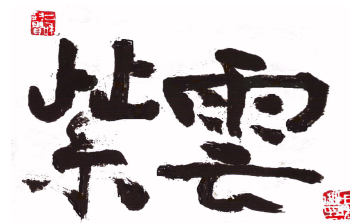


SHIUN



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CONCERNING BIRANKAI –T.K. CHIBA

This article is the last of a series of three articles through which I have attempted to express my motivation and the reasons behind the formation of Birankai International. I don't know yet how the formation of Birankai International has been received elsewhere. Although I feel watchful eyes all around me, I have heard nothing much about it, either in support or against it, at least not directly to me.

In fact, I expected the worst kind of outcome, very stormy responses and a shower of criticism, and I had prepared myself to face it squarely. Whatever the responses might have been, as far as I am concerned our course will not change. Nonetheless, sitting in the midst of silence, having had no response makes me wonder about the direction and undercurrent of the Aikido world at large with regard to its future prosperity.

I have been careful at every step I took so as to avoid unnecessary conflict, both political and cultural, within the structure of the present Aikido world; however, the formation of Birankai International still remains a controversial issue. As a closure to this series of articles I have written, I would like to include the statement that I wrote at the time of the formation of Birankai International in 2000, which has been circulated to associate organizations and their teachers, including Hombu Dojo.

Birankai International (Purpose of formation)

1. To establish a new structure of discipline adapted to our moral, philosophical, and technical convictions, by replacing the existing organization and structure of discipline in order to promote and grow Aikido in an international scale.
2. The new organization shall be called "Birankai International" based on the reason described above.
3. Birankai International shall be organized as a not-for-profit corporation in order that it may contribute to the promotion and growth of Aikido internationally.
4. Birankai International shall approve the Dan grade recommendations submitted by the Teaching Committee / Examination Committee established in each member country, and shall issue its own Dan grade certifications, in addition to the existing Dan grade registration system through Hombu. There shall be no registration fees for Birankai certificates. (See note 1.)
5. Birankai International shall make the traditional Dan grade registration to Hombu available to any member at that member's request. Should such a request be made, the member shall pay to Hombu the prescribed Dan grade registration fees.
6. Birankai International shall issue its own "passport" for Kyu and Dan grade members. With this passport, we will no longer use the Hombu International Yudansha book.
7. Birankai International shall appoint and issue its own "Shihan" title to selected members who are sixth Dan and above.
8. These decisions do not imply separation from Hombu. This decision was made based on logical observation of our philosophy and belief and is not based on analysis of objective situations and conditions. Our action does not intend to reject the authority or authenticity that belongs to Hombu or any other Hombu-related organizations.

The essence of Dan grades, based on my belief, is an acknowledgment by those who are in teaching positions to students who have cultivated various virtues through constant training and have developed technically, spiritually and as human beings. This is one of the responsibilities of teachers. On the other

hand, students have an obligation to support their teachers both spiritually and materially. Currently these obligations are met through the payment of monthly dues and by other services.

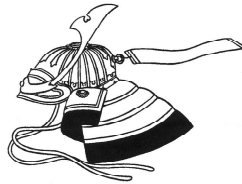
My moral sense makes it difficult for me to agree with the imposition of monetary obligations for the acknowledgment of a student's continued development and the achievement of different levels. In my opinion, such acknowledgment is simply one of the responsibilities given to a teacher.

The presentation of Dan grades may be seen as one of the methods by which a teacher acknowledges the progress of his/her students. However, the truth is that the acknowledgment of progress is a part of a teacher's life. The establishment of the relationship between teacher and student, and a bond of trust and affection that develops in the course of this relationship, reflects the fundamental desire of human beings towards creative, mutual exchange. Acknowledgment of the qualities of an individual's training must transcend any concept of strong vs. weak or good vs. bad. It is for this very reason that Aikido completely rejects all forms of competition. The value of a Dan grade depends upon the character of each individual student. Therefore, we should not allow materialistic value judgments or comparisons to enter into this relationship. The granting of Dan grades, therefore, represents a heart-to-heart connection between the teacher and the student, which must not be expressed in financial terms.

I would like to emphasize that the original purpose in the giving of Dan grades was spiritual, not materialistic. The fundamental nobility in this original design should be recognized by both those who give and those who receive. Promotions must never be given for private gain or used as a tool to achieve private objectives. Such acts reduce the dignity of Aikido.

