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Closing date for submissions 1 Dec 2012 for Jan 2013 issue

Chiba Sensei shows how Consciousness reveals itself with close self-examination

Anyone who thinks that putting more hours into training will necessarily result in greater achievement in the art is thinking like a child. Fundamentally, it is a materialistic attitude and doesn't lead anywhere but to an unsolvable problem. We can't avoid moving, day by day, closer to the grave.

Many people think that through training they can make their bodies responsive and controllable; that they'll be able to move them as they wish. I don't deny that this is an important part of learning. However, it is only part of it. A part that is only relative to a greater factor which one should be more aware of. This, I think, is more important: to develop an



Chiba Sensei

introspective attitude in training, with a more serious eye to self-examination. This is a matter of the quality within one's training.

To recognize the imbalance, disharmony, or disorder within one's system, sensed within the body, as well as between the body and consciousness, is a starting point for one's growth. This is where a conversation or dialog begins to happen between the body and consciousness. As the dialog develops, awareness becomes more clear, and one begins to recognize a natural power or potential ability which has, until then, been hidden.

Instead of adding an external element to the body, one needs to see what is already within. More importantly, consciousness itself (the way one perceives things), begins to change along with the discovery of the

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Photo: Tim Mammie

Chiba Sensei, BNA summer camp 2012, Bronxville, NY



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Photo: Franco

Editorial

As the date of the second BE summer school, 21-27 July 2012 at the University of Worcester, UK approaches, I am pleased to report that, at the time of writing over 130 participants have so far registered. Chiba Sensei 8th Dan together with Miyamoto Sensei 7th Dan from Hombu Dojo, Tokyo will be assisted by the three BE Shihans - Mike Flynn 6th Dan, UK, Chris Mooney 6th Dan, UK, Daniel Brunner 6th Dan, Switzerland and Birankai Senior National Teachers. Planning the summer school a week earlier than usual was fortuitous as the opening ceremony for the London Olympics 2012 takes place on 27 July the last day of our summer school.

I am happy to report that Shihan Didier Boyet has graciously stepped in to take over the role of Assistant Editor - one of his main responsibilities will be in charge of the French translation. I enjoyed working with Suzanne Brunner and shall miss her meticulous approach to the role. I wish her all the best as she is now able to devote all her energies into the publication of her own work.

Edward Burke a former student of London Aikikai decided to enrol as one of the last uchideshi at San Diego Aikikai just before Chiba Sensei's retirement. He has written an absorbing account of his stay and practice which gives an insight into the rigours of the training. A must read for those who have missed the chance to undertake such training, Shihan Mooney has written a review of his book 'The Swordmaster's Apprentice' (page 14).

In our next newsletter in January 2013 we will include a section under the Notice-board heading for announcements of any important Aikido related changes/development within each BE organization together with the Dan promotions. We look forward to receiving your contributions.

Please let me know you if you any suggestions or comments about how you would like to see our newsletter develop. Photographs with articles and of major courses are always welcome. ☺

Dee Chen

Conscious training. . .

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true body (as opposed to the body that one changes according to will).

The important and unique thing that makes Aikido what it is, is that progress moves in proportion to the discovery of a natural power which is already within each individual, together with an organic, dynamic core, which helps the body function in harmony and as a whole.

It is the kind of path where one progressively encounters the true self with wonder and joy. The 'estranged self', hidden with its inexhaustible potential, lies undiscovered by many people who die without knowing that it even exists.

In many ways, rightly or wrongly, our bodies are the product of our consciousness. In order to discover what that requires close self-examination within our training. It isn't a path where one adds more and more information, details, power, etc, externally and

endlessly, to the 'too much' that is already there.

Touching upon this subject in a profound way, according to Dogen Zenji, the founder of Soto Zen: "Buddhist practice through the body is more difficult than practice through the mind. Intellectual comprehension in learning through the mind must be united to practice through our body. This unity is called SHINJITSUNINTAI, the real body of man. It is the perception of everyday mind, through the phenomenal world. If we harmonize the practice of enlightenment with our body, the entire world will be seen in its true form."

Finally, the discovery of the true body of man, with its value and beauty, is beyond comparison with competitive values, but rather stands on its own within each individual. Thus, the only conclusion is for Aikido to be non-

competitive. I'd like to add another zen master's words in this regard - a master from Vietnam whose lecture (given at Smith College in New Hampshire, Massachusetts) I was fortunate enough to attend. During a question and answer period, a woman stood up and asked him what he thought of the meditation system practised by the Quakers. He answered, "How can you compare the beauty of a cherry flower with that of a rose?" ☺

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

This article was originally published in Sansho, April 1987

St Petersburg Aikikai marks move to new premises with commitment and hospitality. Paul Goatman reports

Kimusubi Aikido School in

St Petersburg is the first in Russia to be affiliated to Birankai. Andrey Gunyashov established the dojo in 2008 and it has since grown steadily and moved to new premises this summer. Approximately 15 students currently train under his instruction.



