

Featured Dojo-cho, January 2001



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Division 3

My initial interest in Aikido started with a wish to find something comprehensive. A practice that impacted every aspect of my life. I had been doing Judo on and off for more than ten years since grade school and as I entered university I wanted to explore something else. I started both Yoga and Aikido at this time. My first Aikido instructor was Robert Blackstone, a nidan who had studied with the late Rod Kobayashi Sensei. After about two years of training, I became very inspired. This training created a shift in my perspective and prompted me to ask myself a question, "If I had only a year left to live, how would I live it?" Soon after that question, I found myself leaving school and moving to Japan to study with my primary teacher, Saito Morihiro Sensei. During my 7 years of living and practising Aikido in Iwama, Japan, I also trained in the practice of Ura Senke Cha No Yu, the tea ceremony and took a number of trips to India to pursue studies in Yoga and meditation. Sometime in Japan, another shift occurred in the relationship with the practice and it became "clear" how it all can make sense. This experience led to spending time with some incredible spiritual teachers, Swami Chidanandaji, Sri Poonjaji, and Andrew Cohen. I include mentioning these teachers as they

impacted my practice as much as my Aikido instructors have.

After returning to California, I encountered a number of wonderful teachers, Peter Ralston, Vernon Turner, Richard Moon Sensei, and Robert Nadeau Sensei. With a return visit to Japan, I also was able to study with Takeda Yoshinobu Sensei. All of these instructors offer pathways to discover what lies beyond form and technique. Their message combined what I had experienced in Meditation with what I had learned in Aikido. This type of training/inquiry has helped to merge the practices of Aikido, Yoga, Tea, and Meditation into one real experience.

When I arrived in California, I returned to my home area and founded Aikido of Fresno in 1994 from an informal club that had been there previously for about fifteen years. Aikido of Fresno has expanded to a wonderful community of people with a full time uchideshi program, yoga classes and meditation sessions. The total membership now numbers about 120 with 40 youth, 60 adults, and 20 yoga students. Since our beginning we have had over 30 live in students visit and stay from countries like Sweden, Holland, Switzerland, Brazil, Ireland, and Canada. Our dojo offers 5 evening classes, 3 daytime classes, 3 morning weapon classes, and 5 youth classes held weekly. We also have one advanced class each week. Our meditation classes follow the morning weapons and the yoga class is offered once a week. I instruct most of the classes with assistance from my senior and live in students.

Currently Aikido of Fresno is in Division 3, under the supervision of Robert Nadeau Sensei. As of November 2001, the dojo will be run by one of my senior members Florian Tan, nidan. It is my intention to take a break after 7 years of teaching and spend a year travelling. Following that year, I am planning to move to Switzerland and continue with this work.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

It is difficult to point to one experience as being the most memorable. The training process seems like one non ending moment. But if I had to point out some experiences, my time with Saito Sensei before I left Japan was very special. I had the chance to sit with him in his "tea room" near his son's home. He stopped for a moment and spoke of how great it

was to sit, be still and enjoy this chance to relax. That expressed a lot for me. Another experience that sticks in my mind was a class taught by Richard Moon during an AANC gathering. He spoke of feeling, listening, and sharing. His demonstration expressed a spontaneity that I had never witnessed before. The final memory that I wish to mention is about a time during a class that I was teaching. A realization occurred for me that I will never forget: the desire to protect ourselves is what stands in our way of being fully able to respond. From this place outside of fear, there seems to be a greater movement that takes care of the moment without conscious control. This hit me with a tremendous strength and clarity.