

EDITION 11
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TAE JOURNAL

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
TRADITIONAL AIKIDO EUROPE

AIKIDO AS A MODERN BUDO

THE ROLE OF MARTIAL ARTS IN TODAY'S
SOCIETY AS A MEANS OF SELF-IMPROVEMENT

TRANSITIONING TO TAKEMUSU AIKIDO

THE CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES OF
TRANSITIONING FROM ONE STYLE TO ANOTHER

THE IDEAL WOOD FOR THE IDEAL WEAPON?

AN INTERVIEW WITH WEAPONS MAKER RUUD JASPERS

TORBEN DYRBERG - 50 YEARS IN AIKIDO

IN CONVERSATION WITH LARS LANDBERG

SHOSHIN - VERY FIRST IMPRESSIONS IN AIKIDO

THE EXPERIENCE OF AN UCHI DESHI
WITH THE KOKORO DOJO ZÜRICH



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**‘There is no
attainment in
training. If
you think you
have attained
something
you have
strayed from
the Way’**

— HAGAKURE

The Pine Trees screen, created by Hasegawa Tōhaku, the renowned Japanese artist and founder of the Hasegawa school, consists of six panels that fold. Though the exact date of their creation remains uncertain, they are believed to have been crafted in the late 16th century, during the Momoyama period, approximately around 1595. The screens are currently housed in the Tokyo National Museum and have been honored as a National Treasure of Japan since 1952.

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EDITORIAL

BY ADRIAN PUNT



WELCOME TO THE 11TH EDITION OF THE TAE JOURNAL

Benjamin Franklin is quoted as saying "change is the only constant in life". This he probably adopted from Heraclitus, the ancient Greek philosopher, who once famously proclaimed, "There is nothing permanent except change." No day is the same, no training session the same, no execution of a technique the same, nonetheless, on each step, each opportunity, we try to find room for improvement. The Japanese business concept of 'kaizen' means 'improvement' or 'change for better' (from 改 kai - change, revision; and 善 zen - virtue, goodness). Changes may be small or large, they may be fast or slow, but they should lead to continuous improvement. Although typically used in a business concept, I find the concept of 'kaizen' directly applicable to the study of Budo and life in general. I also find that change, specifically 'seeking change for the better', is a theme that runs through Edition 11 of this Journal.

Firstly, Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros, explores the concept of Aikido as a modern Budo, i.e., the role of martial arts in today's society as a means of self-improvement. Many Aikidoka have explored different martial arts and/or different styles of Aikido and Ellie Denvir discusses the challenges and experiences of transitioning from one Aikido style to another. We then hear from Ruud Jaspers in the Netherlands, of his journey in Aikido and carpentry, and his search for robust and sustainable materials for Aikido weapons making.

In the California Dreaming article we hear about the experiences of a group visit to the US last year. We then look at the history of the hakama, its origins and how it was introduced into Japan and later Aikido, and how its role and significance has changed, evolved, with time.

In an interview with Torben Dyrberg (Københavns Aikido Klub, Denmark) we hear about his 50-years in Aikido, his journey and experiences. We also hear from Willy Oechsli, a student relatively new to Aikido, and his experience as an uchi deshi with the Kokoro Dojo Zürich, Switzerland.

As the first edition of the Journal for 2024, we look back on the TAE yudansha gradings last year and provide a dojo portrait for the TAE Magdeburg Dojo in Germany. Finally, in our book review we look at the Aikido Journal Pre- and Postwar Aikido Pioneers and the life and times of Stanley Pranin, and of his journey and achievements.

The next edition of the Journal (Edition 12) is due autumn this year. If you have ideas, or suggestions for articles, or would like to author something, please email the editorial team (editors@traditionalaikido.eu). Finally, if you haven't already, subscribe to get the journal sent direct to your inbox by following the link below!



ABOUT TRADITIONAL AIKIDO EUROPE

TAE or Traditional Aikido Europe is a group of European Aikido dojos with the purpose of training O-Sensei Morihei Ueshiba's Aikido as taught by the late Morihiro Saito Sensei.

We are currently about 400 active Aikidoka from 29 dojos in 7 countries. For more information, visit our website and make sure to subscribe to our YouTube Channel:

Online:



YouTube:



Contact:





AIKIDO AS A MODERN BUDO

**LEWIS BERNALDO
DE QUIROS**

The meaning of Budo

The common translation for 'Bu' is 'martial' and 'Do' is commonly understood to mean 'path' or 'way'. Hence a 'Bu-do' tradition can be understood as a path of self-development and self-knowledge through training and confrontation in the martial arts where conflict and its management are the arena of practice and study.

For the moment I would like to concentrate on the first term, 'Bu', as the second 'Do' deserves a whole essay in its own right.

So what does the term 'Bu' mean?

The common English translation for Bu is simply 'martial' and is somewhat misleading in its incompleteness. The Japanese character is formed from two sub characters meaning: 'violence, arms of war' and 'to stop, prohibit or bring to an end'. Hence a more comprehensive understanding of this term would be 'to stop violence' or perhaps even, 'to bring about peace'.

Modern day Budo (Kendo, Iaido, Karate-do, Judo, Kyudo, Aikido...) are the contemporary descendants of the traditional martial schools of Japan (Bujutsu, Koryu, Bugei).



In 1987 the Japanese Budo Association (of which the Aikikai Foundation is a member) was formed to foster, develop, and uphold the fundamental principles of traditional Budo in Japan. The member associations drew up a charter as follows (www.nipponbudokan.or.jp):

ARTICLE 1: OBJECTIVE OF BUDŌ

Through physical and mental training in the Japanese martial ways, budō exponents seek to build their character, enhance their sense of judgement, and become disciplined individuals capable of making contributions to society at large.

ARTICLE 2: KEIKO (TRAINING)

When training in budō, practitioners must always act with respect and courtesy, adhere to the prescribed fundamentals of the art, and resist the temptation to pursue mere technical skill rather than strive towards the perfect unity of mind, body and technique.

ARTICLE 3: SHIAI (COMPETITION)

Whether competing in a match or doing set forms (kata), exponents must externalise the spirit underlying budō. They must do their best at all times, winning with modesty, accepting defeat gracefully, and constantly exhibiting self-control.

ARTICLE 4: DŌJŌ (TRAINING HALL)

The dōjō is a special place for training the mind and body. In the dōjō, budō practitioners must maintain discipline, and show proper courtesies and respect. The dōjō should be a quiet, clean, safe, and solemn environment.

ARTICLE 5: TEACHING

Teachers of budō should always encourage others to also strive to better themselves and diligently train their minds and bodies, while continuing to further their understanding of the technical principles of budō. Teachers should not allow focus to be put on winning or losing in competition, or on technical ability alone. Above all, teachers have a responsibility to set an example as role models.

ARTICLE 6: PROMOTING BUDŌ

Persons promoting budō must maintain an open-minded and international perspective as they uphold traditional values. They should make efforts to contribute to research and teaching, and do their utmost to advance budō in every way.

All of the above clearly point towards training in a modern traditional martial art (Budo) as something much more than about learning techniques for self-defence or engaging in competitive fighting sports. Training in a Budo is a path of self-discipline and self-knowledge which as such should be a source of richness in one's life and a positive contribution to the society in which one lives. It does this by promoting in its practitioner's not only the qualities of skilful technique, physical strength, and mind-body unity but also politeness, sensitivity, serenity and appropriate engagement with a view to restoring harmony and peace when under conditions of conflict and discord.

Given this underpinning philosophy, how should the regular training in the Dojo be carried out to foster the above ideals? Before looking at actual technical practice three basic attitudes or orientations to the training need to be addressed that inform all the Budo Charter ideals as follows:

Etiquette (reigi).

Trust and Respect are the cornerstones for practising a Budo. Without them the training environment can easily become a jungle and injuries a real possibility. The bowing etiquette that takes place serves to set the practice in this context: that our 'opponents' are our partners and that our engagement with each other is for the sake of our mutual learning and development. Another related aspect of reigi is that in training we are also training our sense of presence and awareness, without which all the martial techniques are of no real use. Morihiro Saito Sensei once commented succinctly on reigi in that 'a polite person is an attentive person'. Trust, Respect, and Attention: Without these elements pervading the training, one is not engaged in a Budo regardless of the techniques being practised or the ideals being espoused.

Beginner Mind (Shoshin).

This term refers to the attitude of mind that the student should have as a Budoka. It should be open, hungry for real understanding, and free of preconceptions. This attitude should be present whether one is a beginner or an advanced student. Without it one's learning is effectively blocked.

'There is no attainment in training. If you think you have attained something you have strayed from the Way.' (Hagakure).



Sincerity (Makoto).

This Japanese term has a different meaning than the common English meaning and is easily lost in translation. The following story from the Zen tradition (quoted from Diasetz Teitaro Zuzuki in Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*) illustrates this point:

Monk: I understand that when a lion seizes upon his opponent, whether it is a hare or an elephant, he makes an exhaustive use of his power: pray tell me what is this power?

Master: The power of sincerity (literally, the power of not-deceiving). Sincerity, that is, not-deceiving, means 'putting forth one's whole being' technically known as 'the whole being in action'... in which nothing is kept in reserve, nothing is expressed under disguise, nothing goes into waste. When a person lives like this, he is said to be a golden-haired lion; he is a symbol of virility, sincerity, whole heartedness; he is divinely human.

Morihei Ueshiba also talks about Makoto:

'Always imagine yourself on the battlefield under the fiercest attack; never forget this crucial element of training.' (Morihei Ueshiba. Budo p. 36)

In training therefore we should not just train our body but exercise and engage our 'full being', body, mind, spirit, and energy. Morihiro Saito Sensei would often tell us that repeating just three kata with full attention and sincerity (makoto) was far better than endless empty repetitions.

In Kyudo (Japanese traditional archery) this is expressed by the often heard saying, 'one life, one shot' (ichi-go ichi-e: 'one time, one meeting').

These apparently philosophical concepts can be seen as admonitions to pay attention to the present moment and seen as prescriptions for behaviour. However, more than prescriptions, they are literally descriptions of the way things are. This IS the only moment. Martial arts can serve as a powerful reminder to 're-cognise' this ultimate truth and live more fully from that

So how does all this tie into training Aikido as a modern Budo?

First, we must recognise that the objectives of modern Budo are different from those of the former traditional Bujutsu and Koryu whose aims were simply to train soldiers and warriors with one aim in mind: to vanquish the enemy. With the advent of modern technological warfare and the abolishment of the samurai class in Japan, traditional Bujutsu and Koryu schools became effectively obsolete. With their evolution into modern Budo disciplines the purpose of training shifted from combat effectiveness to self-development, as outlined in the charter of the Japanese Budo Association detailed above.

However it is at this junction that we enter a very tricky area. The origin and backbone of the techniques practised in modern day Budo schools are descended directly or indirectly from older more functionally and practically oriented Bujutsu traditions. With self-development shifting to the fore, the practicality of the techniques and the original intention of the training and techniques receded to the background. The battleground was no longer the point - daily life was, although it could be easily argued that this is also a battlefield albeit one far more complex and multilayered...

To my mind this is not necessarily a problem if that functional background, as a background, is still able to inform and check the foreground training process and the teachers and students understand the concept of levels and where they are currently training at and with what objectives (see previous essay on [Levels in TAE Journal 9](#)). The problem arises when that martial background disconnects or disappears from regular practice.

Specifically looking at Aikido practice.

Aikido itself is a modern descendent of older jujutsu schools and specifically Daito Ryu Jujutsu. Morihei Ueshiba was also proficient in various weapon forms and in his creation of Aikido two streams converged in his understanding and experience:

One was his understanding of the above martial traditions where empty-handed jujutsu and weapon forms became synthesised into a complete single technical system where the specific way to use the body - whether handling weapons or empty handed - was the uniting factor (riai).

This process of the technical refinement of his system was a long process and went through many stages of development throughout his life. Hence the many styles of contemporary Aikido reflecting these

different levels of development and the students who trained with him in these phases.

The second influence was clearly of a spiritual nature. Aikido is not just a modern synthesis and extension of older traditions of combat but to my mind represents a radical break with previous martial traditions.

Aikido as conceived by Morihei Ueshiba is the convergence and expression of martial genius and spiritual enlightenment. For the Founder of Aikido, Budo was an expression of universal love and in realising his intrinsic connection or 'at one-ness' with all things, opponents did not exist for him as 'others'.

In the words of the Founder:

'I felt the universe suddenly quake, and that a golden spirit sprang up from the ground, veiled my body, and changed my body into a golden one. At the same time my body became light. I was able to understand the whispering of the birds, and was clearly aware of the mind of God, the creator of the universe. At that moment I was enlightened: the source of Budo is God's love — the spirit of loving protection for all beings ... Budo is not the felling of an opponent by force nor is it a tool to lead the world to destruction with arms. True Budo is to accept the spirit of the universe, keep the peace of the world, correctly produce, protect and cultivate all beings in nature'.

(An account of an experience of transcendent awareness, soon after a contest where, unarmed, he defeated a naval officer armed with a wooden sword without harming him; as quoted in Aikido (1985) by Kisshomaru Ueshiba).

Such a vision of Aikido as a true Budo is in complete agreement with the original meanings of Budo as delineated above: Budo as a means of restoring peace and harmony versus defeating and winning over opposition.

However, controlling an opponent without injury or neutralising aggression without employing violence is easier said than done! So in practice how can we realise these ideals or at the very least orient our training and practice to align with them?

A key point is to gradually free ourselves from reactive defensiveness.

In training we work with techniques which embody and express the principles of connection, control and neutralisation against attacks which seek to restrain and restrict us (holds and strikes). Again and again we are confronted on a deep level with our tendencies to either escape from or struggle against opposition. This is how we seem to be wired up: the flight, fight or freeze responses to stress. Yet Aikido asks us to neither freeze, escape or fight against, but to join with, lead and neutralise an opposing force. Aikido is not about 'against' but rather about 'with' the other.



This 'fourth choice' requires that we yield our defensiveness and resistance on a deep level. This yielding or letting go of our position versus the world is the spiritual training in Aikido and to the extent that we can allow this process to unfold in our experience will our skill as Aikidoka's grow and the practice itself take on additional meaning in the rest of our lives beyond the time spent in the Dojo.

So where is the martial 'background' in this practice and why is it relevant?

First, the attacks and holds need to be both 'real' and 'measured' in terms of the ability of the practitioners to both control the attacks as well as 'blend' with them and execute the techniques. We need a restricting environment to temper our ability in.

Second, both nage and uke need to be aware of the issue of 'openings' (tsuki) in the technical engagement. These openings can be on the side of uke as well as nage and can be exploited through either counter techniques or atemi from uke or via atemi and variation techniques (henka waza) on the part of nage.

Third, the mind. When training with one or more partners we should keep our attention and awareness open so that we are aware of what is happening around us (zanshin) at all times.

Fourth, our intention. The intention is to join with and neutralise our attacking opponent and not to defeat him. This is the most difficult and paradoxical aspect of the training to grasp but to my mind it is the defining aspect of what separates Aikido from other, if not all, other martial arts.

The best way to describe this is from my own experience with my teacher. Sensei's techniques felt overwhelming in terms of power and yet I always had the sense of 'being taken care of' and although I would be convincingly neutralised by him I always felt 'safe' and would always come away with a 'wow, that was great- let's do it again!' kind of feeling.



Receiving this from body to body was a 'direct transmission' which allowed me to 'feel' what defined my teacher's Aikido and has always served me as a guiding orientation in my own practice. This is one reason why we cannot learn Aikido from books or films - wonderful tools as these are -, but need to find good teachers who can 'transmit', as far as possible, these internal and defining aspects of the art.

