



# AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES NEWSLETTER

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## REVIEWING THE MONTH OF OCTOBER

The month of October was an extremely busy month for the dojo. October 1st and 2nd marks a very successful seminar by Yoshimitsu Yamada Sensei from the New York Aikikai. We had over forty students in attendance. On the following Saturday, Ms. Kathy Heinemann, one of the senior students of the dojo, married Mr. Kevin Altieri of our Iaido Section, in a beautiful wedding ceremony in Santa Barbara. The wedding was attended by Sensei and the Senior Assistant Instructor, Mr. Douglas Firestone. On October 12th, Sensei left for a three week tour of Japan returning on November 1st. On the weekend of October 15th and 16th, there was an all day demonstration in Chinatown for a Crime Prevention Festival that they were trying to get off the ground this year. It was much, much less than they promised.

Because of Sensei's short notice trip to Japan, one seminar in Arizona was cancelled. A short visit has been re-scheduled for the first weekend in December.

## UPCOMING EVENTS FOR THE DOJO

November 19th is the Shogun Santa's Parade in Little Tokyo. Our Children's Class will participate in the parade as they did last year. We will need all the help of the Children's Class and the parents to make this event a successful one.

November 24th is Thanksgiving. The dojo will be closed on this holiday. Everyone have a pleasant and safe holiday and be thankful for all that we have received.

December 2nd, Friday, Sensei will be travelling to Arizona to visit the dojo there and teach several classes. He will be returning Monday, December 5th.

On December 25th, Christmas, we will have one special morning class from 9:00am to 10:00am in the morning. There will be no evening classes.

On December 31st, New Year's Eve, there will be our special New Year's Class from 11:30pm to 12:30am practicing Aikido into the New Year. Everyone is invited to attend. Party afterwards.

## A MESSAGE FROM SENSEI

I would, first of all, like to thank everyone for taking good care of the dojo while I was away in Japan. I think it was especially hard for all of the Assistant Instructors because our training schedule is very tough with classes everyday. I would like to give Dan and Sherri Eaton my personal thanks for taking care of my mother's home in Altadena and feeding my mother's dog, Benji, every day. Also, thanks goes to Morgan Weisser for watering all of the dojo plants and killing only one of them with the help of our Senior Assistant Instructor.

I have not been to Japan for almost twenty years so it was quite exciting for me to go but it was a totally unexpected surprise to me.

Mr. John Yumoto, a veteran sword expert in San Francisco, plans these tours to Japan every year. In July, he had asked me to take over if anything might happen to him. He was referring to his failing health. Regretably, he passed away just days before the tour and his dying wish was that I take over the tour for him. What is so strange about this request is that we are total strangers and had never met before our first and only meeting in July. It is difficult to ignore or refuse his dying, final request, so it was necessary to drop everything, as busy as we were in October, obtain a passport within a week, and be off to Japan. It was not an easy tour. Mr. Yumoto, did not, because of his ill health, make any final confirmation of all the appointments set up throughout the tour. No official notice was sent out informing everyone that the tour was not cancelled despite his death. Because of the Emperor's illness, many festivals and exhibitions were cancelled including the National Convention of the Japanese Sword Museum which was the main purpose of the tour. Although we had many, many problems, somehow, it managed to turn out rather nicely.

In the future, I will be travelling more. For five years, since the building of our dojo, I have stayed pretty much close to "home," but it is important for me to go out again to further my knowledge and experience. At the same time, I believe it is very important to develop a strong core membership within the general studentbody to maintain the dojo well during periods when I am absent. Indeed, I believe if everyone works together and donates a fair share of time and energy, the dojo should continue to grow and develop without me.

When beginning students become discouraged, it is very

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important for the older students to encourage them in their training. We must learn how to train others and not just ourselves. Everyone must develop themselves together, helping each and working together. This is the essential attitude to develop in our Aikido training. Students should also encourage their friends and neighbors to join our practice. It is important to keep our membership growing. Sometimes, we become too concerned with ourselves and we forget about the people around us.

