

SHIUN MUSUBI

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Birankai Europe



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Editorial

Suzanne Brunner

The Extraordinary General Meeting hold during last August in Wroclaw, Poland, ratified the Chiba Sensei's decision to dissolve the Birankai Continental Europe. The article by Myke Flynn Shi-han on the Birankai Europe website of is completely unequivocal ; it reminds us that "this decision is conform with the Chiba Sensei's wish that we focus our attention at building strong roots within the Birankai family, which manifests itself in strong National Organizations. We will continue to maintain the spirit of Biran, which unites our community, and will now refer to ourselves as Birankai Europe".

Just one association doesn't need two newsletters. For this reason **Shiun**, the Birankai Continental publication and **Musubi**, the British newsletter, will be amalgamated. This new tool will keep the name of Musubi, which signifies : Contact.

Dee Chen, in charge of Musubi, will be the

editor of the new publication, and I will be the Assistant editor.

The opening page of this last Shiun illustrates the unification, in the literal figurative sense. As the blade of the sword, in which the envelope (kawagane) and the soul (shingane) made with two different steels are forged together in order to constitute a stronger weapon, the newsletter will combine our two energies.

I very much enjoyed working on the three issues Shiun for which I was in charge of. I am looking forward to continuing this work in collaboration with Dee Chen ; I am sure that together, Musubi and Shiun will become an exemplary newsletter.

I take the opportunity to thank here all those who gave their time and energy to give life to Shiun; translating, correcting, illustrating and laying it out.

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contribution:

Norberto Chiesa
Christophe Peytier
Christophe Brunner
Lucienne Suter
Daniel Brunner

PROMOTIONS from July 2009

as we know!

Grece :

Giannis Tsorotiotis, ni dan
Ari Sinavelis, san dan Hombu

France :

Dai Jyo Kan
Daniel Roussel, sho dan Hombu
Fabrice Mahieu, ni dan Hombu
Michel Neumann, ni dan Hombu
Annick Cocuaud, san dan Hombu

Henry Rolgen, yon dan Hombu
Gilles Magrini, yon dan Birankai

Ann Jyou Kan

Anne Ducouret, yon dan Hombu, shidoin
Gabriel Leibacher sho dan

Poland :

Dariusz Machalski, san dan Hombu
Michal Orlik, fukushidoin

Israel :

Ofer Aviv, sho dan



Mike Flynn
Shihan

OUR FAMILY

As I practiced during the most recent Birankai Europe summer camp in Poland this past summer, I was again amazed at the diversity of the Birankai Family. It is truly remarkable to me how so many people from so many different natures, cultures, languages, backgrounds can come together as one to train. We who differ in so many ways unify amongst ourselves to practice Aikido as taught to us by our teacher.

Over the past 40 plus years, since arriving in England in 1966, Chiba Sensei's life work is there for all to see, with a truly global presence. This force of Biran, which swirls around and maneuvers us to the mat in Wroclaw last summer, or any number of other similar events has proven to be quite a significant force, something which cuts through all the differences and influences our life choices across so many areas, and causes us to decide to follow the teachings of our master.

I reflect often on just what is it that distinguishes us from other schools, often within the same mother house. In a general sense, Sensei has used the physical disciplines of Taijitsu, Weapons, Iai Batto-ho, and Zazen to strip away the layers of veneer that over the years have masked our true self. These are the physical foundations of Sensei's teachings, and in my opinion the combination of these elements is the essence of Budo, the way of the warrior.

Historically the true samurai was skilled in unarmed combat, skilled with the sword, and driven to self reflection through zazen.

Sensei has written extensively about the Kneading process, the stages of Go-JyuRyu (Hard, supple, flowing) in training, and Shu-Ha-Ri. It is readily apparent to me that in order to make the journey, the practice of Tai-Jitsu must be first and foremost in

order of importance. It is through this forging process within our Tai-jitsu practice that we come to develop the Aikido body, a body which can establish and maintain connectivity through it's center to the center of it's partner and move as one with that center.

The entire process of forging the Aikidoka's body starts and ends with the body art, stripping away those layers of tension, stress, and tightness which have built up in the body over the years, returning flexibility to the joints via ikkyo through rokkyo, sculpting the body until it transforms into a supple, responsive, and alive being that reacts instantaneously to stimulation.

It is also readily apparent that two vital elements that must be perfected in our study of Aikido are Timing and Distance. Without either of these elements present, one cannot execute the technique. Poor timing or distance can be masked by the use of brute strength in Tai-Jitsu practice between a larger nage and smaller uke. This is why the study of weapons is vital to our practice. Physical strength is neutralized due to the larger distance between uke and nage, and weaknesses in timing and distance are more readily exposed, thereby creating the opportunity to perfect ones understanding of these critical items.

At the same time, our weapons training focuses us on precision within Tai-sabaki and requires the same tension and at the same time suppleness within our bodies which comes from Tai-jitsu.

Iai batto-ho is important, particularly if one is able to practice with a live blade, because of the tremendous degree of focus and concentration (tension) within the execution of the technique. It is referred to in some circles as 'moving zen', but within our school it is merely an extension of our Aikido. It is a vehicle to increase the student's focus and zanshin within the technique, of being in the moment. During an encounter, which could have life or death consequences, one cannot allow one's focus to waver and be distracted. After all, where do Shomenuchi, Yokomenuchi and Tsuki come from?

