

TRADITIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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Kancho's Corner

In Search of Wisdom

The search for wisdom has long been linked with the journey of the martial artist... the relationship between wisdom and action very much enshrined in the warrior mythology.

We live in the 'information age' I'm told... and usually in a tone that indicates that this is a vast improvement on the previous 'dark age/s'. It's as if information has become a new type of gold and the more we have of it the wealthier we become. Information is shared through language, written and verbal, and language obviously played and continues to play a vital role in human development. There was a time when to know the name of something was to have an innate sense of what that thing was at its core and to apprehend its role and connection with us... how it acted upon us and we on it. In a sense, to temporarily own, or at least share, the power of that thing. To people whose very existence was intrinsically entwined with the land, to know the name of the soil, of the rain, of the wind, of the sun - was to be one with the essence of life. Words have great power but, like all power, words need to be treated with respect and care.

It is apparent that as modern humans have become less connected with our environment - have lost our sense of reliance on the basic elements of life - we have also become increasingly careless with the power of words. The capacity to visualise, let alone instinctively grasp, the deep connection between words and the power they represent, is becoming a lost art.

Some people say that words have lost their power through overuse. While all words may suffer from that (humans tend to talk a lot about a little) my theory is that the power of words and what they represent has been diminished as a result of decreasing time invested in meaningful contemplation and dialogue.



While the following synopsis of history is necessarily generalised, I speculate that we began to lose our way in the earliest days with the formation of a priest class in our society - a class that assumed increasing control of our communication with the source of life - whatever you may think that to be. Thinking about and dialogue with that source was left more and more to those people. Over time they in turn created a sub-branch - the specialists called scholars. Wisdom was supposedly the domain of the priests and the scholars, however they were so busy with imaginary gods and information, they had no time to grow their own food or commune with the real world. Their world became one of concepts and words without roots... and slowly but surely they drifted away from the world of sun and wind. Of rain and soil.

The scholars then gave rise to another sub-branch - the lawmakers - and because they were descended from the priest class, the law of the source and the law of the men whose role it had become to commune with the source became hopelessly entangled. And so they remain to this day. More unfortunately again, many of the lawmakers formed the politician class and the politician class now increasingly assume the role of leaders in our society. These people are largely possessed not with wisdom and a sense of mutuality, but with information and self-interest. This information is all that is left of the plant that was once named wisdom. All that remains of wisdom in their world is a shadow without roots.

Information has a tendency to be couched in nouns. Where wisdom once ensured that those nouns were symbolic representations of verbs, we now have nouns that are used (and misused) with no sense of the actions they represent. People speak of 'having thoughts' rather than of thinking... as if the thoughts arose in someplace unconnected to them. When they have happy thoughts these seem to arise from some external source that brings joy, and when they have disturbing thoughts, it's as if they have no ownership or control of them. When we allow ourselves to see thoughts as something that arise independently of us, we are forgetting the power that resides in the action of disciplining what is of course our own thinking.

All of this makes me wonder if it's not actually an information age that we live in, but a 'data age'. When considering this, it is obvious there are quite a few important words and concepts that seem to overlap,

Kancho's Corner continued...

and are even sometimes used as synonyms, and there's definitely value in untangling them and in being a little more discerning about their relationships. Words like data, information, knowledge, comprehension, understanding and wisdom.

Datum is an individual piece of what are called 'facts' and data are a collection of these 'facts'. What passes for information is often more an assembly of datum... data. This data is of no use to you or I as it is. None at all. It requires that we do something with it. It requires the effort of analysis by a thinking person. When blended with analysis it is transformed into information because it can now be useful – it can inform something. That process of transformation however is fraught with subjectivity. Who selects which 'facts' to assemble? Who even determines that a certain datum is a fact? What bias or predetermined position may be consciously or unconsciously influencing the choices? Any action that people may take based on this 'data / information' is often irrational or unreasonable. We might think of it as a mindless type of 'reaction'... the type of reactive behaviour that sadly forms a common part of everyday life.

So the above process - *data analysis* - can present us with information. But can information be trusted? Can it objectively inform action?