On October 17th or thereabouts, my photo appeared in the View Section of the Los Angeles Times. I think it mentions the "mysteries of the universe" or "harmony" or some other nice-sounding words. We have become so verbal in everything we do. We must explain everything or, at the very least, give it a name or term. Aikido does have something to do with the "universe" or "harmony," but I do not believe it is such an easy thing to see or understand in our daily lives. Usually, when we do, we only realize at some later date, that we have been fooling ourselves and others. The last thing I would like to see is everyone misunderstanding the captions of the photos and think that I have achieved such blissful harmony or peace.

Viewing our lives might be like looking at the vast sea. When I was travelling by the Inland Sea in Japan, I saw the most beautiful scenery I could have ever hoped to see in my life. It was breathtaking. Looking over the horizon, the sea appears to be so calm and peaceful. Yet, as we look closely, we see many waves and turbulence caused by the currents. Generally, our lives are quite peaceful in this day and age. However, closer examination may not prove this to be so. Sometimes, we must take the big view of life and see how calm and peaceful our lives really are. Sometimes, we must look very closely and examine the turbulence and constant change of our lives in a smaller view of what we do. Aikido, in many ways, teaches us how to balance the "big view of life" with the "small view of life." It is never a matter of one over the other.

Don't try to understand Aikido through words. As soon as we try to put a name to it, we have already contradicted or limited ourselves in the "definition" of Aikido. Basho, the famous "haiku" poet, travelled all across Japan writing beautiful

poetry but when he arrived at the Inland Sea, he wrote nothing. Scholars of Japanese literature today are stumped as to why he did not leave a single verse here but we believe that the area is so beautiful with tiny islands dotting the deep blue sea, that he was speechless and decided to leave such beauty untouched. Japan has just completed the Seto "Ohashi" or the "Great Bridge of Seto" (the sister bridge of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco) which spans across these islands linking Shikoku with the mainland. It is a magnificent structure of human engineering cutting across the beautiful landscape. It is the longest bridge in the world. During our tour, we only journeyed to the half-way point because the entire length of the bridge is much too long to travel across. At the half-way point situated on one of the small islands, they have built restaurants, touristy gift shops and huge toilet facilities to accommodate all the visitors. The entrance gateway competes with something out of Disneyland. Although the bridge is truly an impressive, manmade structure, Japan has lost one of its most beautiful scenic landmarks which has inspired artists and poets for over one thousand years.

Today, everyone speaks much too much about Aikido. I often imagine that Aikido experts sell their theories about Aikido like vegetable dealers sell their tomatoes by the wayside.

One student became very discouraged and wanted to quit training because, after two months of practice, could not figure out "what Aikido was all about." I think many other students may sympathize with this sentiment. I suppose if he did find out "what Aikido was all about," I would give him a \$.25. I am not trying to be cynical. Quite long ago, 1200 years to be more precise, a student asked an old Zen master, what is the value of Zen? "A piece of broken roof tile" was the reply. It has no value that can be named. While we were travelling through a very quaint old town which has been preserved as it is from feudal times, one of the members of the tour group fell in love with one of the old tile pieces on the roof of a house. It had the face of a devil with red colored eyes. It was not really part of the roof but was sitting on the roof and held in place by a thin wire as a sort of decoration. I thought it was rather rude, at the time, but the wife banged on the door and asked it was for sale. It was so contradictory to the quiet and ancient atmosphere of this old town. The old woman came out and said, "It's very old, but you can have because you are tourists from America. It is only \$80.00." "What a bargain!" bragged the wife over and over again. They cut it down and packed it up in a cardboard box with lots of string.

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This great bargain, the antique tile piece, which they had managed to cheat out of the old lady, was only the beginning of many problems. When I looked at it, it was not really old at all. In fact, it was a newly made piece and someone had glued in red marbles for the eyes. Secondly, it weighed about fifteen pounds and was much too much big to carry around Japan for the remaining two weeks. By the next stop, I heard the devil face had been broken. I don't know how many pieces it was in by the time we reached Tokyo because the woman who bragged so much about buying this valuable roof tile, never said anything more about it again. When I asked her about her prize, she became angry and her eyes reddened reminding me of some new roof tile piece with a devil face with cheap marbles for eyes I saw somewhere in a quaint old Japanese village.

