

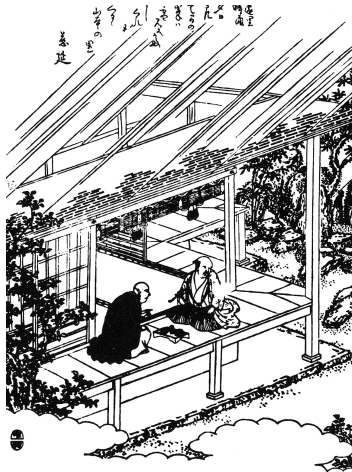
“... I wish to build a bridge to bring the different countries of the world together through the harmony and love contained in Aikido.”

O'SENSEI MORIHEI UESHIBA

February 28, 1961

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

On behalf of Birankai Continental Europe, please allow me to:

- wish you all a good and happy new year
- congratulate Dee Chen for her nomination of Shihan by Chiba Sensei on October 28, 2006
- congratulate also our shihans who received their teaching certificate at the Tokyo Aikikai Hombu Dojo from the very hands of Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba, during a ceremony that took place on Novembre 17th, in presence of Chiba Sensei : Jack Arnold, Darrell Bluhm, Tony Cassells,, Norberto Chiesa, Loraine DiAnne, Mike Flynn, Chris Mooney, Gloria Nomura, Juba Nour, Gabriel Valibouze, Kristina Varjan, Pablo Vázquez, as well as Mike Holloway and Nobuo Iseri posthumously.

This “coming back to the roots” , prepared by Chiba Sensei, reflects his vision and strong-will, simultaneously offering recognition to Birankai and with it the responsibility that we now have to live up to with honour, dignity and as always with buckets of sweat !!

Let the year 2007 give us plenty of opportunities to demonstrate it substantially !!

See you tomorrow on the mats!

Jöel Bertrand



FIRST TIME IN JAPAN

Norberto Chiesa

The image that you have of a country and the people you will meet, never quite matches what you find when you actually get there.

Tokyo is indeed very crowded, yet never once did I feel invaded in my space or instinctively on my guard, as it is usually the rule in aggressive metropolis. There is gentleness and well-meant courtesy in everyday social contact.

Early morning walk from the hotel to Hombu to take Doshu's class. A man yielding the emblem of traffic leadership is helping children to cross the street safely. I know we look like the foreigners that we are and we are not children, but the gentleman is greeting us with a smiling, loud Ohaio Gozaimaaaaase. Next day and in case we had any doubts he heralded his greeting both in English and Japanese.

Escaped to see the Kabuki. Curtain up and I notice two wrinkles on the floor cover down-stage far left; professional disease of catching faults in the decor that disturb no one but myself. It was the first and the last distraction. From then on it was four hours of sheer theatrical delight. Loved it.

Our morning classes led abruptly to the presentation of shihan certification. Doshu Ueshiba Moriteru conducted the ceremony with Spartan simplicity. Birankai, the child of the wind, was home.

It was about then that the dumb stupor of jet lag began to dissipate. I looked at our group wondering what a strange collection of human beings we were. How improbable that we would ever have met other than on a mat. How singular the chain of events that led each one of us to connect with our teacher. What are we doing here? Why are we here?

Back home I went through my Aikido books and read again O Sensei's statement during his visit to the U.S.A. in 1961:

"I have come to Hawaii to build a silver bridge. Until now I have remained in Japan, building a golden bridge to unite Japan, but henceforward, I wish to build a bridge to bring the different countries of the world together through the harmony and love contained in aikido. I think that aiki, offspring of the martial arts, can unite the people of the world in harmony, in the true spirit of budo, enveloping the world in unchanging love."

O Sensei had offered his legacy to the world, and the world, symbolically manifested in our small family, was returning to his native Japan. That is what we were doing there.

