

December 8, 2008

Dear Students, dear Parents, dear Friends:

As 2008 draws rapidly to a close, it is time again to reflect on this year filled with many events, not only in the world, but also at the Yoseikan. Some of those events are Mochizuki Sensei's remains being returned from France to Japan and Tezuka Akira Sensei's recent passing.

This year we celebrated Mochizuki Sensei's fifth memorial and the repose of his bones next to his wife as per his wishes. Twenty-three years ago, while staying together in a hotel, I had asked him how he wanted to have his funeral. "Hold it at the dojo, wear dogi (practice uniform), have a good practice, then enjoy food and drink together," he had replied.

In Tezuka Sensei's case, he died of liver cancer. He was 63 years old. Tezuka Sensei acted as Mochizuki Sensei's right arm for many years, traveling with him as his assistant on numerous occasions and later on his behalf when Mochizuki Sensei stopped traveling. He handled national and international matters always keeping the best interest of the group in mind, thus displaying his understanding of the principle of mutual welfare. He always stood by his decisions, whether popular or not.

After Mochizuki Sensei's departure, the Yoseikan Headquarters were moved to France while Tezuka Sensei led the Seifukai in Japan which is the group of Mochizuki Sensei's direct students who stayed loyal to his teachings. By profession, he was a Shizuoka City Hall top executive and became the director of Shizuoka Zoo upon his retirement.

As an Aikido practitioner, Tezuka Sensei -- mastered Mochizuki Sensei's essential teachings and could use his small and light body with amazing timing and focus, thus displaying his understanding of the principle of maximum efficiency. Tezuka Sensei appeared in the Aikido Journal October 25, 1986 Second Friendship demonstration with Mochizuki Sensei and can be seen on several internet video clips.

Personally, I remember Tezuka Sensei for his generosity, his ability to give without expecting anything in return. Here are some anecdotes worth mentioning.

Tezuka Sensei always came to greet us after we arrived from overseas and was at the station to send us off when we returned home. He would often stay late after practice to teach students and to let them repeat a kata or a technique until they had it right. He also frequently took students to a nearby restaurant (*the Royal Host*) for after practice *mondo* (question and answer period).

Only after it became evident that many foreign students were abusing his kindness by never getting in touch with him or contributing anything to the Yoseikan did I express my concern to him about encouraging misunderstanding and abuse by taking care of people without knowing their true intentions. "We never know. One of them might wake up!" was his reply.

He could listen to others' opinions, but not agree. Another time, we were at a seminar with another shihan. We were confronted with having to conduct a dan ranking examination that had been included as part of the seminar contrary to previously agreed-upon conditions. The students to be tested were lining up in the gym, an attempt to put us in a position with no way out. --*I was familiar with that kind of situation: people treat you well, provide nice food, drink and accommodation, entertain you, and say, "Yes Sensei," to whatever you tell them. You think you have found the ideal students, with the right attitude. Then they ask to be tested, and listen attentively to your corrections and comments. After they receive their certificates with Mochizuki Sensei's signature, you no longer hear from them, until they think it's time for another grading.* The three of us held a quick meeting in the hall. Tezuka Sensei was upset. The other shihan and I had almost convinced him to cancel the event and just proceed with the seminar when he paused a few seconds, then said: "I am the senior Shihan, here. No more discussions. We'll do it!"

Several years later I asked him if he had heard of those people. “No,” he said. “You think it was a mistake? Now we know what they are made of!”

That coincided with Mochizuki Sensei’s teachings that there are no perfect decisions and that it is the intention *behind* the decision that will determine our ability to manage the consequences of that decision.

Tezuka Sensei had to face crises and challenges at home, at work, and at the dojo that could have become excuses to leave *Budo* (The Martial Path) and to abandon his responsibilities as a Budo leader. He always reacted with equanimity, no matter what occurred. He was always there, enthusiastic, polite, and kind. He could express anger, but it was short-lived, lasting just long enough to get someone’s attention. No resentment. He forgave but remembered. It was truly the indication of a good human being and teacher. He was a living proof that one can manage everything in life by balancing family, profession and study.