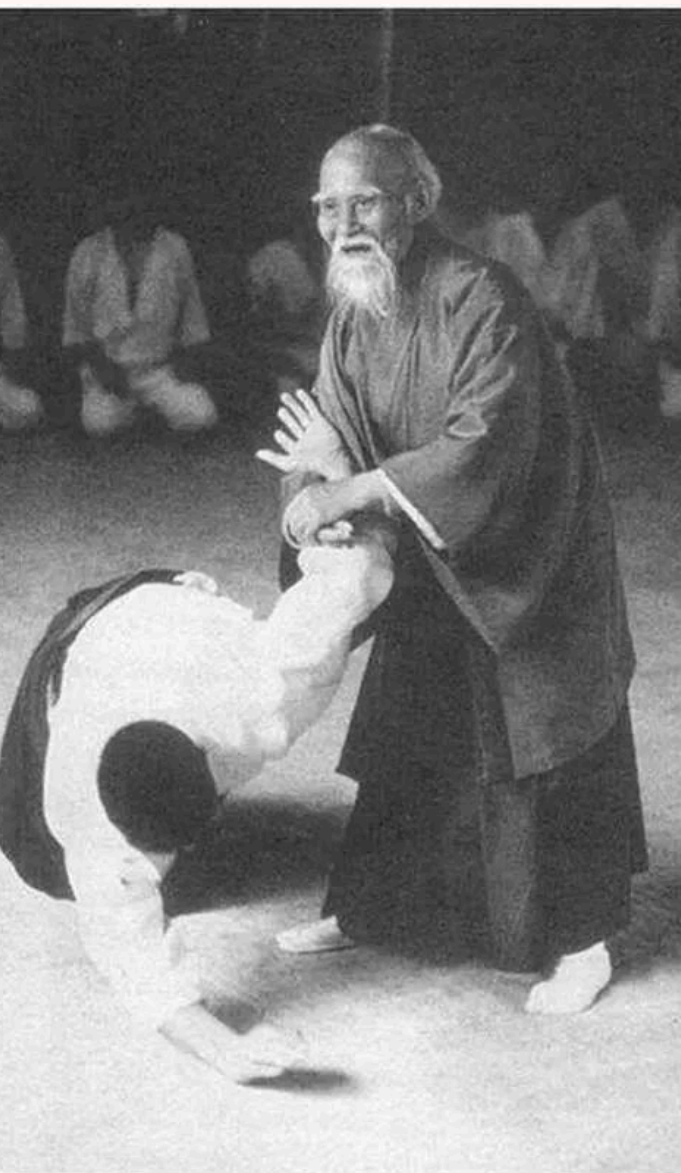
If the practice is informed by these basic martial aspects of connection, balance break and control then the training will all be 'checked' as to its 'realism'.

When I practise, even with children, this 'background' as to openings and the unexpected are always present as well as the sense of 'taking care' of them in the techniques.

In Takemusu Aikido the functional combat level of the techniques is the oyo waza level. This level is not emphasised in our training. Saito Sensei himself would not even emphasise atemi at the basic levels of training but would focus on correct body use and movement through repetitive hard training within a limited technical repertoire first.

This is the 'finding of freedom within restriction' level. Once the body and its ability to move and blend had been minimally mastered, atemi and other levels were introduced.

The 'combat level' was taught sporadically and only to seniors and my experience with it was that it served to 'check' my basics and at the same time open my eyes to the older underlying forms of the techniques. It was also obvious that this aspect was always in the background with all of Sensei's technique as I never had the sense that I could 'surprise' him with a sudden attack or escape from an opening in his technique even at the kihon katai level (first level static solid training).



In conclusion:

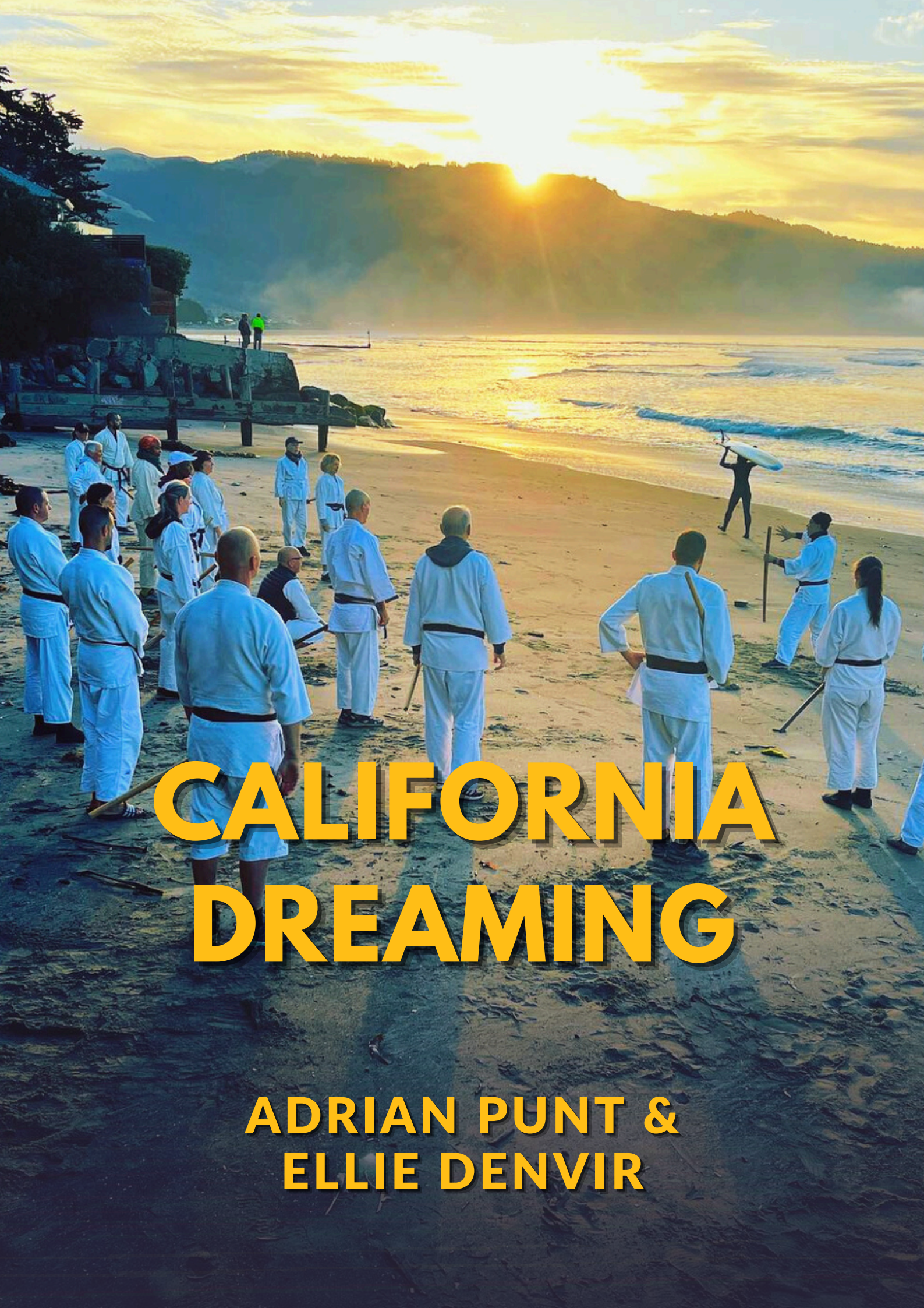
Martial ability in Aikido is the result of a lengthy training whereby reactivity has been overcome through a dual process of physical conditioning and inner relaxation whereby real freedom tempered in a training environment of restriction has been developed under the careful guidance of a teacher who can transmit the 'taste' of non-resistance to his students directly.

All modern Budo have shifted the focus from combat readiness to personal development, but this personal development takes place in the crucible of physical confrontation rooted in the traditions that modern Budo are descended from. Without this 'background check' the techniques and qualities developed in the martial arts can become more fantasy based than real transformations for their practitioners.

Aikido - in addition to the personal development shared with other modern Budo - presupposes a spiritual dimension of insight as expressed by the Founder Morihei Ueshiba in his own definition of Budo which goes far beyond personal development and in fact transcends it.

However it is my opinion that the insight beyond 'self and other' and that conflicts do not in fact exist cannot be attained by avoiding their apparently very real existence. We must go through them and not around them. Hence the training must remain rooted in reality and not fantasy.

This article is a re-written version of an earlier piece written in 2013.



CALIFORNIA DREAMING

ADRIAN PUNT &
ELLIE DENVIR

California is a haven for Aikido – and in the San Francisco Bay Area, Takemusu Aikido in particular. It is probably the first place outside of Japan that Saito Sensei taught, and remains home for some very senior Aikido practitioners. This is the story of our group visit to California in early September 2023, of the Aikido we practised, the people we met, the connections we made, and the places we visited.

Our group consisted of eight intrepid travellers - Lewis and Eduardo from Spain, Johnny from Denmark, and five of us from the UK (Paul, Emilio, Brendon, Ellie, and Adrian). We all arrived in San Francisco International airport in a semi-co-ordinated fashion on the afternoon of Thursday 31st August 2023. The reason – the joint Hoa Newens Sensei and Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros Sensei 'gasshuku' (intense training camp) – in Bolinas, northern California.

Deciding to take the trip to Bolinas was no small matter. The cost, environmental impact and effect on the body of long-distance flights, all weighed heavily in the balance against going. But then, there was the lure of the intensive training with the two dynamic and much-loved Sensei and the enticing photos of the dojo on the hill looking out over the Pacific Ocean like some kind of paradise. One discussion of the pros and cons of the trip went like this: "I don't think I can afford to go" – and the reply: "I don't think I can afford not to go!" With individual hesitations and motivations in check, we set out from our European starting points to head through airports and across the Atlantic Ocean.

After the flights, bodies and vehicles eventually fell into place and we were on the road, heading through traffic-clogged San Francisco, north across the Golden Gate Bridge and onto Highway 1. The twisting road hugged the coast and the San Francisco traffic was left behind. We slowed to stop, got out, and stood on the cliffs in the dusk, breathed, and welcomed the sea air. The scent of forest and ocean, clean fragrant and piney, started to cut through the sleep deprivation of the long flight and queasiness of the weaving car journey.

We arrived in Bolinas, a small coastal community along the San Andreas Fault, 27 miles by road from San Francisco, after sunset. The night and our first day helped us to feel our feet on the ground and to absorb the atmosphere and environment in which we would be training. It was surprisingly cold. Wasn't California meant to be hot? Geoff and Grace welcomed us to their wonderful 19th century redwood barn converted home and their 17.5 tatami (35 sq metre) wood-framed dojo, built by Geoff, in the garden. In the dojo or elsewhere, travel-weary, we found somewhere to lay our sleeping bags and recover from the journey.

We woke to a chilling morning fog, but as promised, the fog dissipated and a view of the green valley that cuts through Bolinas opened with the beach and ocean down below. A leisurely walk around Bolinas, led by Grace and Geoff showed wooden houses, flag poles and pick-up trucks – quintessentially west-coast America, the beach a mecca for surfers – designer surfers; middle of the road surfers; full-time low budget surfers living in camper vans; all clad in black neoprene wetsuits, catching the waves or cooking lunch in the back of their pick-up.

Some of us had brought tents, and there was time to pitch near the dojo before the Friday evening start to the gasshuku. As the earliest of the Aikidoka started to arrive, the buzz of expectation of training and of new encounters began. Extending out from the small, beautiful dojo, Geoff had built a 6 m wide by 11.5 m long, raised wooden platform, and the first activity of the gasshuku, sharing our energies and problem solving skills, was to put down and secure velcro-ed mats on this outside area.

Before long, we were all on the mat, the Europeans and Aikidoka from across Northern California, with some kind of electric charge of anticipation. Training together with Lewis and Hoa Sensei leading, we started to break the ice of unfamiliarity. The variety and texture of training partners, so many diverse levels of experience, took shape to form the weekend's training group. Lewis applied himself to getting to know the level of Aikido in the group, and our band of European Aikidoka adjusted itself to training in the new environment. The tempo and approach of the event was set this first evening with Lewis blending with Hoa Sensei, following and letting him take the lead, improvising the teaching through on-the-mat relationship as they took turns to teach. This Bolinas dynamic was the first phase of a journey that continued though the full weekend and beyond.

We all gathered to eat after training in Grace and Geoff's house, some sat on cushions on the floor at a long, low table, Japanese style, some on the sofa, some on chairs. It was a time to relax, discuss and connect socially with our training partners.

From the first night in tents on the crumbly earth at the side of the dojo, we welcomed sleep quickly and gratefully, but several of us were woken by what sounded like the shouts, whoops and hoops of drunken youths on the other side of the garden fence. Later, we were told that it was a pack of coyotes calling out to each other. On another morning, a mountain lion footprint was found in the garden and there was talk of an eagle sighting. Wild, untamed nature was brushing up against us.

We woke with the rustlings of companion Aikidoka getting out of their sleeping bags in the dark, piling on layers, zipping open tents, nudging from sleep to wakefulness, heading for coffee - chatting, or being quiet. With the immersive experience of training and living together, we were all heading into the dojo by 06:00, finding our cushion, blanket or bench, and sitting in meditation, opening to any stillness that might find us.

After meditation on Sunday, in the first morning light, just before 07:00, with keikogi on, jacket on top and weapons in hand, the whole group wound its way down the valley side to Bolinas Beach. Between us we carried two tyres, each sitting within a wooden frame for tanren uchi (striking) practice. Despite the early hour, the neoprene-clad surfers were out in force and there were children playing on the beach. What an odd sight we must have been, all there in our white dogis!

Practice started with bokken suburi, energetically striking, and thrusting and adapting our form to accommodate the soft sandy slope of the beach. We then moved into high-paced tanren uchi practice, then partnered bokken awase work as the





sun rose over the hilly peaks of Mount Tamalpais State Park to the east. We practised with surf lapping around our legs, and at one point Hoa Sensei drove Geoff so far into the water that he fell over and disappeared, albeit briefly, completely under the waves, to then quickly reemerge, dripping from head to toe. As the morning progressed, we moved into ken tai jo practice, with further opportunities to practise in and against the water, to feel the push and pull of the waves, the sand as it was sucked from beneath the feet, and at keeping focus, clear attack and reception with the surge and spray of the water. Eventually, the advancing tide reduced the beach to a thin strip, forcing us to retreat, pick up all our weapons and the tanren constructions, and climb back up the valley side for an opportunity to rinse feet, dry off and the final classes of the weekend.

The gasshuku continued to a second phase of training on Monday, at the Aikido Institute of Davis in Sacramento, Hoa Sensei's main dojo, about 2 hours drive (ca. 100 miles / 160 km) inland to the north-east of Bolinas, again with Hoa Sensei and Lewis Sensei each teaching half the class. As we headed away from the coast, the temperature increased, to reach the September heat more typical of our expectations of California. We took time to bask in the warm sunshine.

Hoa Sensei's warm up involved deep horse stance, and lots (and lots) of rolling. Hoa Sensei's ukemi is exceptionally fluid. When he stands from a roll, it is like water being poured upwards. The expectation of extended rolling practice, softening the body's flow is a given in his classes. Those training, including some from the California Aikido Association division under Pat Hendricks Sensei, and other members of the Davis club who had not made it to the weekend training in Bolinas, made a full and energetic mat. Working with new and different training partners, all practising under Saito Sensei's legacy, we felt our way through the similarities and differences in the ways that we train, as we listened and connected. For Lewis, in this was a further exercise in feeling his way into the way Aikido is practised in Hoa Sensei's orbit group, tuning his teaching into this context.

Afterwards, we were treated to lunch at Hoa Sensei's home. We sat in the garden under the shade of trees, eating, talking, learning, and laughing, and finally saying goodbye to Hoa Sensei, his wife Phoebe and his close training group. The gasshuku was ended. There was a feeling of completion as we made a very leisurely return to our temporary home, but our training adventure was far from over.

Back in Bolinas later on Monday, sitting outside in the cool evening coastal air, Lewis proposed the shape of our next few days for the eight Europeans and our two hosts: 06:30 morning meditation, followed by an hour's class would continue, and at the end of each days relaxing touristic activities, we would train again for another hour. Fantastic. The delight that our focused training would continue, into a third phase was shared by all.

During one of the first meals of the gasshuku, one of the Californian guests has asked the European group whether we all knew each other already. One of our group replied, "I see this lot more than I see my own family." Yes, this group of Europeans knew each other quite well already, but as we plunged into the further week of living, training, eating, sleeping, meditating, our group, which included our generous, open and warm hosts, started to gain its own shape, as our ways of contributing to the collective experience emerged; Johnny as the quickly-established group barista, brewing coffee every morning, so there was almost always a pot ready; humour and chiropractic manipulations on the side from Paul; Emilio the restaurateur seemingly effortlessly blending with Grace and Geoff in their kitchen; meals cooked, enjoyed and cleaned away by the whole group, as we got to know Grace and Geoff and each other more closely. Each of the remaining mornings, we were on the mat for meditation. Zen meditation might be difficult, but with the feeling of group togetherness that was present, meditating was simply the way into the day.

