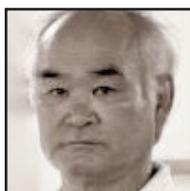


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Shihan TK Chiba reflects on the limits of Aikido for future teachers

Wrong practice is not really an issue of what is done, but rather of what is not done. That is, wrongdoing is the result of that which is not apparent to you.



Chiba Sensei

How difficult it is to teach Aikido as a martial art to this present society with its particular mentality, a society whose attention is focused mainly on what is visible in a very material sense.

A martial art is not merely a fighting art, nor is it just a self-beneficial exercise. Ultimately, it becomes a path that can reveal a secret key to open the

mysterious gate standing between life and death, creation and destruction.

The materialistic attitude tends to attach to only the pleasurable aspects of life. This search for the gratification in martial arts training keeps one from the highest doctrine in life, which is the very essence of Japanese martial arts.

With this pleasure-seeking attitude, one searches endlessly for something to gain, just like those animals who, with their heads down, continue to graze day after day. Most people are unwilling to learn if learning involves giving up pleasure. No wonder we have endless troubles and personal conflicts in our Aikido society.

It is difficult, but of vital importance, to lead students to face and expose

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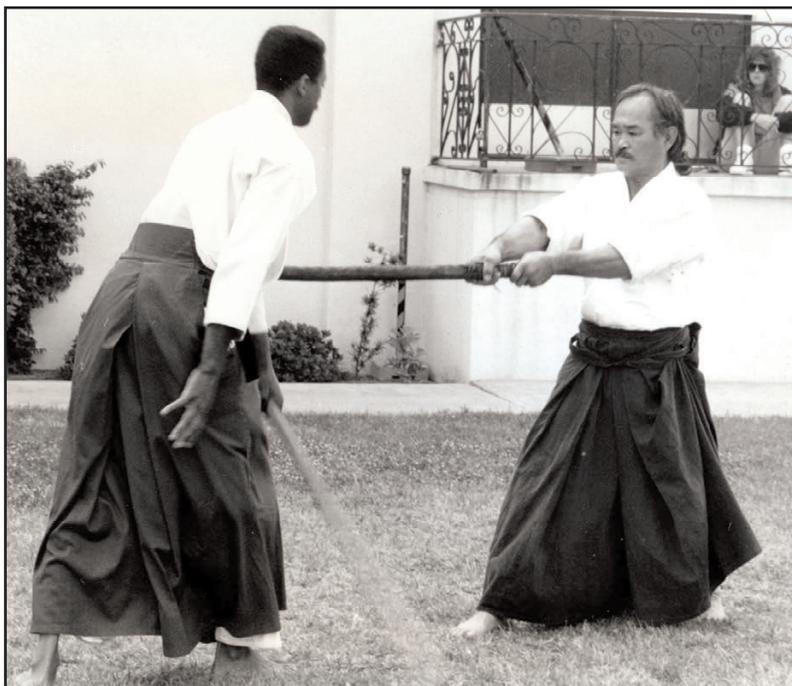


Photo: Franco Chen

Chiba Sensei and Archie Champion (left), United States Aikido Federation Western Region 7th Summer Camp 7-14 July 1990, University of San Diego, California

Please send submissions for November 2015 issue by 31 September 2015



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Photo: Franco Chen

Editorial

For the past few issues we have been revisiting previously published articles by Chiba Sensei. These are directed to a new generation of Aikidoka and as a reminder for the senior students. In our last issue Chiba Sensei's article on Timely Promotion struck a deep chord with Volker Homann as he became fully aware of what Aikido means to him on page four.

On page five another student, Florent Liardet, reflects on the meaning of transmission and system in a martial art context.

Birankai Europe summer camp this year will be held in Paris with Etsuji Horii Shihan 7th dan so Hombu, Aikido Kobe Sanda Dojo, Japan as the guest instructor together with Birankai Shihan and teachers. Please support this important event in our annual calendar. Details on pages 3 & 9.