The answer to the second question is embodied in the destiny of the man that is our teacher, Chiba Sensei. We were there because of his life long effort to transmit to us the intangible treasure that O Sensei had given him. In his own words: "the *essence* of our activities is found in the student-teacher relationship" (my italics). Chiba Sensei's Lady wears the jewel of the love and affection that spring naturally in the process of teaching and learning. That jewel is the vehicle of lineage.

May that in the pursuit of an art without competition we learn to cherish the treasure we have been endowed with.

There is breathtaking beauty in Japan. We spent the weekend in a place blessed by nature with rolling hills, meandering rivers and lush vegetation. Most striking is the distinctly Japanese talent of marrying man-made objects and buildings with its natural surroundings.

Beauty may be the doorway to love and compassion.

Or else I am still jet-lagged.



RETURNING TO JAPAN

Mike Flynn

Returning to Japan was a wonderful experience for me. As I rode the Narita Express from Narita Airport to Shinjuku Station, all of the wonderful memories accumulated during my previous stays came rushing back. After arriving at Shinjuku with a group from the UK and Gabriel, we trooped from the station to our nearby hotel through streets crowded with people, dragging our luggage behind. As we made the trek, my eagerness to get to Hombu was overwhelming.

Entering Hombu was in many ways like returning home. There were many familiar faces and many fond memories that all came rushing back. There is a saying that “the more things change, the more they remain the same”, and that was the sense I got as I was greeted by Doshu, and met several Hombu instructors whom I shared living quarters and many drinks with years before.

I was gratified to be able to practice with most of the current group of deshi, and was happy to see that many of my previous perspectives and recollections were the same.

It was also great to see so many of my friends from the states again, none of whom have aged one bit since I last saw them.

My one bittersweet experience was seeing Mitsuzuka Sensei in a quite weakened state, as he was quite fit when we last met. All the same, it was good to be able to spend an afternoon with he and his wife and catch up.

I am deeply appreciative of Chiba Sensei, as in many ways this trip was a reflection of a piece of his life’s work, one that cannot be taken lightly. It goes without saying that we have been given an immense responsibility to take his work forward to the future generation of Aikidoka.

I also wish to extend my special thanks to Didier Boyet, whose organizational skills and leadership were evident in so many ways from planning through to execution. My hat is off to you for your incredible efforts. Also thanks to Manolo, Roo, and John for your efforts toward making all of us welcome. It was great to see you again and spend time with you as well.

A sincere thank you is also in order to all the members of the British Birankai, with an additional acknowledgement to those members of EiMeiKan who conducted such a successful fundraising event, without whose support I would be hard-pressed to have made this journey.

Mike Flynn Shihan

THREE ESSENTIALS OF LEADERSHIP

Master Fushan Yuan said:

There are three essentials to leadership: humanity, clarity, and courage.

Humanly practicing the virtues of the Way promotes the influence of the teaching, pacifies those in both high and low positions, and delights those who pass by.

Someone with clarity follows proper behavior and just duty, recognizes what is safe and what is dangerous, examines people to see whether they are wise or foolish, and distinguishes right and wrong.

The courageous see things through to their conclusion, settling them without doubt. They get rid of whatever is wrong or false.

Humanity without clarity is like having a field but not plowing it. Clarity without courage is like having sprouts but not weeding. Courage without humanity is like knowing how to reap but not how to sow.

When all three of these are present, the community thrives. When one is lacking, the community deteriorates. When two are lacking the community is in peril, and when there is not one of the three, the way of leadership is in ruins.

LETTER TO MASTER JINGYIN TAI

From: *Classics of Buddhism and Zen*. Thomas Cleary

AIKIDO: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Chris Mooney

Aikido's beginnings were in the world of its founder, O Sensei, the Japanese world of the 1930s. In that world O Sensei, as a practitioner of the warrior's path, was not led by others, but remained true to his own convictions, formed through his own research, and subsequently inspired others to follow in his steps. He chose his path, and gave us an example of how to learn. Now we find ourselves living in a highly competitive society, mainly driven by the desire for money, power and fame – three sins to be avoided by any martial artist.

