



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Steven Shaw
1974 – 2019

Steven's Beginner's Mind by David Ito Aikido Chief Instructor be. That's one of the ways I know it is a worthy endeavor.

Although Steven Shaw studied with Furuya Sensei for around five years in Los Angeles he continued to follow him after Steve moved to Colorado and long after Sensei's passing. When Sensei passed away, he oversaw 16 dojos and almost instantly 90% of those dojos moved on to find better opportunities elsewhere. In the end, only three dojos remained, Spain, Mexico, and Steven Shaw's school, Littleton Aikikai. Within a few years, all but the dojo in Spain had gone. Steven's dojo didn't leave our organization like the others, but rather it was folded into Aikikai Tanshinjuku.

This type of vacuum is something which is typical when a prolific teacher passes away. I totally understand that teachers, students and schools need to find something which is more advantageous or beneficial. The funny thing about Steven was that even though he was at another school and in another state, he still remained loyal to Sensei and tried to stay as close to Sensei's teachings as he could, which Izawa Sensei encouraged, and also in spite of being considered a "sensei" in his own right.

Most might not know, but Steven was gifted with something called a *shoshin* or "beginner's mind." A beginner's mind is a mindset where a person is somewhat of a blank slate with simultaneously infinite possibilities but also able to perceive the smallest details. It must have been a struggle to learn and develop but at the same time stay true to Sensei's teachings. However, Steven did a good job of compartmentalizing teachers, styles and managing his own growth, all things considered. Steven's desire to learn is what, I think, fueled his beginner's mindset. Steven's last email to me three months before his passing illustrates what type of student he was, and it speaks volumes as to what type of person he was as well:

My adjustment back to high school was the dominant priority in my life over the last six/seven months. I have had to maintain a beginner's mind and have drawn on my Aikido training in terms of how I approach learning quite a bit. Many adults see themselves as capable, why wouldn't they, and then they step on the mats and they get frustrated with their inability to pick up the movement and they end up either trying to force things, or they end up shutting down. I have tried very hard to be patient with myself in the transition, but I still am not where I want to

A funny thing happens when we get a title or are given some sort of rank – it tends to go to our heads. This is only natural because how does one lead a class if they are mired in self-doubt. When Sensei

passed away, so many of his "students" sought out opportunity for themselves and wanted to create things for themselves. Many of these people were my friends who I had known for many years and their behaviors really shocked me as they leaped for gain without care for what it did to our school, organization or how it weighed on me its new teacher and organization head.

From the moment Sensei passed away, Steven was someone I talked to almost every week. He took time out of his busy life to

be there for me as I struggled to figure things out and navigate the vacuum that Sensei's passing created. I can remember sitting in my car in a supermarket parking lot on a rainy day talking to Steven for over an hour because I was upset about something someone did. I don't think I could be in the place that I am in today without Steven's support and counsel. Over the years, we grew apart as our lives became busier and I started my own family, but we always stayed in touch.

Steven's passing was a shock to me because I always saw him as someone who was happier, healthier, and someone who had it all together. Over the years, we would share our ups and downs and I always admired his ability to look at his low moments with the eye of learning and thus not take them too seriously. He once shared a more painful moment with a student and parent that happened and the most poignant thing I remember him saying was, "I have to learn from it just like Aikido." Steven's passing unpleasantly marks the first of our generation who have crossed over to be with Sensei and his passing forebodingly resonates with Sensei's assertion that, "there's no time left and thus no time to waste."

Steven was a student who embodied the beginner's mind and I will always remember his big smile. To me, Steven's larger than life smile, no matter what the situation, seemed to say, "learn from it" and that is something that I will try to remember and embody in my own life in Steven's memory. Steven, you are gone, but not forgotten and I pledge that I shall not take your passing lightly. Until we meet again!•



Untitled
by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Stepping into the footsteps of past masters, forward I go,

Grasping out to the future, I slip back into yesterday.

Seeking the moment, it is already gone,

That precious moment endures only in a heart filled with love.



