

Interview with Robert Nadeau

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Robert Nadeau at 2001 San Rafael Summer Camp

Robert Nadeau was 22 years old when he boarded a ship bound for Japan. His odyssey brought him face to face with the founder of aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, who would remain a constant source of inspiration and guidance to the young foreigner. A full-time aikido instructor in Northern California for over 30 years, Nadeau reminisces about his early days in budo and the evolution of his unique body and spiritual training methods.

Nowadays when a student walks into an aikido dojo there are likely to be many black belts on the mat. However, when you began there were probably less than five dojos in all of California.

I'm not sure what was going on down south in Southern California, but as far as I know there was only one school in Northern California which was run by Robert Tann. I wasn't very connected with the Los Angeles area to know what was going on, although I do remember meeting Francis Takahashi around early 1962.

I guess you didn't train with Robert Tann very long before going to Japan...

No, not very long. I was grateful for the opportunity that he provided me to start training. He reminded me at his retirement dinner that it was at my insistence that he continued to operate a dojo and teach.

So you received your first dan rank in Japan?

Yes.

You mentioned a very interesting episode where you had a dream in which a little old man with a white beard appeared and went to see a psychic about it...

It's an oft told story. A family member said that she had met a fantastic psychic who could even name names. So I went to see this lady in San Jose and we got along really well. She said without any prompting, "You're going to the Orient." I said I was. "You're going to meet a little old man with a white beard who is very powerful. He's going to teach you many things. She said his name was MOR.... and at that time I interrupted her because I knew who she meant.

Did you fly to Japan?

No, I went by ship and it took about two weeks. There was time to become acclimatized. Fortunately, there were some Japanese workmen on the ship who taught me bad Japanese!

You mentioned that when you arrived in Japan you started studying several arts at once. Would you talk about that?

Yes, because back in the California I had been doing karate, judo, aikido plus teaching self-defense to the police. I figured I would just continue my studies in Japan and practice as much as I could. My intention was to go there and study everything. I loved being a student. I had no headaches, no body pressure, it was an environment that really suited me. So, when I arrived, I went to the Japan Karate Association, the Kodokan, and the Aikikai Hombu Dojo. After a while it was just the aikido that interested me. Slowly, I dropped out of the other arts. It could have turned out differently. Once, there was a well-known 7th dan judo teacher who saw me in the dressing room at the Kodokan—I had a lot of muscles then—and he said that with my body I should be a judo 3rd dan and invited me to train with him. Fortunately, I mentioned this to my Japanese family and they said, "Oh, no! We'll find you a teacher," and they tried to arrange lessons for me with a judo teacher at a university they were connected with. So if the 7th dan had taken me

under his wing, I might have continued judo.

Also, I did spend some time with Donn Draeger and a group of Western martial artists including Terry Dobson, and a famous t'ai ch'i teacher named Wang Shu-Chin.

Would you give us a little cameo on Donn Draeger? He is not too well-known but was quite an exceptional individual.

He was a good writer and researcher. He liked to train, especially with the jo, because his knees were gone from judo. He used to do mostly ground work at the Kodokan because he couldn't afford to have any more knee injuries. We used to meet at his house and invite this Chinese master who was a monk and was really skilled. He taught t'ai chi, pakua, and Hsing-I. He looked like "Odd Job" from the old 007 Bond movies! He would let us punch him in the stomach, or even the groin. You could squeeze his groin and there was no response. If you punched him in the stomach, he would twist his waist a tiny bit and your punching hand would get injured. Again, if I hadn't met O-Sensei I would have followed this man because of his energy capability plus his fighting skills. But again, O-Sensei was so much more than all of these guys.

I just ended up doing aikido. I liked the people at the Hombu Dojo. I felt comfortable there. I was very impressed with O-Sensei...

There was a story of you getting an apartment right near the Hombu Dojo, thereby fulfilling a prophecy...