O Sensei's disciples have gone on to develop the spirit of Aikido in their own distinctive ways, but their message remains the same: centre, contact, commit, while keeping one's integrity (and not selling out).

That Aikido has its distinctive roots in Japanese philosophy is a view with which nobody can disagree. It is taking root within many cultures throughout the world. At times it has been threatened with commercialization and the introduction of a competitive element, which would surely mean an end to the essential values laid down by the founder.

Whilst Aikido has grown in popularity, it is in danger of being cheapened by showmanship and self-gratification, merely feeding the ego. At times dojos have become places where people meet, learn a few tricks and gimmicks, burn a few calories and socialize, not unlike a conventional sports and leisure centre.

In modern times we have seen the breaking down of some traditional values, for example, that of the master and apprentice or the student teacher relationship, based on a mutual sharing of knowledge and labor and a heart to heart connection. The boy studied under the master carpenter, farmer or artist until he had understood the basic form, before being ready to make his own way in the world. The apprentice's job was not easy, and hard work was expected of them. In return they had the opportunity to watch and learn from their master, and "steal" the master's secrets. The system ensured that knowledge passed from one generation to another without necessarily being kept within the family.



This approach to teaching and learning requires a great commitment of time from everyone involved. They need to proceed with patience, diligence and the enquiring (or better, beginner's) mind. Modern life and its pressure on our time can discourage these natural processes of learning, but the dojo is one place where such traditions must be preserved.

Whole worlds can be created in books, on TV, in movies or in modern computer games. People can become immersed in these worlds, creating and destroying, with the player, viewer or reader being given a feeling of power and superiority that has no physical grounding in reality. These worlds are not, however, whole experiences, and can create a lack of focus, and commitment to self-cultivation in people's lives. By contrast the martial arts such as Aikido, Budo and disciplines such as Zen, face reality as it is.

In the modern world there has been a "sanitizing" of bloodshed and pain – switching on the TV news can show a succession of dead bodies without the viewer being truly engaged with the suffering. In the study of martial arts, the individual is more truly in touch with conflict and its consequences.

In this world we have gurus in the West, while people in the East watch their TVs – the world is changing, and traditions get lost. In Aikido we seek to preserve the tradition of our own practice, in particular the teacher – student relationship. This heart to heart transmission of teaching is part of the natural principles used by O Sensei in establishing his path.

Organizations have become a necessary part of our Aikido world. They are needed so that we can share our knowledge and polish each other, although often they cause confusion and ineffectiveness, as they are often not based on natural principles. Organizations should be cultivated along natural principles, and incorporate both horizontal and vertical axes, autocracy – democracy, without compromising the teacher – student relationship, or indeed the master – apprentice relationship. We need to borrow from the ancients and adapt to modern times.

“Being and non-being create each other

Difficult and easy support each other”

Kohi and sempai define each other
Teacher and student depend on each other

“Before and after follow each other”
adapted from Tao Te Ching

How should Aikido develop in the modern world? If we were all given smart, bright new dojos in some idealistic plan to improve the health of the population, would those dojos set its students on the path to freedom sought by any true warrior, or would they be just another

form of domestication? Would such dojos awaken the spirit of Aikido in its students? Is a dojo a place of mechanical education, or should it grow its warriors in a more organic way? How can our modern dojos encourage the journey of learning that the traditional apprentice had to follow?

Aikido has a past, present and future. To preserve training in the future requires the application now of the basic traditions of the past. The lineage of O Sensei’s tradition is preserved through physical training and the forms given to us by our own teacher. The etiquette of Aikido is such that the mutual respect within the dojo should be reflected in our path, and mutual respect for all human beings must be part of our practice. This is the spirit of O Sensei’s practice. Most people would agree that the civilized society is one which cares for its weakest members. This same spirit is essential in the dojo

We must all discover Aikido for ourselves through training. Seeking it in the here and now, means fulfilling the spirit of the tradition instead of merely copying it. How can we honor the past except by cultivating martial valour in our own hearts through our practice?

