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Editorial

Dear Aiki-friends

When did you last meet someone who has been practicing aikido for 60 years? It is certainly a humbling experience, but most of all it is encouraging to see someone still practicing and keeping a curiosity for the art. Steve Nardone, dojo-cho of Lancaster Aikido club started his aikido career in 1960 when not much information, let alone teachers in aikido were present in Europe and he is still practicing it today, at the age of 79. We are very happy that he and his dojo is part of TAE! Read the interview with him to get a glimpse of how it was to train aikido in the 60ies/70ies.

While most people use their summer holidays to relax at the beach, many aikidokas use this time to train in other dojos or attending a summer camp. Certainly such experiences can broaden your horizon and hopefully deepen your understanding of the art. See what Noelia Zafra Calvo and Johnny Jacobsen have experienced.

Once we step on the mat to train, it is helpful not to think too much, or better, 'think' with your body rather than with your rational mind. However, it is valuable to be critical about one's own approach to training and to keep questioning oneself about different issues during 'off-mat-times' in order to train more focused afterwards. From both the perspective as a student and as a teacher, Tomas Nord from Weesp has been tackling the question of speed and I have pondered on how to improve the quality of a class.

As counts for all articles in the newsletter, they are reflecting the opinions and thoughts of the authors and by no means need to be in line with the opinions of the editors. We hope that these articles raise questions and encourage discussions within our community. So, feel invited to contact us with comments!

I hope that you enjoy reading this issue and if you like it, please spread it to your friends.

Andrea

Dojo portrait

An interview with Steve Nardone, dojo cho of Lancaster Aikido club 1975 – present day

At Lancaster Aikido Club, Steve is loved and respected for being the warm, continuous presence holding the club through the years and changes. His Aikido has certain qualities that make the rest of us quieten down inside about what we think we are doing. We interviewed him to find out some of his story with Aikido and with the club that we love.



Steve started his working life as miner in Perthshire, Scotland, at the age of 14. In 1960, aged 20 and having been a miner for 6 years, he moved to Lancaster. After some months, he started working as a welder at Glasson Dock where he met someone who practised Judo: "We got an hour off for lunch, so we used to go out the back and practise basic self-defence in the field... then he got me down to take photos as the Judo club. And then he said, "Do you fancy doing Aikido?" And I said "What's Aikido?"

"So, he explained what Aikido was, and this guy called Clifford Gibbs was coming up to do a seminar at Heysham. It was a four day course at Easter, and I managed to get my white belt. Cliff Gibbs was a bit of a character. He was of Chinese descent, real Chinese, but he had a cockney accent, brought up in London. He was absolutely brilliant, I must say. Well, it went off from there. While we were at the seminar, we formed a group." This was the start of Lancaster Aikido club, in

1963 or 64, with four or five members. "We didn't have a place... We used to go and practice at the Judo club and use a corner of the mat there."

Clifford Gibbs, also known by his Chinese name Chee Soo, was born in London in 1919 to an English mother and Chinese father who both died in his infancy, and grew up in a Dr. Barnardo's orphanage. He is known now for his work on Taoism https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chee_Soo . He had met a Chinese martial arts teacher in a park in London, again at the age of 14, and straight away started his martial arts training. After World War 2, which included time spent as a Japanese prisoner of war working on "Death Railway" (Railway between Thailand and Burma built by the Japanese Empire), he began learning Judo and Kendo in London, and started training



in Aikido with Kenshiro Abbe after his arrival in London in 1955 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenshiro_Abbe). So, we find a story about the harmony between Chinese martial arts and Aikido, manifested in Chee Soo / Cliff Gibbs, British Chinese survivor of Japanese incarceration, at the beginnings of Aikido in Lancaster.

Steve kept on telling us how brilliant Cliff Gibbs was, so we asked what was so impressive about his aikido, what he'd shown and taught them on the four day course back in 1963 and on subsequent seminars.

Ellie: "You've told us that Cliff taught you a lot about ki. What did he teach you and how?"

Steve: "He demonstrated it quite a lot. He was so soft and smooth, the way he moved himself. When he was on the mat he said, "I won't ask you to do anything that I can't do," but he used to do cartwheels around the mat... When he taught, he said very little, he just came and showed you."



Aaron: "What sort of exercises did he do to give you the feeling or sensation or understanding?"

Steve: "You just took a hold of his wrists, and he'd move around the mat, walk towards you, walk away, and you just couldn't stop him. He was so relaxed, the way he did it, so soft."

"He would do a lot of 'sticky hand' and he would do 'whirling hands' ... He would suddenly lift you up off your feet... He would sit on a chair and lean back onto two legs, and you'd put your hand on his shoulder to push him over, but you couldn't push him over. The only thing he'd do was put his hands on your arms, underneath, and you couldn't shove him back." As Aaron and I probed, we got the idea that Clifford Gibbs was blending his original Kung Fu training together with what he'd learnt from Abbe Sensei.

I felt that Steve must have gained some of his qualities from developing these early experiences with Clifford, so I asked if there was anything he could tell us about the relaxedness, grounding and extension that we find in him. Steve directed us to hands and feet: grounding through focus on the

ball and heel of the foot, and keeping fingers extended and apart.

Ellie: "So, talking about ki, what is your understanding of ki?"

Steve: "Hard to tell really. I've practised it all the time. Not just doing Aikido, but all the time. When I've been working, I've always concentrated on the one point (the centre). Even when I went for an endoscopy, I could meditate, breathe naturally and relax, so I fell asleep having tube passed down my throat... I've always concentrated on the one point, because he (Cliff) always emphasised that. That helps you to be grounded."

Aaron: "Can you describe it in a feeling or body sense? Because people say "Use your ki, extend your ki". For a lot of people, particularly beginners, it's like "What are you talking about?" "

Steve: "I've had people say "I don't believe in ki," but that's up to them... It's like when there was a fire around the post office, and there was a huge wall, *that* high above my head. I thought someone was inside and I jumped over it. I went back the following day and thought "How did I manage to get over there?"