Postscript

As I write this note, I have been informed from Europe that we are going to have a celebration of the establishment of Birankai Europe at the forthcoming spring seminar at Labaroche, France. I am also happy to say that Birankai USA has been granted both federal and California state non-profit educational status.



T.K. Chiba

April 7, 2003

To the members of Birankai International:

I was amazed and overwhelmingly happy to learn that the fund-raising project for the purchase of the San Diego Aikikai building was so successful. It was more or less an open secret amongst the membership that I initially did not approve of this project - the reason being that I simply did not want to add further financial burden on the member dojos that I knew were already struggling for survival. Furthermore, I had serious doubts that we would be able to reach the intended goal within the limited time frame of only two years. Despite my objections, the grand designer of the project, Lynn Ballew, insisted that not only was the purchase of the building an absolute necessity, but that we would be able to pull it off within the given time. After a number of talks and much resistance from me, I finally relented with the condition that I would not be involved on any level or in any way, as the idea still bothered my conscience greatly.

True to my word, I deliberately kept my eyes and ears shut throughout the entire process, and in the end I must admit that I feel I have been childish and irresponsible to behave in such a way. As I had been assured from the beginning, the building fund goal was met in full and within the time allotted. I cannot hide how much the success of this project has eased my mind and lightened the heavy load I have carried for years, and the payment of the dojo's debts has now afforded me a sense of freedom that was previously unimagined. What has been gratifying to me, however, has been the way in which this process has affirmed the strength of our community - a strength that is based on faith, goodwill and cohesiveness. The visible, concrete expression of these virtues gives me great happiness.

I am not only grateful to those individual members and dojos who with their personal sacrifices helped us attain this goal, but also to the people who stood behind them – their partners, families, and friends whose support made it all possible. I offer my heartfelt thanks to you all.

Lastly, I wish to express my special thanks to the grand designer of this project, Lynn Ballew, for her exceeding determination despite obstacles, and to Leslie Cohen and George Lyons, whose efforts and attention in the day-to-day operation of the building fund brought it to its overwhelmingly successful conclusion.

TK Chiba
10 September 2005
San Diego, California

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

New Year is a good time to look back at the recent past and to draw perspectives for the future. In this frame of mind I present to you Birankai Continental Europe's best wishes of good health and happiness! And beyond the practice of aikido that unites us all, may the New Year bring Peace and Justice in the world affairs for the benefit of all!

At the time of the British Aikikai summer camp In Bangor, Wales, Chiba Sensei promoted Chris Mooney Sensei and Tony Cassells Sensei to the rank of shihan. On behalf of all of us, congratulations! Together with Mike Flynn Sensei, who recently arrived from the USA to establish himself in Scotland, Norberto Chiesa Sensei and Gabriel Valibouze Sensei in France, Birankai now counts five shihans in Europe, organised by Chiba Sensei in the Shihankai Europe, a committee created to promote a stronger cohesiveness of our practice in Europe. The British Aikikai and Birankai Continental Europe presidents are also members of this leading body. The Shihankai Europe will gather for the first time in England this January in order to establish the strategy of its future action.

Shortly afterwards, the autumn seminar organized by the Aikikai de Strasbourg under the banner of Birankai Continental Europe was a real success with about eighty people from all parts of Europe: Poland, Greece, Israel, Switzerland, Germany, Scotland, England and France. The program included of course Aikido, Iai Batto Ho and Zazen, and the teaching team was composed of no less than four shihans, Daniel Brunner Sensei and Jenny Flower Sensei. A beautiful demonstration of what can be achieved when working together!

Lastly, the Birankai Continental Europe Teaching Committee submitted to Chiba Sensei for approval, a project of internal by-laws describing in detail the official protocol for all affairs within our organisation: admission of new dojos, organisation and registration of dan grades exams and teaching certifications, responsibilities and commitments of teachers, annual reports of dojos and teachers, etc. This text and its annex have been mailed to all dojos and I invite all members to read it, you may get a copy from your dojo's secretary. We expect to present it to you in detail and answer your questions at our next annual general assembly in April at Labaroche.