Steven's Spirit by Ken Watanabe Iaido Chief Instructor

Whatever you achieve, there is always more to do, there is someone better, there is someone working much harder than you. Whatever you do, because you are doing only "a little bit," be humble, persevere and never, never quit. Keep your dream. Even a half inch worm has a half inch spirit.

– Rev. Kensho Furuya

When I heard the news of Steven's sudden passing, I was completely shocked. Here was a someone who was young, healthy, and in shape! How can this be?

When I first met Steven, I believe he was an aspiring actor. Steven used to tell this amusing story, which I never knew if it was true or not, about how he originally came to Los Angeles to audition for the role of Anakin Skywalker in the first Star Wars prequel.

Even Furuya Sensei found it funny and used to have Steven tell the story at parties as an ice breaker because he was so good at telling the story and making everyone laugh. We all thought Steven's story was hilarious and often ribbed him for it. This story illustrates Steven's gift for everyone: his passion. Who could come out to Los Angeles to follow a dream? I'm certainly not that brave!

After coming to Los Angeles, Steven somehow found his way to studying Aikido and Iaido under Sensei. Steven was one of these

people that was full of energy and was also very strong physically. That, coupled with his strong focus and determination, made him a very good practice partner in Aikido class.

Sensei was so impressed with Steven that he also allowed him to study Iaido which at that time was usually only for people who had attained a black belt in Aikido. In both Aikido and Iaido, Steven trained hard with a lot of focus and dedication. Steven wasn't always all work, he could be very silly when he wanted to be, to Sensei's exasperation, but especially during Iaido class, he exhibited razor sharp focus. Sometimes, I would get distracted because it was unusual to see him so focused demonstrating Iaido and not being his usual playful self and I would get caught up in the dichotomy.

Steven not only lived his life with passion, he lived it with gusto. If a half inch-long worm has a half inch-long spirit then each of us have our own spirit, but Steven had enough spirit for two or three people. Just like my own teacher's untimely demise, Steven passed away doing what he loved; being with his students and teaching them. Steven Shaw passed on living his life the very best way he could and was taken from this Earth far too early.

I wish to extend my sincerest condolences to Steven Shaw's family, and to everyone at Tanshinjuku dojo. We have lost a wonderful person who was a great father, husband, teacher, student and friend. Rest in Peace, Shaw Sensei. You will be missed by all whose paths you crossed. •



by Kei Izawa Chief Instructor, Aikikai Tanshinjuku
Chairman, International Aikido Federation

It was back in 2004 that I received two letters introducing me to Steven Shaw. The letters were from Kensho Furuya Sensei and Hideo Yonemochi Sensei from Aikikai Hombu Dojo. Both letters asked me if I would “allow” Steven to continue his Aikido training in Colorado in my dojo, as he was moving here due to his work. It was such a Japanese expression that I didn’t know what to make of it. Steven’s house was located in South Denver, easily an hour and a half drive to my dojo which was in Lafayette. Not an easy task to commute to continue with Aikido training. But to my surprise, Steven came as often as he could. And eventually moved closer, work wise and home base wise to train in Aikido at my dojo.

Yonemochi Sensei was the head of Aikikai’s International Department and I knew him as part of my involvement in the Aikikai Council at that time. In Japan, letters of introductions are a big deal and an even bigger thing to have a letter of introduction from someone as high in the hierarchy as Yonemochi Sensei. Later I found out that Yonemochi Sensei was a close friend of Furuya Sensei from the time Yonemochi Sensei was working for a Japanese bank in Los Angeles a long time ago.

One thing I immediately noticed with Steven was that he was not the typical American Aikido enthusiast. He was interested in the different technical aspects of Aikido due to my lineage somewhat

overlapping with Furuya Sensei’s in that we both trained with Kanai Sensei, but with quite a different approach. Steven was more of a silent presence and intense observer of the techniques to add to his repertoire. Steven came with a strong basic knowledge of Aikido despite having only trained for four years under Furuya Sensei, not a long time, but obviously Furuya Sensei identified some talent in Steven. He was not necessarily one of the star students immediately nor did he show interest in self-promoting. As I look in my album of Aikido photos, in many of the photos, he was standing in the back giving space to other more advanced people in my dojo at that time. But in the 15 years we became friends, he moved steadily to become my right arm and senior instructor for Tanshinjuku, my dojo.

