

On the Martial Ways of Japan - The Training of Unification of Body and Spirit*

*In Aiki News # 42 (November 1981) translated by Larry & Seiko Bieri

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The article written by M. Ueshiba O'Sensei and published on this website with the kind permission of Stanley Pranin founder of Aikido Journal, appeared in the newsletter of the Budo Senyokai around 1932.

When I visit bujutsu (martial arts) dojo in various places, I notice that very few have a dojo shrine for the "kami." This is especially true of dojo in schools. It seems that modern people think that they can master budo and train in the bujutsu simply by moving the body alone. When I look upon these people who are being trained with this attitude, and work up a good sweat with them, I feel a sort of inexpressible sorrow along with a great responsibility. A "dojo" is, as we can see from the characters by which the word is written, a training place (jo) for the "Way" (do or michi). These present day "dojo" are more suited to the term "factories." As an analogy, despite great advances in the sciences and much progress in the making of alloys and the tempering of metals, modern swords cannot be compared with the famous swords of the past. Striking an accord between modern science and ancient Shinto beliefs is the great path that is our goal. I would like to realize the great essence of budo through this spirit of accord between old and new.

People are cut first not by the blade of the sword, but by the sakki, the bloodthirsty wish to kill, which is thrust out from the mind of the attacker before the blade moves. The famous teacher of the third Tokugawa Shogun, Iemitsu, Yagyu Taima no Kami was walking one day in a garden followed by a servant who was suddenly taken up with the thought, "If I were to attack him now, even such a great swordsman as my master would surely be unable to resist..." At that very instant, as if taken over by some great anxiety, Tajima no Kami hastily returned to his own quarters and spoke to his servant, "Just now while walking in the garden, I felt sakki attack me. But no one except yourself was present. What I fear is sakki where no enemy is apparent."

The essence of waging war is to foresee the enemy's battle plan. As the Baltic fleet of Czarist Russia was approaching our national waters, the hardships faced by Admiral Togo and his men, including Shimamura and Akiyama, were more than words can express. They were almost unable to eat or sleep. Their one thought was to beseech the "kami" to preserve this imperial nation. One night Captain Akiyama had a vision of the Baltic fleet in a single line heading north in the Tsushima straits between western Japan and the Korean Peninsula. When he later related his dream to his commanding officer, Admiral Togo realized that the enemy fleet must be going to pass that way and so it was that our nation's plan of battle was decided [by this dream]. Anyone who has ever had an experience with inspiration will readily admit that such things happen.

As another example, after you have reached a certain level in training of the "way of the sword", you can feel your enemy's intention to cut before the blade begins to cut downward. I, myself, have had the experience of seeing a one inch, white-colored "idea-bullet" and heard its whizzing sound as it flew toward me before the actual bullet was fired, [an experience which] completely defies time and space. In genuine budo, however, simply foreseeing the enemy's plan is not sufficient. But to equip your inner-self with the power to move the enemy according to your own will is the true Way of the Gods (kami no michi). This is just the tip on the iceberg of inspirational experience found in relation to budo. If the bujutsu trainees of this age were to realize that they should honor the "kami" and train in the oneness of the spirit and the body, they would be amazed with their own progress.