The "100th Day Service" for my late mother was for October 30, 1988 but, because I was in Japan, I rescheduled it for as soon as I returned. I apologize to my mother for being two days late. This service commemorates the day my mother ascends to Paradise and is the day when all mourning ceases. A young priest who recently joined the Zenshuji temple gave the sermon and told a rather interesting story. This young priest had come several years previously to work at the temple for a short period of time as part of his training. He said he had come to the Los Angeles temple to further his training and learn more about what his duties will be when he becomes a full-fledged priest on his own. According to his story, when he first arrived at the temple, he was ushered in the Bishop's room and sat down. The first thing the elderly Bishop said really shocked him. "I heard you brought a lot of money with you," said the Bishop, "turn it all over to me right now." The young priest said he was so surprised and almost felt that the Bishop was some kind of "thief" as he obediently turned over all the money he had. Then the Bishop explained, "You think you have come here to take something back with you, but that is not so. You have come here to leave something behind. You are to work here and contribute to the temple. I will return your money when you are ready to return to Japan." The priest then understood. We are always after something and we never think of giving. When we understand that there is nothing to gain, suffering ceases.

I know many people quit Aikido saying, "I am not getting anything out of it anymore." I hear this quite often. Students who think they are "going to get something out of it" will always be disappointed. Students who don't care about gaining anything but come because they like Aikido and enjoy the training always progress quickly by catching the true spirit of Aikido. They ultimately gain the most. It is really not a question of how much you are going to receive. It is a question of how much you are going to put into the practice and the dojo. People who think only of themselves are always disappointed because they always believe they don't have as much as the other person.

The young priest received a very important first lesson from the Bishop. I think the Bishop was an excellent teacher to break the young priest's misconception from the very beginning. In our present society, however, it is difficult to tell the new student, "practice hard because you won't gain anything at all." Most students would just run away or ask, "If you can't get anything out of it, then why do it?" A new student who can understand "non-striving" is half way to being a master already. These students are very few and far between. Students should not think about what they are gaining. Rather, they should concentrate on what they are putting into their training. Finally, the true Aikido student is a student who really loves Aikido (and not for any other reason.) Sawaki Kodo, a famous Zen master, was interviewed on television in his later years and was asked, "What is the benefit of practicing Zen?" Sawaki Roshi replied, "I have practiced Zen for over thirty years and have gained nothing." The television interviewer was shocked.

We come into the world with nothing and we leave the world with nothing. Everything in between our birth and death is a gift from God, so we should always be grateful for whatever we do or receive. Whatever we receive in our lives is usually something we don't deserve in the first place.

Once we understand this, we must continue to refine our understanding. Just to know it is not enough. Refinement of our understanding through training is the meaning of our practice and of the activity of our daily lives.

I am not sure where the Japanese people are headed to today. When I was in Japan twenty years ago, I saw many people struggling and working quite hard. I am amazed at Japan today and the result of hard work in those

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last twenty years. Raised in America, I have always believed that we were the very best and the strongest country in the world. Now I have my doubts. We have much more than the Japanese. But, I wonder if we work as hard to achieve as much. Students who apply themselves diligently to their practice always make good progress. It is not a question of how much talent or strength. I see many students waste their talent because of laziness or an incorrect attitude towards Aikido and I see students of little talent make terrific progress because of the way they faithfully apply themselves to their training. Again, it is not so much what you can get out of practice as what you can put into your practice.

I do not believe in the old adage, "You get out of practice what you put into practice." I always see students get more out of Aikido than whatever they put into it.

#### **HUMAN CRISIS AND ZAZEN**

By Tozen Akiyama, Resident Priest of the Milwaukee Zen Center. From the Milwaukee Zen Center Newsletter, Volume 3. Number 3.

The midwestern United States (where Milwaukee is) suffered exceptional drought and heat this summer. One of our members reported in The Milwaukee Sentinel that Milwaukee had the hottest summer for at least 117 years - - "at least" because records started 117 years ago. On the other hand, I have read in a Japanese newspaper that summer businesses did poorly there because of cold weather. And a friend in England wrote to me that June and July were the wettest they had had for years - - so much so that crops might be so water-logged that they could not be harvested. What an irony!

