



Living the Dream

Peter Brown, ShidoIn, Kyu Shin Kan writes:

The trip to Japan was very special for me, I was able to fulfill two ambitions. One was to actually train at Hombu Dojo, the second to fly for the first time.

After forty one years of Aikido, watching the DVD's, meeting the different Shihan I found my self living the dream. After touching down at Narita airport we set off for Shinjuku.

Eddie Mccalla and I shared a taxi: we hadn't quite mastered the currency yet so when the driver asked for 100 Yen each, we both promptly gave him 20,000 Yen between us. He was well impressed, we both now have equal shares in a taxi.

After booking into our rooms Seki San met us and took us all to the Budokan to see a demonstration by Doshu, and some of the university students studying Aikido in Japan, after the demonstration we went on to a Japanese bar, we had a lot to eat and a little to drink, or was it the other way round? I was too tired to know.

I was unable to sleep much that first night, I was worried



that I would miss the first class with Doshu. I was up and showered by 4.30 that morning. At 5.30am we where off, wondering the almost deserted streets of Shinjuku, putting all our faith in Gordon, hoping that he new were he was going.

The strangest feeling came over me as we entered Hombu Dojo.

I considered all the great Shihan that had passed through these very same doors, Doshu was standing in the reception area, he was quite shocked to see all these people from the UK standing with their mouths open.

On entering the changing room we all stood together a

little apprehensive, not wanting to do or say the wrong thing, so no one said anything.

I slipped through the curtain on to the most famous Tatami in the world, after bowing I followed the others and hung the locker key on its peg, someone spoke to me in Japanese, I think he said move out the way...

I wondered if we had a class that started at 6.30am how many people would be on it: Doshu had 40+ students.

On the evening that we attended Miyamoto Sensei's class, he invited us all to a meal. It was a traditional Japanese restaurant, we removed our shoes at the entrance and sat on the floor

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around the table, it was about 10 minutes before I realised that you could dangle your feet under the table, and this was much more comfortable. One of our party (I won't mention his name to save embarrassment) quite enjoyed feasting on the sperm balls of a whale, he couldn't get enough of them.

Later in the week, off we went to Doshu's 6.30am class, I was unaware that this class was going to become one of my personal highlights of our trip. We all began with Doshu's warm up's and like every day previously one of the Japanese students would invite you to train.

A lady by the name of Miyuki Kumazawa asked me to practice, from that moment I was given a master class in Aikido, she blended so well with my clumsy movements, she made all my techniques look text book. Every turn, projection, strike just flowed. There was no force but I found myself on the Tatami. I don't know if you can have the perfect partner in Aikido, but I felt that I had found one. The only criticism that I



have is that the one hour passed too quickly.

After this experience, even if I had got food poisoning like some of my new mates, it would have been well worth it, this experience will stay with me for many years to come. I would imagine to Miyuki it was just another practice.

There is so much that the group experienced that it would take you weeks to read, so I would like to leave space for one of the other guys to tell their tales. One thing I would like to share is an observation, while practicing: I noticed a lot of very senior students practicing on Doshu's class, and they turned up every morning and just trained.

The thing I noticed was that they all practiced their own Aikido, some of these guy's had practiced under the first Doshu and probably O Sensei himself.

I was told that these guys had all done their best for Aikido and now they enjoyed the fruits of their labour. They had moved aside to allow progression, but it was very plain to see they still held the respect of not only the regular students at Hombu, but all the visitors to the Dojo.

I hope that one day, I will be able to stand back and feel the same pride as these ladies and gentlemen do.

I would like to end by thanking Mr. Jones Shihan for organizing the trip, Seki San for keeping an eye on us, and all the guys that made my first trip to Japan a great one, I couldn't have wished for a better group of friends.

PS Eddie shell we buy a Bus next time?.....





How we became Wa Shin Kan

Guy Needler writes:

The name Wa Shin Kan was given to the Dojo by Tani-San, manager of the International Aikikai Department, International Aikido Headquarters at Hombu Dojo, Japan, in March 2006.

When I initially opened the club at the end of 2001 beginning of 2002 the club was named after the village that our dojo was located within, Tanworth, hence the first name of "*Tanworth Aikikai*". The club operated on two nights, Monday and Wednesday.

During the spring of 2004 we were forced to find a temporary location due to the refurbishment of the village hall we used and as a result we moved to the Village Hall at Ullenhall, Henley in Arden. As luck would have it was a much better facility and we have been there ever since, although Wednesday nights are now at North East Worcestershire College, Redditch, due to the larger catchment area, with classes during the summer break still being held at Ullenhall.

