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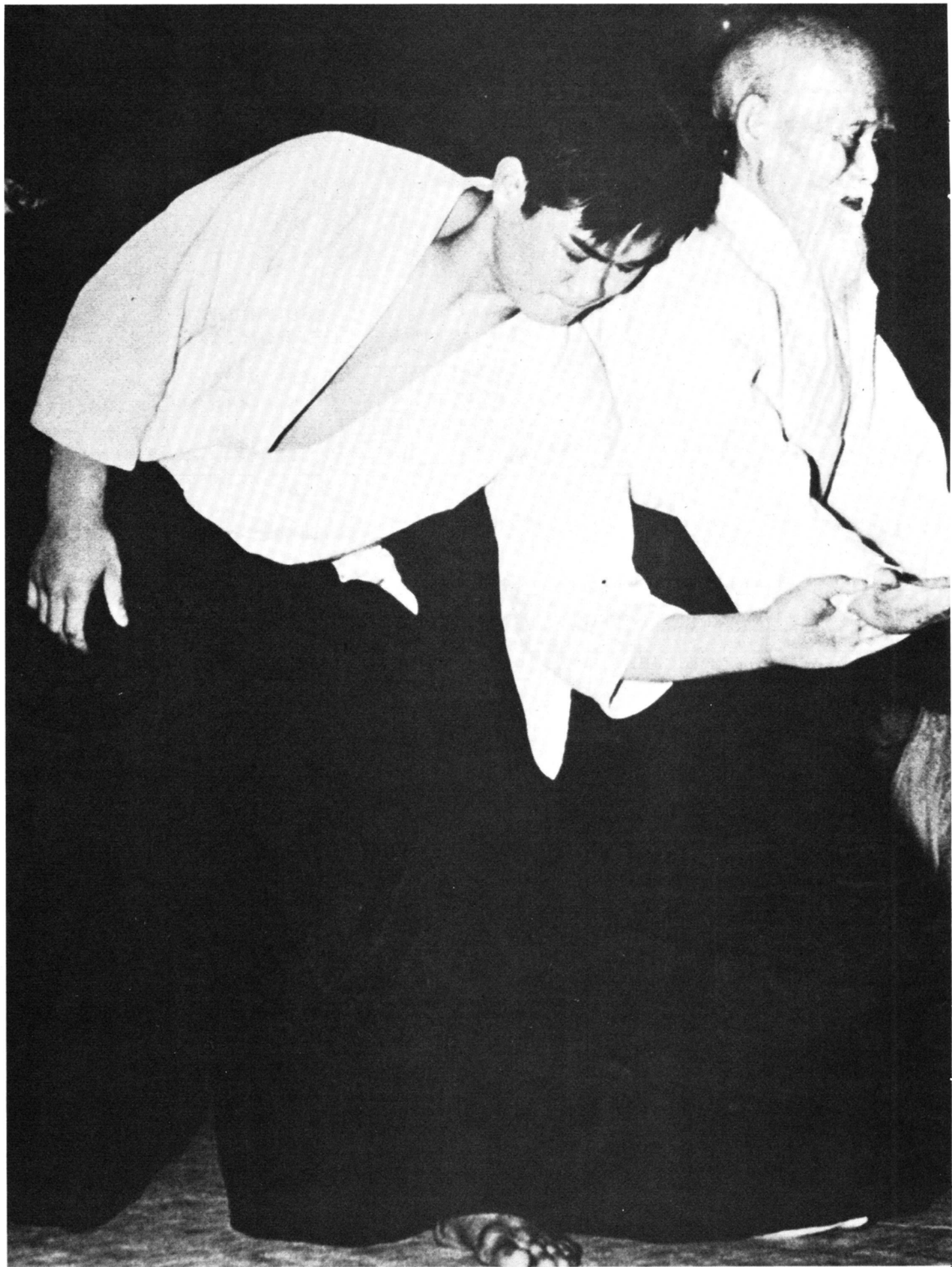
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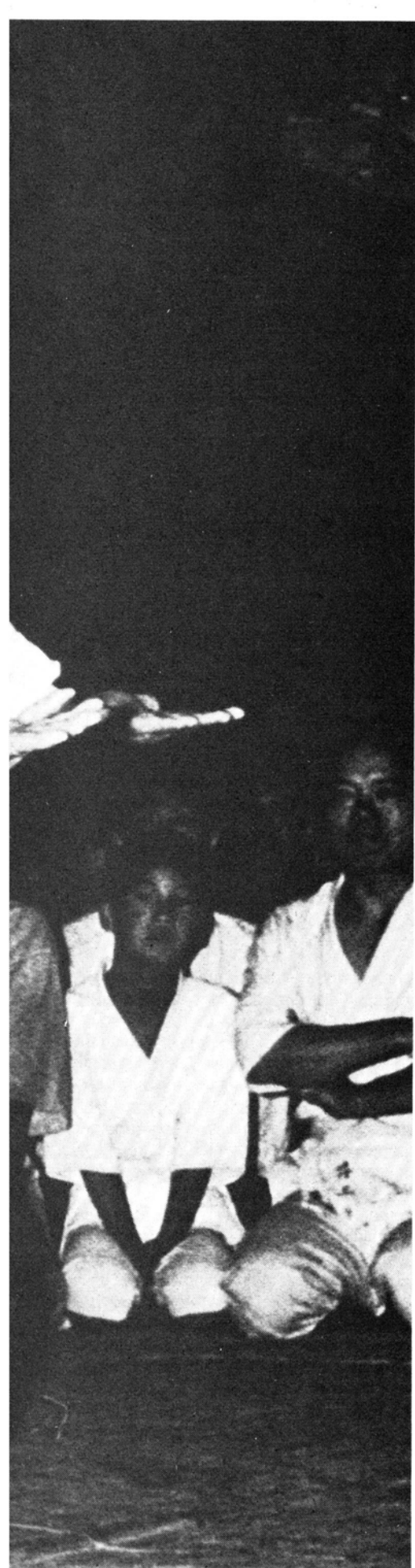
**ZEN
SWORDSMANSHIP**

