

The Seidokan Communicator

Aikido for a Modern Way of Life

Aikido and Mrs. Kobayashi

Part 3: The Decision

Translated by Mariko Kage

Edited by Michiyo Kobayashi and Mark Crapo

For the Seidokan Aikido Family, the loss of Sensei was understandably, an enormous shock. The truth is, in empathizing with many of the students' and instructors' feelings, I had very little time to think about the implications this loss would have on our future, never mind time to shed any tears. If I had been able to cry out loud, to let the tears flow, what a relief it might have been. This is how I came to realize for the first time, the healing benefits of tears.

Eventually, we had to move out of the Hyperion Dojo and we became preoccupied with searching for a new location. For 5 months, we drove around town looking at buildings that did not quite meet our requirements; for one reason or another. Finally in May of 1998, we found our present day Dojo location on Colorado Blvd. I believe it was the "strong Ki" and the support from numerous internal and external Seidokan Dojo members that made it possible to carry on Sensei's path.

With my language handicap and having always followed one step behind Sensei, there are many things I am unable to fulfill as well as Sensei had. I was fully aware that it would not be easy for me to take on the leadership role; I must admit there were times when I had my own doubts. However, had I been ignorant of Aikido and was simply devoted to being a housewife, my decision would have been much easier to make. As described previously, for most of our lives together, the many years we trained together, the two of us have been committed to researching the path of Aikido. Reflecting on the value of the months and years we had deeply engaged in our dialogues, I am reminded of Sensei's motto "Hyakuman Isshin" ("One Million One Mind"). It is as if I can see his gentle smile as I hear his voice reciting this motto. Although my strength shall never amount to more than a tiny fraction of Sensei's in comparison, with the support from numerous students and capable instructors Sensei had fostered over the years, I have come to make the decision to dedicate all that I can in my power to the task of overseeing the continued growth of this "Formidable Tree of Seidokan", the Tree which has been given the opportunity to thrive to become so strong.

Sensei also talked of "One Hundred Pillars", but this is often misunderstood. To explain fully its meaning and Sensei's intent is outside the scope of this article and so I will decline to go into it further here. But, I hope to devote a future article to this very subject.

Also in This Issue

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I have addressed nearly half of the list of questions through the previous articles, Part 1 and Part 2; from here on, I would like to proceed with a change of format to Q & A, and provide answers using true accounts.

Q: Did you ever meet O Sensei?

I have never met O Sensei. However, if I had encountered Aikido just a few years earlier, I am quite certain I would have had the chance to go and observe O Sensei's classes. As mentioned previously, I was directly involved with the establishment of the Ki Society, and therefore had a very close relationship with the top instructors who have on various occasions shared with me many of O Sensei's episodes during his last years.

Q: What type of benefits do you see students of Seidokan receiving?

Having chosen Seidokan out of the numerous types of trainings and dojo that are around, I believe that the kind of benefits really depends on the direct experience of the individual students. Looking back over the years I walked the path with Sensei, I would like to give a few real life examples, those out of many accounts that have never yet been shared publicly.

Example #1) Student who encountered a motorcycle accident

A few years after I came to America and began to train in Aikido, a student who trained at the Torrance Aikido Club with me had an accident. One day he was hit by a car while on his motorcycle and was thrown off to the pavement. Miraculously and naturally he maneuvered a Zempo Kaiten Undo only to realize he survived the accident without any major injury. He happily told us about this incident.

Both Sensei and I rejoiced that the student was not hurt and that merely The Four Principles of Aikido must have become a part of him through training. Motorcycles can be replaced, but the life of a person cannot be. We were reminded of the preciousness of human life. I would encourage everyone to think about what was the significant point in this example.

