

Searching for Spiritual Treasure

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In November 1984 I met Abe Sensei and it caused one of the most drastic changes to my life. I would like to talk about things which I learned from Abe Sensei through our conversations.

The ten days which I spent with Abe Sensei were extremely meaningful to me. We had breakfast together, walked together on quiet hills, and talked together in a house in the mountains of Los Angeles. I asked Abe Sensei to explain various things, for instance, "What is the true Japanese teaching?", "What is Aikido?", asked about gods' (Kami) concept and about Kojiki (the legendary Stories of Old Japan). I do not know how much I comprehended, but what I felt was the depth of Aikido's spirit from the explanations of Abe Sensei. The depth of Aikido's spirit does not simply come from Aikido's history, but through the several thousand years of Japanese people's knowledge. According to Abe Sensei, the origination of Aikido exists in Kojiki which was written in the eight century. Abe Sensei explained to me that during those years the peoples' behavior and concepts were related to Aikido via myths (legends) in the Kojiki. It was very interesting.

At this point, let me briefly explain about Kojiki. Early in the eight century, the Yamato court edited the origin of the Japanese emperor. The Kojiki is one of those documents and an old book explaining ancient Japan and Japanese behaviors and notions through myths (legends). Abe Sensei said it is important how to perceive the Kojiki.

The next morning, I had prepared a light breakfast for Abe Sensei with brown rice and miso soup. While he was having a breakfast he said, "Kojiki should not be something mysterious. It should be understood by scholars, artists, and people in general at same time on the same level". His translation of Kojiki is based on words (Yamato Kotoba). It is not the translation from Chinese character (Kanji), which most of scholars does this way. He also said with deep emotion that the translation of Kojiki is one of his missions in his life.

I was as much as possible, seeking the opportunity to ask Abe Sensei about Aikido, O Sensei and Kojiki. Therefore, I was looking forward to making breakfast every morning for Abe Sensei. I asked him, "Abe Sensei, there is a "breathing power" in the core of Aikido techniques. Would you explain concretely what kind it is?" The original notion of Aikido techniques' breathing power can be found among the ancient people in Kojiki. This "breathing power" is not simply inhaling and exhaling. It is a method to pull out an unlimited power from the human body, and it uses Aikido's own concentration. Such as; 1) Powerful thought, 2) Using the lower abdomen, 3) Extension of the finger tip and 4) Lower abdominal breathing and 5) Voice. When all these elements are united, the real "breathing power" will come forth.

According to Kojiki, from Abe Sensei's explanation, during the Okuninushi-no-mikoto era, the countries of Isumo and Yamato nominated one person in order to achieve a conclusion to the war, and each was to measure his strength against the other's. When the person on Izumo side squeezed the person from Yamato's hand as hard as he could, the hand of the Yamato representative was cold and hard as an icicle. Suddenly, it became as sharp as a sword, and when he squeezed back the Izumo representative's hand was smashed. Based on Abe Sensei's interpretation, the representative of Yamato knew the "breathing power".

The value of harmonizing is central to Aikido. This philosophy was born in ancient Japan and it is still documented in Kojiki as myths (legends). Now I have a romance toward the ancient time, and would like to express my respect toward the ancient people' depth of knowledge. I think it is

important to view our histories with respect, for then we may discover something which we have forgotten as a people.