Steve told us how the initial five people who formed the club found a venue, moved venues, and made a canvas mat from sail cloth and a slot-together frame to stretch the top over the foam base, like an early made-at-home flat-pack. All the time, there were Judo groups and Karate groups around, with students crossing over between the arts, and at one point a ballet class on the floor above, whose members used to join the aikidoka for warm-up.

From its beginnings, the club worked very much as a team, rather than a group with a sensei present all the time:

Ellie: "Did you always like teaching?"

Steve: "Loved it. Always. Right from when we'd been on that weekend course, and training on the mats, just one or two of us, everybody taught each other. Mike (Earnshaw, the club's dan grade) wasn't always there, so we'd just teach each other, and if there was anyone who was just learning, we taught them.

For many years, Lancaster Aikido club had no links to Hombu dojo or directly to Japan, and didn't belong to any national Aikido body.

Steve: "In fact, when I started Aikido, I hadn't a clue who O'Sensei was. I'd been doing it for quite a long time before I started to hear about O'Sensei. It was a good couple of years before I delved into where it had all come from. And there wasn't a lot of literature about O'Sensei then." "Someone said, "Send for the book "What's Aikido?" ", so I sent for it, but they didn't have it; there weren't many martial arts books back then. So they sent me one, "Aikido" by Kisshomaru."

Although the club through its years had connections with senseis from different organisations, until joining the TAE there was a strong decision not to become part of an organisation and become

embroiled in association politics: "We'd never joined an association, Ted (Ted Price, one of the early teachers in the club in the '60s) always said "Don't join as there's too much politics" ... and there was, a hell of a lot, in organisations." In a later part of our interview, we came back to the subject: "It's spoilt Aikido that people would say "My style's better than your style." And we've had a lot of that.. You used to get people falling out like that, so we became independent."



Asked which other sensei have stood out to him, Steve speaks of Alan Ruddock, (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Ruddock , 1944-2012), who trained with Morihei Ueshiba in his latter years, 1966-69. Through his associated club in Chorley, Lancashire, Alan Ruddock held seminars in Lancaster a few times, and club members would go over to Chorley to train with him. Steve praises the softness of Alan Ruddock's Aikido, who the club worked with over a period of ten to fifteen years, and recognises Alan as a key influence in his understanding and practice of Aikido. "When I'm doing a technique, I don't care whether I can throw somebody hard or not. You have that attitude... You don't push yourself to do it. I learnt this from Alan Ruddock."

I asked Steve what the heart of Aikido is for him. "I think there's a lot of friendship and companionship in Aikido. I think that's what kept me doing it, the people that I met, always so friendly. If you met people that were better than you, they were always so happy to pass it on ... Tohei wrote a book called "Aikido in everyday life". I think (it's also) the fact that you could practise Aikido all the time, no matter what you're doing."

Aaron: "Where do you think your Aikido is heading, or what do you want from it now? When you come back and resume your training, what are your aspirations?"

Steve: "You people. Seeing how you come on, that's how I get a lot of reward from it. Not only because of what you've learnt off me, but because you go out and learn from other people and I get a buzz out of that, to see you doing so well... As long as I can join in and be there, I'm quite happy."



Aaron: "Do you have any advice for people who are unable to train at the moment but want to come back."

Steve: "Come to class and watch, because you can learn a lot from watching. Not just from higher grades, but from others. I've learnt a lot from juniors and learners. That's what's made my aikido, seeing stuff they could do and thinking "that's Aikido". A little lad, about 11, showing him suwari waza (kokyu ho) and he couldn't care less, he didn't seem interested. So I got hold of his wrists, and he was doing it on me, and, God, he was moving me, without thinking, and I couldn't hold him back. I've learnt from him."

Steve Nardone himself practices T'ai Chi alongside his Aikido, echoing that early connection between Chinese and Japanese arts: "When I reached 66, I thought, sometime I'll have to jack this in." (Stop practising Aikido) "So I started T'ai Chi. And I'm sure *that's* what's helped me to carry on practising Aikido." Until August this year, Steve was still teaching and training twice a week. Towards the end of September 2019, he had a heart bypass operation and as we write is recovering. We hope he will be able to step back onto the mat and carry on training with us when his recovery allows.

Ellie Denvir and Aaron Wieclawski, Lancaster Aikido Club

Thoughts on Training qualities

Training methodologies - The Issue of Speed

As part of practicing and teaching I tend to spend time reflecting on how to learn effectively. As a teacher I am interested in how to best pass on knowledge and make students have experiences that can further their skills. As a practitioner I am interested in how to spend my practice time effectively and deepen my knowledge and understanding. Sometimes a small effort goes a long way, however, there are also potential problems that can make learning more difficult or take students into dead ends in terms of what is learned. One such issue I often think about is related to the speed and power we are training with.

The topic is quite simple: the martial art we are practicing is functional at full speed and power, however, when learning something new, we are not able to execute movements at full speed and power and thus have to start slow. The problem is that not everything that can be done at slow speeds can be done at full speed or with full power. Because of this it is easy to spend time practicing forms and techniques that will never, irrespective of the amount of time spent, be effective or possible to make functional and fast. Below I would like to share some considerations I take into account for my own training.

The first thing is that I try to remember to not go into training with an attitude that enough time will make things I struggle with go away. It may not. Just repeating a form or technique enough times will not fix an issue if the issue is that this way of doing the form cannot be done fast or with power. I try to notice if I spend too much time without experiencing any progress with a certain issue, and then instead spend time looking for alternative ways of approaching it. Here I pay attention to the mind trap that is me thinking I know how it should be done, which I have to give up in order to move forward. A certain amount of openness to experiment and play with the forms helps with not getting too rigidly stuck.

Secondly, I tend to consider carefully what a teacher is doing. If a teacher shows something slowly, has very elaborate stories about why it works, and never shows it at speed and power, it raises a warning signal. On the other hand, if a teacher shows both slow learning forms and how they translate into more practical use, I can get a good idea about what to focus on during slow practice. Sometimes it is good to ask someone to show things at speed to see how it works. This is not about being challenging or impolite, but should be done with an honest intention of wanting to learn as well as possible. Also, if a teacher points out a specific approach to the training I try to really dig into that rather than just repeating the forms (thinking that I already know them).