(Continued on page 2)

(Mrs. Kobayashi continued)**Example #2) Testimony of students, graduates of California State University Fullerton**

- a) The first example is that of a "hold-up" incident experienced by a female student from the California State University Fullerton who only took one semester of Aikido. She was working as an assistant manager at a supermarket where the incident happened. One day, we had stopped by for shopping when she called "Sensei, Sensei" right inside the store; she found us and then recounted her experience to us while we stood by and listened in awe. She shared with us how in the moment of fear she remembered the Aikido Principles and was able to handle the dangerous situation without letting it escalate into a serious ordeal. Apparently she was promoted to a manager position after this particular incident.
- b) The second example is how Aiki Ryoho and Kokyuhō were applied in real life situation. In his teaching curriculum, Sensei used to incorporate Aiki Ryoho at the end of the school semester. One day, after the semester had long passed, Sensei received a thank you card from a student who described that applying Aiki Ryoho and Kokyuhō assisted in his ailing grandmother's recovery and how happy and grateful he was. Recently, we heard more such wonderful success stories from one of our high rank senior instructors who applied the Aikido Principles to her mother who was in rehabilitation from a heart attack and stroke.

In this way, many of you, both students and instructors, inside and outside of our Dojo, who have learned from Kobayashi Sensei the teaching of Aikido's Principles can be beneficial to our daily life. You have found happiness through overcoming many of life's problems and some have also found enhanced success in your personal workplace. What I request of everyone is, in the midst of living in the harsh and rapidly changing present day society, to never give up within your own given place, to continue on the path of training towards happiness and success.

"Find joy in teaching and find joy in learning"

The acquired principles come alive in daily life through one's effort and mental attitude; I believe the results are assessed as benefits.

Q: What do you think the most important benefit you have received from the practice of Aikido?

Probably, it is that I have been able to polish myself better. I have overcome waves, both big and small in my life, and it has been a great disappointment to lose Sensei so soon. Starting before the time I first encountered Aikido,

I strove to polish myself time and time again, that is, for what is appropriate to my age. I feel the best benefit will be reaped when the teaching is shared with as many people as possible in society, not limited to the dojo setting.

I would like to wait for another opportunity to share some examples from my own personal experiences, which at this present time, I shall decline.

Q: What do you feel were Sensei's goals in the teaching of Seidokan Aikido?

I believe that it was his wish to see each and every individual leaf shine brightly in this world as a part of the Formidable Tree of Seidokan Aikido. In other words, I believe he wanted each member of the Seidokan Family, each in their own given place, to become a light to shine in this world. To diligently train and spread the teaching of Seidokan Aikido through the spirit of "Banyu Aigo" [loving protection towards all living beings]. Is this not the responsibility and mission bestowed on us?

In terms of goals, we can say that Sensei shared O Sensei's dream: "Path towards Peace". I feel Sensei's deepest aspiration was to make a contribution towards world peace through Seidokan Aikido.

SEIDOKAN AIKIDO CALENDAR

Friday, April 16th, 2004; Mini-Workshop with Kawakami

Sensei: @ the Aikido Institute of America; Time: 7:00 – 9:15 p.m. For more information, please email Aikitiger1@aol.com or call (323) 254-3372.

Friday - Sunday, April 16th-18th, 2004; Seminar with

special guest Joe Crotty Sensei: @ Seidokan Aikido of South Carolina, Columbia, SC. For more information, please email Wedell@sc.edu or call (803) 781-9242.

Friday-Sunday, June 4 - 6, 2004; Seidokan Summer Camp hosted by Still Point Aikido:

@ St. Edward's University, Austin, Texas; Time: Early check-in begins at noon on the 4th; Sunday check-out begins at 1pm; For the information packet, go to: http://www.stillpointaikido.com/pdf/Seidokan_Camp_Info.pdf; For the registration forms, go to http://www.stillpointaikido.com/pdf/Seidokan_Camp_Reg.pdf; For further information, please email etaison@stillpointaikido.com.

Saturday, 5/15/04 Workshop at Victory Dojo:

Stewart Chan Sensei will be teaching a session from 9:30am to 12:30. For more information please call (818) 772-4311 or send an e-mail to victorydojo@earthlink.net.

