiveness and quietness, speed and slowness, and the like.

Kata comes to being as an organic life form when the two opposing elements, inside and outside, together with the opposite elements, harmoniously integrate within a martial necessity. The *Kata* then breathes, manifests, comes to being, and dies at the moment of execution. One must then let it go.

Furthermore, what makes *Kata* significant is that it is deeply characterized by school, especially by the school's founder, as well as its successive personalities and experiences. Ultimately it crystallizes as a particular philosophy, which is then passed down to its successors. This is the heart of the school.

In its original form, *Kata* is described as combative motion (against an enemy) and is the accomplishment and collective essence of each school. It results from the pursuit of efficiency, economy, and rational thought in any given circumstance.

By being exposed to, and trained in, *Kata*, under a methodology unique to a school (or teacher) for a number of years, one can learn the physical forms and internal order of energy as well as be penetrated by the heart of the particular school.

Although the foundation of Aikido training is based on the repetition of *Kata*, its approach is much freer and more flexible than in the old schools. It can be said that it is *Kata* beyond *Kata*. The reason behind this can be found first of all in the positive fact that Aikido draws a wide diversity of people compared to other *Budo* disciplines. However, on the negative side, this contributes to a superficial overflow of individualism.

The second reason can be found in the fact that the Founder himself repeatedly transformed and changed his art and in particular its physical presentation. These changes were synonymous with his personal development and age. Without doubt, this is one of the reasons we see the different styles of *Kata*, or different ways of expressing the essence of the art, among his own followers. These students completed their training under the Founder at different period of his life.

This continual development of Aikido is clearly due to the Founder's endless search of the Path, a search with which, I assume, he was never satisfied. The best way that I can describe his attitude in this regard is that he uses to tell his followers that if they advanced 50 steps, he would advance 100. I am convinced that it was truly his intention at the time to encourage his younger followers.

Although there appear to be differences in the approach to *Kata* between Aikido and other arts, its mastery still carries substantial weight in our study. It might, therefore, be helpful to describe the three progressive stages that appear in the study of the traditional arts that exist in Japan. Some of these I will illustrate with the hope that visualization will help the reader grasp them more fully.

The first stage is known as 守 *Shu* and can be translated as follows: to protect, defend, guard, obey, keep, observe, abide (by), tick (to), be true (to). From these definitions, the characteristics of this particular stage can be said to be: protection (by teaching), being defended (by teaching), obeying the order (of teaching), observation (of the teaching), keeping one's eyes open (on the teaching).

As one can see, there are two factors, one a subjective issue, the other, objective. For example, to be protected (by the teaching), to be defended (by the teaching), to be guarded (by the teaching) all refers to defense against external negative influences, and from falling into danger and making mistakes. These are all objective issues. On the other hand, to obey the order (of teaching), to observe (the teaching), to stick (to the teaching), to be true (to the teaching), are all subjective, internal issues.

Technically, what is characteristic of this stage is the learning and embodiment of the fundamentals through the repetitions of *Kata*, exactly as they are presented, without the imposition of will, opinion, or judgment, but with a total openness and modesty. It is an important basic conditioning period both physically and mentally, wherein all the necessary conditions are carefully prepared for the next stage. Physically, this is the time when various parts of the body are trained; joints, muscles, bones, overall posture, how to set the lower part of the body centered by the waist, the use of gravity and its control, the balanced use of hands and footwork, etc.

Mentally, one learns how to focus and concentrate attention on any particular part of the body at any given time, how to generate internal energy and its natural flow through the use of the power of imagination. Furthermore, one learns faith, trust, respect, endurance, modesty, sacrifice, and courage, all of which are considered to be the virtues of *Budo*.

There is no set time or period as to how long it takes to go through this stage. It all depends on the strength, quality, ability, and capability on the parts of both teacher and student. Generally speaking, however, it does not have to be too long, say from three to five years. Needless to say, this is said on the assumption that one trains earnestly, trains every day, and makes that training the first priority of that time of life.