Thanks to all who submitted articles and notices for this issue. I cannot stress enough the importance that for the newsletter to exist all the members of Birankai Europe regardless of rank or age need to submit contributions - articles and/or photographs. Sharing the perspectives on your Aikido practice and related disciplines eg calligraphy, zazen, laido etc with our community adds to the unique tapestry of what makes up the cultural richness of Europe.

A big thank you to Shihan Didier Boyet for his past contribution and a warm welcome to Jean-Luc Busmey who joins us on our Production Panel. ☺

Dee Chen

Welcome to our new Sub-Editor

Jean-Luc Busmey has joined our Production Panel and is responsible for collecting articles from the Continental members and providing the translation (French/English and English/French) as necessary. He is a 4th dan Shidoïin member from Dai jyo kan, Aikikai de Bagnols sur Cèze, Birankai France.



Jean-Luc Busmey

Our thanks to Shihan Didier Boyet for his contribution during the past three years. We wish him well in his future endeavours.

...limits of Aikido for future teachers

continued from page 1

themselves to the naked reality of life that is simultaneously balanced between life and death, creation and destruction. This reality is simply hidden within our very breath.

I have often observed a passive attitude when students are exposed to the 'destructive' side of training, especially as it advances and increases in intensity. Their progress is directly affected and they get stuck, struggling within themselves between commitment and non-commitment, doing and not-doing, believing and not-believing. Their attachment is to a preconceived notion of what they think is important in the art. This is an illusion that blinds them mentally to the instruction that is given, and they tend to lose direction.

Aikido can be learned for many beneficial reasons according to and within a diversity of human conditions. However, I am also convinced that Aikido is selective and noble in the human qualities necessary to be a teacher.

However largely popularized the art

may become in this society in the future, the one who chooses to hold this huge mountain by its base represents the smallest percentage (0.1% maximum) of the total Aikido population.

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

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



Chiba Sensei, Polish Summer Camp 2009

Photo: Beata Darowska

*This article was originally published in the October 1983 issue of **Sansho** - the Aikido Journal of the USAF Western Region and precursor of **Biran**.*

An invitation to Birankai Europe summer camp 25 July - 1 August 2015

Birankai France has the honour to organize the European Shihankai summer camp in Paris.

For this occasion, our guest will be Etsuji Horii Shihan 7th dan so Hombu, Aikido Kobe Sanda Dojo. Etsuji Horii Sensei began Aikido when he was 14 years old. He then became uchi deshi at Hombu Dojo where he taught for 10 years. In 1996, he opened his own dojo in Hyogo prefecture, Japan.

He first met Chiba Sensei during one of his visits to Japan more than 25 years ago and he had a chance to practise with him during Doshu Kisshoumaru Ueshiba class. In 2008, he visited Birankai seminars in the USA.

During our visits to his Dojo in Sanda city, we appreciated not only his teaching but also his friendliness and hospitality.

To share together the breath of '*Biran*'.

The classes of this summer camp will be supervised by shihans but also directed by the teachers of Birankai. We welcome all Birankai students as well as any French and foreign practitioners willing to discover our school, from 25 July to 1 August 2015.

Thanks to the collaboration from the twentieth city district of Paris, we'll have all the necessary space for our practice in the Maryse Hilzs sports hall located near Porte de Montreuil.

Do not miss this annual meeting of Birankai Europe and use this opportunity of a major event to visit Paris.

**Anne Ducouret 5th Dan, Shidoïn
Ann Jyou Kan Dojo, Paris
Birankai France
April 2015**

Translation: Jean-Luc Busmey



Through elevation of the heart and soul Volker Homann's vision of maturity found wings

Having read Chiba Sensei's article on 'Timely Promotion' in BE Musubi issue 9, Nov 2014, I was overcome by a deep feeling of being understood and protected. With deep emotion I became fully aware of what Aikido meant for me. Rather, it wasn't me understanding Aikido; I perceived clearly that it was Aikido understanding me.



Volker Homann

What happened then? After taking my examination for 6th kyu, I made it clear that I would not take any other test. Sensei heard my message with a little smile and a few months later, he let me go through a 'hidden' examination for 5th kyu. I was very disappointed that my will was not respected and I refused the diploma, maybe causing in turn some disappointment to Sensei.

