



Keith Hayward Sensei Interview.

Harper Adams Agricultural College, UKA Summer School, August 2004.

Conducted by Mark Walsh.



Keith Hayward, 6th dan so Hombu, Shido-in, is one of the senior instructors of the United Kingdom Aikikai. He is chief instructor of the Te Shin Kai House of the UKA, and teaches regularly at Okengates Aikido Club (Ken Mon Kan) in Telford, as well as at UKA national courses and the annual Summer School.

Sensei, when and where did you begin aikido?



I started in Wellington, Shropshire in 1968 at the YMCA, with my then instructor Mr David Ford. He was first *dan* and an early student of Chiba *Sensei**. He had moved from Birmingham to Telford and I'd met him through work. I went and watched and was impressed with what was going on, but what impressed me more was the photograph of O'Sensei: everywhere you moved in the room he seemed to be watching you, so I thought there must be something in this aikido if a picture can say, "Come on!"

How old were you at the time?

23.

Do you remember the first class that you participated in?



I do, yes. There was Mr Ford; me; a big guy called Tony who was a plasterer; another big plasterer; and one or two more. There weren't many of us. To do *irimi nage* I remember having to jump to catch hold of the plasterer's neck, as I'm not so tall. I was on a job the other week actually and the plaster was there, we had a good laugh about the old days.



What did aikido seem like when you first walked through the door?

It was very new and I hadn't done any martial arts at all. The interest suddenly hit me in the face: "I wana do this!" because it looked graceful. This Dave Ford was not very tall and he was skinny, but he could throw these guys around like nothing. He lives in Brighton now I believe, and while we've lost contact I'm sure he's still at it somewhere.

Your main instructor after that was Chiba Sensei?



Well, my main instructor was Mr Smith* but I met Chiba *Sensei* a couple of times before he went back to Japan. I was working away from home a lot and I couldn't get to practice as often as I would've liked because of family and other commitments. I trained when I could, especially with Mr Smith and the lads at Nikon [a martial arts club] on Coventry road [Birmingham].

Was there an unusual meeting with Mr Jones*?



I was the second highest grade in Shropshire, because it was a new art and we were starting from scratch. Although I was only an orange belt I was given permission to wear hakama, as I was the assistant instructor at Dave's club. But I could only wear it at the club. Now Mr Smith and Mr Jones came there one night. Mr Jones had been training for



years and was 1st *kyu* I think, but didn't wear a hakama. He saw this little upstart wearing one, stood there and looked me up and down as if to say, "And who do you think you are?" Then every time we trained he made a beeline for me to prove he was the better of the two [laughs]. But we're very friendly now; we've grown close over the years.

You're known for your humour, are there any funny stories you would like to share with us from the early days of aikido?



It was only when the firm I was working for finished and I became self employed, that I threw myself back into the aikido. One thing I remember was at the first BAF* summer school at Chester University College. 11 of us went out on a night, but only three of us stuck the pace: there was myself, Chris Mooney* and a lad called Angus Sinclair. We'd finished the rounds of the pubs in Chester and been for a Chinese, and when we got back to the University grounds the gates were shut, so we climbed over the wall. But when we got to the houses of residence we couldn't get in the door. So I said I'd get in the window as my room had the window open, though it didn't open fully, it just pivoted so there was only half the space to get in. I was hefty and Chris Mooney was thin so in the end he went through. Now we weren't in the state to think, so he went in feet first and couldn't stand on anything so was virtually hanging out of the window. Now I started to laugh hysterically, and lights were coming on all around us, getting closer and closer to Chiba *Sensei's* room. I thought, we can't have this, and literally kicked Chris Mooney through the window. As he went in, Angus appeared and said, "The door's open". He'd just been around the block and tapped on the window of a guy who was awake reading a book. The next morning Chris opened his gi and it was raw where I'd kicked him through and the skin had come off: that was quite funny.



Any other good and bad times you can recall?

I don't think I've ever had a bad time doing aikido. People say they had bad times with Chiba *Sensei*, but I think I came after that time. He was very hard, but I think he was only hard because that was just the way he was. He didn't realise that we held jobs down; he thought we were proper full time students. I never had a bad time in aikido, only when I was working away and couldn't get to train on a regular basis: that did my head in. I always took my kit with me though when I was away. Once in Port Talbot I met Don Morgan* and we became quite good friends from that. I just saw a poster passing by and went in. Don was a student there of a big guy at the time, and what they were doing was impressive. Don took over the club eventually I believe; he came up the other day actually.



