
AIKIDO: The Wisdom and Teaching of Sadao Yoshioka

The following is a direct transcription of Yoshioka-sensei's tapes. I have only added the headings, and formatted the text.

introduction, illness

May 15, Friday (1981). I went to see Dr. Peroff concerning my recent operation on a lymph gland. The result was positive that I have cancer, malignant cancer, and I must get further treatment by a specialist. Because of this I decided to write a book on Aikido.

In the past, many of my students have asked me to, and I hesitated, because time changes, and what a person thinks today will eventually change as time goes by and they mature and mellow. So my intention is to give the students as much information as I can at this time.

meaning of Aikido

First of all I'd like to go into the meaning of Aikido. *Ai*. What is *Ai*? *Ai*, I understand, is to harmonize, to become one, or to love. And *ki* is vapor, spirit, a force, invisible force. And *do* is the way, or the road that we will travel to find this spiritual harmony. All students that practice Aikido are traveling this way as they participate in the demonstration or technique of Aikido.

It is a hard road. In the beginning, many will fall, or be overcome by the hardship. Survivals are very few, and of those who survive, many do not understand the purpose of the teaching of Aikido. I understand that we must find a spiritual harmony with nature, and the way is the technique that we are all training, and trying to master. After you have found this spiritual harmony with nature, one does not need the technique or the way.

harmony with nature

To harmonize with nature doesn't mean for a person to get out in the woods, lie down under a shady tree, and enjoy that beauty or comfort with no pressure. Being one with nature means to be able to get along with other persons, people around you, the highest form of nature put together. This is not easy, because each individual has their own mind, and you must learn to respect their opinions. And by respecting others, they will respect you. And because of this mutual respect perhaps you can find harmony. The minute you disagree with people because of your thinking, you'll be going against nature, or form a low form of conflict between individuals. And someday it might become serious enough to create international war.

hardship, discipline, humility, leadership

In the beginning, we must all suffer. Beginners must suffer learning the techniques, the movement, and being pounded around by the advanced students. A blossom has many seeds in one pod. Only a few will survive. It's the same thing in Aikido or other martial arts.

Many students have good intentions in taking up their martial art, but only the strong-spirited ones will survive. In the beginning they are treated roughly. Sometimes they are treated kindly, and yet it is a hardship. That person, if that person can overcome all this hardship, and discipline themselves, someday they will be able to lead others in the right direction.

As one travels in the direction of spiritual harmony, we must also lead others by showing them the way that you have traveled. Helping others through obstacles and hardship, learning what is discipline.

Without discipline, nothing much will be accomplished. The easiest thing to do in life is to quit. Those who quit will never accomplish much. Once you choose your direction or goal, it doesn't matter how much hardship or time it takes. This is what they call discipline.

As you advance in your technique and become a leader, you must always learn humility, and become humble so others will follow you. Being strong and wise without followers means nothing. To become a good leader you must not only be strong, you must also be kind, without discrimination.

small plants

Small plants will be stepped on and crushed. Many branches will be broken by wind and storm, but the plant never complains. It keeps on growing until such time that no animal could step on it. And they will survive the strong wind and everything. At that time they will protect the young plants. This is the teaching of nature.

teaching

The advanced students that come to beginner's class and help the beginners in their technique are helping beginners 'the way'. Each time they make or assist in correction of a beginner's mistake, they themselves move forward. If the advanced students have

this in their mind, I'm sure they'll be willing to help beginners. Here what I'm trying to explain is the advanced students or instructors helping beginners in the direction of harmony with nature through the technique of Aikido.

tanto, bokken

About 15 years ago I started making *tanto* or wooden knife, for practice purposes in Aikido, and gradually I realized the beauty of the wood that I work on. I always select the best wood and grain to make a *tanto*.

Recently I decided to make *bokken*, wooden sword, realizing that the very good ones are very expensive and hard to get. I'm using rosewood, angico, pau ferro and wenge as my material, and I find that each different wood has different characteristics. They have a different beauty, and yet you cannot say one is better than the other. It is a matter of opinion to each individual.

At this point I realize that we cannot criticize or compare other martial arts. Every martial art has their beauty and philosophy and goal.

I chose Aikido, and I also chose rosewood, as one of the best woods for *bokken*. First of all, the grains are beautiful. They are sturdy, they do not warp easily, light to handle, and there's a warmth in this wood that you can feel.

Angico is another wood that I think is beautiful. Very hard, heavy, and because of this hardness it might be brittle. Pau Ferro is a good wood from South Africa. Very heavy, strong, beautiful grain. But I'm allergic to the wood. Not the wood itself, but the sanddust. Sanding pau ferro, I get a rash, so I can't use it. Wenge is a beautiful wood, but the grain is too distinct, and I don't like that as much.

Wood has spirit, and if you run your hand over it, you can feel your satisfaction, or that you are in harmony with that wood. A person selecting a *bokken* must do this with their heart - with the intention of being one with that *bokken* for the rest of their life. And then make your decision.

In the beginning you may buy any *bokken*, but as you advance and become skilled in this technique, I recommend that you have a good *bokken*, one that you can harmonize with, and understand, and be the master of. At that time, that *bokken* will listen to your command, and protect you from evil, and overcome the evil. This is, I think, very important, instead of just having a stick to use in training and beating up your opponent.

making *bokken*

In making a *bokken*, first of all I go to the hardwood lumber yard, and look into the great pile of wood to find the very piece that I feel fit for a good *bokken*. After buying that piece I bring it home and cut it to length, and rip it into the proper size.

