

## CONTENTS

- 1 Final resting place
- 2 Editorial
- 3 Ki No more
- 6 Letter from Shihan Norberto Chiesa
- 7 Visit to Japan
- 8 Notice-board

# LAI D TO REST

## in a bamboo grove



Photo: Didier Boyet

**Please send submissions  
for May 2016 issue by  
31 March 2016**

Chiba Sensei's final resting place in the family grave in the bamboo grove of Chogenji Temple in Kannami, Shizuoka, Japan. Chanting and prayers were conducted by the Chogenji Osho-san. The ceremony took place on 24 July 2015, 49 days after his death on 5 June in San Diego, USA.



## BIRANKAI EUROPE



### Founder

Shihan TK Chiba 8th Dan

### European Birankai Shihankai

Norberto Chiesa 6th Dan, Birankai  
France

Gabriel Valibouze 6th Dan, Birankai  
France

Dee Chen 6th Dan, British Birankai

Tony Cassells 6th Dan, British  
Birankai

Chris Mooney 6th Dan, British  
Birankai

MIke Flynn 6th Dan, Scottish and  
Borders Birankai

Daniel Brunner 6th Dan, Birankai  
Switzerland

Patrick Barthélémy 6th Dan,  
Birankai France

Joe Curran 6th Dan, British  
Birankai

### Member Countries

Birankai Austria

Birankai France

Birankai Germany

Hellenic Birankai

Birankai Israel

Birankai Poland

Birankai Portugal

Birankai Switzerland

British Birankai

*BE Musubi* is published twice  
a year in May and November.

English edition available on  
[www.britishbirankai.com](http://www.britishbirankai.com) and  
the French edition on  
[www.birankai.eu/shiun\\_fr.html](http://www.birankai.eu/shiun_fr.html)

Individual article reflects the author's  
own views. All submissions may be  
edited due to space constraints and  
should be sent to the Editor.

**Editor:** Dee Chen

[deechen626@gmail.com](mailto:deechen626@gmail.com)

**Sub-editor:** Jean-Luc Busmey

[jlbusmey@neuf.fr](mailto:jlbusmey@neuf.fr)

**Sub-editor:** Wellington Tsang

[wellington.tsang@googlemail.com](mailto:wellington.tsang@googlemail.com)

**Design Consultant:** Franco Chen

© Copyright 2015

All rights reserved.

Reproduction is prohibited without express  
written permission.

161215



Photo: Franco Chen

## Editorial

**W**hen we heard the news in June we were both shocked and surprised. Yes, we knew he was very ill but we still clung on to the hope that he will be with us for a bit longer.

Chiba Sensei passed away on 5 June 2015, after a short illness which he fought against but the kidney cancer eventually spread throughout his body. He passed away peacefully surrounded by his immediate family - his wife, children and grandchildren.

Birankai dojos throughout the world celebrated his life with various ceremonies at courses and gatherings where members shared their personal stories of their relationship with Sensei and how he had touched their lives.

Sensei's remains were taken to Chogenji Temple in the village of Kannami in Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan and laid to rest in the family grave in the bamboo grove of the Temple on Friday 24 July 2015, the 49th day following his passing as is customary in the Buddhist tradition.

Chanting and prayers were conducted by the Chogenji Osho-san, then part of Sensei's remains were placed in the family grave and doused with sake. Cigarettes were lit and placed on the grave and on the tombstone and were then also doused with sake.

Mrs Chiba and her son Kotetsu together with Chiba Sensei's brother, his last surviving sibling and his two daughters, Mrs Chiba's brother and his wife, two other family guests, Miyamoto Sensei and Didier Boyet were all present.

Chiba Sensei now rests with his father, his mother, his little sister and his elder brother. The place is beautiful and quiet, on a steep slope in a bamboo grove. Sensei loved this place and it was his wish to be put to rest here forever.

The year 2015 marks 57 years since Chiba Sensei first met the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba on 3 February 1958. We are all grateful to Sensei for his vision and unique contribution to Aikido. We are indebted to him for the legacy he has left us. We will ensure that this legacy will continue to inspire our members and future generations.

Gassho.

*Dee Chen*

# Ki No more - Fearless and at Peace

Dr Amnon Tzechovoy appraises the passing of Chiba Sensei



On 5 June 2015, Chiba Sensei died. He left behind a grieving and deeply mourning family.