As I mentioned, I was studying judo, karate, aikido, etc. The different schools were located in different parts of Tokyo. I called a real estate agent and I said I needed an apartment, but I didn't say anything about where. The agent picked me up and took me to Shinjuku. Lo and behold he starts to drive me up towards Hombu. "Whoa! This is weird!", I thought. We went to this apartment right around the corner from the dojo. It was just a few seconds away! It just seemed to be an accident but the previously mentioned psychic said, "You will live with him, above him, or near him." Living there in Wakamatsu-cho, it was very hard for me to go across town when I had Hombu right there. It was hard for me to go to some of these other classes that I was feeling questions about anyway. Different things got blocked out for different reasons, leaving me to major in Aikido. I realized that aikido was for me although it was hard to leave the other arts because I had a lot of years practicing them and was about ready to get rank.

Would you describe the situation at Hombu when you arrived?

It was 1962 when I got there. The main teachers were Kisaburo Osawa, Wakasensei (Kisshomaru Ueshiba), Koichi Tohei, Sadateru Arikawa and Seigo Yamaguchi. Hiroshi Tada was there for a bit before going to Italy. On Sundays, there was Morihiro Saito. And O-Sensei, of course.



Left to right: Roy Suenaka, Morihei Ueshiba, Seiichi Sugano, and Robert Nadeau

And who were the uchideshi then?

Yoshimitsu Yamada, Seiichi Sugano, the two Kurita brothers, Yutaka and Minoru, Mitsugi Saotome, Kazuo Chiba, Norihiko Ichihashi, Nobuyoshi Tamura, Masando Sasaki, and others whose names slip my mind.

Did you train a lot with the uchideshi?

Oh yes! I was fortunate to train with people who are now 7th and 8th dans. They were good training partners and helped me out a lot. I was close to many of them like Yoshimitsu Yamada, Yutaka Kurita, Mitsunari Kanai and Seiichi Sugano. Also, Eddie Hagihara from New York and Henry Kono from Toronto were very close friends.

Whose classes did you like to attend?

Oh, I went to everybody's class. I liked all of the teachers. They all offered something different. The only reason I didn't attend Saito Sensei's Sunday class is that my wife insisted that I had to give her one day. But I appreciated his friendliness. For example, if you were sitting at the edge of the mat he would come and explain things to you. That was very nice.

Also, Koichi Tohei was a very good teacher. I took private lessons from him for a long time. Often these would turn into small group classes with someone like Seiichi Sugano joining in or when Frank Doran stopped into visit.

Would you say at the time that Tohei Sensei was the main technical influence?

I don't know if he was *the* dominant force, but he certainly was a dominant force; remember he was the head teacher. And, of course, O-Sensei was still there and I'd say he was *the* dominant force. Tohei Sensei was a dominant force in the sense that he would get on the case of the younger teachers and correct them. On the other hand, so many people attended Doshu's class that I'd have to say he had a lot of influence also.

Later there was a schism between Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba and Tohei, and Tohei Sensei eventually separated from Hombu Dojo. Did you notice anything then that would indicate tension between them?

There was nothing I noticed at first. It was later that the questions came up of Tohei Sensei's changing things. For example, he would change the way of doing things every time he came back from Hawaii. More important, it was noted by many that his attitude changed each time he returned from Hawaii. Later, there was a sense that he was going to make a move away from Hombu. That became apparent. We used to talk about it in the nearby coffee shop,

the Kojimaya. We would talk about what was going to happen when O-Sensei died. The problems started to show more and more as time passed.

I think I have some film of you training with Sugano Sensei in those years. You looked very good considering that this was back in 1963 or 64...

What can I say! I was good? (laughter) I had a lot of support. I was a fast learner and an athlete. When I went there I had well-developed, functioning muscles. I had been training in physical development daily for over ten years. Also, my devotion to the martial arts started at 15. My judo teacher said that I took to it like a duck to water!

I trained hard. I think where I lucked out was in keeping my areas of interest separated. For example, let's say 10:00 pm to midnight was my spiritual meditation time. Sometimes in the afternoon I would do other dimensions of energy. I would do maybe t'ai ch'i type things or stances. Then when I went to the dojo I was there to be there, here and now, and physical. I think each part of me got a turn and didn't fight or conflict with the others. Sometimes I see people trying to do a technique but their attention may be on some spiritual area and it's interfering with them being there. They are somewhere else.