All this takes a lot of physical labor, and hardship is involved, and I feel that this is like a new student learning Aikido. In the beginning it's very hard work and nothing to show. But if you go into the next level where you can make this piece of wood, cut it into the shape of a wooden sword, and grind it down to size, you begin to see the shape, and feel satisfaction and accomplishment.

Many people might quit Aikido at this level, because they feel that they have accomplished what they intended to do. But the *bokken* itself at that level cannot be handled well. It might be off balance, have splinters and many waves. We must continue to work on this wood until such time as there'll be no waves or splinters, and that wood becomes perfectly balanced. And here you might be doing a lot of work and little accomplished, because the difference is not as great as when you first start working on the wood. It may take hours to take one wave away. And yet, if you look at it, it's not a big accomplishment. Only if you continue this discipline, in working so there's no flaw in this piece of wood, only then you have your satisfaction, that you have made a *bokken* that's beautiful, well-balanced, and that can be harmonized with. Then you'll be willing to be the master of that *bokken*. And in return, that *bokken* will appreciate your hardship in making it beautiful, and will listen to your command.

This is philosophy, and yet it's very important that every martial artist have this philosophy.

bokken, way of the warrior

If you look at the back of the *bokken*, or the ridge, near the handle it's wide, and as you go toward the point of the *bokken* it becomes very narrow. This is to me the way a road is. In the beginning you wander much, but as you advance and get to the point, or destination, your road becomes very narrow and straight - there's no wandering, not any doubts in your destination or goal.

And the old warriors or Samurai say that the *ken*, the sword, is the way of the warrior, and I feel that today Aikido students who practice on *bokken* must try to follow this same philosophy. Otherwise there's no use going into *bokken* training, because you only take the vicious part of striking, and you lose the beauty of mastering swordsmanship.

way of the warrior, beyond technique

The way of the warrior is not easy. Today, Aikido students must try to follow these same principles. And it involves many, many things besides the technique, like history, culture, ethics, responsibility. Respecting a senior - *sempai/kohai*, respecting authority, loyalty. These are part of the things that we must never forget as long as you are in martial arts.

take the crust with the cream

This is being able to taste everything instead of just the gravy, or beauty, or cream. If you taste the crust of the pie as well as the cream, then and only then can you say how that pie really tastes. Otherwise you're giving only a certain part of the taste of that pie, which is maybe only the cream, and that's not the truth. Without the crust, there'll be no pie.

Shomen Uchi Irimi Nage

the technique is the way

In Aikido we learn that the technique is the way to our goal, which is to find spiritual oneness, and if we look into each technique closely, we realize that each technique is teaching us the way. Take for instance *shomen uchi*, *irimi nage*. The opponent will strike *shomen uchi*.

The first thing we should do is to avoid, by moving slightly to the left. The second step is to harmonize, to be in harmony with the attacker by facing in the same direction as the attacker. And since you harmonize with your attacker, you can lead them, in the right direction, and from there you will apply your *irimi nage* technique.

So in life we must first of all try to avoid any conflict, secondly we should try to harmonize, and thirdly, if your life is in danger, you must apply your technique. And the technique is performed so that you will not physically injure your partner or your opponent. It is only to show the attacker that they were wrong, and to overcome this evil force.

So the technique is the way, and with each technique, as we study, we must realize what the teaching is all about, and to harmonize with evil force before you can crush them. And perhaps this is where the founder is trying to stress love for your enemy. Of course at our level we cannot love our enemy, and yet we must try to harmonize with our enemy, and someday we'll be able to love them.

teaching *ki*

I was told that I do not teach *ki*, and one of my students asked me that, if I don't teach *ki*. No, I don't teach *ki*, because I cannot explain *ki*, but I can teach you how to develop *ki*, and this is what Aikido is all about.

Ki is invisible, basically weightless, volumeless, colorless, and so we cannot see it with our naked eye. But everything we see and touch on earth is a manifestation of *ki* in different forms.

The highest form of *ki* put together is the human being itself. The lowest forms are material things like a piece of stone. That stones are *ki* put together and yet they cannot move, is the lowest level. Secondly the trees, plants. Plants are also part of *ki* put together. They cannot move around, but they can grow and multiply. And thirdly we have animals. These animals are able to move around and eat when they are hungry, and drink when they are thirsty, and sleep when they want to. They do not have a reasoning mind, and they do not have any scheduling. They do things through instinct.

thinking mind

So the highest form of *ki* put together is human beings, as they have a mind that can reason, think and control. The problem with human beings today is becoming a slave to their own mind, or a slave to their thinking mind.

From childhood we are told to think about anything we do before we take action. In school the teachers teach us how to think, at home the parents remind us of thinking before acting, and gradually we become the slave of our thinking mind, and before we make any decision we think about it. And make the decision. And many times the decisions are wrong, and we get hurt.

how not to think

As we practice Aikido, we must learn how not to think. How not to think means to concentrate on whatever we are doing. And all the techniques that we practice are not easy, and because of the complications and movement, concentration is involved, extension of energy or *ki* is involved, and we have no time to think about anything else. And as we practice our technique with strong concentration we are learning how not to think.

analogy of Nature

Many times you use analogy in explaining a certain point, and I use something that we already know. Now if we add something new to some thing that we already know, it's going to be easier for anyone to understand and to learn something new. I use nature as part of my analogy because we all know the habits of nature.

And in Aikido we understand that nature teaches us the truth. Only we are not aware of what nature is trying to tell us, because we talk too much, and we cannot hear when we talk. While the mind is thinking, it cannot hear. When you stop thinking you will hear the voice of nature speak.

talking in class

As we practice in classes, students shouldn't talk. Concentrating on your movement, extension of your energy, harmonizing with your partner, is a test itself. Listening to the voice of nature is to be able to read or hear others' feelings. The highest form of nature is the human being, and you should be able to hear their feelings.

sixth sense

Developing your five senses as you train is one of the most important things. Too many times people talk about the sixth sense. In the olden days, the Samurai had their sixth sense - you could not cut them from the back, or they could see in the dark. And today martial artists try to imitate or to learn this.