Zazen is another discipline of our school, yet over the years I have heard many students dismiss Zazen training on the grounds that it is contrary to their religious beliefs. I find this notion to be absurd, simply a form of escapism. Of course, zazen can be anything you want it to be. There are those among us who have taken vows and become avowed Buddhists. The fact is, zazen within our school is a tool to enable the student to face his or her inner demons, to peel off those layers and layers of thoughts and concepts that have built up over the years. To be able to

drop everything, to empty one's mind of every thought but what occurs in that moment, as mentioned above, is vital during an encounter. This is the goal of our zen training, nothing more, nothing less.

We practice these four disciplines with an underlying focus on the physical elements of When, Where, and What, which Chiba Sensei has written extensively about and was the focus of the summer school in Poland.

Our journey is framed or structured by what Sensei defines as the '5 Pillars: Centeredness, Connectedness, Wholeness, Liveliness, Openness. He has explained that these Pillars, shown here in order of progression, can reflect the student's movement along the path. Chiba Sensei (2007) has stated 'A natural progression will appear something like this:

of raising the art to its highest level.

We practice together to hone our Martial Awareness. We endeavor to cultivate and stimulate our bodies so that we may respond to ANY situation with Instantly and Spontaneously with our natural being. This is the pinnacle we strive to reach.

This is our family, this is who we are and what we do. The bonds that bind us are forged in our sweat (and sometimes blood) as we follow the path of our teacher. I am fortunate to have so many wonderful companions on this journey that we make together.

Mike Flynn

Chiba, T.K. (2007) The Study and Refinement of Martial Awareness.



(1) When one is able to define the physical center, then (2) s/he is likely to find a connection to the rest of the body as an organically functional whole with recognition of its parts, leading one to (3) a realization of the body as a single, unified entity not broken into parts that may now actuate the previously untapped potential power of a unified body, which then (4) further activates essential life force manifesting as strong physical liveliness, and culminates in (5) the reification of the psychospiritual virtues such as humility, receptivity, modesty, etc. that are necessary to the process

Christophe
Peytier
yo dan
shidoin

san ju kan
Lisbon



The transmission – Part 2

In the first part, we have discussed some key elements of the transmission viewed from the angle of the Sensei. In this second part, I wish to address the practitioner's side. I had intended this article initially for a larger audience, hence these questions about the choice of a school may appear as moot points for a member of Birankai, however perhaps one will find nevertheless an opportunity to be reminded of Shoshin, the spirit of beginner.

Every one of us started martial arts for some reasons, whatever they are. Without really knowing it, a person entering in a Dojo will become potentially a link in the big chain of transmission of Budo. Out of ten people who start practice, one will stay more than six months. Out of ten who stay, one will become black belt. And out of ten black belts, one will become an instructor. Hence there is one chance out of a thousand that whoever steps on the mat of a Dojo become an element of transmission of this token of mankind's inheritance: the culture of Budo. One in a thousand is not a lot, but it is still something. Hence, the first responsibility of a student is the choice of a school and a teacher in particular. A beginner who arrives at a Dojo is, by definition, incompetent to determine if the teacher will help to walk the path of Budo, or not.

However, there are some factors, somewhat easy to spot, that should be taken into account in this endeavour, each of them is important but not sufficient. They are presented in order of decreasing priority

- The lineage

From the founder of an art, what trickles down to the teacher? If a teacher cannot explain his lineage, it may not be a good indicator. If a teacher can relate up to a well known master, or even the founder of an art, it will then be easy to search the characteristics of the art, the methodologies and philoso-

phy, whether through books or Internet.

- The relations between the teacher and his own teacher

One can frequently hear "I was student of Master X for ten years". It is important to try to understand if we are talking about 3 seminars a year or a daily practice with that master.

- The teacher's own practice

When watching a class, you can note how the teacher behaves. Is he doing the same exercises as the students? Or is he walking on the mat, correcting details here and there? Both are important, but seeing a teacher practising himself little or none, one may wonder if he is continuing his own development. For example, a teacher blatantly out of shape, with 50 pounds of fat in excess, may be a person who abandoned his own progression, at least at the physical level. On the contrary, a teacher who keeps practising with his students will give them the opportunity to feel the quality of his body, the way he absorbs a movement, the liveliness, the flexibility, the integrity, the presence of the centre, This will foster a direct transmission, through the skin, with an information throughput that the eyes would not be able to match, and words even less.

- The life

How is the teacher applying the messages that he is teaching, out of the mat? Is he in accordance with the principles he wishes to transmit? There are many "mat samurai" who, when leaving the Dojo, return to mediocre lives, walking in the street head-down, having only the Dojo to get the illusion that they have achieved something. They talk about being centred and coherent, but their everyday life may be incoherent and with no clear priorities.