What has changed since those times?

Everything really: the attitude has changed, as at that time we were just going wham bam, you know? We've changed now through experience, as you can't keep going like that. I'm nearly 60 years of old and can't do it. You have to have your own individual study so you can practice without injury. It's a more intelligent way of practising. The fact that we've had that experience though, makes our students better in a shorter space of time than we were. We were just playing at it when I first started. We were just going to the club and smacking each other around, but I wouldn't have missed that for anything: that experience of just going and being ploughed into the mat. Dave Ford was very powerful, as he was 1st *dan*, which was very good at the time. Then black belt was the bee's knees, though *dan* grades are everywhere now. It was brutal.



So what did you think you learnt through that?



It taught me that aikido is really a very effective martial art, probably the most effective martial art. Because it was so physical, it bought the best out of you in terms of ukemi and technique. If you didn't go with it, it broke your arm. The *ukemi* we do now is a lot safer. Over the years we've had more contact with the Japanese instructors and they've really helped.



You're a teacher now, would you like to say anything about that?

Well yeah, I'm a teacher, but I'm an aikidoka. It's in the blood; I've been doing it for 36 years. But to watch people that you bring on from nothing to say second dan, it's a great feeling watching them perform on the mat. Though sometimes you think, "You doughnut, why have you done that?" There's a lot of heartache. I've bought people up to first *dan* and then they've stopped, and you miss them, but the lads I've got now I couldn't wish for a better bunch. They're loyal, good students. They work hard and some have gone on to open their own clubs.



What about the house system we have in the UKA?

In 1992 I spoke to Mr Smith about forming a group in Shropshire under the umbrella of the UKA. I spoke to him about it when I went up to Glasgow to George Girvens* memorial course and Chiba *Sensei* gave us the name Te Shin Kai. The year after: 1993, when he came back over, he suggested the house system as such. Back then it was just a group of clubs in Shropshire, now it has expanded to the Isle of Wight, Cambridge, Peterborough, Middlesex and Shrewsbury. We've expanded no end with the house system and it's a great way.



Visitors have commented how it allows a degree of autonomy for instructors?

That's right, we can do our own thing, practice how we want to practice, as long as it's legitimate and we're not going over the top so to speak.



Back to teaching, I've seen you use teaching aids over the last couple of years. For instance the half black and half white ball held together by rubber bands?

[Laughs]. I've been struggling for a long time to explain contact between *tori* and *uke*, and I've not been able to get it across. I've tried to explain the idea of two people coming together and moving together; then I saw a video from a guy from Hawaii, Henry someone... He had this black and white ball and I thought perfect, that's the one! So I made one. It shows two separate things: the black and the white halves. Now if they come apart the harmony's gone, but if they stay together as they roll about there's no problem. Also, you can't see as they roll about which is which, they are both *tori* and *uke*, you can't see a dividing line as they're moving together. They come together from two separate things.



I've used a pen before too. By putting the point on the inside of the little finger and the other end on the thumb, you get a contact between the two. By moving without breaking that contact you keep a feeling of extension. I got the idea from Terry Ezra* years ago, who told me to move from my little finger, then bit it! He literally bit my little finger and said, "Now follow that bit of pain." I thought I couldn't go about biting people's fingers so I used the pen.



The other one is my famous figure of eight coat hanger for use with *irimi nage*. If you look at it it's a figure of eight, but if you open it and turn it it's a circle, so I use that as a teaching aid to show that your hands are moving one way, but your body is within a circle inside it. You may have a figure of eight in front of you, but you may also have a figure of eight that moves around with you in the middle.



Another thing you stress in teaching is the movement of the forearm [How it is possible to turn the hand over without moving the position of the elbow or shoulder]?

Yes, the two bones in the arms are the only two you can turn in this way, from palm up to palm down. So with *irimi nage*, *tenchi nage*, *shiho nage*, you make use of that natural movement: you move and turn the hand. It's very hard to explain unless you're showing someone, but again it's natural: the arm is the shape of a sword and you must use that to



slice or cut your enemy.