Steven had been trained by Kensho Furuya Sensei with some Japanese manners and a code of behavior. I am Japanese but due to having lived many years overseas, especially spending my childhood in South America, I do not follow Japanese customs as much. Steven brought more formality to many things. He mentioned to me that Kensho Furuya Sensei had taught him the art of *kizukai*, which is an anticipation of the needs and wants of other people. As such, I didn’t have to give him too much instructions on many things since he could already anticipate my needs. This relationship grew stronger as we trained together. Steven’s *kizukai* was so good that I

“Where does this Path take me, with only my teacher’s teachings as the light? This warm light comforts me among all these cold dark shadows we call Life....”

–Rev. Kensho Furuya



became reliant upon his anticipations. This is not to say that Steven did not train or work hard, because he did. On the other hand, Steven would surprise me with his technical grasp of improvements and certain adjustments as he started to combine his Iaido knowledge with my Aikido teaching. It was nice to see his teaching methods and I enjoyed seeing him grow in technical mastery in both Aikido and Iaido.

In all honesty, my teaching style is not detail oriented and I often omit many explanations to allow people to come up with their own conclusions. If they misunderstood, I would correct, but that was rare in Steven’s case. I believe Furuya Sensei was more detailed and specific about the techniques so I must have pushed Steven to think more of their technical completeness. Steven became even more observant of the techniques as I executed them. So, I think this approach worked very well with him. On the occasion of our 12th year of friendship, he sent me a card thanking me for making him think hard. In Japan there is a saying that epitomizes this type of learning, “if you love your son, you must let him travel on his own so that he suffers and learns about reality.”

Steven and I developed a heart to heart communication. In Japanese that heart to heart communication is called *ishin denshin*. He

was quite observant of my techniques and I observed a lot of progress in his Aikido and Iaido. Steven and I didn’t have to talk too much because we understood each other fairly well. It is amazing how few times I called him or texted him. I asked Steven to teach not only in our dojo but also in other dojos and in other countries so that many people got to see Steven’s approach to very sophisticated and fluid Aikido. I was told that his last statement to the class at the Aikido Summit in Colorado, was that people should thank the *senseis* who have had an impact on them. I am told, Steven mentioned Kensho Furuya Sensei, Mitsunari Kanai Sensei and myself. I am honored but tremendously saddened that his life was cut way too short as Steven was already beginning to have an impact on a lot of people and out of martial arts training. .

Looking back, as a dojo outing, we went to many Star Wars movies as he loved the Star Wars genre so much. Steven was perhaps using Aikido and Iaido as a training ground to become a Jedi, just like Luke Skywalker. Now that he is gone, I will have to continue to use our heart to heart non-verbal communication to stay in touch with him and look for signals in the stars.

May the Force be With You, Steven!•

Train Hard, Play Hard

by Santiago Almaraz *Kodokai Chief Instructor*

Once again as another year passed since Furuya Sensei's passing, many of us gathered in Los Angeles to remember our teacher, visit with friends and share in Sensei's memory. Many of us who were his students and many of us who were not, come together to remember our teacher Rev. Kensho Furuya. What better way to do it than to practice Aikido, to share his teachings and to celebrate his life and all that he has given us as our teacher. This year, there was something off as Steven Shaw was noticeably absent. This year our reunion had a bittersweet taste because during the celebration we received the sad news from Colorado that Steven Shaw had suddenly passed away of a heart attack at the age of 45.

I was with Ito Sensei when he heard the news and it was surreal, like cold water being poured over us. As we sat there in shock it made us reflect on how fast our lives can change in just a few moments and how everything in this world can be relativized in one single tragic event.