After morning training on Tuesday, we visited Mount Tamalpais State Park to hike up 'Mount Tam's' 'Steep Ravine Trail,' a hike that follows Webb Creek through tall redwood trees and dense banks of ferns that are maintained by what appears to be almost daily fog. Taking the trail leading uphill, we were deep in the territory of the trees, towering above us, lending arches for us to walk under, helping us to feel the smallness of being human as we wove between the

trunks that were so much older and bigger than us. We had the fragrance of damp earth and the sound of running water to liven our senses as we climbed. For the very brave, there was even a quick dip into the stream. On the way back we visited the ridge of Mill Valley and a view of San Francisco in the distance. It was then back to Bolinas to train again.



The following day we followed the same schedule, this time visiting Point Reyes (from the Spanish for 'Point of the Kings') a prominent cape and seashore reserve about one hours drive north of Bolinas. Point Reyes is the windiest place on the Pacific Coast and the second foggiest place on the North American continent (fog seems to be a recurring theme along the Californian coast). Luckily, the skies were clear. We walked to an observation point, past the whale skull set against the rocks, to look out across the North Pacific Ocean, the great sweep of beach rolling out to the north. Standing at the railing, we were rewarded by the sight of one, then two plumes of spray, quite far out, powerful out-breaths from grey or humpbacked whales, a mum and pup it seemed, then another group. Then, the quick curve of black against the blue ocean, as one or two breached. These were small flashes of movement that drew whooping from us, delighted by the treat of witnessing the whale's leap.

Each day, back at the dojo, on the platform, all of us were further rewarded by individual, focused feedback from Lewis Sensei on our own Aikido practice, the way we moved or were still, our relationships to our weapons, training partners and our own bodies. The magic was complete, none of us wanted it to end.

Then sadly, it was Thursday, our day of departure and the last morning of meditation and training. It was time to take our tents down, to pack our bags, say our goodbyes, to head to the airport and board our various flights home. It was time to return, and readjust, back to normal daily life.

For many of us on the trip, leaving the exceptional location, dojo and hosts, and leaving the togetherness and intention of the small group that we had created together, had a bittersweet flavour. How lucky we were to have had this experience, and how much we didn't want it to end. Several months on, we still dream about our time in California and of the chance to relive this experience again in the future... Do you have the same dream...?





**TRANSITIONING
TO TAKEMUSU
AIKIDO**

ELLIE DENVIR



In recent years, many people have joined TAE to practise the Aikido taught through Saito Sensei's lineage, coming from other styles of Aikido with different emphases, from other martial arts, or from other groups with slightly different approaches to practising Saito Sensei's Aikido legacy. Bringing our individual Aikido practice in line with what is required in the new framework presents those of us with a different starting point with some deep challenges.

Why do we change style, change the martial art we practise, join a new organisation, adopt a new framework for learning? Why do we want to change?

As absolute beginners in Aikido, most people just find a club, not knowing about different styles or Ryu, turn up and start practising. If the first Aikido dojo you joined was under a teacher who'd been a student of Tohei Sensei, working with the Ki-Aikido approach, the language used to describe how to move, how to be in your body, how to train, the syllabus and system for grading would be very different to the language and learning systems used by the students of Saito Sensei; the posture and way of executing techniques would probably also differ significantly.

Sometimes, a change to a new style in Aikido is initially down to chance, for example, moving to a new place, where the local Aikido club is working in a different way. In this case, the practitioner will be faced with questions to themselves and their instructors - Why should they change the way they have been training? We find out that in order to commit to a new way of practising, we need to have a reason to change.

It can be a combination of both chance and choice that leads us to change style. We discover a teacher whose practice and way of communicating that practice resonates more deeply, makes more sense. This way of being that we experience or witness inspires us, makes us connect more with our sense of what Aikido is.

Lewis Sensei recounts changing from the practice of Shotokan Karate to Aikido, with a change in his own motivations for training, moving from an investigation of issues of violence and self defence, to other issues that had surfaced through his training and life, added to by seeing a demonstration by Saito Sensei with Nemoto Sensei; he was "instantly taken in by it" and immediately understood that this was the next step for him as a martial arts practitioner.

When we have a sense that 'this fits'; the teacher and the art connect with an internal sense of rightness and motivation, we have a chance to become open to the new way of learning. Without embracing the choice and reasons to change, we are unlikely to embrace the change. Sometimes, our reasons for training in the first place, and any adjustments in our motivation are called into question.

I began practising Aikido with Terry Ezra Sensei, in Birkenhead, near Liverpool in the UK, in 1992. A friend who'd trained there had told me that it was perfect for me, and urged me to go. Then, I'd been threatened with violence in a pub in Liverpool where I lived, and suddenly found that I was afraid to be out after dark by myself. Having not taken up my friend's suggestion earlier, I decided it was now time.

From my first visit to the club, I was deeply engaged and felt an affinity with Aikido as an art, with the dojo, and the teacher. Ezra Sensei was an incredibly powerful and sensitive Aikidoka, and a deep and impressive teacher. He had been a student of Chiba Sensei, and with this heritage, alongside his Aikido he practised and taught Iaido. Although Ezra Sensei's Aikido later followed Yamaguchi Sensei, incorporating a very different attitude of love and universal connectedness into the practice, his use and teaching of the bokken followed the shape of the use of the katana in Iaido. In British Aikido, the approach which treats the bokken as a katana, and the handling of it in line with the cut of a shinken has been the most prevalent way of handling the weapon. This puts a large section of British Aikido weapons practice at odds with what we can call Iwama Ryu, Takemusu Aikido, or Saito Sensei's weapons practice.



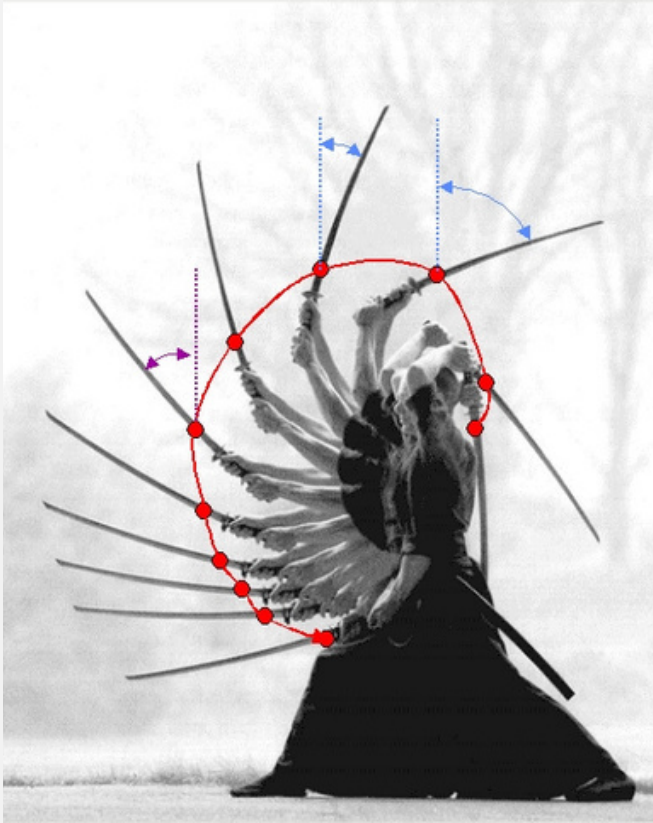
In 2010 or thereabouts, Lancaster Aikido Club, which I'd joined after a ten year break in training, met with Saito Sensei's teaching, and following our first few seminars with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros Sensei, the club started training seriously in this direction. The club as a whole decided to make this change, with a vote between the members about it. It was a clear choice for the group and the individuals within it. Yet, embracing the weapon's system left me with some great anomalies. I'd been taught "cut, don't hit"; the line of shomen uchi with the bokken was a slice, cutting straight through the opponent with the power towards the front of the weapon and in the 'blade'. Now, I was being taught that it was to be treated as a wooden weapon, with more of a percussive impact. The shomen uchi arc has its weight and focus closer to the body, and the weapon vibrates, gaining balance in the grip as it lands at the end of the move. The two approaches were incompatible. Being told not to 'cast out' with my first suburi, in the new style of Aikido that we were adopting, I found that my body and my mind were stuck in a conundrum. "Cut, don't hit" was lodged deeply in my mind and in my bokken use.

I have enormous respect for Ezra Sensei, and for his teaching. With this, there also comes a great attachment. When we are learning, especially as beginners fumbling around trying to find our bodies, the rules of play laid out by our respected teachers go deep: "Never let the bokken drop down behind your head. You have no control of it here, you have given the weapon away." And now, this 'forbidden' action is the middle part of the first suburi, opening the back. So, in the new way of learning, I practised what I was being taught to the best of my ability, but with a dissonant chord being struck. I understood that the bokken lining down the spine was not being practised as a martial application position. But it had been a taboo - never do this! - and now it was a core ingredient.

What are the benefits, difficulties and discoveries we can make in engaging in such a change?

In my dojo, Lancaster Aikido Club, people sometimes join us from other traditional martial arts, particularly in their middle age, when maybe jujitsu or karate practice has become too brutal for the body, or those paths again no longer fit the practitioner. Recently, for a new Aikidoka, moving to the art from Shotokan Karate, one of the first deep challenges was about allowing himself to be taken to the ground. In his Karate training, the idea that if you go to the ground, it's 'finished' went deep. That going to the ground was the last thing he wanted to happen had been thoroughly incorporated into his body responses. Being asked to soften, receive and allow himself to be taken to the ground, not leaving himself rigid and upright and open to various atemi, I experienced coming from him the type of confusion that I had myself experienced when being asked to do things with the bokken that I had drummed into myself, or had drummed into me, were really bad and not what I should do. Again, I'd call this a deep dissonance.





In my early years of Aikido, practising bokken work framed around the use of the katana, I believed that laido was a weapons training system that fitted side by side with Aikido. It took a long time of working with Saito Sensei's weapons system for me to begin to really understand that the aesthetically beautiful forms of laido-based shinken katana and bokken work are fundamentally a different concept to aikido; one being about the physical logic of how to kill with the sword, and the other being essentially the way of harmony. The aim of Aikido is not to kill!

How did the understanding of this difference affect and fit in with my training?

For me, understanding these different aims, understanding the impact of the different lineage and routes of Aikido practice made it easier to unpick the imprint of what I had been taught from my mind and body together, and started to free me from that dissonance between what I am being taught and what I had been taught, giving me more freedom to develop my own practice.

At Terry Ezra's memorial service, I met a friend who I hadn't seen for 20 years, who was an impressive young shodan when I first

started, but had given up Aikido a couple of years after I started training. I explained something of Saito Sensei's step-by-step pedagogy for teaching and learning aikido. He commented 'So, anyone can learn'. Yes. Though, a linear, step by step approach is not typically my way of learning. As a child, I did not learn to read by first understanding phonics, but by falling in love with stories. I was lucky and my parents read a lot of stories to me. At school, I looked at the pictures in the reading books and told my teachers the stories. They thought I could read, but I couldn't. Eventually, I was bored of not being able to read. I took my favourite story books to bed every night for a week and battled with the words until I had all of the written words under my belt, and had the information I needed about words that I needed to build the broader skill. Getting the feel, the big picture, the flow, then retracing the details of abc, put this foot here, then that foot there is more familiar and intuitive for me than starting with the steps. With this personal tendency, added to by the filtered-down influence of Ezra Sensei's second great teacher, Yamaguchi Sensei, for me coming into training Saito Sensei's weapons system, solo suburi practice was definitely not my favourite part of training. I enjoyed and was comfortable with partner work, movement and blending. However, the linear, step by step approach is, as my friend fed back to me, incredibly accessible. The staged progression helps to strip away the idea that reaching a high level in this art is only for those with some kind of unattainable power, like a kind of magic. The story in which we integrate with an encounter, with another person, within our own bodies, and can be in a truly harmonious situation with what is happening in and around us even at times of conflict, is a story which can belong to all of us. Of course, a lot of dedication and deep training is needed.

What are our ideas and beliefs about our Aikido practice?

For me, harmonious movement from the centre, extension, receptivity, and connection with a partner were key ideas and maybe defined my perception of Aikido practice. But before movement is stillness, and in stillness is the possibility of harmonious connection within our own mind-body which allows the rest to happen; we can call this centering or alignment, and we can keep working on it for the rest of our lifetime, maybe eventually being in that state for longer and longer stretches of time, who knows. Maybe the practice of stillness is also fundamental.

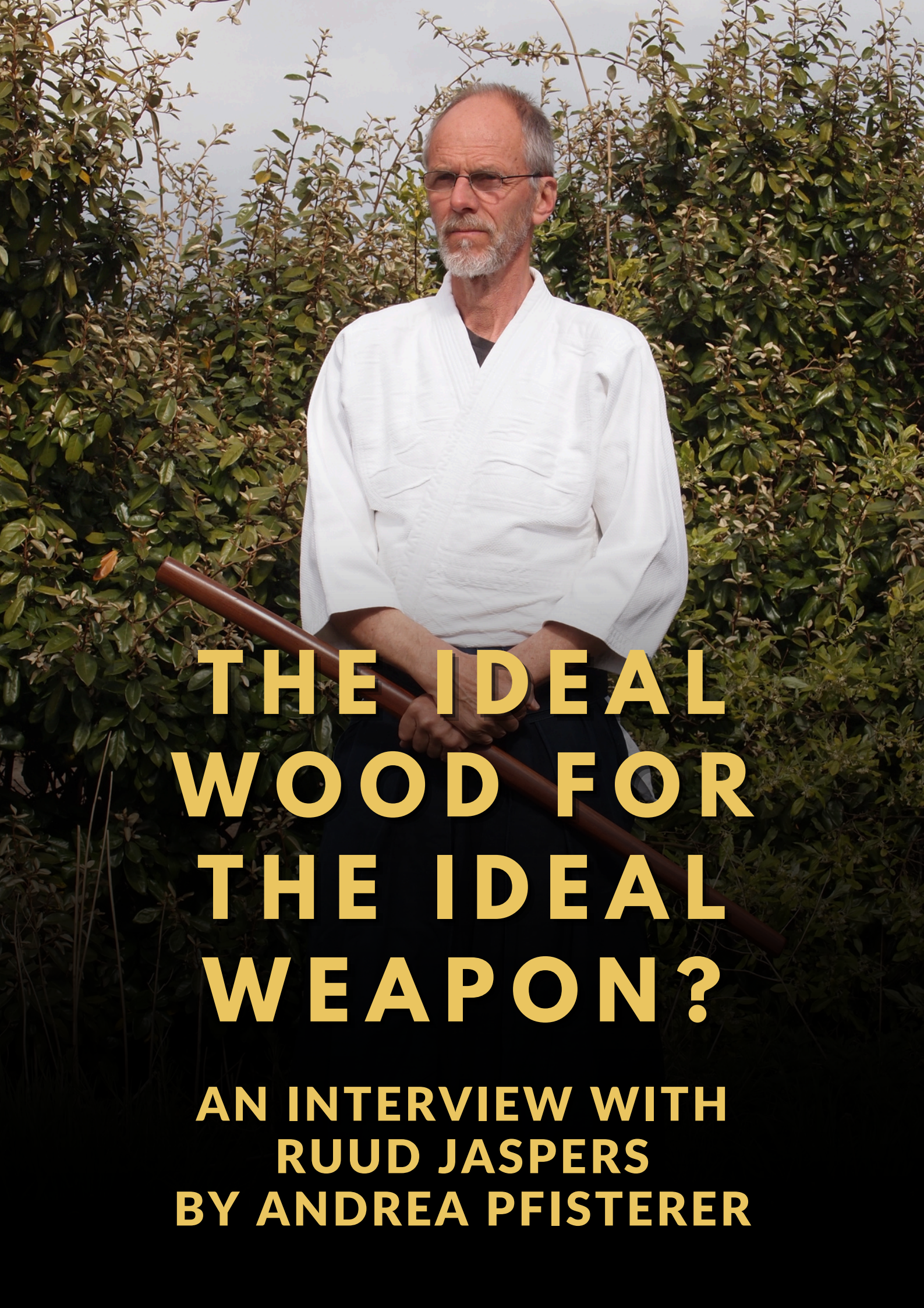
As we are taught, learn and develop our practice, we start to attach belief in the things we are taught, adding to our pre-existing ways of being, beliefs, preconceptions and fears, as well as changing them. The instruction “move; get out of the way of the attack” had settled in me as a core principle. But, did I understand in my mind and body, the place or alignment that I should move from? And do I now? We become faced with moments when we are asked to drop some of our ways of thinking and of being in our bodies, such as a habit of tensing in the shoulders (most likely), and the belief - deep in our habit and mind-body - that tensing is what we need to do. Or, that, because I’ve been taught X, and fixed it inside myself - don’t fall over / don’t hit with the bokken / hanmi is like this - not only do I have the habit of following that instruction, but I have the belief lodged in me that this habit is correct.

