

Edited by Chelsey Friedmann

Continuing
by Peter Jaros

I've been practicing with NU Aikido over three years now, and I have noticed a recurring pattern on the mats at Blomquist. Each quarter, sometime around midterm, the number of people on the mat begins to thin out. Even the remainder starts to look a little more harried and hollow-eyed, and the number of wrenched elbows and twisted knees starts to increase. Eventually, classes with only two or three students become more common, and Mazza Sensei starts to send out emails enjoining us all to get out there and practice regularly, and with luck (with good ki extension, I mean) manages to draw out a few more people per class. The small crowds who gather agree that the training is good, but even they look a bit worn as they stack the mats up after class.

Most of us are students, after all, so the pervasive stress in the air, synchronized with the breakneck pace of the quarter, may not come as a surprise. The stress creeps in, pushing out the time we have for peripheral activities like Aikido, right?

Maybe not. As my own external stresses have increased (and judging from the expressions I get when I ask everyone else how school is going, this is pretty universal), I certainly find that my desire to go to Aikido shrinks. And when I do go, the normal demands of class—keeping focused on the technique at hand, attacking with energy and intent, falling safely—are more difficult. After even an hour of class, I feel beat and ready to leave. But during the second hour something happens. If my body is tired enough, I can't muscle through the tough spots. I can't rely on absorbing a new throw by just sitting and passively watching Sensei. Rather, my Aikido, which is normally supplemented by whatever muscular force and spare energy I can muster, now relies almost completely on keeping centered and extended.

Something amazing has been happening in the last fifteen or so minutes of class in these harsh midterm weeks: I've witnessed everyone's Aikido getting more open, more energetic, more responsive, not despite being physically tired but as a result of working through that tiredness. Such "working through" doesn't

involve gritting your teeth and pushing blindly. As you have probably known since your first day on the mat, gritting teeth and pushing blindly is not Aikido. Aikido, of course, is an art of “matching ki,” using your timing and motion to integrate with an attack. That matching is not only matching with your opponent’s body; it’s also matching with your own. Responding with attention and intent to whatever the world throws at you—even when that includes your own exhausted flesh—that’s Aikido. The work we do on the mat is training that prepares us for real-life situations. But training itself (and the way we fit it into our schedules) is also a real-life situation.

I have noticed recently that we’ve been getting better at stacking the mats. After two hard hours of Aikido, you can’t push through with strength—very little is left. But you can keep your mind pliable, responsive and focused—the quality called zanshin (continuing mind)—in Japanese. In the attention given to piling mats at the end of class you can see this tranquility, or its lack. And after a hard evening, it can be satisfying to see that our dojo’s name, Zanshinkan, actually means something.



Chowa

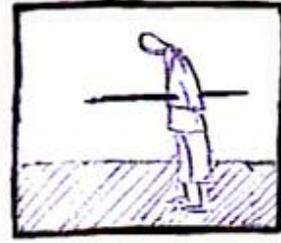
by John Ferrer

Harmony. Chowa (“choe wah”), sometimes just “wa,” is a singularly meaningful concept in the practice of Aikido. Both O-sensei and his son, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, routinely translated Aikido as “the way of harmony with ki.”

When we practice Aikido, we are practicing to harmonize ki--to blend with energy of the attack. We practice also to unify the mind and body through ki and kokyu. Beyond practice, chowa extends to the way in which we interact with others and blend with the flow of our environment. Of harmony, O-sensei wrote,

*Aiki is the power of harmony,
Of all beings, all things working together.
Relentlessly train yourself--
Followers of the Way.*

AIKIDO
ADAM WEST STYLE



BY JANE SOLOMON

The History of Aikido Around the World

Part I: Japan

by Brendon Dusel

This article is the first part in a three-part series tracing the history of Aikido from the Founder to our club here in Evanston.

It concerns the Founder and the origins of Aikido in 19th Century Japan.

