



AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES NEWSLETTER

940 E. Second Street #7
Los Angeles, California
90012
(213) 687-3673

January 1, 1989
Volume 4. Number 1.

NEW YEAR'S GREETING :

As this has been a year of mourning for me with the loss of my parents, it is inappropriate for me to extend holiday greetings to all of my students and friends. However, all of you have become so important to me that I do wish to celebrate the Holiday Season with you as my "new family."

I wish everyone the best of the New Year and pray for everyone's happiness, success and good health throughout 1989. I also pray that the dojo will continue to grow and be strong through everyone's sharing and good will.

D. M. Furuya,
Chief Instructor.

PLANNING THE NEW YEAR

We have designed a new Membership Application form which we are having all the current students complete again. This is our effort to straighten up our old files and give a new presentation for prospective students who wish to join our dojo. We also hope it will give the new student a clearer picture of our dojo and the type of training we do.

From this month, our dojo begins publication of the United States Aikido Federation Newsletter-Eastern Region. This newsletter is bi-monthly and will cover the entire United States. We will still continue to publish our own dojo newsletter. We will also begin to type up the Zazenkaï Newsletter for the Zenshuji Soto Mission, our neighbors, every month. It is a just a small favor because we have such a good computer and printer available to us.

We have many senior students who will hopefully be ready to qualify for their Black Belt Examinations in June of this year. We hope everyone will continue to train hard and make good progress. Our dojo needs many more assistant instructors and hopefully, we will see many fine, young, instructors coming up through the ranks in our dojo.

In February, Sensei has been invited to New York to conduct the annual Shidoï Seminar at the New York Aiki Kai along with Mr. Rick Stickles of the Union County Aikikai in New Jersey. Sensei will also travel to Montreal for an important seminar there and then to New England where he will spend some time with Kanai Sensei, his old teacher. He will leave on February 10th for a ten day trip.

SPECIAL HONOR

At the annual New Year's Celebration at Hombu Dojo in Tokyo, Doshu Grandmaster Kisshomaru Ueshiba has awarded Sensei with go-dan or fifth degree black belt in Aikido.

* * * * *

This is a special honor for me because I think it is difficult for a local instructor, at my age, to receive such a high rank. This marks nearly thirty years of training, yet I am still only forty years old. I accept it on behalf of the dojo hoping that it will encourage students to double their efforts in their training. I hope some students will go on to become fine Aikido instructors and carrying on the work of the dojo providing excellent instruction and training for the community.

Aikido is the most important contribution we can make to our modern society of today. Ideally, we should enter a quiet Zen temple, or retire deep into the mountains or, perhaps, return to the farm life to recapture our spiritual lives. But, for most of us, this is impossible. We must find ourselves in the middle of crowded, dirty cities filled with suffering and doom. We must find ourselves in the middle of our boring and hopeless jobs and in our dreary and lonely homes. In the middle of all this, we try to run away and go nowhere. Aikido cannot solve this. Aikido is not a cure nor a crutch nor is it a catalyst to make "good things" happen.

I have always dreamed of becoming a Zen priest and devoting my life to helping others. I have dreamed of going to India and working for Mother Teresa helping the sick and dying and I have often dreamed of going to Dharmasala in Nepal to be with Trogawa Rinpoche and continue my studies of Tibetan medicine. The starving, the sick and the dying are everywhere in the world today. We seem to enjoy great wealth and prosperity but I wonder how really true that is. Within our wealth, our jobs and homes and everything we have, we are starving and dying too. I believe we are suffering from spiritual starvation and death.

Aikido is not a religion or belief. It is, above all, a martial art. But, as a martial art, it brings us to the realization of our own mortality, to our own life and death. Everyday I see how out of touch we are with our own bodies and minds. I am not criticizing everyone; I include myself as well. We cannot get our bodies to move as we want. Sometimes, it seems like we can not even sense our right foot from our left. We get stuck on a concept or idea and cannot break it or accept anything else. We go around thinking that we are right and everyone else is wrong. We have become so selfish.

Page 2.

Somehow (and perhaps Aikido is the only way) life must become very precious to us. I see many people who put so much stock into themselves or their egos and do not care about their real selves. They care about the self named "me," but do not care about the self which shares life with everyone else and Nature. They think their lives are made up of money and status and are afraid to look at themselves honestly.

The Founder often described Aikido as a bright mirror to the heart. I believe he meant that training is to keep that mirror well polished so that we can always see ourselves clearly. This is a very Japanese concept. I once saw a terrifying movie on television about a man who found glasses which, if worn, gave the wearer the ability to see everyone as they really are. By the end of the movie, he died of fright. I think this is a very Western concept.

Everyone must discover what Aikido means for himself. It is important to catch the correct form of Aikido. This means to polish the mirror well. The image will naturally appear before you without any effort at all.