But if you cannot develop the five senses that you already have to a point of sharpness, how can we talk about the sixth sense? So when we practice Aikido, we must try to develop our eyes, sense of vision, our ears, sense of hearing, our hands and feet, sense of touch, and of course the sense of smell and taste.

wood as a part of people

Going back to wood, from the beginning, cavemen used wood as weapons, and they also burned wood to keep themselves warm, and used trees for shelter. So from the very beginning wood was very close to human beings. Even today, on our advanced weapons, we have gun butts made of wood. Wood is a part of human beings. Most of our homes are made of wood, and it's warm all during the winter, and it's cool during the summer.

So the *bokken* that we use in Aikido is not just a weapon, but something from our ancestors. They used this. Some people used it as a farming tool, some people used it in a carpentry tool, and some people use it in a fishing tool. A very handy thing to have around, and very close to a person's trade. And in Aikido of course, a *bokken* will be very close to us.

meaning of *Ai* - harmony

Ai in Aikido is very interesting - there's many ways you can translate it. For instance, love, oneness, togetherness. But I like the word harmony best, because it represents togetherness in our training.

Initially, when a person attacks you, you must avoid the attack. Secondly you must harmonize with the attacker. And thirdly, the application of Aikido technique, and finally, the submission holds.

So this is the *ai* that we talk about in Aikido - to harmonize with your partner. Now this is very important, I think, for a person to be able to apply the techniques without physical force.

reading feeling

When you harmonize with a person you will be able to read their feeling, or be able to feel you partner's feelings. In the advanced level, if you can feel the opponent or attacker's feeling, you have the advantage over him. And the only way you can get into this level is to harmonize with the attacker's feeling or mind.

hurting students' feelings

When we are able to understand people's feelings, we must try not to hurt their feelings. Student training is another story. Many times you may hurt their feelings, and this is part of their training, so they can overcome themselves, or be able to take punishment. Not only physically, but verbally and mentally, spiritually. Here you will get rid of ego.

Now that's very important for students as they develop, to become humble. So many times the instructor will hurt the student's feelings knowingly, and watch them grow. And if they can overcome or outgrow this abuse, they are ready for the next level.

harmony with nature (2)

Harmonizing with nature itself is being one with nature or creation. This includes the human being, as we talk about the uke as a human being, your partner, and also the surroundings, which include mountains, rivers, trees and animals. And if we can understand this law of nature, it will be easy for us to harmonize with nature.

And when you can do that, many of our problems will be solved. Because nature itself has found the answers to our problems, and if you stop thinking, and listen, you should be able to hear the voice of nature.

harmony of mind and body, mind and mind

The mind has mind waves, and it controls the body's movement. By training in the art of Aikido, we will develop keen coordination of mind and body. When the mind waves and physical power harmonize, you will have strength that can overcome superior force. On the advanced level, we are harmonizing mind against mind, or mind with mind.

meaning of *ki*

In Aikido, the second word *ki* is very important, and a very difficult word to explain. *Ki* is for those who believe in it; it belongs to the universe, and we are all part of the universe, the universal *ki*. Like electricity, *ki* has plus and minus, or positive and negative, and *ki* can be compared with the current in amperes in electricity. And mind can be as the power in voltage. And the body as resistance in ohms.

One of the easiest ways for a student to understand something new is to present them something that they already know. This

type of analogy is used to present something new to the students, and I feel this is one way I really understand Aikido, because I was taught Aikido this way.

water hose analogy

Now for instance we take water. We all know water. And water itself, I'll say is *ki*. Now if there's a fire, and the fire engine pumps water through the hose, the pump will be the mind. The mind. And the fire hose will be the body. If the hose is small there's resistance. And if the hose is large, less resistance.

If we practice Aikido and our body is tense, or we resist, then, like water resistance, the *ki* will not flow through our body freely. And like all resistors, someday our body will burn itself out.

So, to stay young and healthy, we must learn how to relax. Every body has *ki*, and how well you can send *ki* through your body is important. And the more the *ki* flows through your body, in cycle from universe to universe, the more healthy you become. The body becomes a very good conductor, as in electricity.

The mind is very important, as the pump in the fire engine is very important. You must concentrate in extending your force or *ki* through the body.

Only those who believe in this will benefit from it, because human beings believe only in what they can see, feel or hear. And *ki* is invisible. Like electricity, you cannot see it, but you will be able to feel it when you touch it. And in Aikido, a person with a lot of *ki* will be felt when you practice with such a person.

one point

Aikido teaches that the *ki* is stored in the center, or center of gravity, in the human body. This center is located about two inches below the navel. It is only imaginary - there is nothing there.

But our mind should concentrate at this point, and all action of body must be from this center. Whenever the body moves, or changes direction, the center must move or change direction.

At this point, when we practice, we will understand harmony of mind and body. As the mind dictates the body to move, the center must move also. And by doing this you will maintain balance.

No matter how big and strong a person, if they lose their balance they lose their strength. Knowing this, Aikido will stress for students to maintain balance at all times, and yet to guide others, or attackers, so they will be off balance at all times.

breathing

In Aikido, like other teaching, we have breathing exercise - how to control your breath. Breathing exercise helps developing *ki*, and all breathing should be done with the diaphragm. Exhaling is stressed more than inhaling.

We start off exhaling with a purring sound - ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh. Steady pressure with the diaphragm as you exhale, and control, so that you don't exhale all your breath at once. Inhaling will be done with control also, with the diaphragm.