Thirdly, I go fast sometimes even though I do not yet have the skills required. Trying to do something really fast can still give a good idea about the general direction of movements that work at speed and also clearly show which do not. I often alternate between slow and fast training, going

fast for a while to pick up on what breaks down and to try to notice the general outline of movements that seems to work at speed, and then go slow to work out more sharpness and clarity about what I am doing. When alternating my training in this way I also try to stay conscious about what I can learn in each phase. If I only stick to slow training I may spend time training a dead end. If I only go fast and never work things out in more detail I run the risk of getting an unfocused sloppy technique.



A fourth thing I have noticed is that I get better learning results when I first focus on getting bigger core body movements working and only then look at arms and hands and try to fit them into the bigger body movement. It can be very tempting to (unconsciously) try to solve problems with the hands and arms, however, this is often a trap since many or even most such detailed hand and arm movements can only be done independently of the main body movement at slow speeds and simply is not physically possible at higher speeds. When practicing with weapons or with a partner I also need to extend this line of thinking beyond my own body such that it also includes the weapon or partner. Just

being able to execute a technique very fast in isolation does not automatically mean that it will work well on the partner. Instead I need to make sure that the whole of the movement, i.e., both my own and the partner's body movements, is feasible at full speed.

As mentioned above, I try to reflect on how I approach learning in order to make the most out of the time I can spend training. I hope that you might find some of these thoughts interesting or something to come back to during your own training. As always, have fun while training.

Tomas Nord. Co Dojo Cho. Enso Dojo Weesp The Netherlands.

What makes an Aikido class an excellent Aikido class?

This question has been present in me many times after a class that I had participated in but also after classes that I taught myself. Why was a certain class just great, I was happy, felt I had learnt a lot, or students had understood a lot, whereas another one left me unsatisfied as teacher or as student?

So I have been trying to come up with some sort of 'quality check' and realized that always this can be looked at from the teachers side, as well as from the students side. Basically, in order that a certain class is a good class for you, it always also depends on your own contribution towards this end. You might think you have less influence as a student in this, but I think we should never underestimate the effect of our own attitude.

So let's talk about this: **Attitude**

One of the **reigis** (guidelines for training) in our dojo, and rule number 9 in Ōsenseis rules for training which used to hang in Hombu Dojo is:

1. Always train with a joyful heart



Now what does that mean for a teacher?

Teachers perspective

A teacher must radiate positive energy from the moment he/she enters the dojo. By being a good example you will awaken joy in your students. This also means that rather than looking for 'mistakes' in your students' performances you should emphasize on giving positive feedback and looking for ways on how they could improve. For example instead of telling them: 'Don't do this...'

and showing a bad example, show and explain them what they should do, like for example be more heavy, slow down, relax your shoulders...etc.

Students perspective

As a student, make it a ritual for yourself to enter the dojo deciding to leave all negative feelings outside the door, leave your everyday life in the shoe rack and step on the mat fresh and curious. Hopefully you will discover after training that the negative feelings you might have left outside have disappeared!

Also, if for example you enter the dojo with the intent to check out the teacher, or to prove to yourself and others how good you are, you not only radiate this certain negative energy, you also hinder your own and other peoples' learning process. You might even cause a safety concern and thus this attitude should not enter a dojo.

2. Future O Sensei



Teachers perspective

Just imagine that everyone is possibly a future Ōsensei (quote of Terry Dobson), this might make it easier for you to guide your students respectfully. Just like Ōsensei they want to explore the art by themselves and at their own pace. It is your job as a teacher to give them the tools to facilitate this. It's simple: all information from our environment enters our body through our sensory system. If we access it through multiple channels, i.e. through the auditory system by receiving an explanation of a movement, through the visual system by getting it shown and through the kinesthetic and tactile system by having someone do the movement on us, our brains get a much more complete idea

than when the same movement is just explained. In order to then actually learn it, all this information has to be processed in our central nervous system to then steer and code for a complex movement pattern.

Therefore: don't just explain, show it. Don't just show it once, show it multiple times. Don't just show it, let students experience it. And don't just let them experience it, but let them try it out, repeat it and fine-tune it by themselves. Until a movement reaches automation, it needs at least 500 repetitions...

Thus, talk little, show with your own body and let them train!

Also, help students sharpen their perception: rather than 'pre-digesting' the learning experience, e.g. show them two variations of the same movement and let them discover the difference. Or rather than explaining it several times you can also warn them that you are only going to show it once (or twice), so they should *really* look.

A possible tool can also be to 'exclude' one of their senses: you only *show* the movement with no verbal explanation, or you let them only *feel* the movement by letting them train blind-folded.

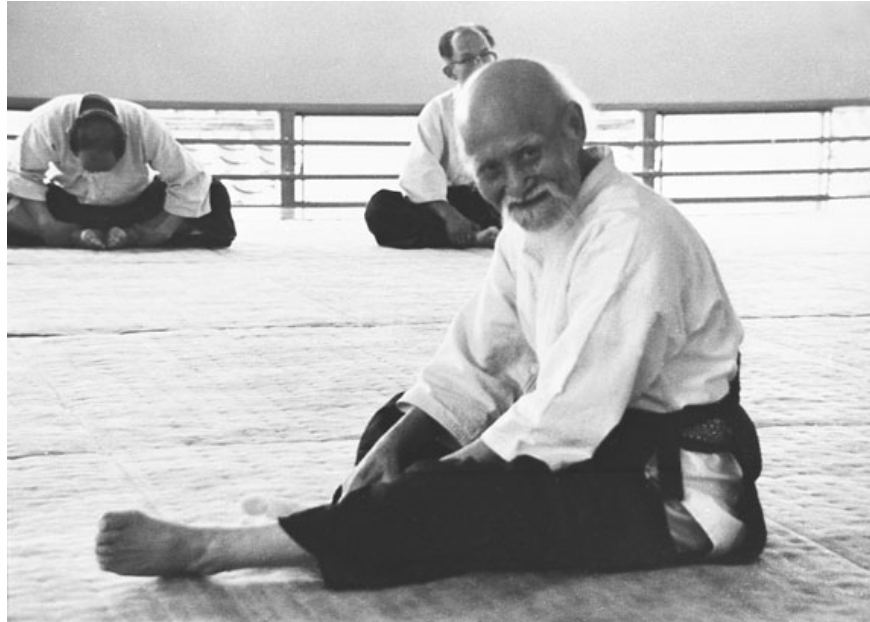
Students perspective

If you need a role model for how to be a student it might be Ōsensei who at old age said: 'This old man still has to train hard every day.' So keep training hard. As Lewis mentioned in the last newsletter, the 'secret' in aikido lies in rigorous training of the basics until they are so much part of you, you do not need to think anymore when moving. Our bodies need to be worked and polished like a tool. In order to get there, really investigate every movement in order to improve it with each repetition.