This last item may seem unimportant in the context of the preceding events, but I'm sure that these by-laws will provide a useful tool to ease the task of all those responsible for the management of the dojos and of Birankai Continental Europe. On behalf of all of you I take the opportunity to thank the members of the BCE Bureau and Management Committee for the work they produce all year round, particularly Christophe Brunner, our General Secretary, Alexander Broll, Deputy General Secretary, Arielle Semin, Treasurer, and Michèle Pauli who assists her.

See you soon on the mat!

Joël BERTRAND, BCE president.



THE WEAPON'S PRACTICE IN AÏKIDO

Nidan examination's essay by PAULE NEST – HELMBACHER



Aikido, the most modern of the Japanese martial arts which was created by Master Morihei Ueshiba at the beginning of 20th century, is the synthesis of military techniques stemming from the Japanese art of warfare, completed and enriched by different spiritual teachings that the Master pursued during his life.

The practice of Aikido such as we approach it nowadays was thus born in this pivotal period of the Warrior - the man of weapon who never parted from his sword, the one who went to the front on battlefields, the man of all the fights - and the end of the traditional wars, the period when the reasons for teaching the art of warfare became obsolete.

The birth of Aikido and its evolution are bound to this period as well as to the research of a man who tried to pass on the wealth of a former art to a society which was motivated by other objectives.

Today, when we discuss the discipline of Aikido, we speak about personal development, about spiritual research even when associated to the more practical notions of self-defense. It is true that the practice with bare hands fulfils well this function of personal blooming. Bodywork allied to a work of the spirit allows for the development of such a research. But what about the teaching of Weapons?

Why continue to have a practice with fictitious weapons in an over protected place such as a Dojo since we shall never meet ourselves in the

situation to have to use such fighting strategies? What sense can we give then to this technical education? The same applies to bare hand practice, but where are the subtleties that make it different? In all modesty, during my daily practice, I try to understand what this education brings me: not what is added, but what is different in my practice of Aikido and I take advantage of this essay to put it in words.

The idea of working with weapons was for me difficult to access because it necessarily appeals to notions (imagery) of fighting, wounds and carnages; not harmony and energy connected to the cosmos, and certainly not to the notions of peace, protection and divine love such as we can read in the textbooks which deal with the discipline.

Nevertheless, I began this work because it is intimately bound to the practice taught by Chiba Sensei. My body refused and still refuses from time to time a total approach to this learning. To hold a weapon, manipulate it and learn to use it effectively requires a complete harmonious merging of the body, the mental and the weapon:

- The body and the weapon have to be One, repeat the teachers during the lessons.
- The weapon has to be the continuation of hands and considered as a Living being. It is an extension of ourselves.
- Loosen shoulders, be supple. Cut, cut!
- Use not the force but the precision, aim at impact points.

- The energy has to come from a good coordination of body - spirit.

- The mind must be constantly alert, wholly present in the action that is taking place, in permanent contact with the opponent and to top it all, you have only a single attempt to achieve the goal— and it can be fatal ... These are the terms used, the given direction.

This stimulating speech remains all the same very theoretical when we are in a learning situation. The use of a weapon, a tool between myself and the other, requires at first its acceptance (which can be more difficult for a woman than for a man) then its integration as an extension of myself, then training in an efficient way and only then can it become a means to connect me with another.

It is a long journey which make sense when at rare times, in my current situation, I succeed in connecting to my partner, proposing to him an exchange based on a fight in which there are no losers.

It is at this stage of my experiences that I began to perceive the subtlety and the sharpness of the work of weapons: the relation to the other one,

whether in the meeting or in the separation, is no longer made in a close hand-to-hand fight but in a finer space, reduced to the sharp edge of a blade, to the extremity of the staff or to the threatening point of a knife. This space, small as it can be, becomes an area of exchange and I understand then the importance of the study of weapons in the progress in Aikido.

The practice of Aikido in our modern world, responds certainly to a spiritual question and a need for our society to find a means to balance the individual increasingly disturbed by its own functioning.

This discipline, based on ancient fundamental concepts, has the quality not to congeal, but to evolve and to adapt itself to the needs of the individual. It seems to be in continual movement and it is only in this optic that I can understand weapons practice, even if lacking in practical necessity. This practice develops attitudes and behavior leading to the refinement of the senses, and perhaps to this famous sixth sense which O' Sensei mentions— the best of warriors is he whose sword stays in the sheath.