Technical Corner

Seiza

By Dan Kawakami

Seiza is a basic and formal way of sitting in the Japanese culture. It is an integral part of training in the martial arts in general and in Aikido in particular. We sit in *seiza* and bow to open and close class and while the sensei is instructing. We also sit in *seiza* when we do *misogi* chanting and breathing. On a more dynamic level, we do *kokyū dosa*, *suwari waza*, and *hamni handachi* from *seiza*. Because of its triangular base, formed by the knees in front and convergence of the big toes in back, *seiza* provides the most stable foundation upon which to build a balanced and centered posture. It may be said that *seiza* most effectively sets the conditions under which centeredness and mind-body unification can be experienced and developed. Despite its importance, there generally is little attention given to teaching how to sit *seiza* correctly and having the students maintain their posture during class. Since posture is an expression of the inner state of mind, having the students sit in an erect position with backs straight will add to the focus, energy, and alertness of the class. This article will cover the following topics: (1) sitting; (2) bowing; and (3) testing for centeredness and mind-body unification. Articles on the more dynamic exercises based on *seiza*, e.g., *shikko* (samurai walk), *kokyū dosa*, *suwari waza*, and *hamni handachi* will follow in coming issues of the Communicator.

Sitting To sit *seiza* from a standing position, step back slightly with your left foot and lower your left knee to the mat, keeping your back straight. Then place your right knee on the mat and lower your body until it softly comes in contact with your heels. Allow yourself to ease into *seiza* rather than abruptly dropping into it. Your big toes may overlap, right over the left, or lay next to each other side by side. Your knees should be two to three fists apart.

Spreading them too widely will throw your weight to the front while bringing your knees together will move your weight to the rear. You will have to find the most stable alignment on your own through a process of trial and error. Having established your base, you must now set your posture. Keeping a straight back, align your body so that it is perpendicular to the horizontal plane. It is of particular importance to pay attention to the placement of your neck and head. To make the correct alignment, tilt your head backward, gazing at the ceiling, and gradually lower your chin until your gaze falls to about three feet in front of you. Do not focus your sight on any one spot but be aware of your surrounding by using your peripheral vision. Your hands rest lightly on your lap, slightly behind your knees, with fingers pointed inward. When your posture is right, your breathing becomes right, and the tension in your upper body is released. Under this condition, your center of gravity falls to a point (*tanden*) two inches below your navel, and keeping your mind there keeps you in a centered and balanced state.

To stand from *seiza*, slide your right foot out and get on your left knee. If the sitting has been long and there is numbness in your feet, stay in that position until some feeling return. Try to wriggle your toes to make sure that you have sufficient feeling and control of your feet before standing. Once standing, walk as normally as you can despite the pain you may still to feel. You will find that you will recover sooner than if you favored the pain and limped along.

Bowing (Rei) At a behavioral level, *rei* means to bow. As a noun, it means courtesy or etiquette. At an attitudinal level, it means respect and gratitude. At the beginning and at the end of class, we bow to the *shomen*, and then the sensei and students bow to each other as a way of acknowledging all the elements that go into making the class possible and expressing respect and gratitude to each. Because it sets the tone for the training to follow, it is important to bow in a mindful and sincere manner.



The knees are too wide. (Fig 1)



The knees are too close. (Fig 2)



This is about right. (Fig 3)

Seiza (continued)

To bow properly from *seiza*, keep your back straight and start your movement from your one-point so your body moves as one unit. Starting your movement with your head or shoulders will separate your upper from your lower body. As your weight shifts to the front, place your left hand, then your right on the mat with your thumb and index finger barely touching. Exhale as you bow to release the tension from your upper body. Remain bowed for a second or two and rise up (again as one unit) and place your hands back on your thighs, right hand first and then the left. Maintain relaxation in the upper body and slight tension in the *hara* or lower abdomen. You have now returned to a balanced and centered position.

Testing Testing for balance and centeredness is not a matter of passing or failing or a win-lose, competitive situation. It is a way for the students to work in a collaborative relationship and help each other experience and develop mind-body unification. To find what is correct, it is often helpful to experience what is incorrect so feel free to experiment as you go through these exercises.

While the student sits *seiza* (Figures 4, 5, 6) the trainer applies steadily increasing pressure to the shoulder of the student. If the student tenses or shifts his mind to the point of pressure or begins to worry about passing or failing, he will soon lose his balance. The training here is to maintain the calm and relaxed state of being, keeping one-point, and absorbing the pressure being applied without any change in the upper body. The same test is repeated from the back and the side to insure that the student is in balance to pressure from all directions.