At the time, it was more important for me to apply to my everyday life what I could learn in the dojo. So it was and so it will be in the future. What I experienced since, while obeying to this principle proves me right and comforts me in the will to follow this path with confidence, even if faltering at times, in Sensei's way of transmitting Aikido. Way which leaves me the freedom to focus on the aspect of art rather than on the martial aspect of the practice.

Usually I am incapable of moving as I would like to, let alone do proper techniques. I have the sensation of

stumbling on things rather than dancing with them. I realized, painfully and in bad temper, that what constitutes my being could also hinder and block me. I had as well the feeling that my self was mostly built on the experience of others, even beyond generations.

These feelings had already been at the origin of my very individual Zen practice. I had expected from this practice some inspiration, not to say illumination that could help me overcome my deep personal problems and thereby attaining some freedom. It required concentration of every instant and this for years.

From the Zen awakening poems on the 'Ten ox-herding pictures', the eighth one appealed to me and moved me.

One or two years later I began to practise Aikido and have been doing

'A stone alone cannot grind wheat'

Origin: <http://www.zeno.org/Wander-1867/A/Stein> (German)

so for the last three years. One of the reasons was to apply my knowledge of Zen. But I also wanted to learn how to deal with the conflicting situations to which I felt ill prepared to confront. The intrinsic idea of Aikido was in harmony with my own research that excluded all violence, including emotional violence of the kind I was unduly exposed in my youth.

I was submerged by a strong emotion when I read "promotion in Aikido can be given through two different procedures: examination and recommendation". I felt that I was being understood and in accord with myself. I had the feeling that what

I had been looking for all this time was giving me a warm welcome. Beyond Chiba Sensei, Alexander Sensei or others, it was Aikido itself that was taking me in.

The word 'Aikidoist' disturbed me a bit, because 'isms' has for me the connotation of the absolute, the fanatic. That is why I dislike the word as much as I dislike examinations. They are horrific to me, probably because of their uselessness. Thus I said to myself: it's good to be an Aikidoka!"

I would rather use Ka "佳", Kanji that means good or beautiful – (<http://lingweb.eva.mpg.de/kanji/>). This way something 'good' entered my life and I was coming out of my jail, jail that still exists somewhere. It symbolized for me the fact that Aikido and Zen was 'good' for me without trespassing on the 'good' of others.

Everything became crystal clear, both for me and for others. It is not easy but I can now understand what was in the dark: to be understood and secure is the fundament of life in society.

In this higher dimension that I often missed, I now find in Aikido the feeling to be understood and protected, feeling which originate from Aikido itself and not from the community around Aikido. I would like to use the words 'levity and gravity': for the lightness that allows me to understand and the weight that offers security; to be able to throw as 'nage' and to fall as 'uke'.

Superficiality will still burden me for a while but now there is the thought that Aikido is here to understand me and make me understand, to raise me so that I can rise. These concepts have now taken shape. With Zen you can find the elevation of the spirit, with Aikido the elevation of soul and heart and therefore the growth to maturity.

Thanks to Sensei. ☺

**Volker Homann 5th Kyu
Dojo Gen Ei Kan, Landau
Birankai Deutschland (Germany)**

*Translated by Christophe Brunner/
Jean-Luc Busmey*



Photo: Volker Homann ©

Hafiling/Südtirol, Italia (Avelengo/South Tyrol, Italy), October 2014

Transmission and system

Florent Liardet reflects on what a martial art represents



To become Fukushima-doin, or assistant, marks the first stage towards the transmission of a martial art such as aikido or iaido to the next generations of students.



Florent Liardet

The title comes along with a big responsibility, first to my master and my teachers, but also to all my *sempai* and *kohai*.

Actually, this responsibility lies upon the shoulders of every student, and a rank in teaching makes it only the more tangible.

I remember a conversation with Robert Savoca Sensei where he insisted on the urgency of 'stealing' the maximum from the teacher before he disappears, so that the art does not weaken from generation to generation.

