

CONTENTS

- 1 Exploring the teachers' mindset
- 2 Editorial
- 4 An uchideshi's experience
- 6 Definition of a healthy dojo
- 7 Joe Curran on his Shihan promotion
- 8 Notice-board

Please send submissions
for July 2013 issue by
1 June 2013

'Young Lions' face challenge of self-examination

Chiba Sensei explores teachers' mindset

How difficult it is to keep the correct attitude of mind for one's training. It is the mind that contains *shoshin*, the beginner's mind, with its self-motivated discipline continuously heightened and refreshed as each layer of awareness is penetrated. There is no room for stagnation.



Chiba Sensei

Generally speaking, the completion of the physical embodiment of the art is achieved around the level of third dan or so, given reasonable accumulation of effort together with the necessary quality of training. Ironically, this is the stage where many practitioners get stuck, falling into a self-created slump. At this stage training is carried by inertia, with no fresh motivation; rather, sitting at ease after mastering the muscularity of the technique. I believe the perfect example of the superficial stage is when I see the

body with no depth of inner quality.

Problems associated with this particular stage can be commonly seen among the young instructors around the level of third dan – those who were once considered to be the 'young lions', the spearhead of the young generation, representing the future prosperity of the Aikido community.

It is easy to lose what one used to have without undergoing continuous self-examination and continually looking for inspiration in order to renew one's conviction. One of the reasons contributing to this particular problem has largely to do with the tendency to start teaching too soon without knowing exactly where one stands.

O-Sensei used to say, "If one starts training a day earlier than others in Aikido, he or she can be a teacher a day in advance of the others."

What a weight these words carry, expressing the true nobility of what Aikido is meant to be. However, it

continued on page 3



Photo: Milena Kremakova

Chiba Sensei with Paul Robinson (uke), BB Summer School, Bangor, Aug 2008



BIRANKAI EUROPE



Technical Director

Shihan TK Chiba 8th Dan

European Birankai Shihankai

Norberto Chiesa 6th Dan, Birankai
France

Gabriel Valibouze 6th Dan, Birankai
France

Dee Chen 6th Dan, British Birankai

Tony Cassells 6th Dan, British
Birankai

Chris Mooney 6th Dan, British
Birankai

Mike Flynn 6th Dan, British
Birankai

Daniel Brunner 6th Dan, Birankai
Switzerland

Patrick Barthélémy 6th Dan,
Birankai France

Joe Curran 6th Dan, British
Birankai

Member Countries

Birankai Austria

Birankai France

Birankai Germany

Hellenic Birankai

Birankai Israel

Birankai Poland

Birankai Portugal

Birankai Switzerland

British Birankai

BE Musubi is published twice a year in 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.

Editor: Dee Chen

deechen626@gmail.com

Assistant Editor: Didier Boyet

dboyet@gol.com

Sub Editor: Chris Howlin

winfaxlite@hotmail.com

Design Consultant: Franco Chen

© Copyright 2013

All rights reserved.

Reproduction is prohibited without express written permission.



Photo: Franco

Editorial

At the BE Second Summer School held in Worcester, UK in July 2012 Chiba Sensei announced that Birankai France has been the latest organization to be granted Aikikai Hombu full recognition in line with the other Birankai organizations in Europe. Chiba Sensei has been working tirelessly over the years to realize this objective for all the organizations in Birankai International.

He was also pleased to announce the promotion of Joe Curran, British Birankai, to Shihan status. Joe Curran met Chiba Sensei in the early 70s and in his article, on page 7, he talks about the special relationship and esteem he holds for Sensei.

The 2012 BE summer school closed on Friday 27 July, the day of the Opening ceremony for the London Olympic Games. It was a busy time in England and this was also reflected in the countries of the students who attended the summer school. There were 167 participants from Austria, Brazil, Chile, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Poland, Russia, Spain, Switzerland and, of course, the UK who all joined in the classes conducted by Chiba Sensei and Miyamoto Sensei from Hombu Dojo, Tokyo, assisted by the BE Shihans and Shidoins.

The BE Third Summer School will be held again in Worcester on 27 July to 2 August 2013. Participants at the BE Summer School in 2011 will be pleased to learn that Shihan Etsuji Horii 7th Dan from Aikido Kobe Sanda Dojo, Japan has again accepted our invitation to attend.

