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Deadline

for July 2011 issue:
1 June 2011

Chiba Sensei concludes his account to establish Aikido abroad After 40 Years A New Start in London

On 14 December 1967, I left Newcastle Station on the 11:55 train bound for London. I had made this particular trip countless times, but this time was different - I was relocating to London for good. It had been one year and seven months since the political mess in the UK had landed me in Northern England; during which time I bitterly felt as though I had been sent into exile for reasons not of my making.

Three notable individuals had appeared at the station to see me off: Mr Logan's secretary, Mr R Myers of Sunderland who had acted as my personal assistant during my stay, and Mr P Butler - a dedicated Aikido student on whose behalf I had battled the Sunderland Physical Education Authority to keep as my student. As a result of that battle, I had lost my job and my only source of income at the time.

His eyes were filled with tears as we shook hands goodbye, and I was touched by this display of tenderness from a man whose physical strength and hot temper had frightened many people.

A few days earlier I had thrown away all of my belongings (save my gis, weapons, a few books and a heavy sheepskin coat I had bought to protect myself from the cold winds of the North) so that I might travel lightly on this new adventure. As the train made its way toward London my heart was filled with overwhelming happiness and joyful anticipation of the future that awaited me.

It was a fine day with a bright winter sun reflecting off the patches of snow



Chiba Sensei, Cardiff, South Wales 1967

Photo from TK Chiba

in the fields where scattered herds of sheep peacefully grazed - a typical view of the English countryside that I always enjoyed. I tried to analyze my experiences since my arrival in Northern England in an attempt to identify what had gone so terribly wrong. Had I accomplished anything?

Perhaps there would be no right answer or satisfactory conclusion to the power struggle that had begun prior to my arrival in England other than to say that it was a tangled web of personal pride, ambition and ego, like most human problems.

Nonetheless, of one thing I am certain - that the core cause of the difficulty I personally experienced was

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BE Musubi is published twice a year in January and July. English edition available on www.britishbirankai.com and the French edition on 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 or Assistant Editor or Sub Editor.

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Editorial



Photo: Franco

Congratulations to Patrick Barthélémy, Dai Jyo Kan, Aikikai de Bagnols, Birankai France, who was promoted Birankai Shihan by Chiba Sensei at the Polish Summer camp in August 2010. Shihan Norberto Chiesa acknowledges his achievements on page 5.

The main theme for this issue of BE Musubi was to explore what impact Aikido has on relationships with a partner and the family. Both Suzanne Brunner and Chris Howling wrote to all the members asking them to encourage their partners to share their experiences with the community. These 'shadow warriors' are very much a part of Aikido even if they remain invisible in the background. It is right that we acknowledge and recognise their very important contribution.

In October 2010, on the recommendation of Chiba Sensei, both Piotr Masztalerz, Birankai Poland and Davinder Bath, British Birankai went to Ichikukai Dojo in Tokyo, Japan for training in misogi-no-kokyu-ho (purification through breathing) and zen meditation. The Ichikukai Dojo website states that through this training one seeks the source or root of one's being, and strives to attain oneness with the universe. The Shogaku Shugyo begins on a Thursday evening and finishes early Sunday evening. As it involves physical exertion roughly equivalent to jogging, it is recommended that only those in good health should attend. Davinder and Piotr share with us their unique and transforming experiences.

Piotr Masztaler reports on his visit in December 2010 to teach at the first official seminar at the Nairobi Aikikai established by one of his friend and student who moved there in the last two years.

It is quite possible, that at some stage, we may have wondered why it was necessary to become registered members of our group. Shihan George Lyons of Birankai North America shares his thoughts on this question. If you would like to respond or expand on this subject, please send us your contribution for our next issue.

All the European Shihans extend their best wishes to the members of Birankai Europe for the new year, and would like to thank everyone for their work and support during the past year. ☺

DEE CHEN

After 40 Years. . .

continued from page 1

the strained relationship between me and Mr Logan. He apparently had quite a grand plan to establish an Aikido centre in the north that would compete with the major Aikido groups (eg the Renown Aikido Society) and the Japanese teachers who were influential within British Aikido at the time.

I did not show any interest in his plan, especially the political battle against the Japanese teachers - they were my seniors, and as such commanded all of my respect. It seemed to me that Mr Logan was (mis)interpreting the will of Professor Abbe to his own advantage, but I was

unable to confirm my suspicions as Abbe Sensei was seriously ill and I hesitated to burden him with such questions.

My unwillingness to support Mr Logan's plan for a competing Aikido centre provided the initial strain in our relationship, which was then worsened by a mishap that occurred during a demonstration for the Northumberland Police Department in Newcastle shortly after my arrival in England. Mr Logan had ambitions to introduce Aikido into the police force's training programme that could well have succeeded had I not seriously injured an officer during demonstration.

It became clear to me that Mr Logan

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had abandoned his hopes for Abbe Sensei's work when he cancelled my five-year contract with the British Judo council after only three months.

If there was anything positive I had achieved during my time in the North it would have to be the significant improvement I had made in my English language skills through personal study, and perhaps a few loyal students I had managed to bring up. As it was, that would have to be enough.

The train continued making its way to London, and after we passed York the sun began to sink below the horizon. The last few bright rays fell across the well-cultivated land creating mysterious shadowy patterns that reminded me of the striped cotton kimonos that I loved to see the Japanese women wear. "Well, this is it," I thought, "the end of one chapter and the beginning of a new one."

Whatever awaited me in London; I believed I would be better off and hopefully a bit wiser, and if the teachings of Dr Osawa (the founder of macrobiotic systems) were correct, then the Three Strengthening Conditions of hunger, cold and loneliness had perhaps made me a bit stronger as well. As I indulged this childish illusion it became completely dark outside my window, and it occurred to me that in only another hour or so I was to meet Mr Iyengar and George Stavrou at King's Cross Station, and I looked forward with anticipation to meeting for the first time the two individuals who had been generous enough to extend their hands to rescue me from my unhappy exile in the North.



Photo: Franco

George Stavrou, Chiba Sensei, Mrs Stavrou and Harada Sensei, London, c1990s

Postscript

This entry concludes a series of articles I began writing for Biran in 2005 as a commemoration of the 40 years since my arrival on the shores of England in 1966. The articles cover my experiences starting with my voyage from the Port of Sasebo in March 1966 to my early life in Northumberland (May 1966 to December 1967). It was a daunting task to accurately recall all of the events of that time as my memories have faded in the last 40 years - especially when it comes to names and places - but what made recollection of my first exposure to a foreign culture and the complexities of living abroad most difficult was my own shortsightedness.

Some time ago I had stupidly decided to destroy all of the diaries I had kept for so many years; deciding that their only purpose would be to bring back bitter memories. Luckily enough, after a desperate search I was able to find one journal that covered my activities from 29 May 1967 to 21 February 1968, plus a handful of random notes that somewhat helped bring back memories and

connect various events more or less to my satisfaction.

Soon after my arrival in London I started teaching at Busen Dojo in King's Cross - the old judo Dojo in the church basement where Kenshiro Abbe had started. There were 20 or so students waiting on the mat for me when I first began - most of which were Greek and in one way or another associated with George Stavrou. This Dojo was used as a temporary space until the new tatami ordered by Mr Iyengar arrived, at which time the Dojo was moved to a new location on Seven Sisters Road in Finchley, London.

The new space was a community hall that we rented for two nights a week until we were able to find a better and more suitable location at the Greater London Sports Club in Chiswick where we (semi)permanently laid down our tatami mats. It was in this Dojo that the serious training began. We later relocated one more time into a large church hall with a much better atmosphere for a Dojo, and remained there until my return to Japan in 1976.

It was during this period of time that I began the first kenshusei programme that incorporated Aikido, weapons, Iaido and Zazen. At this time I was also fortunate enough to meet Professor Harada - a Shotokan Karate Shihan who offered me the use of his studio apartment when I first moved to London while he was visiting Japan for two months. From that time on we became lasting friends and still make a point of visiting with each other almost every year.