The question on my mind as we drove back to the dojo was, "what really matters?" Within our daily worries we are consumed with such trivial things like problems at work, disputes with friends, or other inconsequential things that we think make up our lives. After a tragedy happens, it brings us back to the sobering reality of what we take for granted or what is really important. After that moment, everything seems to take on a different value – everything returns to its true position within our list of priorities and it make us put our feet on the ground and open our hearts to the things that really matter.

I met Steven Shaw in the summer of 2000 at Sensei's dojo when it was in Little Tokyo. I was impressed with Steven because every time I would practice with him, he was someone that was full of pure positivism, cheerful, hard-working, and someone who always had a smile on his face. Steven was passionate about Sensei's teachings and he

seemed like he really enjoyed practicing and he really liked practicing intensely. One of my fondest memories is both of us sleeping in the dojo with Mike Van Ruth during seminars and staying up late joking around and talking about training – something that we all got reprimanded for each year.



After a few years Steven's professional life took him to Colorado. Steven was a dedicated student of Sensei's Aikido and Iaido but he was confronted with the fact that he was hundreds of miles away from Los Angeles and Sensei. With Sensei's suggestion and blessing, Steven opened a school so that he could continue with his training in Aikido and Iaido. This is the most likely step when one is away from their teacher. I think that Sensei gave Steven his blessing because maybe he knew that Steven was dedicated and knew that he would continue to evolve and grow into a good teacher of both disciplines.



Steven was a person who seemed to have his priorities straight. Outside of his family and work, Steven was an ardent follower of Furuya Sensei and I always admired his loyalty and commitment to the Los Angeles dojo and to Sensei. The hardest part about being away from one's teacher is that it is difficult to follow the guidance of your teacher when you are far away and I know from my own experience how difficult it can be. I will miss seeing Steven at Sensei's memorial seminar and I will miss talking to him and laughing about all the good and bad things that we used to get in trouble with when Sensei was alive. Although we only saw each other once a year, we were family and like all families we had our ups and downs. I will always remember Steven's good humor and all the laughs we had every time we were in Los Angeles together. Sometimes I half



planned to get into trouble so that they could remember what it was like when Sensei was alive and we would get scolded for some problem just so we could laugh about it before we went to bed.

Steven was Sensei's student and he assiduously followed Sensei's teaching in Aikido and Iaido and now he has even followed him in death. I hope that Steven is up in heaven getting scolded by Sensei as they reconnect as teacher and student. Train hard, but also rest in peace. Best wishes to you and Sensei up in heaven. •

“There is nothing more precious than the relationships with family or friends. Everything must be done to maintain these relationships and preserve and nurture them - we are not on the battlefield! If we want a peaceful society of harmony and friendship, we must do everything to make it such.”

—Rev. Kensho Furuya



Hana wa sakuragi

Hito wa bushi

This is an old Japanese poem: literally – “As for flowers, it is the cherry blossom, as for men, it is the Samurai.” Another meaning is, “The samurai is like a cherry blossom.”

I remember a long time ago that one of the old Aikido teachers here in the Los Angeles area made a trip to Japan to view the blooming of the *sakura* or cherry blossoms, but unfortunately his schedule got turned around and he missed the full blossoming by a few days. He confided in me that missing the blossoming was his only regret in life.

The *sakura* flower is quite beautiful but once it blossoms, it only lasts a few days before the petals fall to the ground. The bloom is absolutely magnificent and people from ancient times have always associated the cherry blossom with the samurai because the *sakura*'s flower drops at its peak or the height of its beauty. The cherry blossom's short life of beauty is like the samurai whose life could end on the battlefield at any time – just like the short-lived blossom.

The Japanese have always considered “impermanence” as the major theme or the true reality of life. This cultural value of impermanence is a Buddhist concept called *mujokan* or the view that “all things in life pass by.”

The most noted passage about impermanence comes from the first line of the *Tale of the Heike Monogatari* which is one of the great military chronicles of feudal Japan. The first line reads, “The rise and fall of the warrior is like the fading sound of the bell at Gion

Temple on a spring night...”

From writings like this, the Japanese have found great beauty in the impermanence or fragility of life and this has become an underlying aesthetic and theme in all Japanese thought and art including the martial arts. This is very much in contrast with the Western view of “Everlasting Life,” in our western tradition.

