



AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES

NEWSLETTER

940 E. Second Street #7
Los Angeles, California
90012
(213) 687-3673

September-October 1988
Volume 3. Number 9-10.

ONE THOUSAND APOLOGIES

I would like to apologize to everyone for the very late publication of the newsletter. Our dojo has been so busy in the last several months that I was unable to do the September issue, so, with your permission, I am combining the September with our October publication. Thank you for your understanding. - Editor.

ACLA DIARY

August 1988

August 5th - Rehearsal of the Aikido and Iaido demonstration for the Nisei Week Coronation Ball at the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles.

August 6th. 6th Annual Nisei Week Aikido and Iaido Demonstration at the Yaohan-Little Tokyo Square at 2:00pm. A great success with about 300 spectators in attendance.

August 6th. Demonstration for Opening Ceremonies of the Nisei Week Coronation Ball at the Bonaventure Hotel. A great success with about 800 people in attendance. Participants were Sensei, Mr. Douglas Firestone, Mr. Kaz Nishida, Mr. Tony Gonsalves and Mr. Manuel Almaguer.

August 7th. Second day of the 6th Annual Nisei Week Aikido and Iaido Demonstration. About 450 people in attendance.

August 7th. Douglas Firestone leaves for New England for training at the New England Aikikai and the New England Summer Camp.

August 12th to 19th. New England Summer Camp. 6 members from the Dojo in attendance. Mr. Douglas Firestone, Mr. Kaz Nishida, Ms. Mitsuko Yoshimoto, Mr. Bill Heath, Mr. Tony Gonsalves and Mr. Dan Eaton. Congratulations!

August 13th. Demonstration at the Japanese Village Plaza celebrating Nisei Week festivities.

August 14th. Second day of the Japanese Village Plaza demonstrations.

September 1988

September 5th. Special morning practice for the Labor Day Holiday, 9:00am to 10:30am.

September 16th. Lecture: "Introduction to Japanese Swords."

September 17th. Martial Arts Festival at the Japanese Village Plaza.

September 18th. Second day of demonstrations for the Martial Arts Festival at the Japanese Village Plaza.

September 22nd to 25th. Sensei travels to Chicago for the Publications Committee of the Japanese Sword Society of the United States at the Chicago Sword Convention.

September 30th. Yamada Sensei arrives to LA from New York.

October 1988

October 1st and 2nd. Yamada Sensei's Seminar.

UPCOMING EVENTS

The month of October until the end of the year appears very busy for the dojo as well. As of this publication we have many scheduled events, however, it may be necessary for Sensei to travel to Japan so many events may be cancelled or handled by senior members of the dojo.

October 6th. Yamada Sensei's scheduled return to New York. Yamada Sensei will be travelling to Houston and Cincinnati for seminars before his actual return to New York.

October 8th. Ms. Kathy Heinemann, one of the senior students of the dojo, marries Mr. Kevin Altieri (Iaido Section) in Santa Barbara.

October 15th. Chinatown Crime Prevention Seminar. 10:00am to 5:00pm.

October 21st to 23rd. Sensei conducts class in Arizona.

Note: Sensei has been asked to conduct a tour of Japan from October 12 through November 3rd for the Northern California Sword Society. The tour was already scheduled but their teacher, very regretfully, passed away on October 1st. On an emergency basis, Sensei has been asked to fill in at the request of the wife and the members of the tour group. If Sensei does go to Japan, he requests that all the members work together to keep the dojo going in good order until his return on November 3rd. Also, Douglas Firestone will have an extremely busy schedule during October so he also requests your assistance and cooperation. Thank you.

YAMADA SENSEI'S SEMINAR

Yamada Sensei, 7th dan, Chief Instructor of the New York Aikikai and Senior Technical Advisor for the Eastern Region of the United States Aikido Federation, conducted a most successful seminar on October 1st and 2nd at the dojo. 42 members attended the two classes on Saturday and 38 members attended on Sunday. This is one of the best seminars we have had to date. Yamada Sensei arrived on Friday, September 30th, and stayed the Hotel Tokyo in Little Tokyo. He is scheduled to leave Los Angeles on October 6th and travel to Houston and Cincinnati, conducting seminars at each respective dojo before his actual return to New York. We were also joined by another special guest, one of our New York members, Mr. Dick Cavett. Yamada maintains an extremely busy schedule just returning from a lengthy trip to Japan and Europe before his visit to LA.