Regular sesshins began at London Aikikai in 1971 under the direction of Taisen Deshimaru Roshi, who travelled from Paris to lead our sits. This was the period of time in which I met a number of distinguished



Mr Iyengar (2nd left), Norberto Chiesa (3rd left) next to Mrs Chiba, Chiba Sensei holding Kano, Mick Holloway (7th right) and Dee Chen (3rd right), London, April 1972

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After 40 Years . . .
continued from page 3

individuals from all over the world: Mick Holloway and Dee Chen from the UK, Norberto Chiesa and Kristina Varjan from the US, and Daniel Brunner from Switzerland, to name a few who became loyal students as well as lifelong friends, and who are all (with the exception of the late Mick Holloway) still active in Aikido as Birankai Shihan.

In the meantime, Aikikai of Great Britain (AGB) grew steadily and expanded into several major cities in the UK, namely Birmingham, Leicester, Sunderland, Durham, Manchester, Liverpool, Cardiff and Glasgow, plus Oxford and Sussex universities. In the early 1970s I began a serious commitment to the development of Aikido in Europe through the European Aikido Cultural Association (ACEA), the representative organization recognized by Hombu Dojo in Europe. As part of my commitment I conducted extensive teaching trips in France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Monaco, Morocco and Switzerland.

I also managed to re-establish my relationship with Tada Sensei of Italy, and joined his annual International Summer Course held at Lake Grada in Northern Italy near Verona. It was also during this period of time that Aikido

was first introduced to Ireland and Greece. In the end, all of these activities together meant that I was traveling somewhere in the UK or the European continent nearly every weekend of the year.

In 1975, Second Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba conducted a tour of the UK, Spain, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland, Germany, Switzerland and Monaco. It was while Doshu was in Madrid that the International Aikido Federation (IAF) was formed, and the First Congress of the IAF was scheduled to be held in Tokyo in May 1976. During that interval with a strong recommendation from the directing committee of the ACEA, I was nominated to be the first secretary of International Affairs for Hombu Dojo.

It was then that I decided to end the long separation from my homeland; I had seen the AGB grown into a major Aikido organization in the UK, with a membership of nearly a thousand students, and I felt certain that my job in the UK was finished. I returned to Japan in March 1976. As I settled into life back home I had no idea what the future held for me, but I did know that the ten years I had spent in the UK have been the longest of my life.

In closing this article I would like to extend my special thanks to Ms Lori Stewart who has been kind enough to help make my English writing expres-

sions readable. It seems a long time since the first 'After Forty Years...' article was published in the Summer 2005 issue of Biran, and I appreciate the effort and patience she has dedicated to this project for all these years.

Postscript II

I dedicate my prayers to the souls of those now departed individuals who played a significant role in my early years in the UK: Mr and Mrs R Logan, Mr R Myers and Mr P Butler. ☺

Shihan TK Chiba 8th Dan
26 April 2010
San Diego

Note from the Editor

In 2005 during his sabbatical year Chiba Sensei began writing about his experiences from the time he first left Japan in 1966 on a six-week voyage aboard Al-Sabbayah, a Kuwaiti oil tanker to England. These articles were originally published in Biran, the Aikido Journal of Birankai North America. With Chiba Sensei's kind permission all eight articles were reproduced in the two British Birankai souvenir booklets - one in 2006 celebrating his 40 years in the UK and the other in 2008 celebrating his 50 years in Aikido. The above article is the last in the series. ☺



Chiba Sensei and Mick Holloway, Chiswick Dojo, London c1973

Why join Birankai? Shihan George Lyons outlines his reasons to his students

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The due date for our annual reports and Birankai dues is coming up. I recently went through something with one of my students that I thought you might appreciate.



George Lyons

I ask all of my Dojo members to register with Birankai. I admit I haven't always done this, putting off or maybe even ignoring the administrative requirement. One of my students came to me to say he just wanted to train and wasn't interested in joining any organization. I understand his point of view but also realize it's limited.

The truth is though that I have struggled to answer why supporting Birankai is important. The rewards of my involvement are intangible and any normal person wouldn't describe them as rewards anyway. It's a critical time for us as a community so I don't feel I have the luxury of avoiding it any longer or waiting for my students to figure it out for themselves. All of them should at least know how I think about it so I did my best to answer this guy.

Here it is:

I understand wanting to simply train to learn the art and not being

interested in joining some organization. In some ways you don't know why you are joining as you haven't had enough opportunity to get out and interact with the larger Aikido community. Still, even without ever seeing it, your practice is supported by this community. I will try to explain.

It's easy to see the lineage going back: In other words, you couldn't learn Aikido if it wasn't for me, I couldn't have learned it if it wasn't for Chiba Sensei, and so forth.

It's maybe not as obvious that I couldn't have learned it if it wasn't for all of the members in San Diego Aikikai at the time. You couldn't learn if it wasn't for the members here at Bucks County Aikido, and our practice doesn't end at the walls of our Dojo.

Recognition of this is humbling for the self but also wonderful in that it presents the interconnectedness of life and the endless aspect of ourselves. We truly don't end at the threshold of our skin but fill the room, and indeed the universe. It gives meaning to O-Sensei's saying, "You can't beat me, I am already victorious."

Okay, that's the poetic reason to join. You will eventually see the practical reason when you get out to Summer Camp or a seminar. It's good to train with people that you don't

know and who may practise a little differently than you expect. The organization also gives your rank credibility. You may trust me, but it's always possible that a chief instructor can become self-absorbed in their position and do whatever they please. We are continually pushed, humbled and vetted by our participation with our teacher and the larger group of our peers.

At the same time, it should be said that any organization can also be oppressive and resistant to human creativity, so we should be ever watchful of it, too. The sword cuts both ways.

I am asking you and all of my students to join Birankai. We are not only members of it but caretakers too, a post you might hold one day. Part of taking care of it is the financial reality. Many of the people who keep the roof of the organization intact donate their time. Thirty-five dollars is really a modest fee to support it. The rest of our participation is on the mat with our sweat and blood, continually putting forth our best effort.

I hope this is a helpful explanation. Doubts I encourage, so please let me know if you have more questions.

I'm sure you have deal with this with your students. We might have more to say about it amongst each other but this is how I presented it to my fifth kyu. Most of us have devoted our adult lives to the practice of this art. Birankai is a rich community, as diverse as it is challenging.

If a drop of our sweat keeps it together and helps one person, it's worth our effort. ☯

**Shihan George Lyons 6th Dan
Bucks County Aikido
Pennsylvania, USA
Birankai North America**

Shihan George Lyons has kindly given us permission to reprint the above letter sent to fellow instructors in February 2010 and which was published in Biran summer 2010.



Photo: Sarah Davis

Shihan George Lyons (I) with Eric Soroker (uke), Bucks County Aikido Dojo, Pennsylvania, Aug 2010



The silent heroes of Aikido are recognized. Suzanne Brunner goes behind the scene

It is quite rare, in the magazine of a martial art association, like Aikido in particular, or more broadly speaking of that of a sports



Suzanne Brunner

group, to see any mention of the persons that are, by force of circumstances, very close to the art without personally being practitioners. During a conversation I had on this topic with Chiba Sensei, he thought about it and said: "They are the Shadow Warriors".

To be the spouse, the partner, or the 'significant other' of an Aikido practitioner is not insignificant. (I speak from the feminine point of view in order to relate to the majority.)

A husband that comes back from work and prepares his gi and his hakama to go to train, leaves behind him a whole world that nevertheless requires attention, energy and solidity. While he is sweating and suffering on the tatami, someone must take care of the family, be its centre and pillar, deal with the kids' homework, the meals, the laundry, the children's bedtime stories, the listening to school matters, the little sores and sorrows. This person must also let go the hopes of evenings with friends, or going out if it falls on a training night. And even worse: the weekends at the mountain,

skiing or hiking in groups, if they happen to coincide with the date of a seminar.

