

Aikidosphere

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Interview with the New Doshu at Banff

Editor's Note: This interview with the new Doshu was conducted circa 1990 at a memorable seminar in Banff, Canada (at that time he was still known as Waka Sensei). The beautiful setting in the mountains of Canada seemed to inspire him. Since then he has become the leader of the Aikido world, and we thought that our readers would find this informal interview of special interest. It was originally printed in the USAF Federation News.



How did you find Banff?

The mountains are beautiful, the air delicious, the water wonderful, the scenery great. I am quite moved by being here. But, in the midst of all this beauty, I am glad to be among people that have come here to practice Aikido.

Do you think this is a good place to do Aikido?

For me, the home dojo is the best place for practice, of course, but, for summer camp training, this place is wonderful.

How do you find the students?

People who have come here have obviously been taught well. Their teachers have taught them to learn well. Aikido definitely seems to be going fine here.

Can you tell us some of your memories of O-Sensei?

My grandfather died when I was 18. As a young boy, he was just my grandfather but, in the dojo, he was not just my grandfather, of course, he was O-Sensei. I know that I was special, but I could see in his relationship with the other uchideshi, that they were special too. It was all very Budo. He was very strict, but quite different at home. He was my teacher, but I also knew he was my grandfather, so our relationship was quite complex. I started Aikido when I was six years old, and after practicing for several years. I came to look at him as O-Sensei . . . but, he was always my grandfather first.

How were O-Sensei's classes?

A. O-Sensei did not teach regular classes, but rather, he would come to the dojo at impromptu times to impart something special to the class.

Just at this moment, Waka Sensei interrupted the interview and started asking me questions. How was he doing? What did I and the others think of his teaching. How was he doing? What did I and the rest think of his teaching Did I think the students were understanding him and what he was teaching? It was quite a revealing moment, giving us insight into his charming honesty, openness, and, at the same time, humble view of himself. Yet, he had the confidence to show his very human side and endearing spontaneity. Then, Yamada Sensei whisked by and said Waka Sensei was dying to dance. ... But, we returned to our conversation about O-Sensei.

O-Sensei never taught anybody in particular. He was impartial in his teaching. I feel that the roots of Aikido are very important to have learned from him, but, as far as daily Aikido goes, I really learned the most from my father, Doshu.

How were you brought into the leadership of Aikido?

Nobody in my family told me I must do it. Rather, it was the pushing from the other students who said. "Why aren't you doing this? You should be doing this." They put the pressure on me; it wasn't my family. However, it has always been my will to do it, so I'm content to continue.

In another time, or another world, would you have practiced Aikido?

Even in another world, I would be happy to do Aikido.

You now have your own son, will you pass the torch on to him?

My son is eight years old, and he practices during holidays. I hope he continues, but I won't force him. I simply want to make an environment appealing for him to practice Aikido.

You also have a daughter; does she practice too?

My daughter is eleven. If she wants to practice Aikido, she may. But, right now, she likes swimming more than Aikido (he smiles).

Do you have a favorite dojo?

I like all dojos everywhere, but the home dojo is the best. I urge you all to continue Aikido at your home dojos.

I hear you went to the ice fields - what did you think of them?

The ice fields have been here forever. You get the sense that the planet is living and changing, and they give you a good sense of time.

Is there something special or spiritual about this place?

Looking at the sky at night, especially the stars and this bright sky, makes me feel that I am a part of nature. You get a different feeling in Tokyo. I didn't want to speak about God, but felt that feeling here.

What's the funniest thing that has happened to you here?

In Japan, I could never imagine this - I saw an elk right where I was walking, about three to five meters away. He was very pretty. I said. "Hello," to him in Japanese, "I'm a kind man" (as I didn't want him to run away). He didn't move. "I didn't come to do Aikido with you," I said. [Then Waka Sensei burst out laughing.]

This is my first trip to Banff and I will surely come back.