



**TAKEMUSU AIKIDO ASSOCIATION
ITALY**

The Last Uchideshi of Morihei Ueshiba

It is my opinion that the task of a reporter should be to give an objective account of the events, in order to let everyone to be informed and consider them according to his own individuality. But by now I am aware that writing about Hiroswawa Sensei I cannot do it, because my feelings will inevitably shine through these lines of mine. Then, I consciously give up being “scientifically” objective, even keeping to the facts, and all I can offer you is being truthful to myself. You can enjoy or not my “art of reporting”, but I will more than satisfied if it will induce you to break off and think for a while.

Osimo, a nice city of Marche region in Italy, famous for an international treaty, this time was the place where Hideo Hiroswawa Sensei, 7th dan for twenty years and practitioner of Aikido for fifty years, directed his first international seminar in Europe (he was only once in Australia and New Zealand before) and for the first time he offered some public teaching about the inner spiritual concepts and applications of Aikido.

A name was mentioned so many times, with respect and recognition, also by Hiroswawa Sensei: that one of Hiroshi Tada Shihan.

After he was informed about he invitation by Paolo Corallini to this direct student of the Founder, Tada Shihan met Hiroswawa Sensei for a talk in Japan and generously approved his coming to Italy.

As a highly esteemed symbol of the worldwide Aikido, Tada Shihan showed his respect to the memory of his Master and the art he has been devoting his life to, by supporting the idea of Hiroswawa Sensei’s seminar, in which he would be focusing on the teachings of O’Sensei in his final years, the period when Tada Sensei was involved full time in establishing the Italian section of Aikikai.

I would like to join in thanking him from the bottom of my heart. Thanks to the teachings I had received by Tada Shihan I could gain an understanding of the contents I was so blessed to get from Hiroswawa Sensei.

The purpose of Aikido truly needs the support and cooperation of “those who know” ...and I do not add anything else.

Hideo Hiroswawa Sensei was a direct student of O’Sensei for more than twelve years, many of them as uchideshi at the Ibaragi Dojo. After Ueshiba’s passing, he remained in Iwama as a regular practitioner under the guidance of Morihiro Saito

Sensei (his brother in law). At the moment he is a member of the teaching team at the Ibaragi dojo and he directs the Sunday class, which is the most attended.

Since the beginning he felt an unreserved love for Aikido practice. His ideals made him feel that he did not want to take any advantage of training as a chance for financial profit; so he opted for a different job, apparently an ordinary one, not contrasting with his longing for Aikido research.

For three days I was blessed not only to follow his classes, but also to stay in the same hotel where Sensei was, to share all meals and spare time with him. I met a gentle and generous man, inexhaustible in communicating and giving, without any limit. He portrays himself as enthused by a *kami* (spirit), as if Morihei Ueshiba himself grants him access to certain contents of Aikido.

Since his youth, Hirosawa Sensei, at the Ibaragi dojo, was attracted by those non-physical aspects of the art of O'Sensei, by that "strangeness", just to all appearances incomprehensible that played an important role in making him a legendary figure, who fascinated so many people -people curious and often longing for those "powers" for their own success.

When Morihei let people ask him questions, Hideo Hirosawa did it with a pure and direct attitude. His Master, who at first sent him to hell (just to put him to the test), then, after considered his perseverance, answered: "Go and prepare tea" and after the training he was teaching him, sowing the seeds of a practice which he was and still is loyal to.

I imagine that those who have not seen Hirosawa Sensei would be very curious as to what his "special" practice consists of. Hirosawa Sensei shared this "special" practice with us, communicating and emphasizing that this was actually nothing special. Even though, we were witnesses to things that did confuse us. According to Sensei's wish, people who were not allowed to participate in the special practice were allowed to watch.

Here is an example: twenty black-belt practitioners were invited to join in a chain, strongly holding hands. Sensei went close to them and by a motion from the right to the left, touched - touched! - with one finger, the first man of the line at the level of his hara (centre), lightly pulling him off balance and making him fall. With a comical domino effect, the falling passed on from the first to the last man. To all appearances, there wasn't anything transcendental about this, with the exception of an acceleration of the action (while Sensei was continuously exhaling), causing the first member of the chain to fall softly. The last ones dropped to the ground on the left and right sides.