Dr Amnon Tzechovoy

The death of Chiba Sensei came as no surprise to those belonging to the aikido Birankai world he founded. We were all aware that ill health these last two years had lead him to stay at home with his beloved

annual seminar of Birankai North America took place in Seattle, Washington, USA. This seminar, the first one after Chiba Sensei's death, was modified according to Chiba Sensei's wishes to allow us, his aikido family and followers in life, to support each other as we adjusted to his death. A Buddhist ceremony was held in the dojo, a more formal ceremony in a church, and a social gathering in the evening.

The Buddhist ceremony in the dojo

more. Some cried. The deep sense of grief was powerfully evident and shared equally between those who knew him well and those who had had only a brief acquaintance with him.

The path from the dojo to our rooms, which were located in a different building, was filled with people sharing their thoughts and memories of Chiba Sensei. Everyone grieved his passing.

The evening's social gathering was of a different nature altogether. We came together, as someone there



Photo: Didier Boyet

Altar in Chogenji Temple with Chiba Sensei's remains

family. Though I knew that an announcement of his passing was inevitable in the not too distant future, I was nevertheless shocked when it arrived; shocked and deeply saddened. As the announcement of Chiba Sensei's death spread among the thousands of people he touched around the world, all shared a deep sense of loss.

About six week after the announcement of Chiba Sensei's death, the

was very moving. A picture of Chiba Sensei had been placed in the shomen and, after the ceremony, we went to the shomen and bowed for a few seconds to pay our respects before moving on to let the next person in line do the same. This short gesture, a kind of farewell tribute, was followed by yet another one. People remained sitting silently on the tatami, facing the shomen, as if they had yet to grasp that Chiba Sensei was no

accurately phrased, "To do what Sensei liked to do most in his free time." As drinking and singing together was what he liked to do in his free time, that is what we did; we drank and sang to commemorate our teacher. Students and teachers alike sang and danced. There was sadness mixed with joy. This fusion of emotions might seem odd but sadness accompanied

*continued on page 4*



**Ki No more. . .**  
*continued from page 3*

by contentment is a familiar element in many cultures. Wakes are common in the Celtic cultures of Ireland and Scotland and in Judaism there is *Seudat Havraa*, a version of a wake held as a recovery meal after the burial. As for myself, I felt confused in the gathering as I could not avoid feeling a sense of denial, as if the absence of Chiba Sensei had not yet penetrated me as it should have.

The first sentence spoken by one of Birankai's teachers upon being informed of Chiba Sensei's death was, "He was a hero." I believe he meant to convey that Sensei bravely accepted his impending death. He accepted his own death with no sense of resentment; none at all. I, personally, dare to understand this bravery as interrelated with his belief in the eternity of the soul.

In the dialogue *Phaedo*, Plato depicts the death of Socrates in the form of a conversation. Phaedo, a student of Socrates, has with Echecrates, a Pythagorean philosopher. In it Phaedo attempts to describe to

Echecrates the events surrounding Socrates's death.

Phaedo says, I had a singular feeling at being in his company. For I could hardly believe that I was present at the death of a friend, and therefore I did not pity him, Echecrates; he died so fearlessly, and his words and bearing were so noble and gracious, that to me he appeared blessed... I was pleased, but in the pleasure there was also a strange admixture of pain; for I reflected that he was soon to die, and this double feeling was shared by us all; we were laughing and weeping by turns...

As far as I can judge, this is how Chiba Sensei passed away as well; fearless and at peace with the unstoppable process taking place within his body.

This combination of sadness and gratitude, prevalent among so many grieving the death of Chiba Sensei, reflects the meaningfulness of his life; a life that left its mark on people around the world. He left behind many students who he educated in the spirit of aikido. He lived this spirit in the most dignified way. His career

spanned nearly 50 years and his impressive legacy can be seen in the way he shaped and changed the lives of his students. Objective observers can see and assess the results of his career endeavors. I would like to highlight a central trait of Chiba Sensei, one that cannot be inferred by any means of external observation, that of authenticity and to the expression of authenticity in his life. Chiba Sensei was authentic. He was authentic in his life. And, he was authentic in his death.

Samurais acted long centuries ago, but it is Chiba Sensei who lived among us in modern days and who internalized the values of the samurai both in their physical embodiment and in their superiority of awareness. He acted upon the philosophy of Zen Buddhism. From a very early age, he was ready to die, should the need have ever arisen. In 1978, upon the occasion of facing a man who had challenged the Hombu Dojo, Chiba Sensei said, "I told him as a martial arts teacher I was prepared to die if need be." - As reported in an interview published in

*continued on page 5*



Chiba Sensei with Amnon Tzechovoy (uke) 2010, Israel

Photo: Netanel Hagag

*Aikido FAQ* (originally published in Terry O'Neill's *Fighting Arts International*, issue #70).