- The rank

What rank has the teacher attained? When, and by whom, was his ranks delivered? There are so many anecdotes of teachers who leaped three or four degrees of black belt in a couple of years. This should remain suspicious, in particular when a teacher who was mid-ranked in one school suddenly gets into a higher rank in a different school. Normally, it should be the opposite: a change of school should result in a lower grade, not higher. For example, a teacher with a fourth degree black belt in a given school who becomes Shodan in another school inspires respect, because he had the humility and courage to take responsibility for the consequences of his decision, as a true "budo person". On the other hand, a teacher jumping from fourth Dan to sixth Dan while changing "style" inspires doubts: Could it be that the new school has lower standards?

There are too many teachers interested in the search for high grades, whether for personal satisfaction or for better commercial success. Neither ego nor financial interest seem reasons in accordance with the principles of Budo. I remember the formal ceremony of graduation of Saito Morihiro Sensei, when he was awarded his ninth Dan (and his son his sixth Dan) at Hombu Dojo in Tokyo (At the kagami biraki ceremony in January 1993, if I remember well): I was seating next to a gentleman who appeared to be in his seventies. After a few glasses of Sake, he presented me his meishi (business card). Under his name was printed in very large font: "AIKIDO 10TH DAN ". As a young Shodan then, I had of course heard about him as a great figure of Aikido but had not recognized him. I felt impressed to have a table neighbour of that magnitude. But I have to admit that my first reaction was to think "This man is very preoccupied with his rank". Unfortunately I never had a chance to practice with this great master but I was never able to completely get rid of this impression of a man not in peace with his ego. I later heard that he would never take Ukemi for his students, justifying that "this would be fake, since no one could actually throw him", which confirmed my impression on his ego. Having said that, considering that there are only three people in the history of Aikido to be given the rank of Aikido 10th Dan in their lifetime, one must be indulgent and think that it must be quite difficult to not fall in this ego trap. In conclusion, the rank can be an indicator of skills and achievements, but it can also be the mark of some superficiality and an attempt to hide a profound weakness.

We have discussed some elements that can allow a practitioner (or future practitioner) to gauge whether the energy that he or she is ready to invest is worth it. But at the end, just like for most of important decisions, there is one criterion that supersedes all the others: You have to like it. You have to feel impressed, blown away, fascinated. You have to think "This is good". It has to come from the

depth of your soul, from the guts. I always remembered an article relating an interview of Sean Connery, the famous actor: He was commenting on a young student of the Actor's Studio who had asked him whether he could become a good movie actor or not. Sean Connery responded "No. Because if you could you would not be asking".

Hence, in last resort, there cannot be the question "Should I practice in that school?". There is only one sentence: "THIS is what I want to do". But once you are there, you must ask yourself, especially during the first months, if this is really what you expected. In homage to my dear friend Dr. Amnon Tzechovoy, who often quotes French philosophers, I cannot resist paraphrasing the great Israeli thinker Albert Einstein: "the thinking that got you into a problem will not get you out of it" For us, the practice that got us into a dead end will not get us out of it. That is, if you feel frustrated with your practice, if you constantly go to the Dojo against your heart, then you must legitimately ask yourself if it is the right Dojo for you. Obviously, the difficulty is to not fall in the opposite trap, and abandon at the first mishap on the way. The way of Budo is craggy and fraught with pitfalls and "crossing deserts", with moments where our deep resources are solicited, Knowing when to stay and when to quit requires finesse and lucidity. Exactly like during the practice of Ukemi: When do I stick and when do I disconnect? But isn't this also a key question in our very life ?



The wind of Biran in Poland

This seminar of August 2009 in Wroclaw, with T.K. Chiba Shihan rocks everything in deepening the specificities of our school, Birankai. This storm whose name, "Biran", our school is bearing, contains a present for each of us. Practice is main access to this gift of a life dedicated to Aikido. Other layers of our discipline, such as teaching or the very structure of our organization, are also implicated. The welcome of our Polish hosts and their organization also make possible this event of the Birankai in Europe.

Fostering the movement in Teaching

The comments of a beginner confirmed to me one more time that a communication is established between Chiba Shihan and the practitioners, beyond the difficulties of comprehension (technical difficulties, difference in language or even bad acoustic in the sports hall). Thus, as paradoxical as it may appear at times, this form of embodied power represented by the presence of Chiba Sensei invites a heart-to-heart relationship.

In this presence, we take together a reciprocal rhythm of exchange. The privileged moments where we get together with Sensei make the highlights of our practice. Our class program, while being the time frame of our study, gives us the opportunity to deepen our "body consciousness or body-conscience". Thanks to this dynamic, a deeply established connection opens this heart-to-heart way, both engagement and pivot of this transmission.

Nothing surprising, then, that emphasis be put on "shoshin", the spirit of beginner, since only this kind of mind opening allows both the conservation and the renewal of the transmission. Shoshin is one of the four psycho-spiritual elements of our study of martial consciousness (cf. shiun January 2009 volume 7 n°1 p 4-9) . T.K. Chiba Shihan has compared it to the state of love. We all witness how that state allows both vacillating and engagement of self. This sensitive aspect fosters opening to the other and facilitates learning, and as such this attitude is remarkable.

In that context, the teacher participates directly in the sustainability of the fundamentals of our school. His responsibility is at stake because it operates very precisely though the technical application and the fundamental teachings. We need not to forget the rigor required to walk the path that is transmitted to us.

