



AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES NEWSLETTER

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MY DEEPEST APOLOGIES

I really must thank all my students for their patience for my irregular teaching schedule and my absences from the dojo in the last several weeks. I am so happy to hear that many students are practicing faithfully and hard everyday. As of this writing (October 18, 1987), both of my parents are still in very serious condition and I have been at the hospital everyday. I devoted my whole life to Aikido and teaching but, at the same time, I have shamefully neglected my parents. Although it is a little too late, I feel obligated to do as much as I can for them at this critical time. It has really been a difficult time for me.

My father underwent triple by-pass surgery as I have mentioned in the last newsletter. There were many complications but he managed to pull through every difficulty and finally the doctor pronounced him well enough to go home after such a heroic struggle. He was fine, according to the doctor, and all he needed was good food and lots of exercise on the road to a complete recovery. He came home and one day later he had a terrible stroke. At this moment, I am praying for his recovery. My mother entered the hospital on the same day of the big earthquake, two days after my father's surgery and while he was still in intensive care. She underwent surgery for a malignant tumor in her stomach and the operation was a "total success." Ten days later (when she should be home and recovering well), she still cannot take in any solid food, she cannot walk, she is in terrible pain and getting weaker every day. I was there today when the doctor looked at her crumpled and shrivelled body and said, "Medically, according to the numbers, you're fine!" I was so shocked. I cannot understand how numbers on a chart can blind this doctor to the reality of what is before his eyes. Something is obviously missing in our great technology. I immediately returned to the dojo and prepared traditional food which would be agreeable to her system. This was the first food in over several weeks which she easily digested! I am so amazed that they have developed such a complicated and highly technological method of surgery and medicine, which is followed up by a diet of lime soda and cherry jello. It is not surprising to me that her system rejected it.

I have been under such a great strain of late and making so many important decisions for my family that it has also exhausted me terribly, but somehow I am

managing in my day by day effort to keep going. I cannot claim any special ability or powers on my own but I am quite sure that it is the results of Aikido training that have sustained me during this difficult time. I know that many students practice hard but never immediately "feel" any results. If these students have faith in their training, a great power will realize itself from within when the important moment comes. This is the spiritual side of Aikido training which we often forget.

I have spent many sleepless nights thinking of many horrible inevitabilities but I have been very clear in defining the wishes and desires of my parents (much to my own surprise). I spoke with the neurologist today and answered many of her terrible "what if" questions. She made some interesting comments which left an impression upon me and I would like to share them with you. They are not really comforting remarks but I think they are important in light of the direction of our Aikido training. She was rather surprised at my strong decisions and understanding of the situation (although, at that point, I hardly felt like I understood anything). She said that, in her experience, most people break down miserably because they assume until the final moment that "medicine is a great weapon to push back the doors of death" as she put it. It is not. She also said, "We have made great strides in medicine and in our technology but there is an end (limit) to that technology, especially in medicine. Beyond that point, we know nothing. Despite our great technological strides, we have not made the same progress in our spiritual lives so that, at the point where our knowledge and technology ends, we are quite unprepared to deal with what is beyond." She further commented, "At the point where our knowledge ends, our spiritual strength must take over or we are lost." I am sure this is the profound realization of this doctor who has seen so many life and death situations. I think this is a very important teaching.

I notice that many students can only deal with Aikido in the world of "one plus one equals two." Students look for the mysterious or spiritual power of Aikido but they seek it only in their own terms, which cannot be. There is another world which exists side by side with what we call the "real" world. We do not realize fully that the other world, where one plus one does "not" equal two, is a part of the "real" world as

well. This subtle side which we cannot easily see is often neglected or rejected. Our Aikido training opens our eyes to the total reality of the world of the seen and unseen.

I heard an interesting story just the other day which I think is important to share with you. It was related by Otake Risuke Sensei, the head master of the Katori Shinto Ryu of swordsmanship as he was explaining the meaning of martial arts. This story takes place many centuries ago in India.