Fresh in my mind as I write is the Traditional Aikido Midlands Intensive in the UK. One Aikidoka, fairly new to TAE but with years of training behind her, was struggling with the seemingly overwhelming amount of changes she would need to make for a shodan grading with TAE. She was at one of those points of deep frustration and was feeling like giving up the idea of progressing to a grading. She had, a long time before, accepted that right hanmi was ‘weaker’ and the first bokken suburi was painful for her, and had started to try and place the changes she was being told to make on top of the physical discomfort. Over the long weekend and through discussion, notably with Brendon Buchanan and with Thomas Nord, whose approach continuously brings us back to

internal sensitivity in being-in-the-body, she let go of the belief that she had to just suck up the pain and push through it. Her new way of training is to re-find hanmi in a way that fits her own body comfortably and feels right, and to gently move forwards in her Aikido from that place, and after some exploration, she found she could train first suburi in a way that was pain-free.

When we change style to our new, chosen way of practising, it’s like this. Along with understanding from within the body the changes we are seeking in our habits, we may need to find the beliefs that we have adopted along the way which sit in our bodies and block us. We also find that discussion with our teachers, sempai and peers can help to clarify our own relationship to those beliefs.

In the end, we find great benefits from putting ourselves through the process of finding what we need to change, and of finding how to make this change in our movement or alignment and understanding. The precision being sought through the system of learning adds up to a method of taking us deeper into connection with our own bodies, with our partners in training, and beyond. Freeing ourselves from old habits and beliefs that ultimately block us gives us more choice about how we respond to a situation, opening possibilities. Coming to TAE from another school, you might need to spend a long time to bring your practice into the framework and requirements of this way of training and grading. As any Aikidoka progresses through the dan grades, whether or not they have changed school, style or art, they will find that they need to adjust the place from which they connect and move to be able to work at more and more advanced levels, and will continue to face challenges as long as they are learning. And, as a result of facing these challenges, committing to finding the change we need, our Aikido can shine.



**THE IDEAL
WOOD FOR
THE IDEAL
WEAPON?**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH
RUUD JASPERS
BY ANDREA PFISTERER**

Last November I combined the seminar of Lewis Sensei in Magdeburg with the friendship seminar in Weesp and in between I visited Ruud Jaspers in Alkmaar, NL. Ruud is the Aikido weapons maker providing weapons to most members of our community for many years already. He was willing to give me an interview.

Can you tell us something about your professional experience and about your Aikido journey?

I've been a woodworker for most of my professional life with a couple of in-between jobs as a cook and later in a bakery working with mentally handicapped people. I make art but also furniture, kitchens, toys and I also do repairs.

My Aikido journey started fairly late, in 1997 when I was already 41 years old. I trained in a Hombu style dojo and visited seminars of Sugano Sensei, Tamura Sensei, Suga Sensei and French teachers like Christian Tissier, Claude Pellerin and Alain Peyrache. We also visited Doshu's first European seminar in Paris in 2000.

My teacher also practiced Kendo so we practiced with bokken regularly, but weapon training didn't play a large role in Aikido training. Sugano Sensei also taught some partner exercises with bokken for which you could get separate certificates. But overall, and I say this in hindsight because I didn't realize this at the time, weapon training was scarce and a bit shallow. I was enthusiastic about weapon training though, and of course after a couple of months I made my own weapons of hornbeam which was a little light and not so hard but it didn't splinter. The bokken was Aiki style with a pointed tip, a slim model.

Then, after seven years of training I heard about Lewis Sensei and started training with him. From then on everything changed, and in fact I had to start all over again. Everything was so different from what I was used to, the instruction so much more detailed, footwork, position of the hands, etcetera. It was a huge challenge. For example: my bokken made a whooshing sound when I made my cuts and Lewis said that that had to go. I couldn't manage it and handed my bokken to Lewis because I thought that it was because of the shape of the weapon that it made that sound. But when he made some cuts I couldn't hear a thing, so then I knew it was possible. It took me a while though before I succeeded. All techniques were performed differently, so I had to learn and unlearn at the same time, which was very frustrating sometimes.



When I started training with Lewis Sensei I was first kyu and it took me another four years before I passed my shodan test in 2008. I also started teaching then. In 2010 I passed my nidan test. In the meantime Gertjan Jongh started a dojo and I joined in and we shared classes. I liked teaching very much and learned a lot. In 2014 my enthusiasm for Aikido slowly diminished and a while after failing my sandan test that summer, which was a sign, I decided to stop training and teaching. I think you can't do Aikido halfheartedly. I still feel I made the right decision, although I still like Aikido very much and even do suburi practice regularly to keep myself in shape and stay sharp.

When did you have the idea to make weapons yourself and how did you start it all?

After the 'non-whooshing' lesson I was ready for a new bokken, and Lewis lent me one of his, a Tsukuba bokken he got from Saito Sensei. I copied that one using Ipé, a Brazilian hardwood. I also made a jo of the same wood. I liked them very much, and soon they were in demand by my fellow Aikidoka. The Ipé wood turned out to be a bit splintery in the long run, especially the bokken, so I started to look for other wood species. I guess I tried at least twenty or so over the years. Jatoba, also a Brazilian wood, was very promising and I made lots of those. However, over the years the quality of the wood on the market declined rapidly and became less heavy and strong. Massaranduba was the next candidate but also failed in the end. Although I used wood from well managed resources, I wasn't very happy using tropical wood. Also, I had a lot of waste due to imperfections, and prices were going up as well. Then I discovered compressed bamboo, or strand woven bamboo, as it is officially called, and decided to check it out. I tried a few brands and finally settled on what I use now. So far, the feedback I get is very positive.



Can you describe the process of making a bokken, from the moment you select a certain part of wood, then the various steps it takes and the tools and machines you use?. How long does it take you on average to make a bokken?

I use templates to cut out the rough shape of the weapon on a bandsaw and then cut them to exact size and thickness using a router. I then round off the handle and cutting surface by hand using Microplane wood rasps. After this the bokken has to be sanded with various grids. The last step is to finish them with hardwax oil or tung oil. When they are dry, after a couple of days, I polish them with fine steel wool and then they are ready for action.

How do you go about it mentally since you have a long background in Aikido and meditation? Are there any rituals you start your work with? What is important to you during the work and when you take a break?

My mental approach towards making weapons, well, it is pretty straight forward. There is this material I want to shape and there is resistance; it is hard, heavy, there are sharp edges, there is dust, noise. In short, it is hard work. There is also the challenge, or invitation if you will, to bring something of value and beauty into the world. I prefer to work alone and if everything goes well, I become one with

what I am doing, there is no thought, just 'work' happening, even the sense of time is absent. It is just what it is. I am not being philosophical here, it is very simple and very down to earth. You could call it meditation, but I don't like to use that word very much because it is so abused and contaminated. It is just something that happens when there is total attention. As a matter of fact, relating this to aikido, that is what I think O'Sensei was talking about when he said that there is no opponent in aikido. Through my work I can very much relate to that experience. But enough of that.

Did you ever meet any other bokken maker or have exchange with someone on a professional level, or how did you study and improve? How did you choose the curvature, thickness, length?

I have never met any other weapon maker. I guess there aren't that many around. I adapted the original bokken from Lewis to attain a balance that fitted the weight of the material that I am using. Also, in bokken work you are always aiming to control uke's center, so when being attacked, you deflect the energy, neutralize it. Now when you have a bokken with more weight towards the tip there is the danger that you are drawn out too much and so lose contact with your own center and at the same time focus too much on uke's weapon instead of their center. Therefore, I am experimenting with balance. The feedback that I get from the Aikido community is overall quite positive.

Why is the tip in Iwama ryu bokken generally flat or absent?

I think the flat tip of the Iwama style bokken is to emphasize that it is a weapon in its own right and not made for cutting with the tip, but for crushing with the part that is approximately twenty- five centimeters down the 'blade'.

What defines the ideal wood for bokken and jo in your eyes?

In Japan wooden practice weapons were sometimes referred to as 'throwaways', so that makes it clear that they were not made to last forever. They were relatively cheaply made and discarded after a few fierce training sessions. I think in Aikido our approach is somewhat different. We are taught to never meet our partners energy directly, but to move around it, neutralizing it. So why would it be any different in buki waza? In practicing like this we spare our weapons. Having said that, we still need a weapon that can easily take a good blow. Japanese oak, in this respect, is a fine wood: It is heavy, dense and of course it's the traditional wood to use. But it will splinter eventually or even break because it tends to dry out and become brittle over the years. Aikido is now being practiced all over the world and there simply isn't that much Japanese oak, so we have to find substitutes.

Are there any European woods that would be suitable, for example yew or oak?

In my opinion, European indigenous woods are not up to the task because they are either too light or too soft and/or not strong enough. The only exception I can think of is holly oak from southern Europe, but that is not easy to get in the right dimensions.



Why do you predominantly use compressed bamboo nowadays and what are its characteristics?

The use of tropical wood is becoming more and more problematic. Forests are cut down at an ever-faster rate. The rapid economic expansion of China is adding to this problem in recent years. The Chinese have concessions in Asia, Africa and South America, where entire forests are rapidly disappearing, the trees being shipped to China. So if you ask yourself where your future bokken will be coming from... Ironically, it might come from China, but not made of wood, but of bamboo. In the case of Aikido weapons that would be strand woven bamboo.

To make this material, bamboo stems are crushed and the resulting strips are immersed in resin and then compressed into beams in a twelve hundred tons press. The resulting material is extremely hard and dense (1050 kg/m³). The resin content is about seven to eight percent. Also, this product is available in different colors, i.e. natural (boiled input strips), caramel (carbonized input strips), or chocolate (thermally modified input strips, often used for outdoor application). Strand woven bamboo is available in beams or is sawn into planks. Because of the high hardness and hardwood look it is ideally used in indoor applications where the hardness is utilized such as flooring and for tabletops.

Environmentally, bamboo is very promising. It grows incredibly fast. After six years the stems can be up to thirty meters high and are ready for harvesting. It turns out that a well-managed bamboo forest, where twenty to twenty-five percent of the mature stems are harvested yearly, can store enormous amounts of carbon dioxide. Even more than in an unmanaged plot, where old and dead stems disturb exponential growth. Bamboo plants have a root system consisting of underground parts, called rhizomes, from which the stems grow above the ground.

The rhizomes anchor the plant to the soil and supply it with water and nutrients to produce new rhizomes. One single bamboo plant therefore has multiple stems. The extensive rhizome network also helps to hold soil and restore water tables, making bamboo very suitable for reforestation of poor grounds. There is so much more to tell about bamboo, but let's leave it at that.

I believe in the potential of strand woven bamboo for Aikido weapons and I am excited to work with this material and value the feedback I get from the Aikido community.

Is there any difference in the selection for wood for a tanto?

When making tantos, strength and/or hardness is no consideration, so I use all kinds of wood for those as long as they are beautiful in appearance. I am using bamboo more and more for tantos also, but if I happen to come across an interesting piece of wood, I might turn it into a couple of beautiful tantos.

What makes a good bokken or jo and what do you recommend when selecting a weapon for oneself?

A weapon of the right weight can be a great help in training. But what is the right weight? What is a good balance? When you are a skilled practitioner, you'll probably know exactly what you are looking for, what fits you, but for a beginner: Where to start if you don't have the right feel yet? When selecting a bokken for instance, do some suburi and see how it feels. When it feels a little heavy, that's ok, then you have something to work with. But when it feels too heavy after doing second suburi for twenty times or so, it probably is. It's a little like taijutsu: your partner should give you exactly the feedback that you need, not too much

and certainly not too little, because in both cases you stop learning. Since a weapon cannot adapt its feedback, you are the one that has to adapt but within healthy limits. I myself like to work with a heavy bokken because it really forces me not to use strength or it will work against me.

Can you also tell us something about regular maintenance of weapons? Oil or varnish and what to do if they are chipped?

I recommend to inspect your weapons regularly and make sure the surface stays smooth. If necessary, you can lightly sand the weapon on damaged spots using fine sandpaper (grit 240). Then apply a light coat of oil. Let it soak in for about fifteen minutes and then rub off the excess with a piece of cloth and let it dry overnight. I always use tung oil but you can use any good drying oil. Do this regularly, about every two or three months or so, depending of course on how often you train and how heavy the contact during training is. My experience is that when you use your weapon well and not abuse it by banging away at each other, the weapon usually stays in one piece.

And what to do if there is a bend in the jo or bokken?

When a weapon is bent it sometimes helps to bend it in the opposite direction for some time. However, with the strand woven bamboo this problem hasn't occurred because there is hardly any tension in the material, contrary to weapons made of wood.

I read that there are only very few wood and weapon craftsmen left in Japan due to low wages, missing recognition, and lack of successors and that they face a real problem of not getting the right wood anymore. So, will we be forced to train without high-quality weapons, or how do you see the future of Takemusu Aikido in this respect?

The situation in Japan seems to be quite alarming indeed! There are only one or two companies left that produce Aikido weapons in any substantial quantities. Wood is also getting scarce, that is white and red Japanese oak (akagashi and shiragashi respectively). So I guess we have to find our own solutions. Like I said before, I don't know of any indigenous wood that will stand up to the task. I guess most of the Aikido weapons will be produced in China. What that will mean quality-wise is up for grabs. And I guess there will still be weapons on the market made of tropical wood.

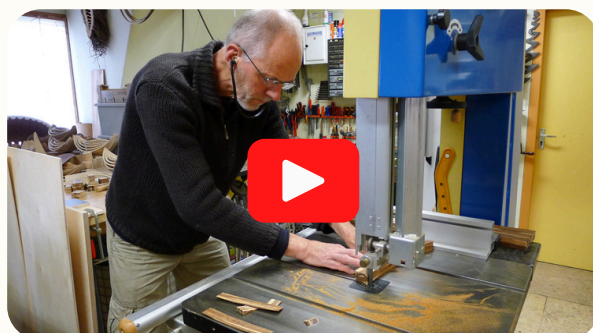
Could I make my own bokken?

That wouldn't be an easy job. You would need woodworking tools and machines but also the skills to use them safely and properly. However, if you're handy and diligent you just might pull it off. It would of course be very rewarding to make your own weapons. Like James Krenov, a famous furniture maker who referred to himself as the impractical furniture maker, I guess I could call myself the impractical weapon maker, but I am used to doing it my way although it is probably not the most efficient one.

Do you offer workshops?

I don't offer workshops, but if people are really interested they are always welcome and I can reveal all my secrets.

Thank you very much Ruud for this interview and for offering me a demonstration in your workshop!





HAKAMA IN AIKIDO:

**WHAT IS THEIR ORIGIN,
MEANING, AND DO THEY
SERVE A PURPOSE?**

ADRIAN PUNT

Introduction:

Some forms of traditional Japanese martial arts, particularly weapons related ones, for example, Kuydo (archery); Iaido (the art of rapidly drawing the sword) and Ken Jutsu (combative swordsmanship and the associated modern-day sports version of Kendo), wear the hakama from day one. In both, pre-WWII, and potentially just over a decade after, O-Sensei was adamant that all students of Aikido, irrespective of grade, wear hakama. At that time, the hakama had nothing to do with dan ranking, it was simply just part of the expected training attire.

For O-Sensei, the hakama was an essential component of the 'keikogi' ('keiko' being training and 'gi' meaning cloths, i.e., keikogi = 'training cloths'), or perhaps more specifically, an essential part of the 'dogi' (literally, 'cloths of the way'). Mitsugi Saotome Sensei (a post-war Aikido student in Tokyo from 1955) notes in his 1989 "The Principles of Aikido" book [1] that:

When I was uchi deshi to O-Sensei, everyone was required to wear a hakama for practice, beginning with the first time they stepped on the mat. There were no restrictions on the type of hakama you could wear then, so the dojo was a very colourful place. One saw hakama of all sorts, all colours, and all qualities, from kendo hakama, to the striped hakama used in Japanese dance, to the costly silk hakama called sendai-hira.

He then goes on to state:

I vividly remember the day that I forgot my hakama. I was preparing to step on the mat for practice, wearing only my dogi, when O-Sensei stopped me. "Where is your hakama?" he demanded sternly. "What makes you think you can receive your teacher's instruction wearing nothing but your underwear? Have you no sense of propriety? You are obviously lacking the attitude and the etiquette necessary in one who pursues Budo training. Go sit on the side and watch class!"