**MASTER
KAZUO
CHIBA**

Ueshiba Disciple
& Outspoken Warrior
of the "Real" Aikido







MASTER KAZUO CHIBA

UESHIBA DISCIPLE & OUTSPOKEN WARRIOR OF THE “REAL” AIKIDO

What distinguishes Master Kazuo Chiba's aikido from other traditional and contemporary versions—and the popular conception of this gentle art—is his emphasis on rugged physical training. It is not uncommon in his dojo to see blood spattered about the mats from rigorous training, accompanied, on occasion, by dislocations or broken bones. For Master Chiba is a warrior whose “real” aikido is an uncompromising marriage of the physical and the philosophical.

By Daniel M. Furuya

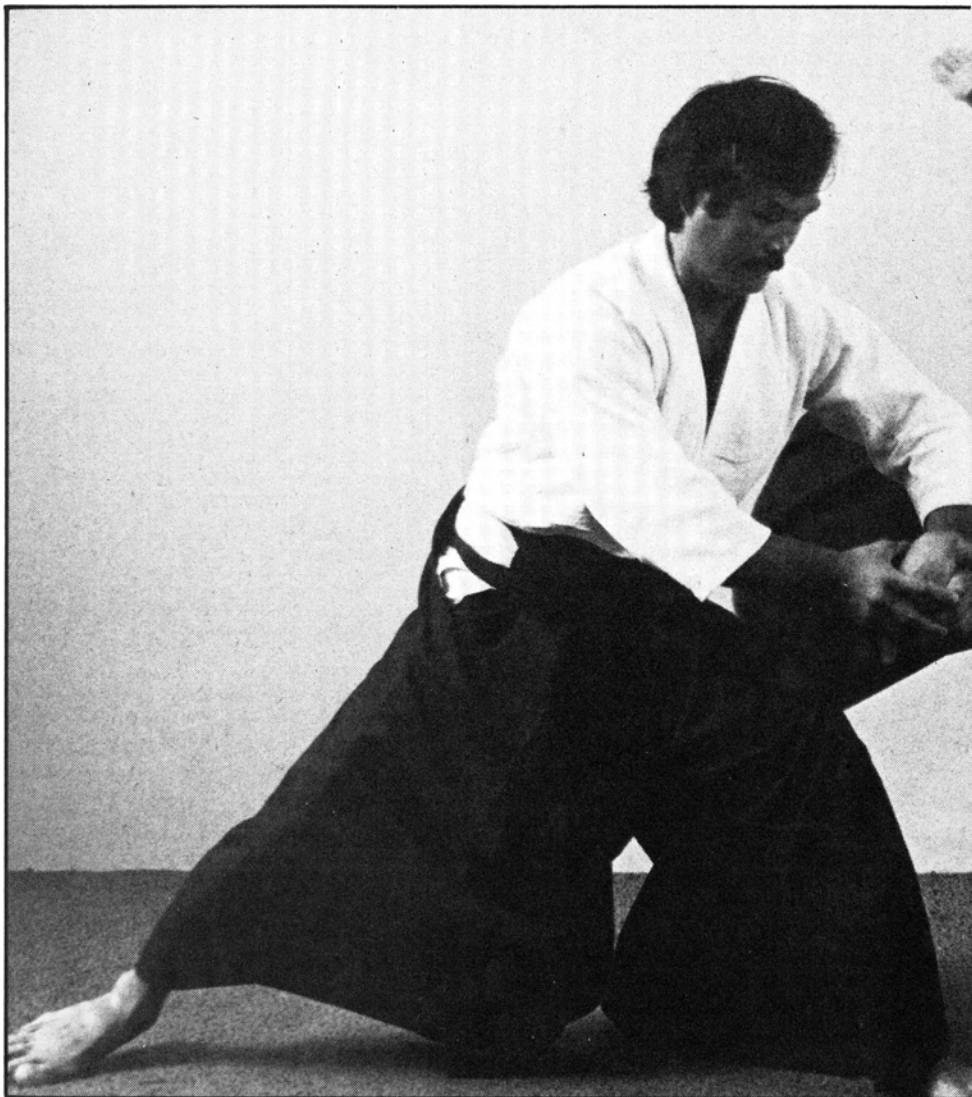
Until recently, only three direct students of Morihei Ueshiba, the late founder of aikido, were teaching and developing this art in the United States. All three are *shihan* (masters) officially designated by the Aikido World Headquarters in Tokyo under the direction of the founder's successor and son, Master Kisshomaru Ueshiba. All three are seventh-degree black belts and, concurrently, the highest ranking aikidoists in America. They are Yoshimitsu Yamada of the New York Aikikai, Akira Tohei of the Mid-West Aikido Center in Chicago, Illinois, and Mitsunari Hambei Kanai of the New England Aikikai in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In February 1981, a fourth master arrived, settling in San Diego, California. Like his predecessors, he is also a *shihan* and a seventh dan, having spent many years under the direct tutelage of Morihei Ueshiba. Although each *shihan* is unique in his own way and each seems to embody a part of the founder, the fourth is probably the most enigmatic and controversial of them all. He is Kazuo Chiba.

