

Kojiki: The inspiration for Aikido lies within the Kojiki

Those who seek the spirituality of Aikido would do wisely to study Kojiki. When Abe Sensei came to LA in the fall 1984, my life changed forever. He taught me what the true meaning of Aikido is. I don't know how much I understood at that time. The time flies fast until today! I still have the same questions I had then about how much I could seek and understand the way. Abe Sensei showed me the method of kokyū or breathing and as he explained it, the meaning of spirituality of Aikido. According to Abe Sensei, the history of Aikido is derived from the ancient time and the concept of Kokyū is in the Kojiki (or record of ancient matters – Japan's mythical origins).

In this article Abe Sensei explains the essence of the translation of Kojiki. He will show the true teaching of O'Sensei and leads us towards a better understanding of Aikido. The following articles are the first time to the public Abe Sensei talks about in details on this topic and try's to reveal the mysticism of the connection between Kojiki and Aikido. I'm sure that it will take a long time for us to digest the following concepts but let's talk and seek more about it from now on. Enjoy!

Matsuoka Sensei

“Kojiki” and O'Sensei

“The heart of ‘Kojiki’ is at the beginning of Minakanushi (A Shinto God). In other words, center is important. In Aikido, it means “exhale”, “hold”, “inhale”, and “hold” of breath. The moment of each movement is existence of Minakanushi.”

There are many quotations from “Kojiki” in O'Sensei's seminars which were called quite difficult. We had an interview with Master Seiseki Abe, who has exchanged among sho with O'Sensei for 20 years and has studied about “Kojiki”. We have asked him how “Kojiki” is related to Aikido and about “Kotodama”(言霊) (latent supernatural power in words), that is indispensable to understand deepness of Aikido.

This is second interview for us to learn Aikido through ancient time with him following by last year's “Misogi”.

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At Amenotakesanjuku Aikido Doujyou
Interviewed by editorial department

Master of School of Amanotakesanjuku
Asking Grand Master Seiseki Abe

Mother's Affection Transferred From “は は(ha ha)” Which Has Soul In The Word

--- We had a special feature in vol.134 about Misogi. We would like to ask you about “Kojiki” and “Kotodama” which are indispensable in Aikido.

What is the relation between “Kojiki” and “Kotodama”?

Abe: In order to tell the story of “Kojiki” in a way to make apprentices to understand, I try to explain it by the way of “Kotodama”; so that they would understand more.

“Kotodama” is so-called “Kotoba (words)”. Words we use today have been pronounced as same as 1000 years ago and 3000 years ago. For example, “ア (a)” has been pronounced as “a” for long time in different eras. “ア” is pronounced out as “a” when we were touched by humans.

“A”, which is different from just pronounced “a” and has heart and breathe is so called “Kotodama”. It can be also called soul in the words.

For example, when “ha” is combined with “ha”, the word, “haha (mother)” is created. When you pronounced “haha” with soul, there would be mother’s love appearing in the word itself.

For instance, when it is a very cold day, a mother holds a child’s hands and tries to warm the child’s hands by her warm breath with exhaling voice, “ha ha”. This pronunciation and the voice, “ha ha”, is so-called “kotodama”- like- “ha ha”.

--- You mean, whether or not there is soul in the word, it creates just a word or it can create “kotodama”.

Also, in order to understand “kotodama”, we need to know the meaning of each sound. For example, there are meanings of (御 [respect]、大 [big]) in a sound of “o”, and there are (日 [day]、火 [fire]) in the sound of “hi”.

Abe: That is right. In addition, when “a” is combined with “ka”, monophonic sound turns into multi-sound, and there is wide range of meanings in the multi-sound.