Was this a circus act? Was it Houdini on the mat? No, actually I don't think so.

This and much more are the consequences of the principles pointed out by O-Sensei, and referred to by name by other masters as well. But Hirosawa Sensei assumed the risky responsibility of demonstrating them, with no fear of laying himself open to scepticism and jeers.

These effects are not possible unless an inner attitude is achieved based on these principles.

First of all, the "power" you are using is not yours, you are merely a channel. In order to become this channel, you cannot be in competition with others, nor try to rule them.

This cannot be a paradox, because - assuming that we are acting in good faith - apparently it is the opponent that attacks us. If I do not defend myself, who else will?

At this point, the statement of O-Sensei – whom none of us have met – about becoming one with the universe would be considered to be a purely mystical concept, if someone such as Hirosawa Sensei could not bring it on a very tangible mat.

Masakatsu, Agatsu Katsu-ayabi ("true victory is the victory over oneself"), as is written by O-Sensei on the Kakejiku (written scroll) that is amazingly on display in Paolo Corallini's private dojo, could be the right key to a meaningful understanding.

More than the concrete aspect of the attack, what is dangerous is our inner reaction to it, the effect on our "spirit", our intention, our "heart".

The real attempt on our safety is a consequence of the inner upsetting effect on our spirit that, breaking our original integrity, hands ourselves over to the negativity (the fission of only one atomic nucleus brings about a chain reaction, by which a destructive energy is released with long-lasting contaminating effects); furthermore, from our or others' evilness can arise only more wickedness, generating never-ending feuds.

Hirosawa Sensei clearly states that the two opposing energies should be combined – (as in a nuclear fusion that fuels the stars, by which much vitalizing and healthy energy is released, with no collateral effect, just as in Aikido, if at the correct distance).

Choosing between the symbolic (from Greek *symbolon*: *sym-* "together" + *ballein*, "to throw", meaning "to throw together") and the diabolical alternative (again from Greek *dia-ballein*: *dia-*, "across" + *ballein*, meaning "throw across"), how to elude the pure verbalism and act in reality?

Hirosawa Sensei says that the rhythm of life, of all of the Universe (and of the psychologism that is behind it), is the same as intense breathing. In order to relate ourselves with the Principle, when somebody attacks us we should connect with him, breathing him in from his centre, and then, breathing out, "lead" him and by making him waste his energy on the attack, let your opponent feel astonished by the enjoyable sensation he feels in failing with his aggressive intention. This has a deeply disarming effect, just as deeply disarming as the personality of Hirosawa Sensei himself when, with his humble and constant smile, he asks the people who have been "led" – not thrown - which sensation they have felt.

Courage is required to not refuse the other's aggression; even more power is necessary to not become contaminated by the spirit of the reaction, evoking in this way our inner enemy. We are put to the test our whole life through; we always have to improve our comprehensibility and humility. We will more and more often be called upon to reconsider ourselves, to find a new balance, to painfully break the old emotional container to create a bigger one, able to store the conflicting opposites.

Hirosawa Sensei continuously refers to the smile of O'Sensei in his later years, a smile that underlined the pleasure of practice, the enjoyable *Ki* (spirit, energy), like a wind that permeates the place of the Way, changing the mood. Then, if the relation is opposed to the conflict, the negativity can be dispersed, and if we smile (in Italian, *ridiamo*) to our opponent we give him back (in Italian *ri-diamo*) his energy, now purified by the *Ki* of the Universe.

Connecting with the Universe, physically and psychologically, we can have the effect of the symbol and become one with the aims of Universe, that is endless. This is the ceaseless work, the daily *keiko*, the never-ending analysis, the

ubermensch.

We are inevitably taking flight towards ethereal levels that involve life and death - matters strangely enough not unrelated to martial arts and the fundamental meanings of life as human beings.