Not only a master of aikido, Chiba, 41, is an adept of the Japanese sword and *iaido*—the fast draw—and a devotee of Zen. His classes are distinguished by a stark contrast: Sessions of deep meditation and spiritual discipline to develop proper breathing and a tranquil state of mind; and uncommonly for aikido, blood splattered over the mats and students' uniforms from rigorous training, accompanied, on occasion, by dislocations or broken bones. For Master Chiba is the outspoken warrior of what he calls the "real" aikido, a physical and philosophical approach which probably appears radical to those familiar with this gentle art.

What distinguishes Master Chiba's aikido from most other aikidoists—and the popular public conception of this art—is his emphasis on the physical aspects of training. In fact, in Chiba's outlook, to deny strength and physical ability dramatically detracts from the realism of the art. It is from using strength and realism as a foundation for technique that the highest levels of the spiritual aspects of the art are attained, according to Chiba. Although aikido stresses spiritual development it does not, at the same time, exclude the importance of physical training and conditioning. This is a popular misconception about aikido, one which Chiba seeks to correct as part of his martial arts mission.

"From the point of view of traditional Japanese budo, it is certainly not ideal to regard strength as of prime importance," he explains. "However, strength is an undeniable element in the reality of Japanese budo. By totally denying it, one is in danger of denying the process for the sake of the ultimate objective, as well as denying the part for the sake of the whole. Consequently, this may lead one to an unrealistic, unbalanced and undynamic understanding of budo."