We have transmitted those words; such as, “a” and “ka” by hearing the pronunciation. But, Kanji (Chinese Character) was imported from China. Because Kanji was convenient, the original words were replaced to Kanji, and current “Kojiki” (Record of Ancient Matters) was made with the method of writing Kanji. In fact, there was “kotodama” in very first “Kojiki”; however, it was stopped and overwritten by Kanji. Then, people have stopped learning “Kojiki” because Kanji is pain in the neck and have forgotten “Kojiki”.

And, voice production is foundation of breaking into “kotodama”. Just like elementary school in Meiji Period taught, we need an education of how to breathe and move upper and lower lips.

Ancient people’s words were beautiful, but modern people’s words are terrible. For example, the pronunciation of “じ (ji)” is different when it is voiced sound of “し (shi)” and when it is voiced sound of “ち (chi). You would not understand “kotodama” unless you learn such difference of pronunciation. It would be out-of-date view, but I think we have to reach that level. People in Meiji Period were educated like this.

When O’Sensei speaks about “Kojiki”, he explained it to easy to understand by the way of “kotodama”-like. It was just like when Mr. Deguchi, (Onisaburo Deguchi: 1871 – 1948, Husband

of the second founder of Ohmotokyo sect, Ms. Sumi Deguchi. He played a role of main person to develop and spread Ohmotokyo.), spoke to believers.

O'Sensei described something about spirituality using easy-to-understand Ohmotokyo-like words, in other words, "kotodama".

Continental, Determined Martial Art

Abe: When Mr. Deguchi went to Mongolia (year of 1924), he took close aides along with him. He asked O'Sensei to go with him. It looked as if he was taken as a guard. But, in fact, O'Sensei just wanted to study about continental martial arts furthermore after he went through all martial art schools in Japan.

He went there as a warrior. He wanted to study continental martial art, what is now called Tai Chi, from Mongolia and after that, he tried to enhance Aikido more.

--- Do you mean that the trip to Mongolia gave great influence to O'Sensei?

Abe: Yes, it was for martial arts. I think he had foresight. O'Sensei thoroughly studied Tai Chi. There were many Tai Chi schools, and he had chances to see something great in Mongolia.

I followed same path (Laughter). The era was different, though. I have visited Beijing two times. The first time was for studying about Calligraphy. I mainly organized the second trip. Although I wanted to know about martial arts and Tai Chi, everyone else went there for Calligraphy.

When I went there, I said, "I do Calligraphy besides Aikido." and demonstrated Aikido. One of the audiences said to me, "I have studied Tai Chi from my father since I was 2 or 3 years old. As I was very touched your technique, I would like you to see my Tai Chi, please." And he showed it to me. It was completely different from Tai Chi people do at the streets. This was a special technique. It is as same as special technique of Aikido.

"It Is Interesting. I Write, Too."

--- Is it at this school when O'Sensei wrote Calligraphy at the first time?

Abe: He wrote at the first time was at Shinguu Dojo. Professor Hikitsuchi (Mr. Michio Hikitsuchi, Master of Kumanojuku Dojo) opened a school, and the great professor (O'Sensei) and I have stayed there for a month or so in 1954. Since I was told from O'Sensei to have a part-time job for time between training in the morning and at night, I taught Calligraphy to neighbors.

When I was teaching to children, he saw it and really enjoyed the way the children were writing. And then, he said, "It is interesting I write, too.", and he started writing. It was the first time for him to write.

The reason he said, "It is interesting.", is because he got knack of Calligraphy immediately to make it better. That is great thing about him. His improvement was remarkable from the beginning. It was just amazing. His energy was just transferred to tip of brush for Calligraphy.

Many pieces of Calligraphy he wrote still remain at this school, and all of them will be here in 300 years and in 500 years. O'Sensei's pieces were genuine and significant.

Another person who wrote great Calligraphy was "Naosama.", mother of Onisaburo Seishi. She was called as the person who was uneducated and illiterate, and that is why she hardly wrote.

One day, she had some feelings and started writing Calligraphy. Her calligraphy was just amazing. The Calligraphy was far from ordinary people write.