Strasbourg, April 2005

WORKING THROUGH THE BODY

Essay for shodan examination by IVO SONDEREGGER



"[Mr. Duffy] lived at a little distance from his body"

Dubliners, James Joyce

In western society much activity is carried out with the help of the intellect. In giving the intellect a prime role in our lives, we lose the awareness of our body and the wisdom that it harbours.

I am no exception. Through Aikido I have found one way of communicating with both my own body and that of my training partners. The work on my own development takes place through my body. I do not dwell on problems with thought; instead I let my body "work" on these problems.

What does it mean to "work through the body"? What this means has been demonstrated to me either through issues that I have worked on or those whose significance I have recently become aware of. These are as follows:

I have learned as uke to give, to maintain equilibrium and to open up. To give means that the better I carry out an attack, the better chance tori has to work on the technique. If I were to only hold on with my hand, then I would be taking away something from both of us. To maintain equilibrium and to open up are related when working on ukemi. The idea is again that the better I am at ukemi, the better the chance for tori to practise the technique and to experience if there are any uncertainties or gaps on his/her side. To maintain equilibrium does not mean that I will try by all means to avoid losing equilibrium. On the contrary, it means that I strive to regain my equilibrium anew as soon as possible. To regain that new equilibrium I must open up and let my body absorb the technique as well as it can while keeping my body's centre stable.

As tori I have learned to both centre and focus myself. Often, from a misconception based on wanting to be nice, I allowed uke to interfere with the execution of the technique. Such behaviour on my side was not enhancing the learning of either person. As tori I did not experience how the technique should be executed because I did not do it properly, and uke was deprived of the chance to work on ukemi with a properly executed technique.

In Aikido practise I have learned to sharpen my observation skills and what I see when a technique is being demonstrated. There are several reasons not to look properly: I trust the words too much, I rely too much on the teacher, or I think that I know the technique already. These pitfalls can only be avoided when I am always ready to be present and alert, and to look each time for yet undiscovered details or finesse of the technique. In looking with sharpened awareness I have learned to focus myself. Be it as tori or as uke, the spirit must be alert at every instant.

The above lessons have led me to the next issue, that of contact and presence. In working

through the body, both contact and presence are of great significance. The execution of a technique is mandated solely through the contact. If as tori I lose contact with uke, then I lose the control of his/her body and hesitation and uncertainty are the result. The goal is however to receive the contact and to direct it in the desired direction throughout the technique without loss of connection. By contact I mean the connection between the centres of the two bodies, not the mere touching of the skin or holding of the wrist. The attacking hand is the point through which the technique is carried out, while the goal of a technique is to move the centre through the hand.

What plays a central role while working on contact is presence. As tori I must be present "here and now" in order to react to the attack. If I am distracted, then I will react too late. If I am trying to recall images from the past, then I will be too late. Only the necessary presence will allow me to meet uke's contact when and where it happens.

Above are a few of my thoughts concerning "working through the body". These few words do not mean that I have understood all. I feel that I am a beginner, and that a door is opening up. Slowly I start to become more aware of my body, and to develop a sense of what it means to be centred and stable or what it means to work from centre to centre. This is an experience that I would not have wanted to miss, and that leaves me hungry for more.

I am immensely grateful to all of those who share my excitement and passion for Aikido on a daily basis and who have allowed me to reach the present stage. In particular, I am especially grateful to Barbara Imboden, the head of our dojo.

The first contact

What keeps surprising me in Aikido practise is the first contact: it is as diverse as human nature itself. The first contact is as rich in its nature as the people making that contact. Sometimes it is decisive and forceful, other times it is uncertain and hesitant. Other times the force is in the hand, while other times it comes from the center. On occasions the contact is rigid, then pliable. And then it can be overly motivated, slow, nervous, loose, tired, demanding, quiet, tricky... as varied as the people themselves.

Berne, 28 March 2005

*Translated by Dannie Jost
Photograph by Dannie Jost*

SEEN FROM THE GALLERY

Or the place of women on the mats
SUZANNE BRUNNER

From the gallery, the observer that I am is surprised by the recurrence of certain questions that are often asked at the end of seminars.