You have mentioned that you had opportunities to spend some "quality" time with O-Sensei...

I wish I could remember the first question I asked him, but I can't recall. Whatever it was, he apparently liked the question and invited me to come spend time with him. At first I got some bad vibes from some of the seniors, but then O-Sensei kept asking for me so they relaxed. A lot of it was just to be in his presence and to try to absorb something, like osmosis. For example, I made an audio tape of O-Sensei with the older Kurita brother and Henry Kono. He was very intent on trying to get the essence of Aikido across to us. There was so much said that Henry Kono and myself spent a month hashing it over.

I would communicate with O-Sensei by asking questions that I thought were major directions for my spiritual development that had begun years before in the States. I knew he was very advanced. So I would say, "Does the Universe work this way?" and explain myself. I would ask him a major directional question. He would confirm or correct and then I would work with that information.

A Japanese in the presence of a master like O-Sensei probably would not even ask a question. O-Sensei may have liked the spontaneity of the foreigners.

At no time did I ever feel anything on his part but a desire to communicate and be honest with me. Never did I get any negative reaction to my questions. There was one occasion when [Fukiko] Sunadomari, Eddie Hagihara, and myself were with O-Sensei. I would ask O-Sensei about something I was doing and she would interpret and say no, that wasn't right. Then O-Sensei would contradict her and say I was right. This happened about three times in a row. This encouraged me to continue asking him questions and deepening my own practice. It also made me realize that in understanding O-Sensei you are on your own.

I think I was lucky in a certain way that I was able to pick up on things like "Seicho no Ie" [a Shinto-based sect founded by Masaharu Taniguchi and one of several offshoots of the Omoto religion] in California before I went to Japan. A friend of mine who helped me to get to Japan was a teacher of Seicho no Ie. She used to hand me booklets and I started to get into it. One day in the dojo, O-Sensei was talking in the dojo and mentioned Seicho no Ie and Taniguchi Sensei and I grabbed someone and asked what he had said. The person told me that O-Sensei said, "I walked the same Path as Taniguchi Sensei." I was excited to hear that!

You know Taniguchi Sensei was originally a believer in the Omoto religion and one of the transcribers who took down Onisaburo Deguchi's words. Deguchi would get up in the morning and, while still reclining in bed, dictate the train of consciousness material that was collected into the 81-volume *Reikai Monogatari* (Tales from the Spirit World).

Taniguchi himself wrote hundreds of books, many in English. They would just gush out of him. So just to learn that I was reading about Taniguchi Sensei and, lo and behold, O-Sensei says he walked the same Path as him! It sort of validated what I was doing.

How often did O-Sensei actually come on to the mat and teach while you were there at Hombu Dojo?

I don't know how much he was teaching... I knew he was out of town a lot. Today you were kind of inferring that he was never there...

Actually, my point was that he was not in charge of the technical curriculum.

That's true. Whenever he was there, though, he would talk and demonstrate things. To get to the office from his house he had to walk through the dojo. I remember one occasion with the windows of the dojo open on a very cold day, that he talked for an hour. Even though it was uncomfortable, I just liked being in his presence. Not everyone reacted positively.

Your stay in Japan was about two years?

The first stay, yes. After two years, I was bombarded with the idea of going home.

Then you returned to California?

Yes. I had been on the police force before my first trip. I was in Northern California for about a year and then I went back to Japan. It's an old monastery occurrence, where you leave its security and go out into the world. Then you miss the monastic life and return again. So I went back for about three months. My training partners were waiting for me. They said he's been in California and we've been training here everyday at Hombu Dojo. And they were frustrated when we trained together because I had continued to progress. I think I was using my head more and being very open. I tried to be open to being taught. I think it worked because my training partners were waiting to eat me up! Sometimes we get locked into thinking that only our teacher can teach us and we can't think for ourselves.

