
Transmission, Inheritance, Emulation 2 by Peter Goldsbury

In the next few columns of this series, I plan to examine in more detail the activities of teaching, learning and 'stealing', especially as these applied to Morihei Ueshiba and his immediate disciples, and also the crucial relationship between these activities and their own (and our own) personal training regimes.

As they progress with their training, aikidoists tend to encounter various problems, when they are led to question the validity of what they are doing. They practice under the supervision of a 'Sensei', who has also practiced, and perhaps received his license to teach, from another 'Sensei' and the pattern then is to trace the lineage and also competence as an aikidoist and an aikido teacher, right back to O Sensei, who is generally considered to be the Source (apologies to the Wachowski brothers), hence the connotation of the Japanese term *Sensei*.

The problems arise when these aikidoists encounter exponents of other martial arts, who tell aikidoists that they are lacking in their technique and training, and also when they encounter other exponents of aikido who are from a different lineage to their own. How is it possible that aikido can be lacking in such essential skills, given that the Founder was the Source, and how is it possible that there can be so many different 'schools' of aikido, when there is only one Founder/Source? The problems have led to much discussion, especially on dedicated websites like *AikiWeb*, and have also led dedicated aikidoists to question severely their own training history. There is no point in going into denial here. The problems exist and the most honest approach is to admit this and then try to find a way to resolve the dilemma in the best traditions of *BUN/BU*: by study and training.

One way out of the dilemma is to argue that aikido has changed over the generations and that in order to practice 'real' aikido, one has to follow in Neo's footsteps and go back to the Source and actually study how Morihei Ueshiba himself trained, how he practiced and what & how he taught. This is a fine idea, provided we can actually find out how he trained & practiced and also what he taught. As a matter of fact, this is rather difficult and we are not helped so much by Ueshiba's own writings.

Morihei Ueshiba was a Japanese living in the Taisho/Early Showa eras and 'taught' his aikido in a conservative and quintessentially Japanese way. He wrote virtually nothing apart from a diary and an annotated edition of Onisaburo Deguchi's *Reikai Monogatari*, both of which appear to have been lost, but he did give many lectures and discourses, some of which have been published in book form. His published 'writings' in English are translations of *Douka* and excerpts from the spoken discourses and interviews. There are no dedicated editions of Ueshiba's writings in English. Thus there is no guarantee that simply reading those of his so-called writings that have been translated from the original Japanese will enable anyone to find out how he trained & practiced and also what he taught. Additional, more circumstantial, evidence is required.

The first column specified the issues in the form of three propositions:

Transmission

1. *Morihei Ueshiba made no attempt to 'teach' the knowledge and skills he possessed to his deshi;*
2. *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.*
3. *Morihei Ueshiba appears to have made no specific attempt to check whether his deshi had understood what they had learned from him.*

In this column we will consider the first of these propositions, especially the vertical relationship between teacher and student as this is seen in Japan.

Transmission

1. *Morihei Ueshiba made no attempt to 'teach' the knowledge and skills he possessed to his deshi.*

I have put 'teach' in quotation marks, because of doubt about the precise sense the term had for Morihei Ueshiba. I think that what he was doing was certainly quite different from the aikido teaching I myself experienced in the UK and US before coming to Japan. This doubt is also closely bound up with the question of 'stealing' techniques, which I take to mean learning what has not been explicitly taught (though it might have been shown intentionally). From all accounts that I have read and also that I have heard from the deshi themselves, Morihei Ueshiba spent a very long time pursuing his own personal training, such that what he actually showed his deshi is only the tip of a very large iceberg. In fact, what he showed his deshi during practice almost continually and exclusively were waza, without any technical explanation, and he also left them to work out for themselves, not only what they had been shown and the principles lying behind this, but also the training regime that resulted in such waza.

Ueshiba has been criticized for 'teaching' in this antiquated way and for requiring his students to resort to such non-productive means as 'stealing' knowledge. If only he had used the well-tryed 'western' methods, so familiar to us, of working through a well-defined syllabus, presenting all the material and in a clear and logical fashion, with periodic checks to see whether he had been understood, we would now be in a much better situation. The issues here are of fundamental importance, not only to the way we practice the art nowadays, but also to the way we actually conceive the art and frame what we are doing in the dojo.