Chiba Sensei visited Israel in 2010. I remember clearly the two of us sitting on the beach in Tel Aviv watching the sunset. The sand was soft and pleasant under our feet and the beer was cool. There were the usual beach sounds of people talking, walking, and playing in the sand. Parents and children wandered back and forth, splashing in the sea with great commotion. We sat quietly and talked. Slowly we began to talk about his childhood memories from the Second World War. He spoke about the US bombing of Japan, of his city. The fire caught hold in homes everywhere and there was an urgent need to flee from the flames. These were horrific moments and Chiba Sensei spoke of them vividly as if the bombing had just happened. This encounter with death never dimmed nor lost its grip on his consciousness. I listened intently and asked him how he felt about death. He turned to me, looked at me with his gentle yet penetrating eyes and said, "I was never afraid of death. I will die when required. When it comes, well, this is the course of nature." This was not the first time I heard him talk about death but it was the first time I heard him share in such an intimate, personal tone. What impressed me most was not the content but the calm tone in which the words were uttered.

I have never known another man, before or after Chiba Sensei, with that kind of consciousness of death. Death awareness evidently accompanied him in everyday life and with it came a calm and unique acceptance.

As mentioned initially, there are two aspects to authenticity. According to the first, we can observe one's authenticity via external cues. There is no doubt Chiba Sensei provided these cues. He was clearly a man of inner truth, willing to accept responsibility for his actions and pay the price of his deeds. According to the second aspect, there is nothing for the viewer to observe as it is completely internal. This authenticity has no external manifestation. However, the consciousness of authenticity can be inferred, and I have no doubt that also in this respect Chiba Sensei lived in the authentic spirit to which I have earlier alluded. He stood in front of



Photo: Didier Boyet

The family offering at the grave, Chogenji Temple

emptiness with great courage. He possessed an inner truth that anyone who met him could never deny or forget. Daniel Kempling, one of Sensei's past uchideshi, described it well when he said, "Chiba Sensei had hands from hell and heart of a Buddha."

In the article, *On the Limits of Aikido for Future Teachers*, by Chiba Sensei, one can find the integration of Heidegger's rejection of 'everydayness' and the readiness of 'being-toward-death' as manifest in the world of aikido.

Chiba Sensei noted:

There is no way to teach the essence of the art of aikido to the uncommitted sword. A committed attitude (sword) exposes one to death and, without this, they cannot pass through the solid gate which stands between life and death, creation and destruction, and I cannot help them. The gate will never open to the uncommitted because with endless self-indulgence they become so large with hubris that they crowd each other to every tiny corner of our society.

Chiba Sensei met his death in the

same state of mind and the same readiness to die as he lived. Shortly before his death he wrote to all Birankai teachers. It was a very sad and moving letter. Here I wish to quote the sentence that moved me the most. He wrote:

Several weeks ago, I was told that my cancer had spread and that treatment will only prolong my death, not extend my life. For that reason, I have chosen not to pursue any of the options offered me. I will instead allow what comes to do so naturally.

Rest in peace, dear Sensei. ☹

Dr Amnon Tzechovoy 5th Dan  
A Mon Kan, Tel Aviv  
Birankai Israel

This is an extract from the last chapter of his book *"Seeking the Unicorn: Philosophical and Psychoanalytical Insights into the Practice and Teaching of Aikido"* which will be added to his book available on Amazon.

# This letter was drafted by Shihan Norberto Chiesa on the twelfth of December of the year 2000, edited on June 2015

In the wake of Birankai formation, I address my teacher and those of my generation that shared with me the pains and joys of our practice.



Norberto Chiesa

## On Lineage

Many years ago, in the pre-history of Aikido in the UK, Chiba Sensei invited Nakazono Sensei to conduct a seminar in Liverpool. He must have read some puzzlement in our eyes. Aikido and Chiba Sensei were all we knew and suddenly we were confronted with this strange man with a radiant smile, taking deep breaths of ocean air, telling us about the sounds of the universe.

In answer to my naive questioning he said: *“Those of us that studied with O-Sensei have captured a fraction of his teachings, some possess the tip of his fingernails, others kept locks of his hair... if we learn to work together we might be able to preserve his precious heritage.”*

Thirty or so years later we find ourselves alarmingly and abruptly confronted with the same situation.