Because of this idea of the brevity of life and the intransience of all living things, the Japanese have developed another idea of the ex-

Cherish the Moment



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

ploding passion of life or living life to the fullest in the brief time we are physically on Earth. This has come to us in the words often used in the tea ceremony, *ichigo Ichi-e*, or “that we only meet once in life, let's us enjoy ourselves to the fullest.”

All of these ideas form the basis of the samurai world view. In martial arts, we seek a “purity” of life in a spiritual preparation of having a noble end to our short lives. At the same time, we live fully and wholeheartedly, because this life or this moment will never come again.

Today, just like the samurai of old, we sit under the cherry blossom trees and admire the falling cherry blossoms and live and drink and eat good food...enjoying our lives blissfully admiring this world of impermanence. This life is transient or just an *ukiyo* or “floating world” which is like a bridge between all our dreams and our delusions. •

Editor's note: *Furuya Sensei published this article in a slightly different form on his Daily Message blog on April 10, 2005. Steven purchased a sword out of Sensei's collection that was forged from a temple bell in Narita, Japan which could have been inspired by the line about impermanence in the Tale of the Heike Monogatari.*

Culture of the Heart

by Steven Shaw *Senior Instructor, Aikikai Tanshinjuku
Aikido 4th Dan, Iaido 3rd Dan*

Culture is learned. We are all constantly being taught the norms of society. How do we respond when people don't follow the norms/cultural expectations? As a teacher in public schools, I must be very aware of the variety of cultural perspectives from which my students come. Not only do they come with cultural norms that originate from and can be as singular as a family nucleus, but influential are the cultural norms of other classrooms, teachers, schools, cities, nations, and religions. If I want to maximize student learning, I must articulate my expectations for learners as well as determine their expectations of me as their teacher. If I do something that bothers them, or makes them feel insecure, then their minds go into safety and self-preservation mode, and away from learning even if I am not aware that I've bothered them. Learning occurs when students and teacher use their relationship to engage with the content. Engaging with the content without the teacher doesn't make use of the expertise of the teacher, and when a teacher engages with the content without the student, then there is no transfer or learning.

As a student, I've tried to figure out the expectations of the teacher so that I may maximize my learning, because that's my responsibility as a learner, but Furuya Sensei was a master of meeting learners exactly where each needed in order to maximize learning. I remember being afraid of Sensei, not because he might hurt me, but because I knew he could see my heart and there would be no place to hide.

One day I was asked to perform some task around the dojo, take out the trash, or clean something (for some reason the detail of the



task is lost to the learning), but in the process of attempting the task I made a huge mess in a rather dramatic fashion. Sensei was watching, as he always was, which only compounded my reaction. I hung my head in shame because I had achieved the exact opposite of the desired outcome due to my lack of attention and focus. I knew it was my fault, and why it had occurred, and Sensei could see this. Instead of a feared scolding and reprimand for not paying attention, Sensei compassionately said,

"Clean it up," and said to a student in a passing comment, "Help Steve," as he ascended the stairs to his office. It was what I needed to transcend my attachment to the shame I felt for my mistake. I didn't need to be scolded, I had already scolded myself; what I needed was compassion and maybe even forgiveness.

There is so much in the legacy of Furuya Sensei. From his books, video series, columns, and numerous articles and some received their spark to study Aikido or other martial arts from him. He was an incredible expert about a great many things, and a student of the world. The culture of his dojo was unlike any I have ever seen before or since. Sensei's instruction was unparalleled in terms of its attention to detail and his ability to target the smallest of intricacies in the technique which were made into enormous shifts for his students, and, yes, I miss those things. What I miss most is the selfless compassion for a person who blamed himself for mistakes instead of the world, and his kindness and compassionate culture of the heart. •

Editor's note: *This is the last article Steven Shaw wrote for the Aiki Dojo and was originally published in the March 2017 edition. Steven, you will be missed. Be with Furuya Sensei and be at peace.*



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