Two lovers were walking together in the jungle when suddenly they were attacked by a ferocious tiger. The young man barely escaped with his life but the young woman was killed and eaten. The young man was terribly grief-stricken at the loss of his true love and vowed to take revenge on the tiger. He took his bow and arrows and went hunting for the tiger. After searching for many days he finally saw the tiger in the distance sleeping by a tree. At last, he thought, he would revenge his love. He took aim with his bow and shot the tiger seeing the arrow pierce through very deeply. As he drew closer to the tiger he realized that what he thought was the sleeping tiger was, in actuality, a large stone which closely resembled a sleeping tiger. He was amazed how deeply the arrow pierced through solid rock. It is from this incident that the saying came about that "a strong will can even pierce stone."

The story goes on. Many people saw this strange happening and asked the young man to shoot another arrow in the stone again to prove this miracle. But after realizing that it was just a stone he shot, every arrow bounced off harmlessly.

In our "commonsense" world, an arrow cannot pierce through rock, but at another level, it may be quite possible. When we reach the end of our knowledge and our technology, our spiritual side expresses itself and then anything is possible. During our lives, I believe we must fortify and polish this spiritual side of our lives so that it is strong when we need it. If our thinking and perspective is limited to only dollars and cents or to what our small minds define as "real," our spiritual side may wither and die and finally when we come to the inevitable point of life and death, we may be lost. Our Aikido training fortifies our physical bodies but subtly refines our spiritual side as well. This is extremely important to keep in mind as we train each day. Although there is no way to measure it as we may measure a bulging

bicep or a thinner waist, we can see it manifest itself each day as we meet crisis after crisis in our daily lives and finally when we come to the threshold of death itself. In this respect, Aikido training is quite different from racquetball or an aerobic class in Beverly Hills. We cannot turn it off and on as we like or start and stop as we like. We must continue our training from day to day just as we live and breathe from day to day. Through our daily activities, we sustain and nourish our bodies, and through our Aikido training, we nourish and refine our spiritual natures. Although we can solve many small problems with logic and reason, we must prepare ourselves for the problems which are beyond all knowledge or commonsense.

MARTIAL ARTS FESTIVAL AT THE JAPANESE VILLAGE PLAZA

The Martial Arts Festival on the weekend of October 17 and 18, held at the Japanese Village Plaza in Little Tokyo, was a big success with many people in attendance. This demonstration was arranged by Sensei in coordination with the Japanese Village Plaza but, due to his absence, was taken care of by all the students and members. On Saturday, our Iaido students demonstrated Iaido and swordsmanship with Iwashita Sensei of the Muso Jikiden School. Other groups demonstrating included Mr. Douglas Wong and the Sil Lum Kung Fu White Lotus Association as well as the Zenshuji Taiko Drummers group, who are members of the Soto Zen Mission, our neighbor. On Sunday, the dojo members led by Mr. Douglas Firestone, Assistant Instructor, demonstrated Aikido. Others groups were Mr. Paulie Zinc who demonstrated Monkey Style Kung Fu and the Chinese staff, Mr. James Lew's stunt actors group, Mr. Fumio Demura of the Japan Karate Federation and Mr. Richard Bustillo and the IMB Academy of Kali and Phillipino Martial Arts. Mr. Demura is one of the most well known Karate instructors in the United States today. Mr. Bustillo is well known as one of the former students of Bruce Lee.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

There are many rules of protocol in the dojo, especially in the practice of a traditional martial art such as Aikido. All of these rules have been handed down from teacher to student for centuries. These rules embody the form of the martial art and were created to maintain order and discipline in the dojo and among the students. Most of these rules do not impose any special restrictions on the students and are generally very reasonable if you think about them.

These are a few of the rules which have been neglected recently.

When you arrive to the dojo late for class, you should enter the dojo very quietly and change into your uniform quickly. Sit in formal "seiza" position on the wood floor outside of the mat area until the teacher gives you a sign to enter. Then, pay your respects to the Founder. Sometimes we are late for class because of our busy work schedules and there is nothing we can do to avoid this. But, it is important not to disturb the rest of the class while they are going through their exercises or their practice. In addition, traditionally, the period of practice or instruction (class) is considered sacred time and space, almost to a religious degree (traditionally, training was equated with a religious ceremony), and therefore we cannot come and go as we please so easily. Therefore, when we are late, we must wait respectfully to enter the mat area. In addition, in olden times, it was considered extremely negligent and shameful to arrive late for class, especially in the eyes of the teacher. We have adjusted this rule in regards to our hectic modern society today because we all must fight our work schedule and LA traffic.

