

The Lone Ranger & The Silver Sword

Ikkyu study by Nicki Ehrlich

“You don’t have to be a genius to learn this, but you can’t be too dumb, either.”¹

“A good student learns to observe with an open mind.”²

Sometimes what starts as a seemingly silly notion evolves into an idea worthy of serious study. I hadn’t physically trained in martial arts for almost seventeen years. And then at the age of 47, which I still considered young, but all my peers described as “almost 50,” I reconnected with Aikido. The Japanese language had, at one time, echoed in my head daily, like a second tongue, though I heard mostly works connected to the art and philosophy of Karate. Here, Aikido was using many of the same works, but also some new ones. And the moment I heard these two, “tanto” and “ki musubi,” my western-TV-series-loving psyche had nowhere to run but back to black & white TV and:

“A fiery horse with the speed of light, a cloud of dust and a hearty ‘Hi Yo Silver!’ The Lone Ranger. ‘Hi Yo Silver, away!’ With his faithful Indian companion, Tonto, the daring and resourceful masked rider of the plains, led the fight for law and order in the early west. Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear. The Lone Ranger rides again!”³

In Aikido “tanto” is the word for “knife.” Not a real knife, but a wooden one, tanto is used to practice defense techniques with those worthy opponents who may dare try using the thing on you.

Anyone old enough to remember the Lone Ranger knows that the Ranger’s side-kick was named “Tonto.” He was an Indian of unknown tribal affiliation, (perhaps from the “Tonto” tribe of southern California and Arizona, but that distracts from my missive), who was the Lone Ranger’s only contradiction to being called “lone.” Tonto was his friend, his companion, his guardian...and he carried a big knife. Although we were privy to the Ranger’s real name only by listening very carefully to the first TV episode (he was the younger brother of one of the slain group of Texas Rangers, John Reid), Tonto called him “Kimosabe,” an easy mispronunciation of ki musubi which means blending with your partner, making yours and your partner’s movements as one, “partnership,” pardner. (Tonto explains in that same first episode that he will call John “Kimosabe” which means “trusted scout.” (Close enough.) Who could hear these terms and not think these stories Aikido-related? In forging ahead with this concept I discovered that some may say “p’shaw,” but I’m about to take this one step further. What about Silver?

Silver, the Lone Ranger’s horse; white of course like any good-guy’s horse/hat would be. Notice the Lone Ranger was always in black and white clothing...like yin and yang.

The Lone Ranger helps Silver after the horse is wounded by a buffalo. When Silver is well and able to run away, the scene plays out as wild west meets desiderata. When Tonto wants to get a rope on the wild stallion before he runs away, The Lone Ranger says, “I like that horse more than anything in the world. But if he wants to go he should be free.” Of course Silver comes back and allows the Lone Ranger to ride him, but as the narrator interjects, “Here is no conflict between animal and master. Here instead is a partnership between horse and rider.” Now, how aiki is that? The very shout of “Hi Yo Silver, away” says “yes” (hai) “work” (as in Gung Ho: work together) “away.” Thus translated, “yes, Silver, let’s get to work.”

His horse was magical, performed super-horse feats, was sharp, precise, ornate. “Silver”...the silver bullet, the silver...sword...? The Lone Ranger a samurai? Everywhere he would wield his silver, he

^{1, 2} *Think Harmony With Horses* – 1978 Raymond J.Hunt

³ “Enter The Lone Ranger” –video of the 1st three television episodes

made things right in the world, struck down evil and embraced peace. He seemed to be serving some unknown master. He never did it for himself...he never ended up with the girl. And he would only shoot to wound, not kill, leaving judgment up to the law.

Yes, the Lone Ranger was a samurai. Witness the Lone Ranger Creed, by creator, Fran Striker, compared to the axioms in *Bushido, the Warrior's Code*, by Inazu Nitobe:

I believe that to have a friend, a man must be one.⁴

Politeness – "...the outward manifestation of a sympathetic regard for the feelings of others."⁵

That all men are created equal and that everyone has within himself the power to make this a better world.

Benevolence – "Gentleness and high manners were taught to the warrior class."

That God put the firewood there but that every man must gather and light it himself.

Courage, the Spirit of Daring – "...it is true courage to live when it is right to live, and to die only when it is right to die."