Although I would not trade my many years in Aikido for anything in the world, I am very tired now and hope that my students will begin to take more responsibilities in the dojo. In the last several years especially, it has not been easy for me and I think it is finally catching up. I am not sure if my promotion to fifth degree black belt means a new start for me or a new beginning for my students. . . .

I hope and pray the New Year will bring many good things to the dojo.

DYING ISAGI YOKU (Continuation from the November and December issues. Final part.)

Religion, morality, and art are all interrelated in Japanese culture and all aim at producing the desired mind quality. D. T. Suzuki's (1970) work has made many Westerners aware of the close relationship of Zen and art, Japanese religion, and artistic activities in general. This interrelationship is seen in the fact that anyone and everyone can be artistic in the Japanese cultural tradition. Consequently, there is no special class of artists in traditional Japan, and the Japanese tend to want to make their lives as artistic or aesthetic as possible. Thus to be artistic for the Japanese is not separated from aesthetic living and cultivation of a calm mind which enables one to have distance when facing an emotional crisis. From this viewpoint, we can also understand why the Japanese emphasize the importance of one's

inner state of facing dying.

The emphasis on the discipline of self-control in the face of death is carried to excess. The Japanese tend to judge a dead person's integrity on the basis of externally observed facts. As a matter of fact, the bereaved family, and especially, the wife, of my friend who passed away saying "where am I going," felt somewhat unhappy regarding the man's peace of mind. However, when I told them the story of the Zen master who wrote, "I don't want to die" on his deathbed, they felt very much relieved, for they thought that if even the self-disciplined Zen master did not want to accept the reality of death, then how much so this must have been with their beloved one.

I had another experience in this regard when about a year ago an elderly lady died. She was a very gentle and agreeable person but she had no children and led a lonesome life. As she grew older, she showed an astounding attachment to material things; it was as though material things were the only source of security for her. Those Japanese who attended her funeral service, regardless of their age or religion, spoke to each other about how tense her death mask was, and that it was as if she showed in it an incurable, unshakable attachment to the material wealth that she left behind. It is quite understandable that this lady's horror of death on the physical level might well have resulted in her tense death mask. Nevertheless, the Japanese believe that the facial expression at death is not the result of physical pain but reflects the interior quality of the person. Thus, it seems commonly held that if we want to show a beautiful face when we die, we have to prepare an attitude of detachment which is characterized as *isagi-yoku*. Dying *isagi-yoku* is the attitude of being ready to face death in such a manner that neither we nor others have regrets. However, as I will discuss later, this attitude is also used in reference to any other critical moment of life.

The attitude that life should be like the flower blossoms on the trees that fall to the ground was embodied in the archetypal image that gripped the Kamikaze pilots in World War II. A common expression in the Japanese language is "to make the flower of death bloom (*shinibana o sakaseru*)," and in the minds of the Kamikaze warriors this archetype of death must have been activated and played an important role in giving meaning to their lives. Another example of this attitude is found in the medieval era in Japan when warriors went into battle, after being purified and wearing their best clothes and armour, made up so that they could die as beautifully as possible.

This aesthetic attitude toward death should not be confused with a romantic conception of life or living outside of reality. In this sense dying *isagi-yoku* is

Page 3.

always concerned with the concrete reality of life. The Japanese extend the idea of dying *isagi-yoku* not only to the physical act of dying but also to symbolic "acts of dying" which occur at each and every important stage of life in which one experiences an emotional crisis. Marriage, separation from loved ones, retirement, or resignation are all transitions in life, the Japanese want to encounter them with detachment, calmness, and tranquility. Thus, for the Japanese one should take the initiative in matters of the inevitable: Retiring under the age limit, or retiring from the stage, or a farewell *sumo* match, are all regarded as a demonstration of one's integrity in terms of dying *isagi-yoku*. As Rohlen (1976) has observed, this attitude toward aging is the embodiment of Confucian ideals in which aging implies not only physical changes but moral and spiritual growth. Accordingly, the reality of death and dying for the Japanese is integrated into one's effort to live meaningfully.

SECRET TEACHINGS IN THE ART OF JAPANESE GARDENS

By David Slawson (Kodansha Press, 1987).

One of the most important lessons I learned in the course of my apprenticeship in the art of Japanese gardens took place during the year-end cleaning of the Yabunouchi tea garden in Kyoto. I had been squatting for some time with both feet flat on the ground in Japanese fashion, sweeping between the aspidistra (*haran*) with the customary bamboo whisk broom. It was a awkward position - I had to be constantly on guard so as not to plant one of my feet on a *haran* clump - and I was tired. To relieve the tension (so I thought), I shifted my weight forward onto the ball of my left foot, leaving my right foot flat on the ground with little weight on it. To my surprise, the crew chief immediately and sharply reprimanded me. Then he told me what I had done wrong. His explanation took the form of a parable. Imagine, he said, that the master of this garden were a blind person. Close to the garden every day, he would constantly breathe its air and become sensitive to its every mood. The uneven distribution of my weight in cleaning the garden would produce a disturbance in the atmosphere of the garden, an uneasiness that the blind master would sense. Hence even in the simplest act of garden maintenance I must conduct myself in the spirit of harmony the garden is intended to convey.