“The way of the warrior is based on humanity, love, sincerity. The heart of martial valour is true bravery, wisdom, love and friendship. Emphasis on the physical aspects of warriorship is futile, for the power of the body is always limited” – O Sensei

Chris Mooney Shihan

There is a Japanese saying I recall once having heard, of the five stages of man’s growth: “At ten, an animal; at twenty, a lunatic; at thirty, a failure; at forty, a fraud; at fifty, a criminal.” And at sixty, I would add, (since by that time one will have gone through all this), one begins advising one’s friends; and at seventy (realizing that everything said has been misunderstood) one keeps quiet and is taken for a sage. “At eighty,” then said Confucius, “I knew my ground and stood firm.”

Carl Gustav Jung



BEING A TEACHER IN OUR SCHOOL

Amnon Tzechovoy



In this paper I will describe the impact of two forces affecting dialectically instructors in a school like ours. Indeed, there are two opposite forces affecting simultaneously teachers in our school. The first is a force unifying instructors' behavior and thought; such a force acts towards establishing a uniform, conformist type of teacher. Under the impact of forces of this kind teachers tend to resemble one another, thinking and acting in ways recommended within the school. The second type of force acts towards individualistic modes of behavior and thought; under the influence of such a force instructors tend to express themselves individually, often deviating from normative or conformist ways of teaching. The two forces mentioned above are conspicuously different, mutually contradictory. I will henceforth call the first type "conformist", the second "individualistic."

The question I raise is the following: how can we characterize the conformist force present in our Aikido tradition? Such a question reminds me a controversy between two of the greatest philosophers in the West: L. Wittgenstein and G. Frege. Wittgenstein adored Frege, and considered him a spiritual master. And yet, Wittgenstein criticized Frege on one essential issue; he thought one should tackle a rival over the latter's strong positions (not over his weak ones). (Frege used to look for rivals' weak points). Challenging a rival's weak points, in Wittgenstein's view,

would not overcome a rival's position (since an improved version would be possible), whereas overcoming an opponent's strong positions would finish off his stance altogether. Wittgenstein is known to have said: "Go the bloody hard way."

This is, in my view, a deep saying; it is indeed a saying expressive of the essence of our school. When we wish to create better teachers and instructors, we need, I think, to inculcate Wittgenstein's attitude into our minds, and seek to make ourselves free of faults and shortcomings of previous generations of teachers, improving ourselves beyond limits of the past.

When Chris Mooney Sensei told me it was time for my Fukushima exam, I realized – after many years of teaching and instructing – that there is a substantial gap between my conception of what is possible for me and what I can actually accomplish. Thus, I realized that in order to become a truly reliable and worthy teacher in our school I had to transform myself the hard way. It is, I think, a way in the spirit of Wittgenstein, inviting a need to renounce what we had learned in the past, making room for new developments often different from what we used to consider as our stronger points.

It is indeed emotionally very difficult to accept our true imperfections. Many schools – even within the Aikikai field – focus on the trainees' powers, ignoring the weak areas which

consist, I think, in the allegedly successful assets. However, in my view transformation and developments constitute the core of our value-system in the school.

But how do we actually act for transformation-sake? One thing is clear: by all means, complacency should be avoided. Neither disciple nor master should be encouraged to be complacent about practice and functioning. Neither should disciples be thrown into despair; a subtle boundary between complacency and despair should be made visible and alive.

Chiba Sensei and his disciples created and maintained a system coherent and cohesive, of specific character and attributes. Anybody experiencing the particular combination of weight (heaviness) and movement in the functioning of our great teachers knows what I mean. Maintaining this spirit the Sensei represents the next phase or generation of disciples in the tradition of Aikido.