Human beings have suffered from unusual weather in past history. But when I visited Omaha in July, it was as hot as Milwaukee. I asked one of the Zen Center members how hot it is there in a normal year, and he said that there has been no normal year recently. The world must be crazy if an abnormal year is normal. If this was "normally" unusual weather or part of a natural, periodic change of weather, we should appreciate that we can experience this unusual event, but if this has been caused by human destruction of nature, we cannot simply be pleased to meet what we can rarely meet.

Scientists say that the density of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased 25% since the mid-nineteenth century and prevents heat on earth from

to space. This causes the "greenhouse effect." Some people say that this summer's weather is the result of the greenhouse effect, while some deny it. Whether the unusual weather was directly related to the greenhouse effect or not, it is very likely that it was influenced by human mistreatment of nature.

Human beings have been so arrogant that they have declared that they have conquered or would conquer nature without knowing that they were just following a natural law. This crazy weather may be the retaliation of nature against human arrogance.

I have heard something to the effect that living things on earth flourish because of their strong points and become extinct because of their strong points. Dinosaurs may be a good example. They once overcame other animals and dominated the earth. Probably that was because of their big bodies, but they had to die out because their big bodies could not survive when the earth faced a glacial epoch. They were like men and women who ruin themselves because of their power or beauty.

What is the strong point of a human being? Why have human beings prospered so much? What makes human beings "human" is their brain. Human beings have developed a wonderful modern civilization with their "good" brain, but, at the same time, they have created all kinds of suffering with the same "good" brain. Both civilization and suffering are the products of their strong point, the brain, and are produced in seeking to satisfy desires that are another product of the brain. The problem here is that people have not only been "satisfied" with creating dissatisfaction and suffering for themselves and others, but people are leaving causes of suffering for the next generation, among which are nuclear power and pollution. Knowledge was certainly the forbidden fruit. As long as people continue to seek satisfaction of their desires with the brain, they will never fail to die out. Their strong point, the brain, will destroy them.

The only way to avoid this catastrophic result is not to depend on or be carried away by the brain. This is zazen. As I tell you repeatedly,

"Chop off your head, put it beside you, and sit."

Zazen is concerned not only with individual suffering but also with the problems of all human beings.

#### **Commentary:**

By D. M. Furuya

I think everyone has noticed that many changes in the weather and the "greenhouse effect" has been the topic of much discussion recently. Certainly, the weather

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the weather has changed considerably and is cause for wonder. It is not only the weather but we have dangerously polluted our rivers and seas. We have destroyed entire eco-systems. Lakes that once flourished with fish and birds are completely barren now. Oceans are so polluted that we cannot even swim in them. We have also polluted the earth with chemicals and toxins and this pollution is gradually making its way back into our bodies by what we eat. And now, we will begin to pollute outer space. Where will be go from there?

I remember when I used to sit in grammar school and laugh at my teacher who taught us conservation and said that one day our skies, seas and earth will be destroyed if we are not careful. Thirty years later, I now believe what she said because it has all come true.

I think that we have forgotten that we are not apart from nature. We have deluded ourselves into thinking that we are better than nature or stronger than nature. We are deluded into thinking that we live apart from nature. How far apart are we from the mountains, trees, the birds in the sky or the fish in the water? We are better than them? Can we live without them? Are we not all part of the same world? We have become so concerned with ourselves that we have forgotten everything else. Now, we are surprised at the consequences we must pay.

We live in such a selfish society today. Despite the many ways we can cure our problems, we do nothing. We do nothing because we know we won't be paid for what we do. There is much in life which we must accomplish for ourselves but as long as we expect something in return, I don't think we can accomplish anything at all. To try to protect the waters of our rivers will bring no money or honor at all in our society today. But, it is a moral obligation of natural law. To see this is to see our "spiritual life."

Art is a good example of this. With all of our great technical advancements, we cannot produce the wonderful cave paintings of ancient man or a beautiful Japanese sword of a thousand years ago. In ancient times, we were concerned with our "spirit" or God. Today, we are concerned with our egos. Two entirely different aspects of ourselves but so easily confused. Indeed, we may have tried to replace God with our own egos and this is a terrible crime.