Take responsibility for your own progress. How:

1. When the teacher is showing or explaining something, look with your complete attention with the attitude that you might never see this again. Don't wait for the teacher to show it a second, third, fourth time and then maybe even explaining it to you afterwards. You might have just *one* chance!
2. Really try to do what the teacher was showing. Suspend judgment if what is being taught seems different to what you already know. Empty your cup....
3. When training with your partner be the best uke possible and study the movement as uke. *Not* with the approach to look for 'holes' in your partners' technique but with the approach that you will improve your own technique once you are up. If you are senior to your partner, 'give' your body in a way that your partner still has to work to get it right, without challenging him/her too much. Help your partner to find the right movement by just being connected and thus giving feedback with your body. Thus, don't talk, give your body fully and train!
4. If after training you have questions about something that came up during training, spend some more time with a partner to figure it out yourself or go and ask a senior. Don't expect the teacher to deliver everything on a silver platter. Some presents need hard work from the receiver to be unwrapped.

3. Sho Shin - Beginners mind



Teachers perspective

Also as teacher, continue to learn, stay open and curious, even while teaching. This might also mean that after you have explained a certain technique you might find out that you made a mistake. Don't be afraid of this! Rather than trying to make reality fit to your mistake, you should correct it and include the students in your own learning process. Be confident that they won't point their finger at you because you made a mistake but instead, by seeing that you are also continuing to learn and rigorously testing your abilities, they will choose you as their role model on the way. Thus keep your curiosity alive.

Students perspective

I am a bit confused sometimes when training with juniors from other dojos how irritated they can get, because I probably do not perform the technique the way they are used to. It seems that they come with a clear expectation on how a certain technique should work and are 'blocked' if their expectations are not met.

In everyday life we are constantly facing situations that we have never dealt with before. Shouldn't the best way to handle them be to first be completely open and not run into it with expectations originating from our past experiences?

In the same way we should meet our training partners in each technique as if it was the first time, really connect and listen and really try our best in the technique. Similarly, when the teacher is showing or explaining a technique, let's try to be completely present, to look and listen as if we saw this technique for the first time – or the last time – and REALLY try to see.

There are basically two questions that can come up during class. The first one is **how**. When watching your teacher you might ask *yourself* this question: how does he/she perform this attack/technique/ukemi? However, there is no need to ask your teacher to answer this question, you just need to watch.

The second question is **why**. E.g. why should I move in this direction, this could be dangerous because I am in line of the attack, etc. Also this question you do not need to ask your teacher. Try to figure it out for yourself and if you do not succeed, keep the question for after class.

Suspend judgment of your teacher, your partner and also yourself, because this only stands in the way of your own learning. Also, do not correct your training partner, unless he/she is really lost and you think you need to help.

4. Maai (timing-distance)



I will take the freedom to interpret 'Maai' – the right distance – more freely here.

Teachers perspective

As a teacher find the right distance to the group in a sense that you take a step outside of it all trying to see common issues and things to work on that might be of interest to the whole group rather than picking on one specific point which is relevant to just one of the students. Also take the

right distance in the sense to find the right balance of guiding the students but also letting them explore and find out for themselves. Don't take them by the hand, but rather show them a way. If you see something, which in your eyes they should correct, give them some explanation. If they don't seem to pick it up, try again from another angle or in other words. If they still don't pick it up, make it simpler, break it down. If they still don't get it, leave it. It might not be the right time for them yet.

Students perspective

In terms of time, Maai pertains to the momentary lapses of awareness. Try to fill these lapses, keep concentration high. In this manner, even if you should be part of a not so high-level class, you can still make it a good one for yourself.

Look for yourself what you could work on, concentrating on principles: awase, maai, zanshin, grounding, being calm, being relaxed, being centered, being a unity. While still doing what the teacher is showing, it is up to you to where you put your focus on. This counts especially for advanced students, where boredom can creep in when training in basics again and again. It is your own responsibility to keep your training alive and full.

So again, what is a good class? The following questions might serve as a quality check for after training, no matter if you are teacher or student:

- Was there a concentrated atmosphere on the mat, with no talking and with people taking care of each other?
- Did people get to train so much that they got really exhausted by the end of the class?
- Did I learn something new?
- Do I feel better after the class than before?
- Did I get angry / frustrated with my training partner or with myself?

If any of the first four questions you had to answer with 'no' or the last question with 'yes': could you yourself have changed something towards a better end? And if so, will you be ready to do this next time?

I now only talked about *attitude* for a good class. Of course there are other important ingredients that should be talked about, such as *content*, *structure*, *rhythm*, *vision*. Maybe someone of the group would like to address this or other aspects in the next issue?

With this spirit, I wish you all excellent classes to enjoy in the future!

Andrea Pfisterer, Kokoro Dojo Zurich, Switzerland

Sho Shin

Summer camp 2019 in Urnäsch, Switzerland

The sound of the bell makes me realise that I am awake. The sun is rising but I am already looking to silencing my mind. Breathing without paying attention to anything, without retaining any thoughts, in silence. Only interrupted by another sound, that of the bells of the cattle that are outside the Dojo, in the impressive mountains that surround us.

The tatami is large and wide, warm, and it seems to try to keep you there... but weapons training takes you outside with the cattle and the freezing morning, near to the forest. Bokken training, starting with the fundamental suburis ... it is amazing when you notice how your arms rise above your head following the rhythm of your hips and your breathing ... one, two, three, four, five, six ...