Most of our senior students had some exposure to Tezuka Sensei, either while studying at the Yoseikan or at a seminar. To us, he was a model of duty, loyalty and courage, the three interdependent qualities of the *Bushi* (Samurai) that Mochizuki Sensei taught us to cultivate and adapt to today’s society. To Kaoru Sensei and me, he was a mentor and a friend, and this loss affects all of us.

I have been saying that Mochizuki Sensei’s Yoseikan is an endangered species. It’s a less popular path for many people because it requires unconditional commitment, first and foremost from those who are teaching and leading. Budo views daily life as a battle field. “Expect the unexpected and you won’t be surprised,” Aguin Sensei, my first *battojutsu* (Quick Sword Drawing) teacher, once told me. After meditating on those words for several years, I added: “Then you will be ready to function in solution mode and face any crisis!”

Some students and the people who surround them blame Budo for their difficulties. To them Aikido (or any martial art) is just an exotic activity that should always be fun, exciting, and never boring. Whether they practice obsessively or indolently, their expectations never materialize. They assume that praise, ranks, and other rewards should directly result from participation and doing what they think the teacher wants. They fail to look at it as a means to an end. What do we think of a craftsman who blames his tools for his poor workmanship? It’s the same regarding Budo. Budo is a tool, not an end.

Our intentions color our actions. That means that our intentions should result from understanding, not from our emotions. Emotions will always exist; they are a reminder of our humanity. But through constant training, we learn to acknowledge and to recognize their existence early enough to intercept them before they gain too much momentum and overwhelm us.

As a *Sogo* Budo (Composite Martial Art), Yoseikan Budo as taught by Mochizuki Sensei also includes meditation practice. This may mean sessions of a few minutes, as in the children’s classes, to longer periods for adult students. The whole purpose is to learn to be present *in the here and the now*, and to develop concentration. Once we are able to maintain our attention on one object, then we can gradually go deeper into our thoughts and understand better why we and others behave, speak, and think the way we do. Then, we can determine our objectives accordingly. Awareness of our intentions makes our vision clear and will help determine the appropriate means to be used. When a crisis occurs, we are able to make better decisions while remaining mindful of our vision. On the other hand, when the vision is weak we lose it and make decisions that will jeopardize our ability to bring that vision back. That is what happens when students who have been practicing for years suddenly abandon or change to find an easier way. And it affects not only those students, but also many other people too, who will never have a chance to benefit from their experience or will be misled into believing they are learning true Budo from them. That is the result of concentrating only on the technical and physical aspect of Budo (*Gi, Tai*) while neglecting the mental aspect (*Shin*).

Here are a few practical tips to help students develop motivation in coordination with other practices:

Motivation doesn't occur by chance, it must be cultivated through daily practice. It stems from passion. Passion and love are basically the same thing, an internal flame that burns forever. Passion differs from obsession, just as love differs from attachment. It's about developing oneself and sharing for the common welfare.

Motivation can be affected by the chatter of the mind which, if not controlled, becomes negative and makes us feel incompetent and like hopeless victims. I have found that the main difficulty that prevents Budo students from getting off the beginner's level is a deep conviction that they don't fit, that something must be wrong with them, and that the solution has to come from somewhere else.

When such thoughts occur, we have to intercept them at the onset; we "breathe them away" and replace them with the kind of thought that we want to generate.

Which makes it easier to achieve a desired result?

- To tell myself not to forget or to tell myself to remember?
- To say "I can't" or to say "Let's find a way to do it?"
- To say "I'll try" (option to fail) or to say "I'll do my best?"
- To say "I won't quit" or to say "I will keep going; all feelings pass?"

We can find other applications according to our needs. The point here is to replace the negative, self-denigrating talk by saying what should be done. At first it is awkward; occasionally, at first, then more and more often we catch ourselves thinking and talking negatively, which is a sign of awareness. That practice leads to a more constant awareness of our thoughts, and we start noticing a shift in our thinking and speaking patterns.