Aikido is as same as Calligraphy. We can tell whether or nor it is real. For example, technique indicates that there are ways to use 5 fingers. We can learn how to use by senior associates. Technique is to be able to use what we learned without making mistake, and when we can do it, it becomes technique of Aikido.

O'Sensei knew that the form of using abdominal muscle was same between Aikido and Calligraphy.

He says, "Why don't you write?" when there is a word which is hard to write or understand. (Laughter) This is the great master and my way of training Calligraphy.

I Answer, "Kojiki", When I Am Asked, "What Is Point Of Pride For Aikido?"

Abe: The important part of "Kojiki" is mythological time until Izanaki and Izanami.

A daughter of Izanagi and Izanami is Amaterasuumikami (天照大御神). Name of a brother is Susanoonamikoto (建速須佐之男) and the other is Tsukuyominamikoto(月読命).

If you translate such name of the Gods by way of "Kotodama", you would understand.

In the first era (mythological time) of "Kojiki", only one name was told. In "Kojiki", it is described as, "worked alone and never appeared the figure in public".

Takamimusubi is the second generation and Kamimusubi is the third generation. Ashikabi is the forth and Toyokumono is the fifth generation. All of them worked alone. After that, God of Uhidini and God of Imo (sister, wife) suhidini, who are Gods of husband and wife.

When I go to abroad, I am asked what point of pride for Aikido is, and I answer, "It is O'Sensei." When I was asked if there was anything else I was proud of, I answered that is was "Kojiki". Without knowing "Kojiki", I could not have answered like this. It requires knowledge to be able to talk about all contents after Minakanushi.

"Kojiki" is such great story as no other country could have. "Kojiki" is valuable religiously, scientifically, literarily, and culturally. O'Sensei strongly insisted to understand "Kojiki" thoroughly. Story at the mythological time in "Kojiki" is our back bone. Therefore, O'Sensei told us to read "Kojiki" thoroughly and read it by way of "Kotodama". This is what was O'Sensei's desire and our mission.

"Kojiki" To Search One's Root

Abe: Those intelligent scholars before the Meiji era explained "Kojiki" academically and interpreted as "There was mythological time...". Because character of Chinese God came over to Japan, Chinese and Japanese Gods were mingled.

It is not right. We didn't have Chinese Character, but we had the word, "kami", which contained ka and mi. It is so-called "kotodama".

When one transfers “Kojiki” by way of “kotodama”, he would know how old this country is and about himself. Professor Kenzou Futaki is the one who taught me about that lesson and deed. He is also my former teacher just like Professor Ueshiba.

I learned Misoginogyo from Professor Tatsumi, who is an apprentice of Professor Kawatsura. I owe what I am now to brown rice from Professor Futaki since 1940, “Kojiki”, and Aiki from Morihei Uehiba.

※ Kenzo Futaki (1873 – 1966. Doctor of Medical Science, Bacteriologist. Apprentice of 植芝翁. President of Dainihonmisogikai. He is also known as a Doctor of brown rice.)

※ Bonji Kawatsura (1862 – 1929. Philosopher. He revived Misoginogyo and organized Japanese ancient deeds before it became affected by influence of Buddhism and Confucianism.)

O’Sensei had seen Professor Kawatsura several times. O’Sensei had seen many great philosophers and scholars those days. He collected edition of Professor Kawatsura (“Collected edition of Boji Kawatsura” 10 series, published by Yahatashoten) and words from Norito of Engi style in Misogigyo is admirable writing, and I could say that it is agglomeration of all Japanese literatures.

The Root Of Breathe Is Minakanushi / “Object Which Has Location But, Doesn’t Have Measurement.”

Abe: Speaking of the heart of “Kojiki”, it is Minakanushi, who was created first. In other words, center is important. On flat surface, center of circle is important. Even though the shape changed to three-dimensional space, the center always locates the same spot. For instance, to talk about oneself, there are body and heart. Then, the matter is which one is Minakanushi. If body were Minakanushi, heart would be accessories. If heart were Minakanushi, body would be accessories.