The stage that follows *Shu* is known as 破 *Ha*. The definition of *Ha* is translated as follows: to tear up, rip, rent, break, crush, destroy, violate, transgress, open, burst.

As these definitions indicate, this is a rather dynamic stage in character and strongly leans towards negativity and denial. However, paradoxically, this negativity leads progressively to self-affirmation.

The stage of *Shu*, described above, is centered on the denial of individualism. That which then develops is a stage of self-affirmation, which is based on denial of the first stage. A new horizon then opens up. It requires a totally different perception in order to grasp the whole meaning of what is happening at this time.

Without question, this stage demands careful preparation by both teacher and student. The strength of the teaching and deep insight and recognition of the potential of the student by the teacher, and the ceaseless and earnest study carried out by the student in response to the teaching, are essential. This is not a superficial self-assertion or pose of individualism because its strength comes from having been through the flame of self-denial.

Technically, this is also the stage wherein it is required to rearrange or reconstruct what the teacher has taught. This includes the elimination of what is undesirable, unnecessary or unsuitable and allows new elements to be brought into the study as food for growth. These changes are based on the true recognition of self together with surrounding conditions, such as temperament, personality, style, age, sex, weight, height, and body strength.

This is the stage, spiritually or mentally, when it is necessary to have a high mind of inquiry and self-reflection. More than anything else, it is required to attain a true and unshakable understanding of oneself as an individual. In other words, it is necessary to have a clear vision of one's own potential and the best possible way to stimulate it. This might require that one abandons or denies what is already an asset or strength in one's art. In this stage, in particular, gaining does not necessarily mean being creative but often means losing or abandoning, and this plays an important part in the process. It is indeed a difficult task to carry out and one often does not see its necessity due to lack of true insight and courage.

As part of human nature, it is indeed difficult to deny what one already has, especially, when it is considered to be a good part of one's possession. This is where most people get stuck and cease to grow. It is a matter of insight and perception in relation to the true recognition of self. In relation to human growth, this stage is still the period of the infant and youth and therefore still comes under the wing of the teaching. Another, very significant part of this stage, is moving from the complete passivity of the previous stage to active responsibility for one's own training.

What happens in this stage is that the one who gives (on the part of teaching – an external effect) and the one who receives (on the part of the student – internal effort) simultaneously contribute towards the birth of individualism. It is exactly like the moment when the baby bird within the egg begins to break the shell from the inside as the parent bird helps to break through from the outside. If the time is not mature, the death of the bird results.



Again, there is no set time or period as to how long this stage takes. However, this is an important transitional period. Growth from infant-youth to a complete, fully grown individual, appears only after this stage.

The final stage is known as 離 *Ri*. The definition of the character is as follows: separation, leave, depart (from) release, set free, detach.

As the definition indicates, this is the time of graduation. The completion of one's study is here, though it is not the end of study. In this stage, one is given recognition as a Master of the art, as well as recognition as a complete individual, independent in the art. Obviously, in this stage, one has to acquire every required technical skill, knowledge and experience, with a dauntless personality. Spiritually or mentally one no longer depends or relies upon external help or guidance. One depends upon one's own continual inquiry. This is the stage wherein one may begin to see the Mind of No-Mind, or the Sword of No-Mind, through an as yet misty horizon.

Needless to say, to attain this stage takes work and study that is beyond expression in words. This is where one liberates the self from external reliances, including one's teacher, until cosmic consciousness, the Mind of No-Mind and the Sword of No-Sword are revealed. And it is the state of *Shoshin* with its continuous growth that is the key to its attainment.

I have given a brief description of *Shu*, *Ha*, and *Ri* with their progressive development and structure. However, these three stages do not necessarily set up in mechanical form with clear boundaries between them, although their progression and transformation are basically acknowledged through a certificate given by the teacher.

Referring the above system to the present ranking system practiced in today's Aikido, the stage of *Shu* is applicable up to the rank of third Dan, the stage of *Ha* up to fifth Dan, and the stage of *Ri* to sixth Dan and above. Obviously it does not apply to everyone's rank for both negative and positive reasons. The quality of rank is often questionable and then there is the genius, someone who is not necessarily restrained by any system.