Last summer, Chiba Sensei agreed in principle to the addition of a teachers' course within the summer school programme. This is open to all Birankai certified teachers as well as Head of Dojos with a minimum rank of Shodan. It will be held this year before the start of summer school on Friday 26th to Saturday 27 July and replaces the separate course held annually - the last being in Edenkoben, Germany.

This arrangement will benefit our membership as there will be more senior members participating and the expenses will be limited to an extra day of intensive instruction and accommodation. Further information will be provided when the summer school details are published.

On behalf of the BE Shihankai I thank you all for your support, hard work and loyalty and we look forward to working with you for the benefit of Birankai Europe in 2013. ☺

Dee Chen

'Young lions' . . .

continued from page 1

would be equally important to refer to another side of O-Sensei's words. He said, "If my student makes 50 steps of advancement, I will make 100 steps." These words keep Aikido alive in reality in its nobility.

Many young teachers, those who open dojos and start teaching without really being able to shift their awareness to being a teacher from what he or she used to be as a simple trainee, will face retrogression, most commonly without themselves knowing what is happening.

What is scary is that it is even noticeable within the period of a few months. My analysis of the cause of this tendency is:

- 1) immaturity in the depth of the art;
- 2) retrogression or loss of the training environment to which the individual used to be exposed;
- 3) allowing a little ego to play the game of being a teacher without realizing the amount of sacrifice

one must give to be a teacher, and what is ahead; and
4) many other factors such as the aging process, injuries, family circumstances, health and diet problems, etc, etc.

Whatever reasons or causes lie behind the stagnation of progress into which many young teachers fall, it must be dealt with more consciously, on an individual level as a personal challenge, as well as on a collective level by sharing experiences and challenges faced as teachers.

When the British Aikikai faced this problem, the teachers and I proposed the idea of organizing a sesshin to create a common ground from which we could form a collective base for sharing more or less collective experiences. Whilst everything must be experienced on an individual level, only through collective efforts can such an environment as a sesshin be created.

We should not have a preconceived idea that sesshin or zazen is a solution to the issue, but hopefully it may lead the way to a shift in awareness beyond the physical mastery of the art, wherein an inexhaustible source of inspiration can be found. ☯

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

*Article originally published in Biran,
Fall 2002. Biran - The Aikido Journal
of Birankai North America.*

志
士
の
道

Photo: Beata Darowska



Polish Summer Camp, Wroclaw, Poland, Aug 2010

Photo: Olga Esina



BNA Summer Camp 2012, Bronxville, NY



BB Summer School, Bangor, Aug 2008 Chiba Sensei with Emily Noak (on left)



Photos: Milena Kremakova



EVGENIY BERMAN'S UCHIDESI EXPERIENCE: *Birth, Childhood, Survival, Death, Redemption, Oneness*

I attended the uchideshi programme from April to August 2012 and trained under Shihan Chris Mooney in Birmingham,



Evgeniy Berman

England. I learned Aikido (the art of the body and weapons), Iai Batto-Ho (the Way of Sword Drawing), Zen meditation and the art of Calligraphy. Along with that, I lived in the Dojo and did housework, participated in courses in England, Germany, Switzerland and Kazakhstan, assisted the Sensei and so on.

The intrinsic value of this subject cannot be described in words. Thus,

it was difficult for me to write this article. Over the last month I have been trying to find the right words to express myself, but every time I felt something was missing in them. First of all, I'm writing this article at Sensei's request.

Secondly, I want to close the books on my experience. And, maybe, it can be useful for someone who will wish to become an uchideshi in the future. My three and a half months in the uchideshi programme have come to an end. It was a miniature life that consisted of a birth, a childhood, a period of youth, a ripeness, old age and death. No doubt that it was the most interesting and exciting period in my life. And, probably, the hardest, both psychologically and physically. An experience of this kind becomes a turning point on the path of every traveller who has come along this way. I believe I'm very lucky. It's hard to find such a traditional Dojo as Ei Mei Kan in our modern world and, moreover, to have an opportunity to live there, train on a regular basis, travel with the Sensei and experience what O-Sensei's private students

would have felt in Japan in the first half of the last century.

While I was studying the biographies of outstanding Aikido Masters I noticed that almost all of them went through such an intense process of transformation, and that is how a wish to become an uchideshi came to me 8 years ago. That's why two years ago when I met Sensei Chris Mooney at a course in Israel and, being impressed by his personality, technique and the way he was teaching Aikido, I asked him to accept me as a student. Sensei agreed. It took two more years to put the idea into practice, because I was serving in the army at the time.

