



AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES

# NEWSLETTER

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## HEAVEN OR HELL?

### An Old Parable.

This is an old parable I heard from a Zen Priest some time ago. It is my favorite story and I have told it many times over in the dojo. Here, once more, I am repeating it again for our many new students.

To the Japanese, heaven and hell look very much the same. We, in this country, usually think of heaven as a kind of paradise or salvation and hell as a real and eternal hell. But the Japanese, at least the old time Japanese, think a little differently.

In hell, everyone is seated at a huge and wonderful banquet table with every rare and tasty delicacy available. But everyone is securely bound to their chairs and to each arm is tied a spoon with a six foot long arm. Everyone in hell suffers because they can reach the food easily enough but there is no way they can get it to their mouths because the handle of the spoons are much too long.

In heaven, the scene is exactly the same. However, there is a big difference: no one suffers but enjoys the wonderful banquet. They use the long handled spoons to feed each other across the table.

Some of us think we are living in hell and some of us are fortunate to think we are living in heaven or paradise. It

is not so much the reality of the situation as it is our own outlook or attitude on life. In actuality, we create our own heaven and hell by how we look at the world and ourselves.

There is another message in this parable as well. By helping others, we can create our own paradise. Our selfish desires make life a kind of hell.

A good part of growing up is to clearly distinguish between good and evil. We call this "maturity." We are brought up to believe that the "good guys" wear the white hats and the "bad guys" wear the black. We know, however, that, in reality, this is not always so. In fact, like our heaven and hell, they are very difficult to tell apart at first glance.

This month, a television program aired with an interview with the notorious murderer, Charles Manson. One could easily see that he is an extremely dangerous person yet he spoke of God, of personal development, of breaking through one's limitations, of harmony with nature, of life and love, etc. They were words we often hear from saints.

If we dis-associated the words from the person, one might easily mistake the dialogue from that of an enlightened man.

Some people say there is only a fine line between genius and insanity.

There is only a fine line between good and evil, as well, and we must look deeply and with great concentration to

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to distinguish between the two. We may assume we know the difference quite well but it is often too late when we realize we are in error. The importance of our training is to cultivate this wisdom to see good clearly and wisely.

I often see many students who train hard and do very well. But, soon they develop a kind of self-conceit or confidence in themselves that they are doing well. When they become too attached to this belief, they become angry or resentful if someone comes along with a different opinion or corrects them. We must constantly be on guard against this. It happens often among senior students as well as beginners.

Quite some time ago, my friend invited a group of friends including myself for dinner at a well known restaurant. He had originally made the reservation for four people but, as it turned out, the final count came to eight. He never bothered to change the reservation at the restaurant. As far as he was concerned, the more the merrier. When we all arrived at the restaurant, we were refused a table for eight. My friend became very upset and angry because he could not understand why the restaurant would not cooperate with him. I don't think it was the restaurant's fault because they were only prepared to serve four. In addition, we were forty-five minutes late and my friend was quite angry that they did not hold the table for us. To this day, he still believes that he was right. I don't know sure

but most people know that if we make a reservation for three, three people should show up at the appointed time. I think this is common sense and polite.

This month, Oliver North was honored with a doctorate at the graduation ceremony of a university. In regards to the Contra Aid affair, many people are divided if he was right or wrong in his actions. Some people would like to see him in jail. Some people want him to become the next President of the United States.

Many of our actions are precariously balanced on the fine line between good and bad. What is good for me may not be what is good for you and visa versa.

Our world is becoming more and more complex. Our world is moving much more faster; there are much more people, and the technology is much more complicated. We have made so much progress in our material world but our spiritual world has not made much significant progress at all. Our Aikido training should be directed to giving us the mental strength and insight to deal with the modern world of today.

In our dojo, more and more students are coming in everyday. It always becomes more complicated when we are dealing with more people. I remember when I only had one or two students. It was very easy to keep track of everyone. But, now, with over one hundred students, I find it difficult to remember everyone and I forget people so easily. Beginning students must keep an open

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mind and realize the difficulties of a small dojo to handle so many new students at one time. Also, senior students should try their best to help the newer students become accustomed to the routine of our training and help them to feel at home become a part of the dojo. I know some students might think this is very difficult but it is a part of training and embodied in our etiquette.

It is said from ancient times, "Martial arts begins and ends with proper etiquette." Senior students and assistant instructors, especially, should be very conscious of their conduct in the dojo and how they act. They serve as the models for the new students, more than the teacher.