Sorry Tanworth!

However, as we were no longer at Tanworth the name of the club was no longer relevant and needed to be changed to one that was more universal and that would cope with future dojo location changes. With Mr Smith's blessing and the guidance of Allan Roberts, I contacted Tani-San at Hombu with the view to asking Doshu for a name that is both Japanese and independent of location. Doshu declined the request because he receives similar requests from all over the world and to undertake these requests would be tremendous work for him. In lieu of this Tani-San made two suggestions of his own, one of which, Wa Shin Kan, we liked instantly. The calligraphy and the English translations are as follows.

和 心 館 道 場

和 (wa) means "peace", "calm" or "harmony"

心 (shin) means "heart" or "center"

館 (kan) means "house" or "building"

Therefore the translation in English is therefore: "*The House of the Peaceful Heart*"

We secured a new domain name for our web site and have completed a word search on Google, which, to my surprise confirmed that no other Aikido dojo has this name world wide (as far as I can see), so Tani-San's intuition in naming our dojo was impressive. (www.washinkan.org.uk)

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How we became Wa Shin Kan. Continued

I prefer to teach the basics at WSK with a view to gaining martiality through technical and spiritual perfection and as a result of this I teach the more spiritual aspects of Aikido to those who wish to learn them. This is consistent with O Sensei's beliefs as he was noted as saying that Aikido, through working together, is the "Art of Peace". This epitomizes the students at Wa Shin Kan and justifies the clubs name as they practice Aikido for personal development, with the emphasis on harmony rather than physical strength.

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Is Aikido 100 per cent ukemi?

**Andrew Humphreys,
Fukushidoin, Te Shin
Kai writes:**

Ukemi is one of those subjects that seem to keep appearing within common debate among aikidoka. Much has been written on the subject of ukemi and even DVDs are now available displaying practice and development. In past editions, the Newsletter and Scribe has been host to many articles and opinions on the subject.

On a basic level, ukemi simply means to roll or take a break fall. As a beginner or novice student we go through the motions and exercises to learn the correct and safe forms of forward and backwards "break falls". However, as previous articles have stressed, there is more to ukemi than just "taking a fall".

I feel that there are points that directly relate to ukemi. These are *contact, reaction, recovery* and *flexibility*. However, these points also are of direct

relevance to the way tori practices. So, if both uke and tori need to encompass contact, reaction, recovery and flexibility does this make Aikido 100% ukemi?

When performing a technique, are tori performing their own form of ukemi? Are the elements of contact, reaction, recovery and flexibility just as important to tori as to uke? Taking these elements, I will examine each one and its relationship with ukemi to tori.

Contact

Within technique and indeed in general practice, contact needs to be established and then maintained by both tori and uke. Through an attack this is usually enforced upon the uke and uke must make sure that they maintain contact throughout the technique. Nonetheless, for tori to be able to use and manipulate uke's movement, tori should also create opportunities for him / her to maintain contact also. With contin-

ual direct contact with uke comes overall control of a technique and thus the ability to manipulate the technique's progression and ultimate outcome.

During the technique, tori's aim should be to keep physical, visual and contact through the centre. Throughout the technique uke is aiming to keep contact with tori.

Reaction

Technique is a reaction to the attack from uke. The reaction of the tori should be sufficient that at the beginning of the technique that he or she is able to evade the physical harm that is intended from the attack such as shomen-uchi. Tori's reaction should position him/her so that they are able to perform the desired technique.

During the technique if the execution does not go to plan, then tori should have an open enough mind to change technique, indeed, react to uke's movement through ukemi.

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Recovery

One of the whole meanings behind ukemi is that the uke is able to recover from the actions enforced upon him/her by tori so that they can respond to the remainder of the technique. Within this recovery may be the opportunity to perform kaeshi waza (reversal technique)

Throughout the technique, as tori moves they are continually recovering their position, kokyu-ho, centre, movement and advantage over the uke. This essentially is achieved via body movement or the dynamics of the technique through continual movement. This continual movement should lead to flowing na-

ture that is almost a trademark of aikido.

Flexibility (body and mind)

An aikidoka needs to be flexible throughout their training. For example, if an aikidoka just learns one way of performing ikkyo with one person, they are at risk of becoming too familiar with that particular way of practice. When this aikidoka then practices with another uke who they are not used to, will they have flexibility to cope efficiently with the uke? I say no, as they conditioned themselves by training with only one person or style of practice.

