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LAO-TZU HOLDING A SCROL, RIDING A WATER BUFFALO
Svteenth Century, Ming dynasty, bronze 65cm

MATT TEALE Essay for 4th dan examination

The supreme good is like water, which nourishes all things without trying to.

It is content with the low places that people disdain.

Thus it is like the Tao.

In dwelling, live close to the ground,

In thinking, keep to the simple.

In conflict, be fair and generous.

In governing, don't try to control.

In work, do what you enjoy.

In family life, be completely present.

When you are content to be simply yourself and don't compare or compete, everybody will respect you.

Tao Te Jing, Chapter 8

What is it that makes me want to continue Aikido, despite the bruises, aches and pains, time away from my family in the main?

I think at the end of the day that the substantial reason is the same reason it frustrates me.

In my day-to-day life I am happy and comfortable, I have a beautiful family. My work is going well; it's stimulating, rewarding and gives financial security. I have a lot of positive feedback from my life which gives me confidence in myself.

However, Aikido gives me something else. I believe that it is a mirror, that if you want, you can hold up to yourself (and others) and see what is really going on, what are the problems, where are the weaknesses. Just as in the rest of life, it is important to see the positive aspects; progress, development, and the external recognition of these by others. It is easy though to get carried away by this positive feedback and forget that we are just regular guys with many faults and a lot of work to do.

I would like to take a look at this excerpt from the Tao Te Jing and reflect on how it refers to my Aikido practice.

How many times have I felt that my feet are not firmly planted on the ground during a technique? In the effort to perform a technique quickly or with power it is so easy to lose one's base.

“Keep to the simple” - In my technique I see this most clearly in the feet. Often we take three steps when one will do. We can lose contact because we're trying "to do the ukemi" that we think "is right for this technique". We don't respond immediately because we're not responding naturally to what is really happening but more to an idea in our head. In dealing with people, we develop all sorts of scenarios in our heads, which stop us from seeing clearly what is happening at this moment.

Conflict – Aikido is all about conflict and finding a positive, creative resolution. Tori can sometimes feel unsure as to whether they can really pull it off, especially if uke is very strong or stiff. In these situations insecurity can lead them to feel that the uke is being intentionally awkward or vindictive, this can make tori extra "positive" to compensate. But in my experience, often I realise later that the uke's response is due to his fear or insecurity, which of course is made worse by applying the technique more aggressively. Techniques seem to work far better when I apply them with calm, relaxed, positive confidence. Here I think is the real joy of Aikido! Finding this balance. If you're meek and yielding, lacking extension and confidence you become over powered by the attacker, but if you're too forceful and aggressive you cause tension and defensiveness in the uke which makes life difficult for yourself.

As uke I am constantly battling with myself to find the balance. Being solid and centred is good but too much becomes being stuck, obstinate and unable to respond. On the other hand, being responsive and alive is essential but too much and your making it up, flying away and not allowing the tori to experience the execution of his full technique. Being generous with your ukemi means to be fully present both centred and awake. Again fear has a huge part to play in this. If we are afraid of the technique it causes me to become stuck and the technique ends up hurting or we run away from the technique trying to avoid the conflict and then our partner doesn't get a chance to practice fully. I know the answer is to be there, responsive in the moment, without fear but I have a long way to go.

Control! This maybe is more relevant as the teacher of a dojo. It is very important to maintain discipline and protocol in a martial arts dojo but it is easy to get carried away with this. Again, I think the greatest danger is fear and insecurity leading the teacher to control the environment too tightly in an attempt to protect themselves from confrontations. Obviously this can stifle the students and cause an oppressive atmosphere. It can also prevent a positive and open interaction with other dojos.



The final point is maybe the most important - for us to find a balance between our personal and Aikido life. I've seen too many people ruin their family life by taking it for granted and spending too much time away working, training, teaching etc. Trying to find a healthy balance

between my family, work and Aikido is work in progress and vital for me to continue training for the years to come. In 10 years my kids will start thinking of moving on and I don't want to realise then that I missed out on being there during their growing years. I sometimes become acutely aware that the precious time I do have with my family is wasted because I'm not actually present mentally or emotionally. In this case what's the point?

Aikido is a mirror for us to see our strengths and weaknesses but it needs constant work. Continually looking in the mirror and polishing off the blemishes.

I've got a lot of work to do!