In a case of Aikido, there are invisible heart and breathe there. And, if one trains the method of breathing mainly by oneself, one’s own Aikido will be established. The way of training of body is depend on where one places Minakanushi. It means that heart, breathe, and body should be united and, when one practices, heart, breathe, and body must be located at the center.

“Exhale, stop breathing, inhale, hold breathing”, each position of breathing method is the location of Minakanushi. The technique is changed by your decision of which one is main: Is inhale main?, is holding breath main?, is exhale main?, or is stopping breathing main? The choice can be made unconsciously by training. Therefore, the Aikido will be Aikido with harmony.

In a home, Minakanushi is different when the husband is main and when the wife is main. The elements of Minakanushi are what something main will never be fixed. The center moves around, but it is never fixed.

The wife is Minakanushi until preparing breakfast in the morning. While having meal, the husband is Minakanushi. After the husband went work, the wife becomes Minakanushi. Just like that, Minakanushi never be fixed.

Minakanushi of “Kojiki” teaches us to get it and know it.

--- O'Sensei said about being communication with universe....

Abe: It means that the smallest of oneself is a dot, which is "There is a location, but there is no size." The center of universe does not have size, either. Speaking as superficial level, all of bodies are same as surface of the Earth. They have incredible sensitivity.

The center is under the navel. There are 2 muscles which are vertical and diagonal muscle under the navel. When you hold in your stomach at practice of Misogi, you can see the muscles. When you hold in your stomach during serious practice of Misogi, you would feel that the skin on your stomach sticks to your back. If you practice those 4 kinds of breathing in such situation, you would get great concentration power.

You hold breathing in the lower part of lung. This power transmits to abdominal muscle. The abdominal muscle was built up by the practice with breathing. That's why the shape of abdominal muscle built by Aikido is different from the muscle built by push-ups or physical exercise. It can tell by holding breath a moment. It becomes such a small thing, like "there is a location, but there is no size." This is Minakanushi of breathing.

When thoughts transmit to other party from one who uses proper technique

Abe: It is instantaneous technique of Aikido. The second your hand was held by other party, you both are harmonized to their vibration.

Because the technique of Aikido is spiral and twisted, it is the strongest and there is no quiescence. As soon as one grabs other party, he attacks other party with spirals by spiral. He pushes other party's stomach through it. In other words, he smashes other party's lungs/diaphragm. We breathe at the diaphragm. Breath of bottom part of diaphragm is connected to abdominal muscle. Therefore, it is possible to kill other party by choking when it comes.

--- Original Aikido is what one captures other party in a moment, isn't it? Techniques of flipping and grappling comes later.

Abe: That's right. Aikido is different from gymnastics. In Aikido, one attacks center of other party. In a case of breathing, one attacks below diaphragm. When one attacks there long time, other party would die by suffocation. It is different from death by strangulation. Strangulation is a murder. (Laughter) When one was killed by Aikido, no one would know it was Aikido. It is so-called killing of knockout technique.

When one is using technique, thoughts of his spirit actually transmit to other party. If the thoughts weren't come across, the other party only experiences the pain. (Laughter) When there is fear for knockout technique in a person who is attacked by the technique, he would know his breath harmonized with other party's breath throughout the pain. They are harmonized well.

Well, Aikido has such amazing techniques, but it is difficult because it is one on one. That's why we choose other party to transmit real thing. The real thing is transmitted from one to another.

--- When you are about to lose by a technique that O'Sensei uses, you would know immediately, right?

Abe: Yes, when he holds my hand, I know he just hold my hand, but when he is about to do "shoumenuchi", the moment of swinging his hand, I can tell it. Whether I am winning or other party is winning, as long as hands keep moving, I can say that we all can tell the moment. When I held O'Sensei's hand and tried to hit him, but it was not successful, and the teacher was laughing behind me. This is one kind of lesson, but it is more difficult than Zen riddle.