Speaking of the army, I wish to share one of my most important

a thoughtless machine out of a human being so that society could use it to destroy an enemy. The goal of the Dojo is to set a human being free from his preprogrammed behaviour and fears. He stays at attention in the army living 'through his mind' and, separating from his own body, he separates himself from the environment. In the Dojo he becomes grounded and centred. He obtains an ability to feel EVERYTHING by living 'through his body'. An ability to be one with the Universe. In the army he learns how to obey rules and commands. In the Dojo he learns how to develop and rely on his own common sense. In the army one size fits all; in the Dojo personality becomes true and clear, fulfilling its own potential.

Photo from Evgeniy Berman



Shihan Chris Mooney with Evgeniy Berman (uke), Almaty, Kazakhstan, August 2012

realizations during my period as an uchideshi – how to tell the difference between a soldier and a warrior. Protection – that is the meaning of life for both warrior and soldier. Both systems are very similar to each other – the person should obey a senior. He answers "Yes, sir" in the army and "Yes, Sensei" here; after this he is meant to immediately do an errand. The goals and methods of the two systems are absolutely opposite. The goal of the army is to create a robot,

My first training stage should probably be called 'Disillusionment'. It involved the confrontation of reality followed by a painful process of dispelling illusions about myself and Aikido. The Sensei was like a clear mirror for me, in which my imperfections reflected. The mirror gave me a chance to awaken. I thought I knew Aikido basics but bruises, split lips and twisted joints that appeared during the very first week proved me wrong. I thought I knew the art of ukemi but it turned out that I simply had been following programmes in my mind, acting mechanically instead of responding naturally. The first time that I realized in my ten-year long Aikido practice what 'listening with your body' really means was a breakthrough. I thought I knew how to attack. It turned out that in most cases I couldn't even see the target. I thought I knew technical forms more or less. It turned out that my basic stance was unstable and this was the reason why everything I did before was wrong. I realized that Aikido is

continued on page 5

a physical art. Not metaphysical, not mystical but absolutely a physical art that has its own beauty. Things start to change when you live not through your mind but through your body.

One time, during a four-hour long Zazen meditation I got a certain feeling. It was unusual. My body started to shake and then nothingness came. There were no thoughts. Suddenly the TV in the head was switched off. But this is a very personal experience and I would rather not speak too much about it. I believe Aikido and Zazen are the same. Whether total activity or total inactivity, martial arts are rooted in sitting. It has three stages: metal, water and air. It takes years of practice to pass all of the stages; I started from the end not knowing that. Though this is a common mistake among Aikidokas. I was too slow, too sleepy, too hasty, without energy. I preferred to beat around the bush instead of directly entering the situation facing my fears, which is much safer. I thought I knew what being in the present moment was. But in the Dojo, where there was no other choice but being present if you want to survive, I realized how my understanding was far from the truth. How egocentric and irresponsible I was. I was that bad horse that can only be forced to obey its Master using dreadful pain.

Realization of all that and other significant issues was bitter. It was not easy for my body as well. From time to time I felt as if I was burning out. My will power was what kept me moving forward. One morning I couldn't stand up because of my old knee injury. I was laying in my bed and thoughts like "And what now? Go back home? So

what's the point in all that then?" appeared in my head.

That day I made a decision to stay there until the end, even if my life would be the price. Looking back I can call it probably the deepest crisis I ever had. Thanks to this decision I was able to stand up and surprisingly my body started to restore itself since that day.

It would be wrong to say that my experience was all suffering and struggle. There were a lot of pleasant moments. I met a lot of amazing people and visited places I couldn't even dream of. I made good friends with students from the Dojo and shared moments of pleasure and pain with them. Together we were sweating and bleeding on the tatami and we had long conversations about life behind glasses of beer in a bar. I realized that the Dojo is the Mother. And we are one big family.

I enjoyed a great opportunity to watch and communicate with the Sensei in daily life and not only during training. I learned what it meant to be down to myself, to adopt a proactive, positive attitude to life and to never passively wait as a victim. What it meant to rely on yourself and not on others. To anticipate the future, but work today, giving my best. What it



Cleaning the Dojo, Ei Mei Kan, May 2012

Photo from Evgeniy Berman

meant not to waste your time in vain. Sensei Chris Mooney taught me how to fulfill my life right now in this moment. How to wake up and be aware all the time. And how to die with dignity when the time will come.

