

Pushing for peace Seminar, Burwell, Cambridgeshire, July 2014.

(With no disrespect intended, I have purposely left out ranks and the term Sensei.)

This seminar was organised by Quentin Cooke of Burwell Aikido Club and brilliantly done so too.

It is almost pointless trying to explain what went on, because unless you were there you won't believe it and you certainly won't feel it either. At every hour there was a choice of three internationally acclaimed teachers, so a choice had to be made to attend which ever seemed to offer the greatest personal value. Not easy. In no particular order I'd like to share what I thought I gained, yet I know only too well that in the absence of the guiding consciousness of the teacher, what I have to share is only a poor copy of their own mastery.

Of course I attended my own teacher's session, partly in support and partly just in case there was yet another gem to carry home. Tony Sargeant emphasised not only the study of the man (O-Sensei) and his lifestyle (pointing out that many will gladly study his art but not at all how he lived) but that the adoption of 'perfect' technique is neither wasteful in movement nor weak in application. Tony's own teacher Morihiro Saito had often told him, "the technique is strong, you don't have to be."

Once, I chose what I thought was an easy class (no effort on my part) only to find that the teachers had changed places and I was faced with the formidably martial Sandro Caccamo from Rome. In fact he turned out to be a superb and considerate teacher and demonstrated the use of centre and its relationship with early sword work and application of Aikido. He reminded me on a number of occasions to reduce strength and keep to centre (something that I'd thought I already knew ... in my dreams eh?) He could effectively neutralise an attack then issue his own soft but unstoppable power from centre into an uke unable to escape. (This was a similar power to that which I have experienced in tai chi, you just don't know where it is coming from, similar to being lifted by a wave in the ocean, you feel the power of movement yet nothing seems to be touching you.)

Paul Linden was superb, in all he did and said. He is a man of slight build and suffers from Parkinson's, his attitude and ability are awesome, his sense of humour and his humility second to none. "Are you ready?" he asked his young uke as he prepared to launch an attack. "Yes", she replied. "Wrong answer", said Paul. The truth of the matter? When you ready yourself you tense, when you are 'not ready' you relax. (I suspect you can prepare for the attack yet not tense.) Then the word 'attack', perhaps it is better if you do not see it as such but see it as a gift. The change in your own body and the reaction of the 'attacker' is quite remarkable when you implement the 'gift' idea. We tried an exercise where uke grabs hard at your arm, first seeing it as an attack then secondly as a gift; the attack is met with resistance and conflict the gift is received with thanks and softness which in turn surprises uke as there seems to be nothing there in response to his attack ... it takes their mind. Paul demonstrated no techniques but lots of Aikido, he sought his own peace by finding the easiest path to remove the threat ... in his own words "I try to save Uke, only when I cannot save him do I resort to saving myself." He was, rather, is, brilliant, you cannot fail to learn from him, he has changed so much of my understanding with only one lesson.

Who was next? Hard to see ... ah yes Steve Fyffe the blind teacher. But he wasn't a blind teacher he was merely blind in sight not in mind. There would be many a sighted person who would envy his Aikido and his poise and balance. We took it in turns to wear blindfolds and train with a sighted partner ... when it came to the punches we were hit before reacting. A very interesting learning curve that Steve had mastered but few would choose to copy.

Luke Archer, an Irishman from France, taught us about verbal Aikido. How rarely we might be physically attacked and yet how frequently verbally attacked in life ... yet we only train hard for the physical. With a few tips from Luke, neutralising insults, bullying and rudeness became an interesting, successful and relaxing 'game'.

'That's rubbish', I hear you say . . . Well, I'm interested in your comment, what exactly do you mean by 'rubbish', what other things do you consider 'rubbish' . . . let's have a coffee together and you can tell me more . . .

I have to say that I wasn't too good at it but now have a copy of his book to help me on my way.

Gunter Buck taught us about animal competencies and links to Aikido by using animal Chi Kung. Gunter could not only show the efficacy of the chi kung for health as well as martial content but could explain how the concept could be used in psychological therapy. Gunter's expression of Ki, (Chi), was very powerful. Sadly not many attended his classes which is often the case with aikido students as they commonly think training their art is all about techniques on the mat. . . it is patently not so and anyone attending Gunter's class would have come away much the wiser.

Judith Elze gave a workshop on connecting. Once again we are obliged to leave our comfort zone and explore for ourselves how to connect. 'Connect with what?' . . . firstly to connect consciously with self and all parts of your body at will, then to connect to the earth and only to move when you have created a conscious connection with the muscles required (*my interpretation*) then to create connection with surroundings and other people within those surroundings. All these things will put you in the real world and not the world imagined by your mind.

Jack Richford introduced the idea of games to encourage attendance of and development of aikido. Jack was full, and I mean full, of enthusiasm for taking the art to as many people as he could, with the ethos of building for peace.

Despite our varying ages and the natural reluctance to make fools of ourselves, it was not long before we all joined in happily with the various games that readily added significant value to our pursuit of effective Aikido.

There were many others teaching, they taught and they learned, they gave and the shared. I was lucky to practice with many of them, I am grateful. It was a very informative and happy seminar with lessons of a lifetime to last a lifetime.

Richard Small

Aikido is...

... not about winning over the other person. It's about victory over yourself. It's about transforming your life. It's about finding new purpose in life. To give others joy and happiness through budo without fighting.

Michio Hikitsuchi, 10th Dan

Fear Makes Us Obey

Why do we do all this: obey, follow, copy? Why? Because we are frightened inwardly to be uncertain. We want to be certain, we want to be certain financially, we want to be certain morally, we want to be approved, we want to be in a safe position, we want never to be confronted with trouble, pain, suffering, we want to be enclosed. So, fear, consciously or unconsciously, makes us obey the Master, the leader, the priest, the government. Fear also controls us from doing something which may be harmful to others, because we will be punished. So behind all these actions, greeds, pursuits, lurks this desire for certainty, this desire to be assured. So, without resolving fear, without being free from fear, merely to obey or to be obeyed has little significance; what has meaning is to understand this fear from day to day and how fear shows itself in different ways. It is only when there is freedom from fear that there is that inward quality of understanding, that aloneness in which there is no accumulation of knowledge or of experience, and it is that alone which gives extraordinary clarity in the pursuit of the real.

J. Krishnamurti, The Book of Life



new forest aikido

are proud to welcome



Sensei Tony Sargeant - 6th Dan Aikikai Saturday 9th August

Ringwood Health and Leisure,
Parsonage Barn Lane, Ringwood, BH24 1PX
12.00 - 18.00 (12.00 - 12.15 registration)

Seminar Fee: £25 (paid by 31st July - see payment method below) or £30 on the day

- All Aikido organisations are welcome
- Please bring Bokken and Jo
- Valid insurance required
- No video recordings will be allowed without the consent of the leisure centre and new forest aikido club

For more details visit www.newforestaikido.co.uk
Alternatively contact Terry Young on 07972471392
or email youngs@strathmore777.freeserve.co.uk

Payment: Cheques to be made payable to T. Young and sent to 41 Strathmore Drive, Verwood, Dorset, BH317BJ. Please quote your name, club, phone number and email