While you are breathing, your stomach will not show inhaling and exhaling by motion in or out. The diaphragm will move up and down- down when you inhale, up when you exhale. So physically you will not see any motion.

take care of self first

Many times we hear that we must be generous and give until it hurts. It sounds good, but personally we must take care of our self first. Make your mind and body strong. With a weak body you cannot help others - you cannot give. So first of all we have to develop our body.

To have a strong body means you have a very strong firehose which can take the water pressure. Without a strong body, the *ki*, no matter how much *ki* you develop, cannot flow through the body freely. A small wire cannot send high voltage. It's the same thing.

So we practice our technique, our physical technique, and we develop our body. At the same time we extend our *ki* with our mind, and develop strong mind. And always with positive feeling.

strength though relaxed

Although the body is strong, it must be relaxed. A good example is, the bowstring must be loose when not in use. Only because of that, when the time comes to use the bow, it will be strong. The body must be always relaxed, and only when necessary it becomes hard and strong.

left/right, plus/minus, foundation

In Aikido we learn that the left is the ground, and the right the plus, or yin and yang. The left is the foundation and the right is the building. If the foundation of the building is weak, it will crumble in a disaster. If the foundation is weak in a person, or the left is weak in a person, it will crumble in a crisis.

A beautiful building on a weak foundation is useless, and a beautiful art in Aikido with a poor foundation is also useless.

positive and negative *ki*

The *ki* of the universe enters from the right, and returns to the universe from the left. Yin and yang, up and down, hot and cold, black and white, tall and short, big and small. All must be balanced. In Aikido we have plus and minus *ki*. The plus is to have positive mind, and minus is to have negative *ki*. Positive mind attracts positive *ki*; negative mind attracts the negative *ki* of the universe. One with positive *ki* shall enjoy life more fully, because even bad things turn out good. One with negative *ki* shall suffer in life, because they will see all things negatively.

Yet in life we must face plus and minus. There's only one's choice to lead a positive life or a negative life. They say, where there's light there's shadow. People that walk in the light walk with plus *ki*, and people that walk in the shadow, walk with negative *ki*.

growth

The body stops growing at a certain age, but the mind and spirit continues to grow. An open-minded person will learn new things. Learning is growing. When we stop growing we start dying. Mental growth is unlimited. So is spiritual growth.

We learn that men are born with three things, body, mind, and spirit. The mind can educate the body and spirit to higher levels of development. Some people educate only the body, and seek material things, and some seek only mental knowledge, but very few seek spiritual advancement.

If a person with mental knowledge can educate their body and mind, and harmonize their body and spirit with their mind, they will be in harmony with nature.

The mind is trapped in its body - this is to say that this person seeks only material things. To seek spiritual growth, one must release the mind from its body, or stop thinking about material things.

The mind that is free shall hear the words of nature. When one stops thinking, judgment shall be true. Things of material gain only retard the growth of one's spirit.

discrimination

We all talk about discrimination. There'll be no discrimination. Now, when we say that, we are already discriminating. If we have the intention of no discrimination, there shouldn't be any talk about discrimination. Now let's talk about discrimination.

We learn from nature that nature doesn't discriminate. All raindrops fall on all plants equally.

When we say that there'll be no discrimination in race, creed, color, religion, we are already talking about discrimination. We are already discriminating.

We must learn that Aikido teaches that the discriminating mind - a person who discriminates - has fear, is a coward. If we understand this, we must stop discriminating.

spirit over beauty

cherry blossoms and weeds

Spirit over beauty. We all look up at beautiful flowers on trees. In Japan, the cherry blossoms are considered beautiful, and people go on tour to see this flower in season. But after a few days, with strong wind, all the petals drop. They last for only about three days.

Very seldom will we look down in the weeds, and notice the flowers on the weeds. These flowers will last a long time, and no matter how strong the wind, the petals will not fall. Watching this nature, we must learn that seeking position and power is like cherry blossoms - it's very fragile. You could be up today and down tomorrow.

But developing strong spirit is something that people cannot take away from you. A person with strong spirit can overcome obstacles in life, and like the grass, will continue to grow, regardless of the weather.

From this experience we must learn that every individual has beauty in them, and we should seek this beauty, and appreciate their beauty.

dangers of power

In the past twenty-five years or so, I have witnessed many students who started Aikido, sincere students. They trained hard, tried to develop the technique, develop *ki*, and helped the organization. And sooner or later they were recognized, and elected to office, appointed to a position as chairman of a committee.

These people sometimes forget what they started Aikido for, and get distracted by the attention of being recognized as a leader, of having power. When this happens, their attitudes change, and this is the beginning of their downfall. And they no longer follow the straight road of Aikido teaching, because in their mind they've become a politician, it becomes a power struggle. I've seen many good students, good leaders, fall because of this.

Now it must be a good lesson or reminder to the rest of us, and it shouldn't happen to us. No matter how you are recognized and appointed to a position, or elected to office, first is the learning of the way, Aikido.

To learn spiritual harmony with nature is our goal, and anything in between is just moving forward in that direction, and should never be the purpose of your training in Aikido. Here I want to remind all students, beginners and advanced students, to be very careful, because it's a shame, after many years of hardship, falling through political struggle.

why teachers are different

Many times I hear a student wondering why all instructors are different in their teaching, and no two instructors teach identical technique the same way. Now, I myself, as a student, had this problem. I tried to study certain technique, and considered that I had learned it well. Then another instructor from Japan would teach the same art, but slightly differently. And I wondered who was right, the first or the second instructor, who was right?

