

Aikidosphere

Yutaka Kurita
7th Dan, Shihan
Director of Kurita Juku Aiki

Interview with Yutaka Kurita, 7th dan - Part Two
by Peter Bernath and David Halprin

This interview was conducted at the 2004 USAF Eastern Region Summer Camp by Peter Bernath and David Halprin, Aikido Online's Co-editors in Chief. Thanks to Robert Zimmermann for translating the interview in real time.

This was definitely one of the most enjoyable interviews we have done. In fact, the entire discussion was conducted in an atmosphere of friendship and unrestrained humor. We're not sure if this comes through when reading the transcript, but try to imagine this scene accompanied by a sound track of constant laughter.

Photo courtesy of Jaime Kahn.

Part Two

What is awase?

Awase and musubi go together. Awase is like reaching for something, for example when you are reaching for a cup. Musubi is tasting what you taste when you drink what is in the cup, and then being able to say, "It's tasty".

So one is the intention and one the completion?

No. Peter, the first time you met Penny you said, "oh please be my girlfriend" or words to that effect. So Penny said "yes", and you said "yes!!"

Is this being recorded?

You've already forgotten!

Who is teaching about awase and musubi? Kanai Sensei? No. Chiba Sensei, no. Yamada Sensei no. Are they teaching awase and musubi? Tamura Sensei? For how long have you been studying with Yamada Sensei or Kanai Sensei? Have they focused on ki awase or ki musubi? Have you studied awase or musubi. They were all uchi deshi. Could it be that only I know about this? Could it be that I am lying? If they were all uchi deshi and none of them ever said "my teacher taught about these things", and no one except me talks about these things, does that make me a liar?

Many teachers say "I'm 8th dan", and "I outrank Kurita" and therefore it is very hard for me to write or say these things because people who outrank me can just say it's a lie. Since we're all friends I just shut my mouth and say nothing.

Why do you think the other senseis don't talk about this?

If I were to write about this, they would all be really surprised. They would say "Kurita, why are you writing about these things". It's not that O-Sensei taught me specifically but rather I learned this on my own even though we were all exposed to the same things.

O-Sensei said there were ichi no tachi, ni no tachi, san no tachi, yon no tachi, etc. ki musubi no tachi, Aiki Kempo. Who knows about these things? Sugano Sensei, Chiba Sensei? All of these other teachers were uchi deshi but who of those knows about these things. For example Sugano Sensei was teaching bokken, but does he know about ichi no tachi, ni no tachi etc. ? Does he know about these things?

Is it because when they were all young they all heard many things but each focused on different things, but now later in life this is something you are remembering and thinking about and you are focusing on this now?

Many people call themselves uchi deshi of O-Sensei. But it is not so simple. There were uchi deshi in Iwama and in Tokyo. In Iwama and in Tokyo, it was different in each place. Chiba Sensei and I would go with O-Sensei to Iwama, so would we have learned the same thing even though we went to

Iwama together? No. Does this mean that Chiba Sensei did not learn anything and only I learned something? I really don't know.

And who is going to tell Chiba Sensei that? (laughter)

Every now and then we would get together and talk about Aikido and someone would say "where did you learn that?" Sometimes Chiba Sensei would get upset and say "I am senior". Even though we were all taught the same, does that mean the other shihan did not learn and I was the only one that learned? I don't know! Why O-Sensei didn't insist on a particular curriculum I don't know.

Is that related to why O-Sensei never wrote anything? Because things were always changing?

I believe that is why. But I don't know if there were any deliberate secrets being kept or things being hidden. If there were secrets, isn't it appropriate for the secrets to come out by now? I don't know. That depends on all the senseis we mentioned: Tamura Sensei, Yamada Sensei, Chiba Sensei, Kanai Sensei, Sugano Sensei.

Does that mean there are secrets?

No it doesn't mean that. Do you have any secrets David? Another girl? Peter, how about you?

No, none of us have any secrets! Can we turn the tape o ? (laughter) Can we go back to the two principles you mentioned? (laughter)

There is something called kihon. Who is saying this is kihon? O-Sensei said these are the principles, not basics. So somebody translated incorrectly. In Japanese it's called gengi. Gengi and kihon are not the same thing. Gengi are the principles. Kihon are the basics.