Sensei was honored by invitation from Yamada Sensei to teach a seminar in New York in February of next year. The schedule is still as yet tentative and in the planning stages. As currently planned, Sensei go to New York directly and will be travelling with Yamada Sensei to Canada as well and then travelling alone to Boston to visit with Kanai Sensei of the New England Aikikai. This special seminar will be celebrating Kanai Sensei's 50th birthday. More details will follow.

Yamada Sensei has also asked Sensei to begin publication of the United States Aikido Federation, East Coast Region, Newsletter. This will be a bi-monthly publication. Our dojo is a member of the East Coast Region because Yamada Sensei and Kanai Sensei are old teachers of Sensei and Sensei prefers maintain his loyalty to them.

Yamada Sensei is scheduling seminars at our dojo for next year. Kanai Sensei will be visiting sometime towards the beginning of 1989. Yamada Sensei and Sugano Sensei will both be coming as well at different times. Hopefully, we can plan for seminars every three or four months. As our dojos grows and more students progress in their training, we may hope for four seminars or a seminar every three months. This would be ideal for our training schedule.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY DOJO

Because of Sensei's loaded schedule, we hope many more senior students in the dojo will lend their time and energy to help building up and supporting our dojo in the valley. We must keep it going and we need your help. It is an excellent dojo and more

students should visit there once in a while for training. Eventually we will be setting up a schedule for senior students to act as assistant instructors there helping the instructors in charge.

YELLOW PAGES AD

We are still looking for volunteers and donors to help with our Yellow Pages ad. Please see Ms. Kathy Altieri or Mr. Douglas Firestone.

NEW STUDENTS

As new students come into the dojo, it is up to the older students to introduce themselves to them and make them feel welcome. It is also important for the older students to show them the proper protocol of the dojo and how to conduct themselves during training. This is an important part of our training.

When students enter the dojo late, they should be very quiet so as not to disturb the students who are training. Usually, students walk in late right in the middle of the exercises and this is always a little distracting. Please enter the dojo quietly.

Students should not hang their belts around their necks while on the mats before and after class. When on the mats, students should be properly dressed in their uniforms.

Students should not wear jewelry on the mats. This can be dangerous during training. Nowadays, men seem to wear more jewelry, such as chains and rings, than women.

Everyone should learn to work together during the clean-up period after practice. Working together is a great part of the meaning of cleaning up the dojo and it is essential to cultivate this spirit for our training.

It is said that even a monkey may fall out of tree. Although a monkey mistakenly falls out of a tree it does not mean that he never climbs a tree again. The tree is essential for his survival. Aikido training is quite similar. We are always making mistakes, but that is part of our training. And, somehow, training is continually correcting our mistakes as well as trying to acquire new information and skills. "To err is human" is not an excuse but a statement of our condition. Good students try to learn from their mistakes and use them as stepping stones for their progress. This is really not an easy task; I know from my own personal experience. I strongly believe it is an excellent way to build up our courage and spiritual strength. Indeed, mistakes should not even be called "mistakes" because we are so conditioned to view them negatively. The realization of our error is more than half the battle.

THE COMPASS

As everyone enters the dojo to go to the changing rooms on the second floor, they pass under a huge, old, wooden sign. I doubt if few people know what it says. It is carved with the words, "Hokushin Itto Ryu - Kenjutsu Shinansho," which means "Official School of the Hokushin Itto School of Swordsmanship." It is about one hundred and fifty years old and is the front sign of one of the most famous schools of Japanese swordsmanship in 19th century feudal Japan. This school was formed by Chiba Shusaku who is one of the first teachers to instruct members of the non-samurai class (or commoners) and who played a very important role in Japan's emergence into the modern era. Chiba Shusaku was one of the very best swordsmen of his day. His swordsmanship greatly influenced the sport of modern kendo.

