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## *Transmission, Inheritance, Emulation* by Peter Goldsbury

This column is an extended discussion of some recent topics already touched upon in the AikiWeb discussion forums and in private mail. The various topics are closely connected and treatment of one influences the perception and treatment of others. The column is very much work in progress and is not intended as a full-blown academic paper. The topics discussed are related to the various issues involved in the transmission of theoretical and practical knowledge in a non-competitive martial art like aikido, especially the transmission of knowledge across cultures. All these issues are fundamental to how we conceive the form and content of the aikido training we undergo at the hands of our teachers and can be presented as propositions, subsumed under the three headings in the title.

### **Transmission**

- (a) *Morihei Ueshiba made no attempt to 'teach' the knowledge and skills he possessed to his deshi.*
- (b) *The latter all gained profound knowledge and skills during their time as deshi, but it is by no means clear that they gained all the knowledge or that all gained the same knowledge.*
- (c) *Morihei Ueshiba appears to have made no specific attempt to check whether his deshi had understood what they had learned from him.*

### **Inheritance**

- (d) *On the other hand, all the evidence indicates that Morihei Ueshiba worried very much about passing on the art to future generations and finally designated his son Kisshomaru Ueshiba as heir and inheritor of the art.*
- (e) *Kisshomaru Ueshiba seems to have changed the inheritance he received quite radically, again, with no clear reaction from his father, such that it has been stated that the aikido taught by him and by his successors nowadays is no longer Morihei Ueshiba's aikido.*

### **Emulation**

- (f) *Just as the heirs of Morihei Ueshiba have passed on their knowledge and skill to their deshi, so also have the deshi of Morihei Ueshiba passed on their knowledge and skill to their own deshi, but with very varying degrees*

*of success, such that the knowledge and skills of present and future generations are becoming and will become increasingly varied in quality, in proportion as they become more distant from the source.*

- (g) *The fact that many of these deshi live outside Japan and that aikido has become a Japanese art practiced more outside Japan than in Japan has profoundly affected and is profoundly affecting its essential character.*

Over the next few columns I will examine each of these three general categories in turn, for, as I suggested above, I believe that they are fundamental to our core perceptions of the art as it is practiced, both here in Japan and abroad. However, I also believe that certain crucial assumptions are made, even in the way that the categories are set up. These assumptions, which are also very much controversial issues, are based on a particular paradigm (for want of a better term). This paradigm can also be expressed in a number of propositions:

- (1) *Aikido is a budo that can be fully taught and fully learned (in the sense that it is possible for the deshi to acquire all of the master's skills).*
- (2) *Aikido is a budo that has to be taught and learned by means of being systematized into teaching and learning strategies.*
- (3) *Whereas the teacher is crucially important in this process, it is the mastery of the teaching and learning strategies on the part of the student that will ultimately determine whether the knowledge and skills can be or have been or are being acquired.*
- (4) *Thus, there is an important element of accountability and independent assessment of the internal efficiency of the art, but this is based on some vague standard of what the art should 'do' in a 'real' situation.*
- (5) *There is also a 'moral' aspect to the art, in the sense that (1) the art should bring about a change in any individual who practices the art, and (2) this change should be for the better, however this is conceived.*

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One can argue that this is a 'western' paradigm, of limited relevance to a Japanese martial art that is strongly vertically-structured and teacher-based. Nevertheless, it is an undisputed fact that aikido spread rapidly overseas with the Founder's blessing (as a 'Golden Bridge', in the Founder's words—uttered in Hawaii) and it can also be argued that the art has a stronger base, in terms of knowledge and numbers, outside Japan than in this country. So the 'western' paradigm cannot be dismissed simply on the grounds that it is western. This paradigm, and the cultural issues surrounding it, will be touched upon frequently during the discussion of the propositions listed above. I myself believe that this is not entirely a western paradigm, but also believe that there are important cultural differences in how particular items in this paradigm are interpreted, even perceived, and that is of critical relevance to aikido.