The one who has attained the stage of *Ri* is considered to be a Master of the art. He/she has become one of the successors of the Path who stands as the embodiment of the art to all others. Obviously, one is still regarded as junior to one's teacher within the lineage of transmission. Nevertheless, one is equal to any other master including one's own teacher in responsibility to transmit the art to others. And by this continual transmission of responsibility the art develops through further generations.

Whether the above-mentioned system is still practiced in today's Aikido in Japan, or whether it is workable here in the States where culture, life-style, and way of thinking are so different, is not my present interest. I am convinced, however, that this system still carries profound values for today's society, as it presents deep insight into the growth of humankind. Furthermore, it clarifies the responsibilities of the teacher and student, thus contributing to the establishment of an ideal relationship between the two.

Whatever changes American Aikido will be making in the future, it will still require a close association with Japan. This is not limited to the technical level, but is meant more broadly from a cultural perspective. Culture exists as an undercurrent within the art wherein knowledge, wisdom, experience, and insight with regard to human growth through physical and spiritual training can be found.

Seeing all change as creative development is a dangerous concept, especially when this is given affirmative recognition based on the superficial assertion of one's own creativity. Equally dangerous is the harsh demand for independence of the art based on political or racial reasons, or giving too strong an emphasis on the differences between two countries (East is East, West is West... its extreme attitude). This is important, especially as American Aikido as a whole is, as yet, still considered to be in its youth.

Change is unavoidable and only natural. However, it is illogical to think only of change while not recognizing those things, which do not change. Changes derive from differences, and their counterpart, of no-change, comes from something common and unified between the differences, through which the value of the art becomes an universal asset or property of humankind.

Whether one places importance on a part that changes or on a part that does not change, it is necessary to have a delicate balance. Ultimately, it is *Shoshin* that will bring about both a deeper insight and a sense of balance.

In a final analysis, it is perhaps *shoshin* that American Aikido as a whole needs, to be truly creative and independent in the future.

NB. European aikido is concerned as well as American aikido

守 *shu*
破 *ha*
離 *ri*





Andrzej Sarnacki

AIKIDO FROM CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Many Christians, who begin practicing aikido, ask themselves, if doing so do they not contradict their faith. Sometimes one can find literature that claims to expose the “true nature” of aikido, as demonic in origin and dangerous in its assumptions. To confirm this thesis, some personal stories can be quoted of ex aikido members, who experienced a certain kind of “possession”, psychic disturbances, traumatic dreams or evil thoughts. Aikido has also been presented as one of the “new age” elements that are imported from the Far East, together with its occult influence. Needless to say, one can find in Christian tradition many arguments and a strong vocabulary, which one can use in defending “the true faith”.

The question regarding the relationship between Christianity and aikido has also been my own one. When I started practicing aikido some ten years ago, I decided to be alert in regard to all possible spiritually harmful influences. At the same time, I must admit, being quite firm in my faith, I was not afraid to meet possible challenges to my belief. During all these years, having a chance to attend aikido trainings in Poland, Germany and the USA, I have encountered a good number of people, who were curious about my personal stand, as a Jesuit, on aikido. I was interested in their motivations and spirituality too, as well as in getting to know, if and how the many hours of practice and (usually) less hours of meditation, have changed their lives.

First of all I would have to say that after all these years I have not noticed any negative influence coming from aikido and deteriorating my faith or a general attitude to myself or other people. On the contrary, it has been going smoothly with all my activities, my prayer life and my Christian identity. It has not been a challenge to my faith, rather an interesting experience of becoming more aware of my body, movements, physical and mental attitudes, and many other elements of this beautiful art that demands so much commitment. There is a striking resemblance between being in a harmony with your own spirit and having more control over your body. And aikido helps to realize better the connection between the two. Aikido should also get some credit for improving a sense of self-respect, self-discipline, perseverance, courage, development of friendship and of course an improvement in one's health.

