

Remembering the founder

Aikido Shihan and Aikido veterans who have had personal close contact with the Aikido Founder, Morihei Ueshiba, recollect their unforgettable moments with O'Sensei.

- H. Tada, 9th Dan Hombu Shihan -



The Founder always gave instruction using polite language. I suspect this is probably because he was accustomed to teaching the leading members of Japanese society at the time, such as Royal Princes, Admirals of the Army and Navy and others. but of course this is not the only reason, because words are, in fact, energy. This polite manner and the discipline of maintaining such a mental attitude under all circumstances gives birth to a refined personality which, in fact, became directly linked to the techniques of the martial art he founded.

I remember at one point becoming aware of something that I thought at the time to be quite strange: whenever I drew near to the Founder, I felt as if my body and spirit suddenly became transparent. Not only that, but when I actually touched the Founder, this sensation became even more clear, and I felt as if the distinction between my own body and spirit and that of the Founder was suddenly removed. I believe this is attributable to the great power of Ki emanating from the spirit of the Founder that reached out to envelop us that had been developed over years of training.

One thing that the Founder frequently corrected us for was "Don't make the technique". This referred to those cases when the uke would take a fall on his own even when his balance had not really been broken, or let go on his own, move on his own, etc. Why did the Founder refer to this as "making the technique"? I believe this is because, being used to particular techniques, we would proceed ahead with them in our mind rather than simply follow the technique being executed, or take the fall without really concentrating or otherwise take ukemi without making ourselves blank like a white sheet of paper. When one thinks about it this way, for the Founder to yell at us "Don't make the technique!" was no different than cautioning us that we were "Open to attack!"

- Y. Hojo, 5th Dan -

We used to go directly to a coffee shop directly after practice still wearing our practice outfits in order to communicate to others that we were taking Aikido lessons. Another thing we did to demonstrate how serious we were about our Aikido training was to grab onto the wrists of the young men in the Dojo and squeeze them hard until they developed blue bruises. The Founder used to correct us by saying "Young fools! Aikido is not a contest of competition. Showing off with ones form, or giving others bruises is not Aikido."

One time I remember having cake one day. The Founder, who was lying on his side, then said "Get me a cake too." I then reached up to get another cake to give the Founder in response to his request, at which point he suddenly said in a loud voice "You fool! Do you even know why you are being yelled at? I'll tell you: you need to think about what would have happened if I had hidden a knife under my cushion and used it to slice your leg while you were reaching up there with both hands to get me that cake!". Then realising what he was saying, I then began to weep with thanks for my teacher who wasted no opportunity to instruct his students in the essence of Aikido without a single opening for attack. This later became an important lesson for me in the Founder's teaching "Aikido is to impart joy to others, and is also a means of obtaining joy oneself."

- M. Shimada, 6th Dan -

There is a saying that "Fuji looks beautiful from a distance, but looks only like a pile of rocks up close". The Founder used to refer to himself in a similar humble manner. For me, however, O'Sensei was an enormous existence best described as "the wondrous Mt. Fuji of the world of martial Arts".

For me, who had never lifted anything heavier until that time, than a pen, the Founder's teaching that "physical strength follows strength - the more strength you exert, the more that will follow" was particularly memorable. When the Founder yelled at his students, he would do so with such vigour that the walls and roof would shake. Once over, however, the Founder would suddenly return to his normal calm. The Founder always treated people with mercy and grace, like a fresh breeze.

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