One thing I know about action is that it does not happen in a vacuum. Action is found in the middle of a maelstrom of intersecting and ever changing energy that is life. In that maelstrom there is no place where time stands still, so information requires that it is integrated into the 'actor' before it can inform action. It seems to me that this integration is a three stage process and separating and studying the stages is very important.

In the first stage information is again fused with effort. The effort of study. It can be studied and this study can transform information into knowledge. What I mean is that through this process information can become 'intellectual' knowledge. I see that, in our current world, the actions that stem from this type of intellectual knowledge are valued. It seems to be what people aspire to when they enter into a course of what passes for education (studying information). This intellectual knowledge largely informs the actions of many people who aspire to senior roles in our society -

to being leaders of business and government, churches and institutions and so on. Sadly for us, this knowledge is all too regularly tinged with the biases of the earlier stage of data collection and is also often allied with poorly camouflaged self-interest. Appropriate and supportive bits of information are cobbled together to serve pre-determined theories or to forward certain agendas. So I conclude that knowledge, like information and data, also cannot inform action in a way that benefits us and our world.



The next stage of integration is comprehension and the result of the effort to comprehend is understanding... information can be understood. And in this stage of understanding I believe we may also develop the capacity to weed out the earlier data / facts that were never really meant to be part of the final equation. So the next question is 'Can understanding inform beneficial action in the real world?' I believe the answer is no. Why? Because I regularly meet people who 'understand' but whose actions are not wise. I speculate that somewhere in the process of developing understanding something else can all too often be born... a type of acceptance that has at its root a corrosive passivity. A passivity that lacks vitality or the ability to actualise knowledge.

Acceptance is not the end that it appears to be. To accept yourself for who you are is simply an acknowledgement of your base nature... the capacities with which you were born. It is the recognition of the beginning... the place from which we then move forward in our world where action is everything. This stage of acceptance through understanding is the in-breath before the out-breath.

And so at last we come to wisdom. What is wisdom? To help us unravel this question let's replace it with another... What does wisdom do? And in this way approach wisdom through the world of action.

Does wisdom act as a receptacle for data or information... for knowledge or understanding? Is it some sort of distillation of these elements? Does wisdom inform action?

I believe it does none of these things. I believe what wisdom does is 'inspire action'

Wisdom is the source of inspired action

Kancho's Corner continued...

And this is what I believe is both the potential and the destiny of human beings - to be agencies of wise action. As human beings we have the unique ability to create our futures... to magnetise our destiny. But it requires action. When all is against us... when our efforts appear doomed to failure... we may still choose to act with an extraordinary positivity. With wisdom in our hearts, we see that we must go in under the very sword if we wish to emerge whole on the other side.

Unfortunately the evidence that we are far from our potential is all around us. The process by which we develop humans intrinsically empowered with wisdom is limited in the extreme. Currently the formal system is the domain of the priests, scholars, lawmakers and politicians. The informal system is largely reliant on people (parents & peers) who themselves increasingly lack role models of wisdom and in some instances whose lives are dominated by the type of irrational and unreasonable reaction alluded to above.



What is action really? I think many people associate action with doing something, but my definition of action can also mean *not* doing something. The action of non-action. I think there are two types of non-action. One is the absence of action... a kind of void. The other non-action is an energised waiting and watching type of non-action. It has vitality and a sense of expectancy.. I have heard it said that action is all that counts, however I would like to add an important rider... wise action is all that counts. Humans are all born with some innate intelligence, with the capacity for compassion, for courage, for perseverance, for trust, for integrity. Wise action is what we do with that capacity. It is disciplining ourselves to act with intelligence... to act with compassion, to act with courage, to act with perseverance, to act with trust and to act with integrity. Why is this so difficult? Because there are so many other paths. So many other actions we can take... and all of them easier than the wise action.

One day a boy walked out of the desert. In his hand he carried an old sword. He walked with purpose, his eyes scanning the horizon. He met a donkey who asked him 'Boy, where are you going?' and the boy said 'I am a warrior and I am searching for wisdom'. The donkey said "I have wisdom and I will share it with you'. The donkey proceeded to proudly show him the many things that he had collected and the boy looked on closely. After two days the boy asked 'And what do you do?' The donkey replied 'What do I do? I collect many things and I show them to others. In return they give me their admiration'. In the morning the boy was gone.