One of the problems that Christians may have with aikido is that it is being unjustly perceived as a part of the “New Age package”. When the New Age movement is clearly non-Christian in its assumptions, aikido has its own “philosophy” that can be reconciled with faith in Jesus Christ. The principles of not doing harm, getting off the attack-line, mastering your aggression, the need for self-restraint and calmness as well as showing respect to other people, well match the Christian spirit. There is no hidden agenda in aikido, no sectarian tricks or secret knowledge. Even if one may meet people who talk about aikido with a sense of supernatural powers or unusualness, I regard this rather as an aberration and an inflated personal interpretation, not standard practice or a mainstream stand.

Christianity, the way I understand it and live it by, does not demonize the reality. The world, people and foremost the human spirit have been created by God as primarily good. Every human being is called to be free and to make a good use of his or her free will. To me that means that one cannot contaminate oneself with evil in the same manner as with a flu or tuberculosis. Even if something is evil, it cannot infect us against our will, unless you open the door to it. I am writing this in opposition to some beliefs on the nature of evil that claim that one can be “possessed” somehow automatically, just by finding oneself in the presence of something or someone that is evil. Aikido is by no means evil. But even if there are elements that are not known to the Christian tradition, one does not need to fear, but to make an effort of translation and adjustment.

When one experiences, for example, some new emotional (psychic) sensations after beginning to practice aikido, it is rather due to one's general condition. Aikido helps one to become more aware, more present in the moment and more in touch with oneself. Sometimes it means that we can experience something about ourselves that until now was unknown to us. Testimonies of “terrifying dreams” or “feelings of possession”, prove that aikido can open in us some areas, where our fears and anxieties are kept. Things like those described above happen as well to many of those, who begin to practice Christian (or another) meditation.

Anyone who lives somehow unreflectively might experience a strange side of themselves, just by simple self-awareness exercises. This is nothing extraordinary, just a normal reflection of who we are deep down. Although Christian anthropology maintains that ultimately we are good, there is also a "dark side", close to our inner life, which could be frightening when one tries to deal with it on one's own. That's why in the Catholic Church we have a tradition of spiritual guidance. This practice has been exercised for centuries, because when we come to our most intimate levels, we often feel helpless and in need of assistance.

There is just one occurrence, I believe, when aikido can intervene negatively with one's spiritual life. This happens when one begins to treat aikido as a religion. By a kind of private divinization, aikido may become in such circumstances a self-sufficient subject of devotion, a teaching that provides all crucial answers to human existence, and even somehow, a personal way of salvation (that includes an expectation that all problems will be solved and all frailties healed). I don't take aikido as a religion, and I have never heard such a claim. Nevertheless I can see that some aikidokas in their fascination can expect more from aikido, than it promises and actually can offer.

This is not just the case with aikido. One can easily treat money in a manner of religious affection. But it is not money as such to be blamed. Some take science as the ultimate reality. But it does not mean that science is demonic. And who knows how many people demand that another person will be the whole world to them, expecting that s/he will give complete meaning to their lives and will be an unquestionable guarantee of their real happiness. All these statements taken as absolute formulas would put religion and its teaching of a central role of God aside. But it does not mean that a true love is wrong. The problem, from a Christian point of view, does not lie somewhere outside but in the more fundamental, interior confusion with the place of God in somebody's life.

My general impression is such that aikido alone usually does not have a great impact on spiritual life. This might sound a bit offensive to those, who treat aikido as an important spiritual factor in their lives. I would like to assure you, that it is not my intention to upset you and even less to judge your spiritual life. I can speak only for myself, from my own experience, which owes a great deal to Christian tradition and Jesuit spirituality. Basically I want to say, that aikido did not challenge what I regard as the core Christian message, which is a personal relationship with God that grows through the life of prayer, sacraments, different events in life, relationships and one's decisions. If one hesitates to practice aikido because of religious principles, I'd advise him or her to keep the faith principles, to pray (meditate) every day, to belong to a lively community of faith and to lead sacramental life (when you are Catholic). Then you can practice aikido without restraint. If you as Christian don't lead a practical life of faith, many things can be harmful and lead you astray. Being a Christian is a practical thing that means to live without fear.

