

## On Zen and Budo

### A Lecture by Toyoda Sensei

Zen is Zen, Aikido is Aikido. These are two different traditions. That is why I don't force regular students or instructors to do Zen training at my dojo. I encourage them, but some of them don't have an interest or just can't take it. I understand. Zen training is difficult. That's ok.

But my uchideshi are required to do it, because they came here to learn *my* Aikido. If they want to learn my Aikido, then they have to do Zen training. In all of my classes, if you know about Zen, you will hear me say familiar things. I'm using Zen stories and words all the time when I talk about Aikido, simply because that's my background.

Zen is part of the tradition of Buddhism, but we don't get stuck on it as a religion in the Western sense. To us, it's a training method. Even Shakyamuni Buddha said not to believe what is handed down from the past, but to find things out through your own experience. Zen has this spirit. So it doesn't matter what your religious background or beliefs are. You can still get benefit from Zen training. Just sit, just go to the *zendo*, just go to *sesshin*, and you will find out for yourself.

In Japanese Budo, martial Ways, and in Japanese culture in general, there are a lot of influences from Zen Buddhism. Not all samurai practiced Zen, like some people say. Other forms of Buddhism were more popular at different times. Some samurai even became Christians. It's probably accurate to say, actually, that the true religion of the samurai was loyalty to one's lord and clan...to the way of the samurai, in other words. You can read this history if you want.

But for many people Zen has provided an understanding of the deeper elements of martial arts training. Especially in Aikido, we have very deep philosophy and very high goals in our training. O-Sensei practiced various forms of breathing exercises and meditation that come from Shinto. However, he didn't pass these on to anyone. Whenever I heard him speak about these things, I couldn't understand what he was talking about. He always talked using old stories from Japanese myths. No one really understood what he said, and mostly we didn't care. We just knew that we liked how he moved, that he was an amazing martial artist.

But he had that deep internal training. Because it wasn't something he systematized and passed down to us, I believe Zen is the best way to fill in that gap.

The famous saying of O-Sensei is *masakatsu agatsu*. In English, people translate this, "the best victory is to win over yourself." What does this mean? To win over yourself means to see yourself for what you really are, to see your true nature.

That true nature isn't different from the nature of the entire universe. When you can see

this, then you understand that no one is really your enemy. In the martial arts, the enemy is you! And a real enemy, another human being trying to harm you, is also you in the deepest sense. You are not different from each other. This is literally true, not just a nice idea.

O-Sensei also said, "I have no enemy." I think that is what he meant. From his standpoint, with his realization, there was no such thing as an enemy, because there was no separateness.

To have this realization, we do Zen training and martial arts together. Martial arts training can help you develop intensity and sharpness and a life-or-death urgency. This improves our Zen. Without this urgency and awareness you can't progress in Zen. At the same time, Zen develops deep calm and insight and compassion. This makes us true martial artists, the kind of people who can be useful to society.

This is my understanding of how the "sword that takes life" can become the "sword that gives life". Through our training and discipline we cut ourselves. We cut the ego, which is to say that we see ourselves for what we truly are. Then we can wield the great sword - our existence, our life - correctly.

*- Recorded by M. Moore*