This article allows me to express my reflection as it is on what represents for me a martial art such as aikido or iaido, on what it constitutes as well my vision of its transmission.

On the shoulders of giants

The origin of this writing comes from a reflection proposed by my master Daniel Brunner Shihan, around the notion of system in aikido and more generally in martial arts. Here I can only refer the reader back to his article and I shall only summarize the main idea: ...from the moment we say: "you



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

Photo: Beata Darowska

have to attack like this or like that, we have established a system. [...] Let either of the partners, opponents, enemy, change a comma to the agreed speech, and all the system collapses (BE Musubi issue 4, January 2012).

This questioning has often been found in the teaching of Daniel Brunner Shihan. I particularly remember a Wednesday evening at the Ryu Seki Kai dojo when I was serving as *uke* for the *sotai* in a series of movements of *batto-ho*. Knowing the movements by heart; we practised them *quickly and without visible clash* to use the words of Sensei. However with the slightest modification of the *kata* from him, I found myself completely opened and experiencing great difficulty in

escaping from the perilous situation I got myself into. To make it short, I was dead. It was the opportunity for a serious review of my work. Did I spend all these efforts until now only to build an empty shell? There is indeed not much sense in learning choreographies in a martial art.

From this point of view, a sport such as badminton would seem more realistic by the unpredictability of the blows delivered by the opponent. It is a common criticism often heard by every aikidoka: "If the attack is agreed upon then it's not realistic, and if I do it some other way, what do you do then?"

Nevertheless I could not resign to admit to this state of ineffectiveness, knowing in myself that the problem was not with the system, but rather that I could not get free from it.

Every art or sport has its own system. When we begin in calligraphy, we generally start by drawing thousands of identical vertical lines. In sport, we have to learn and respect the rules. We are then already in the system.

If we find structures or plans in every activity, it means that they are of importance.

The question is not to deny them but rather to understand their purpose so as not to be overly proud in their application and try to reach a higher goal



Photo: Beata Darowska

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

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than the 'simple' control of the related system.

In medieval Japan there were numerous schools of fencing. Each of them with its own style: *Shimmei Muso Ryu*, *Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu* are some of the best known. *Batto-ho* schools are nothing else but different systems developed from the experience of one or several masters from a lineage. The apprentice fencer has to learn the various techniques of the school he belongs to. Once sufficiently trained (in the best case), he will then join the ranks of the *Shogun* army. In this new function, he will be confronted with other fencers from other schools. At the crucial moment, if he manages to free his spirit from the system he will survive, else he will be slain.

How best to prepare for this crucial instant? How to use this system in full consciousness so as to forget it when the time has come? These are the questions that drive my reflection and bring me to write down these few lines.

"We are as dwarfs mounted on giants' shoulders, so that we can see more things and from farther away than they could see. And this not because our sight is powerful or because our height is advantageous, but because we are carried and heightened by the high stature of the giants." (Jean of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* (v. 1175), éd. J B Hall, 1991). Reassured from this quote, I found it coherent to bring my own contribution, starting from the work and education I was given.



Photo: Beata Darowska

Shihan Patrick Barthélémy (left) & Shihan Daniel Brunner, Polish Summer Camp 2010



Photo: Beata Darowska

Chiba Sensei and Davinder Bath (left), Polish Summer Camp 2009

Apprenticeship from the system

Whatever the context, training must give us strong bases. The giant we stand upon must not be weak. The role of the teacher is then essential: master of the teaching and tutor, he guides the pupil and allows him to rise.

For both the pupil and tutor, the responsibility is central and must increase over the years.

The first one is responsible for working and committing himself body and soul to the training. The second has to try hard to lead the pupil beyond his limits without asking too much or trying to go too fast.

At the end of the program (supposing an end does exist), the pupil must be able to carry on with the learning process by himself, thus becoming his own master. He imposes upon himself discipline, rigour and leads his life in a coherent way.

The system has virtues. It offers a

secure frame where the student can progress.