As such, logically, in this seminar the axis of practice developed by the main stakeholders (Shihan



Anne Ducouret, yo dan, shidoin
ann jyu kan, Paris

and Shidoin) was based on the first two pillars of our action in practice: Centeredness and connection.

Revisiting briefly some of the themes addressed: this unity manifests itself both physically and technically in a posture. It is revealed by the moving of the body, tai-sabaki. The relationship to the other is initiated through a half-stance guard, that is kamae in hanmi. The structure of displacement is based on the two forms, the entering and the pivot: irimi and tenkan, and the combination of these two. In the tenkan form, we must highlight the importance of the back pivot, or ushiro tenkan as a mechanism of absorption. The three key factors of our study have been addressed in particular during the practice of bokken, where we outlined the relationship between the movements (where) and the levels of initiation of the action (when). (the three key factors, cf: shiun July 2007, p 4)

Indeed, the richness of our school doesn't go without the essential contribution of weapons work because this practice preserves the feeling of danger specific to martial practice. The eight cuts or suburi foster the study of footwork that will be also recognized in Aikido.

Meeting T.K Chiba Shihan is also feel linked to the roots of Aikido and to the life of its founder. He shared with us several events that have marked his youth and influenced his course. As such, he was the witness of an event in which O Sensei, not without a certain mischief, sat for a longtime on the back of a student who had fallen asleep during seiza. Or, in the schoolyard, a tree that died from repeated Jo strikes, according to O Sensei some students had an impure Ki. He also referred to that conversation with a naginata master, famous for being undefeated, which key words will remain stuck in his memory during all his life.

Two nominations amongst teachers

Following two nominations, some have witnessed expressions of happiness or astonishment amongst the practitioners. Daniel Brunner Shihan of the Birankai receives his Shihan certificate from Hombu dojo. To piggyback on some of the words said during the ceremonial dinner of the seminar: More than a certificate, this represents the link that connects him more intimately to T.K. Chiba Sensei teacher, O Sensei. It is akin to a bokken, which some will consider as a piece of wood, but if we are mindful it becomes a real sword.



Anne Ducouret is promoted Shidoin by T.K. Chiba Sensei and the Shihankai. Questioned by Norberto Chiesa about it, I answered that I was more preoccupied by the “Duties and obligations” than come with this function. That will be in particular the Paris students that will be happy of that event. And I want to use the opportunity of this article to thank all the persons that have supported me in this journey.

A new dynamic for the Birankai in Europe

In accordance with the links of our organization with Hombu dojo, and the international regulation exercised by the main governing body of Aikido, the new European organization relies essentially on the shihankai and the national organizations.

The intermediate organizational body that the BCE was representing having lost its purpose, ceased its activity. The extraordinary general assembly of the BCE on August 18th ,2009, voted its dissolution. On the mats, T.K Chiba Shihan and the shihankai all thanked Joel Bertrand for his engagement and the service has provided to the Birankai in Europe. His experience remains precious for the future.

The following week, in order to promote the new dynamic of the Birankai in Europe, the shihankai has announced by email to the presidents of National organizations, (Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Poland, Portugal) that it was appointing Anne Ducouret to coordinate information at European level. The missions of this

coordination are defined by the shihankai. National organizations are in relation with the dojo and the teachers. The site of Birankai Europe will also serve as a link between all.

The polish organization, an example of realization

This seminar occurred for the third time in a row at the Olympic Stadium in Wroclaw, place where Renata Bohdanowicz usually teaches. It hosted about one hundred and forty practitioners, among which about sixty coming from twelve different countries: Austria, Benin, Chili, England, France, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland)

Thanks to an important team, both well organized and tight, we have benefited from all the infrastructure required for such a venue. Clearly this corresponds to many years of teaching and practice. For reference, there is roughly thirty years that the first “fans” of tatami have started Aikido. In 1985, the encounter with Daniel Brunner, then 4th Dan, gives a decisive orientation to a group in Wroclaw. Poland now counts four Birankai dojos ,of which one in Gdansk and three in Wroclaw, with more than a hundred practitioners. On the mat one has the pleasure to feel both the enthusiasm and the freshness of the beginners and the availability of the more advanced and their teachers.

Great thanks to the owner of the bar close to the gym, that brings his personal touch to this intensive seminar. The Parisian team, known for its gluttony, has particularly appreciated the original and creative cuisine. And the association of the gourmet meal with beer vodka and jazz remains unforgettable.

We had the pleasure to discover this capital of Silesia, both vibrant and fitted with its tramway, its dwarfs spread out in the old town, the pedestrian streets and their terraces...