Whether one stays home, or has an active hobby, like Tai-Chi, singing or language lessons, one must also have a great deal of confidence in one's husband or partner. Practising ikkyo and iriminage with female partners can create links that are not trivial.

On the side of the tatami, however, one doesn't hear much complaining, such as "he is never here when I need him", or "Aikido takes the whole place", or "if we want a good conversation, only Aikido can be chosen".

In addition, to alleviate the frequent absences, one must also be a support in the case of crisis, heal the wounds of the body and sometime the soul, because the study of Aikido is far from being a peaceful journey.

Despite this engagement, this support in the background, partners of Aikido students are not part of 'the family'. There seem to be a sort of glass wall between those who practise and the rest. A glass wall that is impossible to cross. Sat on the benches, the non-initiated are invisible to the Aikidoka. They are not seen and thus not saluted. A 'nobody' in socks sitting against the wall, standing up for zarei, will cause amazement, assuming he or she is noticed. They are unknown, other than through some moist



Photo: Marie-Madeleine Sacroug

Suzanne Brunner on the Elbrouz, Russia, June 2010

pseudo-samurai to whom they might be associated. Roughly speaking: they don't exist.

It's tough.

This is why Musubi gives them a place in this edition, with gratitude, for having been able to write on this delicate topic. ☺

Suzanne Brunner

Professor of visual art, drama author, illustrator of books for children, and married to Shihan Daniel Brunner, Birankai Switzerland.

Translated by Christophe Peytier

2011 BIRANKAI INTERNATIONAL COURSES

- 21-23 Jan** **Birankai Europe Zen Sesshin** under the direction of Genjo Marinello Osho, Abbot of Dai Bai Cho Zen Temple, Seattle, USA at I Shin Juku Dojo, Tatenhill Village Hall, Burton-Upon-Trent, DE13 9SD, UK
Website: www.britishbirankai.com Contact details: onedojo@gmail.com Mobile +44(0) 7932666801
- 18-20 March** **Birankai Europe Teachers' Seminar** with Birankai Europe Shihankai
Venue: Dojo Ann Jyou Kan, 93 rue Pelleport, 75020 Paris, France
Website: www.birankai.eu/teacherSeminar2011/
Contact: Anne Ducouret anne.ducouret@free.fr Phone: +33 1 40 31 50 03 or +33 6 10 07 84 74
- 8-13 July** **Birankai America Summer Camp 2011**, Pacific University, Forest Grove, Oregon, USA
Website: sites.google.com/site/birankai2011/home email: birankai@gmail.com
- 30 July-5 Aug** **Birankai Europe Summer School 2011** with Shihan TK Chiba 8th Dan, Shihan Etsuji Horii (Japan) 7th Dan and British Birankai Shihan and instructors
University of Worcester, Worcester, UK
Website: www.britishbirankai.com

Weronika Sobolewska reveals the pros and cons of living with an Aikidoka

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I've been thinking about your question. (*How has Aikido impacted on the relationships in the family? Ed.*)

As for me, it is hard to say what is the difference living with or without a martial artist (nicely said), because I live beside one most of my life.

I don't know how it would be if my husband had not been one (Aikido practitioner).

Aikido became a part of my life and it is as obvious as a breath to me.

Aikido is not only a martial art. It is a philosophy and a way of life, it is the ability to sustain positive emotions and cope with problems easily. Aikido is a lifestyle. I really believe that. Although it takes a lot of time and the focus of our husbands, the Aikido students, I think that for these values it pays for us, their wives, to be tolerant and patient with them. Maybe they do pay less attention to us and to the household problems, however thanks to Aikido they become less

stressed, more open-minded and calmer. They are simply better thanks to Aikido. Indeed, it is important and worthwhile, to be a real friend and support our partners.

If we do not feel well in a relationship with an Aikido student, we will not be happy in a relationship with a 'casual mortal'.

Besides, who would stand it to have a husband around for 24 hours a day?

Sometimes, I need to be alone for a while...

When my husband, the Aikido student, disappears for training - I'm happy! When he comes back - I am even happier.

As you see, there are only benefits. ☺



Photo: Andrzej Sobolewski

Weronika Sobolewska

Weronika Sobolewska

A business manager and the wife of Andrzej Sobolewski, Birankai Poland.



Photo: Beata Darowska

Summer Camp 2004 Mrówki, Poland

From left

Shihan Daniel Brunner, Birankai
Switzerland

Andrzej Sobolewski, Birankai
Poland and

Shihan Norberto Chiesa, Birankai
France



Dr Iris Kalka offers a feminist view on the practice of Aikido

First Impressions

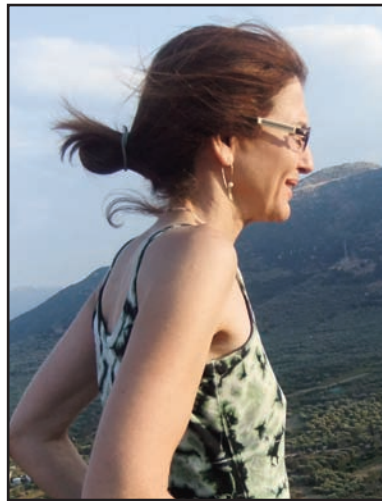
In the last eighteen years I have had many opportunities to observe how people train in Aikido, how they congregate together, and also how they enjoy the company of each other, once the day's lessons are over. I have had ample opportunities to contemplate, though 'from the side', on what it takes to become an Aikido devotee, someone who is continually practising Aikido for a long period. As a sort of bystander, my reflections focus by and large on 'what it takes' to become a devotee of this martial art. Aikido is not, in my view, something that many people would take on board, that is, once exposed to this practice. Those who remain are a sort of 'endangered species'.

I am interested, simply, in the 'training regime' required in order for one to make progress. My intuition leads me to try and decipher some personal traits associated with this practice. The first station on the road to personal traits begins with the roots of Aikido in the Japanese culture. The cultural assets of Japan include, among other things, reverence to a teacher and respect for elders' wisdom, all this alongside immense patience. There are no 'quick fixes' here. Hence, already at this stage we can imagine that those who are drawn to Aikido need those qualities that allow them to endure a never ending routine of rehearsals. They should be persistent, striving to perfection. I am saying this as someone who has always been fascinated with Japanese crafts. Nothing but perfection of skills is acceptable, and perfection requires time. Once we are back to Aikido, our minds should set on life revolving around the Dojo, the 'hub' on the road to perfection. Surely, for an Aikido devotee the Dojo is a main focal point in one's life.

Now I need to be more specific, as my intention is not merely to draw those traits associated with Aikido. These traits can explain how Aikido draws to its fold some people and not others. Yet they do not reveal that Dojo life drive people away from home. This I wish to emphasize as a kind of revelation that has been with me for

a while. I have not grasped this point instantly, so I tell myself, since other preoccupations that people share in their 'out of work' time are more flexible. If one belongs to a choir, surely, there is some room to exercise at home, and examples of more 'flexible' preoccupations are many. Needless to say, I am not alluding here to people for whom Aikido is a profession.

Photo: Amnon Tzechovoy



Dr Iris Kalka

A feminist view and a personal one on Aikido

Time is a dear commodity in western culture. We all want time, badly. Once I have become an adult, I forever seek that freedom of my 'past life' where daily routine was not dictated by needs of other people. With my 'new life' Aikido has evolved as something

'beyond negotiation'. It arrived as a 'packaged deal'. In those eighteen years that Aikido has been part of my life, I have become very intimate with a calendar that has so many days marked with 'these are no days we can do things together'. In other words, if I support a spouse and encourage him to do Aikido, from that moment onwards there is little room for manoeuvre, as if that 'Aikido monster' needs to be fed with more and more attention in order for one 'to do it right'. While this 'monster' is by and large the fruit of my imagination, I dare suggest that my situation is not at all unique. I look around and see that Aikido goes well with young people with no strings attached. I look again and see that they are more likely to be male, and that female 'devotees' decrease in number once they take to raising children.