The www.aikidofaq.com [2] reports Morihiro Saito Sensei as saying that most of the students in Iwama were too poor to buy a hakama, but they were still required to wear one. Hence, if they couldn't get one from an older relative, they would take the cover off an old futon, cut it, dye it, and give it to a seamstress to make into a hakama.

Shigenobu Okumura Sensei (briefly a pre-war student of O-Sensei and senior instructor in the Aikikai Hombu Dojo after the war) notes in "Aikido Today Magazine" #41 [3] that in postwar Japan, many things were hard to get, including cloth. He talks about generally unsuccessful attempts to make hakama from air-raid blackout curtains, and subsequently, as a temporary Hombu Dojo policy to avoid expense (presumably instigated by Kisshomaru Ueshiba), the suggestion that it was okay not to wear hakama until shodan (for men and 3rd kyu for women, where 'modesty' is the commonly quote reason for why women might wear the hakama from an earlier grade). This change was most likely made in the mid to late 1950s as the number of students in the Hombu Dojo in Tokyo increased.

This approach of not having to wear hakama until a certain grade spread to Iwama at some point and ultimately became the norm across the Aikido world. Today, the 'award' of hakama and its wearing, is a symbol of seniority, and as a garment, it is seen as something separate to the white training uniform we call our 'gi', a westernised concept of a Japanese word that just means cloths. This approach is quite different to that which O-Sensei initially insisted on.

Some Aikido clubs / associations may favour the wearing of a hakama from day one, but this is quite rare, and it is more normally worn from 3rd or 1st kyu or shodan depending upon club / association guidelines.

It is also important to note that there are some Aikido practitioners that do not wear a hakama at all, or may restrict the wearing of a hakama to special events and demonstrations, or higher dan ranks. Equally, if training weapons outside, the hakama is often removed, simply to keep it clean and to reduce the need to wash and subsequently ensure that the folds and creases of the garment are back in the right place.

Origin of the Hakama

As noted, the hakama for O-Sensei, who was born in 1883, clearly had a deep connection with Japan's past; it was an integral and essential part of the 'training uniform', an item of clothing linking Aikido to the history and tradition of Japan. Hakama, especially those used in Japanese martial arts, traditionally have seven deep pleats, two on the back and five on the front. Saotome Sensei [1] after his scolding mentioned above, goes on to describe the lecture he then received from O-Sensei:

"They [the pleats of the hakama] symbolize the seven virtues of Budo", O Sensei said. "These are jin (benevolence), gi (honor or justice), rei (courtesy and etiquette), chi (wisdom, intelligence), shin (sincerity), chu (loyalty), and koh (piety). We find these qualities in the distinguished samurai of the past. The hakama prompts us to reflect on the nature of true bushido. Wearing it symbolizes traditions that have been passed down to us from generation to generation. Aikido is born of the bushido spirit of Japan, and in our practice we must strive to polish the seven traditional virtues.

These values probably permeated Japanese warrior societies as a byproduct of the introduction of Chinese Confucianism and were further popularised by the famous Japanese swordsman Musashi Miyamoto (1584-1645) in his Book of Five Rings (Go Rin No Sho). Although the adoption of the Chinese Confucian values by the Japanese warrior class is well documented, the precise point at which the seven pleats of the hakama were ascribed these values is unclear and may actually be a

modern day 'romantic' adoption, and the link to samurai beliefs may be somewhat tenuous [4].

The Aikido Journal [5] notes that hakama are traditional Japanese over trousers, originally worn over a kimono by members of the higher classes of society. The hakama most likely originated in China, as kù or kuzi, the trousers worn by members of the Chinese imperial court in the Sui and Tang dynasties (from ca. 600) [6]. They were most likely imported to Japan within Buddhism as a formal ceremonial garment. The first use of the hakama in Japan is most likely in the Heian period (794-1185), when women of the imperial court used to wear hakama-like garments. However, it's during the Kamakura period (1185-1333) that the Japanese warrior class began to wear hakama commonly, mostly as heavy cloth leg protection during horseback riding (leather was hard to come by in Japan, so heavy cloth was used instead). After the samurai as a class dismounted, and became more like foot-soldiers, they persisted in wearing horseman's garb because it set them apart and made them easily identifiable. The hakama then became a symbol of power as the standard outfit for nobles and Samurai. Various forms appeared and the use of hakama eventually became widespread throughout the Japanese population [7].

There were many types of hakama. The andon-bakama type features the traditional "lantern" shape (or skirt-like cut), which was probably the original garment adopted into Japanese use. The umanori-bakama type, literally meaning "ride a horse", is cut in the shape of trousers (and probably represents a subsequent evolution of the style and cut to allow horseback riding). Some types were very wide or very long, e.g., the naga-bakama type, specifically designed to severely hamper movement of visiting Samurai when in audience with the Shogun. There were also short or narrow versions, with

only five pleats, such as the “mountain” or “field hakama” (no-bakama), originally worn by farmers and workers (due to the practical advantage conferred by its narrower legs section) that are popular with practitioners of Kashima Shin Ryu [8] and as worn occasionally by Morihiro Saito Sensei in Iwama and as popularised by his son, Hitohira Saito Sensei.

With the Meiji era (1868-1912), the first half of the ‘Empire of Japan’, Japan moved from being an isolated feudal society, to the new paradigm of a modern, industrialised nation state influenced by Western scientific, technological, philosophical, political, legal, and aesthetic ideas. Wearing of hakama became rare in everyday life until it was only worn as formal attire for special occasions such as graduation, wedding ceremonies and as Shinto religious attire. It however remained the standard outfit used in almost all classical Japanese martial arts and in some modern Budo, such as Aikido [9].

Is there a benefit (or disbenefit) in wearing the hakama?

Firstly, the hakama is not, and was never meant to, hide the feet [7].

For O-Sensei, it seems that it was the wearing of the hakama that was important, not the garment itself. Hence the cut, the fit, probably had little relation to the practice of Aikido. In a social setting in Japan, there are formal ways to wear a hakama and the cut of the garment, where it sits on the body, and how it is tied, differs between men and women. Modern Aikido hakama represent a garment that has evolved to meet the needs of Aikido practitioners and they may be worn, tied and folded in a variety of ways.

Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros notes that Morihiro Saito Sensei would, for formal events, wear a hakama tied in a traditional way for a man, i.e., front straps tied first (and hidden under the garment), then the back straps brought to the front and tied in a crossed-bow format. However, when in Iwama, he used a different approach, one where the back-straps were tied first and then the longer, front straps, wrapped around the outside of the hakama, creating almost a girdle effect, a ‘country-style’ way of tying, one designed to support and strengthen the waist area. Aside from restricting the wearing of hakama to shodan and above grades, Lewis does not recount Saito Sensei ever giving any instruction or direction with regard to hakama wearing, it was merely just part of the proper training attire expected in Iwama. I asked Lewis how Saito Sensei preferred to fold his hakama when in Iwama, the response was “he didn’t, he would get changed at home and probably just hung the garment up”.



So does (or rather can) the wearing of a hakama offer advantages beyond simply showing respect to tradition? There are certainly disadvantages. Most, if not all, hakama wearers will have tales of trips and falls caused by feet getting caught in the garment, not to mention the rush of getting a hakama off, then back on again, during short training breaks where a trip to the bathroom is required. Purchasing a hakama is an additional financial burden and washing, and subsequently ironing a hakama is not a trivial task. Although the purpose of the hakama is not to hide the feet, instructors will often hitch-up their hakama so that students can more easily see their footwork. For an Aikido beginner in the west, unfamiliar with Japanese history, and trying to learn how to move in a coordinated way, it is hard to imagine any value to wearing a hakama.

Practitioners of Iaido [10] and Kyudo [11] train deep abdominal (hara) breathing and the development of the tanden, the front of the lower body, where the abdominal muscles can be tensed together. Within TAE, we explore the physical structure of the human body and of being balanced with a structure that is both centred and 'full' and where the weight is below (see TAE Journal, Edition 1: A Commentary on Basic Training - by Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros). This includes hara development and the use of the hakama to provide feedback on the activation of the hara. As such, within Aikido practice, the recommendation within TAE, for both men and women, is that the hakama should sit below the naval (for men this tends to be on the top of the 'hip bone', the iliac crest, and for women this is actually on and around the hips ('hipster-style') and not on the waist where it will be too high up and also press on the stomach).

The hakama is not just a symbolic link to the Samurai history of Japan, but is a tool that helps a student, at an appropriate time in their development, to integrate body movements and to use the fit and feel of the hakama as feedback to increase body awareness and subsequent learning. Within TAE clubs, hakama can be worn from 3rd kyu to support the development of whole body coordination / integration and in particular centre work. Prior to this, the student is focused on basic coordination of hands and feet, where the wearing of a hakama would offer no advantage, and possibly a number of disadvantages!

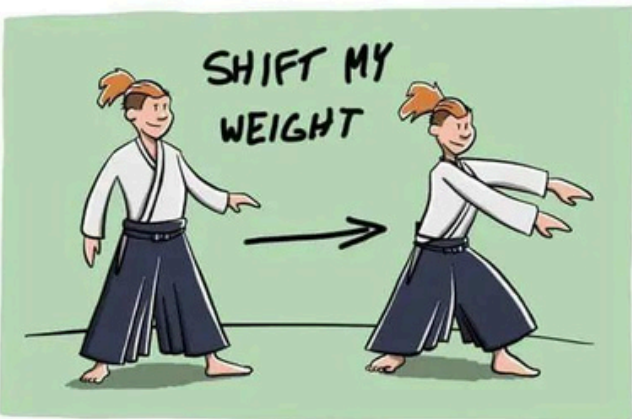
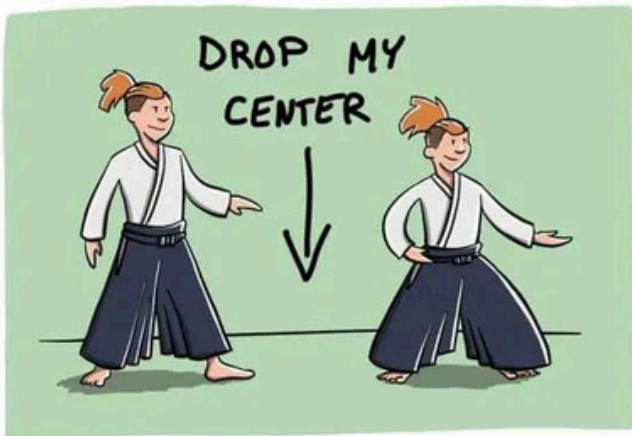
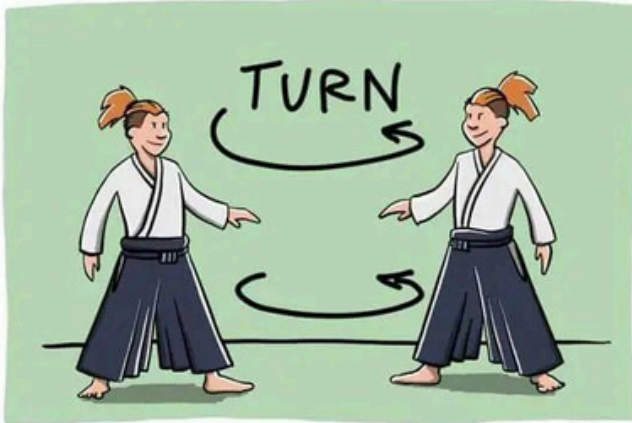
So yes, the wearing of a hakama can have a purpose, a benefit, beyond simple adherence to tradition, but where in TAE, individual clubs decide on whether to wear hakama from 3rd kyu, 1st kyu or shodan.

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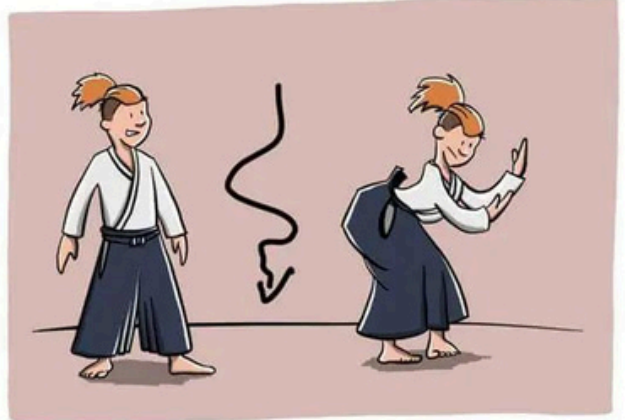
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PART I: AIKIDO

WHAT I THINK I'M DOING:



WHAT I'M ACTUALLY DOING:





**TORBEN
DYRBERG**
**50 YEARS
IN AIKIDO**

**A CONVERSATION WITH
LARS LANDBERG, KAK**

To celebrate Torben Bech Dyrberg co-dojo-cho of the Copenhagen Aikido Dojo's 50th Aikido anniversary, Torben and I sat down for a conversation about a long list of interesting topics. What follows is an edited version of that conversation.

Torben, how did it all start?

It all started with Batman, back in spring 1973! Where, the one who introduced Aikido to me, Torben Kriegsbaum, who was 15 at the time, had read in a Batman magazine that Batman punched somebody, and he said, "Take that, it's an Aikido punch!!" or something to that effect.

And he got very curious, and this was way before the Internet, so he went to the library, and finally he figured out that there was a martial art called Aikido. He was doing Jiu-Jitsu at the time, and then he signed up for a seminar with Tada-sensei in Rome. He trained a week in Rome, and then when he came back, he was a fully "certified" Aikido instructor! He started a very small Aikido team sometime in the autumn of 1973. I was doing Judo at the time in the same building, so I saw them, they were training in a class before I was training. I watched them sometimes, and then I began training. That was in April 1974.



And this was in Bent Jacobsen's dojo?*

Yes, this was in Bent Jacobsen's dojo 'Budokan', in central Copenhagen. In July 1974 we had a seminar with Tomita-sensei, who was a Yondan at the time.

And then you stayed with Bent Jacobsen for how many years?

Not that long, actually, from April 1974 until March 1975, which is when we got our own dojo, which is where we still are today, in Idrætshuset, so we moved in 1975. In the beginning, training with another club, but then quite fast, we set up our own club.

How did you find Idrætshuset, of all the places in Copenhagen, do you know?

Actually, I'm not sure. It could be because the other Torben lived in that area, and because there was already an Aikido club, a very, very small one there.

** Bent Jacobsen was one of the Budo pioneers in Denmark*

Who was the sensei there?

Nils Bødker, who died some years ago. He had been there for a while. So maybe that's also the connection.

You already mentioned that you trained Judo. Have you trained other martial arts?

No, not really. I tried Wing Tsun a couple of times, because there were people in the dojo who did that, and there were some interesting parallels. But no, Judo was basically what I did.

And this was in which club?

At the beginning, it was somebody, a Danish instructor, who was also in Budokan. He was at my school and a couple of years older than me. He started it there. That was once a week, and then we moved into a club close by and then finally to the Budokan.

Which grade did you have in Judo, if you can remember?

I was graded fourth kyu.

And then you switched at that point?

Yes, I switched to Aikido.

You go to a lot of training camps, and you have done that continuously over all the years. What are your thoughts about training camps and the value of them?

Well, there are many values. I mean, Aikido value, obviously, that you meet an interesting instructor, you train with people you usually don't train with. But it's also a social thing for people going from the club.

**Yes, there's this thing about this international Aikido family, isn't there?**

Yes, it feels like we go and visit friends all the time. And it's basically really nice.

I know people talk a lot about this beginner's mind idea, but I think that's one of the things that you, by going to all these camps, really try to focus on and try to learn, ask questions and challenge yourself.

Well, it's basically curiosity and being humble about it, being open to learning. Admittedly, after 50 years of training it might occasionally be somewhat frustrating that there are still basic issues, e.g. Kokyo Ho, which cause problems. In a way, you've got to make a choice: Do you want to face this lack of understanding and deal with it constructively, or do you try to ignore it because it is 'embarrassing'? If you want to improve and advance your understanding of the art, there really is no choice. And that would also be my advice to everybody else, whether they're new or have trained for years, that is, to have a beginner's mind.

I think the other thing, when I think about training camps and you, is that you teach a lot in the Copenhagen dojo, you also attend classes. But by going to training camps, you can be Aikido selfish and egoistic, and focus on your own training?

I think that's also an aspect. That's absolutely true, but the fact is also that you learn something when you teach.

Say more!

Well, perhaps things you weren't really aware of when you teach, you've got to explain it to others, or they would point out something or ask questions. And then you have to deal with it, and you have to think, and so, in that sense, I think teaching is also a way of learning. But it has to be combined with humbleness because otherwise, you have - we see it quite often, actually - people that see themselves as very capable Sensei's. But they are not taking advice or criticism from anybody, and they might not even take ukemi!