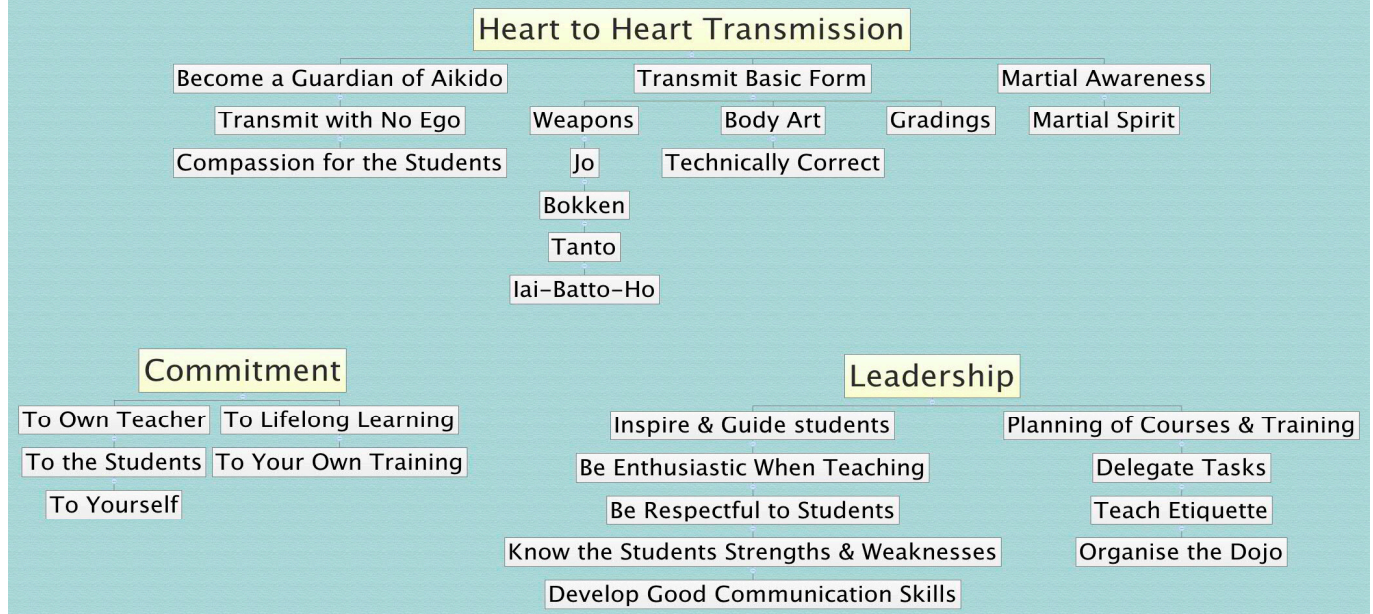
Writing this article has allowed me to note once more that the letter of Birankai, Shiun, is an excellent source of information, both on the teachings of our school and on the life it develops. So, great thanks to those who contribute to its quality, wishing that Musubi and Shiun getting closer will increase it even more.

Great thanks to Norberto Chiesa shihan for the information concerning the organization of Birankai, to Renata Bohdanowicz and Andrzej Sobolewski regarding the organization of the seminar in Poland, and to Iona Mooney for the translations and suggestions. And of course all my gratitude to T.K. Chiba Shihan and this wonderful energy he is transmitting.

Fukushido in retesting essay

Jürgen Schwendinger,
Sandan, Fukushido

Responsibilities of a teacher



In this essay, I would like to write about the responsibilities I have as an Aikido teacher. I am going to write about three main pillars – Commitment, Heart to Heart Transmission and Leadership – as you can see in the mind map above.

The first pillar I am going to write about is commitment. I personally believe that without commitment there is nothing you can achieve in our school of Aikido. Every Aikido teacher should have a strong and deep commitment to his own teacher because he is the one who refills your batteries all the time. He is the one who challenges you and develops you. He is the one who gives you a hard time on the mat, but without that hard time there is no progress possible for your own learning. Again, my personal opinion is that without a true commitment to your own teacher, you can't become an Aikido teacher whom students will follow in the future.

Another important commitment is the commitment to your own students, which is a very difficult and sensitive process, I believe, as well. Every student is different and needs different things at different times. It is of great importance to know when to challenge a student and when to leave a student alone. Students have to go through different plateaus and, as Aikido teachers, we should be able to know where the students are and how to help them reach the next plateau. The commitment to your own teacher and to your students is only possible if we have a true commitment to ourselves, which sometimes seems very demanding. However, because it is so demanding, it is also interesting and challenging and therefore, I think, we will have a lifelong learning

process in our Aikido practice. One of the reasons why I love Aikido is because learning never stops. The last commitment I would like to pay attention to is the commitment to our own training as Aikido teachers. Don't we often take the easy way out and only stay in the role of Tori and throw the students? Don't we often stop working hard on the mat when we teach? As Aikido teachers, we sometimes should ask ourselves these questions. I think we have to find ways to train ourselves while we are teaching. Our teaching should become our training. Similarly, we should not stop taking Ukemi for our students, because I believe that students respect us because we only ask them to do what we do ourselves.

The second pillar is the 'Heart to Heart Transmission' in our school of Aikido. Aikido itself is very fragile and can get bastardized easily. This is the reason why it needs guardians who are able to protect it. For me, my teacher is one of those guardians we have in Aikido. He transmits his Aikido to me with no ego but from his heart to my heart. He has compassion for me and therefore I get the chance to learn from him. This way of learning gives me great hope that, one day, I will also become a guardian of Aikido. Therefore, it is very important that the basic forms are transmitted correctly. The students have to know what basic form is and what a variation is. In our school of Aikido, they have to study a lot of weapon work and body art and they can show what they know when they do a grading.