Aikido began with a man called Morihei Ueshiba (whom we call O'sensei), who was born in Japan on December 14th, 1883. As a boy he witnessed his father's political persecution at the hand of violent gangs, which probably influenced both his decision to pursue martial training and the pacifist direction in which he would take it. At 19, after a few years of confusion regarding his future, he began intensive training in Jujitsu, sword and spear techniques, and also Judo. While he worked to progress in his training he also fought against his body, which was plagued by frequent illness throughout his life. Though ill health and a stint in the army interrupted his training, he progressed quickly and received instruction from some of the great Jujitsu masters of the time: most notably the dynamic and severe Sokaku Takeda, with whom he developed a long and increasingly troubled relationship.

In the 1920s, on the way to see his dying father, Ueshiba encountered 'Omotokyo', a new form of Shintoism. He dedicated the next seven years of his life to it, including a very ill-fated trip to establish a utopian colony in Manchuria and Mongolia, during which he nearly lost his life. At the urging of prominent Japanese military and government officers—who had intervened to get him out of Mongolia—he transferred to Tokyo in 1927. Admiral Isamu Takeshita was a proponent of Ueshiba's skill and style, introducing it to government officials and the social elite, many of whom adopted it and trained in it regularly. (Incidentally, in 1904 Admiral Takeshita acted as the go-between for President Theodore Roosevelt's attempts to bring Jujitsu instruction to America). Though Ueshiba had left the Omoto group to go to Tokyo, his association with the Omoto religion and its founder Onisaburo Deguchi did not end. In fact, the Omoto religion became the first conduit for disseminating Ueshiba's style of jujitsu to the public at large, and provided many of his students of that era. They assisted him in establishing a Dojo in Tokyo at which he taught for 11 years (now the site of the current Aikikai Hombu Dojo and Aikikai Headquarters). This was called the 'Kobukan' period after the Dojo Ueshiba founded, and during this time he rubbed shoulders with many important figures in Japanese society. He also taught at many of the military academies and kept an exhausting schedule moving in and around Tokyo. The Omoto group founded as many as 75 Dojos throughout Japan during this period and even a few in occupied Manchuria and Korea – the first steps Ueshiba's teachings would take from their native Japan. From his time with the Omoto group until the mid 1930s Ueshiba was a teacher of what was called 'Daito-ryu Aikijujutsu', a form of Jujitsu headed by Sokaku Takeda; however, he gradually grew

distant from his teacher Takeda due to his deepening spiritual commitment. Financial disputes and philosophical issues separated Ueshiba from Daito-ryu and he began referring to his art as 'Aiki-Budo'. He gained tremendous popularity within certain circles of Japanese society at this time, most notably the military.

Then in December 1935 the military government raided Omoto property and repressed the religion, accusing it of affronting the dignity of the Emperor. Shortly thereafter Ueshiba retreated to relative isolation, where he passed the second World War meditating, farming and developing his 'Aiki-Budo' into Aikido as we have it today. During this time, his son, Kisshomaru, oversaw the Tokyo Dojo and protected it from the ravages of war. Immediately after the war, conditions for Aikido worsened. The climate of the American occupation was not conducive to the study of martial arts, even forbidding their practice, and the Dojo temporarily functioned as a refugee center.

Following the occupation Kisshomaru Ueshiba worked to popularize his father's now perfected style in depressed post-war Japan. He persuaded his father and senior instructors to demonstrate publicly at stores. He published the first of many books in 1957 which served to make Aikido a household word in Japan. Through his efforts the tradition of Aikido was codified and set down for future generations.

Kisshomaru Ueshiba, along with the great disciples of O'sensei, Kenji Tomiki, Minoru Mochizuki, Gozo Shioda, and Koichi Tohei, would eventually be responsible for promoting Aikido around the world through the efforts of their respective organizations. Even before the death of O'sensei, Aikido was developing into the many styles we see today. Each disciple took his distinct style with him into the world. I will save until next issue the proliferation of these groups. For now, let us consider a quote from O'sensei upon his arrival in Hawaii in 1961: "I have come to Hawaii in order to build a 'silver bridge.' Until now, I have remained in Japan, building a 'golden bridge' to unite Japan, but henceforward, I wish to build a bridge to bring the different countries of the world together through the harmony and love contained in Aikido. I think that aiki, offspring of the martial arts, can unite the people of the world in harmony, in the true spirit of budo, enveloping the world in unchanging love."

