



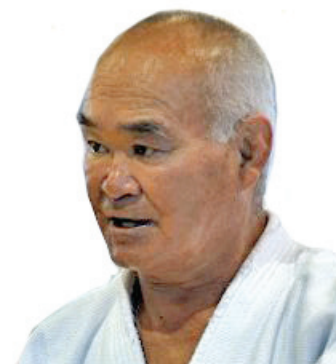
Learning from 'Failure'

Excerpt from a letter by Chiba Sensei to a student in response to her failing a test

From my own experiences as a teacher, it often happens that a student who fails a test achieves an important breakthrough in the aftermath of the test. I believe this is because they have been given an opportunity to have insights into their weaknesses, through having failed the test.

Ironically speaking, the opposite effect is often observed in students who pass their tests. The reason is because they tend to attach themselves to only the affirmative aspects of their art, and therefore forget to look for any weaknesses. Consequently, progression in their art stops and gets stuck for a long time until they realize what has happened. But unfortunately, this is a realization which happens all too rarely. Most of students elevate themselves in accomplishment and importance beyond their actual level in the art.

Try to learn the forms correctly both in executing (nage) and receiving (uke) technique. These forms have been created and developed by many, many individuals who gave their lives to the art, and over the course of many, many generations – not within



Chiba Sensei

one person's lifetime or even one generation. The creation of these forms resulted from continuous sacrifice, effort, research, study and accumulation of knowledge and experience, and handed down to us as concrete wisdom to enable us to attain truth within the framework of martial art.

Through learning these forms, we learn the most rational, economical and effective – therefore natural – way of handling our own energy, as well as responding to the energy in others.

It can seem to be a very physical undertaking to learn these forms. That is so, and that is not so. As the nature of Man cannot

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'Failures' *continued from page 1*

be divided in two, the spirit and the physical, through initially learning the forms physically, we also come to discover the types of energy and states of consciousness required to perfect the forms. And that is the most important thing of all.

Aikido is not mere theory nor simply physical exercise. As a martial art it requires us to pass through various stages which naturally and progressively appear in our training. The most significant part is a spiritual progression of self-liberation which parallels the technical perfection. This does not happen mechanically, but rather in an individualistic and organic fashion, according to the individual's state and condition.

If you fail, don't think that you are not a gifted person. As long as you have a head, two arms, two legs, a body, and humanity as your centre, you will do perfectly well. For you are not going to perfect anybody else's art but your own. One comes to understand that there is no comparison between one's art and another's,

just as the value of each individual life is beyond comparison.

At the same time, don't limit yourself (eg "I can do this, I can't do that. I like this, I don't like that."), but open yourself sincerely and honestly toward what is given through the instruction. Sincerity and honesty can always lead to a higher reality if you are open, so why not in the physical realm?

The important fact to realize is that you were born on this earth as a gift which does not exist in any other time or place except this very moment – where you are and what you are, and to realize that this is true for everybody else as well. No one can give to this world what you can, and the value of that is beyond comparison. . . .

Don't fix your thoughts on an unknown future with unknown expectations. Rather try to see your responsibility to your own life within every passing and approaching moment you breathe. Every class you attend in reality is indeed the last class you will take in your life. Then only when this is thoroughly understood will every class you take become the first class you take in your life (this is true beginner's mind.) And, naturally, every technique you execute becomes the first and last technique in your life; never, ever to come again. This is how you give life to a technique and to a moment. Every passing (and coming) moment you breathe will be filled with your total being. Let it come and let it go without attachment.

Every encounter with other beings – whether happy or sad – will be the same. When you see someone today, let it be the first and last time you see them in your life, for tomorrow is something else – tomorrow may never come. What a precious life is this, and every moment.

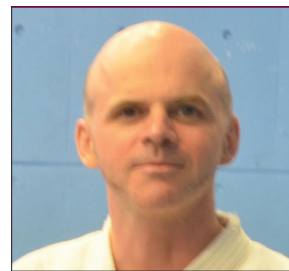


Photo: Davinder Bath

Grave of Chiba family

**Shihan TK Chiba 8th Dan
Birankai Founder**

Steve Branagan on Cultivating the Art of observation and practising Sensei's five pillars of practice



Steve Branagan

Steve Branagan

*At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.*

T S Eliot Burnt Norton

As students of Birankai International, which follows the teaching and example of Chiba Sensei, our key responsibility is to promote and protect the spirit and teachings of the school of Aikido within which we have trained. This can be noted on a number of levels. Firstly there are questions of appropriate etiquette within the Dojo, correct form and respect for the wider cultural tradition within which we practise. Recently I visited Hombu Dojo and I was able to fit in with what was going on easily since I knew how to behave in that setting and that would be true in any traditional Aikido Dojo that one might enter or visit. So part of the responsibility is to pass on that understanding to new students. How far that goes in a contemporary setting is debatable. When I stayed in San Diego in my early twenties when out with Chiba Sensei one would walk on his left side slightly behind him, in a traditional manner; is that something that we see happening with teachers now? Would it be appropriate?