The place of women in the martial arts, especially in aikido, is part of these preoccupations. By extension, one can ask oneself what is the legitimacy of women practicing iaido or possessing samurais' weapons. These interrogations have received until now only rather vague answers. This legitimacy is not essential for the teachers. The first answer coming to mind is that the place one has is simply the place one takes. This is easy to say.

The martial arts as we know them are not a male bastion recently invaded by women; one finds tracks of their presence in the most ancient documents. Their (re) emergence in these arts coincides with the (slow) transformation of the women's role in the modern society.

It would be exaggerated to say that since the feudal era, there is an abundance of legends in the literature portraying feminine heroes. These legends exist, but one has to seek them out. The diaries of aristocratic women, like The Murasaki Shikibu's Diary (973-1025) are very rich and full of details about the life in Japan since the Heian era (794-1185) but they give little information about daily life in the lower classes.

It is known that the every day life of women from the peasantry contrasted sharply with the life of samurai's wives and a fortiori with that of the nobility. Women peasants worked in the fields with their husbands in a kind of rough equality. They had their share in the management of the house. They could inherit and divorce (but not remarry).

The samurais expected a lot from their wives; they had to manage the home while the men were battling at the side of their lord or looking for an engagement.

Apart from the responsibility of the house, the women had to oversee the harvests and deal with financial matters. They had to bring the children up. They kept a close watch on their instruction, on the good development of their physical aptitudes and on the initiation of boys and girls to handling weapons. Moreover, they taught them loyalty to the samurais' ideal of courage.

Like their husbands, these women could commit suicide – by cutting the carotid – in case of disgrace, or to protest against injustice or bad treatment. They had the right of revenge and the possibility to obtain, from the Shogun, the authorization of reprisals. This right empowered them to find their enemy and kill them with the katana.



These women were skilled with weapons, like the arts of the spear, the bow and, of course, the sword. They wore a dagger in their sleeves used to kill by striking or throwing.

While these women could bravely use the jo and the naginata defending their home in the absence of their husbands, the wives of certain shoguns or daimyos, who were often of strong character, would rejoin their spouse on the battlefield and battle beside them. They claim the right to take up weapons, to recruit army corps, to drove

hordes of enemies back, and invade the territories of the opposite camps.

These very ancient traces of women warriors could be enough to legitimate, if necessary, the feminine presence in the academies of martial arts of our time...

But the best is to follow.

Although many samurais' wives were under the obligation to take up arms to defend their possessions, Tomoe-Gozen (1157 -? The suffix « Gozen » was used for the Bushis'wives – members of the warriors' class) appears to be an accomplished woman warrior in her own right. She was the second wife of Kiso (Minamoto) Yoshinaka. The Heike Monogatari describes her rather as one of the lieutenant general of the first forces of attack of Yorimoto.

Breathtakingly beautiful, with a pale bisque complexion, very delicate features and a long silky hair, she was also an excellent archer and it was said she was as good as a thousand swordsmen. She rode with maestria untamed horses and was always ready to confront god or devil, on foot or on horseback.

“When Yoshinaka was injured in the battle of Awozu, Tomoe confronted Onda no Hachiro Moroshige in singular combat. Her long black hair was free, “Tomoe did not wear a helmet” and she looked radiant in her beauty. She declined her identity; the adversaries observed each other and then engaged in hand-to-hand combat, always on horseback. It was a magnificent duel without weapons between a man and a woman, both samurais.

Suddenly the warrior pulled Tomoe by her hair and rolled it round his wrist. Then he drew his sword. She was humiliated because he dared to touch her hair, emblem of her femininity. Tomoe stuck his arm with her elbow and made him let go of the sword. Then she took her own sword, cut off his head and brought it to her husband”.

Indeed, a fine story... The samurai's behavior was not characteristic of the era (I know, I saw the same thing on the mat). The reaction nowadays is fortunately not as drastic as that of Tomoe-Gozen.

