



AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES NEWSLETTER

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THE BIG FORTY

I will turn forty on April 25, 1988 this year. It did not bother me much until everyone told me how much older I will be.

Every year, on my birthday, I vow to become a better teacher. It's like a New Year's resolution, however, which is broken before it even has a chance to get going. But, regardless, every year I try again and again. I hope I am making progress day by day. This is important in our Aikido training. Each day, we should make an effort to improve ourselves despite the difficulties we may face or how ever little progress we think we are making. If I add one drop of water to a cup of tea, the color will not change visibly to the eye. But, if I add another drop of water and another and another, the color will eventually begin to change. It is difficult to see ourselves change, but we do. Sometimes, it is for the better or for the worse. Aikido teaches us how to change for the better.

Everyday, we make all kinds of mistakes. It is very discouraging when nothing seems to go right. It is true when we practice and we can do nothing correctly no matter how hard we try. I know this feeling very well from my own experience in practice. If we give up, we lose everything. If we can continue for one more day and for another after that, we win. It is not important to win. It is important not to give up. Winning requires luck. Not giving up requires faith and courage. When we make mistakes in practice, we should never become discouraged because it is only the natural course of learning. If one thinks he can learn Aikido without making any mistakes, it is like thinking one can learn to swim without getting wet.

The problem is how to accept our mistakes constructively. If we accept them in a positive attitude, they are no longer mistakes but tools for learning. If we accept our

mistakes with a negative mind, we only become discouraged or spoiled. Our personal mistakes are only of value to ourselves. No one else cares about them. It is when you use your mistakes to further your learning and understanding of yourself that you begin to understand the meaning of Aikido practice.

Please do not misunderstand. I am not speaking of carelessness or negligence. I am speaking about ourselves and how we are trying to understand Aikido in our practice and our daily lives.

We believe we gain from our victories but I often wonder if we don't learn more from our failings. Ultimately, it is not a question of success or failure, it is a matter of how we nurture ourselves from day to day. In Aikido, we call this "cultivating our 'ki' energy."

Sawaki Kodo Sensei once said, "To lose is enlightenment, to gain is suffering." I don't want to give you an easy explanation so I hope you will think about this very carefully and deeply.

I believe April is a very spiritual month. Please don't get me wrong. It is not because it is my birthday. That is ridiculous. But, many wonderful and thoughtful events have taken place in April. We celebrate the Resurrection of Christ during Easter. We also commemorate the birth of the Buddha in the Hanamatsuri Festival or Festival of the Flowers. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. died in April. O-Sensei, the Founder of Aikido, passed away on April 26, 1969. I believe April is an appropriate time to think of our own lives and our own mortality. It is also a very important time to think of everyone who has sacrificed their lives so we have what we have today. It is a good time to be grateful and show our appreciation, something we so easily forget nowadays.

In the Bible, John 3:16: "For God so loved

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the world, He gave his only begotten son." When the Buddha was born, he first declared, "In heaven and earth, I alone am the revered One." He meant that every human being is enlightened.

We remember and revere these people because of their great sacrifice for us. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. died tragically but not in vain, I believe. O-Sensei devoted his entire life to give us Aikido. We should always keep this in our minds when we deal with our fellow students and the people around us.

Aikidoists never tire of telling everyone how spiritual Aikido is. But I meet few Aikidoists who can see another's spirit. I met an interesting person the other day who works with many different people. What impressed me was how well he works with each individual. I asked him what his secret was and he confided in me saying, "There are many people whom I don't like to work with but if I see God in them I can always give my best and receive God's love at the same time." I was so impressed that I asked him (very foolishly) where he found such a wonderful teaching. "I discovered it myself," he replied. I told him that he would make an excellent Aikido teacher.

It is inevitable that we practice with people we like or dislike in our training. This is human nature. But, we must discipline ourselves to practice with everyone and enjoy and learn from it.

Nowadays, we look at strangers with suspicion. In olden days, strangers were treated very courteously because it was possible they were gods or spirits in disguise.

Don't look at a person's face or the color of his skin or the nature of his background see God in him.

YAMADA SENSEI'S SEMINAR

On March 19, 1988, Yamada Yoshimitsu Sensei conducted a one day seminar at our dojo which everyone enjoyed. There were about 25 participants, all from our dojo. We should be proud of ourselves.

Yamada Sensei brought his wife and daughter on their first trip to Los Angeles. Sensei took them around Los Angeles, Beverly Hills and Hollywood and they seemed to enjoy themselves very much and look forward to coming again. We were honored to host Yamada Sensei and his family and await their next visit.

Yamada Sensei was particularly pleased with the level of training of our students.