The next day the boy came upon a snake. Again he was asked where he was going and again the boy told of his search. The snake whispered that he had much wisdom and would share it in return for the boys labour. The boy agreed. Like the donkey, the snake had also collected many things and he had assembled these things into many and various groups and patterns. The snake whispered that the boy must assemble these items also and that this labour would bring him wisdom. The boy worked diligently until one day he dared to ask the snake 'And what do you do?' The snake replied "Do? I need do nothing. These patterns give me great power over others.' In the morning the boy was gone.

The boy warrior walked far and met no one. Then he came to a lake. The wind off the lake spoke to him very gently asking him where he was going. The boy explained that he was searching for wisdom and that he had come a long way. The lake told the boy softly that he understood his purpose very well and the boy could now rest. He could drink from the lake and quench his thirst for wisdom. He could stare at the lakes' surface and all would be revealed. But he must first put down his sword.

The boy placed his sword by the lakes edge and then drank deeply. He stared hard at the lake's surface and saw himself revealed along with his world. The scene around him faded as the reflection became the world. Then, as he relaxed, the boys' eyes caught the last rays of the sun glinting off his forgotten sword and he asked the lake 'And what shall we do?' The lake replied 'There is nothing that needs doing. All that we do is dust. Wisdom is in accepting this'.

For the first time the boy's sword spoke to him. What it said the boy would not repeat, but in the morning the boy was gone with his sword again in hand.

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At the place where the sun rises, the boy met a man. The man also carried a sword by his side. The boy asked 'What do you do?' and the man replied 'What is right and what I must'. The boy pondered his words, then asked 'How do you know what is right?' The man smiled grimly 'We all know what is right'.

Gambatte! David

Important Aikido Concepts (part 5)

There is an element in his premise that could be viewed as unimportant from a practical viewpoint, however the spirit he describes between Shidachi and Uchidachi also has an extremely important practical and technical application. The failure to see this makes a great deal of Aikido practice quite worthless.

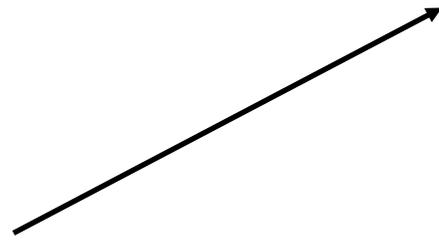
How often do we see an Aikidoka successfully gain a perfectly good Ikkajo (Ikkyo) ... and then go through a complex change to Sankajo (Sankyo) for absolutely no reason whatsoever. I have posed this question to various very senior people in the Aikido world many times and met with only blank stares and responses like "I decided I wanted to do Sankajo" or "because I am practising Sankajo". The reason for the change is visible immediately to any Koryu trained person - Uchidachi moved differently at the time leading Shidachi to the next level of the technique. While we perceive/treat Uke (Uchidachi) as the junior and their role as secondary, we miss the point that to learn the permutations of the kata and waza we need an uke who already knows the permutations and leads us through them in accord with our progress. It cannot be stressed too much that the warping of this spirit/relationship will always cause problems.

Perhaps the most pertinent question now for us is "What can Aikido be?"

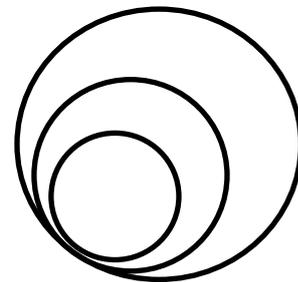
Again, Nishioka Sensei stresses that all martial arts start and end with Rei ho. This is a complex notion however it might be understood as the spirit / condition through which everything finds its place in the universe and we can recognise that it is indeed all as it should be. In this context, Aiki can be considered a path along which we practice the spirit of Rei ho.

