



AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES

NEWSLETTER

940 E. Second Street #7
Los Angeles, California
90012

(213) 687-3673

Volume VI. Number 2.
February 1, 1991

MARTIAL ARTS AND POLITICS

Aristotle said, "Man is by nature a political animal." I have also heard it said that "Whenever more than one person gets together with another, there is politics."

For as long as I can remember, politics in our American society has always had a negative meaning. It is an activity filled with broken promises, betrayal, misrepresentation and the attitude of personal profit over anything other consideration. In this respect, students of Aikido, too, have a very negative view of politics in the art. Since Aikido's introduction into this country a little over thirty years ago, the road has been rough, many people's feeling have been hurt and a great deal of resentment still burns in many people's hearts. Most of these problems have been carried over the years for so long that they pass through several generations of students and no one remembers what the source of the problem was in the first place. Again, the problems are the same: misunderstandings, broken promises, misrepresentation and selfishness. And, as in American politics, it seems, it all boils down to the age old problem of one ego against another or others. Being in Aikido for over thirty years, I have seen most of what has gone on. The places, names and circumstances have changed but the very bottom line of every problem seems very much the same. And, in most all cases, who can say who is right and who is wrong when each side carries so much conviction and sincerity?

It is easy to say that "that is the way it is." Or, "it can't be helped." Or, "there is no way to escape politics." This may be so, but we must consider more carefully, I believe, in the human toll it takes, especially on the human spirit.

I am no expert on politics, I am not a politician. And, I am the first to leave when I smell even a hint of the stench of politics. At the same time, however, students must be a just a tiny bit aware of the problem before they are caught with their pants down and bitten in the ass by the political bug.

Rather than to relate one tragic episode after another in the manner of attending driving school and viewing the remains of drunken drivers and twisted cars, I think we must understand the correct attitude of politics in the

dojo in a more positive sense. In the Japanese language, when we combine the character for "man" with the character for "two," we form the character for "humanity" read as *jin* or *hitoshi*. Confucius said that all human activity must be governed by humanity. When two people get together, it must be by the rules of humanity, not politics. One understands humanity by following the rules of etiquette and form. When one masters the rules of etiquette and form, he becomes the sage (*chun-tze* in Chinese, Confucius' ideal of man) and becomes a teacher who can guide and lead others.

As every one knows Confucianism has had a strong influence on Japanese culture and thinking along with Zen. We have talked about Zen in the past but we have not discussed Confucianism and its meaning in the dojo and our Aikido practice for a while.

The concept of "teacher" as in "Sensei" comes from Confucianism. In Confucius' day, the ideal of each person was to perfect himself morally and spiritually to become a "sage" (*chun-tze*) or a great teacher. Teachers, in those days, held the highest place of honor and this tradition still continues today. As a side note, in Communist China today, the descendants of Confucius are still held in great esteem and have been exempt of taxes since 500 BC. In a recent PBS program, "Education in America," the head of the Carnegie Project for Higher Education in Washington, DC, is quoted, saying, "Education in America suffers greatly because we don't have the concept of 'sensei' as they do in Japan." His message is that our educational system has failed because we don't cultivate the respect for teachers and learning as they do in the East. However, it must be understood, that the tradition of the teacher in Japanese society has existed since the very beginning of Japanese civilized history from the 8th century AD.

We can say, in a way, our rules of etiquette or *reigi-saho* is our politic of the dojo. It has nothing to do with becoming the head boss or being the most powerful or the most influential and has nothing to do with creating cliques or power groups. It has nothing to do with personal prestige or advantage. The politics of the dojo from the traditional standpoint of our rules of etiquette is the careful and thoughtful method in which we deal with others. It doesn't mean that we spoil people. I know this thought immediately comes to mind. This method can be very soft compassionate and can sometimes be very dynamic and tough. The purpose is not how to gain the advantage over another person or persons, the purpose is to perfect our actions and thoughts within a context of self-cultivation and a creating a harmonious environment in which everyone can work

Page 2.

together in a positive and constructive way.

Through the rules of etiquette which are not arbitrary rules but a tradition handed down through the ages, we can understand how to balance our personal goals and the wishes of others around us. I believe this is the most difficult problem we continually face in our lives. I think this is where each one of us, myself included, fall down. O-Sensei's greatness comes from not only understanding how man can live in harmony together but how man can live in harmony with the universe. This is something only a few people can achieve completely through many years of devoted training.