Paul Goatman

Mike Flynn Shihan and I have visited on three occasions to conduct seminars since September last year, all of which have been well attended. The latest of these was held at the dojo from 15-17 June 2012 and was attended by approximately 16 students. Aikidoka from Moscow, Ukraine, Siberia and Kazakhstan have attended one or more of the seminars to show their support for the new dojo. All students are developing a firm understanding of taisabaki and basic

techniques, are whole-hearted in their practice and their commitment to the dojo, and certainly make visitors feel very welcome. ☺

**Paul Goatman 5th Dan
Thistle Aikikai, Scotland
British Birankai**

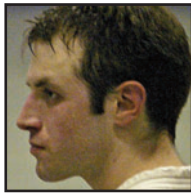


Shihan Mike Flynn with Andrey Gunyashov (left) and Paul Goatman (right), 2012



There is more to Ichikukai than chanting and ringing bells in time. Paul Goatman finds out

Carl Baldini has written about misogi at Ichikukai dojo in Japan. His article can be found here



Paul Goatman

(<http://www.brooklynaiikikai.com/training/misogiArticle.html>), on the Brooklyn Aikikai website and gives a clear and evocative account of the training and spirit at the dojo. As Carl describes, during shogaku shugyo initiates undertake four days of training in which they sit in seiza and chant eight syllables – ‘To Ho Ka Mi E Mi Ta Me’ with all their strength, encouraged by senior members. At the beginning and end of each session breathing exercises are conducted. To sustain this practice students eat three meals a day of a rice and barley mixture, with miso, an umeboshi plum and takuan pickles, and drink warm water. Many Aikidoka have trained at Ichikukai, and although improving our Aikido practice is definitively not the object of the training, I believe it can be of enormous benefit to us on our Aikido path.

The dojo itself is a beautiful building. It is a solid concrete structure that appears formidable and almost fortress-like from the outside. Inside, it contains a traditional and functional layout of training halls and living quarters. The second floor is a zendo, where zazen is conducted and sesshin is held once a month. Downstairs is the misogi training hall, a large kitchen and rooms where the members eat, sleep, rest and work. Uchideshi quarters are in a block separate from the main building and candidates for shogaku shugyo sleep in another separate room adjacent to the main misogi training hall during their stay. They hand over their valuables and mobile phones upon entering the dojo on Thursday night and receive them again when they have finished shogaku on Sunday.

The dojo feels as if it is plugged into an elemental, root energy. When I attended shogaku shugyo to assist (tsudoji), I would usually arrive late on Thursday night after work, when everyone else was already asleep. Because of the calmness and rooted energy in

the dojo I always had a great night’s sleep and awoke refreshed. The strength and sincerity of the members is immediately impressive, as is their kindness and openness. At the farewell party following our shogaku, one of the senior members stood up to make a speech and addressed the new initiates in English, saying: “Please come back to Ichikukai, there is much to learn here.” Fortunately as I lived in Tokyo I was able to come back to assist initiates, attend sesshin and work at the dojo. When fewer than three people sign up for shogaku, it is cancelled and the members conduct *harai* on Sunday – each ringing a bell (tzuzu) and chanting for a set period of time. Occasionally I attended morning practice – a short *harai* and zazen. I enjoyed working in the dojo and the company of the members, who, as Carl describes, seem to be the embodiment of their years of hard training.

Once members have completed shogaku, the form of much of their training is to ring the tsuzu while chanting. Although little formal training

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Photo: Milena Kremakova

Chiba Sensei with Paul Goatman (left), BB Weapons course, Coventry, Oct 2008

is given in this, senior members did offer advice and they helped me a great deal. On one occasion, although he spoke little English and my Japanese was poor, one senior made it clear to me that all my energy had to be exerted on the downward cut, to make the five ball-bearings in the tzuzu ring as one, making a loud 'bang'; my arm then rose again naturally. All effort going into the downward cut, coordinated with chanting and breathing, forces us to exert ourselves more. The training can be uncomfortable, but through it our bodies become increasingly harmonized with our breath and we can locate the source of our breath deep in the hara, below the naval. During harai, our haras and bodies fill with kokyū and the training hall fills with energy. Whenever I attended harai, members jumped up to slide back shoji screens, allowing the energy to fill the whole dojo and pass out into the neighbourhood. At Ichikukai I was always struck that misogi breathing and breathing in Aikido, and indeed in zazen, is the same and that this breathing is essential to the proper execution of Aikido technique.

I was also struck that Ichikukai is a disciplined place. The Japanese word that often passed through my mind, whether I was participating in harai, working, eating or sitting, was *kibishi*. Simply translated it means severe or strict, but has a larger meaning of not sparing oneself. I will try and illustrate my experience of this at Ichikukai by using a few examples. The training can be arduous; it is designed to facilitate complete exertion. The senior members and their example is always a source of strength. As we become



tired, we need to follow their example more closely. When we ring the bell, we keep time with seniors sitting in front of the kamiza, in each corner of the training hall. Ossa, on the left-hand side of the kamiza, keeps the pace and two members on the right hand side take their timing from him or her. It is imperative that everyone else keeps this timing and does not simply ring the bell with abandon, no matter how tired they become. Many times, as we rang the bell together, I felt that in a way the participants were taking ukemi, following the senior members' example and timing. During shogaku, senior members keep a watchful eye on the assistants encouraging the new initiates. Everything, whether striking initiates on the back or shouting words of encouragement, is done to allow them to exert themselves more completely, and continue the practice.

There is a form to almost all the work done in the dojo. From the

moment members wake up, they do simple tasks in a way that appears to have been done for years. Sweeping, washing dishes, putting away zabuton, cooking or making tea all seemed to be done in the same manner each time. But this is not restrictive. Nobody is forced to do anything and everyone enters into all work in a generous spirit. I think this is partly because all the work is being done for the community, but also because a spontaneous virtue can flower through disciplined work and repeated form. I was occasionally rebuked mildly – for laying the table incorrectly or using too much water when washing cups, for example – but I was simply being shown the form, in the same way that seniors would alter my behaviour during tsudoï, keep my timing right, or show me how to ring the bell correctly in the training hall.