The world of the Dojo is by and large a male hub. The very moment I am writing this, I am looking at photos from various Dojos around the world, and count male to female ratio. There in Florida I see four female faces out of 15 faces, all with big smiles, and the proportions change slightly with each Dojo. No picture will reveal that women will not remain with Aikido, not as much as men, once children are waiting at home. Neither will these pictures reveal that it is much more acceptable for men to spend many hours away from home, particularly if they happen to have some 'positive' preoccupation. Women are equal, if they are, when it comes to career. Money and status

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Amnon Tzechovoy (right) with Irit Stenlicht (uke), Seminar, Tel Aviv, June 2009

Photo: Vered Machfari



“All this, for me, is because they want to conquer the world!” A thought, in ironic ode, from the son of an Aikidoist after a week of absence of the latter, gone to a seminar.

“Oh, he is with his sect, again...” Comment, with a blasé voice, from the daughter of an Aikidoist, on an evening in which her dad was training.

“Not Monday, not Wednesday, not Friday and not on the weekend either. OK, this time I will go without you!” Irrevocable answer from the significant other of an Aikidoist, tired of missing so many shows and entertainment, due to so many hours dedicated to the practice of Aikido...

Aikido, for us, means hours of absence, during which one needs to get organised. Often it is simple and natural. Sometimes it is too much. And some other times, let's say as an understatement that too much is the straw that breaks the camel's back...

Staying by the side of a *significant other* who embarks on the path of Aikido means accepting an invasion. In terms of time, of course, right at the beginning. But, beyond this, also in



Héléne Massardier

‘Aikido Widow’ - Héléne Massardier develops a daily coping strategy

terms of movement, of thought, of ‘martialness’.

In terms of movement, it means to smile at those small wrist movement, those pivots around a leg, seamlessly sketched on a subway platform, all those quasi-invisible movements performed by the Aikidoist (when he

believes no one is watching). It means to rediscover a body that is changing and taking shape, a new mastering of the force and the energy of the movement.

In terms of thought, it means to become interested, by way of consequence, in the ‘way of ki’. Integrate what it means, in order to better admit what it means to him. But, even more important, maintain a distance in order to keep the ‘invader’ without its boundaries!

The ‘martialness’ is what, for me, remains the most singular. Maybe because, not understanding well the notion and thus rejecting it almost viscerally I associate it with everything that, in Aikido, disturbs me, and keeps me away. Among other things, this includes the notion of Sensei and his rôle, since I remain fundamentally attached to the belief ‘neither god nor master’.

Staying by the side of a *significant other* embarked on the path of Aikido, at the end of the day, might be a school of ‘letting go’. Which, actually, might not be that far from Aikido itself. . . ☺

Héléne Massardier is a journalist and is married to Jean-Gabriel Massardier, Ann Jyou Kan Dojo, Paris, Birankai France

Translated by Christophe Peytier

Dr Iris Kalka . . .

continued from page 8

justify that they would be away from home, but not something that is close to their hearts, for their benefit alone. If they happen to spend an hour or two with Yoga, this would be quite ‘OK’. A woman who would rather sail at sea than sit quietly on a yoga mat will have to face disapproval. And, most of us, male or female, comply with social norms.

By now I imagine that my point is clear. It might not be clear, however, that Aikido is by and large a sort of ‘case study’, a laboratory to examine how we women carry on with our lives

in a society that still favours men, when it comes to ‘who has the upper hand when it comes to leisure time’. Some bold women, I am sure, are able to assert their rights and ‘play it like men’ when it comes to their leisure time. They might even call the babysitter, a dear agent of equality. Most women who do not themselves practise Aikido, but live with someone who does, will stay at home on those days in the calendar marked with Aikido lessons, seminars, workshops and other events. For me personally, lucky me, there is a lot to do at home, like reading books and writing articles. Assisted by my lightweight laptop I might write at times away for home,

while sipping in a café a nice cup of strong espresso. What a great way to spend leisure time. . . ☺

Dr Iris Kalka, an anthropologist by training, is practising market research in Israel as an independent researcher (www.consumertalk.co.il). She is also the wife of Dr Amnon Tzechovoy, Chairman, Birankai Israel.

Ofer Aviv on the golden road in search for balancing the call of Aikido and duties of family life

In daily life, there are forces that affect an Aikidoka's motivation to routinely attend training. The sources of these forces are both



Ofer Aviv

internal and external. Internal forces are self driven in origin; they can be either an outcome of one's mental status and/or physical status. External forces originate from the trainee's close company (work, friends, family, Aikido members, Sensei). I have been practising Aikido in A Mon Kan Dojo (Tel Aviv, Israel) for the last 10 years. During the week we practise four days a week (Iaido, tai-jitsu, Bokken and Jo), altogether they amount to ten hours. Up until five months ago, the main forces keeping me out of practising Aikido were mostly internal (self-motivation, physical status), that is until my status changed to 'father' to Ido (smiling in the attached picture). Starting from this point external forces (family) have come into play. Other Aikidoka may consider the amount of weekly hours spent on the mat as not much while other non-Aikido people will argue that this is very long for a guy with family and even potentially hurting the delicate connection between husband and wife and between father and child.

Soon after the birth I found myself having difficulty leaving my wife alone with our newborn baby to go to practice. In the first three months after birth, the physical burden in taking care of a baby is large at least for inexperienced new parents whose lives have completely altered. As time went by, in my mind a deep and profound question arose: is practising Aikido an *egotistic* action? First, let us ponder on the term 'egotistic' and how it came about. To be egotistic is to put oneself in the centre with no concern for one's close surrounding. On the

mat, you cannot be egotistic, since Aikido is all about connection with your partner. This is very much pronounced in Chiba Sensei's style, since upon breaking the connection from the partner may well result in you getting injured (uke and nage). So the answer to the question raised here is that one cannot be *egotistic* on the mat.

Off the mat, and outside the Dojo, in the eyes of my close family (wife, friends), leaving my wife alone three nights a week (every week, no exceptions) and going to practice with friends is clearly an egotistic action. In this point of view, the time spent in practice is strictly for my benefit. I answer them with the words of Amnon Tzechovoy Sensei: "Aikido is not just good for oneself, it teaches one to be a better person, a better partner, a better *father*". Thus by practising Aikido, my family will benefit. They may ask back, by devoting all of the free time to Aikido instead of family, *how* and (more importantly) *when* will they benefit? Indeed, there is no good answer to this relatively materialistic question in terms of gain and loss especially to those who are not familiar with martial arts. Anyway, the 'profit' depends on the ability of the trainee to *understand* to the depth concepts of martial art and *transfer* them to daily life, and not anyone as good as he might be technically on the mat, can implement such transfers. Especially for me being a slow learner as I am. I find myself very much baffled by this situation of defending my desire to practise against my wife and explaining my absence in practice to Sensei. As it is only natural that the father spends his time with his family, especially with a newborn baby. Am I selfish fulfilling my desire to go to practice thereby improving my Aikido?