But our tradition implies not only bodily transformation; it means an ethical transformation from the body (often tired, even injured) into the domain of value and spirit. This is the goal of Chiba Sensei as I understand it. In our process of training we need to realize our imperfections and weaknesses as we face authoritative figures not always "nice". We work from the body towards character-traits recommended, emphasized, insisted upon in our school. In this way we live towards establishing a common personality of masters and disciples working together for surviving in changing, hard circumstances. In this sense, the force of conformity is present in our school and tradition.

And yet, we also seek individuality of our disciples, teachers, and masters. Old Hassidic tales are to the point in this respect. Rabbi Bunem was old and blind. When asked about a wish to be Abraham the Father, he said: no, I prefer to be myself, as I am, for what is God's benefit for Bunem being Abraham, or Abraham being Bunem? And there is also the tale of Rabbi Zussia who visualized himself in heaven; then, he said, I won't be asked a question such as "why have you not been Moses", but rather the following one: "why have not you been Rabbi Zussya?" Thus, tension between conformity of character (and values) and individuality is obvious.

Though Chiba Sensei was as powerful and dominant as he was, the individuality of teachers and masters following him could never be suppressed. We will never be able to be exactly like Chiba Sensei, but this is, in my view, not a failure but rather a challenging reality expressive of the aforementioned tension between conformity and individuality. We, all of us, have to find and express ourselves in Chiba Sensei's world.

I wish to end my essay with an advice I once got from a senior master of our school: "Do exactly what I tell you to do, precisely as I show you; but put into that some sparks of your own". This is a wonderful advice and wisdom, integrating the two forces – conformity and self-expression – present in our tradition; I need only find the way to make it real and true in my Aikido-life.

Amnon Tzechovoy
A MON KAN AIKIDO
TEL AVIV AIKIKAI

REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP

The Aikido Teacher as a Leader

Mike Flynn

Having been involved in the process of creating teachers through the Alameda Aikikai Kenshusei program, as well as validating teacher tests as a member of various examination committees throughout the years, I have been pondering the question of what makes a teacher successful. General consensus is that the measure of the successful teacher is the quality and level of the students he or she produces. This is quite natural and indeed measurable, but how can

some teachers produce many quality students and others cannot?

It should be stated that within the deep study of any martial art, a promotion or elevation to a given rank is not solely a reward for past performance, but is also a recognition of future potential. In other words, a promotion should instill a drive within the recipient to work harder to justify the trust emplaced in him or her by the teacher awarding the promotion.

What form should that hard work take when one is awarded a teachers license and charged with the responsibility to transmit the art to others?

Currently our system of creating teachers rests primarily with the administration of a physical test which portrays the candidates' ability to execute techniques cleanly, both with tai-jitsu and weapons work. An essay accompanies the test, which is a measure of the students' ability to write and reflect, and a candidate must be recommended for promotion. That is the measure of how to get there initially, but within our system the re-certification process is the same as the initial certification process. Therefore, the student is required to demonstrate technical proficiency to the best of their ability during each re-certification evolution.

I think there should be more, and I think the "more" should be focused on leadership.

What is a leader?? Leadership is the sum of those qualities of intellect and human understanding which enables an individual to inspire and guide a group towards achievement of a common goal. A leader must combine technical proficiency, moral responsibility, and inspiration as a matter of course. These qualities must be developed, nurtured, and ingrained as the leader is developed. And make no mistake about it, Aikido teachers are Leaders. We inspire our students, we set the example for them, and we provide a sound technical example as we develop their ability as Aikidoists.

Leadership is not inherited, it is a learned behavior. All of us are potential leaders if we nurture the commonly held traits of leadership within ourselves and allow them to develop and grow.

Dependability- making sure you can be relied upon, as a teacher, ensuring you are where you are when you are supposed to be there, consistently.

Bearing- creating a favorable impression in appearance and personal conduct at all times, both on and off the mat.

Courage- the ability to proceed with calmness and firmness in the face of danger.

Decisiveness- Make decisions promptly and follow them through with commitment. Don't waiver.