Why Kill Bill Got on My Nerves by Tom Worsnopp

The more I think about Aikido, the more I find that the most appealing things about it - how it makes me feel more self-aware, more balanced, more centered, and more confident - are common to all martial arts. I also find that Aikido feels less confrontational than other martial arts. I suspect, however, that this is a misconception on my part, and a common thread in all martial arts is that the best way to win a fight is to avoid the fight in the first place. So, when it comes down to it, I'm not sure if there are any fundamental differences between the various martial arts, or, for that matter, between a martial art and any other activity. It's really just a mindset, and you can have that mindset whether you are decapitating an opponent on a battlefield - decked out in full samurai regalia, of course - or playing chess - also in full samurai regalia, if you wish, but it's not gonna score you any points.

With this in mind, I can't help but feel a real sense of shame when watching a movie like Kill Bill. Uma Thurman clearly lacked the mindset of someone wielding a samurai sword (and if that was the point, then shame on me for missing it - I am, however, dubious). She's unbalanced and not centered in any fight scene. It's all camera work and special effects. She probably spent a week, if that long, practicing how to appear like she wouldn't emancipate one of her own limbs from the rest of her body if she were wielding a real sword. And that's pretty much what it looks like when she's facing off against the Crazy 88s.

Contrast Uma's performance with any by Jet Li to see the difference. And admittedly Jet Li's performances are choreographed to the max, but so was Uma's. Jet Li moves like he fully grasps the capabilities of his body: like a high-performance jet fighter, operating on the edge of stability. He clearly has the right mindset to wield lethal weapons...a mindset that will probably protect him from ever having to do so.

That mindset is the reason I am studying Aikido. I want to gain an understanding of my body. I want to regain my sense of awareness of myself and my surroundings. ~~And with my newfound ninja-like awareness, I will then be able to complete my plans for world domination.~~



The Training Principle by Luke Griffiths



To some extent, everyone has a flawed view about the way their brain works. We like to use the analogy of a computer to understand the mind. A computer works by a straightforward process. It has an existing set of instructions, to which it adds data provided by the user, processes the data, and spits out a result. The part of the mind said to closely resemble this behavior is the intellect. It has a previous understanding of the way things are and a set of sensory data about current circumstances, integrated to make decisions. Just like a computer, whose programming can be changed by adding data, so too does the intellect constantly update its understanding. But this is as far as the analogy can go.

To change a computer's programming, you simply enter new instructions to be stored in memory and they become part of what the computer is. The intellect is slightly different. Sometimes we learn a fact, but later can't retrieve it from the intellect's set of understanding; we forget. To remember, we have to experience the fact until it registers and becomes a part of our programming. This condition indicates the completely different architecture that underlies your mind compared to a computer. A computer is built of silicon and plastic, and stores its information by flipping the charge to an all-or-nothing extent on little magnetic blocks. It has a single chain of commands being processed at all times, and never 'forgets'. But your brain is built of squishy interconnected cells that store information by subtly changing the 'strength' of the connections. The brain works by bouncing multiple voltage potential signals in branching patterns simultaneously throughout the entire network. It frequently forgets in order to prioritize processing of things that 'matter' to it.

This united collection of cells composes the neural network. It can be built from wires and silicon and used to solve certain problems impossible for computers. Builders of such a system realize that its behavior is unlike that of a traditional computer. Neural networks can be trained to recognize certain patterns and emit others. The input is an information set of parallel signals across all cells. They are allowed to interact with one another according to the various strengths of their connections and to produce a final result. You can change the processing pattern by altering connection strengths. Training a neural network to associate A with B, you show it A and observe the output. If it's not B, you command the network to update its connections and try again. Eventually you'll achieve B and reinforce whatever connections were most active during the process. This reinforcement creates new memory in the network for future use.

These examples help demonstrate the way the mind works. If you see situation A, do action B, and it benefits you, that experience is pleasurable. Chemicals gush through your brain and complete necessary reinforcements to make the association of A and B permanent. An important aspect of neural networks is the iteration involved in creating an association; it's not a once-through-and-you're done deal. Storing a memory in your head's neural network takes more than just hitting "enter." It requires time and effort.

