

Aikidosphere

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

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

This interview was conducted at the 2004 USAF Eastern Region Summer Camp.. Thanks to Robert Zimmermann for translating the interview in real time.

Part Three

What is the technique you use to get both sides of the brain working properly, in a coordinated way?

If the sugar was open and I tore it open with both hands he could use it. If you were left-handed you would tear it asymmetrically but you would use it. If you're all right handed you would all open it the same way. Whether you are Japanese or American you would open it this way. Would a right-handed Russian open it differently? A left-handed person? A Japanese left-handed person?

Is one side of the brain better than the other?

When you see a woman's breasts do you say "which one is better? Left or right?" or "I have to tune them!" The brain is the same everywhere in the world. Therefore everyone in the world can practice Aikido. Kanai Sensei went to Boston; Yamada Sensei went to New York so you are happy. Aikido makes you happy.

Do you think practicing Aikido makes the two parts of the brain coordinated?

Yes, Aikido helps you coordinate both sides of the brain. If both sides of the brain work at the same time with the same intensity then you go crazy. You can't do that. You have to coordinate them. When one side works the other side rests. They don't go at the same time.

I am now speaking in Spanish and you are listening and talking in English. I can't speak out of one side of my mouth in Spanish and the other in English. So it can't be that both sides work at the same time. When you speak Spanish you speak Spanish, when you speak English you speak English. But you can change from one to the other. If you are unable to change from one side to the other then you go crazy. Our brains never work with both sides in the same intensity.

Can you do shomenuchi with both hands at the same time? You cannot. Some American gangsters or pistoleros are shown on TV shooting with both hands at the same time. Japanese people use the katana with one hand, but Musashi used two swords, one long sword and one short sword. But even he did not do it the same way on both sides. Both sides of the brain are the same but the question is when to use which.

When you receive shomenuchi one hand is more extended than the other, and this represents the long sword and short sword. If you step forward the hands change, the long one becomes the short one and vice versa. How do you reduce the opponent's arm? Everyone is built the same. You would be a fool if you wouldn't understand that. But since you understand that you are intelligent. You guys are 6th dan but you're still fools. So, how can you call yourselves intelligent?

But we're happy! (laughter)

Now that everything is out on the table we can all be happy. If when we are talking we are laughing, then we are using our right brain. So when one is happy and you are talking and laughing which side is happy, the right side or the left side?

I'm thinking!

Just a moment, just a moment! What does the left and right brain mean?

We have only one brain, but now we are talking about the left side and the right side. But for the longest time we've had both sides, but we didn't know the left side has certain functions and the right side has certain others.

Ki Musubi no tachi, awase no tachi, we didn't know about these things in these terms for the longest time, the same as with the brain, we didn't know these things. O-Sensei knew this for the longest time, about awase no tachi and musubi no tachi, but many Aikido practitioners still do not understand this.

What does it mean "no tachi"?

Katana is one thing, but a tachi is something else. If you make a knot in a napkin, the knot is musubi. When you bring the ends together its awase. When you cross them to make the knot and pull the ends to tighten the knot that is musubi. Awase is when you bring the ends together.

Awase is joining the tips of the napkin, the knot is musubi. When we make a knot it is musubi. If you use a sword technique to show this, it is musubi no tachi. If you and I join, and then we cross swords and mesh -- it is musubi. Musubi no tachi and musubi are the same. Shiho no nage and shihonage mean the same thing. Aiki kami and Aiki no kami mean the same thing.

Would O-Sensei explicitly talk about musubi and awase?

Yes he spoke about those things.

Was that in a religious or technical context?

He would explain Aikido techniques in a religious context.

He didn't explain techniques in terms of "put your foot here..."?

Yes, but many people didn't understand it, because O-Sensei would use a word but his meaning of that specific word was a religious meaning, and people would use the same word in daily language to mean something completely different.

Same thing if you were to explain today about Ikkyo, this is musubi or this is awase, no one would understand because they would not have the connotation of it. That's why you don't fight like that. Rather than fighting you would knot things up like that. Blocking techniques would that be musubi or awase? Just striking the weapons together is that all there is? You never question these things because you don't have the additional concepts or additional perspective to look for these concepts. Why are there no questions about what is being taught?

For example in laido when you draw or re-sheath the sword, do you cut with the sword while it's inside the saya? No of course not, you must first draw, then cut and then put it away.

Did O-Sensei get upset if people didn't understand what he was talking about?

He would say, "forget about it, one of these days you'll get it". He would never say to someone "you are a fool". If you were a child and you drank a shot of whiskey, would you be happy? You would not, but as you mature you develop an appreciation of it and you like it, you say "very tasty", but you need time to develop an appreciation for it. Other questions?

If you tried to analyze what O-Sensei was doing technically or physically how would you describe his techniques?

I don't want to analyze what O-Sensei was doing only from a physical point of view. There are other aspects. What are some of those other aspects? Spiritual aspects? Others? The right brain might say "yes I understood", but the left-brain might say "no I didn't get it". The other side of the brain doesn't get it, doesn't get it, doesn't get it. Why doesn't it get it? Because it isn't working properly.

When you were young at Hombu Dojo practicing, and you would look around you and watch how people were practicing. Then today you taught the class, and when you looked around the same way, does it seem very different? Are people missing some important aspects of practice?

Yes. If there was no moon and if there was no sun, the earth would rotate one way. But there is the moon and the sun and so it rotates a different way. If the earth and the sun were to come together such that the earth covers the moon it would be an eclipse, you couldn't see the moon because the moon doesn't reflect the light of the sun. So how can you have both at the same time? In addition, the earth rotates in its orbit. Does Aikido rotate similarly? These are inconceivable things, things that one cannot think about or imagine. If both want to be in front of the sun, there is a fight. If you take a step forward and attack with me a bokken and I do the same there is a fight. If you take a step forward and I take a step back than can you learn something from that?

Sometimes in karate or judo or other martial arts, both people step forward and attack, and so both are taking up the same space. Even if in their minds they do not want to fight, they are fighting because they are taking up the same space.

So are people practicing differently today then they did when you were an uchi deshi?

Everyone practices just the same then as now. If you can grasp this concept of the left-brain and right brain, everyone practices the same now as then.

Do you think Aikido being translated correctly as it is passed along through time? Is it different, or better or worse?

No, it's a bit different. Everyone has evolved, so Aikido has evolved as well. In a way it's the same, but in another way it's different. Right now we do some things, or we don't do some things, or we want to do some things, or we don't want to do some things, yes or no yes or no yes or no. That's how I see it now. If you have two girlfriends, how do you choose? Do you choose one and then the other one, then the other one and then this one? Do you want both and also at the same time just one?

Can I have both at the same time?

No. You can't have them both.

But can you have them almost at the same time? (laughter)

End of Part Three