Matt Teale
March 2006

Matt Teale has lived in Athens for 7 years, has a Greek wife – Alva, and 2 sons, Nicholas (almost 8) and Miltos (6 and a bit). He is a student of Chris Mooney Sensei and has studied under Chiba Sensei. More recently he has been the chief instructor at Panellinos for 2 years with Achilleas Labelle as the second instructor. Panellios is a sports center with a large, airy dojo used for Judo, jujitsu as well as Aikido. The dojo has between 20 and 25 active members.

KIROS TZANNES, Dan Grade essay

Since nearly all aspects of Aikido have already been written about and thoroughly analyzed I decided to write down some thoughts about my personal journey.

I can still remember my first contact with aikido. I was mesmerized by the clever, artful techniques and its beautiful dynamic style. The experience on the mat was quite different though. Each and every muscle and bone in my body was aching and begging me to stop. Luckily that phase passed by quickly once I realized that this was no ordinary pain. It was an expression of joy coming from my dormant body reminding me that it is still there and very much alive... So, the only remedy was to put all my effort and buckets of sweat into my training to condition my body.

When training started to become more intense and more complicated techniques were introduced, my mind became perplexed. Everything begun to feel impossible to do and disappointment started to overcome me. At this stage I understood that it was too difficult to *think* through techniques and felt that the solution laid in ukemi; taking as much as possible and letting my body *feel* the technique first hand gave me the feedback needed in order to execute techniques more precisely. Relying solely on my eyes was making it too difficult to perceive an Aikido technique properly.

Ukemi also gave me the understanding that, the more you stretch and the more energy *you* put into it, the more energy you could steal, manage, and utilize. So, I came to the realization that once the body and mind are taken out of the

equation the only thing left was energies working together. It is fascinating to watch someone high in grade performing a technique with a good uke, not for the fancy big movements, but for the energy that can be generated. Also by paying more attention to my ukemi my techniques became clearer and easier to assimilate.

The next step was weapon's training. This made me understand that even simple movements can become deadly ones when holding a weapon in your hands. The thought of executing every technique as if you were holding a weapon, gives the technique the effectiveness and sharpness sought after and more openings are revealed. It also made me realized that in Aikido you don't throw or push, but you cut. With weapons you develop strong muscles in a more natural way and in places you need the most for the body arts.

Another aspect I realized as being very important is stretching and breathing. Not just mere bending: I mean deep stretching, utilizing deep breathing in order to condition and clean your joints, muscles and ligaments from impurities, giving you more elasticity, allowing energy to flow easily though your body and thus letting you execute more demanding techniques while stepping on the ground firmly and decisively.

When all these things start to become integrated by means of hard training and repetition,

you could get more power into a technique and make it easier to manage a uke.

Technique as a form is our lifetime tool to refine and sharpen ourselves by attaining the ability to calm our minds thus allowing us to expand to higher levels.

For me Aikido does not have techniques but moments, and these moments are more precious than anything else.

Anyway Aikido is a lifetime discipline, and these were just some simple thoughts deriving from my own personal experience. Maybe some of its secrets will be unveiled to me in my journey, maybe not. It is the journey itself that counts...

Kiros Tzannes
April 2006

Kiros Tzannes is instructor of Kithira Aikido, a small dojo on the island of Kithira, situated on the southern part of Greece. He is sandan since April and works under the guidance of Juba Nour Shihan. He started Aikido training in 1990 in Athens with Eamonn Devlin, a student of Chris Mooney Shihan and since 2000 he has been teaching in Kithira. He also owns a restaurant on the island and is father of three children.



BEYOND THE TECHNIQUE Or when killing becomes an Art

Accompanying Essay for Nidan Grading by Stephan Corsten

Tsukahara Bokuden (1490-1572) crossed the Biwa-Lake in a boat with several different other people. Among them a big, strong and very loud Samurai, a huge man telling everybody how good and strong he was. The Samurai spoke of himself as the leader in the art of Swordsmanship. He succeeded to impress all the travelers and to get everybody's attention except for Bokuden's.

Disliking this fact he stepped towards him and asked 'you are carrying two swords yourself, so why don't you say anything?' Bokuden, himself a great sword master of the time, answered: 'my art is different from yours. It's not

about beating others, but about not getting beaten.'