It was the reality that I felt with the whole of my body and the Master embodied in his every move, but it was not an abstract illusion.

My body and soul were reborn. I had to forget most of what I knew before and become a child and start all over again.

I realized that Aikido was primarily a martial art and can be very effective if one remembers its warrior roots.

I returned to the basics. This is true about Aikido itself and the combined system Ken, Jo and Taijutsu. This is true about myself as well. I absorbed the full meaning of my Russian culture through deep learning of Japanese martial art. It feels somewhere in my body and not conceptualized in my mind. This is the way it should be: Aikido doesn't make you a different person; it makes you your own self.

My personality has totally changed. I became more focused and vigorous. With my Sensei's help I regulated 'optimal tension' of my body.

Regarding Aikido, it was more integration and in-depth learning of basics than applying new techniques. One of the biggest advantages of that training was establishing a real and lively connection with a partner. And through this, with all my environment. I had to stay very alert and be aware of everything that went on around me. Despite the psychological density that it brought, I discovered a new way of perceiving the world. I started to see what I never saw before. I realized that there was no difference between

continued on page 6



Left to right Pierre-Alexis Mouthuy, Evgeniy Berman, Shihan Chris Mooney, Thomas Tam, Marcel Santiko, Ei Mei Kan Dojo. Last day of the uchideshi programme, July 2012

Photo: Tim Sullivan



A healthy dojo should preserve the flame of energy

Pierre-Alexis Mouthuy's observations

When you first enter a Dojo as a beginner, the teacher gives you a list of instructions and



Pierre-Alexis Mouthuy

rules meant to ensure your own safety during the practice. In addition to that, those rules also help to maintain a certain order, respect, cleanness, and common sense on the mats. These are all good indicators of a healthy Dojo. However, the presence of rules in a Dojo (whatever these are) does not necessarily mean that the Dojo is healthy. To me, they are only providing a basic structure in which the Dojo has the possibility to grow well.

'Healthy' does not mean 'perfect, absolute order or total safety'. Such delusion might actually lead to

the creation of Dojos lacking of authenticity. 'Healthy' rather means 'living, organic'. Dojos naturally involve a certain amount of chaos and danger. With that perspective, healthy Dojos are places where the energy or fire that animates them is kept very much alive. The nature of the energy might have a different flavour depending on the teacher and the flame of the tradition that they carry. But in the end, what matter is that the Dojo's members keep feeding that fire through a solid practice of their martial art.

With a slightly different angle, I would say that the well-being of a Dojo also resides in how truly and honestly people are training in their martial art. Here again, perfection does not exist. This is particularly important when taking ukemi, as tori cannot apply a technique (or does not need to) if the

attack is empty or fabricated. If there is no meeting, no energy is created and, if such training is maintained, this can have a negative influence on the health of a Dojo. Searching how to overcome fear is one of the key aspects in learning how to truly engage in the training. It is a very personal, long and demanding process but it eventually unlocks both body and mind, step by step. To me, that sort of freedom leads to a more true and honest practice and, therefore, it also contributes to maintaining the health of a Dojo. ☯

**Pierre-Alexis Mouthuy 1st Kyu
Ei Mei Kan, Central Aikikai
British Birankai**

*(Essay submitted for Shodan test,
July 2012)*

An uchideshi's experience

continued from page 5

'inside' and 'out'. Many interpretations, fantasies and illusions that affected my perception passed away.

I experienced the full, undivided way of life. I've learned how to do one thing at a time. How to simply do this. No matter what. Make the dishes. Go. Train. Listen. Fold the hakama. Just do it. Three months are a very short term to let big changes happen. But the Sensei hands the seeds that were sown into me and my subconscious.

It keeps its subtle influence on me even after I leave. I don't know when I'm going to awaken but I know it will happen.

I feel very grateful towards Sensei and all my Dojo friends who supported me during this time. Their support was priceless. They accepted me and their hearts were open to me and that was what helped me to achieve all my realizations. And I want to say thank you to every one of them. Special thanks to Szevone Chin, my Calligraphy teacher. Thanks to her I realized that

the whole is the One. And there is no difference between Aikido, laido, Zazen, Calligraphy and daily life. It is the same technique from different angles. I suppose that to keep on training is the best that I can do. ☯

**Evgeniy Berman 2nd Kyu
Tel Aviv, A Mon Kan
Birankai Israel**

*Translation from Russian: Sofia
Pinchuk
4 September 2012*

Photo from Evgeniy Berman



Shihan Chris Mooney with Evgeniy Berman (uke), Almaty, Kazakhstan, Aug 2012

Joe Curran reflects on his Shihan promotion after an odyssey of 40 years

志
士

Prior to Summer School 2012 I received a phone call from our Chairman, Davinder Bath, indicating that Chiba Sensei wished to see me and Jenny at the summer school.