How much one instructs or explained etiquette might also vary. Part of our martial training is to develop good powers of observation and alertness. Does a new person need to be told to put their sandals neatly by the mat, where other people's footwear is already lined up or should it be obvious? I am often surprised how new people will not notice what everyone else does and instead put their shoes in an

untidily heap some distance off and then start walking across the room with their bare feet to get to the mat. To over instruct and explain robs them of an opportunity to become switched on for themselves. This point of course also applies when giving instruction on particular technique. Of course it is also a shared responsibility of other more senior students in the Dojo to help inform new people of the basic form and expectation.

Maintaining and working within the syllabus of the school is the second area of responsibility. This involves body art, weapons, and ideally Iaido and Zazen. Within our practice there is a certain consistency of form which the Fukushidoin and Shidoin process helps to maintain and we have to work to have clarity in what we do. Having said that some differences come through even within this core curriculum and this will reflect the teachers that students and teachers have been exposed to. For example with Yokomen uchi Nikyo Ura I will make contact directly with the wrist and maintain that throughout the technique whereas some teachers, in our organisation, will go through Ikkyo Ura and then apply the Nikyo. I believe this may reflect the teaching of Saito Sensei. This is just one small example. One of the things that make Aikido interesting is the variety of techniques, interpretation and ways of doing things. Our challenge is to integrate new learning while

still maintaining technical integrity and reflecting that which we learnt from Chiba Sensei. This is an interesting conundrum. I can remember Chiba Sensei saying of Mick Holloway how pleased he was to see how his style and practice had changed and become his own following Sensei leaving the UK. We cannot become mechanistic since that will take the life out of what we do and it is only natural that we will change as we have new experiences and exposure to different ideas.

One way in which we can maintain the appropriate sense of direction in our practice is to remain mindful of Sensei's five pillars of practice: Centeredness, Connectedness, Wholeness, Liveliness and Openness. As well as his advice on "The Study and Refinement of Martial Awareness" including the when, where and what of a martial encounter.

This brings me to the other area of responsibility in that a consistent theme within Aikido as a martial Way, is the sense that it is a means of ethical and spiritual transformation and development.

To make compassion and morality a part of the instinct and consciousness, we must learn to perceive the pain of others. Sharing the same hard experience, the same stress and frustration, an essential part of Aikido education, penetrates ego, forms strong bond of respect and concern, and develops a sensitivity and awareness

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Art of observation.... continued from page 3

of another's situation. If we could sincerely feel each other's pain, there would be fewer wars and less loneliness and hunger.

Satome Sensei. *Aikido and the Harmony of Nature* (1986:313)

This was central to Chiba Sensei's approach and of course is evident in O-Sensei's vision:

I gave the name Aiki to the manifold laws of the universe brought forth from love which govern the destiny of the intricate tapestry of life as it is woven on this earth. To carry out the mission of universal compassion on earth, to protect and cultivate all things in nature, this is the task of Aikido.

In Pope Francis's recent response to the pressing issues of climate change he uses a similar metaphor:

Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.

Encyclical letter On Care for our

Common Home (2015:68)

In our modern world, where consumerism is all, coupled with ever increases and accelerating technological advancement, the consequences of manmade climate change and the placing of economic growth above all other measures of value are already being felt and the consensus is growing that this is likely to be catastrophic both for humans and wider bio-diversity. Therefore what do the fine words and sentiments expressed (the form, the story and myth of Aikido takes) mean in our current world and what should we do individually or collectively to meet these challenges?

In some respects just the practice of something like Aikido goes against the prevailing culture with a lack of competition within Aikido being just one example of this. As the humorous song from an old movie goes:

We're busy doing nothing, working the whole day through, trying to find lot of things not to do. We're busy going nowhere, isn't it just a crime, we'd like to be unhappy but

we never do have the time.

Bing Crosby - A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (Busy doing nothing)

Individually people have to think about what response if any they have to these issues. It may be appropriate that as an organisation, where we fly teachers in from all over the world, we could adopt a policy of carbon offsetting, to at least acknowledge in a small way our collective responsibility in this complex interwoven web of life.

So in conclusion, beyond meeting the needs of the students, the Dojo, the tradition and the Aikido community big Aikido suggests we also have to look to our wider world and responsibilities within it.