In Figure 7, the trainer is attempting to lift the student's hand. If mind and body are unified, the body becomes one unit so trying to lift the hand would be like trying to lift the whole body. If the hand is easily lifted, the student must check his posture, breath, and the focus of his attention and make any necessary adjustment to return to a state of mind-body unification. In Figure 8, pressure is being applied at the knees. If the student is sitting correctly, there will be no space for the pressure to enter and unbalance the student.

In Figure 9, the trainer is increasing the level of difficulty by pushing on the student's shoulders with two hands. The student raises his hands to touch the trainer's elbows just as his hands come in contact with the shoulders. This touch directs the force from the trainer's push to the one-point and stabilizes the student's posture. A key to this exercise is keeping the spine extended by pulling up on the nape of the neck.



Testing from the back. (Fig 4)



Testing from the front. (Fig 5)



Testing by lifting the hands. (Fig 7)



Testing by lifting the knee. (Fig 8)



Testing from the side. (Fig 6)



(Fig 9) Pushing with two hands.

Concluding Remarks *Seiza* is an integral part of Aikido training. It is not just a customary way of sitting to fill in the time between physical activity. It is first and foremost a way to develop mind-body unification. Each moment on the mat can be training if you sit mindfully whenever not engaged in physical activity. The heightened state of alertness and focus will also make you a more efficient learner.

The stability of balance gained in *seiza* is offset by a loss in mobility. However, the more dynamic exercises based on *seiza* are also effective ways of developing your center and balance because you cannot move efficiently without correct posture. Your gains from this type of practice will transfer directly to your standing practice. As mentioned earlier, these topics will be covered in subsequent articles. There are many different exercises and ways in Aikido to develop your center and balance, and *seiza* and *seiza*-related activities are basic to this development.

Promotions

Yondan

Dale Petersen AIA / Petersen Family Dojo
11/29/03

Audrey Nelson AIA / Ahsa Aikido
1/1/04

Nidan

Christine Johnson Aikido Institute of Mid-America

Shodan

James Hubbard Aikido Institute of Mid-America

Congratulations!

Please send articles, news, and announcements to the Communicator's editor, Doug Wedell via email: Wedell@sc.edu. Deadline for the next two issues are 6/18/04 and 9/17/04, respectively.

Makoto: Sincerity!

By Doug Wedell

In the introduction to *Budo*, the 1938 training manual written by O-Sensei, there are some compelling descriptions of the fundamental spirit of the new art he was developing at the time. A passage that is particularly striking to me is translated as follows (John Stevens 1991 translation, page 32):

Our enlightened ancestors developed true budō based on humanity, love, and sincerity; its heart consists of sincere bravery, sincere wisdom, sincere love and sincere empathy. These four spiritual virtues should be incorporated in the single sword of diligent training; constantly forge the spirit and body and let the brilliance of the transforming sword permeate your entire being.

One key feature of this passage is its emphasis on sincerity, the *makoto* or *sei* in *Seidokan*. Sincerity reflects making our actions and words agree so that we are true to ourselves and our beliefs. O-Sensei describes it as one of the three cornerstones of training, along with humanity (recognition of ourselves within others) and love (the care we extend to others based on that recognition).

Note that beyond this spiritual triangle of humanity, love, and sincerity, O-sensei included the concept of sincerity in each of the four spiritual virtues he listed. Sincere bravery reminds us to face our fears and stay true to our principles in spite of those fears. Sincere wisdom requires that we look beyond the descriptions we place on reality and use our direct experiences and knowledge to gain enlightenment. Sincere love and sincere empathy speak to moving beyond self-centeredness and into a more selfless state.

O-Sensei notes that it is the "diligent sword of training" that allows us to forge these principles into our being, with a key guiding element in our training being sincerity. I believe Kobayashi Sensei chose wisely when he selected the name *Seidokan* for us, reminding us constantly of the aim of our training.



Kanji for Makoto