You already mentioned this beginner's mind idea. But if you were to advise a young person, for instance, your daughter, if she were to start Aikido, what kind of advice would you give her?

Train. Yes, train. Train. Train!

Basically, I think, being dedicated, to really give it a chance, see if this is something you want to do? Because after a while, if you do it the best you can and you realise, well, it's not really interesting, then that's it. But if you never really get into it, or you think it's a bit too weird, so you keep a distance, then you don't give yourself the opportunity to learn. So patience and dedicated training!

And what about training camps and young people who have just started? Should they go?

I think they should start right away. And there are good examples of that. I think it's rewarding. It's also courageous for a beginner to join a training camp with lots of qualified and experienced people.

And then, I know this is a classic silly question, but if you were to do it all again, what would you have done differently?

Hmm. I guess I would have been in Iwama more.



Iwama 1984. Saito Sensei explaining about a moped.



Iwama 1984. Saito Sensei at the far back. Hitohiro Sensei in his kitchen. Torben in the red t-shirt.

And maybe actually now that you mentioned Iwama, can you maybe say how often you went and when?

I went for two months in '84. We were some people from the Copenhagen Dojo going there. And in a way that was the best time. Because everything was new. So, it was just a complete cultural shock. Everything you could do wrong, you did wrong. There were not that many people at that time. So we were very much with Sensei. We often ate lunch with him and he took us on sightseeing trips. He even invited us to join him at a seedy bar somewhere in Iwama. It also depended on who was in the dojo. In the summer 1984 there were two Canadians in particular, I remember, and they were good company and very helpful, and very down to earth. I then went back several times over the following years.

Except for going to Iwama. You also, as we talked about in the beginning, went to a lot of training camps with Sensei outside of Japan. Can you mention a few of them?

Well, sure. There were our own camps at Fuglsø, which were incredible. Really a lot of people and the surroundings just couldn't be better. There was the beach, the woods - beautiful scenery. And being with Sensei for almost a week was great and partying every day made it a very good experience.



Fuglsø, Denmark, 1994. Summercamp

Also a good experience in terms of the Copenhagen group organising it and everybody in the seminar was extremely positive. From early morning, the weapons classes close to the beach, the rising sun. It was just amazing.

And then I can remember a YouTube video of you and Sensei in Cambridge maybe.

That's true. That was early summer '89.

And did you also go to Italy and Germany?

Yes and Switzerland, too.

What are your thoughts, Torben, on Aikido and politics?

It's kind of ambivalent, because usually when we talk about politics, it's always in a rather pejorative sense where politics is associated with conflicts and where status and grades, for instance, are more important than Aikido. Here, politics encroaches upon the art. But it's also important to stress that politics in a fundamental sense is that you act on behalf of a group. It could be individual clubs or the TAE. In that sense, politics is absolutely crucial and necessary. It's basically about how you run a club. For the leadership/instructors this is a huge responsibility, but it's also a responsibility of each member to be part of this 'political community'.

It's actually how groups of people interact, basically.

That's the basic thing. Because obviously when people interact, there might be different opinions as to what would be the best thing to do. Here, politics is concerned with how you deal with conflicts.

Why have you continued training Aikido for so many years?

I don't have a profound answer to that. I mean, it has always triggered my curiosity. Aikido is not only a beautiful martial art, which feels good to exercise. Above all, it's a way of cultivating an effortless power, and this is extremely challenging. How you carry yourself, being centred and hence in balance as opposed to tense up, how you blend with partners. This is also a health issue. For example, bokken/jo training before we met Saito sensei was very stiff, which was really bad for my back and shoulders.

I think for my own part as well, it's very much become a part of me.

I can see that clearly for you too. It's like part of who you are. You are your family. You are your job. But you're definitely also Aikido.

That's true. It's part of you and how you interact with other people in daily life.

Turning now back to Sensei. Do you have some memories you would like to share?

Well, basically, the memories of Japan. One of the pictures I recall is that - this goes back to '84 - he was always having chisai parties. Small parties. And that would be yakisoba, beer and whiskey. I tried to stick to the beer, but sometimes you got this lethal blend of beer, whiskey and tea!

I think of what you said before, just being with Sensei

Yes, maybe there's not a specific story, but just a feeling of having been with Sensei like in 84. Where you've seen him and he's seen you. I know he was not like a friend or a pal, but having the interaction with him on and off the mat and in the actual dojo. Actually, going back to the first question about how it all started, I'd like to mention that I saw a movie about Aikido made by Japanese television probably back in '73. I saw it in 74. Most of the film was shot on location in Iwama and the surrounding countryside. It made a great impression on me and aroused my curiosity about the art. 10 years later in Iwama, Sensei showed us this film, which had brought me into Aikido. That was a very special and touching moment.

Do you maybe have another story?

I have never seen Sensei in real action outside the dojo, but there was one incident when we were on a ferry back from the Fuglsø Summercamp. We were on the car deck slowly moving upstairs. I was behind Sensei and suddenly a man in a car opens the door right in front of Sensei, who without making any fuss, did a kokyu movement sending the guy right back into his car. He was completely taken aback and had probably no idea what had happened!

Effortless!

Completely effortless. Yes..

And, well, I didn't see his facial expression because I was behind him, but it was just the usual kind of bear kind of way of walking. It's not really martial art in that sense, but it was just, it was very much Sensei.

What's the most important thing you learned from Saito Sensei, would you say?

What I learned or perhaps what I found most intriguing was actually this effortlessness. And when he was demonstrating Morote-dori Kokyo Ho and wanted somebody big who could hold him tight. No matter how tight I held, his wrist was like a sponge. And then he would be completely relaxed to the point of being lazy. That was the feeling. And then he would just throw you. I think that was probably one of the most fascinating things I experienced from him.

What's your favourite technique?

Nikyō could be one.

I wouldn't be surprised by you saying that! Why that one particularly, why does it come to mind?

It's difficult and it's just really vicious, but I mean, it's also something which you can do again in kind of an effortless way. I mean, you can do that with all of them obviously, like Irimi nage as well.

Beautiful techniques both.

Yes.

So I know you cannot say that one of your children is more preferred than the other, but which weapon is the one you like the most - bokken or jo?

Hmm... it's difficult to say, but if I've got to choose, I might go for the jo. Both should feel like an extension of the body or as an integral part of body movements. This is a unique thing about the Aikido we're training – that the principles of body and weapons training are merged.

You have a lot of grades all the way from the very first six kyu up to your sixth Dan. Was there one of those grades that really stood out?

I think the third kyu stands out because in Denmark, we get the hakama at that point.

Obviously that was a major thing, because it marked a certain level and we were very few people who had it at the time. And then, of course, also shodan. Tomita sensei in Stockholm was the examiner.

And a very silly question: Which colour should a Hakama be?

Well, since white and black are no colours, there's only blue!

I like that answer and now we're ready for the last question. What's next?

Nothing will change, actually, nothing

Another 50 years!

Yes, as long as I can... I'm going to a couple of seminars with Lewis in the spring - Lancaster in March and Brügge in May, and there's also a seminar with Lasse Andersson and Mark Larson in Sweden in June.

Thank you very much Torben!

Copenhagen, 2012 Friendship seminar.

PART II: UKEMI

WHAT I THINK I'M DOING:

WHAT I'M ACTUALLY DOING:



A photograph of two men in Aikido gi practicing a technique in a dojo. The man on the left is bald and wearing a dark blue gi, while the man on the right has dark curly hair and is wearing a white gi. They are in a dynamic pose, with the man in white having his hands on the man in blue's arm and shoulder. The background shows a white wall with a framed picture and a potted plant.

**SHOSHIN:
VERY FIRST
IMPRESSIONS
IN AIKIDO**

WILLY OECHSLI

Willy stayed for 3 months as uchideshi with Nik Bärtsch and Andrea Pfisterer in Zurich, Switzerland, getting piano lessons and joining music workshops with Nik and joining the regular trainings at Kokoro Dojo Zurich with Andrea and Hanspi Dietz.

On my first day in Aikido I was late, so I saw everyone in their gis kneeling for the beginning. And I thought, "OK, cool, there's a ceremony. It's serious." I was entering a space of training and focus and attention, and also of traditions or customs—there are certain rules about it that you have to be keen on, and I didn't know any of them, so immediately I had to clear my head and get ready to be very open and very attentive. "Take this seriously," was the energy I got. Dressing in a gi felt good, energetically neutral. I didn't know how to tie the belt knot for the next five times. But it was OK.

The first hour we worked with the bokken. I could feel this as a big blunt object. I'm doing a sort of whacking motion, so I need to be careful and aware of my surroundings. Also it's a weight. So I realized I have to carry this in my system somehow. I can't just, sort of twiddle it around. How do I incorporate this big thing? And then how do I move it in a way that's not tiring, or too loose. It added to the focus—because I could really whack someone if I was not careful, or whack my own knee.

Most of the instructions I couldn't understand at first, so I was relying more on watching. I think letting the gravity pull the bokken down, not striking exactly, but really more just guiding the weight downwards and then catching it at the bottom was helpful. At one point the instruction was given that the right hand is not really holding the bokken, it's more guiding it. Which actually is like holding a drumstick: the fulcrum between your two fingers holds it and the rest of the fingers are just kind of there to guide. So that made sense to me. Also if only one hand is holding it and the other hand is just guiding, then the power is probably not coming from the arm. Or at least you're not gonna be muscling it.

I liked a lot that in Aikido we train barefoot, because I do a lot of barefoot walking and running. I feel much more balanced and in relation to my whole system when my bare feet are on the ground. I can feel where my weight is, where my joints are, which part of my body is carrying which other parts.

In the second class, Taijutsu, we had to grip our partner's wrist and I was holding it very lightly. Later, we actually had to push them and they had to take a fall. But I was touching the shoulder, not even, no power at all. I didn't want to hurt anybody. I can be timid in general about asserting action. So it was hard for me to push someone. Being pushed was better; I quickly noticed I had trouble pushing my partner but she didn't have trouble pushing me—I felt her power and thought, "woah." It was maybe a bit frustrating to be timid in my own force and then, WOMP, lying on the floor after the first few times. I clearly wasn't fully engaged, but the gears started turning with the feeling "I need power in my actions." My first reaction was shock. I've never been in a fight in school or anything and I'm not used to being pushed or hitting the ground. So I was like, "whoa, this is new."

I still have trouble confidently using my power when attacking in Taijutsu. I think that's also because I'm not super comfortable with the forms yet. But it now feels much better to be engaged—it feels empowering. I feel more confident about asserting myself that I have a body, an energy, it can move, it can be translated; I don't have to tiptoe around glass all the time. Settledness and trust that this is what I'm doing right now and that's okay. If it really goes wrong—okay, we'll figure it out.

That first class we were training in fours, attacking and blending and performing the technique when appropriate. As uke, I had to watch for the cue that the nage was ready to do the technique and then I had to get my feet right and everything... So I was really trying to watch and focus. And there's also all this motion happening, and some of us were not very clear with our movements until the last second, so there was a lot to process. As nage I had to make a decision of when to do the technique and I'm not totally sure how to do it. So there was a bit of stress there of—okay now what? It was a ramp up from one-on-one partner work.

I think one of the cool things about Aikido is, a lot of the time I don't know what's going on. And that's fine. I just have to jump in, really pay attention, and try to get as much each time as I can. So in a way, that challenge is good. It really mobilizes my attention. There's no choice. I can't be thinking about what I had for dinner or what I'm gonna do later, or did my friend text me back? Because then I'll miss it. I have to clear my mental space and be there. And not just be there, but also watch the right things—what are the feet doing? Where does the center move? Also, it's not enough just to see it. I have to try to do it without doing it—"shadow it" in my own system to leave a little imprint that I can follow later. Because otherwise I'm trying to remember what I saw and that doesn't really work. There are a lot of steps for acquiring the information, processing it, notating which information is important, getting rid of the rest, then trying to reproduce it somehow in the system so that there's just a little ghost of a template to follow later.

And then, if all that goes well and you have that template, then when you start going through the movement, it starts to get filled in, you build on it. But if you don't get that, then you really have to learn it from scratch and that's a mess. And your partners, poor partners, waiting here in this position and waiting there...

We ended the first class with a super short demo, where all the others were watching. That was stressful! It took me right back to grade school actually, because it was something I didn't know. Aikido is brand new to me. And in elementary school most things are totally new to you for the first several years. So getting up in front of the class is a really weird experience and it's totally unknown, and you have all these people you don't know looking at you and you're about to show them something that you don't really know yourself, and you're thinking, "how am I supposed to say this?" Because you're eight years old or something. So it was this kind of shock and awkwardness. But I got through it, with radical acceptance. I told myself that this was weird and scary, but that I just had to get through it. Maybe I do it totally wrong and it looks silly and that's fine, then that's gonna be the way that I get through. I kind of turned off the inner monologue.

I think that is part of what's really cool about Aikido to me: you fall a lot and you get things wrong a lot and your pride, your ego has no place here. You're here to learn skills and to be grounded in yourself, aware, present for yourself and your partner and everyone else. It's not useful to spend any time thinking about "did I look cool when I did this technique?" So I guess in that moment there, I kind of shut off the sensor and fumbled through.



And then it was done. We sat down and I remember that feeling of relief. We all did it, we all had to get through this. Maybe it was a little scarier for me as I never practiced before, but still. We've all gone through the same rite of passage to get to the end of the session and here we are. That was a really good feeling. I think the joint clapping at the end of the demo was good because we're all sharing in this release together. "We did it!"

Putting on my street clothes after training and walking outside, immediately I carried with me the body awareness that I had in the session and the awareness of my weight, my center. I'm free to just move. I felt more dynamic, more in control of where I'm moving, where I am, how I'm moving. That was a cool impression right away, just how I felt different walking out. And I thought, "Wow, there's so much to work on here, a brand new skill tree opening up, with all these different paths I can go down and learn and improve. I had the impression that it could be very empowering to me, as far as asserting my energy, my self...a little more trusting in that I can engage with the world and put power into it and take force from it and be okay. I can keep moving, I can handle this. The seed had been planted, that this could lead me down a path of self-assertion and confidence, being in relationship with my own weight and movement and body.

And also connected with other people. I've always been really sensitive to all kinds of stimuli, but especially other people can be a lot for me; there's facial expressions, there's emotions, there's needs, desires, there's physical presence, social expectations ... A lot of stimulation going on in any kind of interaction. As a young person, I was overwhelmed by all of this information, and my response grew to be tense, tight, trying to keep myself protected and a little distanced, even in conversations.

In this physical practice of Aikido, you have to hold people's bodies in intense ways. So if I'm gonna do Aikido, I have to bite the bullet and just do it. That already has helped me a lot, feeling that I have boundaries on my body and energy. Already, from the practice, I don't feel invaded if I have to hold someone or if they have to push me down or something. I can trust my own skin as it keeps me contained. But also the transfer of power from one body to another....You have to give energy with power, and you have to take it. Back and forth between bodies. Physicality is an undeniable form of connection. So through these repetitive actions, getting used to it, and learning that I can trust myself and my wholeness, despite my anxiety....I'm learning to know myself. I know where my weight is, I know what to



do when someone comes at me. Aikido is really exciting for me because the more I practice, the more I will develop in this direction.

As uke I try to be ready, I try to be light in my body, to be springy and ready to contort in some weird way. Not bearing a lot of weight in any one place because I don't know how I'm about to get moved. I think it's important to be light so that when my center of balance starts changing or when my body starts hanging in some weird way, I'm able to figure out quickly where the bound is, where I have to be in order to not get hurt. In that way, it's actually the same attentiveness that you would have watching a demo, except it's not so much visual as it is proprioceptive. I have to sort of watch my space and realize quickly, if my arm is doing this twisting move, my shoulders better follow because otherwise something will be damaged.

I have to try to be aware and sensitive to any information coming from any part of my body that tells me to react. I have to be ready for that signal because then I can move, I can change. I can be noodly like a sea anemone, I can move however is needed. Especially because I trust that the sempai is doing something that they know works—they're not going to break my bones or anything. So if I trust what they're doing, then I can also trust whatever my body's telling me. If my partner is twisting my hand over, then that's where my body begins and everything else comes out of there. If I'm embodied in that way, then naturally my whole body wants to follow the twist.

Initially the question of, "does this really work?" crossed my mind when we had to set up the techniques very intentionally (my right leg is forward, your leg matches on the other side, you lunge from the left at my outstretched hand) we have to get the setup right in order for the move to work.