Because of his three near-death experiences, Hirosawa Sensei got a bright, clear and solid vision about life and death that he renders in a very amusing, easy way: "Our body is merely clothing, but our spirit, that is One, is everlasting." And he is utterly persuasive, avowing it from those "regions" he visited in his exceptional experiences of the border between life and death.

Another significant part of Hirosawa Sensei's training is the underlining the role of the gaze: *metsuke*.

Important points he makes are: rhythm of breathing, visualizing the centre of the attacker (who is "inhaled" into our centre and led by breathing out), and the direction of our gaze. An example is *ikkyo*, which O'Sensei executed looking upward (and not only because he was not tall!).

These principles, essentially easy, require a great understanding of the inner aspects; let us consider that looking at the exterior reality should be complemented by the internalized visualisation, with the necessary attitude of discerning the two functions, avoiding to waste the naturalness of deep breathing, keeping in balance, calm, at the right distance, at the right moment...

Even though one "myself" would like to pursue all these elements, he will inevitably find himself out of breath, and confused from head to toe. There is something superior that we should interact with, toward which we should be open, that should call for our attention; that we should let ourselves be amazed and transformed by. This actually means to care for ourselves, in a way we realize to be religious, even for a professing atheist. The religiosity of the action verifies a perfect unison between the Founder and his last *uchi deshi*, also influenced by those above mentioned experiences. Passing from a religious education in the light of the absolute transcendence to an art that prays with the body in connection with the spirit, for me, a western man of even rejected Catholic roots, represented an unexpected discovery.

Joining together the -no longer- opposite body and soul suggests other unions that the symbolic attitude is invited to celebrate, such as that of male and female. The emphasis given by Hirosawa Sensei on leading more than throwing and the attitude of "capacity", calls the cruel warrior to light himself up by a purely female attitude, part of what commonly "women do not say".

It is a female trait - the subliminal capacity of leading the brutal and unidirectional energies, of calming down, even ensnaring them. In fact, I consider some dynamics of Hirosawa Sensei seductive, such as when the attacker, without being touched, oddly changes direction.

There was a lovely anecdote told by Hirosawa Sensei about the Founder's wife, referred to by aikido practitioners as O-Okusama (Great Wife), her actual name being Hatsu. As is often the case, O'Sensei's wife had a great influence on her husband. If she liked someone, then a potential dislike by the Founder could be easily overcome, but in cases of the contrary, she could be unswerving in her opinion.

Obviously, if from my male point of view I well understand the necessity of combining the female principle, looking at the contemporary world, it seems to me essential to invite the female universe to do the same with the male principle

and with the same humility. Only if the two principles recognize each other (the necessity of "breathing" in the opponent), the integration could be realised, just as O'Sensei explained the *tai sabaki* of certain techniques - inviting *tori* to take the place of *uke* -also psychologically!

In his later years, O'Sensei often underlined that the sound "ai" also means love. He would often emphasize this aspect, taking advantage of the different meanings of the same word to make jokes, a practice found often with other enlightened Japanese men, for instance Yamaoka Tesshu, and echoed by western psychology (Freud, Lacan...).

Observing Hirosawa Sensei I am in no way uncertain in stating that the true practice of Aikido (as the spiritual tradition of the tantric Buddhism that O'Sensei was looking for all his life) is making love! To avoid some laughable misunderstandings, I definitely do not refer here to *Kama Sutra*. Again, the Greek language suggests us different meanings of "love", such as:

Eros = love among human beings;

Filia = friendship;

Adelfia = brotherhood;

Agape = consubstantiation eating the same food;

Porneia = physical practice of love.

In particular, Aikido teaches to blend, to harmonize using the gesture of violence, distilling **love as reconciliation**. A rejoicing love, with body and soul, grateful to God, a prayer.

About this loving practice, Hirosawa Sensei reminds us that the Founder was only one and that, inspired by him, united under the guidance of Doshu Moriteru, we should work in harmony, each according his own personality, in order to not dissipate that precious treasure and to realize the true Aikido.

Angelo Armano