The first question that arises is how usual Morihei Ueshiba's approach was in Japan, and so it is instructive to compare the teaching of aikido

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with the teaching of other forms of structured activity or practice, understood in a broad sense. Does the method of 'teaching', and also the 'teaching' relationship between the master and student, change according to what is being taught?

At the outset, the heavily Confucian nature of the teaching role needs to be stressed, as also the difference between this way of teaching and the Socratic method, which, as the name implies, originated with the Greeks. In his book, *Education in Tokugawa Japan*, Ronald Dore presents a picture of what and how Japanese teachers taught in the domain schools. It was Confucian, in the sense that (1) knowledge was bestowed from the teacher above and the students below had a moral duty to understand and learn and, (2) the knowledge shown, and thus the training to acquire it, followed a prescribed pattern—one can say that it was *kata*-based. The students carried out their role by patient listening and rote learning.

I think the best contemporary parallel is the learning of written Japanese, especially the 2,000 Chinese characters in common use, in Japanese schools. This awesome task is accomplished in several predetermined steps and every single Japanese child in elementary and junior high school goes through the same steps at the same time, all over Japan. Everything is there: there is a determined order; students are learn by endless repetition; they have to learn to write the easier characters correctly before going on to the more difficult ones, but they learn the underlying structures and principles as they go along; the skills are so internalized that they become effortless. Westerners who have merely to master the alphabet need to make a serious mental leap to understand the dimensions of this learning process and also to see how it establishes a Confucian learning paradigm that is right at the centre of the cognitive process of any Japanese who has been through the school system.

That this Confucian attitude still exists today was brought home to me quite forcefully by my first martial arts teacher, who was Japanese, very traditional Japanese. We were total beginners and he presented aikido as a part of traditional Japanese culture. At some point he declared that in general it was quite wrong for students to criticize or question their teachers unless they could show that they knew better. Questioning the teacher was in itself a form of criticism. This was not particularly well received by us, his students, who were all studying at university in the UK. I myself was brought up in a tradition that favored dialectic: engaging in disputation with the teacher, in an effort to find holes and openings in his argument. This tradition, as I stated above, originated with the Greeks and was copied in universities throughout medieval Europe. It is quintessentially 'western'. Again, there is no point in denying that this tradition exists and is relevant to training in Japanese martial arts.

I am pretty sure that we did try to find holes and openings in our teacher's waza, but we were complete beginners and none of us had any experience in other Japanese martial arts. His English was pretty rudimentary and so he had us go through endless repetitions of such exercises as *funa-kogi*, simple *ken* and *jo suburi*, and complex *ashi-sabaki* movements. Of course, there were waza, but these were only the basics: *1 -- 4kyou*, the *nage-waza* of *irimi-nage*, *kote-gaeshi*, *shiho-nage* and *kaiten-nage*, and a few basic *koshi waza* and *kokyu waza*.

Ukemi was called 'receiving' and the extensive solo training here was quite carefully contrasted with the quite different role of *ukemi* with a partner. I found out later that my first teacher simply reproduced with us without any real explanation the training procedure he had undergone with his own teacher (who, incidentally, was also the teacher of Minoru Inaba, of the Shiseikan Dojo). Since his English skills did not allow him to give any real explanation of the purpose of the training procedure, I think he hoped to plant seeds that would later germinate.

In due course, I also found out that this traditional Confucian pattern of teaching in the Japanese martial arts is duplicated in the teaching of other activities. In the Japanese academic world, with which I am most familiar, a rigid distinction is made in universities between teaching, especially teaching undergraduate students, and conducting one's own research. The latter is definitely preferred and not much effort is invested in the former. There are two reasons for this. One is that a professor is evaluated by the research accomplished and not by the number of students taught. (I think that this has always been the case, but only now has this begun to matter for the purposes of evaluation.) The second reason, consequent on the first, is that the professor is never explicitly taught how to teach. Teaching ability is expected to flow naturally from expertise in research.

Those students who somehow make the grade become research students and thus become members of the professor's *zemi* (research seminar). These students are closest to the *deshi* of a dojo (indeed they are also called *deshi*). They are chosen by the professor and really do follow in the master's footsteps. In the old days the best *deshi*, in the professor's eyes, inherited his position when he himself retired and the pattern was repeated. The role of the *zemi* also explains the practice of publishing material under the professor's name, when the actual research and writing has been done by the *deshi* themselves. Given the group cohesion of a *zemi* and the professor's central role in looking after the members of the *zemi*, including their future careers, this practice is not considered at all strange. That he should consent to allow his name to be included as author is an indication that the professor has given his blessing and public approval to the research undertaken.