To come out of the system trying to approach the reality of a combat such as it may have been in feudal Japan, is to expose oneself to serious injuries. It is nonetheless difficult to be satisfied with rehearsing movements again and again knowing pertinently the outcome. *Kata* or predefined forms, must be taken for what they are: a means of learning fundamental notions such as distance (*ma-ai*), posture (*kamae*), attitude (*shisei*)¹, foot work (*tai sabaki*) and a tool for training body and spirit.

But along with this learning, a process of emancipation must exist that brings the student to gradually become free from the system.

How to come out of a predefined figure? I already had this question in mind when I was preparing my music diploma under the supervision of German Herrero, a talented jazzman.

I had then reached that critical time in this style when we are ready to leave aside what is written on the partition and dash into a part of improvisation. Although the life of the musician is not at this moment really endangered (physically speaking), the emptiness that lies before him can be really paralyzing.

To be able to improvise in music, an endless repetition of the scales is necessary so that the fingers immediately translate the melody shaped by the spirit. There must be no interference of thought between the idea of a music note and its realization. It has to be instantaneous. This takes after the

¹On this subject, see the work 'Simplified history of the Japanese sword' by Daniel Brunner, 2008, pp 69-71

writing of Takuan Soho: “if your spirit is allowed to be distracted in any way, your action will be hesitating, you will risk your life” (Indomitable Spirit, Budo Edition 2001, page 24)

The forms are like fixed points stuck in the rock to allow the climber to rise in safety. These do not however totally remove the sensation of danger from the empty space. To ignore these forms in a controlled improvisation it is to remove as many safeties in our practice. The acceptance of danger and the risk of injury becomes a requirement.

Improvisation with the sword, to open the spirit and become emancipated

Words to build sentences

Following this comparison with music, Chiba Sensei created and provided us with numerous scales: *eight-count suburi*, *jyo basic*, etc, to which are added the movements created by his direct pupils, today masters on their own. It can be interesting to stop for a moment to consider the process of creation of these *kata*, which become also part of the system.

The *jyo* example illustrates extremely well the idea of language. The 36 *jyo* basics are simple words: one attack is addressed with one counter attack. To learn these 36 ‘words’ is to learn how to use them better in *San Sho* ‘sentences’ where grammar and syntax, which are distance and timing, take all their importance.

As a last example, the six *kata*, *roku no tachi*, are offered by Chiba Sensei as a link between *aikido* and *iaido* in

Wroclaw 2009 and to which Daniel Brunner Sensei added the *sotai renshu*.

As in any language, the number of words available is limited, even if neologisms enrich it all the time. On the other hand the combination of these words is unlimited. So it goes with the sword, the body art, or any other element of the martial arts and all art in general.

The three particulars points in fencing

From now on, I take the *roku no tachi* as a base for experiment. There is in fencing, such as represented in these exercises, five consecutive parts for each movement². Among these, we take into account three important features which are going to determine the outcome of the fight: *nukitsuke*, to unsheathe and to cut, *furikamuri*, transition, *kiritsuke* (*kirisage*, *kirihage* or *kesagiri*), cut from top to bottom, from the bottom up or oblique, representing the moment of the decisive striking and *nototsuke*, to sheathe the blade.

When there is an important difference of level between the opponents and/or when we are determined to win the fight, *nukitsuke* would be enough to win in one and only movement. It is the core of *batto-ho*: unsheathe the blade and cut in a single action. *Furikamuri* intervenes only when the first stage has failed.

It is during the phases *nukitsuke* and/or *furikamuri* that the acquired vocabulary must be mobilized freely and without the spirit becoming stalled at any time during the action. The six most common *nukitsuke* constitute the basic vocabulary at this stage:

guruma, men, kesa - jodan, gedan - gyaku kesa, tsuki, hidari kesa.

The various answers used in the phase *furikamuri* of the *roku no tachi* constitute a first base. However, it would be irrelevant here to draw an exhaustive list. The main point of this work is that it does not belong to an old school with set forms, not to say congealed forms - an immaterial heritage which can only be preserved by the most faithful possible rehearsal of movements transmitted from practitioner to practitioner – depending on the situation. On the contrary, these movements lead us to get free from a predefined shape and even to invent. This changes everything and opens new horizons.