And this was one of my biggest problems in the beginning, because I thought every technique must be one way - no other way. But now I realize that no two individuals are alike, and this is what life is. No two persons are the same - their height, their weight, their movement - everything is different. Now we take, for instance, a fruit tree. You get the seed growing, and say this is an apple tree. Every branch from this apple tree is not identical, they're all different. And yet the leaves are the same. When it bears fruit, the fruit itself seems identical, the same.

Now we take the seed as the founder of Aikido, and the branches are all his instructors. And they're all teaching the same technique that they have learned from the founder. and yet, they're not identical. But the end results of Aikido should be the same, like the tree that bears fruit. Regardless of where the branch came from, the fruit will be the same.

And our final destination of *aiki*, harmony with nature, will be like the fruit, the same. So with this in mind, I accept many different instructors teaching the same art in a different way. And I hope this will help new students in their learning, that no two instructors are the same.

loyalty

As we practice in any martial art, people in Aikido must realize that loyalty is very important. We must be loyal to the founder and his son, to the organization, headquarters in Japan, and of course, to your local club, or teacher, and the Federation.

otomo's loyalty

Once there was a visiting instructor from Japan, and his *otomo*. And the people of Hawaii gave this instructor black coral, mounted as a gift. And the instructor told the *otomo*, 'this is a very beautiful black coral'. And the *otomo* said, 'Well, if the skin were peeled off from the black coral, I think it would be more beautiful.' And the instructor said, 'I like it with the skin on, it's beautiful this way.' And then the *otomo* said, 'Of course, I like it much better with the skin on, it's much more beautiful with the skin on.'

I was amazed, because at one point the *otomo* had said if the skin were peeled off it would be beautiful, but all of a sudden, when the teacher, his master, said 'no', he said 'no', too. Now this shows loyalty, or being faithful to the master, his teacher. Loyalty is to have faith without thoughts of oneself, and to be able to take blame, to protect your master. students arguing

Many times students try to argue, to prove their point, or to show that they are right. Arguing to prove your point is not the way, or not the *michi do*. Proving that you are right is wrong in Aikido or other martial art, because actually, teachers don't care if you make a mistake. As long as you know it was a mistake.

But to prove that you are right means that you did not make a mistake, and you will continue to make the same mistake again. So it is better that when you make a mistake, or some wrong movement, you should correct yourself. And try not to make the same mistake - this is growing, or advancing, moving forward.

Kusunoki Masashige

loyalty

Kusunoki Masashige, in the 14th century, was considered a very loyal commander. He was very loyal to the emperor, Daigo (II). In those days, feudal days, Shogun was the leader of Japan, controlled Japan, and the emperor had no control. And the loyal Samurai or leaders tried to regain power. Throughout the history of Japan, there was a constant battle fighting for the government.

Kusunoki Masashige was a general or commander who was very loyal to the emperor Daigo. Daigo and he fought many battles, many times outnumbered. And he was a strategist; many campaigns were won, sometimes with tremendous loss to the enemy.

In his last battle, at Minatogawa, the emperor wanted him to fight that battle, but Kusunoki Masashige said they should wait, that they were outnumbered, and that the strategy wasn't right. It was a sure defeat, so he didn't want to fight that battle. But the emperor said 'no, you should go and fight the enemy', and so, without hesitation, he decided to go.

Before he left, he gave his sword to his son, Masatsura, and this indicated that he knew he was not coming back. And naturally, in the battle he was defeated, and beheaded, and his head was sent by the enemy to his family, because they respected him as a loyal and brave hero.

The family, although they had known that the father, Masashige was going to die, was grieved with that experience, receiving his head. And Masatsura, although only ten years old, decided to commit suicide, hara-kiri. But his mother stopped him in time, and told him to remember what his father had said: 'When you grow up, you have to be a loyal follower of the emperor, and protect him, and fight for him, and someday regain the crown for the leader of Japan, the emperor of Japan.' And surely, when he grew up, he became a great leader, and fought many battles for the emperor.

Now these are history stories about warriors who were loyal, and because of that they became heroes of the country. Although today we don't have to die for any individual, we must remember to be loyal to an organization. It's very important.

respect for seniors

sempai/kohai

The old tradition of Japan, and some other countries too, is to respect the older people. And especially in martial arts we have to respect seniority, and this is where we have *sempai*, or senior person, *kohai*, junior person. *Sempai/kohai* is very strict. And in Aikido we believe that the center of gravity, or your center of balance, is very important. Now if your center is off-balance, your whole body is off-balance, and you will easily fall, or be thrown.

If you understand this through our physical training, we must look at our organization, and realize that the center of Aikido, Doshu, is very important. And if we show disrespect to the Doshu, this can be considered as off-center in the physical aspect. So we must all respect Doshu as the center of Aikido. And in the *dojo*, the teacher will become the center of your training, and we must show our respect to the teacher. And between students, senior students, ranking students, should be respected as such. And once we understand this, I don't think we'll have any problem in our organization, as well as with class behavior. If all the students and instructors know their position, there are no problems.

relative rank

Going back to student position, if two students start Aikido the same day, the older person will be *sempai*, or senior. When two students take the same *kyu* test at the same time, the older person will be *sempai*, or senior. Regardless of when you start, if someone who is your junior puts in more hours and takes the next promotion test before you, that person, who was your junior, will be your *sempai* from then on. So attending class regularly, and taking tests when you're qualified is very important in the long run, because of your status as *sempai* or *kohai*. With two persons taking the same test at the same time, age will make a difference, and the older person will be senior, *sempai*. When you receive your black belt, the date of your test for promotion will be considered your date of *sempai/kohai*.