The truth of the matter is that we were all born egotistic. A well-known developmental psychologist, Jean

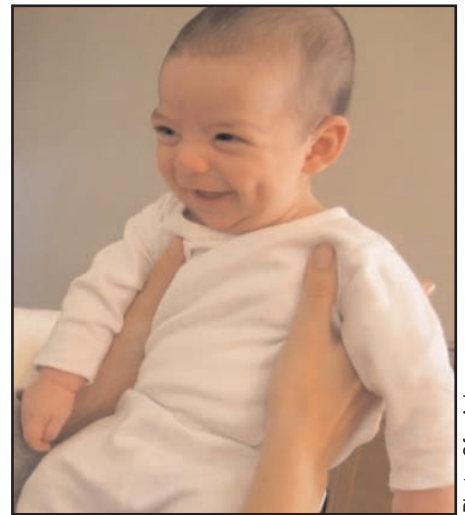


Photo: Ofer Aviv

'A golden moment of pure joy', Ido at age of four months, May 2010

Piaget (1896-1980) asserted that babies are egotistic in nature as they are not aware of their surroundings, and consider their mother as being an integral part of them. As they grow up and become toddlers they become more and more aware of other people and their needs. In analogy, it is very usual for people new to Aikido to behave on the mat in an egotistic nature, trying to perform a technique disregarding the uke completely. This is usually expressed in the trainee's body (muscles tighten, making the body stiff and small), and in the distance (*Maai*) between uke and nage (being either too large or too small). In the physical aspect the new trainee is fully aware of the existence of his opponent, but mentally he behaves as if nothing is there, but an ambiguous threat. With time the mind of the new trainee evolves, his mental conception of the opponent clarifies thus giving the appropriate attention to the attacker. This is reflected in the *Maai*, as well as in one's body being flexible.

Can I practise Aikido in a 'non-egotistic' manner and still be a good father\ husband? I fear to miss my son growing up (which happens very quickly) by being away from him three nights a week. In my talks with Chris Mooney Sensei, I was told repeatedly that I should take great care of my family making sure that practising Aikido will not harm the connection with the family. Aikido is all about balancing between uke and nage, similarly much of family life is about balance. I am still searching for the golden road of conducting proper family life without

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Thoughts and impressions of Ofer Aviv from Tel-Aviv First Seminar with TK Chiba Sensei

TK
Chiba

In July 2010 A Mon Kan Dojo was proud to host Chiba Sensei for the first time in Tel Aviv, Israel. Almost all the Aikido schools from across Israel attended what was considered one of the largest and most important Aikido events of the year. During the visit our Dojo members were lucky to meet Sensei face to face and for Sensei to get acquainted with our culture.

For me it is the third time I participated in a seminar with Sensei, however, unlike previous seminars, this one felt in a way kind of intimate. Much of the seminar was devoted to basic Aikido techniques putting emphasis on the ukemi side. Each technique was demonstrated in depth. Not only that, Sensei was kind enough to remind all of us of some fundamental concepts in martial art which we tend to forget.

The last session was devoted to Questions and Answers, where practitioners were encouraged to freely ask Sensei questions. We were all enthusiastic to hear Sensei sharing stories and precious insights from the time he was taught by O-Sensei.

While I am always impressed by Sensei's enormous strength, I was astonished during a thank-you moment in the closing session of the seminar. Amnon Sensei handed Chiba Sensei a modest present as a token for honoring Israel Aikido and doing the seminar, it was an antique arrow head. Sensei, gently untied the present taking the time to open each sting carefully and placing the wrapping paper aside gracefully. As an observer this



Photo: Vered Machfari

Ofer Aviv (right) and Yosi Cohn (uke), Seminar with Shihan Chris Mooney and Shidoian Ian Grubb, Tel Aviv, Israel, June 2009

felt like a full ceremony and demonstrated how powerful Sensei is.

In my talks with many practitioners (outside and inside our school), I felt that Sensei has left a great impact during his short visit in Israel. In a manner of speaking Sensei forced us to think (uke and nage side) and not merely performing a technique.

I deeply hope that Chiba Sensei will find time and come back to Tel Aviv again someday.

This seminar became possible with the help of our dear Sensei, Amnon

Tzechovoy, and many of the Dojo members. We are grateful for having Shihan Chris Mooney and Shihan Aki Fleshler as well as Shidoian Davinder Bath taking part in this historical occasion which serves as a milestone in our small Dojos as well as of the Aikido community in Israel. ☯

**Ofer Aviv 1st Dan
A Mon Kan, Tel Aviv
Birankai Israel**

Ofer Aviv in search for . . .

continued from page 10

missing too many Aikido practice hours. This means spending the time with my family with higher quality, giving more attention, and thinking more how to improve our relationship.

In many ways, to be a better father/husband is to be a better Aikidoka. ☯

**Ofer Aviv 1st Dan
A Mon Kan, Tel Aviv
Birankai Israel**



Photo: Netanel Hagage

Chiba Sensei's First Seminar in Tel Aviv, Israel, July 2010



Miroslav Brejla integrates Aikido and family life with time management technique

Many articles discussing integration of Aikido and family life highlight the scarcity of time.



Meaning restricting family life for hours spent in the Dojo. . .

Aikido practice often requires more time than other more common hobbies. This is due to the limited number of suitable Dojos as well as definite hours when classes are held. Aikido also requires regular practice in order for one to improve and it is often said that the more you practise the more you enjoy.

Many practitioners will spend two hours traveling in order to have one hour practice. Therefore a decision to train just four or five hours a week may have significant impact on their life and relationship with people around them. To give up other hobbies may not be pleasant, but real obstacles arrive when supposedly 'family time' has to go. With many different things to do, the time is often precious.

Although my life circumstances are Aikido favourable (no family responsibilities as such, Aikidoka girlfriend and house close to the Dojo) the day is

never long enough. Even now I cannot believe where has the Sunday gone and I still have so much stuff to do. All of it is very important of course.

I believe that it is essential to be well aware of these potentially disadvantageous circumstances of Aikido practice. This will assist in appreciating more structured approach for long term Aikido studying and its implementation into one's life.

Different set of techniques can be used when dealing with time management, prioritising, etc. There is a saying that: "Busy people get things done." This is not because they work harder, but because they work smarter - effectively and efficiently. Using simple principles such as: Do it once, Do it right, Do it quickly or applying more complex methodology such as ABC (Activity Based Costing) method or POSEC (Prioritize, Organize, Streamline, Economize, Contribution) method would help us to examine, organize and improve our working and leisure time in systematic and conscious way. It is certainly a similar approach to learning different footwork when executing ushiro ryote dori nikyo omote vs ura.

An analytical approach may also help us to realize how much quality

time we really spend with the wife, kids, boyfriend, dog, I mean does watching TV counts as a 'family together' time? Being in the same room physically, but mentally travelling far away is not very honest. Also it is not proper demonstration of Aikido connection, Zanshin, Maai and other principles.

By spending hours on the mat improving our movements we influence our thoughts and feelings and we grasp ideas and discover Aiki principles (Chiiku, Tokuiku, Kiiku, etc) which we often instinctively apply in our life. While using different techniques (for example those taught at business schools) we need to apply the same principles consciously, improving balance in life and increasing awareness when performing daily routines. The intensity of such an experience may raise up to such a level that having Wednesday dinner with family is as if it was for the first time and the last time. ☺

**Miroslav Brejla 2nd Dan
London Aikikai, Shinmei-kan
British Birankai**

(Essay submitted for Nidan test at BB summer school, August 2010)



Miroslav Brejla in the centre of multiple attacks at demonstration at Japan Matsuri, Spitalfields, London, September 2010

Photo: Laszlo Seres

Shihan Daniel Brunner salutes the 'Shadow Warriors'



Daniel Brunner

Shihan Daniel Brunner's name in Japanese calligraphy.

Thinking about Aikido is very time consuming, it very often keeps the mind busy a lot longer than the time spent within the Dojo. Indeed, Aikido holds all our thoughts, all the time. This is how we can experience it fully.

At the same time, its forceful body contact often results in injuries which sometimes result in long recovery. The mood is thus influenced, a feeling of frustration might appear. We have the feeling to be losing our time.

And along us, our companions show such patience which is worth praising since they:

- take care of the children while we're sweating in the Dojo;
- wait for hours for the return of the worthy fighter;
- laundry gis and iron hakamas;
- put aside seaside holidays in order to allow their beloved to join the summer seminar battlefields;
- listen to endless stories about the aim of practising;
- are made to take sides (even if they don't want to) or, from time to time and unfortunately, just have to leave in order to carry on with their own life without Aikido.