The Founder of Aikido often used the expression,

"kishin" or "returning to God." He believed that we should all go back to Him and referred to Aikido movement as "misogi-waza" or "cleansing techniques" to purify ourselves to be able to see God.

This is difficult to understand from the standpoint of our practice but, I believe that through Aikido training we gain a reverence for nature and all living things. This is, in a way, seeing God.

Most probably, nature is warning us to be careful. I don't know if everyone is heeding this warning. I do know that we cannot see what is happening and that is because we have lost our spirit and our energies have become so weak.

Aikido is a martial art and we can hardly understand the meaning of martial arts if we cannot even see where we are standing on this earth.

#### **DYING ISAGI-YOKU**

By Miyuki Mokusen

##### Summary:

I became aware of the uniqueness of the Japanese attitude toward death when I participated in a workshop at the "Art of Dying" conference in 1974. This realization led me to further consideration of the Japanese perception of death and dying because it seems so different from common Western attitudes.

The Japanese response to the fear of death can be characterized as the attitude of *isagi-yoku*, a very important part of Japanese life. Dying *isagi-yoku* means to die with dignity and self-control. Such a death is considered to be the result of one's lifelong endeavor to face any emotional crisis with calmness and self-discipline.

In the East, death or dying is regarded as one's last enterprise in life; death exists inside or as a part of life, not outside of life or as the negation of life as in the West. Thus, in death the Easterner is concerned with inner attitude, or readiness to confront the horror of death, and in conducting oneself will in these last moments of life.

The reality of death and dying is integrated into one's efforts to live meaningfully for the Japanese. The traditional Japanese feeling about life is that it is a journey and that each stage of this journey is equally important. Thus, one "dies" at the end of each of the critical stages of life. In this tradition, aging is regarded not only as physical change but also as moral and spiritual growth.

##### Original Text:

Death is a concept. Dying, but not death, belongs to the experience of the living person. However, dying as a

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form of living is crucially different from other forms of living in that the individual is facing the critical moment in which he or she is going to disappear from this life. In this article I present the Japanese response to the fear of death which can be characterized as the attitude of *isagi-yoku*.

Speaking of this attitude, D. T. Suzuki in his work *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1970) states:

To die *isagi-yoku* is one of the thoughts very dear to the Japanese heart. . . . *Isagi-yoku* means "leaving no regrets," "with a clear conscience," "like a brave man," "with no reluctance," "in full possession of mind," and so on. The Japanese hate to see death met irresolutely and lingeringly; they desire to be blown away like the cherry blossom before the wind, and no doubt this Japanese attitude toward death must have gone very well with the teachings of Zen (pp. 84-85).

Recently a friend of mine died. He was a *nisei* of about sixty who had cancer of the liver, and when I last visited him after he returned from the hospital, he appeared rather healthy in spite of the fact that he was expected to die within a few months. He knew he was approaching death, and I found I could offer him no words of consolation. When we shook hands he said to me, "I am ready to go." He survived long beyond the time expected by the doctors and his family, and during these last months, he went many places and really seemed to enjoy his life. On the other hand, throughout these last months his life centered around the preparation for his death; he very carefully kept his personal belongings in order, bought a cemetery plot, made a will, and even washed the bowls from which he ate after every meal, thus indicating that he was quite ready to "leave" at every moment of his life. Nevertheless, according to his wife, from time to time he uttered the question, "Where am I going?" In fact, this was one of the last things he said.

I have a definite feeling that my friend knew that his question could only be answered by "going," or by experiencing death. He was driven to find the answer to his question by preparing to "leave" every moment, by living with his entire being from moment to moment. This man's words "Where am I going?" were not uttered out of anguish or desperation. His careful preparations and calm acceptance of his fate were very possibly the reasons why he lived much longer than was expected.

This friend's experience suggests to me that, no matter how calmly or *isagi-yoku* one accepts death on the rational level, the total acceptance of death remains impossible on the existential level. There is a famous story about a Zen monk that makes this point: On his death bed a Zen master was asked by his disciples to leave his last words for them, and thus they brought him a brush and ink. The dying monk wrote, "I don't want to die. I don't want to die (*Shini tomo nai shini tomo nai*)." The disciples were very much perplexed and annoyed because the words did not seem to be those of an eminent Zen monk, so they asked him to write what he really felt. The monk then wrote, "Really, really (*Horrami, horrami*)" (Kaneko, 1965)."