Joe Curran

We duly arrived at Worcester where I received the news that Chiba Sensei earlier in the week had announced my appointment to Shihan. On arrival I paid my respects to Sensei and he confirmed that he had indeed awarded me the Shihan title. Quite frankly I was stunned. The award, welcome as it was, was totally unexpected.

I first met Chiba Sensei in the early 70s. The minute I saw him I knew I had found my master. As my teacher he continues to inspire not only myself but the many aikidoka in Birankai. I thank him most sincerely for all his guidance, his care and his advice given to me over the years.

I have also considered what this award means to me. The Shihan title, has given me cause to reflect on all

the hundreds of people I have met and trained with over the last forty plus years. With each encounter with fellow aikidoka, be they senior or junior grades, they have all assisted me in my Aikido odyssey. In a sense I feel that this award is not so much a personal one. For me the award should be seen as a presentation to me on behalf of all the people I have met



Shihan Joe Curran and Iona Mooney (uke), Warwick Aikido Anniversary Course, March 2008

Photo: Milena Kremakova



Photo from Joe Curran

Chiba Sensei and Shihan Joe Curran take a break during classes in the early 70s

over the last 40 plus years.

I do hope to continue to work on behalf of Chiba Sensei and the members of the BB. May I wish each and everyone a belated Happy New Year. I hope to see both old friends and meet new ones in 2013. ☺

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



NOTICE-BOARD

PROMOTIONS 2012

COUNTRY

BRITISH BIRANKAI

Asia Thompson, Gen Pu Kan, Central Aikikai
Pierre-Alexis Mouthly, Ei Mei Kan, Central Aikikai

Andrzej Kmiotek, Shinmei-kan, London Aikikai
Thomas Kai Yip Tam, Ei Mei Kan, Central Aikikai
Eric Dadey, Ji Myo Kan, Central Aikikai

Steve Branagan, Ji Myo Kan, Central Aikikai

Eric Beake, Shinmei-kan, London Aikikai
Davinder Bath, Shinmei-kan, London Aikikai
Ian Grubb, Mei Jyu Kan, Central Aikikai
Mark Pickering, Cocks Moors Woods, Central Aikikai

Joe Curran 6th Dan, Sakumei Kan, North East Aikikai

Malcolm Blackwood 4th Dan, Abbey Aikido Club, North East Aikikai

Laura Anderson 2nd Dan, Gen Pu Kan, Central Aikikai
Miroslav Brejla 2nd Dan, Shinmei-kan, London Aikikai

BIRANKAI DEUTSCHLAND (GERMANY)

Georg Stoll, Gen Ei Kan, Landau

BIRANKAI CH (SWITZERLAND)

Matteo Laffranchi, Aikido Birankai Zurich

Philippe Baur, Aikido Birankai Zurich

Stephan Corsten, Aikido Birankai Zurich

André Perretten, Ryu Seki Kai, Lausanne

Christophe Brunner 4th Dan, Ryu Seki Kai, Lausanne
Stephan Corsten 4th Dan, Aikido Birankai Zurich

PROMOTION

Shodan
Shodan

Nidan
Nidan
Nidan

Sandan & Fukushido re-certification

Rokudan
Rokudan
Rokudan
Rokudan

Shihan

Shidoi

Fukushido
Fukushido

Nidan

Shodan

Nidan

Yondan

Godan

Shidoi
Shidoi

DATE

July 2012
Dec 2012

July 2012
July 2012
July 2012

July 2012

July 2012
July 2012
July 2012
July 2012

July 2012

July 2012

July 2012
July 2012

May 2012

Sept 2012

Sept 2012

Sept 2012

Sept 2012

Nov 2012
Nov 2012

Shihan Etsuji Horii, Seminar in Wroclaw, Poland, 19-21 October 2012



Photos: Sylwia Nowak

Horii Sensei with Piotr Masztalerz (uke) (on left)