In being prepared physically, mentally, and morally to fight when necessary for that which is right.

Rectitude or Justice – "...to strike, when to strike is right," and *Self-control* – "He shows no sign of joy or anger."

That "This government, of the people, by the people and for the people, shall live always.

Loyalty – "Loyalty to the state or to one's feudal lord were the most important aspects of this trait."

That sooner or later...somewhere...somehow...we must settle with the world and make payment for what we have taken.

Honor – "Dishonor is like a scar on a tree, which time, instead of effacing only helps to enlarge."

That men should live by the rule of what is best for the greatest number and that all things change but truth, and that truth alone, lives on forever. In my creator, my country, my fellow man.

Veracity – "...the word of a samurai was sufficient guarantee for the truthfulness of an assertion."

All he needed was his trusty steed, his silver-bullet sword, and protective Tonto, (all Samurai had a "second," a trusted friend who would help him commit hari kiri if necessary.) As Arthur Ishimoto wrote, "The sword was the soul of the samurai. Bushido made the sword its emblem of power and prowess. The possession of a sword imparts to the samurai a feeling of self respect and responsibility. The American Cowboy had his six-shooter as his sword."⁶ The Lone Ranger traveled a Zen universe and embodied ki musubi, as Kimosabe and Tonto rode off into the sunset.

One more note: the creator of the TV version of the Lone Ranger, George Trendle, at a later date created another TV series, giving John Reid a nephew, Dan, who was the father of none other than Britt Reid, the "Green Hornet," again with a side-kick, Kato, (Bruce Lee), and there lies the martial arts in that.

So, this silly notion of the Lone Ranger and the Silver Sword was running through my mind (as notions do) while driving north from Big Sur to Monterey. I caught a glimpse of a small group of horses, including a paint mare that stirred memories. At that point in the road, the memories began to flood like the Little Sur river into the sea. What memories, you might ask? All of them.

Funny how memories can do that. They can all come back to you at once, and yet be very separate. They can be from any and all times of yesteryear right up to yesterday. And then I realized our memories are no different from our bodies. Everything we are is everything we ever were. It's no more unusual to have a million memories at once than it is to walk around in a body with a million cells. I am

⁴ (alternates with 5) – Lone Ranger web site

⁵ (alternates with 4) – *Bushido, The Warrior's Code*, Inazu Nitobe, 1969/1977, Ohara Publications Inc.

⁶ Arthur Ishimoto is the Administrative Assistant of the International Karate League, and a long-time Shorin Ryu Karate student, training at hombu dojo with Walter Nishioka, Shihan. This quote was from an article, "Karate Do and Bushido," written for the IKL newsletter.

only one thing. One being with all my cells, all my memories, thoughts, cravings, fears in one body. All the millions of parts that I am are perceived as one. Like a paint horse. All those colors on one horse.

I remembered the year Secretariat won the Kentucky Derby. I remembered a horse training clinic I attended in Blackfoot, Idaho, presented by a man named Ray Hunt. Ray was one of the original “horse whisperers.” Robert Redford’s character in the popular movie was modeled after him. “Make the wrong thing difficult and the right thing easy,” was Ray’s mantra. At the time I took this clinic, I was also training in Shorin Ryu Karate. Even then I saw similarities between training horses and training in the martial arts.

“At the heart of (this) teaching are lessons about giving, discipline, awareness, compassion, stillness, concentration and intelligence, the Buddhist paramitas...”⁷

We were gathered at a ranch in Idaho. Our hosts brought out a portable TV and all those cowboys and cowgirls watched Secretariat’s magnificent horse spirit soar across that finish line so far in front of the rest that it looked like he was running his own race. The misty-eyed silence in that moment of a warm summer morning, said it all. It wasn’t about the horse race. It was about the horse spirit. The life energy and love that horse had for running.

I observed the first day of the clinic. I watched as Ray took on one young horse after another, some fresh off the range, some needing retraining, some just needing reassurance. He kept saying there are no horse problems, just people problems. I watched him rope, I heard him speak, I felt him whisper. This was not a horse trainer in front of me. Ray Hunt was a sensei, a Zen monk, a spiritual leader. This sinuey cowboy who seemed to whisper as much to people as to horses, seemed to me a true Zen master. What he could do with an untrained colt was what I wanted in my Karate training then and is certainly what I want in my Aikido training now. A way of keeping the spirit and getting rid of the fear. At the end of class, I spoke to him about my paint mare.