This answer upset the loud Samurai and he asked about the name of the school Bokuden was trained in. The school was called Mutekatsu-School in which the opponent was beaten without the use of hands (in this case without sword) 'So why are you carrying swords' shouted the Samurai. 'To cut off egocentric motives, not to kill others!' was the answer.

The Samurai felt very offended and asked whether Bokuden intended to fight him without his swords. Bokuden answered very calm 'why not?'

The big Samurai jumped upon the ferryman and gave orders to gain land. Bokuden suggested to land on a little island ahead, so the duel wouldn't attract other people, which would then get into danger to get hurt. The big Samurai agreed. Soon they arrived at the island and the big strong Samurai jumped out of the boat, pulled out his sword and posed for combat. Bokuden put down slowly his two swords and then suddenly took over the steering of the boat. He pushed the boat quickly away from the island to a safe distance and left the big loud Samurai alone on the island. 'This is the no-sword school!' he said smiling.

(Freely translated and shortened out of D.T. Suzuki 'Zen and the culture of Japan')

Without any doubt Bokuden would have won the fight if he had chosen the duel with the sword. He did not run away from this rude opponent, but he used a very simple strategy to solve this conflict without using any sword-technique. Or, I prefer to say, he solved the conflict without using any ego. There are many such stories that tell us about martial artist neither using their technical repertoire nor their physical capacities to solve conflicts. Mainly their solutions are surprisingly simple, not to say simply surprising.

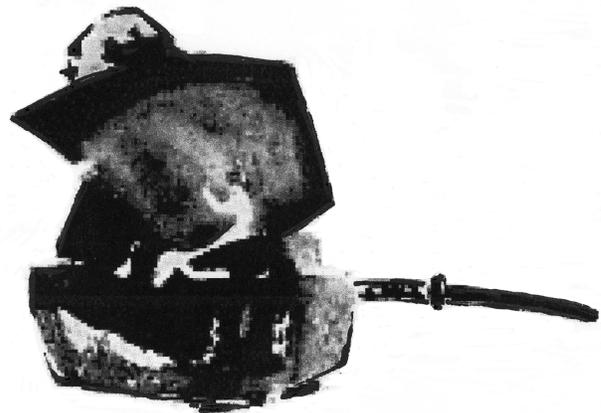
In our daily practice on the mat, we study technique after technique. And all this in combination with distance and timing. Of course we consider the size and age of our opponent. Some people even work with the flow of Ki. But all this is still technique. I wonder why we don't get tired studying techniques over and over again, and as soon we might have understood, we change them again. I have been told that we have to study all techniques until we have them in our body. We have to form our body until it reacts without hesitation, without analyzing – intuitively! As it is.

And still it's technique. We can become perfect machines for combat. Or since we are not looking for a man-to-man fight on the street, we can also say we become perfectly skilled in martial movements. At the beginning we used to get stuck, when somebody grabbed our wrist, we looked at his hand holding us, and our mind locked on that simple happening. After some time of training somebody's attack didn't paralyze us anymore. We learned to move out of the line and to do something, some technique. After

even more years of practice we become free in choosing any technique we'd like to apply. And then we start applying a technique that the situation requires. It's not our mind choosing the technique, but it just happens. So we free ourselves from getting stuck in the technique. But still, we are doing technique. My question is, how far this can go? And of course I don't intend to suggest that I can truly answer this question.

The sources of martial art lead back to *ko bujutsu* (old or classical *bujutsu*) At that time techniques were developed to survive in combat situation or, actually to kill the opponent. The *shin budo* (new or modern *budo*) has developed away from this killing purpose, and *Aikido* in particular has even renounced the destructive part of combat.

It's easy to understand the importance of technique in those early days, when life depended on them. In our time it has become much more difficult. Nevertheless it still presents a perfect tool for our body and spiritual training.



The spiritual part I haven't really emphasized in these lines yet, and I won't. There is only one part that I'd like to underline, which is the influence of Zen (starting about 1200) on the warriors of that time.

Zen teaches the 'letting go' which contains 'the giving up of your ego'. This is a perfect tool for warriors such as Samurai's with a very strong code of honor. So it is easy to understand the big influence Zen had on the development of *bujutsu*, which actually brought about the changing into *budo*.

