

CHARTER FOR AIKIDO

Foreword

The goal of training in Budo is to overcome six kinds of diseases :

- q the desire for victory,
- q the desire to rely on technical cunning,
- q the desire to show off,
- q the desire to psychologocally overwhelm the opponent,
- q the desire to remain passive and wait for an opening,
- q the desire to become free of these deseases

Yagyu Munenori (1571-1646) master swordman of the Tokugawa Shogun.

Aikido remains very much alive. Today, several Aikido experts who are the direct disciples of Ueshiba Sensei, still remain very much active. We feel bound to help them preserve and transmit their knowledge to the future generations.

In several instances, the persons in charge of national Aikido associations have encouraged simplified forms of its practice. Some also claim that Aikido is nothing but a physical activity. We feel bound to correct this simplistic and inaccurate conception.

HISTORICAL ORIGIN

Aikido is a discipline created by O-Sensei Ueshiba Morihei. It includes diverse and complex elements, some of them technical, others philosophical or moral.

Aikido was officially recognized as an original martial discipline by the Japanese authorities in 1942.

After World War II, its founder offered his creation to the world. In order to spread his method, he even sent his own experts to Europe and to the United States of America in the fifties and later.

The present Doshu, grand'son of the founding Master, remains the model and the moral guardian of Aikido. The Tokyo Aikikai was founded with O-Sensei's permission. This respected organisation remains a testimony of loyalty to the wishes of its creator. However, no national or international concern should claim to have a monopoly on any part of a discipline that his creator himself considered as universal. Thus, Aikido should never be considered as being the exclusive property of any single person or group.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Aikido is not a sport in the Western meaning of that word. The practice of Aikido uses precise physical actions but the discipline itself remains quite complex. Its subtleties can only be understood little by little.
- According to its Founder, Aikido has mainly peaceful purposes. It was inspired by an ancient tradition, expressed by Lao-tseu's *Tao-tö-king*. The word *BUDO* means "chivalrous path". The first ideogram *BU* can be roughly translated by "one who stops the spears" i. e. a man of peace. Thanks to that high conception, Aikido cannot be mistaken for a set of merely defensive or fighting techniques.
- Aikido appears to be an efficient method for solving conflicts in a peaceful way and reconciling opposites forces. It teaches its followers how to develop the human, moral and physical qualities necessary to achieve its high purposes.
- The human psyche is often the siege of contradictory impulses. Experience has shown that a steady practice of Aikido improves self-control. It also brings about deep mental changes such as an enhanced vigilance, increased equanimity, as well as better health and stamina.
- No human being should disregard the laws of nature. If he tries to understand them and conform to their dictates he may expect to achieve a more harmonious life. The Founder went as far as claiming that an adept has a personal responsibility in the proper working of the universe.
- O-Sensei did not want Aikido to become a sport (as Judo did). He rejected the artificial restrictive rules of sport and considered that competition stimulated ambition and vanity in the young people. He wanted his Budo to be a traditional school firmly rooted in reality. Therefore, Aikido's normal sphere of activity is not only the Dojo but the whole universe as well.

TEACHING AIKIDO

The above principles impose some constraints on the teaching and practice of Aikido. Most of them are traditional. Several concern the safety of the students.

The rules, which insure the proper functioning of a Dojo, the etiquette, the necessary courtesy and cooperation between the students, as well as the respect due to the instructor are valid in the protected area where the training takes place.

The ranks and honorary distinctions may be thought of as encouragements for the younger students; however they have no practical usefulness in everyday life. The students should know that they need moral and physical qualities to help them withstand the hardship of life.

Although the *study* of Aikido takes place in a protected area, the Dojo, the *real practice* takes place outside, in the concrete everyday world, where weapons cut, where accidents happen and where mistakes may kill. In this complex universe, where situations are always

changing, the first quality of a human being is its ability to adapt to unforeseen situations. It is obvious that the mere repetition of specific gestures in response to given attacks would not be enough to face up to that reality. Thus, spontaneity, ability to welcome, vigilance and an unfettered mind, remain essential qualities. Training exercises, such as *randoris*, which develop these characteristics should be compulsory.