I remember one mistake I made. I had started to work on a technique I had never seen and began to doubt whether I should be experimenting. And lo and behold, Koichi Tohei comes to California—and I know him very well because we used to hang out together and I attended all of his classes in Japan. I mean we even did private lessons together and I was a part of his drinking group. I know his stuff very well. Then I saw him do something very similar to what I was experimenting with. I said to myself, "Don't ever do that again. If you're going to be open to learn, be open!" I think there might be a bit of that going on. Of course, you must get your basics. But what is that? One year? Ten years? How long before you begin to express yourself in the art?

When you were back in California did you have an association with a particular teacher at that time?

In one sense, Koichi Tohei was the main teacher and the Yankee (American) teacher. He was the one who gave ranking. But now that you bring up the subject of ranking, it's so screwy today! You've got to know the individuals. There was a moment in time when a rank was a true sign of a person's capability.

I think the first time I saw you was at a demonstration in Los Angeles with Bob Frager about 1965. I think that period was the real beginning of aikido in Northern California. Would you describe that process?

Well, there were Frank Doran and myself. Bob Tann was still there; it was just before his retirement. Frank came in. He was an old marine buddy of Bob Tann and was on the Brisbane police department. He started a class in Brisbane and later moved to Half Moon Bay and taught out of his garage. We used to do a lot of exchange teaching. Eventually there were enough advanced people around and I thought we did a fantastic thing. That was to have people come together in a "show and tell" form to talk about a technique. For example, if someone had a problem with shihonage, we would have that person do the technique in front of us. Then a couple of guys who felt comfortable with the technique would show it and you could see by watching them why the first guy was having problems. We used to do things like that and learned a lot. I tried to reinstate this kind of practice, but by that time there were folks around who would say, "It's done like this and that's it." It's too bad because it was a fantastic teaching and training tool.

This was the beginning of the first professional dojos, I guess.

I think I started teaching in the Mountain View dojo in 1966. Before that I did a class at Menlo Park, but there weren't many people around. Sometimes I would go to a dojo and there would be nobody there. Aikido was still an unknown.

I arrived on the scene in 1968 when I was with Bob Frager at the University of California, Berkeley. You already had a good core group at Mountain View.

There was also a group in San Jose run by a Buddhist monk named Hara Kusada. He was a little tiny fellow. He left shortly and was sent some place else by his church.

Let's see, you had the Mountain View dojo and then Allen Grow left to start a dojo in Oakland.

Right. Also Kenichi Suzuki was teaching in Berkeley. Then in Oakland there was a nice fellow named Julian Jacobs who had learned in Northern Japan who was married to a Japanese lady. Later, he went back to Japan and had a bad day and quit the art. You should never quit on a bad day! I think there was a judo/karate man named Walter Todd, too. Aikido was starting to become known.

Down in Los Angeles, there were many more schools. But after I got out of the army in 1972 and returned to Northern California the art had really picked up speed. Then you opened the San Francisco dojo which functioned as kind of a regional center. How did you come to open the dojo?

It was an old dream of mine. I use to think about it at the old Kojimaya coffee shop near Hombu when I was in Japan. I would write out notes about how I would start a Hombu Dojo-type thing in San Francisco. I remember I used to go to San Francisco for meditation classes when I was very young. I didn't know the city very well, but I remember a particular building in this neighborhood and thinking that some place like that would be good. I thought about how you would go about paying a teacher. "Let's see, you need a certain amount of income and pay each teacher a certain amount per hour and then if there is anything left over after that... If you were partners you would split it.... What would be the best teaching schedule?..." I worked out all these details.

I later started teaching in the San Francisco as an offshoot of the Friends of Esalen. There was an Esalen group in San Francisco at that time. It started as a private class. It got bigger and we started teaching in different places. It just got bigger and bigger. I asked Frank if he wanted to pick up a class and he said, "Sure." Then one day I was driving down the street and I saw a "For rent" sign and I decided to check it out. The building was dirty, but cheap. We started classes from the day we moved in even though there was still work to be done. Ed Dreeson helped me as a financial manager by donating his time, but I knew we still needed more than two teachers if it was going to be a Hombu Dojo. We then invited Bill Witt who used to study with me in Mountain View and who was now with Saito Sensei whom I always liked. By the way, here's another coincidence. After teaching at the Turk Street dojo in San Francisco for about a year, I found out it was the same room I had first learned to meditate from Walt Baptiste!