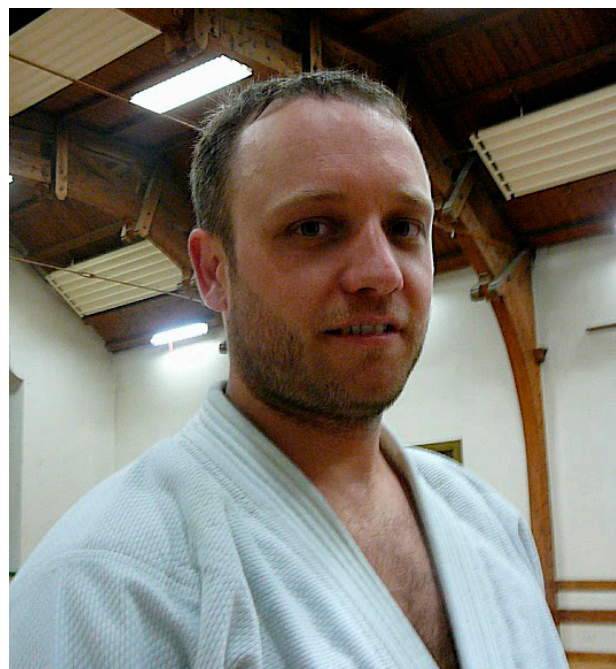
Gradings are always a great way to show what the students know but also what the teacher has to look at again. Gradings also reflect the work and teaching

of the teacher. I have learned a lot from my teacher through his heart to heart transmission. Through that special connection, I have also developed my martial awareness. It might sound funny for a few people but also familiar to others if I say that I have learned most about my martial awareness while looking after my teacher off the mat. When he stays at my place, I am responsible for him and it is then, that I learn most about martial awareness. On the mat, he has been polishing my martial spirit, which is a different thing. I think that martial spirit is created on the mat ukeing for different teachers. My teacher has the ability to create an atmosphere where the back of my hair stands up and this atmosphere demands both my martial spirit and my martial awareness to be there at all times.

The third and last pillar I am going to write about is ‚Leadership’. There are a few things every leader should be able to do. This is basically organizing everything in the dojo. This starts with planning and organising courses and seminars or planning the schedules in the dojo. Another task is to teach the students a proper etiquette. My personal experience is that the clearer the etiquette in the dojo is, the better the students feel, because they always know how to behave and what they have to do. However, it is also of great importance that a leader learns to delegate tasks. What I mean is, that a leader has to learn what he has to do himself and what others can easily do for him, so he frees himself for more important tasks. The goal in our Aikido school is that every Aikido teacher should become a leader. I have been the leader of Aikikai Dornbirn for the last six-and-a-half years and to be honest, it wasn’t always easy. Leaders don’t have easy lives! I can only write about my own leadership in my own dojo. I have always tried to lead being an example for the others. What I mean is that I never asked a student for something I wouldn’t do myself.

A leader should always inspire and guide his students. He can do this best through his teaching. Therefore, I think the teaching of a leader should always be enthusiastic and passionate. I know this is very difficult but, nevertheless, it should be that way. A teacher should know, as mentioned before, the students’ strengths and weaknesses. If he knows them well, he naturally shows respect for them. I think we should always respect our students because if we don’t, we might be left with no students one day, hence no Aikido. This is also the reason why a leader should know how to communicate with his students. He has to know when to talk to a student and when to leave him alone. In our dojo for example, I usually socialise with my students on Fridays after class and they are welcome to join and talk to me about anything they want. We call this the socialising process in our

Aikido and my teacher even calls this „Big Aikido“. „Small Aikido“ is done on the mat and „Big Aikido“ off the mat. Finally, I would like to thank my teacher Tony Cassells Sensei for his commitment towards me and for his heart to heart transmission, which means everything to me. I also thank him for being such a great leader I can learn from. When I look back at the last seven years, it has been an adventurous journey and I am looking forward to many more years full of learning. Those were my thoughts about the responsibilities of an Aikido teacher within Chiba Sensei’s school.



Jürgen Schwendinger,
Sandan, Fukushima
O SEN KAN Dornbirn



André Perret, sho dan
ryu seki kai, Lausanne

Sliding... *towards perfection?*

Since, fortunately, in our modern times and civilized regions, duels and battlefields are rare, it is only in mundane acts of daily life that one can measure the impact of practicing Aikido.

It is, thus, a common winter situation that I am describing in this text written for my Shodan test.

Slide...toward perfection? But, first, slide...on a pretty black-ice patch. It is the experience I had the opportunity to materialize last winter.

In front of my garage, a beautiful patch of black-ice allowed me to be put in a real situation of back fall, situation immediate and irremediable. At the moment I felt "in the air", with no possibility to catch-up, which I already had the opportunity to live a couple of times, time became extended. Seconds became longer and gave me the occasion to think about many things before falling down.

The main thought was that falling was inevitable. Then, facing that evidence, that I had

to accept this fall. At this very moment, I really abandoned and even, I think, projected my body like if I was throwing myself backwards on a bed or in a deep sofa. This, in all relaxation and serenity.

It was another matter after the landing... A sharp pain on all the surface of my right forearm (break fall?), a slight "taste of violence" in the mouth and a trauma felt in all my being. The surface of the ice was really hard, and so was the fall.

However, no other localized pain, nor physical sequel. It is only the next morning, after a night of sleep, that I felt completely recovered.