What is important to Chiba is the harmonious unification of and balance between the best qualities of the body, the spirit, and strength. "The danger in the total denial of strength," says Chiba, "is that it may eliminate the vital importance of the development of



Master Kazuo Chiba demonstrates a superb *shiho-nage* (four-corners throw).

physical ability, as strength and physical ability are interdependent. Furthermore, the development of such physical ability may open the path to spiritual realization, which is the most profound essence of Japanese budo."

According to Chiba, the disowning of strength in aikido for the sake of developing "spiritual" or "ki" power is an unrealistic and fragmentary approach. The approach must be holistic and take into consideration both the mind and body as a complete, inseparable

At 36, Chiba dedicated himself to a spartan existence. He moved to the country to practice farming and Zen meditation for two years.

able unit. The ego must be broken to reveal one's true nature through which one achieves spiritual liberation and perceives, for the first time, his oneness with the universe.

To break the ego one must endure rugged training under Chiba's guidance. Stories of

his demanding classes are legend in aikido, bringing shivers even to the very staunch, die-hard aikidoists. It is not uncommon for Chiba's students to run endless laps around the dojo—on their knees! Other times students are made to practice an overhead cut with *bokken* (wooden sword) some 3,000 times in one session. The exercise lasts approximately 90 minutes. So numb are the students' arms afterwards that they are too weak even to lift a paper cup of water to quench their thirst!

Master Chiba is not a man of double standards. He believes in uncompromisingly rigorous training because he endured it himself under aikido founder Morihei Ueshiba. It is this demanding training which Chiba believes is essential to reach a spiritual breakthrough in aikido. Chiba remained with the founder until he achieved his own breakthrough. And his teaching is therefore directly synonymous with the instruction he received from the founder.

TRAINING WITH THE FOUNDER

During Chiba's initial years of martial arts training in Japan, no art or teacher was able to fulfill his spiritual quest. The more he threw

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third day, the founder returned. Waka-Sensei informed him that "some crazy guy" refused to move from the doorway unless he was accepted as a student. "Bring him in and let me talk to him," said the founder. Chiba entered Master Ueshiba's home and politely sat in the hallway outside the founder's room. Ueshiba approached him and said, "Aikido is very, very tough to learn. Can you take it?" Chiba bowed, saying yes, not realizing the weight of the master's words.

Hence, Chiba was accepted and consequently spent the entire next year cleaning toilets, scrubbing floors, washing dirty uniforms, and keeping the dojo immaculately clean. This marked the unglamorous beginning of Chiba's quest for spiritual fulfillment.

Chiba recalls that very often the founder would leave for instructional tours in various cities. One student always accompanied the master in order to take his breakfalls and carry his luggage and sword. This student was called the *kaban-mochi* or "baggage carrier." Chiba and other direct disciples of the founder agree that this was one of the more difficult aspects of their training. No matter how crowded the streets were, the founder could just glide through the crowd at his usual intense pace. The *kaban-mochi* was usually trailing far behind, struggling awkwardly to keep up; naturally, he was constantly scolded by the founder for being slow and lazy.

Many times the founder boarded a train without a ticket, leaving the *kaban-mochi* the

responsibility of purchasing the tickets. More often than not, the train departed with the founder while the poor *kaban-mochi* was frantically running down the boarding platform. Usually, these tours lasted about one week, and by the time the founder returned home the *kaban-mochi* was in a state of sheer exhaustion. And Chiba himself was once the *kaban-mochi* for a record six weeks!

In the evenings, the founder and Chiba slept in separate rooms but shared the same bathroom. The elderly Ueshiba woke up many times during the night to use the facilities. To get there, he always passed through Chiba's room. Chiba was required not only to be awake to greet the founder each time, but had to ensure there was clean water and a towel to wash his hands. Thus, besides taking the founder's *ukemi* all day long and lugging his baggage, Chiba's sleep was interrupted every night. This, too, served as part of Chiba's training. For, if Chiba did not learn to be mentally alert even during sleep, an enemy could enter his bedroom and kill him.

For Chiba, Ueshiba's teaching was always a physical and mental method, not one for the sake of the other. The founder could instill abilities in his disciples that most others thought were extraordinary natural gifts. Chiba's many trials and tribulations under the master brought him to the point of spiritual realization, and engendered a very beautiful, worthwhile teacher-student relationship.