This description could be a paragraph from any Japanese samurai book, but it is not, it is the description of how every day started at the summer camp in Switzerland. And we only realised that we were in Switzerland because after weapons training came breakfast. Muesli, cheese, homemade apple juice and butter, fresh bread ... then we were sure that we were in the Alps. The wonderful breakfast indicated that a good day had begun.



The camp lasted six days in the summer of 2019. Breakfast was followed by a couple of hours of empty-handed training. One of the things that amazes me most about Lewis Sensei is his ability to communicate, transmit and teach people that hold very different levels, knowledge and views. And that can only be done when the teaching is so essential, so core, that each one learns or acquires

the appropriate knowledge to their degree or level of prior knowledge. The structure of the body and its connection with the Earth, the balance in any movement, precision to unbalance the opponent effectively and specially the martial spirit behind any single breath or movement. All that goes beyond simple techniques and makes you connect with your body to learn with it. Fascinating!



After a break to eat the Swiss gastronomic delights that a dedicated chef prepared for us, we usually went outside again to train with the Jo. Personally, I love the Jo. I feel it much more as a part of my body, faster and more flexible, less harmful and more precise than the bokken...

We continued the day with another two hours of empty-hands training. Although it may seem exhausting, the practice of Aikido based as it is on such issues as balance and movement can be very enjoyable and fun, even with games that rest your body and spirit. Another great advantage of having Lewis as our sensei is that he can read people's state and understand the group dynamics that inevitably appear at such an intensive event. Tiredness, boredom, curiosity ... and he can fit the training to this.

The spirit ... again captured by the meditation bell. This time the feeling of being awake is firmer, because you can feel your sweat, your tiredness, listen to children playing outside, life.

Then after training it is time to enjoy. A wonderful and comforting shower, a delicious dinner and an amazing beer (or several) while the conversation evolves around Aikido, the life of the aikidoka's or life in general.



At night, when an attendee was requested to share some of their skills with others, about yoga, archery, massages or even karaoke, informal activities were organised. One afternoon we went to take bath to a lake in the nearby mountains of the Alps!

Having the opportunity to spend six days with thirty colleagues from all over Europe and learn, enjoy, and experience Aikido in the way we did, is unique. Having the opportunity to share my experience in this newsletter, exceptional. Thank you very much everyone and looking forward for the summer camp next year!

Noelia Zafra Calvo, Aikido Tanabe Bilbao / Københavns Aikido Klub



Holiday training in Berlin

Holidays are a wonderful period where you want to have a relaxed time. I also think it should be relaxed, but as aikidoka relaxation for me almost always includes exercise time, as aikido training gives plenty of space and quiet in an otherwise restless soul.

I like to try to train in an unknown dojo when I travel. To experience the feeling of aikido brothers and sisters and not just talk about it. Meeting new people and other forms of training that can provide the ability to work outside of the forms that are familiar.

This time my focus was on two dojos in Berlin. The first dojo I visited was Dojo am Gleisdreieck (<https://www.aikido-dojogleisdreieck.de>). I wrote an email to them at short notice and dojo-cho Ulrike Serak replied that I was welcome to participate in their training that evening.



With joy I set off for training on my bike through the streets of Berlin. I found the address with Google's help, I got into the dojo and there was Ulrike to receive me and show me around, it was a warm and welcoming reception. I got dressed and went onto the mat that had approximately 20 people that night. Everyone was very kind and sincere, it made me completely relax.

We started with normal warm-up, which was quiet and calm, went through all the joints and got some movement into the body. Then we went over to kokyu nage with a focus on the fall out of the technique. Dojo members high and low had beautiful high falls, a pleasure to watch. I considered it a nice warm-up that contained a calm and clear direction to warm muscles and joints, so I was ready for today's challenge.

Then we went on to ikkyo omote and ura ki no nagare, I had the experience that most participants wanted to train with me and made an effort to try to train with "the stranger". The experience of it was really positive and made me believe that having visitors from other countries and styles give something to the individual dojo and the visitor, like opening each others horizons, seeing new perspectives and needing to be flexible and adapt to new situations, people, forms.

Then came shiho nage omote kihon. The technical execution of this was not so far from what I am used to and yet I had the experience of a performance that was more focused on uke and nage cooperating in a joint technique. I was picked as uke to show a detail. Since the teaching was in German, I was probably the uncomprehending one, so the detail avoided me, but I believe that Ulrike's instructions were more addressed to her students.

I thanked them for the chance to join their training. All in all it was a fun and insightful experience. There is no doubt that the style is different from the one I practice daily, for example with more focus on ki no nagare and not so much on kihon. There was a good and compassionate atmosphere and good people to give energy and joy to everyone. I headed back to the streets of Berlin with a smile on the lips.

On my 3rd day in Berlin, I went to another dojo: Aikido Zentrum (<http://www.aikidozentrum.de>). I wrote an email at the same short notice to hear if I could attend a training session in their dojo. However, there was no response from them by email, so I just decided to try my luck and show up for an hour. I cycled again through Berlin and arrived at my destination 20 min. before the start of the training.



I was met by a man of approx. 55 years, who was to participate in the evening's training. He said they were only two for training that night, and I was welcome to attend, I thanked and got changed. It turned out that there was sword training this evening, I borrowed a bokken and got ready to train.

The young man who was teaching that evening was reasonably new and was a little uncertain about the performance of their techniques. After showing the first of 10 exercises with the bokken, I assured him that he had more knowledge about their system than I had. I could not recognize much of what I saw; I plunged into it with an open mind and tried to do the things they did. It wasn't



that easy, I think there were some awkward positions in their exercises that wouldn't have been my first choice. I tried to find the logic in their weapons system, but didn't think it made sense to me. Yet it was fun to be challenged in a completely different way.

We went over to body techniques, training randori with two attackers. Here the recognition was somewhat larger; body techniques were much more what I knew. Again, it seemed that the performance of the techniques was based on full cooperation from both parts uke and nage. In most cases, I would have had the possibility to leave the technique, but I remained the cooperative uke. We had a good and fun 1.5 hour training. Also this club was very accommodating and the feeling of being received by some kind of family was there. I thanked for an enjoyable workout and left the dojo an experience richer.