DOUGLAS FIRESTONE'S ANNIVERSARY

April 4, 1988 marks Douglas' sixth year anniversary in Aikido. He started at the old Hollywood dojo and help greatly to build our present one. He has come a long way in six years and deserves everyone's congratulations.

In honor of this occasion, Douglas is now promoted to Chief Assistant Instructor of the Yudansha-kai.



CHILDREN'S DISCOVERY DAY

On April 7, 1988, our dojo participated in a Children's Discovery Day at the Japanese American Community and Cultural Center in Little Tokyo. Mr. Douglas Firestone conducted a introductory class in Aikido to about 25 kids from the age of 4 and up. The class was well received. The JACCC presented the dojo with a donation of \$50.00 which was then donated to the upcoming Children's Day Festival in May.

MERLIN HINDLEY FROM UPSTATE NEW YORK

Mr. Merlin Hindley, an instructor from upstate New York visited the dojo for several days while he was looking for a new home in the Santa Barbara area. He plans to open a dojo there next year. He is a student of Mr. Harvey Konisberg and Yamada Sensei. He teaches at the Woodstock Aikikai.



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CHILDREN'S DAY DEMONSTRATION

On April 30th and May 1st, the Children's Class will be demonstration in the Children's Day Festival in the Japanese Village Plaza. This has become an annual event. We do need the support of the adults, so everyone is invited to attend and help out. We need people to pass out flyers, keep the kids from getting lost, answer questions about the dojo and give our kids a good applause.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY AIKI-KAI

Our branch dojo meets on Thursday evenings from 7:30pm to 8:30pm and on Saturday afternoons from 2:30pm to 3:30pm. Students who need extra training may attend these classes. We also need volunteers from the senior students to help out teaching the classes. Please see Sensei about helping out.

WE NEED YOU!!!

YELLOW PAGES ADS

We still need volunteer donations to help cover our Yellow Pages Ads. Please see Kathy about your pledges, any amount will be helpful and greatly appreciated. Thank you very much.

Next year, our Yellow Page Ads will be \$420.00 per month. We will keep our pledge amount at \$335.00 and the dojo will cover the new balance. Please help out if you can.

KEEPING THE DOJO CLEAN

There are three things which make a good dojo look good to our guest. A respectful attitude of the students, good training and a clean dojo. Everyone should help out as part of their training. It is not simply a formality, it is important for the health of each and every one of you that your training area is spotless clean. Please keep this in mind.

We are also in charge of cleaning the area around the building and the bathrooms of the Japan-America Museum. We need volunteers for this work as well. We receive a small discount on our rent for this. Please work together and share together.

O-SENSEI'S MEMORIAL SERVICE

On April 26, we will have a Memorial Service conducted in commemoration of the passing of the late Ueshiba Morihei, the Founder of Aikido. The short service of about 45 minutes will be conducted by the priests of the Zenshuji Soto Mission, our neighbors.

The priest will recite scriptures and offer incense. Each student may offer incense as well.

We are not trying to promote Buddhism but we are trying to remember and pay homage to the Founder of Aikido for his gift to us. Everyone is welcome to attend.

We will be taking the priests of the temple for dinner afterwards. Those who wish to come are more than welcome. There will be no training on this day in the Founder's honor.



The following article will be published in Martial Arts Training magazine.



April 4, 1988

Ancient Ways Monthly Column

THE SECRETS OF TRAINING:
PASSING ON TRADITIONS OR TRADITIONS PASSING ON?

Quite a few years ago, when I was a young Aikido student, my teacher was returning to Japan for several years and I asked him for one last teaching, the final secret of Aikido. He stood in the middle of the mat and asked me to attack him as best I could. I didn't want to grab him because I was familiar with what kind of hold he would apply on me so I thought I would bring him down with a football type body tackle. As I raced towards him, he seemed to stand there smiling with no intention of doing anything at all. Before I knew what was happening, he suddenly disappeared and I thought I was speeding "pell-mell" into the wall. Somehow, I really don't know how, I lost all control of my balance and landed on my butt. This all happened in a split second and I didn't know which hurt more, my rear-end or my pride. I must have been thrown at least ten or fifteen feet through the air. At the moment, I thought I had experienced the final secret of Aikido and vowed to master Aikido's mysterious "no-touch" throw.

After many years and now a full-fledged teacher of Aikido myself, I realize that it was far from "the secret of Aikido;" however, at that time, it inspired me to practice Aikido until I finally mastered the "no touch" throw which took years of training.