Most dojo functions are planned by the teacher but it is always nice that the students can plan social activities for the dojo as well. Although this was not done in earlier days except on special holidays or religious occasions, in today's dojo, it is very good that the students can get together socially as well as on the mats. However, it is proper procedure to first get the approval of the teacher or the instructors committee before initiating any social function or party. The teacher must judge if it is appropriate for all the dojo members or not. Secondly, and most importantly, dojo parties or social functions are open to all members and not a select few. By violating this rule, we cause much ill feeling and misunderstanding among the members and we are not being fair to everyone. It is really a form of discrimination. Every member is equally important in the dojo. People still do not seem to understand this.

Sensei's personal quarters are on the third floor of the dojo and are absolutely private. When Sensei is in his quarters, it usually means that he does not want to be disturbed. Otherwise, Sensei will be on the second floor or on the mat area. Please show some sensitivity and courtesy in this matter.

EARTHQUAKE ON OCTOBER 1, 1987

As everyone knows, an earthquake rocked Los Angeles and the dojo as well. We are in a very old brick building so we sustained quite a bit of damage to the third floor. This has caused me great concern but many dojo members pitched in and contributed greatly to get everything back in order. I want to personally thank everyone for their generous contributions. This caused me very great concern and worry because I was afraid they might condemn the whole building. And, during a time when my family is in trouble, to return to the dojo and find my only place of peace and solitude in shambles was really quite heartbreaking for me. Thank you so much.

SUGANO SENSEI'S SEMINAR- A BIG SUCCESS

Sugano Seiichi Sensei conducted an exceptional seminar on the weekend of October 24th and 25th at our San Fernando Valley Aiki Kai. About 18 members of the ACLA attended and one student, Mr Lance Saegusa, from an outside dojo. Sugano Sensei taught three classes on Saturday and two on Sunday. He introduced a very broad view of Aikido techniques from the basics to the most advanced freely, incorporating sword and staff movements and demonstrating their relationship with body techniques. Students were also introduced to three-man (san-nin gake) techniques.

Sugano Sensei is one of the uchi-deshi or personal apprentices to the Founder of Aikido, O-Sensei. During the mid-sixties, he travelled to Australia to introduce Aikido there. During his fifteen year stay, he cultivated an active Aikido community of about three thousand students. Sugano Sensei then travelled to Belgium where he further developed and taught Aikido until he moved to New York City several months ago. He now teaches daily at the New York Aiki Kai along with Yamada Sensei. Although he will now be teaching in the East Coast, he will still be making annual visits to Australia and Belgium to continue instructing his students there. Sugano Sensei has taught Aikido all over the world and is well known in Europe. He mentioned that he has travelled to Tibet and Nepal as well for his personal interest in Buddhism. He spent some time as a priest at the Eihei-ji Temple, the center of the Soto Sect of Zen Buddhism in Japan. Sugano Sensei is also macrobiotic or practices "shizen-shoku," eating only natural foods.

Sugano Sensei arrived at LAX on Friday afternoon, October 24, 1987, for his very first visit to the West Coast. He was met by Sensei and Mr. Brian Reverman and taken for lunch and to the Hotel Tokyo in Little Tokyo. He consented to teach the Friday evening class. Saturday morning, he had breakfast with Sensei at the hotel and then proceeded to the San Fernando Valley Aiki Kai for the seminar. He had lunch with the students, and later Sensei took him for dinner in Little Tokyo. After the last class on Sunday, Sensei showed him around Los Angeles taking him around downtown L.A., Hollywood, Beverly Hills and Venice Beach where we had a nice lunch at the Rose Cafe and ice cream across the street. Mr. Douglas Firestone and Sensei took him for a farewell dinner at the Thousand Cranes Restaurant in the New Otani Hotel and saw him off at the airport Sunday evening. He took the red-eye back to New York.