Although many dojos follow different assumptions and styles, I think there is much to be gained from the experiences you get by visiting different dojos and stepping away from the known. Trying other ways to perform techniques helps on one hand to scrutinise one's own aikido and on the other hand to finding the common spirit between two people. I left Berlin with a good feeling of being received with a positive attitude and a friendly smile.

Johnny Aamand Jacobsen, Københavns Aikido Klub

Questions and Answers

How can we practice Aikido at home alone? Whether to supplement our regular training or when we cannot make it to the dojo? Or if we are remote from other clubs who train in our style there are times when we need to train by ourselves. What is the most effective way to do this?

Mark Alcock Wellsprings Aikido, Dorset, UK.

First of all I want to emphasise that training outside the Dojo on a regular basis is essential for serious progress in Aikido (or in any other worthwhile subject of study!). Saito Sensei himself was famous for training in the Aiki Jinja grounds beyond the classes he received from O Sensei. The bulk of my own training over the years has been solo training, particularly suburi and weapon kata. Although Aikido is fundamentally an interactive art and training in the dojo is essential, the body/mind is the instrument that we bring to the mat to engage in these interactions and so when not in a position to train with our partners in a Dojo setting, much can be done alone.



What kind of training one does alone will depend on one's level and on what particular issues one wants to address. It's also useful as a junior to ask for advice from one's seniors or principal instructor in this area if one is not sure how to go about it.

From my own personal experience I have various training routines, from a complete routine to shorter ones and variations depending on how much time I have and what particular objectives I may have at that time.

A full routine in my opinion would comprise the following elements:

- Warming up, stretching and strengthening.
- Movement training (tai sabaki)
- Bukiwaza
- Meditation

The above sections comprises my full solo training which takes about one and a half hours. I do it about once a week or twice if I have the chance. Other days I do shorter routines taking sections from the full one. But even if just practicing 50 cuts with the bokken, I will always pick up a weapon as part of the session and finish with meditation, even if 'just standing' for 3 minutes or so. At other times if depleted of energy, I will put more focus on stretching and tai sabaki or if nursing an injury I will include specific exercises to address that. The key is to be flexible and adapt to your needs. And most importantly it should be enjoyable and interesting!

The complete routine.

1. Warming up, stretching and strengthening. I will not go into this in much depth as it is a big area and one students should take on personally and study to find what works for them individually. There are many many good stretching and strengthening systems out there. Study and adapt them to one's personal needs. Strengthening exercises should not isolate muscles but strengthen them in conjunction with the whole body. I would not recommend targeted weight training (for example barbell bicep curls or bench presses etc) which while useful in other contexts go against the whole body movement dynamic that we seek to develop in Aikido. The one exception I have in this is grip strengthening. When I really started to understand the grip we use in Aikido I realised that the strength in my fingers and hence grip was unbalanced towards the thumb index and middle fingers and therefore towards the upper part of my arms and shoulders, I developed a whole system of grip strengthening using various types of tools that I use regularly when driving (in non dangerous conditions or traffic flow of course!) which helped develop strength in the small and ring fingers. Doing this type of focused training really helped in this area, particularly with bokken.

2. Movement. Tai sabaki. There are many basic movements that we can train alone. The focus should be on movement that is directed from the center region of the body (hara) while the weight stays low throughout the body and compresses one's weight into the feet. I spend a lot of time on just stepping and turning looking for the weight 'being underneath' and studying how to motivate movement from the centre of the body. I put a lot of attention on 'whole body kinaesthetic awareness' and look to free up movement and blockages on as many levels as I can be aware of, from gross to more subtle. This is a slow conscious practice where I learn about my body on many levels, it's structural relationships and how to move taking maximum advantage of the ground while eliminating any extraneous tension. I once had the chance to ask Peter Ralston why it was (in my

opinion) that none of his students were anywhere near him in terms of ability. His answer: 'the don't take footwork seriously'. I have come to see that footwork is bodywork in its totality.

3. Weapon training. Suburi and kata. This will of course be a continuation of the previous section. Slow practice with full awareness of the relationships with the ground, within the body and the space around and with the weapon. Exercise the mind (attention), the energetic body (feeling attention) and the body (stretch and rebound all the tissues rhythmically in the movements). The weapon should feel like an extension of one's body and an expression of the center. This is actually the core of my training. The weapons present unique challenges in terms of connection and great advantages in terms of learning extension. My own way of training is to focus on the most basic things and movements and I will go in long phases of perhaps months just working on one or maybe two issues. Right now I am working on ken suburi (first suburi and zengo giri) since roughly the beginning of the year.



4. Meditation. I will end a session of training with some form of meditation. For me meditation is a non goal oriented activity and involves just sitting in stillness with one's experience of the moment

without any form of resistance or manipulation. Actually this state of being with one's experience and accepting it fully is the ground of 'awase' or joining and harmonising with the other. A full sitting session would be 40 mins but even just 3 mins is enough if my routine is a short one.

A final consideration.

At some point we start to connect the training we do in the Dojo with our daily life. The way we walk, move, touch things and interact with people. The expanded sense of awareness of the space around us as we walk down a busy street. Feeling the people around us. 'Reading' what they are saying with their bodies. At that point our concept of what 'training' means expands and we find ourselves 'training' the 'body-feeling-awareness' we seek in Aikido regularly throughout the day. Then we begin to understand that Aikido is based on the universal principles of being a human being in constant interaction and relationship. And with this our understanding of Aikido also expands greatly.



What's the purpose of reigi; Japanese rules in a western society?

Paul Lipman. Takemusu Aikido Sponaar, Den Haag, NL.