Another extraordinary story tells us about the epic of the Empress Zingu. She was pregnant when she learned about the death of her husband during the battle of Sin-Ra, in Korea. She spread the news that the Mikado was alive and decided to take his place. She then recruited new troops in order to reinforce the army. She was dressed in a fabulous armor of black horn with large epau-

lettes. Her hair was hidden in a helmet displaying a golden chrysanthemum. She had not only a katana and a wakisashi, but she also carried at her side a very long hatchet. When she and her army arrived at the seaside, she boarded a boat and looking far into space she shouted: – Look, look, the God of the Sea Owata-tsu-Mi agreed to be our guide and he is walking ahead of us! Only she could see the God of the Sea, but no one had the slightest doubt about her vision. Extremely excited, the warriors felt invincible. They crossed the sea, defeated the royal Korean army and invaded Korea.

Some fourteen centuries have passed since the illustrious Zingu returned to her capital after two years of battling and gave birth to the son she had carried in her body all along her long epic. (The phenomenon of delayed gestation is frequent to certain species of animals as does, martens, she-bears, etc. The females wait for the optimal conditions to have their babies.) She remains through the ages a glorious example of determination and bravery.

After this period in Japanese history, the girls were increasingly used as pawns in the struggle for power through the custom of arranged marriages. This practice inexorably restricted the influence of women in the samurais' class. A picture of a samurai's wife as humble, obedient and totally submissive to her husband or to her son if she were a widow replaced the image of the courageous women-warrior.

Confucianism and Buddhism contributed equally to the degradation of the women's position. Both of these doctrines denigrated to women intellectual and mental abilities. In the same period the Catholic Church established the same iniquitous degradation.

I have had great pleasure delving into the Japanese history and its legends. I hope they would persuade women in the martial arts never to doubt the validity of their presence in these arts. I wish for them to be able to develop on the mat the same qualities of courage, daring, resistance, persistence and patience as the heroines of former times.

Sources:

1. Journal of Asian Martial Arts, vo. 5, 1996
2. Famous Women of Japanese History
3. Women and Women's Communities in Ancient Japan, Richard Hooker, 1996
4. Women in Heian and Feudal Japan (Women in World History Sarah



On the occasion of their Shihan nomination, Chiba Sensei asked Norberto Chiesa and Gabriel Valibouze to express their thoughts on the subject:

AIKIDO: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

NORBERTO CHIESA

Present day Aikido is the only one we have, the only one we can perceive through direct experience. Living with it here and now, offers a glimpse of its past and an intimation of its future. This essay is a subjective insight into Aikido in time, from the viewpoint of today's practice.

The Past

Aikido's contemporary message of peace and protection of life is the paradoxical outcome of centuries of conflict and warfare.

Its martial form stems from the patient distillation in time of the fighting ways and means we have developed in the process of survival.

Its spiritual content is the alchemical transformation of destructive negativity into creative action, brought into existence by an avatar born out of the Japanese culture, known to us as O Sensei, Morihei Ueshiba.

I knew someone, years ago that stated that Aikido does not exist. He wanted very badly to be free of judgments, opinions, likes and dislikes. He wanted to be in touch with "what is".

I knew a Master who said that Aikido is perfect emptiness.

The present

Aikido today contains in its boundless space, as much and as little as we put in it.

Aikido exists in the flesh of those who practice it, in a myriad of shapes and levels. Reflecting gedan, chudan and jodan, Aikido is a multilevel discipline that engenders the most diverse positive and negative results, from better health to bad knees, from caring compassion to destructive ag-

gressiveness, from self knowledge to self glorification.

When asked what Aikido is we answer glibly that it is a Martial Art; an answer that reassures the questioner in his notions about oriental fighting and gives us a way out to talk about something else.

But why is it an Art and what does that mean?

In the art of painting the finished canvas is a "work" of art, not the "workings" of an art. The canvas is the material residue of a creative process in which thought, experience, technique, premeditation and judgment recede into the background of awareness. Creation is, when the ego is not.

In the art of Aikido these conditions are the same. A situation of danger demands an imme-



diately, spontaneous response in which there is no time for lineal thinking. The best response is innocent yet rich with the storing of endless repetition of form. A creative iriminage has no name when it happens. It just is. Aikido, a Martial Art, leaves no residue. What come into play in the best of cases are the integrated qualities of the artist as a whole.

Nevertheless we do not live in the “best of cases”. In rare moments our action on the mat (or elsewhere) is creative action. It is easy to believe in the illusion that we are practicing a martial art or that we are already martial artists.

Aikido as manifested in our everyday practice, is a tool for integration. Our bodies, so often a collection of parts vaguely interrelated, begin to organize around a center into a cohesive whole. We learn to move physically as a whole and technique becomes possible.