Andrzej Sarnacki, Jesuit and Shodan

The *Hakama*



Suzanne Brunner
RYU SEKI KAI
Lausanne

The *hakama* is the traditional cloth worn by *samurais* and the Japanese high social classes, since the Middle-age. Its name comes from the word "*hakamo*", it has been noted in the *Kojiki*, the historical chronicles covering the period going from the creation of Japan in 660 BC up to 628 CE. It is found in the *Nihonshoki*, historical records written in 720 CE. Of course, it has evolved over time. In the ancient times, these large pants were worn by women. It then became part of the *samurai* equipment, as a leg protection against bushes, bramble and stones. The widening at the legs would facilitate horseback mounting. Later they continued to wear it as a distinctive sign of their warrior status.

The aikido *hakama* is a throwback from the horse mounted *bushi's* gear. While leaving a great ease of motion and embellishing them, it helps hiding the moves. The small rigid cushion, *koshi ita*, in the back, protects it and fosters a good withstanding. The *himo* are the straps use to tie it. It is worn in blue or black; it exists in white for iaido practice in some schools, white being the symbol of purity.

Saito Sensei reports that O Sensei was adamant that every aikido practitioner should wear the *hakama*, he did not consider it linked to the rank or seniority. The only choice to wear it or not was a financial consideration. Students would thus practice without *hakama* until they could afford one.

The right to bear one only after a certain level is therefore a matter of modern interpretation and does not represent the sign of progression in the art.

The creases of the *hakama* bear a signification: they represent the seven virtues of *budo* and the traditions have lasted over the generations.

O Sensei used to say that "Since aikido is derived from the spirit of *budo*, we must strive in our practice to polish the seven traditional virtues".

The two creases at the back of the *hakama* come from a popular myth, according to which the gods of war, at the time of unification of Japan, helped the god of the sun in his project, and worked together to build the nation in using only their dignity, without the help of weapons. Each of the two creases represents one of the gods of war. The *koshi ita* that unites them represents the god of sun et the harmony that unites them, the *Wa*.

These two creases are :

Chu (loyalty): Loyalty and fidelity. These values in our society may appear obsolete, while the aikidoka

must engage in a total fidelity and respect towards the rules of his school, like the *samurai* towards his master. These qualities reflect the righteousness of the body and the spirit of the practitioner.

Koh (piety): this virtue in martial art is understood in the sense of respect of the values of the *budo* principles.

The creases on the front of the *hakama* recall the five moral principles that reflect the true nature of *bushido*.

From right to left (from the bearer's perspective)

Jin (benevolence and generosity): benevolence (from *bene*, and *volentia*, in Latin) suppose the good that one wishes to someone else, the respect of others, the attention given and the strive to never cause trouble or pain on purpose.

Gi (honor and justice): honor is the moral dignity, it encompasses the respect one has for oneself and other people, and moral principles that are considered just.

Rei (courtesy, etiquette): it is a set of behaviors aiming at expressing the recognition and the interest for others, and the consideration that is granted as a person with sentiments. The etiquette, also called propriety, is the set of rules characteristic of courtesy.

Chi (wisdom and intelligence): wisdom is the aptitude to distinguish the positive and the negative amongst things, to give to events and things only the importance they really have without losing one's serenity.

Shin (sincerity): without sincerity, the practice of a martial art is just a lie, a hoax and pretending. The sincerity must foster trust. Sincere, the engagement must be total and with no doubt.

To wear the *hakama* invites us to perpetuate the traditional values of *bushido*, think about it, and try to be faithful to them, inside but also outside of our practice.

(from Morihei Ueshiba, the information of the CTIR-Aikibudo, and various international sites)



The flute and the drum

These two musical instruments are the first to appear in the history of humanity. On pre-historic sites there are traces of aerophones (wind instruments) of all kinds, carved out of wild animals fangs, horns, stones and seashells. About percussion, it is easy to imagine our ancestors trying to reproduce the rhythm of their heartbeats using the first object at hand, sticks, stones or skulls taken from the skeleton of a close relative.