In 1966, Chiba was sent to England to

himself into his training the less clear his direction became. Then, at age 18, he witnessed an event which would forever change his life. One day in 1958, he happened to see a diminutive old man demonstrating the art of aikido. That old man was aikido founder Morihei Ueshiba. Chiba recognized in Ueshiba's art great strength and power, qualities paradoxically characterized by nobility and peace. The strange contrast won Chiba's instant admiration.

The very next day he went to Master Ueshiba's dojo with the intention of becoming a student. Master Ueshiba, however, was teaching in another city and Chiba was greeted by Waka-Sensei ("Young Master," referring to Master Kisshomaru Ueshiba at that time). Chiba's request to join the school was met with outright rejection. He had not known that admission into aikido was extremely selective and, for most people, impossible without the highest references and recommendations. In retaliation, Chiba sat in the doorway and refused to move until he was granted entrance. He decided that he would remain there for three days before giving up.

As fate would have it, on the evening of the



Aikido founder Morihei Ueshiba evades Chiba's sword attack while training in the country at Iwama.



(Above) Chiba demonstrates his mastery of Omori-ryu iaido, the art of the fast draw, and (below) he teaches aikido at his new dojo in San Diego.

teach and develop aikido. Over a period of ten years he established the Aikikai of Great Britain which now contains more than 2,000 students. One student who entered Chiba's dojo from another school was dismissed three times, but persistently returned each time to ask permission to continue training. Today this student is a very fine instructor who has succeeded Chiba as technical advisor of the Aikikai of Great Britain.

SPARTAN EXISTENCE

Chiba returned to Japan in 1976. He resumed his teaching position at the Aikido World Headquarters and conducted seminars all over the world, concentrating on the United States, especially Hawaii and the East Coast. However, in the interim of Chiba's absence, Japan had changed drastically. Aikido, too, had grown incredibly and radically differed from that which he had learned from the founder. As a product of its popularity, aikido had become an art for the public rather than one exclusively for the devout martial artist.

The extreme change was too much for Chiba to accept. He decided, at age 36, to dedicate himself to a spartan existence. He moved to the country to practice farming and Zen meditation. To support his family, he sold all of his material possessions, including a



precious samurai sword. After two years Chiba returned to the city and resumed teaching aikido. He then accepted an invitation to come to the U.S. and teach here on a permanent basis. Just this year, Chiba and his family settled into a small apartment and he immediately established a small dojo in San Diego.

It is rare to find such an accomplished, high-ranking master like Chiba who continually subjects himself to rigorous training and the demands of a spartan lifestyle. Chiba seems to embody a martial arts spirit which, for the most part, has died out in this modern age of technological efficiency and mass production. He is, quite understandably, a warrior who is perhaps misplaced in time. One can vicariously see the impact of his first meeting with the founder when Chiba demonstrates his art. He embodies the "real" aikido. One can hear the echo of the founder's words: "Aikido is very, very tough. Can you take it?"

By Master Chiba's own standards, his apprenticeship has not yet ended. At the conclusion of a class, he tucks up his *hakama* and gets down on his hands and knees along with his students to scrub the dojo floor, much in the same manner he did when he first started aikido back in 1958. Somehow, the menial task of cleaning is transformed into a noble act of spiritual purification. One must recall the words of Dogen, the first patriarch of Zen in Japan, in the *Shobogenzo*. "Practice and enlightenment are one and the same act." Not only is the floor cleaned, but the mind and body of the individual is purified as well.

In the founder's words, "Aikido is *misogi-waza*, the art of purification." Aikido becomes the art to polish one's soul. Embodied in the art is also the denial of the ego. In Zen, one must eliminate the ego to reveal one's original nature or spiritual mind. This is the goal of all martial arts, aikido included. According to Chiba, "Martial arts has become a method of self-affirmation which is the perpetuation of delusion. True martial arts is self-denial, which ultimately reveals one's true nature."

