

Record of my Hombu Dojo Training, 29 March ~ 4 April 2013 by Jerald Tai

General Observations

I woke up every morning at 5:30 am to prepare for my training at Hombu Dojo. The morning classes ended at 9am and were followed by a six-hour break before the afternoon session picked up again at 3pm. This was followed by the evening session finishing at 8 pm.

The first session of the day was conducted by Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba. Later classes were overseen by various Hombu Shihan or Shidoin, and a senior Shihan in the evening. All instructors (Sensei/Shihan) had their own styles, but I could see the principles at work were consistent.

Teaching by Hombu Shihan

All Shihan/Sensei focused primarily on breaking the Uke's balance. Some taught triangular footwork with circular body movements, some taught projection techniques based on the law of the lever, etc. The instructors spent less time explaining the details of immobilization techniques.

It was evident that all Shihan were concerned about practitioners' ukemi, highlighting the importance of protecting oneself and reacting properly to attacks. Proper ukemi can help Tori/Nage optimize his technique.

The techniques I practiced at Hombu Dojo were similar to those taught in Hong Kong. That said, I still learned a lot from the Hombu Shihan, Ushi-deshi and other practitioners. Their attitude, manners and spirit inspired me in a spiritual way and broadened my understanding of Aikido.

Attitude and Manner of Learning Aikido

Before the start of Keiko (practice), people entered the dojo from different entrances, with women entering from the door next to the Shoman and men coming in through the rear door via the male locker room. With the exception of the duty Shihan, all male Aikidoka, regardless of their title or rank, entered by the rear door, including other Hombu Shihan and Waka Sensei. I mention this to emphasize the respect commanded by the each instructor during training. All Aikidoka bow to Shoman and the dojo and sometimes bow to Sempai (senior Aikidoka).

The atmosphere was relaxed, with friendly chatting. Right before class, ushi-deshi will join in and nicely remind practitioners the class is about to begin. At that point, everyone lines up to wait for the Sensei.

During Keiko at Hombu Dojo, one rarely changes partners, although I managed to change several times. My partners were uniformly serious during training and never talked. Some of them had senior rankings, from 5th Dan to 7th Dan, but were still very patient with me and corrected my techniques without verbal explanations. They allowed me to carry on with techniques even when I appeared uncertain. Their main concern was mastering the points demonstrated by the Sensei.

Another huge benefit of the Keiko is the emphasis on ukemi (受身 – Receiving the technique). In particular, Shihan spent a lot of time teaching us ushiro ukemi (後ろ受身 - falling backwards). There is also the important matter of how to attack correctly.

I noticed that all of the practitioners basically had very good ukemi and were able to protect themselves despite practicing in a crowded dojo. They were also conscientious about surveying the area where they were practicing to make sure it was safe before throwing Uke. I felt assured that my partners were intent on having a safe practice that would allow everyone to improve and correct their techniques.

Another major benefit of the Keiko was the opportunity to act as Uke for the teachers. I was lucky enough to have Sakurai Shihan choose me as his Uke. On the 3rd Floor (the main dojo), this honor is generally reserved for Ushi-deshi. It was not uncommon for the teachers to circulate during the class, giving each person the opportunity to act as Uke. And if one is lucky enough, one may be selected to act as Uke while the teacher demonstrates a technique for the entire class. It was quite an experience to feel the power when being thrown by the teachers.

The Hombu training for beginners and yudansha is the same. To master the basics, yudansha can do fast and strong techniques. But that is only because they understand the basics. If one does not grasp the basics, one shouldn't train too fast or hard.

The focus wasn't just on applying techniques, but also on improving Ukemi so that the body gains flexibility coupled with strength. In practice, if Uke is not flexible and cannot keep the connection (musubi), tori can atemi and the technique ends. Flexibility and connection are very important during training.

Teachers

Teachers take their role very seriously, clearly explaining the techniques and offering their advice on how to improve. They weren't just introducing the techniques. They were also focusing on helping people make adjustments and avoid bad habits.

Any Hombu Shihan present at a class they weren't teaching would train just like any other practitioner. They were attentive to the specific movements of the duty instructor. I was deeply impressed by and respected their attitude, and believe that is how they became Shihan.

Making Friends

Another of the benefits I hoped to gain from going to Hombu Dojo was the opportunity to meet people and make friends. It took a while for this to happen. There wasn't a lot of talking during practice, and most people disappeared after the practice was finished. But gradually I made some connections with the other students (asking your partner's name is a good start!), and as we practiced together I slowly got to know a few people. Going through the training together at the end of session also helped to strengthen those friendships, as you feel like you've helped each other achieve something.