At this point I'd like to refer to Norberto Chiesa Sensei's 'Aikido: Past, Present and Future' (Shiun Volume 4 / January 2006) In particular I like the part where he writes about martial-ART and why it is a martial art. (Of course

part of my question from above is answered by his text!) One sentence struck me the most: *Creation is, where ego is not.*

Here I finally come back to the point why I introduced this text with the story of Bokuden. He killed his own ego, instead of killing his opponent. He could have proved to the crowd, to the other Samurai and to himself that he was the better fighter. But he did not, instead he introduced his using of the sword to cut off egocentric motives, not to kill others! So he uses his skills, his practice, to free himself of the ego. At this point he'll be ready to do incredible things because he's free to choose from all the possibilities there are. Maybe he is so free, that he doesn't have to choose, but his unconscious or his intuition will make the choice for him. In addition his body owns the movement of technique, which gives him the possibility to execute any movement, or no-movement, that will develop.

By studying the technique of cutting I will learn how to cut. Once I know how to cut, I am able to cut off my ego. Once I have killed my ego I can enter a new dimension of creation (instead of destruction) and there I believe my martial movement becomes a martial ART. There my budo will differ from bujutsu. And there I even risk formulating the provocative sentence, that my "killing", the killing of my ego, becomes an art.

My thanks for this understanding go naturally to the founder O Sensei and T.K. Chiba Sensei. But also to all others of my many aikido teachers, my fellow training partners who have sweated with me and most particularly to my patient and dear Sensei Daniel Brunner.

Stephan Corsten
Zürich, 6th Mai 2006

INTERNATIONAL AIKIDO SEMINAR IN LANDAU/PFALZ

Peter Büchler

On 4th and 5th March 2006 in the Aikido Dojo Gen Ei Kan, Landau, the second international Birankai seminar took place hosted by teachers such as Sensei - Alexander Broll from Landau - Chris Mooney Shihan from Great Britain and Gabriel Valibouze Shihan from France.

Despite wintry conditions there were participants coming from Strasburg, Switzerland, Sigma-ring, Münster, Karlsruhe and Landau. May we here, once again, express special thanks to Alexander Broll Sensei, Arno and Georg for the excellent organisation as well as all other helpers for their commitment throughout.



Despite intensive practical work the seminar proceeded without any noteworthy injuries. As pointed out by our teachers over and over, it is not only practicing certain techniques that are the most

important issues but also clarifying principals as well as consciously perceiving and experiencing movements and techniques with your partner.

What I was made particularly aware of when I went through the notes of this report was what Chris Mooney Sensei and Gabriel Valibouze Sensei commented to Aikido, referring to reality, the life outside Tatami.

I clearly recognise the value which Budo can have in day to day activities or the path of life.

Following the practical part, the two Senseis allowed some time for questions regarding Aikido and although time was limited they succeeded to discuss philosophical and spiritual aspects comprehensively and in a sophisticated way.

There are some quotations I would like to reiterate without further comment (since they speak for themselves):

There are three things that have to be considered at all times:

- back bone, centre, energy
- distance, timing, to be in the centre
- yourself, your partner, your relationship towards each other
- stay down, relax your shoulders, keep breathing (if you

do not breathe you'll explode)

- As to Bokken: let yourself be led by the tip, feel where it is, see it, hear it and feel it
- don't look away, don't look at the weapon, don't look into the eyes, grasp the whole picture
- no connection - no Aikido
- the first contact is very important
- go forward even if you are going backwards
- pain is a partner exercising, that is when you notice that you are alive
- in Budo there is no starting signal like in sport, you always have to be ready
- awaken the instincts in your partner

- instinct has no fear
- keep calm but do not sleep, then there is a moment when you explode but not emotionally
- there are always more than one possibilities and not only one direction; when I think I am falling, I'll fall
- you have time, now.



Peter Büchler
Aikido Dojo
Gen Ei Kan
D - Landau/Pfalz

LATE SPRING IN LABAROCHE

Yves Lepoivre

At the time of his last visit at Labaroche in 2003, Chiba Sensei seemed very worried. Did he have the premonition of the accident that was to keep him away from the tatamis for months? The fact remains that his concern with a weakening of the transmission of Aikido was apparent in every one of his interventions. At that time Birankai was just newly born.

The spring training course in Labaroche, one of the major events of Birankai Continental Europe, was the opportunity three years later to take stock of the situation.

Under Chiba Sensei's constant impulse, the child developed sturdy bones predicting a robust constitution. To begin with, Hombu Dojo has recently agreed to recognize Birankai International and its Shihans. Birankai has therefore been established, if any reassurance was needed in our minds, in the lineage of O' Sensei.