So it was your vision of creating a Hombu Dojo-like environment...

I guess if I were into making a buck I would have kept the San Francisco dojo to myself and later the San Jose dojo that I sold to Jack Wada who I thought had good teaching capability and wanted to become a full-time teacher.

There was a real acceleration in growth in the area when that dojo opened. I remember the quarterly dan regional tests that were held when people would come from all points north and south. It was sort of like a festival! Were these joint-ranking tests a kind of extension of the Hombu Dojo paradigm?

I think so. The shared experience was part of the purpose. I always thought training at Hombu Dojo with a variety of teachers was good. Even now my present dojo in San Francisco, City Aikido, has a nice variety with among others, 35 year veteran Nick Scoggin, who was with Steven Seagal in Southern Japan for ten years. Another influence in the dojo is Peter Ting, with over 40 years in Aikido, who had a long relationship with Koichi Tohei. Early on in the Turk Street dojo, we would do things like special sessions where three of us would teach at the same time since we had three separate mat spaces. It was a way for the students to get this variety. It was sort of a round-robin setup. It also became easy to invite people like Doshu and other major teachers.

In 1976, we got a wake-up call with the proposed creation of the International Aikido Federation. What was your reaction as someone who had a successful dojo and was being told you had to be part of this organization?

We had already had a California Federation. You had to do things like register a student and send money as soon as they enrolled. By the time the organization sent you back their registration card the students had already quit! You had to ask students for money when they signed up which you didn't want to do. We realized there would be a lot of paperwork with an international organization and a lot of dollars going out when we needed them for our own growth. We already had our own affiliations. We didn't see any purpose for it. It looked like a waste of time and money. I believe they even wanted money for kyu certificates which we in Northern California had never charged students for. It was also apparent we in Northern California weren't going to administer our own area.

As I recall, we in Northern California did not define our position on the organization. I remember we had some strategy meetings. It went on for several years like that. In the early days, aikido was spread mostly in places like YMCA's and community centers. But later there were professional dojos...

Yes, that was the problem. We just were being able to make it full-time. This was the beginning of really building something. To send so many dollars out of the area at that time would have been tough. We needed those dollars to survive. As an aside, going back to the subject of getting together for testing, one of the main reasons was because we had so many young teachers. We wanted to keep a certain level. So it was important for aikidoists to see the capability that we desired. I think that we really established a very good level for many years.

Looking back, we had a “non-organized” organization. Participation was voluntary and there was a high technical standard. Even though there was no structure, people were drawn into it because there was a strong core group and fair treatment. It was a very inspiring sort of experience that you could have several times a year. I think it really energized the whole Northern California area. What I found interesting was that there was this whole different model which was so different from the traditional structured approach where you were coerced into joining if you wanted rank.

You mentioned something else that became an institution about that time, the San Rafael summer camp. Was this, too, an extension of the central dojo idea?

Yes. I remember doing a seminar in Mountain View with a sleep-over and arranging meals with a local restaurant for the participants. We went to my house, which was in the middle of an orchard, to do stick work. Later, Frank Doran suggested we do yearly summer camps.

The San Rafael retreat has become an elaborate event with a real tradition of its own. Would you describe how these week-long camps came about?

I guess the time was just right to do them. We also needed the extra funds because we weren't quite making ends meet with the operation of the dojos alone. The sense of real training for a period of time was very important. It was also an opportunity to talk to other aikido people. The camps just seemed to catch on well and grew each year.

Your method of teaching has for a long, long time been unique in the sense that no one else is doing anything like it. Would you describe how it was that you departed from the normal approach?