While standing up after my fall, I saw my wife standing next to the garage, laughing. And as I am writing these lines, I think she has not stopped laughing. She said it was a great fall, "just like in Aikido".

As I thought about it, I remembered a few other moves in daily life, acquired by my body, without intervention of the mind that would slow down the process. For example, without thinking, without effort and without abrupt reaction, catching a falling object, accompanying it and catching it as it falls. I also sense my environment, maybe not in a sharper way, but in a more serene way, more in phase with reality as it is, instead of as I dream it would be.

Also, stronger and stronger is the feeling that only the present moment counts. At this stage, these are only vague sensations, but giving me the willingness to continue the practice of Aikido to see where this can lead me, what benefit, physical or mental, this martial art can bring me.

Continue to practice in order to , just simply maybe, on any type of black-ice patch, avoid sliding.

Translation Christophe Peytier



Michel
Neuman
ni dan
fukushidoin
Dai Jyo Kan
and Uzès

Uke:
Fabrice
Mahieu
ni dan
fukushidoin
Dai Jyo Kan
and Uzès



Why is there something instead of nothing? The physicists don't know how to answer this anguishing question other than by saying that they are neither sure of nothing nor of something. Nevertheless this business is rather basic, give and take a few decimals... Everyone could verify the real existence of something, but who knows, we live in troublesome times when the birth of the universe could be the result of a simple mistake of calculation. It appears, according to the observations of scientist, that we are there thanks to a light imbalance between matter and antimatter. Let's hope this will continue and let' pray that our researchers will not decide to go on strike.

This universe imposes limitations of understanding to all, relative to the culture and the activity in question. Astronomers have their black holes, tax payers the banks to bail out, rockers have Johnny Hallyday, and candidates to Fukushima the fear of having their fingers caressed by the tip of a jo. Relatively and luckily, the above-mentioned universe offers everyone a space of progress: our

universe in its natural and generous creation!

This natural creation springs from the very core of nature. Everything that precludes an eventual intervention of human beings is a creation of nature: within this absolute we are raw, limitless, evolving specks of dust, specks of the absolute nevertheless. I have nothing to say about this absolute except that it is there. From this absolute creation to an absolute truth there is only one step to take— which I happily do take (you don't expect me to write a book I hope?). Human beings can experience this comforting truth through all kinds of activities. Like nature, truth has no limits.

Man, in which truth is revealed, finds himself at one with the fundamental laws of nature. He embodies these laws in himself. It is therefore not surprising that such are the aspirations of budokas, since, from a martial point of view, one must as well try to kick a planet (OM go!), rather than search combat with an accomplished person, and here, aikidokas have an example.

No doubt because he partakes of that speck of the absolute, man is going to invent art intending to reach the moon. The art generates multiple definitions. It is on principle free from utilitarian concerns, its original production is often unique. It manifests itself when man, going beyond his ordinary condition, widens his perception of the world. A new universe appears: what happens then is new. Art exists as much in the change affecting humanity as in the work of art itself. Everyone is potentially an artist, that is, everyone has in himself the channel of art.

Aikido is the creation of O'Sensei. This practice, because of its spiritual dimension, its unselfishness, its potential for development, its capacity to move us, can be perhaps considered as an artistic creation. Just like the painting of a landscape is not the landscape, Aikido is not the war: the art transcend martiality by raising it above the aims of destruction.

It is possible to grow during the whole of one's life by continually opening the channel of art, to the very end, to the edge of the sea, this mystery that knows all about us (I must be missing the mark: I hate vacations on the sea side. But let's go back to the subject at hand).

It seems to me therefore that the art is closely related to creation. Nevertheless, the great cultural diversity should incite us to examine a particular point specific to the arts of Japan. Apparently, many are those immersed in the Philosophy of Zen, in three words: here and

now. Of course, we can always build bridges. Thus, an orchestra director gives a concert, conducts a symphony. It could have been written a century ago, played thousands of times, if the director is an artist he will bring to our ears the art of the music. If the film director is an artist there will be transmission through his film.

You can make new with the trodden old. I find this has a positive consequence if we apply this idea to Aikido. Creativity can thus blossom through the relentless repetition of one technique, in diverse situations and with any number of partners, the new arises, surprisingly, from an ever-renewed interpretation that touches the core of an impermanent reality. In this way and under the direction of a teacher, we can find in our turn the landmarks that pave the way, the markers that were given to our elders, to those that have preceded us on the Way.

From this point of view and besides imitation and repetition, I would distinguish two other possible access roads. In the case of a musician practicing improvisation, a frequent situation in jazz, Indian raggae and many other styles, the realization and the creation are simultaneously executed on rhythmic and harmonic bases. Of course, this excludes neither a long training nor a careful familiarization with the piece, even though these elements may be absent. We can find this creativity in Aikido in an original and efficient action that integrates in one move all the restrictions of a given situation. It seems to me that, like in the case of

a musical improvisation, this venue is accessible particularly to beginners who will react outside all knowledge and conventions and also to the practitioner capable to see and hear accordingly.