At this stage, a certain sense of accomplishment is legitimate but incomplete. The body, integrated as it may be, is but the housing of a complex being. We also have a brain capable of amazing intellection that needs to develop and function in that whole.

We are capable of feeling; a function we ascribe to the heart, and that must flower and be integrated too.

Moving, thinking and feeling are like the legs of a tripod. We are rarely able to stand straight, the three legs are too short, or too long, but mostly never the same length. The norm in our culture is overdeveloped minds, ruling over rudimentary hearts, sitting on distorted bodies.

Aikido practice induces awareness. What we are doing on the mat is cleaning up house, day after day. To gain awareness is the beginning of house cleaning. To remember what we are, whatever that is, and what we are doing “as it is” is to give honesty to our practice. To be humble unconcerned with humility, to be proud of what we are without falling prey to pride, to be simple without contrivance is the beginning of good practice. The road is long, walking on it is endless and the journey is not without danger. Unawareness is a constant threat.

The stronger one kills the weaker.

Equal strength results in mutual killing.

Or the art of passing through.

One day, if I live long enough, I may find out what is the meaning of passing through.

Not knowing why, creativity and leaving no residues is the trail I am on.

The Future

Every thing alive is subject to the same laws. Everything manifested springs into existence, lives and dies in perpetual becoming. What is

alive is constantly changing. Aikido is constantly changing just as we do.

The future of Aikido is imprinted in the bodies of the young and its survival rests with the capacity to teach its form and the gift to transmit its essence.

The material content of Aikido may have a long life; its intangible substance may endure beyond time or fade away due to its own fragility.

Our challenge is not to “preserve” Aikido. Only dead things are preserved in museums and academies. Our challenge is to remain creative and I do not mean inventing new techniques. Our challenge is to make Aikido alive now, from moment to moment. It is the only way I know to pay our debt to generations of men that with great suffering prepared the ground for the birth of our art, to the teachers that devoted their life to transmitting its message, and indeed to the extraordinary human being that brought Aikido into the world as a gift to humanity, O Sensei, may his Kami know undisturbed peace.

In perfect emptiness there is no limit to space, and time is timeless.

In that realm, Aikido has no past, no present, and no future.

Buenos Aires, October 30, 2004



REPORT OF FIRST SHIHANKAI MEETING

In Summer 2005 Chiba sensei created the European shihankai consisting of shihans Tony Cassells, Norberto Chiesa, Mike Flynn, Chris Mooney, and Gabriel Valibouze.

Many questions may arise from the members of BCE and British Aikikai - what is shihankai, what is its purpose, why did sensei create it?

In order to answer these questions the Shihankai met for their first official meeting on 18 January in Birmingham, UK. This meeting has taken place thanks to the joined effort of both BUK and BCE. The discussions were wide ranging and covered ethical, philosophical and practical issues.

A number of views were agreed. The role of the shihankai would be to

- act as custodians for the integrity of Chiba sensei's work for the future in Europe (UK & CE)
- be closely involved with maintaining and developing the high quality of future and existing teachers in Europe
- look to the future and plan for the time after Chiba sensei's retirement in Europe
- take a strategic view of Aikido within Birankai and across the world with Aikikai Hombu Dojo in Japan and other aikido associations

Shihankai has a role of its own but will work alongside the existing teaching committees of the BA and BCE.

It was decided that in order to promote the aim of working with teachers that at least one annual course would be held with all shidoin and fukushidoin and that yudansha would also be invited as the potential teachers of the future. The course venue will be rotated across Europe.

The shihan will give their teaching for no cost and any profit after course expenses will go directly towards a fund for making the shihankai meetings self financing.

The first course will be held in Strasbourg, France in February 2007. Although this may seem like a long way in the future it allows all teachers and yudansha to plan and save. This course is seen as very important for the future of Birankai in Europe and we would urge all teachers to attend.

The Chairman of BA and the President of BCE attended the inaugural shihankai meeting in a support capacity and we would encourage you to give the Shihankai every help in this new role that sensei has given them.

The next shihankai meeting will take place at Bangor at the BA summer school in August.

Joel Bertrand
Chairman BCE

Pauline Wilson
Chairman BA