First, I had always been interested in evolving human potential even as a young teenager. I couldn't believe, even as a child, that this was it. It wasn't enough. Hence the attraction to all forms of self development. I was fortunate as a youth to train under people like Walt Baptiste, a Mr. America, yoga, spiritual teacher, who was thirty years ahead of the times. Yasutoshi “Moon” Watanabe, an excellent judoka, had been Yamamoto Sensei's best student in Hawaii. Moon was studying ways to improve his judo by utilizing mind development. We used to sit around and try new things out. He would include us in his experimentation. That might have been the start of it. Also, the first time I started doing Hatha Yoga from a book I became aware of all of this energy stuff. I could feel all of this stuff going on. I knew the mind was tricky when I used to hit the barbells. Some days I didn't feel like going so I used to fool myself by saying, “Okay, I'll just go for a steam bath. Well, as long as I'm here I'll do a little forearm exercise. That feels okay, maybe I'll just do a few curls.” Lo and behold, I almost got a decent workout. So I said to myself, “Who is the guy who didn't want to go workout?”

I was also into meditation. I noticed that when I meditated and went to judo practice it was different. My movements and throws were very different. I said, “What is the relationship between this and my meditation?” Koichi Tohei talked a lot about mind and body harmony. And then, of course, there was O-Sensei. My God, the stuff he was doing!

Then I started doing my basics, but I knew that was not my goal particularly. Even though I like martial arts, I knew they were not my real goal but that doesn't mean I was sloppy with my training. I did the best I could all the while knowing this was not the real answer for what I wanted. There were those who talked about O-Sensei having trained for fifty years with the implication that after that length of time they would be at his level. But I said to myself, “No way!”

The change in my teaching approach might have really started here in California. I also had some interaction with Bob Frager after we returned from Japan and he was doing some weird things too! He was a member of the Tempukai and so he had his own training. We did some teaching together and I got to wondering if we could teach aikido people—or even non-aikido people something deeper. We knew there were a lot of nice things you could get from aikido training, but we knew people either didn't have the time or ability to do it. Forward rolling for some is too much. We created a workshop situation where we tried to give to people—whether aikido students or not—some of the nitty-gritty aspects of aikido. For example, we would teach centering and Bob would use something from his Tempu practices and I would bring in some energy flow things like blind folded training, sensitivity, chanting, etc. Over time, this work led to the Esalen workshops. There was Dr. Charlie Tart of the University of California at Davis who was a psychologist and author. He really liked my energy awareness work so he mentioned it to Michael Murphy, founder of Esalen, and that led to me teaching there. That's how that whole workshop thing got started. It was good stuff.

The Esalen experience was quite exciting. Other workshop leaders included Maslow, Fritz Perls, Julian Silverman, Ida Rolf, Gabrielle Roth, Al Wang, John Lilly, so many. At my first presentation, many of the residents got excited “Wow, this is moving gestalt!” I had to ask someone, “What is gestalt?” The people attending the workshops ranged from professors, to government officials, generals, scads of authors. I remember a couple of drama professors spending summers at my home because they'd had trouble teaching their students how to have stage presence. I led workshops at Esalen monthly for a period of 12 years on topics ranging from centering, energy awareness, changing levels of consciousness, and psychic work.

I did a lot of energy healing when I first started teaching energy. I thought a safe way was energy healing because you wouldn't draw anyone with bad *kimochi* into that sort of training. My suspicion is that my aikido started to change around then although I can't remember the exact day. I was shifting my art from purely physical to some kind of energy flow and I remember not being able to throw one of my aikido friends. He looked at me like I wasn't very good or something. I remember this feeling of wanting to go back to physical training. But I said to myself, “No, if you do that you won't be able to catch on to this other level of doing things!” I think a lot of people go through that. I remember watching Saotome Sensei going through the same kind of thing. It's just something you do if you have enough guts when you are trying to make a major change. I know that O-Sensei went through changes like that and at more than one level. I knew what I could do physically but I didn't know what would happen if I allowed myself to do this kind of energy stuff, for want of a better word.