Reigi (etiquette) are the Japanese rules of conduct within society which basically allow for maximum cooperation and minimum conflict. In Japan these rules were born in a strictly hierarchical island culture society where the cost of conflict could have severe consequences. The essence of Reigi can be understood in contemporary society as basic politeness and consideration towards one's fellow human beings and I think these values regardless of the cultural behavioural

forms they take obviously have great value in any society. In the Japanese martial arts Reigi governs our behaviour in the Dojo and ensures that the training takes place in an atmosphere of trust and respect. These elements ensure that the dangerous techniques we practice can be practiced safely. Reigi further ensures that we pay attention to what we are doing at all times: as we enter the Dojo, as we place our zori, as we bow in, as we practice and change roles, as we handle and exchange weapons, etc, etc. All this helps us to be aware of what we are doing and to be more present in our practice. For me this is the essence of Reigi: that it is a structure of behavioural rules that acts as a kind of 'scaffolding' for exercising our capacity to be present and aware in our actions. And while 'being conscious' is not a technique or the result of a technique, the rules of reigi can also just become mindless acts. Reigi in its best sense can serve as a kind of reminder in our goal of greater consciousness. I once had the chance to ask Saito Morihiro Sensei this question (the purpose of Reigi) and his answer was simple: 'a polite person is an aware person'.

What is the foot/hip position e.g. in 17 or 27 in the 31 jo kata? Since it is neither hanmi nor hitoemi, is there a word for this position?

And to double-check: 16 or 26: is hitoemi?

Andrea Pfisterer. Kokoro Dojo, Zurich, CH.

Tricky question! None of the below will really help as this needs to be demonstrated but I will give it a go.

First, definitions:

Hanmi: half body stance. Half open stance.

Facing your opponent at an angle with one foot forward
(Budo. Teachings of the Founder of Aikido).

Hito e mi: It literally means making the body small or narrow.

17: gedan gaeshi

27: idem

16: preparation position for 17

26: preparation position for 27

A quick word about footwork and functionality.



Both Hanmi and Hito e mi are footwork positions which allow the body to interact with the opponent in a triangular fashion. Triangular bodywork both allows us to engage an attack (by either receiving it along the line of attack or by stepping off that line) as well as enter into the opponent's space to engage his center. The essential difference between the two is that Hito e mi is a narrower triangle than Hanmi. Hanmi in essence presents the body in an oblique manner ('half body') while Hito e mi deepens that to present more the side of the body (narrowing the target area for uke).

The footwork we adopt will place the whole body in a certain position and orient the center in a particular way, both with respect to the connection with the weapon we are using (or technique we are applying with our hands) and with our partners line of attack and the distance and angles of vulnerability that these imply. Hence the footwork should act to serve stability, balance and center engagement with our partner while keeping us safe from his attack and it's potential follow-up (which we seek to nullify in the first moment of meeting through balance breaking).



While we study Hanmi and Hito e mi in their pure forms within the kata once we begin moving beyond prearranged kata our footwork should be fluid and unrestricted by strict learnt positions. In fact the kata introduce us to this fluidity and variation from the very beginning. Foot work and positioning should serve the purpose of the engagement which in Aikido is to be able to receive an attack and connect with our partners center through it and control him. In that sense what we will see fundamentally are endless variations of the triangle in our footwork which serves both to receive and engage at the same time.

So...the purest expression of Hanmi is simply being in right foot forward Ken Kamae. Once we begin moving and cutting with the ken we enter subtle variations of this footwork.

The purest expression of Hito e mi is in Tsuki no Kamae. And again, once we begin moving variations appear, especially with the Jo which has a much more complex 'vocabulary' of movement than the ken.

We should not make the mistake of defining footwork as a few basic rather fixed positions and then trying to apply them in all situations. This only creates stiffness in movement (and in the mind). We need to understand the purpose of the positions and the functions they serve. And then be flexible in their applications allowing function to be our guide.

So...to finally answer the questions (and it is so much easier to show than describe all this!).

16 and 26 are variations of Hanmi although both slightly different, in particular as regards their length as they originate in different situations: in 16 I withdraw the Jo after striking with a strong intent to connect forward and into the next movement. In 26 the movement is a fast withdrawal with a shorter length Hanmi than for 16. The hip work in both is slightly different because you are doing different things.

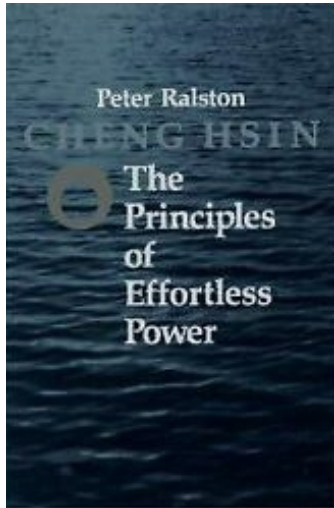
17 and 27 are variations of Hito e mi although slightly different as 17 is an entering response striking the knee while 27 is a block which takes place while withdrawing. With these two the hip work difference is bigger than the difference between 16 and 26.

Ask me next time we are on the mat and I show you in a few seconds!



Book reviews

Review of Peter Ralston's The Principles of Effortless Power. 2nd edition.



Publisher North Atlantic books.
Year 1999

I must say from the start that this book tends to divide it's readers into those who think it is simply brilliant (I am one of those obviously) and those who think it is unintelligible gibberish (a majority of readers I have introduced this book to, I am afraid).

The second edition is actually written in a slightly more reader-friendly manner than the first one (1989) but still is a book that cannot just be skimmed through lightly. It is meant to be read slowly and re-read many times. Peter's intention, as in all his work, is to aid the reader to get past information and belief to an authentic experience of the matter. So the writing style is deliberate with that objective in mind - and hence challenging.

The book addresses, as the title implies the principles of internal martial arts that allow for the generation of internal power versus 'external' power. Plus a lot, lot more.

Peter from his experience in training mostly Chinese internal martial arts (Tai Chi, Pa Kua, Hsing i) plus Judo and Aikido eventually developed his own system of martial arts which he calls Cheng Hsin and it is the Principles of this system that he expounds in this book. What makes the book powerful for me is the emphasis on consciousness work. That training the body and developing ability in a 'fighting' art inevitably implies understanding and developing not only the body, but the mind.

In this aspect, giving equal weight to physical and consciousness domains, the book is unsurpassed in my opinion and even after 30 years in print since the first edition, remains so.



In discussing his system: the physical and structural aspects as well as the more subtle interactive principles, aikidoka can find much that sheds new light and inspiration on their own art.