This is a very interesting sign beyond the fact of its great rarity. "Hokushin Itto Ryu" means the "Northern Star" school of swordsmanship. Chiba saw his school as the North Star for all martial arts to aim towards. "Shinansho" or "Shinan" is the old term for "teaching." Its original meaning, however, is "compass." The teachings or the teacher was thought of as a compass which points to the correct way. Although the compass points north, the ancient Japanese considered the north to be the direction from where evil came so they called the compass not "north pointer" but "south pointer." South is the direction of paradise. "Shinan" means "pointing south" but is the old term for compass. I think it is very confusing but an unusual insight into the Japanese mentality. Although Chiba used the term "North Star" for his school name; ironically, the term he used for his school means to "point south," the opposite direction.

Although you may jiggle a compass to move the needle, the needle will always come back to point in a northerly direction. I believe all humans have a little compass within themselves which always points in their right direction. We often jiggle this compass and make it point in other directions but if we observe it carefully and calmly, it always guides us in the right direction like a real compass. Sometimes, we forget about this compass and we go way off the track. Every once in a while, we should observe the compass within ourselves and make sure we are pointed in the right direction.

Aikido is like a compass as well. Aikido training, I believe, points us in the right direction of our lives. The navigator always keeps track of the needle so he won't lose his way, we, as students of Aikido,

must continually see how Aikido is pointing us in the right direction through our practice. I think this is where the great benefit of Aikido lies.

When my mother was very sick, she felt like something to eat which I had never cooked before in my life. But, I pulled out the cookbook and following the directions very carefully, I prepared the dish and was surprised at how well it tasted. Often, we take off pell-mell in any direction and later wonder how we could have gotten lost. I think it is better to proceed a little more slowly with proper direction than to just take off without thinking. I remember I was trying to bake a cake for my student's party many years ago and after I got all the ingredients together I thought I knew very well how to prepare the rest. It was not very hard I thought and just went along in my own fashion. I finally put the cake into the oven and began to clean up the dirty dishes and mixing bowls thinking to myself that I did a pretty good job. Much to my surprise I found two eggs on the kitchen counter which I had forgotten to mix into the batter. As it turned out, it was a terrible cake! If I had followed the proper directions, I probably would have added the eggs at the proper time and avoided all the waste of time, energy and cake mix!

One time, I was riding with my friend and when he got lost he began to drive very fast. Somehow, he thought that, by driving more quickly, we would find our way. I thought it would be better to stop and ask the proper directions from a gas station. On one occasion, however, I stopped to ask directions, but somehow by the look in his eyes, I drove in the opposite direction and found my destination very quickly.

Many times in our training, we look at the technique being demonstrated and immediately jump up and begin doing our own thing, not what we just saw. This is not the "true learning experience," it is merely "history repeating itself."

Try what is being taught first and then apply to it what you have learned in the past. Never assume that you know it but always keep your mind open and clear. In practice, always think of yourself as a beginner trying to learn the first thing ever being taught.

As students advance in their training, they, at some point in time, begin to think they know everything. What a big mistake! I know this from my own personal experience.

People who try to prove their own strength to everyone are not very strong people at all. They only show to everyone that they lack confidence in themselves and are somehow disappointed with themselves.

We should always take a look at ourselves and make sure that we have not jiggle the needle of our inner compass way off course.

When we become teachers, we become "shinan" (south pointers) or compasses for other people so they can find their way. This is the great honor and responsibility of becoming a teacher.

About one hundred and fifty years ago, many great warriors passed daily under the old sign which now hangs in the dojo. In those days, these warriors changed the course of history by their courage and skill in martial arts. I hope that all my students who pass under the old sign today will bring about changes for the better in our world of tomorrow.

BUILDING OUR DOJO

Everyone should think how to continue to make our dojo grow. It is important to let your friends know about our training and let the news spread through word of mouth. This is the best way to bring in new students. At the same time, it is important to help our new students so they feel at home and will continue in their training. Aikido is always very difficult at first. I think everyone has experienced this.

Progress is not measured by "good and bad." It is measured by personal effort and commitment. Each person makes progress in his own way. Occasionally the teacher shows the carrot or the whip to make the horse run. Both work well according to the situation. Just don't mistake the carrot for the whip or visa versa.