This story may conflict with our image of a great Zen master; the Zen monk is expected to be calm in facing death as the result of his *Zazen* practice which presumably enables him to live constantly in the here and now and to transcend the dichotomy of life and death. Assuredly this monk did not betray the general expectation as he wrote his last words with such self-composure, not in confusion and despair. The master was experiencing his immediate reality, which was his natural unwillingness to die, while in contrast his disciples were concerned with their image of what it means to be a famous Zen master. As with the experience of my friend, this story seems to convey that, as long as we live, the natural attachment to our physical existence is undeniable, even for someone who has cultivated the ability to transcend life and death.

In this connection I am reminded of Kishimoto Hideo, a Japanese scholar in the field of religion. He suffered for many years from a terminal illness and left us a valuable document which contains his talks about his experience of death in life, and also a manuscript in which he set down his perception of what it means to die. Being driven by the physical terror of death, which he characterized as incomprehensible, unquenchable "thirst or hunger for life," he had hopelessly attempted to intellectualize about the life hereafter. As he was a scholar, he first endeavored, in vain, to convince himself to accept his fate by utilizing the religious knowledge which he had accumulated. As in our previous stories, the attachment to physical life was unquestionably overwhelming for him. Then, he writes (Kishimoto, Kamei, Karaki, & Shimoyama, 1964), suddenly one day he had a flash of illumination:

The only necessary thing is our preparation to confront death when it comes. . . . What I discovered here was that I was afraid of death because I was thinking that I would experience it, and then I discovered that death was outside of my experience. What we can experience is only life or living. It was a shocking experi-



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ence for me to realize that there is no other way permitted for human beings to live except to keep living (pg. 61).

Kishimoto (1962) goes on to state that death is simply the lack of life, and the only thing given to us is life or living, nothing else. Thus his question became very clear: "How can I 'really' live what is left of my life?" Since life, for which he was "thirsty," was no more granted, he tried to live best each and every given moment beyond which there was no further assurance of life. He convinced himself that it was necessary for him to be ready to confront death at any moment when it came with the attitude of calmly bidding farewell to his life. Thus, whenever he said goodbye to others, he experienced that moment as if it had been the last opportunity for him to exchange these words.

(Continued in the next issue.)



**DOJO BULLETIN:**

We are closing the morning classes (Monday, Wednesday and Friday classes, 7:00am to 8:00am) until further notice.

We have so few black belts who are willing to help with the dojo, it is important for us to groom more assistants to help with the classes. Senior students: please continue to practice hard. Everyone comes up with such wonderful excuses nowadays, it is difficult to find help. Without more help, it will be necessary (and very unfortunate) to reduce the number of classes per week, increase our dues and eliminate our newsletter.

Everyone should continue to try their best to build up the membership of the dojo. It is important that we work hard to maintain its smooth operation. It is, afterall, Your School.

Special Thanks goes to all the students who helped with painting Sensei's home in Altadena. (Hopefully, we can finish the painting job before the New Year.)

Special Thanks goes to all the students who helped with the Chinatown Crime Prevention Demonstration in October.

Special Thanks goes to Kaz Nishida, Assistant Instructor, for all the classes he took care of in October.

Mr. Kaz Nishida just received his Shodan (1st Degree Black Belt) Certificate from the Aikido World Headquarters which was presented in class on November 10, 1988.

Sensei has been appointed Editor of the United States Aikido Federation Newsletter of the Eastern Region. The newsletter will begin publication from January 1, 1989. Subscriptions are \$15.00 per year for six issues. To receive the USAF Eastern Region Newsletter, please remit \$15.00 plus your name and address, clearly written. Send to:

United States Aikido Federation Newsletter, Eastern Region.

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Martial Arts Training magazine, Winter 1988, features Sensei's article entitled, "Tests of Time," about various tests teachers gave their students to evaluate their ability and potential.