Aikido practice such as I see it, demands to acquire:

- a good physical form, concerning both the muscles and the joints;

- a mastery of the "vocabulary" composed of the forms that are proper to aikido, ways of moving, attacks, hand holds, throwing, immobilizations, etc., the whole combined and listed in Japanese terms to be memorized as soon as possible;

- the capacity to create in real time a mental image representing your own body in movement and the body of your partner, the whole making up a single, dynamic entity governed by forces we would do well to harmonize;

- the mastery and the awareness of breathing, with the implicit influence on blood and muscles, since this vital function is our link to the Universal, therefore allowing us to harmonize with our partner at all times.

During the rohatsu sesshin at Dai Bosatsu Zendo at the Bleacher Lake in the Catskills mountains (state of New York), a very peculiar race takes place several times a day at the approach of the personal interviews (dokusan) with Edo Roshi. The first come are the first served. Thus, at the sound of the bell everybody abruptly ends his meditation, jumps on his feet and runs in a big rush towards the Dharma Hall to form a waiting line. The game is of course to get there first overtaking those that are in a favorable position sitting near the door. There is only one way to make it: not waiting for the bell, on the contrary staying concentrated on breathing as if nothing is happening. Letting a relaxed diaphragm rhyme the course of life palpitating in you, the *sine qua non* condition for spontaneity. At the sound of the bell, it is then by instinct that the body gathers itself and springs forward, and so doing gaining over the neighbor the precious hundredths of a second that make the difference. Otherwise, the anxiety of the waiting interferes with good breathing and paralyzes the muscles losing the capacity to react suddenly.

The flute and the drum, this image helps me constantly to keep in mind what today appears to be the most difficult thing to realize. The flute, the image of the passage of the air through the body, conditions its flexibility and availability at all times. The drum, the image of a distended abdomen thanks to the control of the diaphragm, conditions a dynamic and reactive breathing.

This description is of course a simple outline not very analytical in character, the constraints of this scheme makes us lose sight of the essential, namely that aikido is a living practice that cannot be cut in separate parts. In my practice, it matters to me to develop these different skills in each exercise that I practice or teach, and that from the first step on the tatami.

Among these aptitudes, I concentrate my attention these days on the control and the good use of breathing in practice. I have now the feeling that my capacity to develop in aikido goes through this aspect. I have been convinced of that by the intensive practice of zazen during prolonged sesshin.

This is how, connected to the Universe by breathing, we all partake in a single heart-beat, the one that sometimes we touch with our fingertips in the realization of an accomplished aikido form, no sooner gone, again to be searched for.



Joël BERTRAND
shidoi, yondan.
GEN NEI KAN
Mialet



Florent Liardet
RYU SEKI KAI
Lausanne

Towards Santiago de Compostela

Glimpses of reflexion along the way

During the 2 months of peregrination that lead me from Puy en Velais to Santiago de Compostela, each new day brought its load of experiences: the biting cold while crossing the Pyrénées mountains, walking under the rain along a busy highway, the grandiose scenery of a Spanish sunrise, or the contemplation of the moon close to an old wash house by a cool morning...

When one does a long haul walk, one has time and does not do much. Those who pretend that crossing the almost 1000 miles separating those two towns is a physical prowess are wrong: It's "only" a matter of putting one foot in front of the other, five or six hours per day during two months. The true challenge resided, in my case, 5 foot 10 inches higher, in my head. Indeed, rocked by this neverending two-stroke rate and immersed in the spread of the space traversed, the mind has a tendency to quickly escape, and get carried away in all sorts of thoughts. There is no better fertilizer for a fertile mind than walking.

In the beginning, one cannot deny it, it's mainly blisters, aches and other pains that impose on the mind. But after a few hundred miles, the number of topics meditated in a single day makes one dizzy. Amongst the themes of reflexion is, of course, Aikido. It was so present that I could, without great difficulty, dissert for pages on the possible ties to be woven between the teachings of the walk and those received during my practice. I actually did try to write, at several occasions, but obviously I had not yet digested enough that experience to achieve a satisfactory result. It was after reading the January edition of Shiun that I decided to really go for it. It became blatant to me that three very impressive experiences illustrated the notions of AI, KI, and DO. I will describe these experiences in chronological order, since nature and the walk do not seem to respect the Japanese syntax.