Systematic use of excessive muscular strength, when executing an Aikido technique, is *always* a mistake. It slows down any type of action; it blocks the necessary perception of the opponent's movements; it slows adaptation to the different phases of a fight. Furthermore, excessive force often leads to accidents and conflicts.

Acquiring accurate techniques is an essential step but it should never prevent the student from keeping up his ability to adapt. On the contrary, repetition of harmonious techniques, applied with the concern of protecting the opponent, is an efficient educational method to help the student's progress. Ultimately, it will allow them to master themselves and reality.

REQUIREMENTS

It is far from certain that Aikido needs a complex administration in order to flourish. Each School or Dojo already has the necessary internal organization allowing it to function properly. A simple communication system between the basic components – Dojos, clubs or schools – would be a big step forward compared with today's situation.

Experience has shown that an organization of Aikido solely intent on copying a technical model was a dangerous chimera. The temptation, for any group, to possess an exclusive monopoly on this Art, with the help of the authorities as the case may be, would be at complete odds with the principles taught by the Founder. It would negate the freedom of expression and the right to personal research we wish to preserve.

In the countries where the ranking system (**dans**) has been stolen by human groups, as an instrument of power, it is essential that the teachers be given back their essential responsibility of grading their own students. They know their students best, in all their complexity and they are aware of their inner wealth and occasional technical defects. Thus, the teacher is the only person really able to appreciate the level of his own students.

The transmission of knowledge can be properly carried out from teacher to student. Assistants who have proved their worth under the supervision of an expert may become instructors in their turn. Official commissions that grant teaching certificates after a simple examination fail to guarantee the competence of a candidate. These commissions often display a complete lack of objectivity. Collegial decisions and secret deliberations insure the individual irresponsibility of their members. They should be proscribed.

GENERAL REMARKS

- q An overwhelming ranking system might lead the students to seek flattering distinctions instead of pursuing their own individual research. A wise enough student will know that any such distinction only reflects a level of technical accomplishment, at a given time. that Progress towards mastery should remains mostly invisible.

- q The wealth of Aikido rests partly on its experts' knowledge. They are the best choice when it comes to demonstrate the underlying principles of our discipline. However, no single expert can claim today that he alone represents the Art which he teaches.
- q Every instructor, every confirmed student, even if they cannot claim to be full-fledged experts, do possess a specific proficiency. The sum of those diverse experiences constitute an impressive whole. It should be approached with due respect.
- q The students are the *raison d'être* of education and represent the future of the Art we practice. At first they are the reflection of their teachers but they must keep alive their independence and their ability to critic. Thus, they will prepare themselves when the time comes for them to teach what they have learned.
- q The frame in which the transmission of knowledge takes place and is put to practice is the whole universe. As no one can claim to know it in its entirety, no one can put arbitrary limits to the field of research of an Aikido student.

PROTOCOL

This document offers ideas and principles around which a fair number of Aikido teachers and students could rally. They should permit an informal gathering of most persons who wish to protect the wealth and variety of that Art.

Article 1

The signatories of this Charter generally adhere to the principles mentioned in the Preamble. Their aim is to preserve for the coming generations O-Sensei Ueshiba Morihei's Aikido, in all its wealth and complexity.

Article 2

By practicing that Art they contribute to its transmission in a spirit of tolerance and respect. They specifically reject any kind of discrimination, either based on political convictions, or religious belief, or ethnical differences.

Article 3

The signatories do not expect any reward for their efforts except to know that they have been participating in the useful task of spreading peace and harmony around the world.

Article 4

They recognize the Dojo – a place made sacred by the practice of the Path – as the fundamental unit for teaching Aikido. It includes the students, their instructor and, as the case may be, the President, united by a common practice.

Article 5

Inside a Dojo, no one may interfere between the students and their instructor. The latter is responsible for the techniques he teaches and for the ranks he grants to encourage the neophytes.

Article 6

When a teacher allows a student to wear the black belt, it is not only because he has reached a sufficient technical level. It is also a symbol of sincere and unselfish research. The black belt implies a personal commitment by the student who will have, from then on, to discover by himself the deepest secrets of the Art and remain faithful to what he, or she, will have learned from them.