I think students may become discouraged if Sensei does not appear too often in the dojo from time to time. This is rather a busy time for me and people from many directions are demanding my time. I am currently publishing our newsletter as well as the Southern California Japanese Sword Society's monthly newsletter of which I am now the President. From January 1989, I will also be responsible to the United States Aikido Federation's bi-monthly newsletter. This is all in addition to the many articles I prepare for magazines each month. It is a very important time for me for my writing because I feel that I am very much behind in all the writing I wish to do. I hope everyone will have patience with me but continue to enjoy my articles. In 1989, I hope to do a little more travelling and teaching because I need to again broaden my perspective of what is going in Aikido today. Everyone should continue to practice hard. Everyone is doing very well. We all have a lot to look forward to in 1989. It

may seem a little strange to discuss the New Year already but this year has gone by so fast, I know the New Year will be upon us before we know it. This year has been very hard on me with the death of my mother and grandmother and the terrible illness of my father but I am looking forward to a great deal of work ahead. We must all suffer great hardship but it is a part of how we take one step at a time going forward. There is nothing to deny and we never lose. The Founder said that Aikido means, "always winning." "Always winning" means to continue to live each day as fully and as meaningfully as we can and polish each day with our Aikido training.

OFF TO JAPAN

Life never ceases to surprise me.

No matter how discouraged or tired I am, something always happens to make me wonder about this strange and mysterious world.

Several months ago, in July, as a matter of fact, I took a trip to San Francisco. It was all quite sudden and unplanned but I was quite sad after my mother's funeral and wanted to get away for just a few days. I thought the change would do me good and I thought I deserved a short vacation. I visited a sword collector in San Mateo who said he had a sword which I might be interested in. This collector is quite well known as an expert and one of the first persons to write a book on the Japanese sword in English. He also conducts tours every year to Japan taking collectors along to see famous swords collections and points of historical and cultural interest to sword collectors.

It was the first time I ever met him but he looked at me for a minute and said that he wanted me to be his successor and continue his tours to Japan for him because he was getting old and his health was very poor. He asked me in a way that was difficult to refuse. I was quite surprised at this quite unexpected request and asked him, "How do you know I am the right person? We have never met! You don't even know me!" Somehow he knew and he immediately proclaimed me his "official assistant." And that was that. I was to go on his next trip and learn the ropes and continue his tours from year to year. This all caught me quite by surprise. This does not happen everyday.

Regretfully, he passed away in surgery on October 1st from unsuccessful by-pass heart surgery. Exactly the same conditions of my poor father who suffered from the aftermath of by-pass surgery on October 1st of last year. The very same day. I think there is a strange karma involved. I heard from his wife that he had talked about me very much just before he died. All of the members of this year's tour have requested that I go so I

am making frantic arrangements to obtain a passport and visa. The tour begins on October 12th, just several days from this writing. My schedule is so busy for October that it is beyond all normal reason to go, however, it is a strange feeling that someone can have so much confidence and trust in me without knowing me very well and even talk about me so much just before he died. I do feel some strange obligation to go and continue his tours to Japan as a memorial and tribute to him. It is indeed a very mysterious world we live in.

Twenty years ago, it was necessary for me to return home from Japan early because of the illness of my grandfather. It has always been difficult for me to return to Japan because of the lack of time and money. It is so odd to have a trip to Japan presented to me on a silver platter. It will be a great deal of hard work but that is nothing in comparison to this wonderful opportunity.

If it turns out that I am able to make all of the proper arrangements to go, I hope all of my students will work together during my absence to keep the dojo going smoothly. Please cooperate and give your time and energy to Douglas who will be in charge. I will also make arrangements to visit with Doshu and Hombu Dojo.

WORDS OF APPRECIATION

I would to take this opportunity to express my thanks to Yamada Sensei for a most successful and very pleasurable seminar. Yamada Sensei stayed in Los Angeles for several days after the seminar and I very much enjoyed his company. I am also looking forward to visiting New York at his invitation in February of 1989.