The third axis is rather accessible to confirmed and evolved artists because they represent in general an important amount of work, of thinking, and of focusing. Besides, if only the creators themselves often know the creations realized within the framework of the first two axes, and there are direct witnesses to this, the third venue will result in the creation of durable works. For a musician it could mean the composition of a piece, and for the aikidoka the construction of a kata, followed by its refinement and completion to the last detail. And it seems to me that this corresponds to an artistic creation such as I described in this paper.

I am happy to observe that Aikido is rightly considered an art. Artistic creation, martial art, Aikido, all this is deeply integrated. So, I must thank all of you. Everyone; without distinction of grade or title, for the road we have shared, for everything that has been tried, for your success and your failures, for that which you made me see, for what you hide from me, my cunning friends, so that I will have the pleasure to find out for myself, by the theft and the gift.

Thank you

Translation Norberto Chiesa

shamisen
player

Ukiyo-e
(image of the floating world)
by
Utamaro



The Emperor's choice

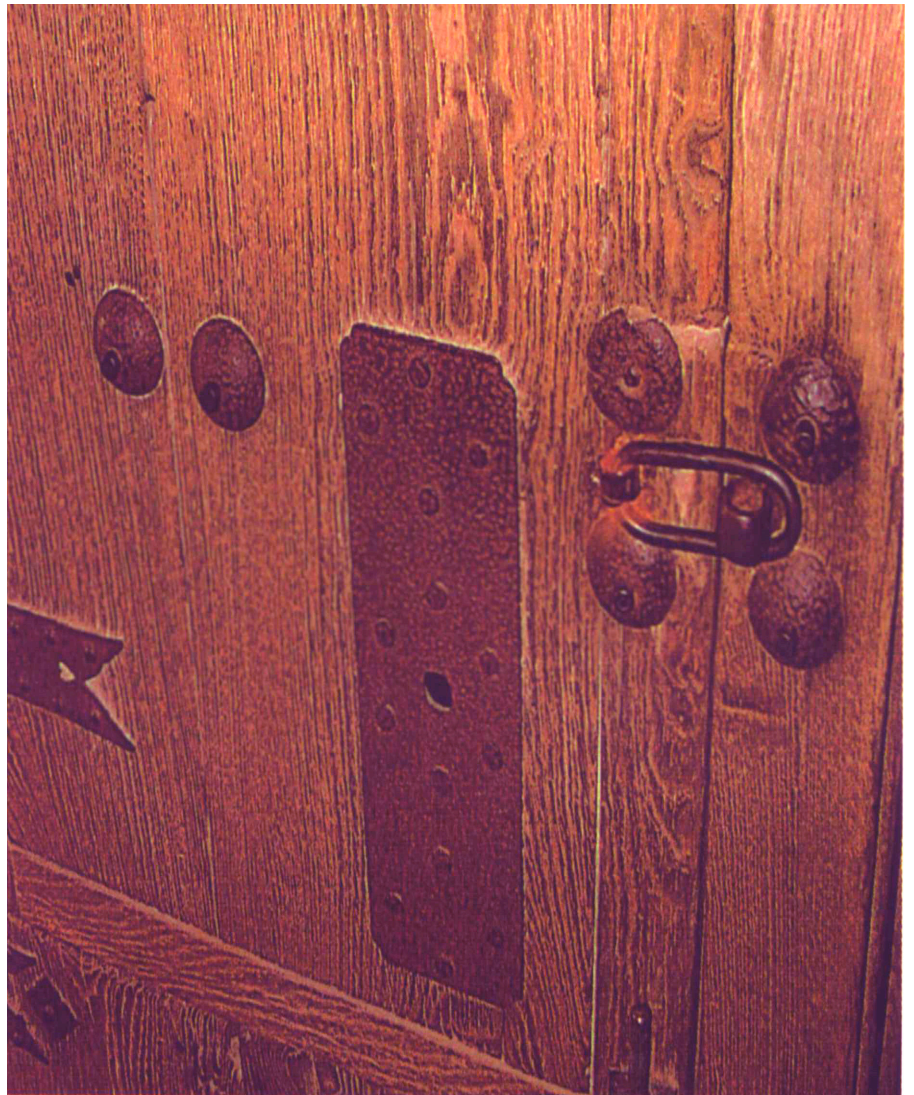
Once upon a time there was an Emperor who, having to choose a new prime minister, wished to find the wisest, the most intelligent and the smartest amongst his subjects. Those he considered to be suitable to the post had to pass a number of tests. After going through a series of difficult trials there were three candidates left.

- Here is a last obstacle you will have to overcome, said the Emperor. You will be enclosed in a room whose door will be fit with a solid and sophisticated lock. The first among you that will leave the room shall be my prime minister.

Two of the candidates who were very learned, immediately started their calculations, lined up rows of numbers and devised complicated charters and abstruse diagrams. From time to time they examined the lock carefully, they mumbled, sighed and pulled their hair.

The third was doing nothing. He stayed sitting on his carpet in meditation. All of a sudden he got up, went to the door and turn the handle: the door opened and he left.

Adapted from Henri Brunel
Translation Norberto Chiesa



Considering of the merging of Shiun with Musubi, the bla-bla page disappears. Regarding the news you would like to share, thank you for using the appropriate form. It will be available in the NEWS heading in the <http://www.birankai.eu/home.html> website, from the beginning of January 2010.