Article 7

Nowadays, as always, the real hability of a human being is assessed by the test of reality, not by the distinctions and trinkets he has been awarded. A teacher should not request any rank for himself, nor mention too loudly those he has received in the past.

Article 8

Regardless of more restrictive legal conditions, which could be effective in some countries, every teacher may issue, *under his own responsibility*, a teaching certificate to one of his assistrants. That authorization will be implicit if an owner of the black belt can prove an effective practice in teaching Aikido.

Article 9

In a spirit of conciliation, the membership in an Aikido Federation will not prevent a black belt holder from signing this Protocol if he shares our goals. On the contrary we sincerely hope that the high principles, which we are putting forward, can be accepted by all true practitionners of Aikido.

Out of respect for other students of Aikido and aware of their own human weakness, the signatories of this Protocol disclaim being the depositories of any kind of absolute Truth. Therefore, any improvement to this text or any other initiative for a better safeguard of Aikido are welcome and can be put down in writing below.

Drafted in the month April 2000

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Contribution du Dr. Jean-Marie TUNG

1 Le dojo est la cellule de base, centrée sur son professeur, éventuellement relié à une Ecole, c'est à dire une structure à échelle familiale où tous les pratiquants se connaissent, rassemblés autour d'un ancien...

2 Personne ne détient la vérité, ni enseignant, ni expert, fut-il élève direct du Fondateur ; il n'y a que des "gardiens du savoir" et toute garantie est relative.

3 Le Dan est un contrat entre le professeur et son élève dans le cadre d'un dojo ou d'une Ecole et ne devrait pas faire l'objet d'une publicité. Aura-t-on le courage de dire que ce système est néfaste et devrait être supprimé, surtout pour le professeur ?

4 Question fondamentale : Qui est apte à dire si tel ou tel pratiquant expert ou groupe est apte à faire partie de cette Charte. Sur quels critères (forcément subjectifs) ?

Réponse:

« C'est à chacun de décider si oui ou non il adhère (à peu près) aux idées qui sont contenue dans la Charte et le Protocole. Si un pratiquant, un expert ou un groupe se reconnaît dans les principes qui sont proposés, il est le bienvenu. Personne n'aurait l'idée de lui imposer le moindre critère ! »

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Chers amis,

Merci de votre lettre et de vos encouragements pour le livre sur le Bouddhisme.

En ce qui concerne le protocole ta première remarque, Jean-Marie, est tout à fait partagée. Il est évident que les fédérations, à l'image de celles de Football, sont des usines à fric et des instruments de pouvoir. C'est pourquoi je n'ai pas voulu d'une organisation de plus, mais simplement une affirmation publique, face aux ignorants ou aux malveillants,

Pour la seconde, c'est une évidence. La vérité quand on s'en approche n'est, le plus souvent, que notre propre image vue dans un miroir.

En ce qui concerne les grades des professeurs, je pense que ce point n'est pas assez clairement précisé. Je me propose d'ajouter en annexe toutes les remarques et compléments envoyés par les signataires. Les tiens seront en bonne place.

La proposition du Doshu, de nous aligner en fonction de l'ancienneté, ce jour là, était tout à fait ponctuelle et ne concernait que la séance d'entraînement concernée (celle de 1989) ! Il n'était certainement pas dans son intention de substituer l'ancienneté aux grades, que son organisation distribuait à l'époque à ses clients (au sens romain du terme).

Pour ta question fondamentale : **Qui est apte à dire si tel ou tel pratiquant expert ou groupe est apte à faire partie (à être signataire) de cette Chartre ?** La réponse est très simple :

« C'est à chacun de décider si oui ou non il adhère (à peu près) aux idées qui y sont contenues. Si un pratiquant, un expert ou un groupe se reconnaît dans les principes qui sont proposés, il est le bienvenu et personne, pas en tout cas Michel ou moi, n'aurait l'idée de lui imposer le moindre critère ! »

Je transmets tes coordonnées à Michel Cogneau et joint ton nom à celui des signataires.

Grosses bises aux filles, qui vont apprécier d'être enfin en vacances !