Sugano Sensei liked Los Angeles very much for his first visit. The weather was very nice after the rain and the skies were clear and one could see for miles around downtown Los Angeles. Sensei liked the closeness of the mountains and sea and the way the city seems to be nestled between the two. He liked Little Tokyo especially and said he does not need to go to Japan now if he can come to Little Tokyo. Sensei also liked how Los Angeles seems to consist of smaller cities which each have their own special character. In several hours he toured Little Tokyo, then Hollywood, which was quite a change, then Beverly Hills and finally Venice. Each community was so different to him and yet he was still in LA.

Sensei spoke a little about his Aikido after dinner on Saturday. He is very interested in how the students respond to the teacher and to the techniques. He is interested in how students pick up the movements. He concentrates on movement and likes to move quickly from one technique to the next so the student does not become attached to any one movement and learns how to freely move from one technique to the other. He does not want to show the technique in a detailed manner but likes to demonstrate the "possibility" of the technique so the student must understand the techniques on his own. He believes that each student must develop his own Aikido. He said that Aikido must always be taught as a "total" art and therefore it is important not to present a partial or fragmented version of Aikido. Sugano Sensei freely incorporates sword and staff in his class but does not specifically teach a sword or staff class separately.

He said that many people may concentrate on the sword and that attachment to the sword narrows the student's view of the total art of Aikido. That narrow, attached view "hardens" into a set technique. He said that this is not Aikido. He utilizes the sword and staff to enhance the instruction and practice of Aikido techniques, but he does not think of them as separate aspects of the art. Aikido is unattached and must always be free and complete. Sensei does emphasize the basics but always throws in difficult techniques to keep the students on their toes and always shows that there are so many aspects of the art which we must always keep in mind.

Sugano Sensei taught a most enjoyable and instructive class and many members of the ACLA were impressed with him. Sugano Sensei seemed to enjoy himself and said he would like to come again very soon and spend more time with us. When we were waiting for his departing plane, he was already trying to figure out if he can make stop-overs in Los Angeles on his way to Australia and Belgium every year. This was his very nice compliment to our membership and dojo.

"GETTING STUCK"- A FAMOUS SWORDSMAN TEACHES A GOOD LESSON.

Just about everyone has heard of Miyamoto Musashi, the famous swordsman, because he has been immortalized in so many samurai movies. He is also the author of "The Book of Five Rings."

During his later years, he had become quite famous and many strong martial arts experts came to him to further their skill in swordsmanship. One very strong swordsman came to him one day and it was obvious that he was too confident in his strength and skill. He asked Musashi for instruction but Musashi refused. But after continued pleading, Musashi consented to teach him if he could pass a few tests to prove his sincerity and willingness to learn. Musashi asked him to stand up and walk along the line of the tatami mats on the floor. This he easily did. Then Musashi took him outside to the terrace and asked him to walk along the railing of the terrace which stood about four or five feet from the ground. This was a little more difficult but really nothing for any skilled martial artist. The aspiring swordsman became more confident because these tests were much too easy. Finally, Musashi led him up to a mountain ridge to an old rope bridge which spanned across a

deep ravine. The rope railings were old and frayed and the wooden planks were rotten and many were missing. The ravine below was very deep and jagged rocks stuck out from the cliffs along each side. Musashi told him to cross the bridge. The swordsman took a few steps and dropped to his knees clinging to the ropes for dear life. This bridge was much too dangerous and old and could break at any moment under his weight. The swordsman didn't know what to do and was petrified with fright. Musashi called out to ask what was wrong. "What is the difference between the bridge and the line on the tatami mats and terrace railing?" he said. "The difference is only in your mind," Musashi called out. The swordsman thought Musashi must be crazy. "It may only be in my mind but this bridge is old!" thought the swordsman and continued to cling to the fraying ropes for dear life. Musashi told him that his training was still too inadequate and left him there. Now the swordsman was really in a jam because Musashi had abandoned him and left. After a long while, he heard some tapping noises up ahead on the bridge. Ahead of him, much to his shock, was an old woman about eighty or ninety years old, nearly blind and with a cane, carrying a heavy load of kindling on her bent-over back, casually making her way across the bridge as she had done everyday for years. As she came closer and closer to the swordsman, she called out, "What is the matter with you, young samurai, are you just going to sit there all day long blocking my way or are you going to get a move on. What a lazy bum! Why aren't you off somewhere practicing your swordsmanship?"