Eventually I realized, you train every which way. And the more you train every configuration, the more you must be naturally ready without thinking or planning. I imagine your body just goes to it. But initially I did wonder if the moves were actually applicable.

The main thing I thought is, "this martial art has been around for quite some time, and a lot of people are practicing it. And in fact, I'm in a dojo full of people who know much more about this than I do." So I had some doubts, but it was more of a little question mark in my mind. The more I practiced and saw how people would move more fluidly and quickly, especially when the senseis do a demo and it happens naturally, then I think I started to get the sense that I'm training my awareness and ability to move and react, so of course it's going to translate to the 'wild'.



I like the setup, that in Aikido everybody trains with everybody. I'm pretty much always being taught, because I'm a beginner and often I'm paired with advanced people. On the other hand, sometimes when I'm paired with a beginner, it's a little more experimental. I may be able to learn through my own choices a little more, which is cool. I'm able to try something and see that I wasn't quite right, but my partner isn't really sure either. So then I have to think, "what can I change?" And when I change it, my body really remembers that, especially if it works.

Stiffness though can be a challenge to work with. Which is not always a bad thing. Sometimes when I'm partnered with a stiff person, I have to be careful as the Uke. I must really focus on where my weight is and what signals my body is sending, because a stiff partner may not react to tension in my body sensitively enough to protect me from injury. It requires more of my attention to stay safe. Usually I'm not that worried that I'm going to get hurt, but I just know it is necessary to focus more. So, for the most part, I think it's cool to be partnered indiscriminately, because I get a variety of experiences.

The role of uke is more chilled, there's less pressure but I prefer the role of nage. If it's a move I can actually start to get, that I can get tangibly better at each time, then I prefer being the nage. If it's kind of beyond me, and I have to keep struggling and struggling with a complex movement that isn't sticking, then I guess I prefer to be the uke.

Weapons training is my favorite. There's a larger degree of separation, less weird contortions...so I guess it feels safer. It's also nice to wield a weight.

The other day at the bus stop after Aikido, I was listening to In a Sentimental Mood by Duke Ellington, performed with John Coltrane. I was listening to it and all of the sudden realized...music and Aikido have very much in common. There's this melody that the saxophone does. And underneath it are these repetitive piano chords; they dance a

bit, and then they land, in the same place each time. The song is slow and deliberate, and I felt it: each strong-pulse note from the saxophone is a step, like walking along a line in the mats, landing each time in hanmi. The weak-pulse notes are the movement in between the steps, pulling your other leg forward, swaying your upper body. The sound moves its weight, balanced by the center, which is kind of the beat, but also the key signature, depending on your focus. In this moment of insight, I experienced a physical feeling of oneness between movement and music. Life is music, if you're doing it right. And in music, you have a sense of your center; every movement you do from there comes into or out of a state of balance, which you can control. This tension and release is what makes everything interesting, gives our story direction. When one moves with intention from their center, their sound resonates deeply. Just as in Aikido.

I did come to Zurich partly under the pretense of music, but also to learn about presence and listening, not just in the aural sense, but also in the way of harmonizing my physical system with my awareness; generally, calibrating my immersive experience of life. So, in a way, I came here for Aikido as much as for piano, although I didn't know how that would work initially because I didn't know what Aikido really was. But I trusted that it was going to work, and it has. I think my intentions with music and awareness are the same. No matter what I'm doing, I want to be present and engaged in order to experience fully. In order to participate in an exchange of energies, or of content or information or whatever, I have to be there. And that's what I'm working on in my life. So, in Aikido and in music you have to be there in the moment. You have to be listening, watching, you have to be ready and you have to be relaxed.

YUDANSHA AWARDS 2023

The annual recap of yudansha awards in the previous year.



MARC RIJNVELD, 1ST DAN

What I learned from my grading:

An extension of my profession and a way to further develop my conflict-resolution awareness.



ROY VRIJS, 1ST DAN

What I learned from my grading:

Having lots of fun while developing as an Aikidoka with my fellow students at the dojo and during seminars.



SHOHREH SHAHRZAD, 1ST DAN

What I learned from my grading:

Aikido is a way for me to go through all my weaknesses and be able to look at them and try to improve them. The relationship between Nage and Uke is a very good example of how Aikido can help us to find harmony between ourselves and others in our daily lives.



BAS CEULEMAN, 1ST DAN

What I learned from my grading:

It doesn't matter how intense the training is, I always finish more relaxed than I started.



BERNIE GITMANS, 1ST DAN

What I learned from my grading:

Aikido can bring people together, no matter your gender, background, race, religion, sexual orientation or age.



HAMID JAFARY, 1ST DAN

What I learned from my grading:

Aikido is a journey of harmony and personal growth, both on and off the mat. It's a path of continual growth and understanding.



DANIEL AYALA LORENZO, 2ND DAN

What I learned from my grading:

That moment when you see those familiar and friendly faces that you could even consider friends. The hand shakes, the hugs, the chats that happen before the first session of training.



FRODO SCHERING, 2ND DAN

What I learned from my grading:

The challenge of staying open, present and relaxed while moving under pressure.



MIGUEL OBSTRUP, 2ND DAN

What I learned from my grading:

Practicing techniques with various people at different levels gives me the opportunity to meet other people in my daily life with grace and acknowledgement for who they are by asking myself: Who am I in this relationship?



PETER RASMUSSEN, 2ND DAN

What I learned from my grading:

In every training on or off the mat, there is an insight to gain, when I am in a curious and open state of mind.



KEITH SHAW, 2ND DAN

What I learned from my grading:

Aikido training has improved both my mental and physical well being and introduced me to many fantastic and inspirational people.



INIGO GARATE, 3RD DAN

What I learned from my grading:

Well-being and friendship.



MARTIJN BURGMAN, 3RD DAN

What I learned from my grading:

The more I practice aikido, the more I get to connect with partners; the more I connect, the lighter my Aikido gets.



KASPER HOEJBY NIELSEN, 3RD DAN

What I learned from my grading:

In Aikido I love to explore the connection between us - in the dojo, but also outside!



FILIP SCHUERBEKE, 4TH DAN

What I learned from my grading:

What attracts me the most is the path to seeking perfection in a technique, knowing that perfection is elusive. Bearing in mind that you have to work hard every training to take that small step forward. Striving for something intangible is the most beautiful thing there is.



RICHARD VAN BERKUM, 5TH DAN

What I learned from my grading:

The depth of Aikido never ends, that's why it's so much fun to explore it.



**DOJO PORTRAIT:
TAKEMUSU AIKI
DOJO MAGDEBURG**

**CHRISTIANE
LAEHNEMANN**

My own Aikido background and the development of our dojo:

In 1991, I started Aikido in the Aiki Dojo Malsheim (see TAE Journal #5, April 2021) which already practised Takemusu Aikido at that time. My teacher was Corvin Zahn, and his teacher, Henning Inselmann came for monthly training. After one year of Aikido I had my first one-week Aikido seminar and after one and a half years I attended my first seminar with Morihiro Saito Sensei. For the next ten years I didn't miss any Aikido seminar Saito Sensei taught in Germany.

After three years of Aikido in Malsheim my family moved to Magdeburg due to my husband's job. Of course I wanted to continue Aikido, but unfortunately there was no Aikido group in Magdeburg at that time (four years after the German reunification). So I decided to start my own group even though I was only third kyu (today I myself am astonished about my own courage!?) In 1995, I offered an Aikido course in the "Volkshochschule", an institution for adult education. The first person I met in front of the gym was a big guy who kind of scared me when I saw him, but he asked me very friendly, almost shyly, whether I had anything to do with the Aikido class. He had practised Karate but was more interested in Aikido.

Then I got the list of participants and saw that there was only one woman among the 17 participants. So I was very nervous when the class started. But after the first one and a half hours of teaching I realised that there is a difference between three years of Aikido and no experience at all. The "big guy", Stephan, turned out to be my most interested student. He found a dojo in a Judo club for us after we had started in a school gym without proper tatami. Now he is my co-dojo-cho! In the dojo we started with a group of 6-8 students, every half year we offered another "Volkshochschul" course for 8-12 participants and if we were lucky one or two of them stayed. In our best times we had 15-20 Aikidoka in the group who were regularly practising. But we also had times with very few students.



I wouldn't have succeeded in getting the dojo started without the help of Dagmar Lackinger and Christian Holst who were living in Berlin (150 km from Magdeburg) at that time and offered to support us. They came at least once a month for a longer training session and they connected me with their teacher Edmund Kern, 5th Dan Aikido at that time, advancing to 6th Dan soon after. Edmund Sensei had been a student of Morihiro Saito Sensei since 1984 and visited Iwama every year for a few weeks. Edmund taught lots of seminars and we tried to attend as many of them as possible.

When Dagmar and Christian moved from Berlin to Darmstadt they were too far away to come to Magdeburg for just an evening class. So we started to invite them for weekend seminars instead. They came two or three times a year and we also went to Darmstadt for weekend intensives with them. Dagmar and Christian prepared me for all my further examinations. When I got my Shodan in 2002 it was a great improvement for our dojo to have a black belt as dojo-cho!

After Saito Sensei passed away, Edmund Sensei joined the IMAF (International Martial Arts Federation) which was our international association for the next few years. Here he was awarded 7th and 8th Dan and the titles of Renshi and Kyoshi. In 2015, I had the chance to travel to Japan with Edmund and a group of Aikidoka for two weeks in cherry blossom time which was a great experience. We practiced Aikido in Kanazawa and got insights into Japanese culture and traditions in Kyoto. Edmund Sensei continued coming to Magdeburg two or three times a year and gave his last seminar in Magdeburg in September 2017, two months before he died at the age of 84. Edmund Sensei was a very good teacher with an exceptional personality. In his seminars he could integrate beginners and challenge advanced students at the same time. His insights, not only in Aikido but also in Japanese traditions, and the stories he included in his teaching, fascinated everybody.

As important for us was, and continues to be, the support of Dagmar and Christian who still come regularly and help us to develop our Aikido. They celebrated several anniversaries of our dojo with us and we became friends independent of Aikido. For many years they administered the kyu-graduations in our dojo and they prepared Stephan and me for our 3rd





Dan graduation in the TAVD (Takemusu Aikido Verband Deutschland) which we had joined for some years. Together with Dagmar and Christian we also attended seminars of Ulf Evenas, but finally they made contact with Lewis Sensei and organized the TAE membership for our dojo and we are very glad about that!

So we joined TAE just in the beginning of COVID and we were glad to have the TAE connection for dojo-cho meetings and online seminars in those difficult times. And now we enjoy visiting seminars with Lewis and other TAE teachers.

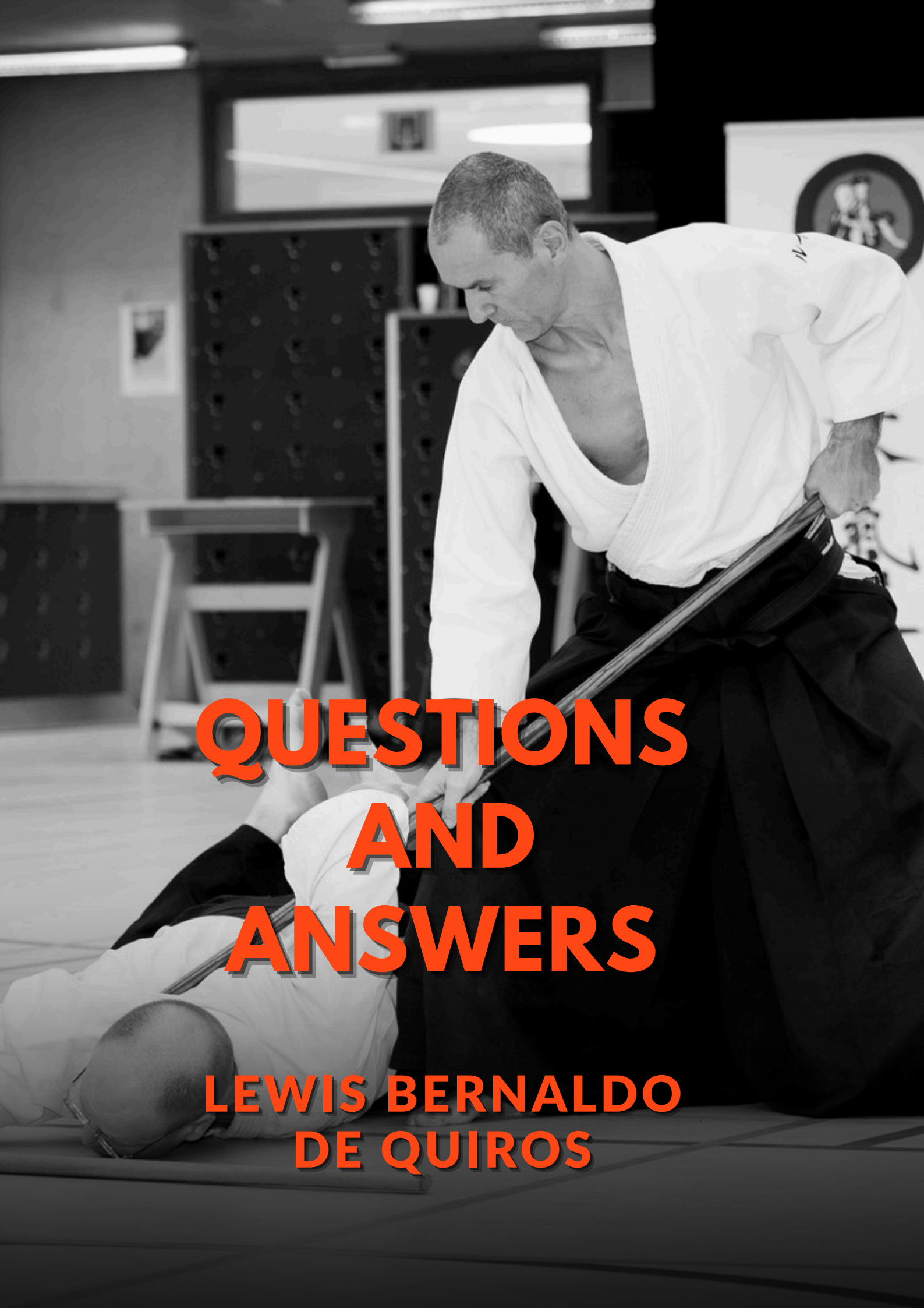


Due to COVID we lost some members and are a very small group of 9 active Aikidoka at the moment. So it was a great event for us to host our first International Aikido Seminar with Lewis in October 2023 and we enjoyed it very much. It was the first time that the Judo department we belong to as Aikido group acknowledged us by putting a report on their website:

<https://www.judo-fsv1895.de/internationaler-aikido-lehrgang-in-magdeburg/>

After being considered guests in the department for 27 years they finally accepted us as members!?!





**QUESTIONS
AND
ANSWERS**

**LEWIS BERNALDO
DE QUIROS**

Should we introduce henka and kaeshi waza at an earlier stage in the syllabus? I.e. 1st kyu. It appears that there is little study of this before nidan and sandan. Why is this?

Henka and kaeshi waza are advanced practices in that they require a well developed ability to blend with our partners. When we begin our practice 'blending' seems to be primarily about the point of contact (handwork) between partners, but the smoothness and timing of advanced blending depends on ordered bodywork and a refined sense of distance and timing (maai). This is a delicate process of reeducation and training and is what is done through our system up to sandan / yondan levels. In my experience introducing these levels of technique too early are counterproductive as they are not so much about learning sets of techniques as developing the 'following -joining -leading' subtleties of the relational encounter where the transitions become seamless and hence undetected by our partners. That is the core of these levels. Without that quality, Henka waza easily becomes forcing a change and Kaeshi waza becomes resistance-counter.

Why do we not practice kicks more, and techniques of defending these? What about headbutts, knees and elbow strikes? Obviously, these are not very 'aiki'. Are we ill-prepared if someone attacks with these in a violent encounter?

This is related to strikes in general as Aikidoka. In our system we begin with static grabs (kihon) moving onto dynamic grabs (ki no nagare) and from there onto strikes (shomen yokomen tsuki). But of course kicks elbow strikes and even head-butts can be addressed. I think the problem is twofold. Aikidoka in general do not train striking ability sufficiently in my opinion. We need good attacks to train and perfect our techniques under real pressure and of course atemi are part of the techniques and are emphasised later at advanced levels. We should train strikes the same way we train suburi with weapons. The second issue is - at yudansha levels - is to give ourselves permission to explore beyond the basic training system we have inherited and in which the atemi you mention are not emphasised. There is nothing to stop us exploring these areas.