Final Words

I was honored to have had dinner with Sugawara Shihan and (a lady Sempai). Sugawara Sensei shared some of his stories about his training at Hombu and offered much encouragement.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to the Hong Kong Aikido Association for sponsoring my visit to Hombu Dojo with funds from the Kenneth Cottier Fund.

In short, if you are considering training at Aikikai Hombu Dojo, and you can afford it and are able to commit to the class times, I say **go for it**. The experience was amazing and one that I will never forget.

Jerald TAI
April 2013

我的合氣道本部道場之旅

二零一三年 春季

戴頌豪

基本觀察

每天早上五時三十分起來，為一天的合氣道訓練作準備，每日早上第一節課堂由 道主-植芝 守央 主持，於上午九時完結，之後的課堂由下午三時開始，直到晚上八時完結，由不同的本部師範及指導員主持，晚上主持課堂更多為高級師範，我當然不會放過所有課堂。師範們各有自己的合氣道及教學風格，但都貫串了一致的本部宗旨和原則。

本部師範的教學

課堂的練習中，師範們示範技法時，會集中強調取方如何用不同方式去破壞對手體勢平衡，受方如何以正確的受身去配合，保護自己，練習雙方是以身體感受一切技法及招式精髓，少用語言去解釋。

其實，在本部練習的招式與香港練習的非常相似，或許稍為重點有別。然而練習時道場上的氣氛、集中的神態，那種練習時的精神感染力，令我更用心去了解自己的合氣道。

練習時的態度及禮儀

有一件事情令我非常深刻，就是對主持課堂師範的尊重。在本部道場，所有男性學員都是從側門進入道場，只有主持課堂的師範能從主門進入，就算是一些高級的本部師範及 少主(植芝 充央) 等，除非是當值師範，否則都會從側門進入道場，練習時亦完全聽從當值師範的指示，課堂開始前，眾人會輕鬆傾談，直至有內弟子提醒課堂開始，參與者會安靜坐好等師範出現。本部非常關心學員的受身練習，用不少時間去指導學員受身技巧，我注意到大部份練習者都有良好的受身技巧，雖然本部道場練習人數眾多，相當擠擁，練習者會十分留意保護對手，只有確信安全情況下，才讓對手拋出或落蓆。

另外，本部道場的練習是甚少更換練習對手，而且更有機會遇上可能是擁有高段位及資歷非凡的師範、指導員及前輩，我也遇到了，他們很有耐性透過練習去調整我的技巧細節，過程中他們沒有隻言片語，縱然我的技巧不足，他們會透過動作告訴我如何改進。

對我而言，練習期間還有一件事情令我血脈沸騰，興奮萬分，就是本部 櫻井 寬幸 師範在其課堂找我作示範，這通常是內弟子的角色，現在卻是我的光榮，這是很難得的機會，讓我能親身感受師範的教導，我知道這對一個海外訪客而言是很難得機會。

還有令我大開眼界的是在本部道場，初學者與有段者(黑帶)的訓練是一樣的，唯一分別是練習者彼此之間會按對方程度而施技，若受方能跟進，取方才可施展強勁、快速的技法，若對手是初學者，取方則應調節技法。尤其練習時對安全及受身的着重，練習時重點並不是施展技法，或擊倒對手，練習時應保持彼此接觸及感應，取方感到受方身體有

足夠的移動力及協調性，則順暢地、自然地施展技法。所以若感覺到對手未能跟隨，則不需要全面施技，只需完成組型，破壞體勢平衡，達到練習目的即可。

本部的師範們

各師範指導非常認真，清晰地示範及解釋技巧，而且還會作出建議甚樣去提昇技巧，他們能指出學員應如何調整自己的技巧，避免養成壞習慣。而且各師範在非當值的課堂，都會與其他學員一起練習，不會因身份而有所影響，在練習時，他們都只是一個普通學員，聽從當值師範的指示，這才是真正值得尊敬的師範態度。

結識新朋友

整個旅程，結識了不少朋友，大家期間交談不太多，甚至有可能不再見面，但大家都是互相尊重，認真好練習合氣道之人，我會與他們保持聯絡，期待有再遇上。

後感

我榮幸能與 菅原 繁 師範 及負責翻譯的女前輩晚餐，他分享了自己在本部練習合氣道的故事，令我獲益良多。

我建議大家，若能力及時間許可，想在本部道場訓練，「就去吧!」不用猶豫，因為這必定是個難忘及裨益良多的旅程。

最後，我想感謝 香港合氣道協會 藉由 葛迪雅基金 贊助我此行。