The Aikido we principally study and practise in AMAI Dojos combines the influence of Yoshinkan & Shinto Muso Ryu. We use the name Shinto Muso Ryu Aiki to honour Nishioka Sensei and to clearly state the nature of the art as distinct from the other Aikido Ryu ha. It is neither better nor worse than any other because these aren't valid descriptors in a world such as Budo. There is the art the way we choose to study it - and then there are a multitude of others.

Their very diversity is a sign of the health of the art. It has long been Nishioka Senseis' goal that Shinto Muso Ryu would reinforce once more a positive synthesis of swordsmanship and Aikido riai. His advice to me is that this development is not another or a new idea. Rather he believes it is a move along the original path of the art. This is an interesting model because we often see learning as progressive and progressive as linear. Learning that way would of course look like this ...



Instead Nishioka Sensei represents it like this ... an endless returning to the source ... each time taking the essence and extending it into another realm.



Again, I want to stress that the above ideas are neither right nor wrong – they are simply a distillation of my experience and I hope that by sharing them we can all progress well and truly in an art we all love.

Life Hacks

Awareness and Gratitude

A Russian psychologist, Peter Ouspensky, said that as people we spend much of our lives 'asleep' - and the main obstacle to 'waking up' is the belief that we are already awake!

Ouspensky was a disciple of a very interesting man, George Gurdjieff, and lived at a time and in a *milieu* when **thinking** (in terms of deeply and openly contemplating the universe and our relationship with it) was still very much an art form.

In these days of busy-ness, our time and even our lives can so easily be consumed by the details that fill out the more mundane aspects of our existence. I have heard people refer to this period in history as the age of 'me' – but if so, it is very much the 'lower case me' – the 'me' that is separated from its higher self and its universe. We experience joy when we gain something and sadness when we lose something. So much is weighed up to assess its value or its use to benefit us prior to any decision or action taking place. The ideals of service, placing others before ourselves and mutual benefit can seem almost archaic or even naïve in that environment.

I met a person who is a professional photographer. He commented that most people have very little understanding of martial arts and it can seem somewhat surreal when we think about it. My feeling is not like that. Rather than surreal, my experience of traditional martial arts is that it is 'super-real'. Being in a dangerous environment can bring our senses to a new level. Our sense of what is going on outside us is heightened but so is our sense of what is going on inside us. Even more is our sense of the connection between inside and outside – how they feed and drive each other in all sorts of interesting ways.

This type of 'super-reality' is ours every moment of every day if we wish ... we will be awake! The Dojo is a great place to continuously renew our wakeful state. It's hard to 'sleep' when bodies are flying around or swords are whizzing past our ears.

The experience that flows out of this for me is Gratitude - with a capital G. I feel so grateful for my life ... for the people and things that share it with me ... for the chance to breathe in and breathe out. For the 'right here and nowness'.

Awareness and Gratitude go hand in hand. As does everything in this universe if we just wake up and see.



Grading

2018 End of Year Shinsa

Congratulations to the following people for successfully completing their recent Shinsa...

Juniors:

Kaiden Ey	7 th Kyu
Mala Miller	6 th Kyu
Tinzen Huston	4 th Kyu
Tinko Huston	4 th Kyu
Lyla Keogh	4 th Kyu

Adults:

Alyce Williams	4 th Kyu
Phil Brocklehurst	Shodan
Kurek Ashley	Shodan
Tamara Burriss	Nidan
Aaron Williams	Nidan



Technique Workshop

Yokomen uchi Shomen Iriminage Irimi



1. Take gyaku hanmi kamae facing your partner and lead them to attack.



2. Enter strongly and strike ura ken while cutting down on uke's attacking arm.



3. Continue the downward motion on the attacking arm and pass contact over to your right arm maintaining soft control behind uke's elbow as your left hand slides up to control uke's neck.



4. Enter deeply behind uke unbalancing him further. Retain control of his neck and advance your right arm so your armpit sits on his shoulder and your elbow completely controls uke's head.

Technique Workshop continued...



5. Change direction via your lead knee and enter deeply to finalise the throw. Take care not to raise your centre or your right elbow. Maintain zanshin.

Inspirational corner

Happy Christmas