Today, it seems, many aspiring young martial artists are seeking movie contracts or dojo franchises. Just a few decades ago, as I remember then, we all sought of secrets of the art which would bring our skill to perfection. Training hard everyday, we all dreamed that some day we would be qualified for the secret transmission of the art from master to student. Perhaps, this was just a fantasy but it was certainly a great form of inspiration

We call this transmission of the art, "okuden" (inner transmission) or "okugi" (inner teachings) or "kuden" (secret oral teachings). It dates back thousands of years to the time of the Buddha. It is said that on the occasion of the Buddha's final teaching, he simply picked up a flower and said nothing. Mahakasyapa, one of his top students among thousands in attendance, understood its secret meaning and smiled. The Buddha smiled back. This is referred to "the teaching without words, outside the scriptures, a direct transmission from heart to heart." Zeami, the developer of the Noh drama for the emerging samurai class in the 15th

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century wrote the secrets of his art in the classic, "Kadensho" which means the "Secret of the Transmission of the Flower."

In the legend of Miyamoto Musashi, the great 16th century swordsman, Musashi tried to challenge Sekishusai, the famous head of Yagyu Shinkage Ryu of swordsmanship but was not able to see him. The old Sekishusai sent Musashi a single flower in apology for not granting him an interview. When Musashi examined the cut end of the flower, he realized that Sekishusai was a great master of the sword to make a simple cut so cleanly and without any effort. This episode appears in the "Legend of Musashi" by Yoshikawa Eiji, and recalls the Buddha's secret transmission.

When one great swordsman received his degree of mastery from his teacher, he unrolled the scroll to find a blank piece of paper. One student asked his teacher how to achieve mastery and the teacher began to rub a piece of tile. The puzzled student asked what he was doing. "I'm trying to make a mirror," replied the master. "How can you make a mirror out of a piece of tile?" inquired the student. "How can I make a master out of you?" answered the master.

A student asked his teacher, "How can I understand this art?" "When you can swallow the entire West River in one gulp." replied the teacher. This is a famous "koan" used in Zen to bring the student to greater awareness. The student ponders the question until he finally achieves some awakening or intuitive understanding of himself.

What is important to understand is that the secret of transmission is not the final answer itself. It leads to the final answer. There is an old saying: When you begin to study, the flower is just a flower. When you are in the midst of studying, the flower becomes something more than a flower. When you achieve complete understanding, the flower is just a flower again.

Swallowing an entire river in one gulp doesn't not make any sense at all logically. In martial arts, it has great meaning. The "West river" means nature or the universe. When the student can accept nature or all that nature holds in one moment, he has achieved enlightenment. It means that the student must drop his discriminating mind. Today, as students of martial arts, we pick and choose for ourselves. If the training is too rough or we feel we don't understand the practice, we pick up our things and

leave. Of course, I am speaking of training under a competent teacher of martial arts. In olden days, we wasn't so easy because there was no where else to go. Martial arts training under a good instructor is not easy to understand. I often hear of "practical" training or "realistic" training, and I hope that it is in the context of real training. The instructor must think of the long term effects of his teaching as well as developing a more immediate skill in his students. This was the importance of the secret transmission. A student with incomplete skill and understanding of the art could never grasp the final message.

There are three stages in traditional training. Miyamoto Musashi spoke of five levels in his Book of Five Rings. In Rinzai Zen, they speak of the ten stages of training (as in the Ten Ox-Herding Pictures.) Some Zen masters spoke of twelve or fifteen stages. Sekiun, a well-known swordsman of the 17th century spoke of three stages which is accepted as basic to all Japanese style martial arts training.

The three stages are known as "shu," "ha" and "ri." "Shu" means the "protecting stage." The symbol is an egg. It means that the first stage is "hard." In others words, the form (or shape) of the technique must be mastered or protected just as the mother bird protects her egg. Also, the hard shell of the egg symbolizes the beginning fundamental form. The second stage of training is called "ha" or "breaking form." The symbol is the young chick "breaking" out of the shell. At this secondary stage, the basic form is broken into its infinite applications. It means that the fundamentals are mastered and now applied in all situations. The third stage is called "ri" or the "releasing form." The chick has matured into a young bird and flys away from the nest. It means that, in the third stage of mastery, the student forgets all forms and masters the "formless" technique leaving old ideas behind him. It means that he has fully matured in his training.

There is a fourth stage of training which was never recorded by Sekiun and never written down. It was transmitted orally from student to master, from generation to generation. It is called "ku" or the "stage of emptiness." It means that "everything is gone" or "no trace is left behind." The secret transmission of the fourth stage of training means that the student has reached the highest level of mastery in which no one can trace his movements or capture his technique.

When the student received his degree of mastery and opened the scroll to find a blank piece of paper, the master was expressing the final secret transmission of "no trace" and "everything gone."