© Glenn Feldman

What do you think Saito Sensei would be focused on now if he were still alive, and didn't have to teach at many seminars? I.e. would he be writing books, structuring the tanken syllabus, something else?

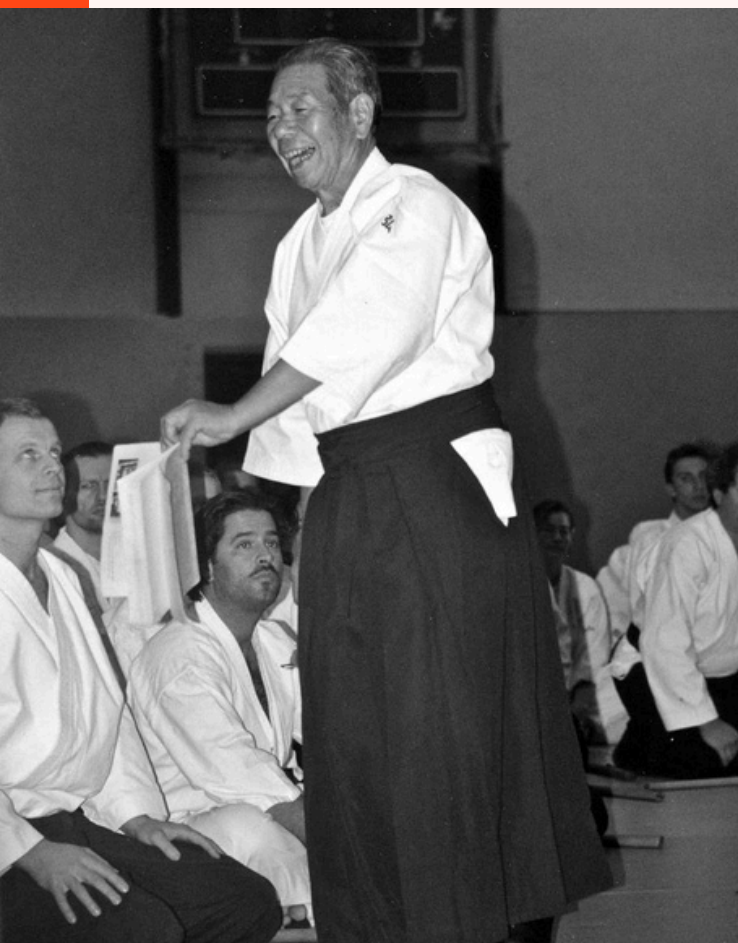
My impression of Sensei is that he had a real passion for transmitting the founders Aikido so I think he would still be busy with that in one way or another - as he was in the many years I knew him. If he had lived longer I think he would have continued teaching seminars but also would have perhaps focused more on his seniors. He once commented that Iwama was a 'University for instructors'. I told Sensei six months before I left that I would be returning to Europe. Once Sensei realised this he regularly (weekly) would be giving me advice and pointers on how to teach. So transmission of the system was very much uppermost in his mind and I think that would have only increased had he lived longer.

Should we train highfalls more? It has been suggested that the development of ukemi should be more central to grading, particularly in kyu grades i.e., Mae/ushiro ukemi progressed to asymmetrical rolls, to highfalls from various techniques?

I think the ability to take highfalls is important - but not that important. Sensei once commented that if your partner was able to take a high fall he was able to counter your technique. In regular training in Iwama high falls were not so emphasised. For example shiho nage was a direct tight spiral to the ground. No highfall. Uke takes a high fall from this technique if I allow it or change the angle on the elbow. The same goes for irimi nage. However in demonstrations these days we see a predominance of high fall ukemi to the extent that we even called this 'embu ukemi' (demonstration ukemi) when in Iwama. Frankly most of it is unrealistic and for show which I am not in favour of. When I first saw a Daitu Ryu JiuJitsu demonstration in Japan I saw a type of ukemi that was very functional and simple. As Sensei also emphasised, the job of uke is to take care of himself with his ukemi and not facilitate the technique for Nage. The techniques were compressive and functional and ukes had to de-form and compress under the pressure and direction of the technique to maintain their physical integrity. This was very much the kind of ukemi we trained regularly and which I took from Sensei in regular classes. Having said that, certain techniques such as Koshi Nage and various Kokyu Nage demand the ability to take a high fall and distribute the force of the impact over a curved area through the body into the ground. So everything has its place.

What is your favourite technique, and why?

I think all the techniques of Aikido are beautiful so no particular favourite. However techniques explore different ranges of motion and different entry points to Uke's attack so on some days I may walk into the Dojo feeling that I 'need' a particular technique to break up or unwind some tension or block in the body. Then on that day, that particular technique could be said to be my favourite.





As teachers, when watching students, should we let people get things wrong for a while or step in quickly and address the issue?

It's about direction. If they are 'getting it wrong' but moving in the right direction then I leave students alone. Getting it 'wrong' is feedback and making adjustments and improving is the learning process. In that sense there is not right and wrong but just learning and these judgemental terms are not so useful. However if a student is 'moving in the wrong direction' or stuck in a cul de sac (for too long and does not seem to realise where he or she is) I will generally step in and correct or reorient them. One of the jobs of a teacher is to save the student time. Otherwise I am conservative on intervention and generally demonstrate and allow the students to do their own work.

How do we teach extension, grounding, kokyu to beginners?

I do it in two ways. First I demonstrate and have students feel directly what is happening when I am grounded and extended or producing power through 'kokyu' - and when not. This gives them a feeling distinction to work with. The other is to draw their attention to these principles as being evident in other areas and activities of life: the rootedness of a great tree, the extension of a cat as it jumps onto a table top, the 'weight underneath' in a two year old baby sitting on the ground, the focus of a surgeon just before he makes the first incision with a scalpel, the 'stillness in motion' of the late and great Tetsuzan Kuroda in that endless moment before drawing the sword...The world is full of wonder when we have the eyes to see it.

If you have any questions for Lewis, or in regards to the articles in this issue - submit your question via our mailbox:

[CLICK HERE](#)

BOOK REVIEW

Aikido Journal Pre- and Post-war Era Aikido Pioneers

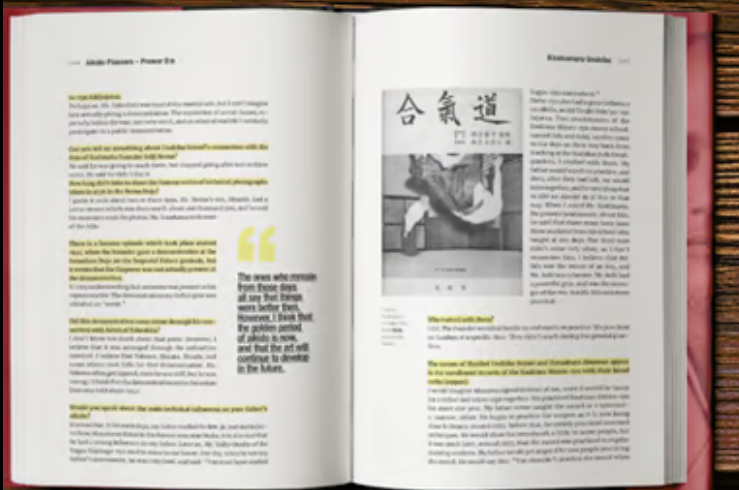
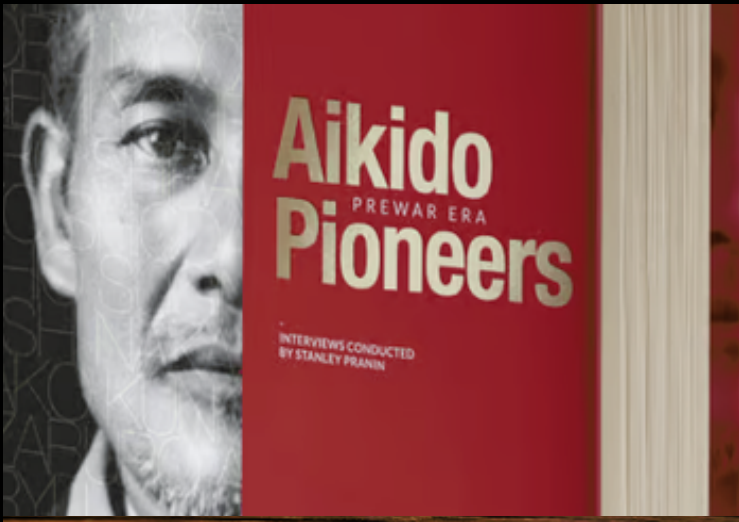
Reviewed by Adrian Punt

This is a book review, or rather a review of two books in a set, the Aikido Journal pre- and post-war era Aikido pioneers. They are beautiful books, but they are just books. What is more important is the man who was behind them, Stanley Pranin (1945 – 2017), his history and how the books came to be.

Stanley was an American Aikidoka. He began practicing Yoshinkan Aikido in California in 1962 and a year later joined an Aikikai club following the Koichi Tohei-led curriculum of the Aikikai (Tohei Sensei was, at this point, the Aikikai Chief Instructor). Stanley passed his 1st Dan (in August 1965) and 2nd Dan (in 1967) under Tohei Sensei when Tohei was visiting the US. After receiving a master's degree from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1968, Stanley began doctoral studies at the University of California, Berkeley where he contributed to teaching at the university's Aikido Club.

Stanley visited Japan for the first time in June 1969 and spent the summer practicing at the Aikikai Hombu dojo in Tokyo. On his return to the US, he was inducted into the US Army in October 1969 and stationed in Eritrea (then part of Ethiopia) where he worked as a translator. In 1972 he was discharged from the army and returned to California.

At some point in the early 1970s, the idea of an Aikido newsletter came to him. This became a reality with the publication of Volume 1, Number 1 of the 'Aiki News' in April 1974, the timing of which was probably set to fit with the Second Doshu,



Kisshomaru Ueshiba's tour of the US that same month. That first edition set out its purpose to:

1. "Disseminate among non-Japanese readers data concerning the life of Morihei Ueshiba and the circumstances surrounding the birth and development of Aikido.
2. Provide a format for thoughtful exploration of the philosophical implications of Ueshiba Sensei's Aikido.
3. Announce and record events of interest and importance to students of Aikido worldwide.
4. Provide a complete and updated listing of dojos and Aikido instructors in good standing in the US and as many other countries as possible."

One-year subscription rates were \$5 for the US and Canada and \$7 for countries outside of North America. That first edition of the Aiki News was brief, it was 7-pages. It had some introduction, schedule of the Doshu's visit, and the first of 17-articles that Stanley wrote about the life of the Founder.

Volume 1, number 2 was published the following month, and again each month after. Over time the newsletter became longer. Stanley sought and interviewed anyone he could and diligently published their words.

Stanley moved to Japan in August 1977, studying Aikido under Morihiro Saito Sensei in Iwama. About a year later, the newsletter became the 'Aiki News International'. The years went by with no gap in the journal publication, nor Stanley's training, and in 1983 he was promoted to 5th Dan by Morihiro Saito Sensei.

In 1994, Vol. 21, no. 3, the 'Aiki News International' became the 'Aikido Journal', the magazine of "Aikido and the Japanese Martial Arts", expanding its remit to encompass Daitoryu Aiki Jujutsu, Ken Jutsu, Iaido. Over the years, the journal evolved, becoming bigger, bolder, more colourful and more diverse. Throughout, Stanley remained focused on collecting and publishing interviews from all he could, whilst also ensuring that the modern Aikido world didn't forget the contribution of the likes of Tohei Sensei and Saito Sensei.

In 2000, the Aikido Journal stopped creating printed magazines, and after 4,000-plus pages of print, became a digital only platform.

On March 7, 2017, aged a little less than 72, Stanley sadly died of advanced stomach cancer.

In December 2020, the Aikido Journal announced the intention to publish 'Aikido Pioneers of the Prewar Era', in part a rework of an earlier soft backed book by Stanley, now expanded and presented as a numbered, limited edition large format hardback 'coffee table' style book. The book includes an impressive array of interviews that Stanley conducted with pre-war students of the Founder, including Kenji Tomiki, Gozo Shioda, Koichi Tohei, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, and many others.

In autumn 2022, based on the success of the prewar era volume, the Aikido Journal announced the intention to publish a postwar era companion, again a limited-edition large format hardback 'coffee table' style book. The book contains many more interviews, that Stanley conducted with post-war students of the Founder, including Kazuo Chiba, Yasuo Kobayashi, Shoji Nishio, Morihiro Saito, Seichi Sugano, Nobuyoshi Tamura, Moriteru Ueshiba, and Yoshimitsu Yamada to name a few.

The books aim to capture, preserve, and make available, the words of so many deshi of O-Sensei. They are a tribute to Stanley and his work of decades, and whether hard copy or digital, they provide key insight into thoughts and memories of those that trained directly with O-Sensei. I am glad that I invested in them, and the two copies in their presentation cases take pride-of-place on my bookshelf. For those that didn't manage to get a copy, they are also available in digital format at a much more modest price!

[CLICK HERE](#)

SEMINAR SCHEDULE 2024

11-12 MAY

Dorset, UK
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
 Contact Mark:
contact@wellspringsaikido.co.uk

24-26 MAY

Brugges, Belgium
TAE Yudansha seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
 Contact Filip:
info@irad.be

25-26 MAY

Bath, UK
50 Years in Aikido with Bjorn Saw
 Contact Bjorn:
aikidoalive@yahoo.co.uk

1-2 JUNE

Azkoitia, Euskadi
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
 Contact Iñigo:
yogarate@hotmail.com

15-16 JUNE

Kokoro Dojo, Zurich, CH
Seminar on Functional Training and Power Release, with Marko Marffy, 6th Dan Karate Do
 Contact: info@kokorodojo.ch

21-23 JUNE

Cumbria, UK
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
 Contact Adrian:
adrian@radecol.co.uk

29-30 JUNE

Weesp, NL
Seminar with Paul Keessen & Arjan den Haan
 Contact: Paul:
paul.keessen@gmail.com



15-20 JULY**Summer Camp, Urnäsch, CH****FULL****With Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**

Contact: See web-page

27-28 JULY**Wells, UK****Seminar with Bjorn Saw**

Contact Bjorn:

aikidoalive@yahoo.co.uk**3-4 AUGUST****Dorset, UK****Seminar with Andrea Pfisterer**

Contact Mark:

contact@wellspringsaikido.co.uk**23-25 AUGUST****Malmsheim, Germany****Seminar with Lars Landberg**

Contact Barbara:

coyote.blue@gmx.net**2-9 SEPTEMBER****Kokoro Dojo, Zurich, CH****Uchi-Deshi-Week****More details to follow**Contact: info@kokorodojo.ch**7-8 SEPTEMBER****Kokoro Dojo, Zurich, CH****Seminar with Moa Lindell and****Thalea Koithan**Contact: info@kokorodojo.ch**7-8 SEPTEMBER****Wolverhampton, UK****Seminar with Thomas Nord**

Contact Brendon:

info@takemusuaikidomidlands.com**7-8 SEPTEMBER****7-8: Zutphen, The Netherlands****Seminar with Richard Van Berkum, Thomas Shoenherr and Filip Schuerbeke**Contact Filip: info@irad.be

14-15 SEPTEMBER**Motril, Spain****Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**Contact: lewisbdeq@gmail.com**21-22 SEPTEMBER****21-22: Copenhagen, Denmark
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**

Contact Lars:

lars@aikido-copenhagen.dk**27-29 SEPTEMBER****Norfolk, UK****Seminar with Michael Ormerod**

Contact Sarina:

chetvalleyaikido@gmail.com**11-13 OCTOBER****Magdeburg, Germany****Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**

Contact:

christiane@laehnemann.de**12-13 OCTOBER****Wells, UK****Seminar with Bjorn Saw**

Contact: Bjorn:

aikidoalive@yahoo.co.uk**2-3 NOVEMBER****The Netherlands****Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**

Contact Paul:

paul.keessen@gmail.com**16-17 NOVEMBER****Dorset, UK****Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**

Contact Mark:

contact@wellspringsaikido.co.uk**16-17 NOVEMBER****16-17: Lund, Sweden****Seminar with Paul Keessen & Tomas Nord**

Contact Thalea:

leaswelt@yahoo.de

23-24 NOVEMBER

Bilbao, Spain
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Contact:
Aikinoken.recalde@gmail.com

7-8 DECEMBER

Dorset, UK
Seminar with Tomas Nord

Contact Mark:
contact@wellspringsaikido.co.uk

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