In February this year Chiba Sensei conducted a seminar for Birankai teachers in San Diego. There, he described Aikido technique as a spontaneous manifestation of virtue, the spontaneous expression of a life lived virtuously. I must say this struck me quite forcefully and I realised: "Yes, this is what we are doing", although I was amazed that I had not been able to come to this realization sooner. It seems to me that Ichikukai is a place of enormous value, where through hard training we can cultivate both our Aikido bodies and virtue in our own lives. ☺

**Paul Goatman 5th Dan
Thistle Aikikai, Scotland
British Birankai**





George Heliotis prepares his body, spirit and soul

The Greek crisis - an opportunity for rebirth

I am going to take my Shodan test in the city of Athens, capital of Greece, in a period of economical crisis when everything



George Heliotis

falls apart. This is an issue that will involve the replacement of the political and ethical structures with new ones. In other words we are living through a real crisis which will lead us in a psychological, mental and structural rebirth. In these terms, I look at myself sometimes and I feel very lucky that I have taken the path of Aikido.

Aikido is a martial art which teaches you the life of a warrior and prepares you for the fight. This is not the physical fight, but the one you have to give in everyday life, with the people that you have to live with, and yourself. In this fight you need the body more than anything; the spirit and the soul ready for war. The body is the vehicle. It will go where the mind tells it to go. The direction that it will take, the quality of the path that it will follow will depend on the quality of the ideas, the depth of the emotions.

The body, though, carries more than the three ingredients: the body, the spirit and the soul. It also carries the fear which is the reflexive reaction. It is harder for the body to overcome the fear and to control its reactions. When the body is ready take the right ukemi, you have made a considerable step in the right direction in order to face the facts of life. As Don Juan in Carlos Castaneda's *Magical Passes* says:

"Only the thought to look at the unknown – to get in depth into it – demands courage of steel and a body that will have the strength to conserve such a courage. What would be the point if you had the strength and the mental readiness, if you didn't have enough physical and muscular power?"

"The patient spirit lifts the most heavy burden like the camel which runs in the desert; the spirit runs on its own desert" as Nietzsche says. Aikido, with Zazen and Iaido helps the human

being to tell the difference between these burdens that one carries and that many times one doesn't know which they are.

The constant training makes the person grow older by helping him to live through his everyday problems and situations with a different feeling, to make the mind out of steel against the pain and to construct the thought in order to be able to face the facts of life. Aikido prepares the mind for the fight against the obstacles of life.

Most of all, Aikido prepares you for the big fight: the fight with yourself, the fight of Saint George with the dragon, with 'oneself'. When we focus on the strength of consciousness in the present through our senses, we awaken the awareness and the feeling, we control our wishes, and we come against the resistance of our ego that we have to fight with. Our ego makes us blind so that we cannot see the real strength of the opponent, whether he

is a fellow human being or it is a situation we have to face. Aikido teaches modesty and through modesty one learns to see life with clarity.

Personally, I feel that the path of Aikido offers me a balanced soul, a clear mind in a healthy body. With these supplements you manage to use the negative power which comes at you and use it as a means to become stronger.

Finally, the main thing is that the crisis in Greece is an opportunity of rebirth. Everyone who will be able to realize that, he or she will come out of this crisis and start from scratch. This is the point of view that Aikido has given to me. ☺

George Heliotis 1st Kyu
Athens Aikido
Hellenic Birankai

(Essay submitted for Shodan test in May 2012)



George Heliotis, Polish summer camp, Wroclaw, Aug 2009

Photo: Beata Darowska

Psychological stages in keiko by Andrew Stones

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Introduction

In this article I describe seven psychological stages that I've watched myself go through in budo keiko. The last two stages ('Integration' and 'Wisdom') I've only slightly touched base with, but I know they are there because I can sense them. Having been involved in budo keiko for nearly 40 years now, I can also report that I've watched many colleagues and fellow students go through what look to be similar stages, hence this article. However, I cannot hand-on-heart say that everyone goes through these stages, nor that everyone needs to. But I think they are quite common. These stages are psychological stages, that is to say, they are stages in the development of one's relationship with keiko, with the teacher, with one's self, and ultimately with God (or the Goddess, or Great Nature or the All-That-Is, whatever one likes to call It). They are, to a certain extent irrespective of the development of technical skill and ability in budo practice. Because these stages are really about



Andrew Stones

one's relationship with God, I imagine that analogous stages could occur in many contexts, for example within any loving relationship, any apprenticeship, any friendship, and any spiritual practice. I would group the seven stages as follows:

Stages 1 & 2: Falling in love with the practice

Stage 3: Falling in love with the teacher

Stages 4 & 5: Separating from the teacher in order to learn to love one's Self and God

Stages 6 & 7: Learning to love one's self, the teacher, the practice and God all at the same time.