Are the two things you mentioned earlier part of the principles?

To learn something with your right brain is like learning the mechanics, let's say Newton's Principles. With the right brain we learn the physical aspects of things, the same areas that the sciences cover. Whatever Newton said in terms of physics, Newton said these are my principles, he didn't say these are my basics. Newtonian physics derives from that.

Going back to the two principles, could you explain them one more time?

Here is a coffee cup. This is ceramic. What is the principle of this, for example, is it mud? Is ceramics a basic? What is the principle of ceramics? If you start with mud and then you build a cup or saucer, then you can use it to drink. But can you drink from the mud? No you can't. It's the same idea.

Which is the mud?

(Holding up his hand) This is called tegatana, doing shomen with your hand open, it's not another religion, it's just how you cut with your hand open. When we speak of tegatana we speak one way, but O-Sensei talked in religious terms, he would say "the door is closed, you need to open the door". So, what needs to be opened? Your left-brain, your right brain? One of your brains seems to be closed. For example, if a very beautiful girl were to walk by and I notice her but I don't react at all, why would that be?

Because the tape recorder is on? (Much laughter)

Because you might tell on me, so it's better to keep it secret! So how can I bring this into the open? (Sensei picks up a small package of sugar) Can you open this pack of sugar with just one hand? No, you need both hands. What does it mean to open it? To open it means to do this (as he opens the package)...

The right hand is controlled by the left-brain, and left hand with right brain, the other side of the brain helps open the packet, and working together you can open the packet.

It's the same with bokken. Not kihon but gengi. Awase means if I can see it and grab it, i.e. the packet, that's awase, and then if I stir the sugar into the coffee and taste it and I say "that's tasty" that would be musubi.

You really understand these things already, but to make it more clear by example, when you first met Penny you were overtaken by her beauty and you said "oh she's so beautiful" that was awase, and when you consummated the relationship that was musubi. Then you got married and you were so happy together, that also would be musubi. But sometimes you're not too happy and you say "I want a divorce" -- that's musubi too.

So it's the intention versus the manifestation or realization or digesting it?

Yes, exactly. Don't get confused with the Japanese terms. These are the concepts.

How do these two concepts relate to Aikido?

Right now we're just talking about the principles, that's awase, but when you really try to carry them out and see if they work that's musubi. You can have a concept or an idea and you do nothing, nothing manifests, it's just an idea. No one derives anything from it. Many people are interested only in learning the concepts of Aikido. But for how long have you kept the concepts only? You're sixth dan, you're sixth dan, others are shihan, what does that mean? You get Shodan, and you say "thank you very much", then nidan "thank you very much" and so on until you get to eighth dan and then you die. So what? Like Kanai Sensei!

Suppose you go to Yamada Sensei and ask him for eighth dan and he gives it to you and you croak, what good is that? Which is better?

I'll keep sixth dan.

You're very intelligent! We use Aikido in daily life, and if you use those principles and everyone is happy that is awase and musubi. Many people focus on musubi but forget awase. Which is most important? Both. What have you learned from Aikido in all the time you've been practicing? Is it just Barbara, or are there others?

Of course, there is just Barbara.

That's why you are so happy! Right. If you had another girl you would never be so happy.

Is that right?

It's the same for you all. If there were another one and another one and another one, would you be happy?

(Long silence) I'm thinking! (laughter) Bob comments, "You have to understand the concept of a rhetorical question."

That's good Aikido. So you know many things through Aikido. You met Penny, you met Barbara. If there was no Aikido you wouldn't have met Penny or Barbara and then would you be happy now?

(Silence.) I'm thinking! (The waitress arrives bringing Peter's lost keys.) Happiness is never losing your keys! I understand that, but it's the trick questions that I have trouble with.

He knows he's happy because he didn't lose his keys. He's not sure about anything else. If you're happy, which side of the brain is happy?

(Peter hits himself in the head.)

Peter is saying, "I don't know", then he slaps himself in the head. You'll never be happy that way. If you don't have understanding, you'll never be happy. If you have understanding and both sides of your brain are working, then you'll be happy.

End of Part 2