I had watched this horse grow up on a farm next to mine. I worked at a feed store in town and saw her owner now and then. I asked time after time if I could buy her, but he would just say, no, she was going to be his son’s horse. I’d drive by the farm everyday, usually seeing this flashy paint filly bounding around in the wind out in the pasture. One day the owner came into the store and asked me if I still wanted the paint mare. It had been a couple years and I had a pretty good collection of horses by the, but he said he’d sell her cheap to me...or at auction. He said she was “untrainable” and had hurt a few trainers already. I told him I’d take her. Her name was Flash.

For weeks all I did was lead her around and groom her and try to calm her down. She was nervous and sweaty; shaking with fear most of the time people were close to her. I never knew what her prior “training” had been, but it was obvious she had been mistreated. Very slowly she relaxed and I started working on her feet, picking them up and cleaning them. As she settled in and I got a little braver, I saddled her and finally got on her. We would just walk through the pastures, and I could tell she was light on her feet and willing. Little things would spook her, but we were learning some trust. And as the weeks went by, we trotted and cantered, and I felt she was going to be fine.

One day I came home from town and decided to go for a short ride before the weather turned. It was already a little blustery, but a nice day otherwise. I took Flash out in the south pasture and she seemed a little excited in the windy conditions. We rode back and forth and she tended to be in a hurry to get back to the barn. I turned her away one more time, thinking just to walk to the end of the pasture and back. I felt her hunch up, I remember hitting my chest on the saddle horn and the next thing I knew I was laying in the middle of the pasture, staring at a distant farm house that looked familiar. I wasn’t sure who or where I was, but I thought I’d walk toward that house. The second opinion at the hospital said my neck wasn’t broken, but I had a concussion and would probably have a headache for a couple of days.

As I imparted this tale to Ray, he alternately smiled, frowned and shook his head. I thought I heard him mutter something like “damn cowboys,” but I could be mistaken. Ray said to bring Flash to the clinic the next day. While I was telling Ray my story there were a few of the other participants listening, judging, who knows what they were thinking. But that next day, when I trailered her in, she backed out of the trailer just fine, (we’d worked on that). I had asked my horse shoer if he could trim her before class and she stood flaccid, like an aged brood mare through the whole thing. Students were showing up for day two and a look

⁷ “The Shambhala Sun” article on Ray Hunt “The Way of The Horse,” July 1998, by Gretel Ehrlich

at this wild paint mare, and she was being a pussy -cat. Ray barely glanced at us as he walked by to get ready for the class. He told me to saddle her and pull all the cinches up tight. I had seen other people do this the day before, so I knew what to do. Still Flash stood there like a kid's pony. Other students climbed onto the top rail of the round pen where that day's class was being held. I stood patiently by my horse of many colors.

Ray looked over and said, "take off her halter and turn her loose." Flash had the run of the paddock with nothing in her way if she wanted it, but when I took off her halter she just stood there. I thought I heard some snickers and comments from the cowboy crowd. "Turn her head away from the fence so she knows she's loose." It was Ray. I touched her cheek and stepped out of her way. She took a couple steps and then arched her back like a black cat on Halloween and lifted into the air like something had exploded underneath her. The disbelieving cowboys became believers and I thought, "oh, so that's how she bucked me off." I got a soft spot in my heart for that horse right then. She hadn't let me down.

By the time it came to her turn in the round pen, she was already lathered up from sheer anticipation. I knew this was the day everyone was to mount their horses, but I thought maybe Flash would be the exception. Ray started working with her like he did all the others. With a deft and somewhat magical use of a rope, he would get her moving in one direction and then the other, fast and slow, and wait until she would turn and listen to him.