1) The Urge

Where does the urge to engage in martial arts training originate? The urge to move clearly and effectively; the urge to carve out the space around us, define boundaries; harness timing with affectivity and power; have dominion over space and time; define *our* space and *our* time: "this is *my* space – *you shall not enter here*" "this is *my* body – *you shall not hurt it nor attack it* – if you attempt to, I shall overpower and immobilize you". The urge for me

not only to *defend* me, but also to *define* me, to stand firm and strong in maelstrom of life, defining my boundaries and my space. Is it not primal? Is it not analogous to the urge of a chick to break forth from its egg? "I shall not be defined by this egg! I shall break forth from it and be self-defined! I shall punch it through!" Self-defense and self-definition are two very similar urges. If we refuse to defend ourselves we risk being defined, molded and manipulated by others. The first 'self-defense' is the saying "NO!" that every toddler enjoys when it first realizes it is distinct, separate from its mother. The urge to defend and define one's self is indeed as primal as life itself. It is surely the primal springboard to freedom and eventual self-actualization – the true realization "I am me! I have impact! I create my life! I have choice regarding who I am, and who I choose to be!"

As this fundamental urge is down-stepped through the layers of our inner neurological programmings, it takes many different forms within different people, and also combines with other urges: the varieties of conscious reasons people take up budo keiko. Perhaps we always dreamed of being a samurai or wanted to enjoy an extended form of playing 'cowboys and Indians'. Perhaps we always felt physically inadequate and want to get tougher – to get revenge on those who bullied us in the past. Perhaps we are drawn to oriental culture and would like to practise something we consider rare and exotic. Perhaps we already have an idea of a spiritual path, and are drawn to a discipline which integrates spirituality with physicality. Perhaps we are trying to please our father, or are seeking a new father-figure in the form of the sensei. Perhaps we are seeking a friendly community. Perhaps we simply have an occupation in which we are likely to need to physically defend ourselves: working in the army, or the police, or working on the doors. Perhaps we just want to get fit. Perhaps we just want to have fun. Perhaps we just 'stumbled upon it'. There are any number of conscious motivations for starting training. At this



Photo: Tim Mianne

Chiba Sensei with Manolo San Miguel (uke), BNA summer camp 2012, Bronxville, NY

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stage we are either just exploring, or already having an idea of what we want, are seeking to pursue it. We seek the gratification of our desires for self-actualization, either exploratorily or already-concretized, in whatever personal way they are manifesting within our consciousness. We seek the dojo.

2) Gratification

This is the stage in which training seems to provide some gratification – some fulfillment of our desire. We enjoy feeling fitter, more skilled, having fun. We feel we are getting what we want. Training is good, and seems to be giving us what we want, so we continue. Some people spend their whole keiko careers at this stage, and I would argue that there is nothing necessarily wrong with this. Buddha's teaching notwithstanding, I have no personal problem with the fulfillment of desires. I think it's a good thing! (As long as it doesn't hurt other people.) I think it's great to get fit, to learn to defend one's self, to enjoy being part of a spiritual community, and to master an aesthetically-pleasing discipline. These are all great things that can help and enhance our lives tremendously. We can become better citizens through this training: more energized

individuals; more sensitive to ourselves and others, and we can also become more physically and emotionally courageous and forthcoming. In the dojo we enjoy not only developing our selves but helping others, learning to be sensitive to others' needs as we must learn to adjust our role as uke as we partner up with dan grades and beginners, strong men and gentle children alike. In this way we learn to foster community, and this feels good. If our training stays eternally at this stage, I say all well and good. Already we are doing a good thing. But sometimes, for some people, something else happens too, which propels us into another phase – that of devotion.

3) Devotion

This is the stage where we, on an emotional level find ourself literally 'falling in love' with the teacher and the teaching, and feeling utterly devoted to them. What is 'falling in love'? It is when we see God in a person. We suddenly realize, that through their spiritual perseverance and dedication this teacher is actually in contact with *and manifesting* levels of spirituality, levels of being, levels of intensity, levels of compassion, levels of love, that we had not previously even conceived of. When we realize this, it takes our breath away, and we feel a devotion to this teacher, and a

commitment to practice that may even surprise ourselves. We find ourselves in love with the path of keiko itself, and the teachings of this teacher in particular, and there is often a sense now of wanting to devote our whole lives to the practice. We practise with a new intensity, a new vigor, and may even be a little 'blinded by love' and become somewhat evangelical and even arrogant when we consider the 'poor fools' who do not practise. Keiko feels like a rare jewel that we have stumbled upon, and our teacher a bright shining light in the wilderness. We do all we can to emulate our teacher – we may even copy their personal traits and mannerisms, their taste in music and food, and any of their other personal peccadilloes. Family and friends may think we've become a little weird! We want nothing more than the smile of the teacher, or at least the acceptance. We want nothing more than for the teacher to say "Yes, this is my student, and he/she is a good student, with whom I am well pleased." Whether or not the teacher ever says this, is of course variable, yet it is always our most heartfelt desire at this stage. In terms of keiko, we seek to copy our teacher's every move, with absolute accuracy. This devotional stage may last for many years, and may indeed entail the majority of some keikonin's

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Photo: Tim Mannle



Chiba Sensei, BNA summer camp 2012, Bronxville, NY

lives. At this stage we are no longer a student, we are a true 'disciple' in the fullest meaning of that word. We are happy to cook and clean for our teacher, to be an 'uchideshi' if the opportunity arises, and to similarly care for the dojo community which we love with all our heart. Yet the falling-in-love or discipleship stage of relationship will always give way, at some stage, to the next phase...