students before class

Now in class, before the class starts, the students must line up, maybe two minutes before the starting time. Five minutes is too much time to sit and wait. So for a couple of minutes before class starts, you sit there. This indicates that you are anxious to learn, and the teacher will pick up this feeling, and will be anxious to teach. But if the time comes for the class to start, and the students drag around and take time to sit and prepare themselves, and the teacher is up front waiting for the students to sit, the teacher is going to reflect the same feeling: 'Why should I teach the students when they're not interested?'. So we have to be careful at the beginning of class; expressing your feeling through the action of your body is very important.

line-up position

Now after you sit, for instance, now the senior person will be sitting on the right side, facing the teacher, in the first row. And so on down the line, second, and third. The new students will be in the last row, and if there's advanced students in the beginners' class to help, advanced students will be behind the last beginner. And the purpose is, that in case the beginner needs help, you help them, in the back row. So this sitting arrangement is proper, and convenient.

bowing, signal for

In many classes, there'll be a person that will give the signal when to bow. The first bow facing the front, O Sensei, will be the signal when the teacher starts to bow. And after the first bow, when the teacher turns around, the senior student who is sitting on the right of the first row must yell *REI!*, before the teacher bows. In other words, the students will bow to the teacher first, and then the teacher bows to the students. And many times the signal is too late, and the teacher is bowing to the students first. Now this is not proper.

After the class, sometimes the students will walk up to the teacher, and bow to the teacher individually, to thank the teacher for a very good instruction, or in appreciation. Now if one student does that, other students wish to do that also, and if there's thirty students, the teacher must bow thirty times. So to prevent that from happening, there is one bow to the teacher after class, all together, and that's the end. No more bowing from there on.

hakama folding

After the class, it's a privilege for the teacher to have his *hakama* folded by one of the junior students. This privilege will be given only to the instructors. Now if the students fold *hakama* for every black belt, then there's no value in it. So, the students must be aware of this, and ask only the teachers if they can fold their *hakama*. Regardless of rank. If the teacher is *san-dan*, they shall have that privilege. But sometimes, students overdo it, and try to fold for every black-belt, which is unnecessary. And some black-belts don't deserve it, because they don't teach. And here we have to be very careful, and draw a line. And if the students forget to fold the teacher's *hakama*, that's okay too. Once the teacher starts folding the *hakama*, for a student to ask is too late. It's

better not to ask.

***hakama* folding as training**

On the other hand, folding the *hakama* for the teacher is training for the student. Now if you extend your mind, and with positive thinking, fold the *hakama*, the *hakama*, in the end result, will be beautiful and firm. But if you fold because you think you have to fold it, and without any spiritual feeling, and negative feeling, the end result will show also - the *hakama* will be sagging and soft, without firmness. So training in folding *hakama* is very important. It helps a student develop neatness, patience, humility. And it's not easy, because we're not used to this type of training. But if you can humble yourself, and feel that folding *hakama* is a privilege, then you are one step forward, you have overcome pride and learned what humility is.

bowing

Bowing is very important in all martial arts, and this is the old custom of the Japanese. When you bow, you show that you don't have any weapon in your hands. (And also, it's sanitary - you don't have any physical contact with strangers.)

To begin Aikido, like all martial arts, we begin with humility and end with humility. Now there's an old saying, that the rice plant bends as the grain develops. So you see, when you humble yourself, this shows that you have developed knowledge.

- 1) First of all, bowing is done from the waist. The bow must be low enough from the waist that you can see if your hands and feet are clean.
- 2) Bow before going on and off the mat. This is to give thanks for good training, without injury to you or others.
- 3) Bow to the front, before and after each class. This is to thank the founder for sharing his knowledge, and this country for this privilege.
- 4) Bow to the teacher before and after each class. This is to thank the teacher for his instruction and guidance.
- 5) Bow to your partner before and after each class. This is to thank your partner for a good practice and prevention of injury.

bowing, *sempai/kohai*

When bowing to *sempai*, or to the teacher, the *kohai* or junior student will bow first, and raise their head after the *sempai* or teacher. This is to show you are *kohai*, and show respect to your *sempai*.

When *kohai* bow to *sempai*, they must be sure not to look at the *sempai*'s face as they bow, but to be able to see their own hands and feet. This is to show that you respect the *sempai*, and also trust them. When you look at their face, this shows that you don't trust them.

And we must be very careful in this, because many times, unintentionally, we look at a person's face when we bow. And if that person understands the etiquette of bowing, he will think that you don't trust him.

bowing to strangers

Now when you bow to strangers, bow as low as you can see his hands and feet. This is to prevent the stranger from striking you when your head is down. In bowing, be sure that you are more than two arm's length away from the person. We call this *ma-ai*. With this, you will not bang heads when you bow.

At the same time, you can avoid any attack, sudden attack. In bowing, your hands must be in front or to the side of your body, and your feet together. And here you will be showing that you have no weapon, or hidden weapon.

The above etiquette that I mention should be observed, and remember that all etiquette is for self-preservation.

cleanliness

Also a very important part of our training is that we keep our *gi* clean. A training *gi* must be reasonably clean. You must remember that your partners have five senses that they are trying to develop, and that one of them is the sense of smell. And we must respect your partner's sense of smell. Also, it's unsanitary if your body smells dirty.

Our body must be washed with soap and water every day. Our body's like a mirror; it reflects our mind. So sometimes a dirty *gi* or dirty body reflects a dirty mind. If you understand this, then we have to be very careful that we try to show others that our mind is clean. Then we must keep our body clean, and also our *gi* clean.