Before we can begin this discussion, however, one more crucial element needs to be added to the mix. The art of aikido is based on the life of one individual and it is also a controversial issue to distinguish clearly the life he led & the training he underwent from the art he created & the traditions relating to the art that have grown up as a result. The life of Morihei Ueshiba and the circumstances in which he created aikido follow a recognizable pattern and one that cannot easily be assigned as specific to any particular national culture. The pattern is sketched in the following paragraph and has several stages, though sometimes these cannot easily be distinguished. The stages can also be expressed as propositions:

- (1) *A charismatic individual undergoes a physical and spiritual transformation as a result of rigorous personal training. The individual is in a real sense a 'loner': he marries and produces offspring, but this does not affect his central aim of training as an individual.*
- (2) *The individual attracts disciples, who desire to obtain what he possesses. The disciples also undergo rigorous training, which is supposedly a replication of some, but not all, of the training which the individual himself underwent. Some disciples supplement this by their own additional training regimes outside the dojo.*
- (3) *However, the training is undergone as a group and the group achieves a close internal cohesion, based on the fact that all the members are 'uchi-deshi', or live-in students, of the charismatic individual.*
- (4) *An organization evolves, which is more than the sum total of the individuals who comprise it.*
- (5) *The personal training of the individual be-*

*comes an 'art', which is given several names, but which also becomes distinct from the sum total of the knowledge of the charismatic individual who created it.*

- (6) *Since the art was created and has flourished in the Founder's lifetime and does not end with his death, it thus acquires a life of its own and is also used as a benchmark of authenticity.*
- (7) *Since the charismatic individual, now called the Founder or some other appropriate name, is mortal, he 'entrusts' the 'art' to his disciples, but with the core organization and training placed in the hands of his son, who is also a first-generation deshi.*
- (8) *At this point the other deshi have a choice to make: to accept the new position of the son, or to go their own way and create other training regimes, organizations, or arts, also based on the original.*
- (9) *Thus in a real sense there is a 'passing on': a bequeathing and an inheritance, a tradition is thus created in each case, and also respective histories of the traditions thus created: ways of interpreting the activities of the Founder and his place within the specific tradition.*

Given the works of C G Jung and Joseph Campbell, some of the earlier stages of this pattern are easily recognizable as a hero's journey. However—and this is something that neither Jung nor Campbell discussed very much, the ways in which the hero's journey is reproduced, reenacted and valued in each culture are severely culture-based and are thus subject to the values of the particular culture. (I think that Jung and Campbell assumed that each culture would interpret the hero's exploits in a particular, i.e., 'western' way.) So, even though I have stated above that this pattern cannot easily be assigned to one national culture, it will not do for westerners to make judgments on uniquely Japanese aspects of Morihei Ueshiba's evolution as a budo 'hero', simply because his life follows the usual pattern, sketched above.

I should add by way of a conclusion that these columns are the result of almost three decades spent in Japan, becoming part of the culture from the 'inside', so to speak, in the general context of (1) teaching & researching at a large university, (2) practicing aikido under a large number of teachers (but always with one particular teacher at the core), and (3) teaching comparative culture and intercultural negotiation to mature Japanese students in one of the university's graduate schools. I have put them in the above order because I regard my time at Hiroshima University as the locus for the fundamental process of learn-

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ing how to become part of the culture in general. The dojo is a working miniature of this culture and in the dojo some aspects of the culture are present to a heightened degree and others are absent. Finally, the teaching of comparative 'culture' to mature 'natives' has yielded some sensitivity to the problems involved in using the term itself. So I have first-hand experience of being exposed in its birthplace to what is thought to be a 'global' or 'international', but Japanese, martial art and also have first-hand experience of trying to understand the art that I am practicing within the parameters of its 'host' culture.

What I am using, in effect, is the Argument from Authority and we all know that this is the very weakest form of argument. Accordingly, I expect these arguments to be examined for what they are and not because it is I who am using them. However, those who do challenge these arguments should also be aware of the ways in which the cultural standpoint they take can affect how they actually frame both the argument and the challenges. For those with an interest in comparative culture, I have been using in my classes the two works of Geert Hofstede: *Culture's Consequences* and *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. Hofstede is Dutch and his work is not without problems. However, given adequate awareness of these problems, his work is a reasonably reliable peg on which to hang the general treatment of comparative culture.

So, over the next few columns I will examine each of the general categories of transmission, inheritance and emulation, listed earlier, and then follow this up with further discussion of the teaching & learning paradigm and also the 'hero' biography of Morihei Ueshiba. The general conclusions offered will be pretty bleak.

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