Also I would thank to the many students to helped to clean-up and paint my house in Altadena recently. Also, my deepest appreciation to the students who have been so supportive and helpful during the difficult times when my mother and grandmother passed away.

And last but not least, I am grateful to the many students who are training hard and doing so well.

D. Furuya,
Chief Instructor.

Page 6.

A PLEA FOR HELP

Dear Fellow Students:

HELP! Our advertising fund is empty! As you may or may not know, the Dojo has an ad in the Pacific Bell Yellow Pages, which the students pay for with monthly contributions. My thanks go out to those who have so faithfully donated in the past.

The ad costs us \$300.00 a month - we are currently collecting only \$150.00 a month, and our reserve is empty. We hate to ask it, but we need more beginners to get involved.

If you can help, please contact Kathy or Douglas with the amount you can contribute per month. As the membership grows, the Dojo will be able to pay for the ad on its own, but right now we are forced to rely on student support. Thank you for your patience and understanding - we look forward to hearing from you!

WHAT IS "KI"?

What seems to attract many students to Aikido in the beginning is Aikido's "power of ki." We have heard many fantastic stories about O-Sensei, the Founder of Aikido, and his mysterious power to throw twenty people with just one hand or to become immovable so that ten people cannot push him over. Nowadays, we hear many people talking about this ki energy, but I have noticed that most of their theories are a far cry from what the Founder spoke of. Over the years, it seems that everyone has added their own little interpretation or understanding of what they think ki might be. I know this has caused many, many misunderstandings. Although I have been practicing and teaching Aikido for many years, I would be the first one to deny that I have a thorough understanding of ki; but, nevertheless, I have done much research over the years and I feel a responsibility to, at least, clear up many of the more obvious and fundamental misconceptions about ki.

I really do not want to criticize anyone or any teacher, but I do believe that much, much more study and research must be done in this area, and a more profound understanding achieved, before we begin to instruct our students. There are many schools of thought interpreting ki throughout the long philosophical and religious history of the East. It may be important, I believe personally, to understand each school of thought rather than pick catch phrases here and there that momentarily appeal to us. We are in danger of creating more misunderstanding and my greatest fear is that we may mislead our students or

represent Aikido to the public and future generations of Aikidoists.

The Founder coined the term "Aikido" from what he previously referred to as simply "Budo" (martial arts) or "Aiki-Budo" (Aiki-martial arts).

This term probably originated from the term "Aiki-jutsu" or Aiki techniques which he learned from Takeda Sokaku, one of the last descendants of the Takeda family teaching Daito Ryu Aiki-jujutsu. "Aiki-jujutsu" means "Aiki" style or form of jujutsu. Daito Ryu means the Daito School. Daito ("Great East") was the name of the residence of Shinra Saburo Yoshimitsu, the third son of Emperor Seiwa Genji. It is said that Yoshimitsu was a man of great learning with a strong interest in medicine. After one battle, he examined the corpses to further his medical studies and came up with several martial arts techniques based on the structure of the human joints. He called this Aiki-jujutsu. These techniques were later handed down through the Takeda Family in Kosho. After the 16th century, the Takeda family moved to Aizu where it remained to modern times as a family secret.

Aiki literally means "joining ki." There is no appropriate term in English with an equivalent meaning of ki. This is one source of the many problems in defining what ki is. "Ai" means harmony or joining or blending or combining. Ki is often defined as energy or power or prana (Indian for energy). I have heard one instructor define ki as "red electricity." I don't know why electricity is colored red.

The term "Aiki" is not found in any dictionary I have researched including the Dai Genkai, which is one of the most comprehensive dictionaries in the Japanese language. Some modern dictionaries today may include the term, "Aikido" but this has not become a common practice as yet and is not included in all modern dictionaries.

The earliest usage of the term "Aiki", which I have found, is in a poem by the poet-priest, Saigyō (1118-1190ad).

Haru o hete,
Hana no sakari ni
AIKI-tsutsu, omoide ooki
Waga mi ni narikeri.

"For many springs, I have come here to UNITE my mind with the blossoming flowers, so my body is made up of so many of these sweet memories."

Continued next month.