Chiba Sensei will retire, whether to a fishing port or to heaven. And all of us carry in our bodies a part of the treasure.

Are we going to be able to work together?

Shall we be capable of transmitting his heritage?

Aikido is a discipline learned by imitation. It offers us the invaluable opportunity to become nothing more than what we are. We copy our teacher as much as we can and one day a peculiar transmutation takes place: we do not end up looking like our teacher; for better or for worse we end up looking like ourselves.

If our insight is narrow each of us will think to be the only one to have got the message. Therefore we will judge all others to be wrong.

We will fight over the number of degrees we should turn out our front foot and how far to spiral the tip of our

jo. We will form Technical Committees to dissect our body language into intelligible parts. In our zeal to preserve what we know we will institutionalize knowledge. Our school will become an Academy, a Conservatory where no creativity is possible. A quiet morgue.

Unfortunately this is not an alarmist prediction. You need not to be a seer to see what is already happening. There are accomplished masters in the world claiming to be the only ones. The Aikido environment at large has strayed so far away from moral, philosophical and spiritual values that the heritage is thoroughly wasted in many parts of the world.

Aikido, like all living things, might one day decline. But it does not have



Chiba Sensei, 1967

to degrade. If such were its future I would rather give it a proper burial right now.

I say we have a challenge.

We must enlarge our vision and deepen our insight.

Or else our brothers of today shall be strangers tomorrow.

## On Sensitivity

I probably tired Chiba Sensei with my relentless complaints about grades. He wrote in a recent letter that a reflection was open on the merits of the ranking system. He added that in his opinion it had worked well for him.

A famous violinist was strolling in a Mexican street market. He approached a stand selling violins of modest craft and asked for the price. “Anyone for ten pesos.” The master took one and struck a few notes. The vendor jumped on him, took the violin

from his hands and said: “Sorry, this one is one hundred pesos.”

What kind of tune are we going to play with the grades?

How many pesos is the ranking system worth in our hands?

We possess now a document referring to the essence of grades in the note 1 of the Birankai text.

There is nothing to add to its content that would enhance its pristine clarity.

There is nevertheless much to do on our part to live up to its vision.

There is nothing complicated there. All we need to do is remember that the learning of techniques is inseparable from the transmission of intangible values.

We need to remember that these values only travel through the heart; the poor things do not fare well on other means of communication.

Without person-to-person, heart to heart connection, there is no teaching. At best we have accumulation of knowledge.

Without this kind of relationship a dojo is not a dojo. At best we have a club.

Uncomplicated does not mean easy.

We must nurture this contact and protect the environment of the dojo. And it needs protection because it is as vulnerable as life itself.

Nothing is fixed; a dojo is a living organism living from day to day. The teacher is not an unmovable reference to measure the student by. Both grow, harmoniously or not, together.

A grade is not a price given by one person to another. It is recognition of what is already there and in passing one more learning step.

It is a very intimate affair incompatible with judgment and comparison.

We cannot claim to practice a non-competitive martial art and let competition creep insidiously into our grades.

We do have a challenge. ☹️

Shihan Norberto Chiesa 6th Dan  
Dai jyo kan, Aikikai de  
Bagnols sur Cèze  
Birankai France

# Steve Branagan finds a warm welcome in Tokyo but has to adapt to unforgiving mats



In the autumn of 2014 I fulfilled a long held ambition to visit Hombu Dojo. I had been to Japan some 20 years ago but that visit was linked to Zen Buddhism and was at a time when I had stopped my Aikido training, which I only resumed again around 1999.



Steve Branagan

On my first day in Tokyo, I went to find where the Dojo was and walking back immediately saw Gabrielle Valibouze who was also visiting at that time with some of his students from Strasbourg. Didier Boyet generously let me join him for a meal after class one evening, with some of the regular students that he knows, and we were also joined by Manolo San Miguel originally from San Diego. Also in the Dojo, I bumped into William Gillespie who is now based in China but who

I knew from when he was living in London and training at Shinmei-kan. He was also just visiting Japan for a short while. Miyamoto Sensei was welcoming. So one key experience of the visit was the meeting of old and new friends; people that I have met on the mat over the years in various places in the world. My sense was that there must be a constant flow of international visitors, some staying many months or years and others, like me, just there for a few days.

In the Dojo people were welcoming and happy to train with me. There was a joyful and enthusiastic atmosphere. Some of the classes, especially Doshu's morning class, were incredibly busy.