A *gi* should be washed at least once a week. Some students don't wash their *gi* for many weeks, or months, to show that they're training hard, but this is laziness. You probably train hard, but you're also lazy. You don't want to wash it. So remember, a dirty *gi* doesn't show that you're training hard.

clean mind

It's easy to wash your *gi* and body with soap and water, but we cannot wash our mind with soap and water. So we must mentally try to get rid of bad thinking. This is washing the mind before it settles, getting rid of the bad thinking. Meditation in this area will be a great help. There is an old saying that "before you criticize others' dirty feet, first check your own."

We must remember that we are immune to our own body odor or bad breath - we cannot smell our own. And so it's very hard to say that your *gi* is smelly. But if you wash it, you know it's not going to be smelly to others. This is an area where we have to be very careful, because unintentionally, we might hurt others.

dojo, front of

Now in the front of the *dojo*, the front will be the farthest from the front entrance in any room. This will be the front wall or section of the *dojo*. And O Sensei's picture, Doshu's picture, or the mirror, should be at the front of the *dojo*, farthest from the front door.

mirror

Now the mirror in Aikido is always round. Roundness represents harmony, or nothingness, zero. Because the mirror is empty, we can see the true reflection. Only when the mirror is clean will we be able to see the truth. If the mirror is dirty, no matter who stands before the mirror, that person's reflection will show that their face is dirty. So the true image has to have a clean mirror, and the mirror should be wiped free of dust everyday.

And this will remind the student that our mind is the same as the mirror. If our mind is empty, it will reflect the truth, and if the mind is clean, every person that you see will be clean. If the mind is dirty, every person you see will be dirty. So in Aikido we learn that a circle has a beginning and no end. And in harmonizing with nature, we have a beginning, and there's no end.

harmony with nature (3)

Harmonizing with nature. Many times people believe that nature is the natural - trees, mountains, the beach, the ocean, this is nature. But the highest form in nature is the human being. We're the highest form of animal on earth itself. And to harmonize with nature, what we are talking about is everything that's on earth. And to harmonize with another person is very important. It's easy to harmonize with mountains, trees, rivers - but to harmonize with another person is not easy.

Now it's in this area that in Aikido we must try to harmonize with our partners as we practice. In all the movement, physical movement, we try to harmonize. Beyond the physical movement will be the mind, the harmony with the opponent's mind, and beyond that will be training in trying to harmonize with a spiritual thing, with another person.

When you can harmonize with another person, or being, probably you'll be one with nature, because trees and mountains don't talk back - there's no problem there. People who lie down under the shady tree and say they're in harmony with nature are making a big mistake. Actually, they're just lazy people who want to rest.

punctuality

Punctuality is another area that I'd like to cover. Students and teachers should be on time for classes. To be late without cause is to demonstrate lack of enthusiasm. The teacher will conduct class with enthusiasm, students will learn with enthusiasm. 'If the source is dirty, the pool will never be clean.' This is an old saying.

Punctuality is, in a way, our timing. If you lack timing in an emergency, it might cost your life. Being on time in self-defense is most important. All of our techniques in Aikido depend on timing. Timing is coordination of mind and body. And training of mind and body must be twenty-four hours a day. Here we must understand that being prompt in appointments, attending classes, is training of the mind. And because of this discipline, someday you might be able to protect yourself from harm.

late for class

Any student who is late, tardy for class, must leave the *dojo* as soon as class is over. Now this action shows that you are sorry for being late, and that you are very busy - it could be work, or other things - but to show that you are sorry, you should leave the class as soon as the class is over.

Any student who is late for class must ask the instructor for permission to get on the mat. This is a custom. You cannot just enter a *dojo* and practice - you must approach the instructor and ask permission to participate in class.

Any student who wants to leave the *dojo* before class is over, must also have permission from the instructor. A student leaving class in an emergency, without the teacher's approval, cannot come back to class until such time as the teacher forgives them for that bad etiquette. Leaving the *dojo* without permission from the instructor is to say that you don't want to learn anymore from such an instructor, because his instruction is not good.

Now you don't want to give this impression to the instructor, so every student that leaves in an emergency, before the class is over, should explain the situation to the instructor, and get permission to leave. No instructor will stop a student from leaving a *dojo*.

guest instructor etiquette

Any guest instructor must be compensated for his service. Whenever a *dojo* invites a guest instructor, they must see that his transportation is taken care of, and also, after class, that his entertainment is taken care of. It doesn't have to be expensive, but whenever a guest instructor is invited to a *dojo*, be sure to entertain them for a few minutes, or if possible, an hour.

Now this is to show the instructor that you are satisfied with his instruction. At no time will you drive the instructor home right after class - this is insulting to the guest instructor. A simple coffee or tea will be served - this is good enough.

***dojo* layout**

Now I want to talk about *dojo*. A *dojo* is a place to find enlightenment. It could be any kind of training. And because of this we must be very careful how we dress ourselves. It is improper to have any student walking into a *dojo* with shorts. They must have proper *gi*, training *gi*, *keiko gi*.

Now in the *dojo*, the front of the *dojo* will be furthest from the front door, on the opposite side from the front door. And that area will be considered the front. If you have a(n American) flag, or O Sensei's picture, it should be at the front of the *dojo*.

Students should be sitting *seiza* a few minutes before class starts. This is to show the instructor that you are all there, enthusiastic and waiting for instruction. The front row will be the senior students, right to left. The most senior student will be sitting in the front row, at the first right slot. Junior students will be to their left, and so on, down the line.

left side

From olden days, the left side was considered the weak side for the Japanese. The warriors would draw their swords from left to right, and though they could easily protect the right side, it was very difficult to protect their left. So their assistant would always be on their left, to protect the weak side. From the olden days, Samurai *kohai* have protected the weak side of the *sempai*.

late for class, instructor

If at any time the instructor is late for class due to an emergency, the senior student will immediately start the exercise. And if the instructor has not arrived, the highest ranking student will conduct the class, with no second thoughts.

picture taking

In taking souvenir pictures, group pictures, the guest instructor will always be seated in the center, first row. The senior instructor will be to his left, second in line to his right, third, two down to his left, fourth, two down to his right, and so on down the line. The *sempai* will be in the front rows, and the *kohai* will be in the back rows.

social/business gathering

Whenever you have a social or business gathering, the head instructor must be seated farthest from the front door, or the head table should be farthest from the front door. This is to protect the leaders from intruders.