This incident took place about two thousand five hundred years ago. The mother of a student of Confucius passed away after a long illness. In Chinese society, there are many complicated rites to be observed and a strict period of mourning. (Three years in olden days - the time a mother cares for a child until it can walk.) This student, however, did not observe any of the proper ceremonies but sat under a tree and drank and ate as if nothing had happened. His fellow students were quite angry and ashamed of him and finally complained to their teacher, Confucius. Confucius replied: "If he hasn't the mind to mourn for his mother, I don't see why he should. It would only become empty and meaningless actions on his part. He

should only do what is in his heart. That is honest. However, because no natural feeling of sadness at the death of his mother arises out of his soul to compel him to mourn and perform the proper rites for her soul, I have no respect for him at all. There is no way he can ever follow me."

Perhaps, much of the etiquette in the dojo may seem pointless or meaningless to the new student. They may seem like so many empty actions and silly rituals. However, in our Aikido discipline they are very important because they are the proper way to express our inner feelings. They correct and discipline our inner feelings as well.

By following the proper form, we eventually come to understand the proper way to act. And, through proper action, we begin to understand the significance of these actions and finally their innermost meaning.

#### **O-SENSEI'S MEMORIAL SERVICE**

On April 26, 1988, Tuesday, Reverend Fukushima of the Zenshuji Temple came to the dojo to perform a memorial service to the soul of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba O-Sensei. About twenty students attended and offered incense. This marks the twentieth anniversary of his passing on April 26, 1969. After the ceremony, about twenty students enjoyed a wonderful feast at the Regency Seafood Restaurant.

Fukushima Sensei spoke about the form of Zen during his sermon. In meditation, it is often difficult to achieve the

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correct mental attitude. If one tries to adjust his mind, the efforts to correct himself will cause his mind to become even more disturbed. In Zen, when the mind is disturbed, one corrects his posture or form. The correct posture will encourage the correct mental attitude.

We often consider Aikido a mental or spiritual discipline. When people try to discipline their minds, they quickly become disillusioned because the mind is so elusive and difficult to define. We catch the spiritual aspects of the art through the form. But, students often confuse "form" for "technique."

I knew a young lady in the bank where I worked who loved to cook. She was always finding famous recipes and trying them out. She was very conscientious and followed each recipe exactly but no one ever considered her a very good cook despite all her efforts. I often think she knew how to follow the recipes well enough but I think she never understood the meaning of "what tastes good." The recipes are not the "form" of cooking. Taste is the "form" of cooking. In Aikido, the techniques are not the form of the art. The "form" is the spirit of the art. This I think needs serious consideration because it is difficult to understand. A sage once asked, "In carving the handle of an axe, the form is close at hand." Can you understand the meaning of this question? It answers the question of "what is the form of Aikido?" Please think about it very carefully and find the answer yourself.

## **TWO APRIL DEMONSTRATIONS**

ACLA students were very busy in April with two demonstrations. There were demonstrations at the Pasadena Old Town Arts and Crafts Festival in Pasadena and the Children's Day Festival at the Japanese Village Plaza in Little Tokyo. The weather was a little gloomy in Pasadena and there was only a small turnout but the Children's Day Festival, as usual, was a big success. Everyone who participated in the demonstration and helped out with answering questions and passing flyers all deserve a word of appreciation and thanks.

## **KCET MAGAZINE FOR APRIL, 1988**

Our dojo received a very nice mention in the April 1988 issue of KCET Magazine on page 22 to 23. We also received a very nice letter from the president of KCET. Their thoughtfulness has allowed many people to find out about our dojo.

Also, Inside Kung-Fu magazine mentioned the fact that Mr. Dick Cavett practices Aikido at our dojo in their latest issue.

## **NEW ENGLAND SUMMER CAMP**

The New England Aiki Kai will be sponsoring their annual Summer Camp in July of this year. We have not received detailed information as yet but several students are already making plans to attend. This year, the guest instructor will be Ohsawa Kisaburo Sensei, 9th Dan, and former Chief Instructor of the Aikido World Headquarters. Ohsawa Sensei is one of the highest ranking masters in the Aikido world today. He recently retired from his post which

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was taken over by Moriteru Ueshiba Sensei, the son of the present Doshu, Grandmaster Kisshomaru Ueshiba.