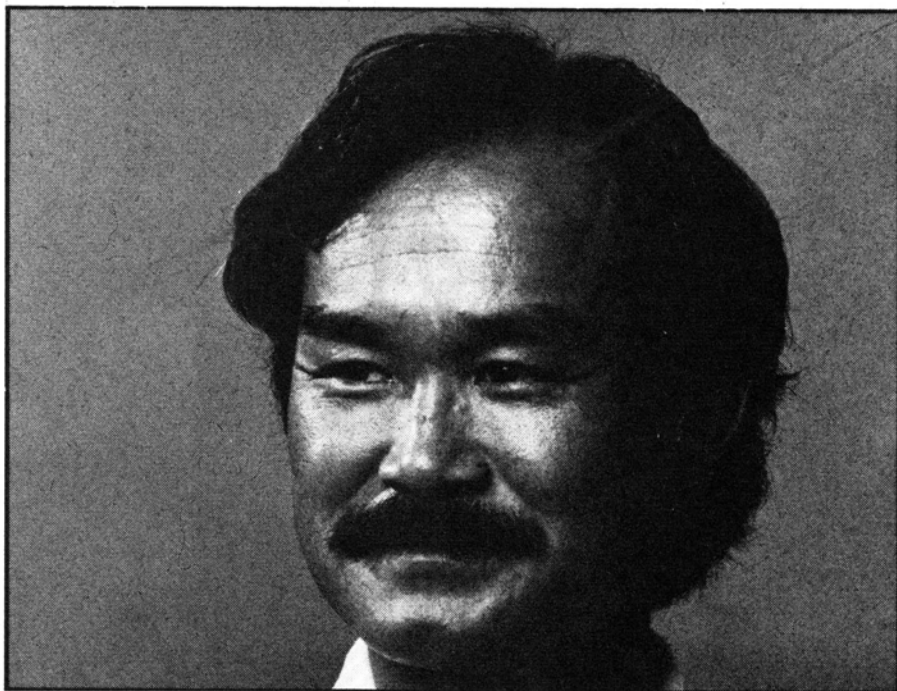
It is this revelation of one's original nature that links man to the totality of nature itself, through which the oneness and harmony of all creation is perceived. This brings about inner strength and tranquility in the individual.

REAL AIKIDO

"It is my belief," says Chiba, "that aikido is a creation of profound human wisdom which carries in its substance a kind of poison or powerful drug holding both the secret of creation and destruction, life and death, rather than having the qualities of a miracle. The important point is to become aware of reality in its totality, and to face up to it squarely as the fundamental requirement necessary to grasp the whole truth.

"The one who seeks only joy without pain, the one who sees only beauty without ugliness, the one who looks only at creation without destruction, the one who receives without giving, the one who prays for rebirth without dying—will fail to grasp the whole truth."

This is Chiba's real aikido.



Master Chiba is one of only four direct students of aikido founder Ueshiba teaching in the U.S. today, and is probably the most enigmatic and controversial among them.

THE FOUR STAGES OF AIKIDO DEVELOPMENT

1. GO (HARDNESS) THE NATURE OF METAL FOUNDATION

Hard and static training in the basics.

"In this stage one learns the basic concepts of the techniques, how to develop an excellent physical condition and its accompanying strength, and the rational way of executing the techniques according to aikido principles. Hardness, fullness (i.e., readiness to act both physically and mentally), positivity, and concentration all characterize this stage of go.

2. JYU (SOFTNESS) THE NATURE OF PLANTS APPLICATION

Soft, relaxed training applying the basic techniques in a dynamic situation with more *maai* (distancing).

"In this stage one learns softness, relaxation and *maai* and their effectiveness. All these factors lead to an understanding of the importance of economizing energy. After all, an ideal budo should include and maintain a balance between *go* and *jyu*. The ideal budo, it is said, is hard inside and soft outside. It could be said that, technically, the perfection of technique depends almost entirely on this stage."

3. RYU (FLOWING) THE NATURE OF WATER REALIZATION

Technically speaking, this form is often seen in combination with the state of *jyu*.

"This is a significant stage in which technical perfection begins to interact with spiritual realization. The nature of water reveals the action of non-attachment which is the essence of budo, since the highest form of budo is beyond relativity and is a dynamic expression of one's experience of Oneness or the unity of the world; in other words, the unity of subject and object."

As Chiba relates, according to the Zen teaching, "One who recognizes the true nature of the Self in accordance with the principle of flowing is free from both joy and sorrow."

4. KI (FORMLESSNESS) THE NATURE OF AIR LIBERATION

The highest stage of budo.

"Total liberation leading to absolute freedom. The stage in which one attains the denial of existence of budo itself. It is said that in the highest stage of budo there is no deliberate action, but the perfection of action through non-action."