Chiba Sensei then created the Shihankai, bringing together European Shihans from both the continent and the UK; an action intended to unify and reinforce the training program of current and future teaching staff under the Shihans leadership.

The effect was immediately perceptible in Labaroche since not less than five Shihans (Norberto Chiesa Sensei, Mike Flynn Sensei, Juba Nour Sensei, in transatlantic reinforcement, Chris Mooney Sensei and Gabriel Valibouze Sensei), all 6th Dan, were mingling on the mat. Mingling is not a vain word since everybody

could practise with them and with a whole galaxy of Shidoins and Fukushidoins. Great depth and density of teaching, availability of the teachers, these are the first character traits of Birankai.

On this occasion Strasbourg was organizing the thirtieth edition of its spring training course. This is no small matter since it is a question of recreating the best Aikido practice conditions, at nearly one hundred kilometers from its bases. The transformation of the training hall into a Dojo, the organization of housing and reception; everything must contribute to help the practitioner immerse himself fully in the depths of this Aikido. In all immodesty, it would seem that Strasbourg Aikikai has been once again equal to the task...

We cannot evoke the best practice conditions without mentioning the water (???) point around which the thirsty herd gathers, the Inn of France, at Mireille's.

But Labaroche is also the occasion to meet the many that are famished. Famished of Aikido of course. From Germany, Austria, United States, France, Great Britain, Greece, Israel, Poland, Portugal, Russia, and Switzerland, a hundred and ten practitioners responded present to the gathering, communicating in the Esperanto of Aikido, Iai Batto-Ho and Zazen. Twenty hours of road for our two Russian friends. If this is not passion, it very much resembles it!

It is indeed in the light of this Esperanto and this ravenous hunger that can be seen the success of Birankai as created by Chiba Sensei (*"I wanted Aikido to rest on two wheels, Sword and Zen"*). The mat becomes narrow for Iai Batto-Ho, so numerous are the Swords, Iaitos and Bokkens working side by side. And what about Zazen with so many monoliths sitting as early as 6:30 am under the benevolent ferule (sorry, Kyusaku!) of Shokan Marcel Urech.



A small dissonance however, raised by Norberto Sensei, with his usual acuity: the relatively weak female presence, particularly amongst the teachers. Aikido would be amiss in its holistic intention by being only Yang. Without any doubt Labaroche 2007 will be able to restore the Tao.

In "Late Spring (Banshun)", the movie of the great Yasujiro Ozu, the father says to his daughter: *"do not wait for happiness, build it by yourself"*.

Ah! Brotherhood of Arts! As long as there will be enthusiastic architects and impassioned masons, Aikido will have the taste of happiness.

Yves Lepoivre
Strasbourg Aikikai

AWORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Getting ready for a long journey can be a bit of a paradox: why would you load yourself with stocks of food and things that will anyway end up missing long before your arrival or return. In that circumstance, rather than a heavy burden, nothing matches suppleness and a sense of adaptation at any time. In an organisation such as ours, we have to cultivate this capacity collectively in order to succeed: to see far ahead, travel light, aim sharp and above all, not to exhaust ourselves with unnecessary preparations since, by essence, we already are in the midst of action. Biran, the wind that precedes the storm, blows from the very beginning. Unlucky he who forgets!

And yet everything appears to flow like the waters of a calm river.

Each year our organisation grows with the arrival of new dojos. Last spring, the Cronenbourg Aikikai, founded by Sadeck Khettab, joined us and we expect already that of Piotr Masztalerz in Wrocław and Anne Ducouret in Paris, who are both working hard on their project.

Summer is the time for family gathering : by the end of July, many of us will join together in Bangor, northern Wales, at the summer camp with Chiba Sensei, organised by the Birankai UK. Later in August, in Uzès, southern France, the Dai Jyo Kan of Bagnols-sur-Cèze invites us for the third consecutive year, on behalf and for the first time this year, with the support of Birankai Continental Europe.

In autumn, the trip to Japan and the visit to Hombu dojo, organised by Chiba Sensei for the group of the Birankai International shihans, will attract all our attention: it is a matter of reweaving the threads of a long history.

May the reading of Shiun and of this editorial, by a great summer storm, sharpen your curiosity and bring you back to the uncertain times of the beginning!



JOEL BERTRAND