**Steve Branagan 3rd Dan
Ji Myo Kan, Central Aikikai
British Birankai**

*Essay for Fukushido in
Re-test
9 July 2015*



Chiba Sensei and Steve Branagan, Weapons Course, Birmingham, UK 2008

Photo: Milena Kremakova

Japan Trip - Lost in translation and Tokyo, Joe Curran manages to navigate his way home



I started my journey to Japan on 2 June 2016. The object of my visit was to join with others to visit the resting place of Chiba Sensei who had passed away one year earlier. The other reason was to visit Hombu Dojo along with my colleagues. The purpose of our visit to Hombu was to start a process of establishing a formal connection with Aikikai Foundation. A meeting had previously been arranged between Hombu/BB representatives.

I enjoyed an excellent flight courtesy of Emirate airlines. My next task was to find my rented accommodation in Tokyo. This flat turned out to be quite small by European standards. Nevertheless the place served its purpose and was fairly close to Aikikai HQ.

On 4th June after a chat with Davinder Bath I decided to meet him and his party in a place called Gora. The Temple where the Memorial for Chiba Sensei was taking place was quite a distance from Tokyo. Not wanting to miss the service for my

teacher I left Tokyo in good time.

At Gora the party (Davinder, his group, Chris Mooney, Amnon Tzechovoy and Anne Ducouret) all met up, had a few hours to spare, enjoyed a meal and prepared to set out on our journey to Chogenji Temple.

On arrival on the day of the Ceremony we were met by and introduced to the Temple master. As it turned out the Master of the Temple was the son of Osho San, a Zen master who had visited the UK many years ago at the invitation of Chiba Sensei.

The Temple was set in a very quiet, lovely location. The interior of the Temple was quite beautiful with a wonderful ornate shrine. The service was conducted by the Temple Master and I found it despite not being too familiar with Sutras quite moving. Afterwards Mrs Chiba and all the guests had a Japanese meal.

There were quite a few elderly Japanese gentlemen present and I had a pleasant chat with a Japanese gent, Mr Yoshii,

who had known Chiba Sensei in London in the early days. Mr Yoshii was a bookseller and Chiba Sensei had been a customer.

After the meal our party climbed up a steep hillside, lined with ferns, foliage and trees to where the grave of the Chiba Family was found. The grave itself was very beautiful, and being on a hillside the grave had a good outlook over the area. The grave itself was grey/black marble. In keeping with Japanese traditions the grave was washed down and saké was poured over it.

Bidding farewell and thanking Mrs Chiba, the Temple Master and his wife I then took the journey back to Tokyo. My thanks go to Didier Boyet Sensei for his skill and his assistance in helping me find my way through the Japanese travel network.

My next job was to visit Aikikai HQ where I introduced myself to Sebastian Barudi from the International Dept and later met

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Photo: Davinder Bath

Shihan Joe Curran paying his respects at the Temple before memorial ceremony

The Way It Is.

*The Master asked after many a year
tell me why we had not been so close
let me buy you a beer,
It was difficult to reply.*

*He had fire and passion that burned white hot
and I didn't want to die.*

*You see dear reader that I had seen many a grown man
with a thirst for his knowledge like moths
attracted to the flame,
that drew them in
and burnt their skin
but I needed to survive.*

*Now his body is no more but the flame has not expired
in its place is a warmth and light that guides us
felt by all that he touched
that's deep down inside.*

*Next time you see a real Chiba Sensei student
just watch them open their crispy wings
to share the power, the heat, the way
and be aware of the sacrifices they had both made
to pass on his message to you today.*

**In memory of Shihan TK Chiba by Steve Beecham 6th Dan
London East Aikikai (Gen Pu Kan) British Birankai**

Memorial Ceremony, Chogenji Temple Shizuoka, Japan, 5 June 2016



Photo from Amnon Tzechovoy

Mr Nobuyoshi Chiba (Sensei's brother), Shihan Chris Mooney, Mrs Chiba and Amnon Tzechovoy

Japan Trip *continued from page 5*

Mr Masaki Tani, the person who the BB representatives were going to meet later in the week. Due to trouble with my right hand and arm I decided just to watch the training. I watched quite a few classes each day including classes by Miyamoto, Osawa, Fujimaki Senseis and of course Waka Sensei and Doshu. The work rate of the participants was quite high and the standard of tuition as you would expect was very good.

Socially in Tokyo I met up with Davinder and we had a walk around the area where he was staying. On one evening a party of us went to Shinjuku for an evening meal. At the end of the meal I called a taxi. This taxi came, the driver looked as though he was 150 years old. I jumped into the taxi, drove off to my little flat. No such luck, the driver could not find my flat despite various attempts. In despair I paid him his fee, and just left the cab, lost in some alley, and no idea where I was.

Went to the Koban (Police) and explained my position. After a talk part pidgin Japanese/pidgin English the officer drew me a sketch of the area. I duly followed the scribbles and after some time the "eagle has landed" so to speak. Oh what joy!! My comfy?? futon never felt so good.