Do we only think of them?

The ordinary practitioner is a selfish, egotistic person who sacrifices nothing to his commitment but claim the free-

dom to go to the Dojo as often as he wants.

It is probably difficult to admit but it reflects reality.

In historical Japan, samurais' wives used to be named shadow fighters. They were truly essential to the balance of the society, keeping their home forever welcoming, defending it from thieves and villains, assuming the responsibility for the education of the children.

Nowadays there aren't any more samurais, either in Japan or in our

society. Shadow fighters are still present, however.

Let's take care of them, thank them often and give them our highest esteem and deepest respect. And (why not?). . . let's salute them. ☺

**Shihan Daniel Brunner 6th Dan
Ryu Seki Kai, Lausanne
Birankai Switzerland**

Translation: Christophe Brunner



Photos: Beata Darowska

Shihan Daniel Brunner (right) and Marcin Chyla (uke), Polish Summer Camp, Wroclaw, Aug 2010



Photos: Netanel Hagage

Chiba Sensei's First Seminar in Tel Aviv, Israel, July 2010



How Gina Urazan Razzini builds a balanced environment around Aikido, family and work

Once an Aikidoka told me that joining Aikido was like joining a family. At first this statement seemed overstated to me, and even if it was a very positive way to see the relations that a practice like Aikido could build I was skeptical about it. When I began to practise I thought Aikido was going to be just a body art activity where I was exercising beautiful movements and then I was going to travel back home to meet my family and friends. However, during my time practising Aikido and even more after arriving to London, this statement began to take shape and I began to find a different meaning for it.



Gina Urazan Razzini

I began to practise Aikido when I was at university, it was very busy times for me but I wanted to complement my professional studies with some physical practice. After seeing a demonstration of the university Aikido group I was convinced I wanted to try it. At first I began to practise once a week but very soon I found myself going three times per week, every time my studies permitted me.

I was always surprised of how issues that worried me in my everyday life were reflected in the Aikido practice and from the Dojo back into my everyday life. My personal questions and struggles were reflected so clearly during the practice that soon I found myself applying my Aikido learning into my social and professional life. As much as Aikido was the moment of letting everything go to get into a demanding practice at the end of each class I was a little bit different and therefore I was changing in my other activities and in everyday mood.

At the same time though I began to struggle to combine my studies and my social life with the practice of Aikido and many times I had to abandon it for long periods in order to fulfill my studies. Afterwards I found that even in my professional life the struggle would continue. The more the growth in Aikido the more I struggle to find the time to practise it. If I look backwards my whole way of living has been shaped gradually by my practice, and of course my social relations as well.

For many years during the week I have never arrived home before ten, the place where I live and my meetings with friends are often conditioned

by my Aikido schedule. Very often when I discuss with colleagues their relaxing afternoon in front of the TV I can only remember struggling with a nikyo ukemi or some flying moment after a kokyunage.

Though even if I ask myself sometime how long it will continue and how it will be when taking care of a family, I always find myself finding options rather than abandoning the practice. I can see Aikidoka balancing their family times and negotiating with their partners and that reassures me that when the moment comes it is going to be possible to continue to find harmony between the practice and my everyday life. I have to confess having a partner that practises Aikido as well is a big advantage not only because we both understand the importance of Aikido for the other, but also because we can discuss and help each other.

The practice of a martial art is said to strengthen discipline and self-control and I believe also self knowledge which is fundamental in order to relate with others with compassion and respect. These two principles are the ones that lead the way I share with the ones I love, the ones I meet and the ones I work with. My learning in Aikido goes beyond a body conditioning and it helps me to build a balanced environment around me, the way we balance time and activities are just practical issues which can be easily solved. This can be achieved as far as we truly believe in what we do.

Morihei Ueshiba O-Sensei said once about love and it "Love is like the rays of the sun, shining left, right, up, down, front, back, bathing everything in light." ☺

**Gina Urazan Razzini 1st Dan
London Aikikai, Shinmei-kan
British Birankai**



Photo: Laszlo Seres

Davinder Bath and Gina Urazan Razzini (uke) Demonstration at Japan Matsuri, Spitalfields, London, September 2010

(Essay submitted for Shodan test at BB summer school, August 2010)

Fragments of thoughts and feelings during intensive Aikido course with Mooney Sensei at Ei Mei Kan, Birmingham, UK. Practising an average of 11 hours per day training. Little sleep, some samu, zazen, ten students. One Shihan. Some good food. Great people! And a good idea: I will never get it right, but I will always enjoy trying.

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心



Photo: Suzanne Brunner

Eyal Naor

Aikido thought

Shomen uchi,

I know shomen uchi,

Am I doing it right?

I must do it right!

Ukemi,

It's too slow,

It's too fast,

I don't know shomen uchi,

Do they like me?

Shomen uchi,

oo' my knees hurt,

Sensei is mad,

I must show him,

Sensei is really mad,

Ukemi,

Concentrate on the leg,

Don't concentrate on the leg,

oo' my knees hurts,

It must be flowing,

Shomen uchi,

It must be soft,

It must be strong,

I will never get it right,

oo' my knees hurts,

Ukemi,

Why am I doing it?

When does this class end?

How many more classes for today?

I must eat something,

Ukemi,

It will never end,

Where is my center

Did I do it good?

Drop it!

Eyal Naor 3rd Kyu, A Mon Kan, Tel Aviv, Birankai Israel

British Birankai 15th Summer School, Worcester, Aug 2010

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Photos: Ken Pearson

Chiba Sensei's First Tel Aviv Seminar, Israel, July 2010



Photos: Netanel Hagege

Polish Summer Camp, Wroclaw, Poland, Aug 2010

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Photos: Beata Darowska



Nairobi - The Flame of Aikido is lit and witnessed by Piotr Masztalerz

Over two years ago Mateusz Waga, a long time friend and student of mine moved to Nairobi, Kenya.



Piotr Masztalerz

Photo: Beata Darowska full of enthusiasm and show a hunger for practice.

During the seminar seven of them passed 5th kyu test.

Birankai has many strange ways to grow. The wind has blown us to Africa now.

Life here is hard, many people struggle everyday to survive and

One and a half years later Nairobi Aikikai was established. As far as we know it was the first Aikido Dojo in Kenya.

After a year of practising there are about 20 students.

I was invited to teach the first official seminar in December 2010. There were about 15 students attending the weekend seminar.

Nairobi Aikikai runs 2 to 3 classes weekly in two locations. Students practise on the wooden floor. Ukemi is difficult and painful sometimes. People are



Photo: Beata Darowska

Piotr Masztalerz, Polish Summer Camp, Wroclaw, Aug 2010



Photo: Beata Darowska

Piotr Masztalerz, Polish Summer Camp, Wroclaw, Aug 2010

support their families. I come from Poland, it's specially touching for us, who overcame similar hardships.

I hope that the

Dojo and daily practice in Kenya will survive, growing from a single flame to fire. ☺

Piotr Masztalerz 4th Dan
Wroclaw Aikikai
Birankai Poland



First seminar at Nairobi Aikikai, December 2010

Shogaku Shugyo - Training experience that will stretch you to your limit. Piotr Masztalerz bears witness

Shogaku Shugyo

Ichikukai is a misogi centre located in Tokyo. This way of purification training has been in existence for almost 100 years.

Chiba Sensei suggested that, together with some other teachers, I should take part in the practice called Shogaku Shugyo.

For a number of reasons it's very difficult to share experiences with this practice.

It is difficult because it's supposed to be so hard, somehow shocking and exhausting that sharing details about the practice can spoil the experience for those who will take part in the future.

It's difficult also because what happened there is like a seed planted in my mind and for the few first weeks

I didn't even know what happened to me.

I just knew that I went somewhere I have never been.