DO What could be more natural, as one walks along the way, to reflect on the nature of that way. It quickly appeared to me that this walk is in fact a long metaphor for life, with a birth, a growth, moments of doubt. One is sometime bored with yet another sunrise, sometime one is caught talking down to that "small walker" only here to walk a couple of hundred miles, then regrets, a sort of awareness of the path already accomplished, sometime the coming of wisdom, and finally the arrival, death, whether we reached the destination or not. As I think about it, I realize that it is the same for any matter of importance that one embarks on in life.

Every stage reached brings its batch of difficulties, and those have rather a tendency to go crescendo: The beginner's pain, the arrogance of the ignorant who think he knows, and yet the difficulty to remain curious while one thinks he has seen it all. Upon my return, it took me some time to re-center, to regain my place as a young man who has still a lot to discover and not the spirit of a bitter old man that haunted me towards the end of my journey.

AI Galicia, area in the north west of Spain, has a climate similar to Brittany between September and April. However, the summer months are very hot and dry and wildfires are not uncommon. The capital, Santiago de Compostela, is surrounded with large eucalyptus forests, species introduced here for the fabrication of paper and to my great surprise (since I knew only the leaves, seen on packs of throat medication) are splendid trees, high and wide. A month before I walked on Galician ground, its forests were completely ravaged by a particularly intense and long wildfire. So upon my arrival, these immense forests were bygone. The eucalyptus were burned on all their length, and only a few leaves from the treetops had survived. The scorched earth mixed with ashes was dull and dirty. Only huge battlefields were left, on which no life appeared possible. But despite this, no trees, big or small, were dead. To the contrary, dozens of new small branches had found their way through the burned barks, at man's height. Isn't this a magnificent example of adaptation? Life seeks naturally to battle for sustainability, adapting to new situations as they unfold, and even extreme situations cannot get over it easily. As such, the same goes for the man who fights for his personal survival or that of his group. As I think about it, it appears to me that there are two different sorts of combat, only differentiated by the willingness that man puts into it: to fight to destroy one's opponent, or to fight for one's own survival, or that of one's group. This reminds me of a sentence of O Sensei read a few years ago and marked the beginning of my practice: "the path of the Warrior is not to destroy and kill but to maintain life, to continuously create". Although the result for our opponent may be the same in both cases – defeat – the difference is huge.

KI Like many students in Martial Arts, I have been long interested in Ki, that vital energy on which so many books have been written in more or less new age ways. I always wanted to experiment it, but I had no idea it would be by its absence.

After sixty-four days of walking, my journey was coming to an end. Here I am lost in the streets of Santiago de Compostela, town slightly shy of 100,000 people, seeking the cathedral, or any place where I could consider myself arrived. The more time was going by, the more I can feel my tension exacerbated. My patience is literally melting, I want to arrive now, right now. Although I am separated by about half a mile from my objective, my spirit just collapses completely.

As I finally reach the "Pilgrim's Street", where all the souvenir shops lie under the arcades, I feel my life force running away from my body. I am not sealed. The image comes to mind of a punctured tire whose air is released. I take no advantage whatsoever of being arrived. After renting a hotel room in order to get a bit of comfort, I try to rest but I am totally incapable of sleeping. The next day, however, I wake up early, with an urge to continue to walk the three last days separating me from Fisterra, the extreme occidental point of Europe, and from the ocean. I am thus leaving, aware of making a mistake and to not have enough strength left. After an hour and a half under the rain, I walk in front of a bus stop bound towards Santiago. Huge temptation. I am cold, my back is aching, and my kidneys tense up. Finally, with a heart broken by the dilemma, I give up. This abandon at the end of the journey will tarnish even more my "victory" on my initial goal. At that moment I feel that I am dying, at the same time in a metaphoric, symbolic and quasi-real way.