This story-lesson was indelibly impressed upon my mind, and I have never ceased to appreciate the crew chief's kindness in telling it to me. The lesson that the spirit with which one performs any task, no matter how "menial," is more important than getting

it done cannot be ignored by any serious student of the art of Japanese gardens. The essence of that spirit is to be "centered." My body position indicated I was not. Perhaps in the early years of the crew chief's own apprenticeship his superior had kindly communicated the same message to him. In any event, I had been initiated into one of the traditional secrets of the art through the time-honored techniques of oral transmission.

The beauty of classical Japanese gardens and the perhaps naive belief that I could uncover the secrets of their design have led me to seek both skills required to create such gardens myself and an understanding of their underlying principles. The degree to which these two things are interdependent cannot be overstated. . . .

Go to the pine if you want to learn about the pine, or to the bamboo if you want to learn about the bamboo. and in doing so, you must leave your subjective preoccupation with yourself. Otherwise, you impose yourself on the object and do not learn.

- Matsuo Basho

How is the classical art of Japanese gardens learned? The answer to this question is important, not only for what it tells us about the art, but also for what it reveals about an approach to learning that has almost totally disappeared in the West.

The above. . . might give the impression that the designer has very little latitude for creativity or self-expression in the traditional design process. But this is far from the truth. The traditional methods of learning the art were intended, above all, to assure that the student gained the tools and sensitivity needed to create highly satisfying solutions for the gardens he was charged to design. When Michelangelo was asked by the Church to do the fresco on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, he sought with fervor to express the spiritual qualities of his subject in forms humans would understand. We know he drew upon the methods of past masters, just as he studied human anatomy and so learned from nature. His greatness as an artist, we might say, results from the way he reached deep down inside himself to create something beyond himself, something powerful for all people to experience.

Japanese garden design aims at the same thing. The traditional learning methods seek to develop in the designer a sensitivity to the qualities of materials, to the potentialities of the garden site, and to the needs of the client. To bring these three into a mutually productive relationship requires the utmost creativity and expressiveness.

Page 4.

A THOUGHT ON REIGISAHO

"The Way to Show Respect and Appreciation"

By Mitsunari Kanai, Chief Instructor of the New England Aikikai.

Excerpted from Federation News, Fall 1978. Translated by Taitetsu Unno.

Fundamental Philosophy of Reigi.

The motivating principle of human survival, based upon the instinctual needs of food and sex, is power. The ability to effectively use power is crucial for the sustenance of life itself. The technology of fighting, pre-modern and modern, is an expression of this power, and the human race has survived to this point in history because of the ability to properly use this power. In fact, the development of this technology has given rise to new ideas, scientific advances, civilization and culture. The basic principle of power is deeply rooted in life itself, and it is still the basis of human society as we know it today.

The student of Aikido, regardless of the reason, has chosen this particular form of martial art as his or her path, seeking to integrate it into daily life and undertaking the practice with dedication and constancy. Some people get enjoyment out of the Aikido training while some others get lost and fall into confusion. Some approach the training selfishly while others approach with modesty. Each person's approach to the training is a personal expression of his or her sufferings and conflicts as a human being. Thus, the person applies his or her own judgement to Aikido and tries to give his or her own meaning to Aikido. The significance of Aikido, first of all, is that it is a martial art, but it also has meaning as the manifestation of natural laws and as a psychological, sociological, physiological, ethical and religious phenomenon. All of these are overlapping, although each has its own unique identity, and together they constitute what we call Aikido.

If we pursue the combative aspect of Aikido in our training, we can find an extremely lethal and destructive power in Aikido. Therefore, if Aikido is misused, it can become a martial art of incomparable danger. Originally, martial arts meant this dangerous aspect. Aikido is no exception. Thus, any combative art unaccompanied by a strict philosophical discipline of life and death is nothing but a competitive sport.

While sports do not deal directly with life-or-death situations, they nevertheless advocate certain values necessary for the building of character: for example, the observances of rules, respect for others, sportsmanship, proper dress and manners. This should

be even more true and essential in the art of Aikido because Aikido deals with the question of life and death and insists on the preservation of life. In such an art is it not unquestionably appropriate to emphasize the need of dignified Reig in human interactions? Therefore, it is said that Reig is the origin and final goal of budo.