In my case, unlike Zazen, this Misogi practice doesn't give you any chance to escape - to sleep, to dream, to pretend. I did Zazen Sesshin a couple of times, but for me - Ichikukai was much harder in many aspects. There is no mercy, and even if you don't want to, this training will take you far away.

So I went somewhere far and to be honest I didn't like what I saw there.

It takes time to understand this kind of experience.

What really helped me go through this is being sure that whatever pain, doubts, exhaustion, stress I went

through - I'm safe because there are experienced people taking care of us.

For us - people practising Aikido, it is a realization that the pain of sitting in seiza for an hour is really nothing. ☺

Latent power and possibilities in you are huge. Things you are sure you can't do are possible. Doesn't matter if you are a small girl or a strong man.

The seed inside me is growing but for the moment this is what I know. ☺



Photo: Beata Darowska

Piotr Masztalerz 4th Dan
Wroclaw Aikikai
Birankai Poland



Photo: Beata Darowska

Chiba Sensei with Piotr Masztalerz, Polish Summer Camp, Wroclaw, Aug 2010



First Trip to Japan

Davinder Bath surrenders himself to the rigours and uncertainties of Misogi training in a Japanese temple Dojo

MISOGI BEGINS

Ichikukai Dojo,
Tokyo; Thursday
21 October 2010;
5:30pm local time.

Piotr Masztalerz
and I just had our
first go at calligra-

phy. It is embarrassing as my splodges are barely legible; I wish I had attended Szevone Chin's calligraphy course at Ei Mei Kan earlier in the year. We have just written our names and addresses in the register for Shogaku Shugyo, first misogi experience, along with four Japanese boys and two Japanese ladies. We have never met them before.

We are told to follow someone down a dimly lit corridor to a room 5m by 4m with traditional tatami on the floor, small fitted cupboards on one side and large sliding wooden/paper doors. The whole place is old Japan straight out of the movies, with creaking floors and all. We are asked to put our valuables and mobile phones into a tray to be taken away. We will be here for three days and three nights.

Everyone is told to take a hakama from the pile. The hakama are all white and all the same size – small. They are folded but are quite crumpled, as if to insult us. There is no room for egos here. The girls are shown to their changing/sleeping quarters next door. We are told to change into keikogi and hakama. Piotr looks quite ridiculous in the tiny hakama. He tells me I do too. We have a little giggle but it doesn't last. Barely five minutes and we are told to put our bags in the side cupboards and are ordered to leave the room. This sets the tone for the next three days; authoritative, thick, cold atmosphere and not really knowing what is coming next.

We stand about in the dark corridors not knowing just where we are supposed to be. Some instructions are given in Japanese but that doesn't help Piotr and I; we should have made a better effort at learning a bit of verbal Japanese at least. Within moments we are ordered back to our room. It has been cleared and places have been



Davinder Bath

set on the tatami; chopsticks and cups with our names on them. There is an extra place at the head of the 'table' with no name on it. Hiruta Sensei comes and we all stand by our places; he indicates for us to sit (in seiza). We bow, drink some hot water and are told we will go to the Haraiba (Shinto practice hall) whenever the bell rings. Sensei gives us our seating plan for the Haraiba. The bell rings immediately. My heart is pounding. This feels too much like those American college initiation movies where your little finger, or something, has to be cut off.

We snake off to the Haraiba in no particular order. We enter, do a standing bow to the Kamidana (altar) and take our places on the bare tatami in seiza. The Osa (leader of the bell

severe tension and pain. I am worried about whether I can afford it.

I cannot get it out of my head and within two hours I reply to Sensei that I will do it as long as my health and finances allow. Sensei has told me that October will be a good time to go and that Piotr Masztalerz from Wroclaw, Poland and Miguel Moreno from San Diego, California, USA will be going too. I have worked out that the misogi will be done in seiza and since my knee troubles me mostly in Burmese and my back, well it will survive, I decide that health is not a big issue. Finances are to be explored.

I really don't want to do it at one level, but at the same time this is exactly what I wish for. In January 1987 Terry Waite, a hostage negotia-



Ichikukai Dojo Kamidana (altar)

ringers) rings his bell three times and we all follow him into a bowing and short sutra chanting ceremony, and it begins.

DECISION TIME

London, 29 March 2010. I receive an email from Brooklyn Aikikai with an attachment, a letter from Chiba Sensei with a recommendation to go to Japan for Misogi training at Ichikukai Dojo. I am stunned. I have heard stories about Ichikukai and might even have occasionally said something stronger than 'you won't find me going there'. It is supposed to be very hard and there are stories of people getting quite 'beaten up'. Admittedly I don't really know what is involved and I have never turned down any recommendations from Sensei. I am worried about my right knee which for some four or five years has been giving me a lot of trouble. My back is prone to

tor, an envoy of the archbishop of Canterbury was taken hostage in Beirut. He remained in captivity for 1,763 days, the first four years of which he was kept in total solitary confinement. He was in the news and on our minds the whole time, and when he was finally released he briefly described his torment to reporters and on TV shows. I had seen movies like 'A Man Called Horse'. I appreciated the learning one might get from such experiences and although I would never wish to be in their shoes I had wondered if something of such an experience could be gained in a somewhat safer environment. By definition it could not but any insight would be of value I concluded. I had an idea that Ichikukai misogi might be something akin to what I had wondered about.

Having decided to go I set about

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contemplating how I might cope in such a situation and how I might get the most benefit from it. It is all about seeing the positive in any situation to learn something of substance, and there is always something positive in everything as Chiba Sensei has often reminded us. Two Gurus of the Sikh faith, my personal hero Banda Singh Bahadur and countless others from my culture endured unfathomable suffering and I resigned to relying on their example to get me through. I was also aware that Chiba Sensei expected me to get through it. Above all I was going to take ownership and I was going to do it for me.

Within a few weeks of saying yes to going I get a tiny injury to my right ring finger. I know straight away that this is going to take years to heal. I protect it in the Dojo by not taking ukemi as I cannot slap down. Then come the summer schools and taking ukemi while protecting the injured finger brings about an injury to my left knee. This one is more severe than the right knee and quite painful in seiza or any other sitting position. I hope it will heal enough by October as I am not planning to excuse myself from this misogi. Chiba Sensei tells Piotr and I in



Ichikukai Dojo Zendo

武
道

Poland that people will find any excuse to abandon. I was not planning to . . . unless . . .

FROM LONDON TO TOKYO

It is time to take the flight. My knee is as bad as ever. I even picked up another injury to my left Achilles tendon. Misogi and Aikido is going to be fun in Japan – not. I have decided to take a direct flight to Tokyo and it is a twelve-hour journey. I find myself next to a young Japanese woman, tall and handsome and we talk much of the way. She sleeps, I watch some movies. She is suffering from back

pain as am I. Aeroplane seats are not as bad as bus seats but I can never find a position that does not cause backache. I am used to it. Some wriggling and putting up with it and already I am in Tokyo. I wait at the airport for Piotr to arrive from Poland and for Didier Boyet Shihan to meet us and take us to Ichikukai Dojo. This is very kind of him – thank you Didier San! It is Wednesday morning, 20 October. It is my first time in Japan. I have always wanted to go to Japan with Chiba Sensei but providence has other ideas. The airport somehow reminds me of Ben Gurion airport in Tel-Aviv, Israel. We meet and take the train to Shinjuku, Tokyo. From there another train and then a taxi will take us to the Dojo. On the train we comment on the surrounding countryside and villages. To me the countryside is like Switzerland and the houses are like Spain and France. The others don't agree. I do like it – luscious green hills.