Exercises proposed for improvisation

Once the two following facts stated - the divisibility of known *kata* into shorter bricks of knowledge and a fight structure divided in four phases - it seemed important for me to experiment solutions which can lead to a liberation of the spirit and an improvisation in fencing.

The lines that follow are only a humble part of my reflection, reflection that must still be put to the test and criticized. It is based on experiments conducted with fellow practitioner at the *Ryu Seki Kai dojo*, to whom I here-with give thank. These experiments come from attempts of ‘free’ fights, too disorganized for them to induce the following exercises.

Exercises for whom?

It is obvious that what follows is not addressed to the brand new novice. Basics in weapons is necessary and the knowledge of *roku no tachi*, even at a choreographic level, is an utmost requirement. On the other hand, their playful character can let them be appreciated by experienced novices.

Functioning

The principle lays upon the realization of the *sotai renchu* of the *roku no tachi*. For reminder, they can be described as follows:

- 1 Two opponents face each other, sword in the sheath.

continued on page 8



Photo: Floyd

Florent Liardet (left) & Tristan Lehmann (uke), Ryu Seki Kai, Lausanne, April 2015

²Ibid, p 67

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continued from page 7

- 2 They advance towards each other until the proper distance of fighting is reached.
- 3 At this moment the three previously described phases take place according to the agreed roles:
 - a) *Nukitsuke*
 - b) *Furikamuri*
 - c) *Kiritsuke*

When we begin these exercises, it is important not to remove too many known elements too soon.

At first, I suggest leaving the practitioner a free choice only on the *furikamuri* part. Then the roles are preserved and we know the nature of the first attack. This way, it is easy for *uke* to fend it off and respond with an unpredictable action. This already stimulates the imagination of both students. His defense will inevitably be followed by a counterattack, which *tori* will have to fend off in turn, etc, etc. Seldom no more than two or three exchanges take place before arriving at a clear cutting, bringing the fight to an end.

Afterwards, the *nukitsuke* phase is also freed. At this stage, either the

roles can be known but not the attack, or else, neither the roles, nor the attack are predefined. Every new unknown action makes the situation all the more precarious. It is thus important to proceed by stages so that the movements are always executed with sincerity and so that the degree of fear remains stimulating and not blocking.

Finally, it can be conceivable to modify the first and second aspects of the fight, adding for instance another opponent, or making the foot work no longer linear, but rather circular, or having one of the opponents moving back, etc.

Obviously all this must be practised exclusively with *fukuro shinai*!

Furikamuri

The *furikamuri* phase can grow richer with all the Kata taught within Birankai such as the *kumidachi* of aikido, those of Brunner Sensei, etc. When the student discovers a new form, it is rewarding for him to succeed in extracting the various 'words' that compose it in order to increase the range of possible answers adding elements of surprise to his opponent during these freed encounters.

Avoiding complacency

In conclusion, it seems clear to me that the process of transmission cannot unfold without the system, be it for the teacher, to help him organize his material in a logical and coherent way, or for the student to be contained within a reassuring and non blocking frame of work. It is however equally important to learn to break free from it so as to avoid falling in mutual complacency, self-consideration, or simply coming to a standstill. All three being absolutely incompatible drawbacks within the martial arts. ☯

**Florent Liardet 2nd Dan
Ryu Seki Kai, Lausanne
Birankai CH (Switzerland)**

This article is in reality the merge of two essays written first for my Nidan rank test on 19 October 2013, and second for my Fukushima test on 23 November 2013. FL

Translation: Jean-Luc Busmey

Shihan Etsuji Horii, Seminar in Wroclaw, Poland, October 2014

Photo: Sylwia Nowak



Horii Sensei with Maciej Tomaszewski (left)

BIRANKAI EUROPE SUMMER CAMP 2015
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Paris, France

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From the archives

BUDOSAI Grand Festival of the Martial Arts
Crowtree, Sunderland, UK
15-16 October 1988



Photo: Franco Chen

Chiba Sensei and Yahe Solomon