Do you study weapons?

I do yes, I like weapon work. Unfortunately we've just moved into a new *dojo* and the ceilings about three foot high. The first night we were in there I put one of my student's toes through the ceiling doing *koshi nage*. He caught one of the polystyrene tiles so we have to be very careful now. We go into the main hall of the leisure centre to practice weapons.



You also run a camp on the Isle of Wight?

I do, it's really good. Wasn't that the first time I met you there? Well some good's come out of it eh [laughs]?

Ideally, how intense do you think aikido training should be?

Well, it depends what you mean. I'm proud of all the lads, but I have one student who likes the weapons, and I use him for demonstrations. He doesn't shy from the fact that he's trying to cut you, and that what it's all about. It's no good having someone who cuts to the left or to the right because they don't want to hurt you. Weapons are a good way to learn...and I don't like the word... but focus.



Intense? Well I think it depends on the people, if you have a young fit group then you can be really intense and make hem work hard. Like on the Isle of Wight, they're a small club with 3 or 4 members. The teacher was a big guy and they had been doing big guy aikido so they were very physical in their movement. Then I go and I'm old and decrepit so I'm trying to make them move by overbalancing them. By unbalancing my partners with body movement rather than just by trying to whack them over. The sudden change from a physical to a more delicate approach was very hard for them to come to grips with I think, but they're doing really well now and I'm pleased.

What should your approach be when you step onto the mat?

Be prepared for anything. Study *ukemi* and contact. The teacher should be showing that, because if you don't have it you're going to get hurt and you wont understand the movements.



All the UKA teachers talk about contact, does it apply to *uke* and *nage*?

Yes, that's why it's a black and white ball. In my opinion here is no difference between *tori* and *uke*. If someone attacks you, you have to respond, and *ukemi* is response. So you start off taking *ukemi* from them, then you move into whatever technique and unbalance and throw them: so it's reversed. *Nage*, by making *taisabaki** in response to a blow or whatever, becomes *uke*. When struck you have to make contact with *ai-hanmi* or *gyaku hanmi** first, and then move from a defender to an attacker.



Are all techniques reducible to *ai hanmi* and *gyaku hanmi*?

I would think so, yes. Your first contact will be at least. *Yokomen* is more *gyaku hanmi*, *shomen* is basically *ai hanmi* and *tsuki* can be either.



What should different grades concentrate on? For instance if you are a lower *kyu* grade what should you concentrate on?

Basics. O'Sensei used the triangle, the circle and the square. The triangle is fundamental, the circle is the *tai-sabaki* and the square is the control. You should have those elements in all techniques. The triangle is basics and that's what you have to have. With higher grades it's just better basics.



Any other advice for say, a 16-year-old 6th *kyu* practising here this week?

Ukemi. Learn to keep basic contact. Learn how to move and learn response. Also, don't be stiff. It's very hard to tell a person that, as people lock out and think that's the way to do it. You have to keep a firm grip, firm contact, but the arm has to be flexible to absorb the movement of your partner. If you're not flexible you lose contact, hence the ball comes apart.



What about for people in the upper *kyu* grades?

Still basics. I'm still studying basics and I'm 6th *dan* with 36 years training. I still find the basics are very important. Before you can build a house you must have a very good base, and without that base your house is going to wobble and fall down.

If you had to say one thing that was the essence of good aikido what would it be?

Taisabaki. I am a body movement freak.



Change of track now. Your daughter graded yesterday to *Shodan*. You must have been very proud?

I was yes. She was the best [laughs]. I'm really pleased with her. She comes with me everywhere when she's not working, and really gets stuck in. Her *ukemi* is out of this world: really brilliant. I was really pleased for her. I was a bit dubious whether she could stand the pace as she does have asthma trouble, but she did with a little break.



You presented her a black belt?

Yes, we had that ready, and a bottle of champagne too. She's 19 so is old enough to drink [laughs]!

And your wife organises Summer School?

