

Interview with Yoshigasaki-sensei.

8 dan Shin shin toitsu aikido

Chief instructor of Ki no Kenyukai Europe.

The interview was made by Matthias Rezac during the summercamp in Sweden 1998.

MR: Sensei, when did you start to train aikido and why?

Yoshigasaki-sensei: I started to train aikido in 1968 when I was 17 years old. It was just by chance in the sense that somebody invited me to come to an aikidodojo. I saw it and I started training. It was just by chance.

MR: What is the main purpose for training in aikido? Why should one train aikido instead of something else?

Sensei: Everybody trains what he likes so the reason is because you like it. This is from the students perspective. From the teachers side each teacher determines what he wants to teach.

MR: Could you please explain the relationship between relaxation and calmness.

Sensei: Technically, aikido comes from Japanese fighting arts. With and without weapon, which is normally called ju jutsu in Japan. But then the founder Ueshiba Morihei became religious, changed everything and reorganised it according to this religious idea. Meaning something that makes people peaceful and spiritual. But then, he did it believing in God, whereas most people do not really believe in God so you can't do it his way directly.

There are two ways to understand peace and spirituality, religion and meditation. So people who do not seriously believe in God must go to meditation to understand these things. So what I teach is aikido based on meditation. Then to understand spirituality you have to understand "eternal happiness". Without understanding this, spirituality doesn't work. That is why in religion they talk about eternal happiness after death, a paradise. But in meditation this eternal happiness must happen while we are still alive. Then to understand this eternal happiness, all you have to do is not to disturb it. So not to disturb this is called calmness. This eternal happiness happens only when you can perceive everything as one. When you perceive everything as one that is called relaxation.

MR: A few days ago you said that you used to be uke for Tohei-sensei. Could you please explain the importance of ukemi.

Sensei: Ukemi means receiving something through your body. This relaxation, calmness etc is something that you can see from outside, but that is not enough. It is better that you feel it within your own body. So in a way if nage is calm and relaxed clearly the ukemi also understands calmness and relaxation. With the body of course, not intellectually. In a way that is the essential part of aikido, that you transmit something physically. Uke learns calmness and relaxation on condition that nage knows these things.

MR: During seminars you don't use that many different people as uke. If doing ukemi for someone who knows about relaxation and calmness is this important, how come you don't walk around and let more students do ukemi.

Sensei: The thing is that everything physical depends on quantity. So in a way it is not enough to throw someone once or twice. By throwing people with calmness and relaxation you change their body and that takes some time. So it is impossible to do it to everybody and therefore you are obliged to choose. So that is why I choose one, basically an instructor, as it is important that the instructors know this. Then I continue until I get some result. When I get some result I change ukemi.

MR: Sensei, what is kiai and how can one train kiai?

Sensei: Kiai and aiki go together. "Ai" means harmony and "ki" is something not clear. Everything can be divided into something clear and something not clear. Something clear means words, materials... Anything that can be captured by science is something clear. Anything that is difficult to capture by science, like love, harmony or beauty, is something not clear. So everything means something clear plus something not clear. And since everybody knows that which is clear we can understand everything by emphasising on ki, that is something not clear.

So aiki means that the whole entity of one person and another comes into harmony. That is aiki. Kiai means the harmony of one person as aiki is the harmony of two or more people. Kiai is inside. Normally to have kiai is the basic "keeping one point". That means kiai. Then clearly if one has harmony in oneself, one is always strong and harmonious. Expression of that is the voice, so very often kiai is expressed in the voice. So normally when people say kiai they mean the voice that comes from the harmony of one self.

MR: You often talk about concepts. What do you mean with concept?

Sensei: Concept roughly means the meaning of each word, the relationship between words and the reality. Not only words actually. It can be the relationship between any expression, like movement, and reality. That is what I mean with concept.

MR: Other instructors often talk about kokyu, but you don't. Why?

Sensei: Because kokyu means breathing. So I talk about breathing. But actually in Japan when they say kokyu it means harmony because they have found out that for harmonious movement, harmonious action, breathing plays a big part. When they talk about harmonious action they emphasise the importance of breathing, good controlled breathing. So in a way those people who talk about kokyu don't exactly know what harmony is, so they are just copying ancient tradition. It actually means just to control breathing and to find that harmonious action.

MR: How would you define the concept budo?

Sensei: Budo is a rather new concept, actually Japanese. I once talked about it with a Chinese martial teacher. He said that budo is Japanese, not Chinese. In China there are fighting techniques and there is religion. Fighting techniques for your body and you train your mind with religion. That is the Chinese idea, which more or less is the same as here in Europe. You train your body with sport and then your mind with religion or philosophy. But then we have the characteristic of this budo. The word was invented in Japan about a hundred years ago. It means that they wanted to mix physical activity and religion or moral activity. That is the unification of mind and body. The real meaning of budo is to train mind and body together. But in most cases the real meaning is forgotten and all over the world budo simply means fighting techniques or self defence.

MR: What is "soku shin no gyo" and why train it in ki-aikido?

Sensei: It is shouting with misogi. So it is part of the breathing exercise which is good because breathing is associated with physical movement and voice. It is just good training.

MR: I heard that you are, finally, going to write two books. What will they be about?

Sensei: One about life and one about aikido.

MR: Why have you chosen to write them now?

Sensei: The material I teach has become big in quantity so it has become difficult for people to understand as the brain can't take in too many things at one time. I think it is more convenient that it is written in a book so if people are interested they can read it many times.

MR: O-sensei is said to have had some kind of religious experience that changed his way of looking at budo and that made him start creating aikido from older ju jutsu. His faith was his source of inspiration. What makes you continue year after year teaching and developing aikido? What is your source of inspiration?

Sensei: It is just a natural thing. I think it is just the nature of the human brain.

MR: In an interview with Saito-sensei he says that O-sensei did not teach weapon outside Iwama, but that he always said that the relationship between ken and tai jutsu was very important. If this is so, from where does the bokken and jo-techniques in ki-aikido come?

Sensei: First you have to understand what Saito means by "teach". Ueshiba used to show a lot of things without teaching, saying that only he could do it and that it was no use the students do it. In Tokyo Ueshiba Morihei showed many techniques of bokken and jo, but he never tried to teach it to his students. Clearly the students tried to copy it, but of course this is difficult. Tohei-sensei just watched it and tried to remember and understand the movements. After that he developed this bokken and jo of ki-aikido. So clearly it is not exactly the same as Ueshiba's bokken and jo, it is Tohei-sensei's, but still it is based on what Ueshiba was doing.

MR: When I compare the rei, the etiquette, on the tatami it is very different for instance between that of Iwama ryu and that of ki-aikido. At the summercamps in particular I see many people sitting in a bad manner here. What is your reaction to this lack of etiquette in Sweden? Is it the same in other European countries?

Sensei: Correct etiquette is the expression of ones own mind. There are two ways. To start from the outside and hope it will go inside. That means first teach correct etiquette outside. That is one way. The other is to start from the inside. To teach mind and wait until it goes outside. I think I am doing it case by case. For instance in England they are very keen on outside etiquette there. Here in Sweden maybe you are better on inside etiquette. If the lack of etiquette doesn't disturb other people I choose to teach more from the inside. But if it does disturb others, maybe it would be better to emphasise etiquette a bit more.

MR: Thank you sensei for letting me do this interview.