Then it was time to head home. Picked up the Bullet Train (sitting in first class seats by mistake - shown to the cheapies by the train inspector) then signed in for homeward bound flight courtesy of the Emirates.

All in all a trip I do not think I will forget for some time. May I also thank the Membership and Management Committee for the financial assistance which enabled my participation in this trip.

**Shihan Joe Curran 6th Dan
Sakumei Kan, North East
Aikikai
British Birankai**

“I am the Greatest!”

Wellington Tsang reminds us that Self Belief can take us up to a greater level

On 5 June 2015, our Technical Director TK Chiba died.

In the year that followed, all sorts of people died and on the 365 day, as people were preparing for the anniversary of Chiba Sensei's death, the death of Muhammed Ali was announced.

Born Cassius Clay, Ali proclaimed he was the greatest. He won the Heavyweight Boxing World Championship and is regularly rated in the top three boxers if not the top. But was he the greatest?

He certainly reinvigorated interest in boxing and participated in some of the most talked about fights in history, but his detractors were appalled at his “going to ropes” tactic in the Rumble in the Jungle amongst his tactics of demeaning his opponents before the fight. He did apologise years afterwards saying that trash talk was to promote the fight, but his one time friend and adversary Joe Frazier felt it had gone too far. There are others who statistically achieved better boxing records, maybe because they

better managed their fights and retirements rather than attempt comebacks.

He had a dedication to his Islamic religion, leading to his name change, but his public womanising tainted his integrity.

He was an objector to the Vietnam war and refused to be drafted leading to stripping of his world title and a lengthy legal battle which left him penniless. Some believe that this act was key in changing the perception of the war. His detractors claimed he used his fame and money to keep him from the war whilst many objectors were drafted and lost their lives and more. Maybe if he had joined, as a public known figure, he would never have been endangered on the front line, and he would have had even greater rewards and recognition.

And then there was the 30 years of Parkinson Disease. Maybe it gave him a greater voice than ever before. But all of us will succumb to age, injuries and death and he is not alone in facing such trauma.

So what made him the greatest?



Wellington Tsang

All of those who experienced his youth talked about his Self Belief. It was this great Self Belief that propelled him from racial segregation to his gold medal to his fame. It reminds me of Chiba Sensei's talks in Labaroche 2002. He talked about how he perceived Aikido, not a system of techniques and engagements, but creating his own personal Macro Cosmos, allowing him to be himself and travel anywhere. He said that if Aikido was to be considered as a self defence, then you should concentrate on the Self with a capital S!

Aikido is an opportunity to develop more than technique and body conditioning. Much much more. We may not become the greatest boxer, actor, musician or shihan but we can become greater selves if not our Greatest Selves in this journey in Aikido.

**Wellington Tsang 2nd Dan
South Manchester Aikido,
North West Aikikai
British Birankai**



Photo Milena Kremakova

Chiba Sensei, Weapons Course, Birmingham, UK 2008

NOTICEBOARD

PROMOTIONS

BIRANKAI GERMANY

Waldemar Frank, Gen Ei Kan, Landau
Georg Stoll, Gen Ei Kan, Landau

Shodan
Sandan

13 Feb 2016
7 Nov 2016

Tim Sullivan, 2nd Dan, Aikido Berlin-Mitte

Fukushidoin

13 Feb 2016

Congratulations

Alexander Broll, President, Birankai Deutschland is pleased to announce that Birankai Deutschland received recognition from Hombu Dojo on 1 November 2016

Japan trip: Memorial service for Chiba Sensei and courtesy visit with Doshu at Hombu Dojo, Tokyo

Photo: Davinder Bath



Photo: Davinder Bath



Photo from Monika Dörig

BJO



Birankai Europe Aikido Summer Camp 2017

SAVE THE DATE!

15–21 July 2017

Annweiler am Trifels, Pfalz, Germany



Training and accommodation (full board, half board, camping) at the Turnerheim Annweiler in heart of the Palatinate Forest www.tjh.de

Further information to come on
www.birankai.eu and www.birankai.de

Registration Opens 1 February 2017



Birankai Europe Aikido Summer Camp 2017

15–21 July 2017

Annweiler am Trifels, Pfalz, Germany



The Turnerheim Annweiler (www.tjh.de) offers two 13m x 27m training halls, as well as overnight accommodation in 2–5 person rooms and up to three meals per day. The nightly rates* are



- Full board: €35 per person
- Half board: €29 per person
- Camping: €6 per person, €10 per car



*Surcharges of €2–€4 apply for 2-person rooms or stays shorter than 3 nights.



Address: Turnerweg 60, 76855 Annweiler, Germany

Train Station: Bahnhof Annweiler am Trifels

Nearby Airports: Frankfurt am Main (FRA, 130km),
Stuttgart (STR, 130km), Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden
(FKB, 75km)



Further information to come on
www.birankai.eu and www.birankai.de

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