Flexibility of the mind is almost a self-fulfilling prophecy for an aikidoka as it enables them to react

to situations and enables recovery with techniques. This flexibility within tori's practice enable them to deal with a great deal of different uke, large, small, short, wide, heavy, light.

Conclusions

I feel that the though aikido is not 100% aikido as suggested at the beginning of this article, that tori's practice can focus on those same elements that make up ukemi. Importantly, there is also the need for tori to learn from uke and not just use them as an aid to practice their technique. Analysing how uke (especially at a more senior level) responds to different and changing technique can enable a greater understanding in everyday aikido practice.

The Modest Masters

Dennis Chapmas, Kyu Shin Kan writes:

The Aikido course on 16 March 2008 was attended by approximately 25 aikidoka, of which a well-distributed mix of kyu and dan grades trained under the direction of Sensei Pete Brown and Sensei Mike Smith, two 5th Dan Shidoin, at the De Montfort Sports Centre, one of the three venues of the Kyu Shin Kan Aikido club. The course was split into two halves, the first taken by Sensei Brown. Sensei Brown's reputation for

Taisabaki was upheld in top form as the attending aikidoka were shown how to do Aikido, as opposed to how 'to dance'. (As Sensei Smith later remarked, if your uke moves before the application of the technique by Tori, then it is a dance, as oppose to a martial art). Sensei Brown also demonstrated his modesty, as he chose from a variety of kyu grade ukes and performed his advanced techniques in fluid movements which taught his uke through the compassionate disturbance of

balance first demonstrated by O Sensei, the founder of Aikido. Sensei Brown's physical prowess was that of a world class athlete combined with an absolute awareness of an opponent's harmony (or disharmony) between mind and body. One technique introduced to the class is called Uchi Kaiten Nage. As with all Aikido techniques, there are limitless variations; however, Sensei Brown made the technique his own and even to the most experienced aikidoka, there were gasps, as Sensei

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Brown (tori) dominated the situation with uke, positioning his body like a corkscrew, to reach under and above, as well as in front and behind uke, and then with instantaneous motion, applied each crucial step of the technique. There is no time for escape for the uke, as Sensei Brown uses the full space of the tatami to manoeuvre himself and project uke without the possibility of counter-attack or accurate anticipation that would give any advantage to uke. The speed, accuracy and power of Sensei Brown's demonstration of technique inspired participants; there was great spirit among the aikidoka, whose talents were all elevated by the 'real life' Aikido demonstrated by Sensei Brown.

The second half of the course was instructed by Sensei Smith, who reminded the class that weapons are at the centre of all Aikido. With energy levels having peaked during Sensei Brown's demonstration, Sensei Smith began with what seemed a simple exercise of the wrist, as tori and uke

blended together with Bokkens at 'long sword' (as opposed to 'short sword') positions. In his demonstration, Sensei Smith gently moved his Bokken over and then under uke's Bokken. This was a mind and body exercise, as Sensei Smith took the class through a kata in which tori and uke attacked and defended, taking irimi and tenkan steps to maintain 'two steps to kill' at all times. In his demonstration Sensei Smith demonstrated advanced Bokken technique with the speed of lightning, the agility of a fox and the control of a bird of prey as his wooden bokken seemed to bend in the air to deflect and eliminate any possible threat posed by uke. After the kata, Sensei Smith brought the class back to themes in the first half of the course as he demonstrated the most challenging part of Aikido: applying the full range of techniques whilst armed with a bokken. As Sensei Smith demonstrated Uchi Kaiten Nage, it was as if the air around the Bokken moved uke, though the technique was finished by a simulated slicing of the

back of uke's neck (beheading) in the classic style practised by the Samurai. Sensei Smith glided over the matt, as he blended his mind, body and Bokken together in a harmonious, deadly (in principle), and subtle defence.

In short, the course was a success and the blending of Sensei Brown's and Sensei Smith's teaching made it uncomfortable for aikidokas to practise their old, if perfected, styles against the efforts of a student grasping only a small part of what either instructor demonstrated. The four hours of training was followed up by a presentation of awards in which the instructors bestowed honour upon four aikidokas who have shown diligent progress in their training. Even the smallest disrespect is not tolerated on the tatami and the great formalisation of award presentation was a fitting conclusion to a day spent in the presence of Aikido masters, whose modesty is only outshone by their great martial art talent.