4) The Severing

Love, (which after all, is what the great teachers have said Keiko is all about), waxes and wanes, it ebbs and flows. It is continuous, but not continual; that is to say it changes its quality as we grow and change ourselves. The breathless devotional love of the young keikonin is not the same as the seasoned mature keiko love of the old master. One is not better than the other. They are just different types of love. Often however, we seek, as in romantic love, to perpetually adhere to breathless devotion. If this is the case (and it often is), the universe will always present us, at a certain stage of our keiko-lives with what I call 'the severing'. The severing is like birth, and like birth it can be traumatic. It can also feel like death. At a certain time the universe will demand that it is time for us to stand on our own spiritual 'two feet', and no longer seek to perpetually ride on the coat tails of the master. This may happen in any number of ways: firstly, it may occur naturally in an organic way, with an inner maturing of the student through the path of life itself – as the student matures as a person, they naturally realize they are in fact 'their own man', 'their own woman', and naturally a more mature, less child-parent type of relationship with the teacher can develop. This is not all that common however. Some teachers may not be particularly emotionally mature themselves, and may seek to hold on to a type of parental authority over a student, which can be very damaging. Also, in the oriental traditions, it seems to me that the devotional stage is exalted as the highest type of student-teacher relationship. One is not necessarily encouraged to go beyond it. But I believe that it is healthy to go beyond it, and whether or not the teacher or the tradition encourages it, eventually



Chiba Sensei, BNA summer camp 2012, Bronxville, NY

Photo: Tim Mannie

the universe itself will *force* the student to move on. No one is allowed to stay a child forever. We must grow up. In my observations, these are some of the ways the universe can 'force' the issue:

- i) The teacher may die. This is the clearest type of 'severing'. After the teacher dies, we must find a way to fend for ourselves and be our own master.
- ii) The teacher may tell the student to leave, for example to go and teach in another country. Or the teacher himself (or herself) leaves the country. Suddenly we find ourself reliant utterly on our own resources.
- iii) The teacher may 'fall from grace' and reveal personal character flaws which appall the student, and may indeed be utterly appalling. The teacher may betray the student in some way, and break trust.
- iv) The student may fall from grace, behave badly, and be expelled by the teacher.

In these and many other ways, the severing can occur, and be very painful. There is often a sense of loss, disappointment, and grieving. Keiko is no longer the garden-of-Eden that it once seemed. We are thrown back onto our own resources and have to re-think things. In my opinion, whether or not the severing can be a relatively gentle natural-maturing, or a painful agonizing trauma, is very much linked to how much the student has, for-want-of-a-better-term, healed their inner child. If I am still seeking a perfect father or mother to make my wounded inner child feel at ease, the

prospect of severing from the teacher (who will often have taken that parental role) may seem nightmarish. Indeed, some students may just absolutely refuse to 'grow up', and even years after a teacher has died may devote themselves to his or her memory, still as children devoted to a parent, never maturing. It must also be said that just as a student may try and refuse to grow up, to refuse to sever, similarly a student may try to sever too much or too soon – like a child too desperate to grow up – throwing the baby out with the bath water in a desperate bid for independence. This can be equally traumatic and traumatizing for their progress at this stage.

As an aside, I would say that Britain and Japan are possibly two of the most emotionally-repressed nations in the world. This means that on the one hand we can perhaps understand each other well – the British stiff-upper-lip and the Japanese spirit of forbearance and endurance. On the other hand it may not bode particularly well for mature emotional relationships, which is what 'growing up' as a student can be so much about. Certainly in my own path I did not negotiate the severance stage at all well. For many years I did not understand it. The essence of the severance stage, I now release, is a realization that what I was really seeking was *friendship* – mature adult friendship with the teacher. And loving friendship involves *expression* – even of the difficult stuff – the 'warts-and-all' of a relationship. Seeking to maintain a perfectionist idealized "perfect disciple or nothing" type of relationship with a

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teacher, eventually becomes a recipe for disaster, in my opinion, and experience. We are not perfect. Life is messy. Can we still love each other *through* the mess? For me this is part of what growing up as a keikonin (and as a human being) is about.

5) Wilderness

Whether the severance has gone smoothly or been problematic, it seems to be always followed, to a greater or lesser extent, by what I would call the 'wilderness years'. These are years in which the student tries to integrate what they have learned, and at the same time come to terms with and understand the severing that has occurred. These years seem to be often characterized by feelings of loneliness, lost-ness and isolation, and often a sense of longing for the 'good old days' of being with teacher, even if those 'good old days' were painful and in many ways not that good. Often a student may give up keiko at this phase, just as many marriages flounder after the initial romantic infatuation has diminished or completely gone. Others persevere, sensing that even though things have changed – all is not the same, and they will never relate to the sensei in the way they previously did - at the same time there is still a path to be trod, and the keiko and the student's own 'Original Nature' (their Higher Self) can lead the way. The wilderness years are like that stage in the archetypal 'Hero's Journey' in which the hero must leave the safety of the community and set out alone into the literal wilderness to seek the true treasure – deepening relationship with Higher Self, our Original Nature.

6) Integration and Return

The wilderness phase can last many years. It can be the longest of the phases. If we are successful in forging a deeper relationship with our Truer Self during these years, we may be able to do two things: firstly, we may be able to return to the teacher on a new basis of equality – not necessarily in skill, but certainly in terms of dignity and True-Self-ness, if we so desire – now more as friend than disciple. This may or may not be appropriate,

depending on the emotional maturity of the teacher (some are not that mature!). And secondly, as our Higher Self is now, in a sense, our teacher, we can now access many more levels of authenticity and truly original creativity, with which we can return and gift our community, the dojo, or indeed, create our own dojo. At this stage we are ready to approach true confidence in our keiko, knowing that it is ours and ours alone, and in that sense, it is unassailable.