In Japan this teaching model flourished during the Tokugawa era with Hayashi Razan and the Mito School and was the *BUN/BU* element in the *BUN/BU* relationship, so closely favored by the samurai. Young samurai spent their days studying the Confucian classics under the severe guidance of a professor and then went into the dojo to train in the martial arts, under a teacher who gave similar severe guidance. However, the point to be stressed here is that the individual aspect of the relationship is not so much teaching (as understood in a western sense), as allowing the *deshi* to have a close relationship with the master, as the latter developed his knowledge and skills.

However, one can argue that the parallels only go so far and are also affected to some degree by what is actually being shown/ taught/ learned. Consider the different activities or practice of (1) engineering, for example, bridge-building, (2) medicine, (3) language-learning, and (4) philosophy, as these are taught / learned in Japan. I have chosen these examples because they present a spectrum of the ways in which the cultural paradigms of the teacher-student relationship and teaching/

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learning competence can be assessed, for the relationship and the competence has to yield concrete, tangible results. The teacher-student relationship is always traditionally based, in the way that I have described above, but issues in different outcomes.

(1) In engineering, the teacher-student relationship has to issue in the building of good bridges, whether these are in Japan or elsewhere, which do not fall down under the weight of what passes over them. It will not do to emphasize the high quality of the teacher-student relationship if this basic competence or outcome is lacking. The point here is that the activity or practice has to issue in concrete results like bridges, the quality of which can be assessed objectively and relatively easily. However, in Japan the basic teaching pattern is the *zemi*, as described above. The professor is primarily conducting research and publishing the results of this research and the students learn by participating in the professor's research. Of course, the professor also gives lectures to undergraduate classes and the students have the responsibility of diligently listening to these lectures, mastering the material and then giving it back to the professor, in the form of answers to examination questions or in results of practical experiments.

(2) In medicine, the teacher-student relationship has to issue in competent doctors. The student has to pass an examination and be seen to possess the skills required, in order to practice medicine professionally. However, it seems to me that in Japan there is more of a personal element involved here than in engineering. In Japan doctors can set up clinics after a few years of training and people really choose to have their operations based on the reputation of the individual doctor, rather than on the proximity of the nearest hospital. Of course, the activity of medicine has to result in healthy patients and few deaths, but the assessment of the outcomes, in terms of competence and incompetence, is more difficult than in bridge-building. Whether a person is cured or not cannot directly be related to the quality of the medical treatment received. Here, again, the teaching pattern is the *zemi* and the students learn by watching experienced doctors at work and by participating in their research. Patients, too, have great respect for their doctors and dutifully listen to the explanations he chooses to give them: they hardly ever ask any questions.

(3) In language teaching and learning, it might be thought that the acid test of the teacher-student relationship is the extent to which the learner can display skills possessed by the native speaker. However, this is not the case in Japan, where the established pattern of language-learning is the study of texts written in English (novels by authors such as Dickens and Virginia Woolf are good examples here), the translation of these texts into Japanese, and the giving of detailed explanations of these texts in Japanese. An alternative is the detailed examination of English grammar and teaching methodology, also in Japanese. A professor, long passed away, once proudly told me that he was probably the world's authority on Chaucer's verbs. The members of his *zemi* dutifully assisted his research in this arcane subject and some went on to fill positions in the academic world secured by the professor as head of the *zemi* or *gaku-batsu*.

There is even more of a personal element involved here than in medicine, since the desired outcomes are not what we might expect. Spoken competence of a native-speaker of English, for example, is not consid-

ered to be an indication of knowledge of that language. There are no tests of native-speaker competence, short of the learner being able to pass as a native to all intents and purposes. The tests like TOEIC and TOEFL are popular in Japan, but bear little relationship to the skills possessed by native speakers. Assessment of teacher competence is also difficult, since there is no consensus in Japan as to what constitutes language proficiency. Here again, however, the teaching pattern is the *zemi* and the students learn by helping the professor to pursue his research.