For further details about the seminar, please inquire with Ms. Kathy Heine-mann. Good travel rates are available through Mr. Saito of the Saito Travel Bureau on Sixth Street in Downtown Los Angeles, please mention Sensei's name.

### **DOJO WILL BE FEATURED IN "MARTIAL ARTS TRAINING"**

Our School will be featured in a cover story in Martial Arts Training magazine. The editors will be visiting the dojo on May 22nd and 23rd to take extensive photos of the dojo and the students training. Everyone come and look your best!

### **ONE THOUSAND APOLOGIES**

The first and third Monday evening study group has been temporarily cancelled due to Sensei's heavy writing schedule and many family responsibilities. Thank you for your understanding.

In addition, we have many new students coming into the dojo so the 7:30pm to 8:30pm class on Monday and Thursday will be open to new students.

### **WELCOMING NEW STUDENTS**

The dojo welcomes the many new students who have join the dojo in recent weeks.

As new students, it is always difficult to adjust to a new environment and a

new discipline. New students must have patience for at least two months- before they begin to feel comfortable and catch on to the various movements. If you quit right away without giving yourself a chance to understand Aikido a little, you have lost a great deal. Patience is the key to developing good skill.

They say a journey of ten thousand miles begins with the first step. Once you have taken the first step you should not give up so easily. This is the spirit of Aikido training.

I think Aikido must be very difficult to enter into nowadays for many people because Aikido has no gimmicks and no sales pitch. I think we become accustomed to be lead into or persuaded before we buy a product or join an organization. Aikido has none of this. Aikido is simply Aikido. Everyone is welcome to join our dojo but no one is forced into joining our dojo. Everyone must come of his own free will. "Free will" is an interesting term. We hold it so preciously yet few of us know what it really means. This is something we begin to understand in our training. We develop ourselves as we help others to develop themselves. Working together, training together, suffering together, we begin to understand what "free will" is.

I feel that people entering into Aikido training now are very lucky because there is so much for Aikido to offer. Twenty and thirty years ago there were hardly any well qualified instructors

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available and very few dojos to practice in. There were no dojos open seven days a week. I am so happy to see many people joining the dojo and hope everyone will enjoy their training and continue to devote themselves to their Aikido practice.

### WORDS OF APPRECIATION

A word of thanks go to the following people for their donations.

Dr. Larry Yoshioka (Memorial Service)	\$10.00
Dr. Larry Yoshioka (Dojo)	\$20.00
Mr. Kazuho Nishida (Memorial Service)	\$50.00
Mr. Blaine Navroth (Dojo for purchase of Hard Disk Computer)	\$700.00

### SPECIAL GUEST INSTRUCTOR MAY 15TH, SUNDAY

Mr. Harvey Konisberg, Assistant Instructor of the New York Aiki Kai, will be conducting two special classes on Sunday morning, May 15, 1988. All students are encouraged to attend.

First Class. 10:00am to 11:00am  
Second Class. 11:30am to 12:30pm  
Welcome Luncheon Follows.

Mr. Konisberg is one of the oldest students of Yamada Sensei of the New York Aiki Kai. He has visited our dojo several times in the past and we welcome him again. Everyone is looking forward to his visit. New students are also welcome and should not miss this.

### DOJO PATCHES

We are still taking orders for the new patches for the dojo. Please see Mr. Blake Ashley or Mr. Douglas Firestone about putting in your order today. The patches are a \$5.00 donation each and are worn on the left shoulder on your uniform.

### NISEI WEEK DEMONSTRATION UP-COMING.

We have just been notified by the Nisei Week Festival Committee about the upcoming Nisei Week Aikido Demonstration to be held sometime in the middle of July. Our demonstration of Aikido and Iaido is always well received and has become a Nisei Week tradition. This year, it would be nice to design a poster or nice flyer of some kind to let everyone know about the demonstration.

The demonstration will be held in the mall of the Tokyo Plaza on the second floor. The Tokyo Plaza is located in the Yaohan Store Complex on Third Street and Alameda Street very close to the dojo. Our registration fees and space rental is donated by Mr. Pat Seki of Seki Jewellers in the Honda Plaza.

### CONGRATULATIONS TO MR. STEPHAN STÉPHANIDES ON HIS TRIP TO JAPAN

Mr. Steve Stephanides has qualified and received a scholarship to go to Japan for ten months to study at the Waseda University in Tokyo. Steve is also planning to train at the Waseda University Aikido Club and the Aikido Hombu Dojo. We wish him lots of good luck and await his return to our dojo.