7) Wisdom

The Wisdom phase flickers in and out throughout our lives. It's like enlightenment. On the one hand it increases gradually with experience, but on the other hand it arises like a kind of strobe effect – flickering in and out, initially just now-and-again, gradually becoming more and more continuous as we learn to reside within and abide with its intense light. It is residing-within and manifesting and emanating of the love of our Higher Selves, our Original Natures. It is the integration of all the other previous stages. Within wisdom we appreciate and savor the continuing urge for self-actualization – self definition and self *re-definition*, for as Buddha said, everything is always changing. We have a Self, but it is continually growing, changing, re-defining, becoming more, just as God/Goddess/All That Is, is continually growing, changing, re-defining, becoming more. This is surely a delightful process, as we witness and enjoy desire and new desire, gratification and new-gratification endlessly tumbling upon each other. A bit like being a gardener of a garden in which we can not only plant new exciting bulbs each year, but also witnesses the miracles of nature as new delightful plants and flowers emerge over time that we never even realized we planted! And some that we definitely didn't plant! (maybe a gift from Great Nature!) At the same time new fallings-in-love, now with life itself, and with our spouse or sensei once again in a new way. We 'fall in love' with our children, not in a romantic way of course, but in a heartfelt way, as they are just so delightful in their growth and exploration; and if leading a dojo our 'children' are all our students. And the severing now experienced, not as a terrifying trauma, but

as a majestic deepening and cooling – a process of great gravitas – as students leave and find their own path. Whilst the 'in love' stage is like the heat of molten lava, the 'severing' now can be likened to the cooling of that lava into discrete majestic statues of great beauty and individuality, as we and our students mature and separate, still appreciative of each other, but now mature and distinct. And the integration and return as when two old statues come together to laugh and love and remember the old times, and appreciate each other, and the deep magnificence of the whole process. And as each new keikonin enters the dojo the whole processes starting up again in a new way, with love blossoming anew in each and every spring time. And old statues melt once again and become as lava, and even two old statues melting with each other and experiencing new depths of love with each other once again. And this endless cycle of melting, melding, transforming in love, and then separating and solidifying anew, only to re-melt and transform again, is the path we take in our continual dance with God, in our dance *as part of God*. For truly as God is really God/Goddess/*All-That-Is*, we are a part of that; we are part of the glorious dance of All That Is, as Self defines Self, melts and re-defines New Self, melts again and re-defines yet newer deeper truer Self, and on and on and on into the glory, into the Light, of Love. And as the journey is inwards, toward the heart of Love and the heart of God, so the emanation is also outwards...for as ever more human beings find their true heart, their true humanity, which is One with the heart of God, so Heaven increasingly manifests on earth, and the dreams of the ancient ones, of Morihei Ueshiba, of Onisaburo Deguchi and of Hirouyuki Aoki, are fulfilled... ☺

Andrew Stones

*Former student of the late
Shihan Mick Holloway*

Pictorial Report

Birankai Europe Teachers' Seminar 2-4 March 2012

with Birankai Europe Shihankai
in Edenkoben, Germany
Organized by Alexander Broll
Gen Ei Kan, Landau
Birankai Deutschland

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Zazen and Aikido prove an antidote to Greece's troubled times John Ioannou discovers

My first contact with Aikido was during my childhood years. As with many kids at my age I was always looking for action and martial arts movies that during the 80s and early 90s were at their high peak. This was when I came across my first glimpse of O-Sensei and his art. I was so overwhelmed with what I saw that, throughout the rest of the day, I kept thinking of O-Sensei and the dojos in Japan. I knew at that point, even as a kid, that if I ever was to embark into a martial arts way, it would be through Aikido. And that's how it happened. I remember like yesterday, 15 May 2006 (6 years to the date) when I first went on the tatami in Athens Aikikai, Halandri dojo and I embarked at a journey that brought me to this point of writing down my thoughts.



John Ioannou

When I started training I remember it was a year after the Olympic Games in Athens, I had just found my first job, following almost a year and a half of searching, and Greece was still enjoying the laurels of making a successful Olympic Games and was anticipating a future full of promises and opportunities. Little did most of the people know of the storm that was building, although the first clouds were already beginning to form. Only few could foresee that far. In those conditions, my own trip to martial arts began and my training continued through the following years, with the situation in my country gradually deteriorating year after year, until the terms, crisis, default, IMF etc, started to take their place in our everyday vocabulary. Our lives started to change day after day, and the effects were visible, people became stressed, anxious, uncertain about their future, or even the next day. Many people lost their jobs and became socially isolated and depressed.

Through my daily interaction with people from my close environment, family, friends and coworkers, I could see all this in effect, to a smaller or

larger scale. As the time passed, I became aware and noticed my stance and reactions to the above. I will analyze my thoughts and experiences and try to describe the effect that Aikido has in my daily life especially in the current social and economic conditions that we live in.

From the first ukemi rolls and training days, given that I never had martial arts experience before, it was evident to me that Aikido practice would be hard, demanding both physically and mentally, and would require serious commitment from my side to be able to cope and progress. Through the Aikido training approach of Chiba Sensei's teaching, Body Arts - Iaido - Zazen, and thus the approach of the Birankai dojos, the Aikido trainee 'aikidoist' has to deal with physical (body arts) and mental (Zazen) challenges as well as to work with concentration and detail awareness (Iaido).