Once, a great master was asked, "What is more important, the form or the essence of the matter?" The teacher answered saying, "Form is more important." Immediately, we think that this answer is too bureaucratic or too materialistic or too shallow. When I first heard this story, I thought the same. Actually, he means that clever and talented people can understand matters easily but when understanding or knowledge comes too easily or too quickly, it soon, more often than not, becomes tainted with self-interest or ego. If we take the time and energy to understand the proper form, the understanding comes naturally and in its own time. This is the preferred, time-tested, method of learning.

I know many, many people who understand the concept of Aikido. You hear them chit-chatting away about the highest philosophy of Aikido at fancy cocktail parties. There are fewer people who can actually "do" or practice Aikido. And very, very few who can continue to practice Aikido year after year. Finally, those who make Aikido a part of their lives can be respected as teachers and leaders. I am speaking of the individual student of Aikido, not rank.

After practice, we clean the dojo. This is not something separate from practice, it is a part of the training itself. I have said this often. We learn many things from this activity. We do a good job without receiving any pay or acknowledgement and we learn to work together with others. We don't clean for personal profit or motive; we clean the dojo because we use and it needs to be cleaned. This teaches us selflessness. Oftentimes, we don't want to clean because we are tired or we want to catch up with the others who are going to lunch together or we want to hurry home to catch a favorite TV program. There are many reasons we can create for not cleaning. However, despite whatever advantage we gain in making a good excuse or reason, we see that they are all selfish motives. We clean because that is what has to be done at the moment. With the activity of doing what has to be done at every moment, we achieve true independence and freedom. This is the highest spiritual practice.

A Zen master, when he was young was studying in a temple in China. One day, as he was walking to the Buddha Hall, he saw an old man drying mushrooms in the courtyard. He was old and his back was bent, the work was hard and it was very hot. He struck up a conversation with the old priest and asked him why he was doing such hard work. The old man replied, "If I don't do it, who will? Other people are not me." The young priest was ashamed. But again he asked compassionately, "It is so hot and you are so old, why don't you wait until it is cooler?" The old priest curtly replied, "Why do you expect me to put off later what has to be done now?" The young priest realized how much more training he needed.

In the dojo we answer with, "Hai" or "Onegae-shimasu" during our practice. This is the form of our practice. Sometimes, I call out, "Douglas" and the immediate response from him is, "Hai" and I know we are creating a harmonious relationship. Sometimes, there is no answer or response and I wonder if he heard me, or he doesn't understand me, or he doesn't want to answer or something. Maybe he is mad at me. Maybe he is sleeping or being unaware. This is the root of misunderstanding and bad feelings. If you go up to someone for practice and you bow your head and say, "Onegae-shimasu" and your partner also responds with a bow and "Onegae-shimasu" you are off to a good start and practice is enjoyable. But, if you bow your head and politely ask for practice and your partner doesn't respond correctly, you feel a little bad or uncomfortable inside. You think that he doesn't like you or he is upset about something. You think that maybe he doesn't respect you or that he is being arrogant with you. Naturally you become upset with him. This becomes the root of disharmony and misunderstanding.

We practice our etiquette to create the proper harmony and atmosphere for good relationships with everyone around us. When we abuse this, we only create misunderstandings which eventually lead to bad feelings. If we practice the form conscientiously everyday it becomes a part of us and becomes very natural and, at this stage, we can understand the wisdom and value of it. At the beginning, however, it may seem like we are just imitating others without apparent meaning or value. We should always keep in mind that most misunderstandings come about from very tiny acts and just one thoughtless word. If you plant just one unkind word in another person, it will grow in that person until he finally can't control it any longer and bursts out in anger. You can only respond with, "Why is he mad at me? I didn't do anything." That is why we must watch ourselves very carefully and always act according to the proper etiquette.

Sometimes, I may say something to a student but he just turns around and walks away without saying, "Hai." I wonder if he really understood or I think just walking away without saying anything must mean, "no." I don't know what to think and a problem has been created.

Page 3.

I am sure the student doesn't realize what he did. But, if he understood the proper way to respond, no misunderstanding would be created. Later, he may say, "Oh, I didn't say, 'hai' but I know what he said, why is he upset?"