Beginners usually hold other party's hand so strongly with his fingertips. In order to have a strong grip, one trains holding something hard. Then, he trains to break this habit by using grip strength last. There was a student, who could break a glass by his hand, and he was glad about it, but his hand was covered in scars. This way of using strength of grip is wrong.

After making a mistake, we learn how to adjust the strength. Each of necessary strength is different when you hold a glass, when you hold a wooden sword, and when you hold a real sword. We need to know the differences by ourselves. This is the way of O'Sensei's teaching method. Or, this is the way of learning. Well, sometimes this method turns out to be fruitless. (Laughter)

It is as same as the case of Ikkyo. If you do it like this, the hand would be cut, but this time, (teacher is faster), he holds the sword; so that, (the hand) would not be cut. But, we all sometimes make a mistake. Teacher said to me to use a wooden sword. The technique using a sword was so fast. That's why the sword had to be changed to wooden from real sword.

Then, I could tell, "Oh, this is wooden sword", and "this is Aiki" by intense lesson. When I was learning a technique from the O'Sensei, I could hear the sound of swinging wooden sword. If I made a mistake, it would be very dangerous. The lesson was so much fun. (Laughter)

After Experiencing Hard Deed

--- The level of seriousness now is very different from old days, isn't it?

Abe: O'Sensei has taught me substantial lessons with his life. When I asked him what the most difficult deed was, he answered it was Mizunogyo. When we practiced Mizunogyo in Hokkaido, we had to start with breaking ice at lake. Because the ice was very thick, we had to spend whole day breaking ice on the first day. When we worked so hard, we sweated, and it helped us from freezing. The second day, the ice was not as thick as the first day. We could break the ice faster, but it made us cold. The ice of the third day was thinner. After that, we practiced Chinkonkishin. That deed was the hardest one. If we go all the way to the end of practicing this deed, we would die. Therefore, we practice deed asking someone to watch till right before death. Only the person who completes the deed can have a spiritual epiphany.

There is love in the martial arts. This love is created when body and soul became unified. One should consider others, not only himself. When one-to-many martial arts it is called love, it is Aikido.

When one has a bitter experience, previous bitter experiences would be less pain for him. When he remembers this principle and treats other people with decency, harmony among people is created. This is also the lesson from the O'Sensei.

At first, one leaves his family for a week, forgets about the house, and practices Misoginogyo during the whole one week. Then, he achieves enlightenment. He learns how important parents and children are. It is truthful harmony of family. Without the harmony, Misoginogyo will

mean nothing. It is very difficult to diet, not to say anything, and to practice zagyou. When you do for a week, you would be exhausted, but you would successful. When you left home, you and your soul become one. I think it is superb to have deed like this in this country.

--- You mean, it is necessary to practice this deed in order to understand O'Sensei's Aikido.

Abe: That's right. It is not superficial. If we pursue Misoginogyou like this, we all will be real Aikido people.

Technique should not be changed, and should be based on Douka (songs with words with wisdom including moral). Also, we should not misinterpret Douka. This is ideal. There are so many secrets in language; so that, we sometimes misinterpret. When we change “を(wo)” to “と(to)”, the meaning would be completely different. But, it won't happen to Douka. There is no way to change.

Therefore, I would like to tell technique to student considering Douka as essence.

--- Thank you very much.

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Seiseki Abe

1915-. He began Aikido in 1952 or so. He is also a calligrapher. He is a member of Nitten. In early 20's, he joined Kenzo Futagi's Misogikai. In this Misogikai, he has learned wamenshikigyohou from Sonken, who is Bonji Kawatsura's apprentice. He is an apprentice of O'Sensei and in later life, he instructed calligraphy. He was allowed to have 10dan unofficially. He is the head of Amenotakesanjuku Aikido

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