Body arts (either as an uke or nage) require good physic, buildup of 'total' body strength and elasticity through rolls and pins. At the beginning most ukes look like they are just trying to 'survive' nage's technique. Slowly, through daily practice and conditioning, uke should reach a point that he is capable of maintaining his awareness, and control of his centre, up to the last instant of the technique and only relax his contact to the pin.

This approach to study and physical training also creates a mental approach to life hardships. An aikidoist has a constant state of mind to judge every moment in any situation for an opportunity (an opening), to adjust his position (his centre), to improve his status, and do the 'ukemi', (as a result of an action or a situation in real life) as controllable and up to his measure as possible. In the current social and economic situation, people that train are, for me, fortunate to have this ability to clearly judge and adapt to the conditions they are facing. The very essence of Aikido training dictates that one should not oppose the oncoming force or energy, but take advantage of the momentum and change it to one's benefit. Not only is the student accustomed to physical hardships, but is

actually embracing them to improve. In times like the ones we are living, people need more and more the strength and the correct approach to overcome everyday difficulties that lately are increasing.

One of the first things that is learned in Aikido is to get up as soon as one falls, either through the ukemi roll or through the commitment in the training sequence - a quality that is imprinted also in one's character through physical training. An aikidoist may accept life's hardships and obstacles but is bound to get up and continue, a reaction that becomes a natural instinct through training. As mentioned above it is clear that body and mind do interact and work together. Physical training needs mental health and vice versa. It is a known ancient Greek proverb translated freely, 'healthy mind in a healthy body'. You cannot have the one without the other.

Nowadays more and more people are becoming mentally stressed. They have to cope with everyday pressure from work and family, as well as social and consumerism stereotypes. The current economic situation and uncertainty for the future, creates enormous mental stresses and pressure to individuals that either cannot cope with it, or choose wrong ways to deal with it. Through Zazen one is given the opportunity to clear one's mind and combine physical posture with mental challenge in a way that enables the practitioner to concentrate and 'reset' one's mind.

With the concentration on breathing from Zazen practice, gradually one learns to maintain one's state of mind and relax. One becomes aware of one's environment in a broad manner, enabling one to control one's surroundings. Slow and controlled breathing increases the oxygen and strength capacity of the body and in times of stress and anxiety, this ability helps to maintain composure. In this Zazen state of 'thinking without thinking' I have many times found myself visualizing solutions or answers to things that during the day have bothered me. Furthermore the relaxed state that follows Zazen practice is I believe

continued on page 13

a great gift especially in the years we are living and the crisis we are facing.

The above is, without any doubt, increased by the laido training. Controlled, with specific timing 'movements' and precise 'cuts', in a powerful, centre oriented and delicate way, it is a study where the mind is trained to recognize the motions for the most effective actions. In the current socio-economic conditions that change daily, it is a great advantage to be able to adopt and recognize instantly any opportunities, and moreover the most effective actions towards the desired end result. The above is completely reflected and summarized in the laido proverb that I have come upon, 'One Breath, One Cut, One Victory'. An approach that when applied in real life, it saves time and effort in all applicable situations although in interpersonal relationships, it may be perceived as aggressive and may require more delicate approaches.

Interpersonal relationships are in fact built up in a very particular way in Aikido. I have experienced and encountered many types of people

through my training days. People that train together daily, create a special bond through the physical contact, the training rhythm and the act of providing one's body for the other to train. A special trust is built up and people tend to each other. Dojo members as far as I have experienced (always with the given exceptions) gradually become a team and in the depth of time they form a closer family-like bond. Aikido as point of interest, interaction or even discussion creates a special common ground that to my experience cannot be easily found in other type of activities. This bond and the friendships created in Aikido create, in a more broad view, an Aikido community that I feel has the dynamic to become a point of reference in the difficult years we are leaving.

As it can be seen, Aikido affects one's life in specific ways but encapsulates all aspects of human nature. The more you get involved in the martial way (do), the more strengths and qualities become visible, through facing and dealing with your own

weaknesses first. We are able to train our body and mind to face and approach difficulties in a martial way. Even training itself, is a stress and mental relief and in many cases through body challenge comes purification of the mind, as it is intended, in the long term training or in a more short and 'special' case, that of misogi practices through constant repetition. There is no doubt to me that all the above benefits of Aikido as I perceive them are a result of the martial way that O-Sensei introduced and Chiba Sensei transferred to us.

I feel thankful that I am still able to practise even in harsh times like the ones that Greece (and not only Greece) is going through. ☺

**John Ioannou 1st Kyu
Athens Aikikai
Hellenic Birankai**

(Essay submitted for Shodan test in May 2012)

Birankai North America summer camp 2012, Bronxville, New York

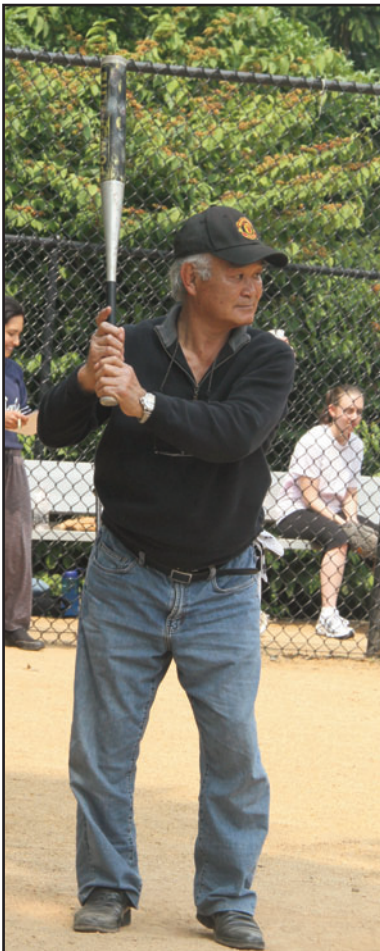


Photo: Olga Esina



Photos: Tim Mannie

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Jenny Curran reflects on her videography days

To the Members of British Birankai

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you most sincerely for the beautiful crystal O-Sensei gift that was presented to me at the end of 2011 Summer School.