The biggest revelation or shock was the mats which were very hard and it felt like they were biting me on the knee every time I sat down! They are tatami mats with a thin cloth cover. I had to change my ukemi immediately

and I made a conscious effort to make friends with the mat straight away. One young British person I met, who has been there for just a few months, had various scraps and bumps on ankles, knees, elbows etc whereas others who had obviously been there for a substantial period had adapted and changed and moved through that stage and their bodies had adapted. When I had trained with people from Hombu Dojo in the past I had noted how their ukemi was different from ours and now I understand better, at least one reason, why that is. It also made me think of how the expansive style of Aikido in the West may have been shaped, in part, by the environments within which we train.

All too quickly that part of my visit was over. I then went on to visit the priest I had stayed with on my previous visit to Japan and then to a Zen Sesshin in Kyoto (something that I would also recommend to visitors to Japan). Within the Sesshin we sat in the most beautiful surroundings, overlooking the gardens of a Temple first built in the 12th Century: Sitting surrounded by beauty and being in absolute agony all at the same time. What's not to like! And is not life, in some ways, like this too.

I do not travel internationally very much, and I was surprised how easy the visit was. It did make me think that I would like to do this again, and with carbon offsetting I can feel less uncomfortable about taking long haul flights in this age of Global Warming.

All best wishes to all, and happy travelling if you decide to go. ☺



Photo: Dee Chen

Steve Branagan (right), BB summer school, Birmingham, July 2015

Steve Branagan 3rd Dan  
Ji Myo Kan Dojo, Central Aikikai  
British Birankai  
April 2015



# NOTICE-BOARD

## Birankai International Summer Camp

Birankai France and Ann Jyou Kan Dojo in Paris would like to welcome you to the next Birankai International Summer Camp in Paris from 23 to 30 July 2016. Also invited are Etsuji Horii Shihan 7th Dan, Hombu Dojo and Shihans and Shidoins of Birankai Europe.

This summer camp will be in the same place as last year's event: two large halls at the Maryse Hilsz gymnasium Porte de Montreuil 20th district of Paris. This event has the full backing of the district town hall.

Please come and enjoy the practice and social event.

Contact: Anne Ducouret [anne.ducouret@free.fr](mailto:anne.ducouret@free.fr)  
Tel:+33(0)607108474

Anne Ducouret 5th Dan  
Camp Organiser  
Ann Jyou Kan Dojo, Paris  
Birankai France

**Aikido**

*Le Birankai France invite  
Etsuji Horii shihan 7<sup>e</sup> dan  
so Hombu assisté des shihans  
et shidoins du Birankai Europe*

**International Summer Camp  
du 23 juillet au 30 juillet 2016**  
*Ouvert à tous/Open to all*

**Gymnase Maryse Hilsz**  
34, rue Maryse Hilsz, Paris 20<sup>e</sup>

Enregistrement en ligne/Online booking  
[www.aikido-paris-cap.org/inscription-birankai-2016](http://www.aikido-paris-cap.org/inscription-birankai-2016)  
Contact: Anne Ducouret : +33(0)607108774 - [anne.ducouret@free.fr](mailto:anne.ducouret@free.fr)

空手館 | Cercle Aikido Parisien | DOJO ECOLE | BIRANKAI FRANCE | mairie paris 20

From BB Chairman:

2016 - A very special year to celebrate Chiba Sensei's life

Chiba Sensei arrived in England in 1966 as the first official Aikido teacher designated by O-Sensei and World Aikido Headquarters to teach and promote Aikido in the UK. He remains today the father of British Aikikai aikido. The senior teachers of British Birankai, British Aikido Federation, United Kingdom Aikikai and Komyokan all trace their Aikido roots to Chiba Sensei.

2016 marks the 50th anniversary of Chiba Sensei's arrival and there will be special events throughout the year to mark the occasion.

British Birankai are planning a trip to Japan at the end of May 2016. We will visit Chiba Sensei's grave on 5th June to pay our respects to Sensei on the first anniversary of his passing. We will practise Aikido at Hombu Dojo. Details will be announced in the coming weeks. We invite all our teachers and students to join us.

In autumn 2016 British Birankai will mark the 50th anniversary and Chiba Sensei's first memorial with a course and meal in the UK. Mrs Chiba and senior Birankai teachers will be our guests.

Davinder Bath 6th Dan  
Chairman, British Birankai



Chiba Sensei's burial site at Chogenji Temple

Photo: Didier Boyet