She's brilliant. She's magic, I don't know what else to say. She's followed me to summer camps and nearly every course. She used to take the kids for a walk, or look after them in the dojo or whatever when they were small. Gradually she's become a very big strength for me in aikido. If she hadn't have come with me, there's a lot of times I couldn't have gone on courses. I advise people to take their partners with them, as aikido's a great family thing. My wife purely by accident took over organising the summer camp for the UKA, when one of the lads couldn't do it. She took over from him on the week of summer camp, and everyone was so pleased they asked he to keep on doing it. She's golden. She's the power behind the throne. She does everything: she's my treasurer, my registrar, she sits and takes money, does the website and the internet...We finish this camp on Friday, and on Sunday she'll start to get ready for next year's camp: putting flyers out, putting articles in the newsletter, etc. She's a powerful force; I'm scared of her really.



Aikido to me seems to be more than just the people on the mat. There are a lot of other people who make it what it is.

That's right, and I don't think she'd be able to do what she does if she trained to be quite honest. I recommend any instructor, house or club: if you're going to get someone to run your club, get someone who doesn't train, because they see things from a totally different aspect. They are probably shrewder than you are. There are some really clever guys who do aikido and run their own clubs, and they struggle; because they're trying to train, run the club, advertise...I don't have that trouble, I go and study aikido, that's it! I have nothing else to worry about.



How do you think aikido has affected your life?



It's made me more at peace with my life I think. I can handle problems at work much better than I used to. The whole family is involved in aikido. The only holidays I have are aikido holidays. I go to the Isle of Wight for a week, then again for a long weekend, and then I come to Summer Camp. To some people that might sound sad, but everything I do is based around aikido: it's just there! The family...everything is aikido involved, especially now that she's got her dan grade, it'll be even worse now. I have a really good life with aikido and my family.



Why do you think aikido becomes such a big part of people's lives?

Just because it's there. I'm on the spot a bit here. Perhaps because of the principles that O'Sensei left, it's not just knocking someone down, it's part of nature and part of your life. It's just there; it's so hard to explain! It takes over your life but you don't have to do it.

I'm a painter and decorator, and when I'm using a roller or a brush I can see the aikido in the movement or the tool. I'll go with it and my family will say, "Dad you're doing it again!"



Once you get it into your head, you have the desire and it's like a drug. Once it gets into your system it's devilish trying to get rid of it. Honestly, it's just there all the time and that's really all I can say about it.

Any thoughts about any other aspect of aikido before we finish off?



I've put them down pretty well I think, but I would like to be better. I think that is probably one of the things that make some of the instructors as they are, because they're never quite content with the way they do it. They're always looking and searching to find a more improved way of executing a technique. There are people out there who won't change: they have been the same for thirty years: they're like dinosaurs. Until you change your students won't get better.

Because people get old, your body gets stiffer and more tired, so you can't use strength. You have to use body movement and *kokyu ho** to develop a power that isn't strength. *Kokyu ho* comes through the bone not the muscle. Your muscles get weaker as you get older, so you won't be able to do it [aikido] if you're relying on strength, but you'll always have a bone in your arm. Extend through the bone and not muscle. There are young guys out there that you can't just knock down.



Could age and ill health actually help your technique develop then?

Yes, it doesn't have to be an injury, just getting older. I'm nearly 60 and getting older by the minute, and I find I can still hold my own with some of the young lads. Not as energetically as I did 25, 20 or even 10 years ago, I've had to develop me, my body movement without strength, so that I can still train and have a good practice. Maybe this is where weapons work comes in. As I get older I study more weapons work, as I may not be able to study aikido so much because of frailty in the future. You'll always be able to pick a bokken up and study your own, or someone else's weapons work. You can still be involved with aikido practice through that.



Old age slows you down, so you have to develop while you can, as once you get too old you won't be able to. The years of practice I've had up until now have developed me to make it easier. If I hadn't tried to develop in the years up till now to make it easier for me, then it'd be too late to start now. I teach my students to become old men now: in the sense of not being able to use strength. They're people that use a lot of strength and tear your head off, but there's no need to.



Some people say, "Pretend your partner is the biggest person in the world, or a delicate child so you don't use strength."



That's right, and working with children is a good practice for someone who is big and strong, as you have to soften your technique. I have a large children's class and I make my seniors train with them. The BAB* don't like that but I don't care. It helps the child as the child learns. Two children together often just scrap; the whole point of being on the mat is to learn, and an adult will stop them messing about. So the kids learn and the adult learns too by softening their technique: it's mutual learning, it has to be. Aikido is mutual learning anyway, whether its two fat men, two thin men, a man and a woman: it doesn't really matter. You learn off each other. After 36 years I'll be practising with a total beginner and they'll do something and you'll think, "That's nice, why hadn't I thought of that?" and he'd done it purely naturally without a clue.