If I had to do it right now the dialog with the student might go something like this.

I'd say, “Hold your hand out. Is it stiff, loose or what? How much can you squeeze? What would be comfortable for you to do? Throw a rock?”
Level two. “Now, just settle and relax.”

“My arm feels longer. There is much less pull back. The energy is flowing more and my hand feels hot. There is something currenting out of my hands.”

Level three. “It feels like it's got its own timing, like it's dancing to music, like I'm not totally in control of it.”

Maybe we could call this the dimensionality of the physical system. I loosely call it energy work.

Were there various phases when you were emphasizing a particular thing?

I was probably bouncing back and forth between the physical and energy aspects. I would watch my students to see if they were losing the basics or if I was getting too far out for them. You could tell because the classes would suddenly start getting small. Then I'd instantly go back to the first basics. It would depend on their needs. For example, I recently went down to New Mexico for some aikijujutsu people. I brought up some of the things we've talked about today, but we did basic techniques. I wanted to make sure they could recognize and perform all of our Hombu-related techniques because they want to major in aikido.

I went to Switzerland for students who are from Saito Sensei's lineage. I'm going to teach them more basics?! Some of these guys have twenty years studying aikido! That would be redundant. One thing I have to offer is a psychology on the move—utilizing aikido techniques to obtain a level of harmony which then allows a natural shift to another level of consciousness. I would like to help people become more successful in their careers/missions in life not just improve their nkyo. Naturally, I can do that too. It would be nice if people understood that's what I'm doing. That was one nice thing about having different teachers, I was not locked into one thing. For some people if you try to teach a little bit different, they freak out. I guess I must have had ten teachers. I've had some students come in and say, "My teacher would never allow talking on the mat. That's the way it is done." You get used to there being only one way.

That's what I'm trying to stress today. If a person can just get passed that opening up and letting go—that scary time when your techniques don't work. What's going to happen is that you're going to allow your style to emerge. If you manage to succeed, you're going to be worth your rank. Figure anyone who has quality waza has crossed that line. I don't want to teach you my "color," that is, my way of doing things. You're going to excel in your own "color." Figure that all highly ranked dans have crossed that line. I don't want to teach you my color. I want to teach you to open to your color and improve upon it. We need to help people find themselves, not to imitate someone else's quality or color.

Those who have reached a certain level of development are manifesting a specific color. They are technically good or even great. They look impressive and have a philosophy. But not everyone will agree with each other. Some are from the "fighting" school, others are from the "movement" school. It seems like they don't understand that they've developed their individual color to a higher level. Sometimes they infer someone else's color is wrong and sadly their students may believe it.

Do you see any growth in the aikido consciousness? Do you see any qualitative change in the people you train with compared to those of, let's say, twenty years ago?

I think there is more potential now because more people are involved. Therefore, there are more people that might be ready to hear things and gain from it.

Aikido is now part of our culture.

We now have thousands instead of hundreds. There is more feedback and people have more experience now. I was working with a student today to illustrate how if you walked a certain way you're going to get attacked. He told me later that he used to get attacked all the time in New York. He finally said, "This is stupid!" He started standing and breathing different and no one attacked him any more. I told him, "Oh, what a surprise I worked with you on that!" Since there are more people now, potentially the level of development or awareness or personal growth can increase.

Have you come in to contact with other teachers who are trying to develop their own "color," to use your words?

Everyone is trying to develop their own color. It's just unfortunate that something so natural and potentially easy is difficult. O-Sensei said to me, "Catch the secret and you can do my level of aikido in three months."

Do you sometimes get a feeling you are being pulled by O-Sensei?

Yes, I feel a pull. I have always felt a kinship with O-Sensei. I've always been interested in how he made such a giant leap from the norm to a great being that the rest of us can potentially match. It's been said before, "These and greater things shall ye do."

I realize now, that my mission wasn't to run a chain of dojos or be the "fastest gun" in martial arts. In retrospect, I made choices in my life to fulfill my mission which is to understand and help others integrate the spiritual and physical heaven on earth.

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