Living in the computer age, we tend to view things in terms of the behavior of machines. For instance, if you're struggling with Microsoft Word, attempting to print double-sided pages, you eventually find the right command through extensive searching and trial and error. And because you've hit the right pressure point, your computer suddenly begins to print flawless double-sided pages. The 'all-or-nothing' digital nature of a computer's components causes 'all-or-nothing' behavior.

I try to apply this sort of solution to my own life and my own problems. Often I feel like there should be some simple key element that will change everything. This tendency to look for a magic bullet is apparent in psychoanalytic theory, where it is believed that healing can happen suddenly by finding one childhood incident at the root of everything and finally reinterpreting it. Politics, philosophy, economics, and science all have the pervading faith that a single piece of the puzzle, if discovered, can fundamentally transform everything. Solutions to problems are seen as single-keystroke quantum leaps obscured by ignorance, but waiting to be taken nevertheless.

This may be a valid way of looking at certain systems but 'magic bullet' mentality does not suit others, such as neural networks. Since every chain of phenomena in your life eventually flows through your mind as ideas, it would seem beneficial to have an accurate view of your mind, its nature, and the neural network connecting it to reality.

I propose that (in spite of the appealing, but elusive, 'magic bullet' belief) we, as students, develop an appreciation for what I call the training principle. The training principle is a schema for approaching problems, by implementing the way your brain and many of the systems around you work. It can be summed up by two truths. First, there is no 'magic bullet' for many problems and second, change takes time and effort since training replaces programming.

In terms of your own brain, observation of the training principle means that both failure and success are part of the learning process. Initial success does not mean you've learned something, nor does success following trial and error. You learn from the repeated process of failing. As Aikido students, we need to stop thinking in terms of not knowing something, learning it, and then knowing it. Instead, every hour on the mat should be invested in the strength and refinement of patterns in the brain. Moore Sensei talks of beating at a piece of metal to form a sword. Each time the hammer hits the metal it gets stopped and bounces off. But every impact shapes the lump of steel into what it is meant to be. The blacksmith doesn't try different strikes until the right one instantaneously produces a sword (like when you finally get your computer to print on both sides of the paper). Rather, each time the blacksmith hits the metal and doesn't get a sword, that failure is crucial to creation.

Mazza Sensei has his own take on the matter; he says, "Luke! Less talking!" The more time we spend searching with the hammer to strike the right angle (in Aikido, talking on the mat), the less time we actually spend hammering. If I suddenly break off conversation during practice and start an attack, it's not because I've gone off the deep end. I just feel like we should get back to work.

The two ways to solve a problem are both valid in the right circumstances. Clicking 'print' a thousand times will not produce double-sided pages in Microsoft Word. The correct strategy is discovering the 'magic bullet'; a command or check box. In Aikido, finding the perfect way to do something will not make you better ("Don't get locked in technique," warns Mazza Sensei). The right method is shutting up and trying it again.

The training principle affects more than just muscle memory. The frameworks for understanding need to be trained as well. We do not instantly integrate or implement knowledge upon realization. This is true of the training principle too. In other words, you can practice the training principle just as you practice Aikido. When you're on the mat doing Aikido you can strengthen your technique with awareness of the training principle. Since the training principle is applicable to many aspects of life, pouring yourself fully into your training will enhance your ability to behave appropriately in all situations.

I tend to not always respect the philosophy of the 'un-carved block' and like to explain things in full. It's not my place to determine the nature of class, but I do think we talk too much sometimes. I hope this article will give you some idea why (Googling 'un-carved block' will also help). As Sensei keeps the class moving quickly, we should try our best to get as much repetition as possible. See you there.