***dojo* attendance away from home**

Whenever you travel, or arrange travel for Aikido purposes, we must remember that the first *dojo* you attend is the host *dojo*, or the *dojo* that you have made arrangements with.

Suppose you go to Japan. The first *dojo* you should attend will be headquarters, Hombu *dojo*, in Tokyo. From there, you may attend any other classes, it's not important who's first. If you go to the mainland, and the host *dojo* is Chicago, you must go to that *dojo* first, before you can attend any branch of that *dojo*. Now this is etiquette.

junior guest instructor

If you are a junior instructor at any *dojo* you have been invited to, and you are asked to conduct classes, first of all you must refuse in respect to the senior instructor at that *dojo*. But if the senior instructor insists that you help and teach, then you may do so. But at no time should you just go ahead and teach Aikido in an area where there's a senior instructor. This is bad manners.

bad etiquette

visiting young teacher

Once I was home and I had a phone call from the Central YMCA, and there was an Aikidoist that called me and asked if I could pick him up, because he wished to practice Aikido. So I went down to the YMCA, and I looked around for this person, and he wasn't around. And I saw this guy drinking coffee and eating a hamburger, and I asked him if by any chance he was an Aikido member, and he said "yeah". And he just got in my car with the coffee and hamburger, and sat down like he was some top-ranking instructor. So I told him to get rid of the coffee.

After traveling a few minutes he said "Well, what do you want me to teach tonight?" This attitude is ridiculous - the first time I came across anybody - and this person was only about college age, and he came to Hawaii and he thought Hawaii was maybe still in its old grass shack time, and he asked me what he should teach. Very difficult and embarrassing.

another case of bad etiquette

hotel pickup

There's another incident. This person from Japan, a young boy. He called me and said he's at the Kobayashi Hotel, can I pick him up. So I went at the scheduled time and looked in the lobby and I couldn't find anybody. So after waiting for a few minutes after the appointed time, I left the place and went to the YMCA to practice. Then he came to the YMCA and said he was waiting for me and how come I didn't pick him up? I told him that I went to the lobby looking for him, and he said "No, I was in my room, how come you didn't come and ask for me?" Now this kind of stuff is ridiculous, and he was a young kid too.

I don't want any of my students to do things like that. If you are supposed to meet someone in a hotel, at least be in the lobby before the scheduled time, and wait for you host, or whoever is going to come and pick you up. You don't stay in your room and expect them to come and get you.

recent example

Now recently I had two guests from Chicago. They stayed in their room, and expected me to come and pick them up, made me wait in the lobby. This was a bad start, and from there on the feeling is not as good as it should have been. And yet I cannot bring up things like that, because you spoil the atmosphere, and it looks small on my part to say things like that. After all, they're my friends, so I'll overlook that. No matter how close you are with another person as an Aikido member - you can say you're very close friends - etiquette is etiquette. The way of Aikido training cannot be changed. The respect for seniority still holds, and all the etiquette involved in training still holds.

friendship/etiquette

You cannot take advantage of friendship, because this is the beginning of the breaking apart of friendship. In Aikido we learn that we must treasure our friends, that it's very hard to find good, sincere friends. But when you start taking advantage of friendship, and overlooking etiquette or common sense, then the tie between two friends is gradually going to be untied. And you're going to have to be very careful - the closer you treasure them the more - and show all respect that's necessary.

non-Aikido friends

Now friends that are not in Aikido are another story. They don't know all the etiquette, and they don't have discipline. So you cannot expect them to be like Aikido students, and you can overlook their mistakes, because they're not in training.

twenty-four-hour training

Now Aikido students are in training, and their training is twenty-four hours a day. If you consider this, outside of the *dojo*, outside of the training hall, if they make a mistake, they should be corrected. This is what we mean by twenty-four hours. You cannot just practice Aikido in the *dojo*, follow other disciplines, and as soon as you step out of the door, you forget all that training.

Then I don't see why a person goes into Aikido training, because Aikido is not like other sports. It's going to be involving not only your body, but the mind and spirit, and especially if you're talking about the spiritual training it's not going to be only in the *dojo*. Because of this it's very difficult for us to understand, because sometimes out of the training hall, you become your old self. But gradually you become aware of your mistakes, and then improve yourself, and someday I'd like to see all Aikidoists follow the do, the way, of spiritual oneness. This way, I think, some of us will someday find it. But if you're going to practice Aikido only two or four hours a week, probably it's only a hobby, and you won't be able to understand what the founder is trying to teach us.

friends, lecturing

Basically, I enjoy friends. I hate to give them lectures and correct their mistakes. But if I don't do that, who will? I have a responsibility that as instructor, whenever I see a mistake I should correct it. And by doing that, the student will improve, and someday they will become a good instructor. And at that time they know most of the etiquette, and how to behave. Now if we don't have this type of training, someday Aikido in Hawaii will lack discipline, and people will not respect Hawaii Aikido.

my teaching

As far as I am teaching, and as long as I am teaching, I like to teach and pass all my knowledge to the student, not only certain parts. And when I do that, I mean business. I'm not joking around, and I expect the students to learn seriously. Otherwise I waste my breath and time.