Some people may react negatively to this emphasis on etiquette as old-fashioned, conservative, and even feudalistic in some societies, and this is quite understandable. But we must never lose sight of the essence of Reig. Students of Aikido are especially required to appreciate the reason for and the meaning of Reigisaho, for it becomes an important step towards misogi which is at the heart of Aikido practice. I hope to discuss misogi in a future issue.

At any rate, people working in martial arts tend to become attached to technical strength. They become arrogant and boorish, bragging of their accomplishments. They tend to make unpolished statements based on egotism. They immerse themselves in self-satisfaction. They not only fail to contribute anything to society but, as human beings, their attitudes are underdeveloped and their actions are childish. What is important about Reigisaho is that it is not simply a matter of bowing properly. The basis of Reigisaho is the accomplishment of the purified inner self and the personal dignity essential to the martial artist.

If we advance this way of thinking, the matter of Reigisaho becomes the question of how one should live life itself. It determines what one's mental frame and physical posture should be prior to any conflict situation. Furthermore, in the actual conflict situation, the guardposture must have no openings. Thus, Reigisaho originates in a sincere and serious confrontation with life and death. Above all, Reigisaho is an expression of mutual respect in person-to-person encounters, a respect for each other's personalities, a respect which results from the martial artist's confrontations with life-or-death situations. The culmination of the martial artist's experience is the expression of love for all of humanity. This expression of love for all of humanity is Reigisaho.

The martial artist's respect for the self and for others easily tends to become coarse and unpolished. So the idea of Reigisaho, that each person is important, functions as a filter to purify and sublimate the martial artist's personality and dignity. Reigisaho thus melts into a harmonious whole with the personal power and confidence that the martial artist possesses. This coming together establishes a peaceful, secure and stable inner self which appears externally as the martial artist's personal dignity. Hence, a respectful personality with strength and independence is actualized.

Page 5.

Therefore, Reigisaho is a form of self-expression. The formalized actions of Reigisaho reveal the total knowledge and personality of the martial artist.

Continued in the next issue.

WORDS FROM SENSEI:

Welcoming the New Year is a time of renewal. We renew our hopes and expectations and resolve to create a better life for ourselves. We resolve to train harder in Aikido and apply ourselves more conscientiously to our work. Yet, at the same time, life goes on without too much change. Our problems today do not really disappear with the New Year despite all the hope we may have. As I mourn and pray for my parents, the new hope for the New Year does not erase my loneliness and pain. Yet, the next step in our lives must be taken. And another step. And another. Life never stands still and must continue on.

There are three symbols of the New Year in Japanese tradition. There are the pine, bamboo and plum blossom. This is called "shochikubai" in the Japanese language. The pine represents "green-ness" and long life. The bamboo represents resiliency. The plum represents rebirth in difficulty. These are the qualities we must renew within ourselves in the New Year. We must somehow survive, bend in difficulty and be able to come back in the face in hardship.

Indeed, these qualities which we must cultivate within our lives may be difficult within the context of our society and the lifestyles we lead today. These are the qualities which we are able to cultivate and strengthen within our Aikido training.

I hope the New Year brings new growth and strength for the dojo and for all of my students. We need to share and work together to see the dojo grow. It requires everyone to give just a little of his time and energy towards this goal.

In celebration of my promotion to go-dan, I am awarding the title of "uchi-deshi" to Mr. Douglas Firestone. He is one of the very few of my senior students who has shown the talent, devotion and trust to achieve the highest qualifications as one of my personal disciples which "uchi-deshi" means. He has my heartiest congratulations and best wishes for the future.

Daniel M. Furuya,
Chief Instructor.

TRAINING SCHEDULE FOR 1989

Open Classes (Beginners to Advanced)
Monday through Friday Evenings
6:15pm to 7:15pm

Monday, Thursday and Friday Evenings
7:30pm to 8:30pm

Saturday Mornings
11:30am to 12:30pm

Sunday Mornings
10:15am to 11:30am

Advanced Classes
(3rd Kyu and Up - No Exceptions)
Tuesday Evenings
7:30pm to 8:30pm

Wednesday Evenings (Weapons)
7:30pm to 8:30pm

Saturday Mornings
10:15am to 11:15am

MUSO SHINDEN RYU IAIDO

Wednesday Evenings
8:45pm to 9:45pm

Saturday and Sunday Mornings
9:00am to 10:00am

* * * * *

FEES

Adults \$60.00 per month.
First month. \$25.00 membership fee.

\$160.00 for three months (Save \$20.00)
\$320.00 for six months (Save \$40.00)
\$620.00 for one year (Save \$100.00)

Children \$30.00 per month.
Eight years and older.

There are no refunds, exchanges or make-up classes.

Dues should be paid at the first of the month.

All members should abide by the Rules and Regulations of the dojo.

Financial problems may be discussed with Mr. Douglas Firestone.