These days, we call this, "lack of communication." I hear this term often and lately it seems to be a popular all around excuse for many people. As soon as there is a problem, someone immediately blurts out, "lack of communication, lack of communication!" This doesn't make any sense to me. Even though we communicate with people we still have many problems with communication.

In Japanese, we call this, "soku-taku." When the baby chick is ready to hatch, the mother senses this and pecks one or twice on the shell. The baby chick naturally and immediately responds with a tap from the inside. For us, this immediate, natural response is like saying, "hai," when called upon. Through this one tiny act, the baby chick naturally understands how to tap on the shell to break out. Without this natural response or communication between the mother hen and the baby chick, it could never free itself from the shell. When you say the word, "soku-taku," it sounds like the tapping of the mother hen on the shell of the egg. Communication in the dojo must be spontaneous and natural just like "soku-taku."

During one meeting with the black belts, we discussed the schedule for 1991. A few schedule changes were made. After the meeting, however, Jim Graves left a note on my desk reading, "I thought you might forget the date changes so I wrote them down for you." I was very moved. This is common sense act if you think about it but, at the same time, it is a naturally compassionate and thoughtful act. In Japanese, we call this, "ki ga kiku" or "your 'ki' is working." This is exactly what Aikido is all about. Indeed, O-Sensei called this the essence of Aikido.

To respond naturally and spontaneously with each other without creating small misunderstandings or bad feelings is something you must think about in your practice (and in your daily life). This is the meaning of our practice and if we can understand this, we have no need for politics in the dojo. We understand this through the practice of our etiquette or *reigi-saho*.

Confucius said, "Even when you are alone in a darkened room where no one can see you, act with the proper decorum as if you are in front of one thousand people."

Kensho Furuya

SPECIAL EVENTS FOR 1991

February 20th. Yasuo Kobayashi Sensei, 7th dan, from Tokyo, Japan will be conducting a one evening seminar. Classes follow the regular training schedule. 1st class: 6:15pm to 7:15pm. 2nd Class: 7:30pm to 8:30pm. Everyone is welcome. Fee is \$10.00 for members and students. Non members of the dojo: \$25.00.

February 26th-27th. Mitsuo Hataya Sensei arrives from Japan. Tameshigiri practice.

March 4th. Tameshigiri practice with Hataya Sensei.

April 26th. O-Sensei's Memorial Service. 7:00pm.

April 27th. One Day Seminar with John Stevens Sensei from Sendai, Japan. All day.

May 11th-12th. Weekend Seminar with Seiichi Sugano Sensei, 7th Dan, from the New York Aikikai.

August 11th. Annual Nisei Week Aikido Demonstration at the Japan America Theatre, Little Tokyo.

All students are invited and encouraged all of these events. In some cases, we have to ask for minimal seminar fees to cover expenses such as travel or honorariums. Thank you.

Do not judge yourself in terms of success and failure, just think about trying a little harder tomorrow.

Kensho

Subscriptions

The Newsletter is free to all members of the Dojo. To non-members and out of state and out of country friends, an annual subscription fee of \$20.00 is requested. Please send your name, address, telephone number and remittance in care of the Dojo.

Free copies are available at the Bodhi Tree Bookstore every month. Students may give extra copies to their friends and those interested in Aikido.

ACLA

Page 4.

TRAINING SCHEDULE

Open Class

Mondays thru Fridays
5:15pm - 6:00pm (Individual)
6:15pm - 7:15pm

Mondays-Wednesdays-Fridays
7:30pm - 8:30pm

Saturdays & Sundays
10:15am - 11:30am

Intermediate: 4kyu & Above

Thursdays
7:30pm - 8:30pm

Advanced: 3kyu & Above

Tuesdays
7:30pm - 8:30pm

Saturdays
12:00pm - 1:00pm

Muso Shinden Ryu Iaido & Tameshigiri

Tuesdays
8:45pm - 9:45pm

Saturdays (Iaido)
8:30am - 9:30am

Sundays
9:00am - 10:00am

Schedule Changes

Please note new schedule changes. Wednesday night iaido has been changed to Tuesday evenings from 8:45pm. The Thursday night second class is now open to students from 5th kyu and above.

The dojo will be open earlier during the week from 5:15pm for those students who wish to come early for individual training. Students are also welcome to stay after the second class during the week, with the exception of Tuesday evenings (Advanced Class), for free practice.

Sensei's schedule and work load has lightened up slightly and he will be conducting more classes during the week and on weekends. Please attend class.