As most of you are aware I have been the videographer at the British Birankai National Courses. I started taking recordings of BA/BB events initially from 1996/7 until the present. I was a complete beginner as a camera operator and it took me sometime to get the hang of things. The role of photographer was at times a bit challenging, dodging the odd flailing bokken and the occasional ukemi from a student. This certainly sharpened my awareness skills. While videoing the action I felt that somehow I was a part of the group and not just an appendage of an elderly Shido-in, who shall remain nameless!!

Now that I have retired from this role I reflect on all the good times and the really nice people I have met during this period. I have shared in some wonderful social events (the formal dinners) and sketches at our social evenings. There are certainly an incredible amount of talented people both at home and abroad in Birankai.

I wish all of you in Birankai continued success in your life and in your Aikido study. I would hope that we will meet again some time in the future.

Warmest regards

Jenny



Book Review: The Swordmaster's Apprentice

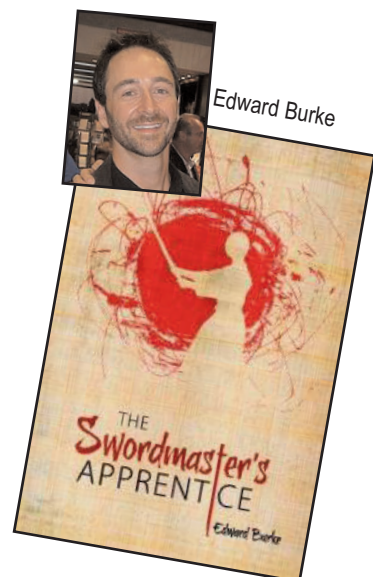
“... ‘DON’T COLLAPSE!’

He shakes me like a rag doll, up and down, backwards and forwards, never letting me regain my balance. It is all I can do to keep my feet under me as I dance around the floor like a marionette. I let him take my upper body, dropping my center of gravity and trying to stay connected through my core to my toes. My back and stomach muscles burn and my heart rate is soaring, but I barely notice the strain; I’m focused on survival...” Edward Burke

Edward Burke’s journey into martial arts in ‘The Swordmaster’s Apprentice’ gives a rare insight into a tradition of the flame that has been burning and transmitted from generation to generation. Edward’s brief encounter with Chiba Sensei clearly highlights the demands on the rigorous training required both physically and mentally for anyone who is serious about the Path. To apprentice oneself under a master such as Chiba Sensei requires courage, determination and humility, virtues required for anyone on the martial path. I enjoyed reading about Edward’s observation of

the uchideshi which showed the most natural camaraderie and tensions that appear when being forged in the fire. An enjoyable read.

**Shihan Chris Mooney 6th Dan
Ei Mei Kan, Central Aikikai
British Birankai**



Farewell and Welcome

We are happy to acknowledge the work of Suzanne Brunner who has been the Assistant Editor since our inception in July 2010. Suzanne has been of tremendous support as she used her expertise of two years' editorship of Shiun to help in developing our newsletter.



Suzanne Brunner

Unfortunately she has had to resign to fully concentrate on writing, illustrating and publishing her own children's books.

We wish her all the best. ☺

Shihan Didier Boyet 6th has decided to take up the mantle as the new Assistant Editor. A familiar face at Birankai North America and Birankai Europe courses and summer schools, Shihan Boyet resides in Tokyo, Japan and is also the Hombu-Birankai International Liaison Officer. ☺



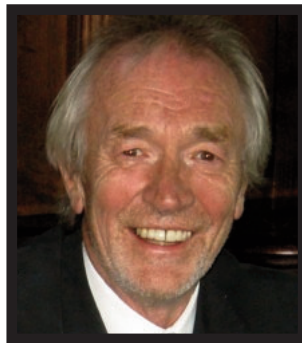
Shihan Didier Boyet

Shihan Mooney remembers

In Memorium Phil Savage



Shihan Chris Mooney 6th Dan
Ei Mei Kan, Central Aikikai
British Birankai



5 Feb 1949 - 17 Jun 2012

Phil joined the Dojo (Ei Mei Kan, Central Aikikai) some 15 years ago and became a loyal and devoted member to both myself and the community at large. In the mid-90s he hosted and supported spring and autumn courses at St Philip's College with Chiba Sensei. At summer school many of you will remember Phil for his great singing performance during our social evening.

Phil was my student, my teacher, my friend. Thanks Phil for old times we shared, lighting fires, drinking beer and singing songs. Thanks for your energy, passion and resolve, you could always fix it, you could always do it. I respect your courage, which always burned bright in adversity

you have now entered the gateless gate

So, sing your death poem and return home like a hero. ☺