Endurance- stamina in the face of fatigue and hardship. Remember how many years it takes to develop a student to shodan.

Enthusiasm- the teacher must show a sincere interest and exuberance in transmitting the art. If you don't, I guarantee the students you teach won't either.

Initiative- You must anticipate the unexpected and be ready to act. If you see an opening you must take it. If you recognize a breakthrough in a student you must reward it.

Integrity- The uprightness of character, soundness of moral principles. The teacher must demonstrate the qualities of truthfulness and honesty. This is critical to the Student-Teacher relationship.

Judgment- The teacher should be able to make sound decisions based on his or her ability to weigh all facts, i.e. the promotion of a student.

Justice- The teacher must be impartial and consistent within the dojo, and not show favorites.

Knowledge- The teacher must continually study and improve his or her technical skill within the art. It doesn't stop, it only gets deeper.

Tact- The teacher must be able to deal with others without creating offence. The teacher must also remember why the students are there, and treat them with respect and dignity.

Unselfishness- The teacher must nurture and look out for the needs of the student.

Loyalty- The quality of faithfulness to the organization, one's teacher, one's peers, and one's students.

The teacher should endeavour to develop the above qualities within his or herself. Through the nurturing and development of these traits, the teacher is able to apply him/herself to the leadership principles, which should become a way of life, or second nature.

Know yourself and seek self-improvement. As noted earlier, we are all on a path. Once you reach a certain level, it is time for more introspection and study. One should never rest on one's laurels. Beginners mind. In addition, the teacher should not attempt to be someone he or she is not. Trying to develop or emulate the persona of someone else is very transparent and is nearly impossible to carry off. You must be yourself.

Be technically proficient. Study the art deeply, and understand the essence of what we practice. Don't neglect your own training because you are a teacher. Figure out alternative methods of training so that your study does not suffer because you are teaching, but rather your teaching improves your training.

Set the example. Leaders lead. Your students will and should look for you to be a role model for them, *and not only on the mat*. This is a great responsibility and cannot be ignored.

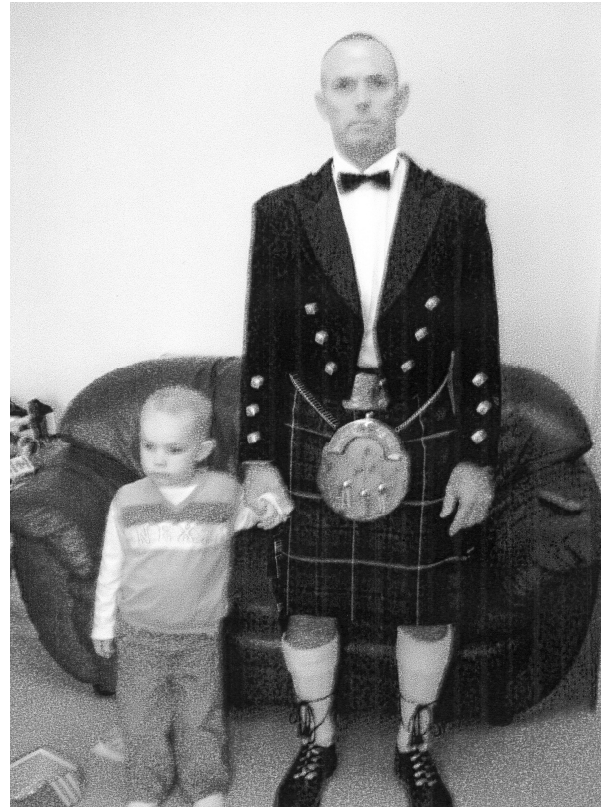
Know your students, their strengths and weaknesses, and look out for their welfare. Everyone has strengths and limitations, and it is your responsibility as a teacher to enhance the strengths and reduce the weaknesses within your students. Knowing your students also entails understanding what motivates them, what they respond to, and what turns them off. The demonising or ridiculing of students is inappropriate under any circumstance. I once walked into a dojo in the northeast of England to observe a senior teacher tormenting a young student, accusing him of being stupid and dull, yet this same teacher was unable to properly execute the same technique he was abusing the student for.

Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions. You are the ultimate authority within your dojo, and as such you bear ultimate responsibility for anything that happens, whether you are there or not. The buck stops with you.

Establish and stimulate open dialogue with your students. This goes hand in hand with "knowing your students...". If you develop an atmosphere of dialogue and good communication, *while simultaneously maintaining professional boundaries*, you will readily under-

stand what makes your students tick, which will facilitate your teaching.

As teachers, you need to have a full toolbox. This box should include technical proficiency, communication skills, integrity and high ethical standards, and leadership skills. I hope this article is of help in adding to your toolbox.



Mike Flynn Shihan

DANIEL BRUNNER SENSEI IN WROCLAW

Piotr Masztalerz

We have recently tried to survey the number of seminars that Daniel Brunner Sensei has conducted in the past in Wroclaw. During the last twenty years we have accounted for more than thirty-five weekend seminars and eighteen summer camps. I realize that those that have attended all of these courses have spent almost

five months of their lives living in a tent in the midst of our Polish forest.

Our regular autumn seminar took place in Wroclaw from the 10th to the 12th of last November. This is a very special year for us since we are celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of Polish Aikido; our first Dojo was opened in 1976.

In this occasion, the vice-president of the Polish Aikido Federation, Andrzej Sobolewski, presented a document to Daniel Brunner Sensei, expressing the membership's deep respect for his commitment and dedication to the development of Aikido in Poland.



This seminar was to be different from others. We were lucky to have access to a totally new dojo, situated in the Sports Center of the Wroclaw University, a vast building near an old park and next to a Japanese Garden.

As we anticipated we had 160 participants, the bulk of the attendance coming from the Wroclaw Dojos and Sen Nen Sugi.

Sensei taught mostly body arts but we also had the opportunity to practice basic bokken forms.

It is usual at this time of the year to have many beginners so we concentrated on the study of basic techniques. We felt it was an intense and joyous weekend, and Sensei confided he felt the same.

These seminars are an integral part of our practice. Some of us have evolved with these events as a normal element of our daily practice. It is therefore quite naturally that we look forward to the next thirty-five seminars.



Piotr Masztalerz
Sen Nen Sugi Aikido Dojo
Wroclaw, Poland

MY POLISH FRIENDS

Daniel Brunner

Twenty-two years ago I left with my wife for Poland to work in the Puppet Theatre of Wroclaw.

As soon as I arrived and in order to continue with my Aikido practice I made contact with the local Aikido club. Since then I have become their teacher, but above all, it pleases me to know that they think of me as their friend.

Every journey to Poland is a source of great pleasure. And together with the basic team of Wroclaw we have put together an unusual summer camp. It takes place in the most beautiful dojo in the world since it has the sky for a ceiling. Sometimes the storks fly overhead.

Practice is intense and focused on weapons. A normal day starts at sunrise with a half hour meditation, followed by six hours of practice, interspaced with meals, siestas and swimming in the lake right next to us.

It is week out of time during which personal contacts have as much importance as the clashes of bokken and jo. Norberto Chiesa, who lately comes with me to this camp, noticed how surrealist it was the sight of a band of obsessed guys learning Chiba Sensei's techniques in the middle of a lost place in a Polish forest!

My advanced students, both from Poland and Switzerland, have the occasion to conduct courses followed by critical assessment of their work.

Next summer camp will take place from the fourth to the eleventh of August 2007 and it is of course open to every one. For information please contact:

<http://wsaikido.wroc.pl/cms/?id=176>

Daniel Brunner

ATTENTION!!!

The traces of a secret training camp have been recently discovered in the depth of the Polish forest.



Hikers are advised to carry jo and bokken...