Such as counter techniques, like spinning out of *shiho nages*?

Yes, but that's because you've not been doing the technique right [laughs]. The only way you can counter a technique is if it's rubbish.

What do you hope and think will be the future of British aikido?



I'd like to see uniformity. We have that many people now that are splinter groups who haven't trained with Japanese or anybody in years. They're in their own little room and they don't want anybody to come in. They think people who will come and take over their club or whatever. If I go to another club, I don't go with the intention taking it over; I go there to show what they could do if they want to join the association, or just to show what we're doing. But you get people in a little shed at the bottom of the garden who don't go anywhere: they're dinosaurs. They don't want to learn and they don't want to send their students out in case they say, "Heh, did you see that bloke up the road he's great!" They don't want to know as they think you are going to rock the boat and take the power away from them. That's not what I would like to see, I'd like to see everyone come together and work together. There's going to be differences as there are different origins, but everyone can still work together without egos and jealousy about who is trying to take the club, or who is better than whom. That's not the way it should be, or the way O'Sensei wanted it, I'm sure.



I would like everyone to train together and understand what aikido is, to understand the joy. Aikido is a living breathing art and they're stifling it by not coming out and sharing. There may be some guy in back shed somewhere that has a lot to offer, but if they don't come out no one knows they're there. They could be passing something up that beautiful, holding something back that the world should know about. Some people would rather be king in a little field than a prince in a big realm.



Is there anything you would like to share about you as a person not to do with aikido?

Well, I like a good film, whether it's a cowboy, mystery or sci-fi. I can't do with these films where people are balancing on trees or someone throws a spear and they stand on it, that does my head, but I like a good adventure film. The food I like is the wife's; she's a good cook. I don't like bland food, but I like Chinese...anything. I have a very simple life and I like it. Nothing complicated and it's easy. The secret of my happiness is having a bloody good woman that does everything for me; I have nothing to worry about. I go out, earn the money, and then give it to her. I have a wonderful life. I have four great kids and I couldn't wish for anything better. I have a great family and what could anyone else want? I have a roof over my head and that's it.



Thank you.



Notes.



* Kazuo Chiba *Sensei*, 8th *dan Shihan*, currently head of the USAF western region based in San Diego. Instructed for 10 years in the UK, and still visits regularly.

*William J Smith *Sensei*, 6th *dan so Hombu Shihan*, MBE, one of the two principals of the UKA.



*Mr Gordon Jones *Sensei*, 6th *dan so Hombu, Shidojin*, co-principal of the UKA, based at Renshinkan, West Midlands.

*British Aikido Federation, technical director Minoru Kanetsuka *Sensei*, 7th *dan so Hombu, Shihan*. The UKA was formed from the BAF, which was called the Aikikai of Great Britain before Chiba *Sensei* left the country.

*Chris Mooney *Sensei*, 6th *dan so Hombu Shidojin*, now a senior instructor with the British Aikikai, based in the West Midlands.



*Don Morgan *Sensei*, 5th *dan so Hombu, Shidojin*, a senior member of the BAF, based in south Wales.

* George Girvan *Sensei*, a respected Scottish aikido instructor, now deceased.

*Terry Ezra *Sensei*, 6th *dan so Hombu*, chief instructor of the Komyokan Aikido Association, based in Birkenhead.



**Taisabaki* - Body movement, either as an exercise such as *tenkan ho*, or as part of a technique.

**Ai hanmi/ gyaku hanmi* -mutual (both with the same, i.e. left or right, leg and usually hand forward) and reverse stance respectively. Usually associated with *katate dori* (wrist grab) but not necessarily.

**Kokyu* - literally breath. In an aikido context *kokyu* is difficult to define, but examples might be, "moving in harmony with one's breathing", or "using the body in a relaxed and unified way".



*British Aikido Board. The Sports England governing body for aikido in the UK. An "umbrella" organisation, covering the majority of aikido organisations and clubs in Britain. It had recently changed regulations governing the instruction of children.