The development of awareness can be reinforced by mindfully observing dojo etiquette, not out of obligation, but as a guideline to help us be aware of the existence of others and of how our attitude affects them and reflects on ourselves. For example:

- Make a priority of attending your designated classes. Students who frequently change classes to accommodate their schedules have difficulty keeping up, since classes have different rates of progression. That leads to confusion, denial of responsibility, and discouragement. On the other hand, black belts should make change part of their practice in order to improve their ability to adapt to all kinds of partners and to share their experience with others.
- Tell your teacher in advance of your absences, ask to make up. It helps set your mind to commit yourself. Your teacher and others will notice and will take you more seriously. Even the most regular students may miss practice, but the crucial difference lies in their attitude toward managing the consequences of their absences.
- Tell the truth when talking to your teacher. It helps you to see clearly inside of yourself and to maintain peace of mind. When we act, lie, or make false excuses, we also make our teacher into a liar, because his advice will be based on the false information we gave him. Consequently, we will mindlessly reject his advice and lose trust and respect for him. That will become the evidence of the lie.
- When entering or leaving the dojo, announce it clearly, speaking from the depth of your lungs (*Kiai*). Leave all your daily business and concerns at the door with your shoes. Also greet entering and leaving students and visitors as well, and invite them to sit down and observe the class. That helps develop mindfulness, awareness of others' existence and how their existence makes ours possible, which is the definition of respect.
- Develop a clear understanding of what you are studying, your goals, and your intentions. Develop the ability to explain them clearly to those who ask and in a way that they can understand and will remember. Avoid useless chatting and gossiping. Replace that by conversations that address what is really important in life. Participate in *mondo* (question/answer periods) whenever you have a chance. At the beginning, you may feel awkward, but as with a foreign language, familiarity comes with practice. At the Yoseikan, we had Sunday afternoon

mondo with Mochizuki Sensei. We have been doing it here with the advanced students on Saturdays since we moved to North America. The purpose is to develop our capacity to think and talk about abstract subjects such as spirituality, ethics, practice, experience, etc., in order to establish a solid foundation for our practice.

- When asked to participate in some task, look at it, with a mind free of expectations, as a way to contribute to your dojo, a quality that is very important to develop in our profit-and-loss-obsessed society.
- Finally, some advice for parents: If it is clear to you that something is good for your children and will help them later, make them do it! As adults, we are ahead of our children in terms of experience and judgment. Children will always choose what is convenient for them *now*, no matter how costly, because they cannot see what they don't know; but, we do. Hence, we have a responsibility to make decisions for them if necessary and to enforce those decisions. If we are willing to adapt our lifestyle to accommodate our children's needs, here is a lesson of love that will stay with them and continue into future generations. It takes patience and courage. Courage is the ability to do consistently what is right according to our duty. It results from understanding, and differs from temerity, which expresses itself in acts which are mindless and ephemeral, no matter how spectacular they may seem. In the case of children, we may not see obvious results immediately – as most of us expect. They may even become rebellious (“my friends don't have to do that!”), but we must stick to our guns. In my thirty-some years as a teacher, I have been following students from childhood to adulthood, and I have noticed that exposure at an early age will make a whole difference later in life. If we can say that ignorance breeds ignorance, we can also conclude that wisdom breeds wisdom...

Those topics are just basic ideas that should be discussed among students until they become familiar with them and develop their own understanding.

Not all students can become teachers, but everyone can participate and share with others. We should operate within our capacities, which is where we can function the most efficiently and be happy. When someone tries to take on a task that is beyond his capacities, it's bound to backfire and hurt the whole group. Many people want to become *shihan*, but few are ready to accept the responsibilities, the sacrifices, the modesty, and the solitude that far outweigh the privileges. It takes passion, vision, and the will to do “whatever it takes” and to commit to the necessary training. For that reason we should encourage those who have talent and determination. The future of the Yoseikan depends on it.

Once, a young teacher asked: “Will I ever be better than my teacher?” A senior teacher replied: “That's not for you to decide; it's after you are gone that people will judge!” If a student surpasses his teacher, that makes his teacher even greater.

Kaoru Sensei and I wish you peaceful Holidays and a Happy New Year. Thank you again for your continued trust in and support of our mission.

Patrick Augé and Kaoru Sugiyama

The Torrance dojo will be closed for the Holidays from Saturday, December 20 and will reopen Monday, January 5th, 2009.

I will be leading the 24th annual Christmas seminar at my former teacher's (Mr. Michel Bourgoin) dojo organized by his son Frédéric, December 22-23 in Amiens, France. The Kangeiko (early morning winter practice) will be held January 18-24, 2009. A subscription to Aikido Journal (aikidojournal.com) makes a very useful present. It contains a lot of valuable information in several languages.

Warmest Regards.