(4) Philosophy has been practiced since the ancient Greeks and has been taught in universities for almost as long, but here there is even less scope for judging competence based on results. You become good at philosophy by actually doing it and the Greek original favored a confrontational approach, based on the individual. Of course there were schools of Platonists and Aristotelians, but these were based on the philosophical endeavors of two men, one of whom was a student in the other's school, who broke away and formed a school of his own. Philosophy is taught in Japanese universities, but it tends to be taught as history, or by focusing on some famous philosopher, such as Hegel or Heidegger. Here again, the teaching pattern is the *zemi* and the students learn by helping the professor to pursue his research. However, it should come as no surprise that there are no original or famous Japanese philosophers. The way of teaching is too Confucian and the group cohesion is too pervasive to allow any nails to stick up.

In certain fields the efficiency and efficacy of this approach is not in question. There is a creative tension between the teacher and the forms that constitute the practice and it works in many fields. The Japanese are unrivalled at building complex structures and making machinery and automobiles, where the 'kata-factor' and group cohesion is paramount. The approach seems to work far less well in fields where individual creativity is necessary.

Where would the martial arts, and especially aikido, fit? Is it more like engineering, medicine, language-learning, or philosophy, or perhaps a combination of all four? Aikido is a set of complex activities based on principles and these are clearly teachable. The principles rest on the activities and worldview of one particular person who was Japanese and who followed a Japanese teaching paradigm. Given this paradigm, however, there can be a gap between (a) the combination of these activities/ principles in Morihei Ueshiba's own *waza*, such that they are one unified whole, (b) Ueshiba's own awareness of the unified whole of these activities / principles, as his life proceeds, (c) Ueshiba's ability to teach these activities / principles to his *deshi*. This matter is especially important if we consider the differences between aikido and its parent, Daito-ryu, and traditional *koryu*.

The *waza* that Morihei Ueshiba practiced in the Kobukan can be found in the book *Budo Renshu*, produced in 1933 and handed out to select *deshi*. However, neither the comments on the individual *waza* nor the explanation given at the beginning of the book give any indication of Ueshiba's own personal training schedule. The fact that the book was handed out to select *deshi* indicates that Ueshiba used it as an indication of progress achieved, as he did also with the *mokuroku* scrolls that summarize the *waza* contained in the book. The contents of *Budo Renshu* should be compared with the Asahi Shinbun tape made in

1935 and also with the small *Budo* volume, printed in 1938 and also handed out to select deshi. It has been stated that the Asahi Shinbun tape depicts a type of practice that is closer to present-day aikido than to Daito-ryu seen in *Budo Renshu* and the Noma Dojo photo archive, but there is difference of only three years between *Budo Renshu* and the Asahi tape.

With this in mind, one can restate the issues in the previous paragraph in another way. (a) There is a creative tension between Morihei Ueshiba's personal training regime and the aikido waza that he created, or adapted from Daito-ryu. Did he see training and waza as two separate wholes, as two separate parts of one whole, or as one undivided whole? All the deshi I have talked to choose the third alternative, but stress that he taught only waza and some individual exercises like *funa-kogi/tori-fune*, *furitama*, *suburi* and some breathing exercises. (b) Morihei Ueshiba trained continuously from adolescence until when he died at the age of 86. Thus there is a personal history, of the maturing of one person. However, his discourses cover only a part of this history, in the sense that they were put together towards the end of this period, in the Kobukan years and afterwards, when he had embraced the Omoto religion. Only a few deshi were intellectually equipped to grasp how he presented what he was going through at the time. (c) All the deshi I have talked to at length about Morihei Ueshiba's teaching methodology (Noro, Tada, Yamaguchi, Arikawa, Isoyama) stress that Morihei Ueshiba *showed* waza and refrained from technical explanations, but gave long discourses about the universe etc. that they were not able to understand at the time.

Thus, it should come as no surprise to learn that Ueshiba followed the traditional teaching pattern sketched earlier. Of course, there is a difference in size between a large university and a small dojo, but there is far less difference in size between the early Kobukan, for example, and the traditional university zemi, within a department and within a faculty. The deshi in the Kobukan were close aides in an ongoing research process and also shared in this process, often without being fully aware of what was going on. We will examine this awareness and its limitations in the next column.

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