"There's a spot in there...an opening where there is no fear or resistance, and that's what I (look for)."⁸

Flash was going to be a hard sell. She lathered and foamed and breathed hard and I felt sorry for her and wanted it to stop, yet I knew Ray wasn't hurting her, he was trying to find out where all this fear had come from. He was sad about it, but he finally got her to talk to him. It was time to climb on. Ray was working from his horse now, and explained to me that he was going to try to get her to buck and rope a back foot. She would only buck once, and then be all right. I got on and everything seemed fine for a minute, until Ray asked Flash to go faster, which at this point to her meant to buck. She did what he asked, and (I do believe it's the only time it ever happened to him) Ray's rope got caught up under his stirrup. He hadn't been able to rope the foot and Flash hadn't been able to stop bucking. I bailed off onto the side of the round pen, Ray stopped Flash, apologized to me and asked me to get back on. It wouldn't happen again.

Now this is where my martial arts training came in. It wasn't more than a second of thought, but in that second or less, I heard cowboy comment, "I wouldn't get back on..." nervous snickers, deep breaths, and my own heartbeat. But I had no doubt about getting back on Flash and everything would be fine. Ray was a master, my horse sensei, asking me to trust him and I did, unquestioningly. I got back on, I can't remember exactly what happened, but there was no bucking. I remember the smell of sweat and exhaustion coming from a horse that seemed to have changed her mind. There was no thought of bucking. Something had changed in Flash. The spirit was still there, but the fear was gone. Somehow, Ray Hunt kept the spirit alive, but got rid of the fear. We were turned out with the rest of the newly trained horses; saddles, and riders, but no bridles, halters, reins. Ray came in on his horse, whooping and hollering, and horses with riders scattered around the corral, but Flash never bucked again. The overall lesson has never left me. He found the spot; the place of no fear or resistance where we could learn to accept.

I took Flash on a pack trip up into the Sawtooth mountains. It was beautiful, solitary, hard trails and we got caught in a thunderstorm, but she seemed in her element there. And later I sold her to a woman from Montana. I hear from her new owner that she had become the best cow-horse they ever had. The whole world changed for that horse. Because of Ray Hunt and martial arts and everything being one. All those memories being one. All those colors on one horse.

"It's not dominating but more like dancing with a partner. It's all balance, timing, rhythm, the kind of dancing where your body and (your partner's) body become one."⁹

⁸ "The Shambhala Sun" article on Ray Hunt "The Way of the Horse," July 1998, by Gretel Ehrlich

⁹ *Think Harmony With Horses* – 1978 Raymond J. Hunt

Today in aikido I remember and contemplate these memories. Without fear, a colt is ready to do what you want him to do. He is willing and collected and can feel you. Without fear of making a mistake, looking stupid, being unteachable, ...how much farther could that colt...or I go in my training?

I've learned in the space between Nikkyu and Ikkyu that "ikkyu" is simply a mispronunciation of "ego." We manifest our own lives. The Lone Ranger and Aikido seemed to those around me a far-fetched notion barley touching the edges of humor. But as soon as I spoke of martial arts and horses, I heard of other martial artists who used the experience of training horses, becoming one as a rider and horse, in their own teaching of Aikido. When I was sailing I learned of many sailors who had been or still were horsemen/women and knew the similarities there. Everything we have done and will do in this lifetime is connected. We cannot always see the whole picture, and that is where, along the way, faith must persist. It would be a great gift to realize how all the major events in this life interconnect. For me, to interconnect my love of horses, martial arts, and sailing, or at least to realize there is a connection; a purpose for each one leading to the next and back and forth, always moving, always punctuating some lesson here or there, would be something to write about.

"...without opposing him with force, just try to keep a constant connection..."¹⁰

"There is no force involved with 'draw'—it's more of an invitation. The draw that we're talking about has to do with first getting his attention and then waiting for him to take a new direction."¹¹

"Position yourself to let (him) succeed..."¹²

These quotes from Ray Hunt are almost word for word phrases that I have heard in Aikido classes. And so, what's left at the bottom of the pot after boiling is the Aikido that relates to, well, everything. We're not studying something that is foreign to us that we have to learn. We're studying the very essence of human nature that already exists in us all and that, indeed, we only have to remember. Like the thrilling days of yesteryear..."Hi Yo Silver, Away!" Suddenly this quote from Ray Hunt makes all the sense in the world:

"It's hard to teach what I've been talking about...because the first thing you need to know is the last thing you'll learn. But I can tell you this: when you get to square ten, all of square one will be in it."¹³

^{10, 11, 12, 13} *Think Harmony With Horses* – 1978 Raymond J.Hunt