This feeling will last for several months after my return, in Switzerland. Still today, it is difficult to find an explanation to this sudden "burn out". Since the day before my arrival I still felt good. However, with the distance, I realize that it was indeed the attainment of a stage, and the beginning of another one.

Can one rebirth without dying?





RICKSHAW

I wanted to join Amnon Sensei and go with him to the seminar in Uzes last summer.

Unfortunately like most of us aikidokas, I did not have the money to fly and join the seminar, and driving a car from Israel is not a possibility (not just because I do not own one).

So I decided to find an evening job that will get me the extra money I needed to participate to the seminar with Chiba Sensei and meet all our friends from around Europe.

Friend of mine suggested to work as a rickshaw (a bicyclecab) driver around Tel Aviv touristy area, at first I thought that it's not for me to work in that sort of high school summer job and to get bad attitude from bored customers. But when I started working I learned to enjoy the interaction with the people and how I can control the atmosphere around me, I was happy to see the customers enjoy themselves when they took the ride and were always smiling. And because I was in a good mood even people who looked «hard» were enjoying the experience of the ride like little boys.

So I got enough money to come to Uzes and got this amazing experience of a positive interaction and got in fairly good shape.



Her new born daughter Myrto makes Jenny Flower the happiest since Novembre.

Congratulations and best wishes.

THE NEW GRADES IN 2008

as far as we currently know!!!

4e dan

Joël Bertrand, GEN NEI KAN, Mialet
Anne Ducouret, AN JYU KAN, CAP, Paris
Piotr Masztalerz, SEN NEN SUGI, Wroclawska sekcja aikido
Daniel Wiedmann, GEN YO KAN, aikikai Strasbourg

3e dan

Hans-Peter Höpp, Aikido Dojo Uni Münster
Zbignew Dudzic, SEN NEN SUGI, Wroclaw aikido club

2e dan

Carole Czaja, GEN YO KAN, aikikai Strasbourg
Michel Nuemann, DAI JYO KAN, Bagnols
Fabrice Mahieux, DAI JYO KAN, Bagnols

1er dan

Loui Abeshi, Athens aikikai
Cyrille Benoît, AN JYU KAN, CAP, Paris
Krzysztof Chlapinski, SEN NEN SUGI, Wroclaw aikido club
Zbignew Kosior, SEN NEN SUGI, Wroclaw aikido club
Jean-Gabriel Massadier, AN JYU KAN, CAP, Paris
Rafal Michalak, SEN NEN SUGI, Wroclawska sekcja aikido
Claudia Neyhousser, GEN YO KAN, aikikai Strasbourg
Christophe Neyhousser, GEN YO KAN, aikikai Strasbourg
Sylvain Rio, AN JYU KAN, CAP, Paris
Marion van Ee, GEN YO KAN, aikikai Strasbourg

Shidoin

Joël Bertrand, GEN NEI KAN, Mialet
Barbara Imboden, SHO GI KAN, Bern
Piotr Masztalerz, SEN NEN SUGI, Wroclawska sekcja aikido

Fukushidoin

Zbignew Dudzic, SEN NEN SUGI, Wroclaw aikido club
Paule Helmbacher, Aikikai Cronenburg
Hans-Peter Höpp, Aikido Dojo Uni Münster
Alexandre Pigeollot, GEN YO KAN, aikikai Strasbourg
Kyros Tsanes, Aikido from Kythira

Shoden armes

Joël Bertrand, GEN NEI KAN, Mialet
Anne Ducouret, AN JYU KAN, CAP, Paris
Jacek Kochaniec, SEN NEN SUGI, Wroclawska sekcja aikido
Piotr Masztalerz, SEN NEN SUGI, Wroclawska sekcja aikido
Jürgen Schwendinger, O SEN KAN, Aikikai Dornbirn

Shoden batto-ho

Jacek Kochaniec, SEN NEN SUGI, Wroclawska sekcja aikido
Piotr Masztalerz, SEN NEN SUGI, Wroclawska sekcja aikido
Jürgen Schwendinger, O SEN KAN, Aikikai Dornbirn