The first chapter on the 5 basic principles of 'Body being' which allow for access to this functional power is brilliant and has had a very powerful influence on my view of bodywork in Aikido.

The second chapter goes into more details as regards bodily structure and its alignment with its functional design.



Chapters 3 and 4 go more deeply into Cheng Hsin and its ontological underpinnings. In these chapters, it becomes clear that martial arts and consciousness, and the investigation of not only how the body is structured and works but also what consciousness is and how it moves through and creates physical experience, are at the heart of Peters approach and that his ability as a martial artist is rooted more in breakthroughs in consciousness work than in just training.

Chapter 5 goes into functional considerations in depth. The four principles of (interactive) function apply to Aikido perfectly and unpick the event of 'awase' into its components.

Chapter 6 looks at what fundamentally is required to create ability (in any endeavour) and again we are squarely back in the domain of considering consciousness in this matter.

Chapter 7 considers Cheng Hsin as applied to learning other art forms. To get a taste of Peter's writing and communication style:

'Practicing an art is studying one's own event, which appears for us as our experience, expression and relationships - or life itself. Art, meditation, love, human expression, spirituality, integrity, Zen, honesty, excellence, essence, may all be words about the same thing. Although the 'form' may change, such a practice is the difference between surviving in suffering and living in joy' .

Chapter 8 concludes the core of the book with a deep dive into matters such as 'confusion', 'intrinsic nature', 'reality' and 'the principle behind the principles', etc. To give you another taste of this communication:

'It must be understood then that the Source of all 'things' cannot be a 'thing'. Neither can it exist in or as time and space, since these are limitations and principles within which things can appear. Nor can it have any form or emptiness of form (which is a form also). It must be absolutely no thing and not separate from anything, or different from anything, since if it is separate or different, then it must be some thing. So the nature of the Source (Cheng Hsin) is absolutely paradoxical; still it can be directly 'experienced'.

Chapter 9 was added in the second edition of this book to make it somewhat more comprehensible and is a review of the material covered but from slightly different angles.

The book ends with two appendices : one an interview by a magazine and is actually where I recommend one begins the book and two, a 'Discourse on the art of Swordsmanship' by Chozan Shissai from 1728. Basically this treatise and everything in the book before on the Art of Cheng Hsin as written by Peter Ralston are reflections of each other.

A weak part (if we can describe it as weak) is Peters writing style. He comes across as somewhat arrogant. And this has put many people off this material. He himself writes in the introduction that a reader once found a new copy of the book discarded in a rubbish bin. Having met and trained under Peter I can personally attest that he clearly can walk his talk and can really do what he teaches. As a martial artist he is formidable and as a teacher, uncompromising and exceptionally creative.

The constant invitation in the book is not to believe anything but to test it in one's experience and in this sense there is tons of material to look into and work with - for years!

I would suggest reading the interview at the back of the book in appendix 1 first as this will give a taste of what Peter is about and about the angle he takes with martial arts and ontology as inextricably interwoven. If this interview grabs your attention (as it did mine) then the book will speak to you.

Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros.





Seminar schedule

Below is the Seminar schedule as confirmed for 2019/20.

Make sure to check the schedule on the TAE website for new seminars, updates and changes:

<http://traditionalaikido.eu/seminars.html>

2019

November

8-10 Weesp, The Netherlands

[Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros](#)

Contact: paul.keessen@gmail.com

22-24 Zaragoza, Spain

Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Contact: aikidojzaragoza@gmail.com or lewisbdeq@gmail.com

23-24 Dortmund, Germany

[Seminar with Richard van Berkum](#)

Contact: hallo@aikido-dortmund.de

December

7-8 Modena, Italy

[Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros](#)

Contact Vera Casolari at: vera.casolari@libero.it

2020

January

11-12 [TAE Yudansha seminar \(training and workshop\), Copenhagen, Denmark](#)

Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Theme: Beginner's mind

Contact: lars@aikido-copenhagen.dk



February

1 Almuñecar Spain

Jornada Tropical de Aikido en Almuñecar. Jorge Guillen, Rafael Madrid, Pepe Jesus Garcia, Eugene Abarrategui, Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Contact Lewis at: lewisbdeq@gmail.com

15-16 Malsheim, Germany

Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Contact Barbara Ambrus at: coyote.blue@gmx.net

March

6-8 Weesp, The Netherlands

Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Contact Paul Keessen at: paul.keessen@gmail.com

14-15 Gamlestaden, Sweden

Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Contact Ylva Beckman at ylvab@bahnhof.se

21-22 Lancaster, United Kingdom

Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Contact Aaron at: aaronwieclawski@gmail.com

April

18-25 Motril, Spain

Weekend weapons seminar 18-19 April

Intensive : 21 - 25 April

Contact lewis at: info@aikidotradicional.eu

May

8-10 Lund, Sweden

Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Contact Moa Lindell at: moalindell@gmail.com



June

6-7 Brugges, Belgium
TAE yudansha camp
Contact Filip Schuerbeke filip@irad.be

27-28 Wolverhampton, United Kingdom
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
Contact Brendon at: brendonsan@gmail.com

July

20-25 Rossfall, Switzerland
[Residential Summer Camp with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros](#)
Contact: info@kokorodojo.ch or lewisbdeq@gmail.com

August

22-23 California, USA
Aikido Institute of Bolinas
24 hour intensive with Hoa Newens Sensei and Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
Contact: lewisbdeq@gmail.com

September

26-27 Dortmund, Germany
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
Contact dirk Kilian at: dirkkilian@me.com

October

3 - 4 Copenhagen, Denmark
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
Contact Lars Landberg at: lars@aikido-copenhagen.dk

10-11 Weesp, The Netherlands
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
Contact Paul Keessen at: paul.keessen@gmail.com

November

21-22, Dorset UK

to be confirmed

Contact Mark Allcock: mark@yogawithmark.co.uk

27 -29 Zaragoza, Spain

to be confirmed

Contact Arturo Navarro: aikidojozaragoza@gmail.com

The latest video uploaded to the TAE Youtube Channel:



Resources and links:

- [TAE website](#)
- [Listing and contact details of all members dojos.](#)
- [TAE youtube channel](#)



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