SUDŌRI by Craig Bina

Many of us feel a bit skeptical when first we see demonstrated the technique called "sudori". We see uke come rushing in to strike and, at the last possible moment, nage dropping to a knee or two, followed by uke flying forward into space. It can look rather staged. Indeed, I never quite believed in the efficacy of sudori until I was chosen as uke for the free-form practice called "randori". I rushed in, striking at nage's head, but suddenly nage was not there anymore, and I was airborne. Sudori was the last thing I had expected nage to do, and I was stunned to find myself on the receiving end of it. Viewed from the sidelines, sudori can appear to be rather abrupt; sometimes it looks almost as if nage is tripping uke bodily. This illusion leads to the technique often being described using rather abrupt terms: "ducking", or "the disappearing throw", or even "making the body into a bowling ball".*

When you find yourself unexpectedly on the receiving end, however, it all feels much more subtle. Indeed, the very name "sudori" is rather subtle, as it literally means "passing by without calling" (and is related to the word "sudoshi" meaning "transparent"). When practicing sudori, I find it important to maintain this sense of subtlety. Rather than trying to think like a bowling ball (which can earn one some bruised ribs) I prefer to think of the passage in the Tao Te Ching in which Lao Tzu describes the Tao that "reached for, cannot be held." Indeed, the whole technique calls to mind a poem by O-sensei (which actually applies to many aikido techniques): "Attacking with a long sword, / The enemy thinks I'm in front of him. / Ah, behind him. / I'm already standing there." When next you practice this technique, rather than trying to use your body as an obstacle, recall the meaning of "sudori" and just imagine yourself unconcernedly passing someone in the street without stopping to say hello.

** web editor's note: The actual spelling of this word is as in the title; I couldn't for the life of me figure out how to write the special character in html*

Sensei's Corner



This Thing Called Ki
by John Mazza

Ki, what is it? Where does it come from? How do I get it? What does it have to do with Aikido? The questions always seem to be the same, but the answer...

Well, frankly, I have no idea as to what Ki is. What I can give you is my understanding of, and experience with, Ki ("in my personal opinion," as my teacher would always say). To say this IS "Ki" then I am giving you my truth; you take it and make it your truth without any thought on your own – without your experience.

*"Like a finger pointing to the moon,
Do not focus on the finger, or you'll miss all that heavenly glory."*

So, that said, I would not venture to tell you that my understanding is the True Meaning, or even that my explanation is the True Way. It is one person's expression, garnered from years of listening, seeing and doing.

The term 'Ki', a Japanese term, is used because the majority of my training has been, and continues to be, in the Japanese style of Zen and the Martial Arts (Budo). If I had spent more time in the Chinese arts, I would use the term 'Chi', or 'Prana' from the Yoga tradition. For my purpose here, I will limit myself to the term 'Ki', if for no other reason than to preserve my own sanity. Most commonly, Ki is an expression that has several meanings. It can mean the oneness of all things, the energy that permeates all things, the universal force that connects all things, the ever-present life force... simply, the universe. Ki can also mean tree.

However you choose to identify Ki (energy or life force), it does exist. Scientific research has demonstrated that there is an energy that permeates all things. Others refer to this energy as a mystical power bestowed on us through intense Budo practice and/or meditation, maybe. But I am more inclined to think of it as a constant in transition.

In Aikido [Way of Harmony with the Universe (Ki)], I use Ki and energy interchangeably. Your life is energy, your actions are energy, all that you do is a manifestation of this energy in constant flux. When you practice a technique, you learn to receive a burst of energy directed at you from an outside source. You combine the incoming flow of energy with your energy, redirecting the two forces into a new direction that is to your benefit.

It is through daily practice that we begin to see this flow of energy, how to use it, how to direct it, and maybe even understand a small visible segment of its application, but what is Ki? Is it a mystical power that takes over our body, or is it some constant that continually expresses itself by chance... an anomaly, a physical state that comes to bare when two or more elements function in harmony?

Whatever name you desire to give it: Ki, Chi, Prana, Life Force or Energy... it is one and the same. No matter where you look you can find its expression; training in Aikido, painting, writing, walking, zazen, and yes, even in a tree. But again, you will have to discover it for yourself and find your own truth.

I will leave you with a saying that has been a guide to me over the years:

Mind and Body were originally one.

Do not think that the power you have is only the power you ordinarily use and moan that you have little strength.

The power you ordinarily use is like the small, visible segment of an iceberg.

When we unify our mind and body, and become one with the universe, we can use the great power that is naturally ours.

(From KI SAYINGS © 1973, By Koichi Tohei)

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