A meal in Shinjuku turns out to be cheap compared to the train ticket. That's how it is, some things are prohibitively expensive, other quite reasonable. We arrive at Ichikukai Dojo and I meet Miguel who had decided to come the month earlier and has already done his misogi. He will assist with ours. He is a close friend of Piotr's but I have not met him before. He is dark like me and easy to get on with. The Dojo is my first experience of a



Photo: Beata Darowska

Chiba Sensei and Davinder Bath (uke), Polish Summer Camp, Wroclaw, Aug 2010

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First Trip to Japan

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temple/house in Japan. I imagine all might be like this but then I think probably they are not. This is an old style Dojo, all wooden with lots of paper walls and doors, narrow corridors with creaking wooden floors. Very nice but all seems quite fragile to me. I grew up in a big house with tall brick walls and brick floors in India, quite the opposite of fragile.

The weather is not quite what Chiba Sensei had promised, not quite the Japanese autumn, this year. It is cloudy or raining the whole time and cold, although not cold enough to vanquish all the mosquitoes! I can put up with flies and wasps but I find mosquitoes... challenging! The Dojo gardens harbour plenty of them and they seem to particularly like me. At least they keep my mind off the misogi to come.

We meet Hiruta Sensei early evening; he is very friendly and very nice and I feel relaxed in his presence. Robert (a Hungarian) arrives, there is Nelly also from Hungary. They have drinks and kindly let me have soft drinks. I explain that I don't drink much and they don't push me. Phew! Robert is quite a character and I like talking with him.

Next morning we are up early for cleaning, daily misogi and Zazen, each

for about 30 minutes. Four locals come to join us. I go upstairs to the Zendo where Gen San shows me exactly what I am to do. Gen san's son and I clean the tatami and mop the floors, and stairs. Everyone rings the bells in misogi except Piotr and I, that privilege being reserved for those who have completed their misogi training. Then we go upstairs for Zazen. At 10am we have 1,000 suburi and 30 minutes Zazen in the Zendo.

For lunch Sensei takes us out to a burger bar... for meat; we will eat only rice with some pickles during misogi. This is my first outing after settling in. There is a village feel; narrow streets without pavement, super quiet all around, cars are so few and so quiet that you don't hear them coming behind you. Everywhere is clean.

MISOGI

Chiba Sensei did his misogi here in the very same Haraiba, forty seven years ago. He spent a year here in total. I get an indescribably warm feeling thinking about this. As I will explain later Chiba Sensei is all Ichikukai and very little Hombu Dojo.

The main task in misogi is to sit in seiza and shout the words 'To Ho Ka Mi E Mi Ta Me' as loudly as possible – for three days. I am the first to lose my voice within a few hours. Some of the others only loose it on the last day; incorrect breathing on my part, or just

shouting too loud? Each time we return to our room we find the kettle and our cups filled with fresh hot water. The hot water eases the throat but I am unable to drink much.

I am not used to the words. The rhythmic shouting plays tricks on my mind for almost a day. Toho Kami Ehmi Tamay, Toho Kami here I am, Yo ho Kami here I come, Toho Kami I am coming... I am feeling good and my ego is taking advantage. I try to return to the actual words but each time it takes several attempts before I remember them. After one day the tricks cease completely and I am focused on the actual words. The helpers are aware that I have a knee problem and they are really trying to make sure that my misogi does not become too focused on my pain. I am aware of how hard they are trying and it convinces me that they are really on my side. I feel calm and positive all the way through.

I try to do everything they ask, with more effort than they expect as I want to reap the benefits of this experience. The rice and pickle diet is getting in the way... gas, too much rice... I quickly realise this is going to be my chance to make a breakthrough in breathing... I cannot get it right... It begins to feel like San Diego 1996 when I tried everything I could think of

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Photo: Beata Darowska



Davinder Bath (r), Polish Summer Camp, Wroclaw, Aug 2010

First Trip to Japan

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for weeks until I abandoned it all realizing it was not right, then when I was empty Chiba Sensei showed me. Chiba Sensei is not here. I keep trying.

Misogi is very long, each day is very long and in the end it is very exhausting. It can take you to your physical and mental limits. I was told I am allowed to tell everything about my experience except one part, but misogi is like a great movie and I cannot give away the plot. It is an amazing experience and some people reading this will want to go and train.

Perhaps I can say this, at the end of the second day I am thinking if it doesn't get much worse than this I will be OK, only to find that it is just the beginning . . .

I wake up early in the morning and cannot sleep. I go to the toilet and realize a mosquito bit me on my bottom. They are all ganging up against me . . .

Piotr wrestles the young Japanese boys in our room, two and three at a time. I show one of them how to use the tongue to sound the letters R and L. He learns within one minute. One of the girls asks me if I am the Sensei

from London - Fabio was training in London before moving back to Japan and knows the lady and has told her that I am scheduled to be there - small world. We joke about escaping and people passing us takeaways and alcohol...

When it ends we are given our valuables back. There is a surreal sight - all Japanese candidates switch on their mobiles and start texting. No one is in



Photo: Beata Darowska

Davinder Bath
Polish Summer Camp,
Wroclaw, Aug 2010

a hurry to leave our room. There is a meal to celebrate the completion of misogi. The Haraiba has been laid out with low tables in a large square. There are over fifty people, the candidates, the Sensei, the bell ringers, the other helpers... I am asked to give a toast to Hiruta Sensei. I choose my words carefully 'To the chief of the bogeymen and a pearl of wisdom'. Robert smirks (the chief bogeyman) but I am not sure if anyone really understands. I have no voice and a Japanese man is translating me. I am relieved to think that perhaps no one understood. Every person takes their turn to introduce themselves!

I feel a breakthrough in my breathing. I am very happy . . . ☺

Davinder Bath 5th Dan
London Aikikai
British Birankai

Part 2 of Davinder Bath's trip to Japan to follow in the next issue of BE Musubi. Seven more days including a Zazen Sesshin at Ichikukai Dojo and twelve days at Aikikai Hombu Dojo.

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Birankai Polska

Photo from Birankai Polska

Davinder Bath (l) and Piotr Masztalerz, Poland, March 2009

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Shihan Norberto Chiesa on the new Birankai Shihan promotion

Photo: Beata Darowska

I met Patrick Barthélémy in 1974 and I have kept on meeting him anew ever since. We have shared the intimacy of our friendship over the span of thirty-six years. I have been at his side in times of joy and in moments of pain.

Most special, I have observed his practice over the years and watched the process of becoming of what he is today.

He is a strong man. He was well aware that to go beyond physical strength he needed to search deeper in his practice. Chiba Sensei recognized his inner transformation in 2004 by promoting him to the rank of godan.

With the principles of our school well lodged in his



Shihan Patrick Barthélémy, Polish Summer Camp, Aug 2008

body, he continued his investigation into the meaning of weapons. The search cost him – and one or two lucky partners – countless blue marks, very sore fingers and some inevitable battle injuries. He never forgot that Aikido is an Art.

Chiba Sensei witnessed his achievement in August 2010 and promptly declared him rokudan and Birankai Shihan.

Patrick is a hungry man, his practice is his avidity to learn, and he will keep on searching.

With all my respect and affection,

Congratulations! ☯

**Shihan Norberto Chiesa 6th Dan
Dai Jyo Kan, Aikikai de Bagnols
Birankai France**

In Memorium

Shihan Nobuyoshi Tamura 8th Dan
2 March 1933 – 9 July 2010



Tamura Sensei became an uchi deshi in 1953. He was O-Sensei's favorite uke, accompanying the Founder on numerous demonstrations as well as on his only visit to the United States in Hawaii in 1961. He moved to Marseilles, France, in 1964 as an official representative of the Aikikai. He has been the major influence in the enormous growth of Aikido in both Western and Eastern Europe. ☯

Shihan Seiichi Sugano 8th Dan
17 December 1939 - 29 August 2010



Sugano Sensei was among the last generation of uchideshi at the Aikikai Hombu Dojo in Tokyo to have studied directly under Aikido Founder Morihei Ueshiba. He was dispatched to Australia in 1965, later taught in Belgium and Europe, and beginning in 1988, at the New York Aikikai until his passing. ☯