

Changes in Tendoryu-Aikido

or

Master and student — an everlasting contradiction?

Experiences from both sides

There has been a lot of discussion about Tendoryu, lately. People talk about greed, despotism, blind allegiance, public exposure and much more. This emotional campaign should probably be viewed a little closer.

Sometimes a teacher leaves his student because in the master's opinion the student is not pursuing the correct goal. Some students abandon their teacher because the teacher does not meet the student's expectations any more. That is exactly how it should be — if there was no egoism influencing the matter. If a teacher is an „ideal type“ the student will feel let down as soon as this ideal is not met anymore. The master does not appear to live up to the originally attached measure any more. But is it really the student's role to judge the teacher instead of trying to understand what the teacher is trying to convey to him? Should the teacher adapt to the needs of the student or should he remain true to his principles and pass on his knowledge as he pleases ? How many students (and which ones in particular) should he adapt to? How many ideals should the teacher conform to? Can you see the absurdity in this train of thought?

Does the other person, whoever this may be, always have to conform to our expectations? Parents and teachers have a special role here. We should stop trying to measure our parents and teachers. Their task is extremely difficult and laden with responsibility. They also make mistakes in their lives and we should not repeat them. One day we might be teachers or parents ourselves and have to face the same responsibility. „Nobody listens to us anymore because everyone thinks he or she knows better what to do (and how). After all, everybody does it like this.“ Or do they?

Shimizu Sensei is a person that can look back at a wealth of experience in life as well as in Budo. It is this experience he is passing on to us. He is neither idol nor ideal, nor do I think that he wants to be either. In his lessons of Tendoryu-Aikido he is not only teaching technique but he also tries to impart an understanding for character-building. He is strict, direct and open.

Out of this reason I would like to talk about my own experiences for a while. If you believe a teacher should live up to your expectations, you probably do not need a teacher, anyway. Lately I observe a lot of people who appear to be more self-seeking than seeking their self. This is not only true in gender relations but also in friendships as well as in this special case of a relation between teacher and student.

To begin with I would like to talk about my experiences with the instrumental teachers in my life. In Kindergarten I started learning the recorder. The nursery teacher who was giving the lessons was very nice. Nevertheless, we did not have a choice to take part and practice or not.

My parents were working hard to make it possible for me to take piano lessons and also give my three brothers a chance to learn a sophisticated instrument. My piano teacher who also was the organist of our local church visited us weekly to instruct me. He did not view this as service delivery but as a chance to pass on his knowledge. Sometimes I did not practice. Regardless of this he never told my parents. Instead he would scold me for wasting my parents' money and tell me I would better stop the tuititions. This was quite embarassing for me so I started being more deligent and stopped being apologetic to my friends because I could not come out and play. After this my piano teacher started inviting me to his house for the lessons. Here I was allowed to play his new grand piano. This must have been an exceptional treat.

My fascination for music became the most important thing in my life. I started teaching myself

guitar, bass guitar and bass recorder. I founded a school band and at the age of 15 a dance band.

I moved to the city and started attending a school that had a special emphasis on musical education. My brother was already studying in the associated boarding-school. He suggested learning the double bass since there were enough good piano players and thus career options would be rather small. Since I always was quite easy-going and, at the same time, curious about learning a new instrument, (since it was supposed to be rather easy to learn) I started taking lessons with the colleague of my brother. Apart from teaching the double bass he also was an impressive Rock and Pop musician on guitar and bass guitar.

Full of enthusiasm I started taking the lessons. My tuition took 2 hours every day and I was only allowed to play guitar or with practise the band after I finished my double bass exercises. Three months later my teacher revealed to me that I had to enroll for the qualifying exams as a protégé of the conservatory and that he would take me to his teacher the next day. My heart was sinking into my boots since I was about to meet a real master of the double bass.

The beginning was a little disappointing. We entered the professor's tuition room, which was beautifully decorated but full of smoke. The professor greeted me briefly and asked us to take a seat. An older student was receiving a lesson. I did not believe my eyes, the student was smoking a cigarette, the professor a pipe. At the same time the professor was passionately singing the voice the student was supposed to play. Suddenly he stopped and started ranting, „Mr. Whatever, if you don't practise and play with more commitment I will set your backside on fire!“ (A common German proverb.) The student answered that if this was the professor's opinion it probably would be necessary. The professor took out his gas lighter and set it to produce the biggest possible flame and held it to the student's behind. Although the student jumped up immediately, holding on to his bass, his corduroy trousers suffered a big black spot. Everybody was laughing but I was shocked. Apparently the whole thing was not as aristocratic as I thought after all.

After this incident the professor took the student's bass and played the piece for us. This left me speechless. I had never heard anything like this before. No record could impress me more than this little live demonstration. Then he asked me to play a few notes so I nervously struggled through my little etude. „Good,“ said the professor, „I accept you.“ That was it. I was dismissed and allowed to go. Two weeks later I passed the qualifying exam. Both the professor and the principal were present. The principal was looking very disappointed as he turned to the professor and said, „Dear Professor, I leave this young man in your hands as I am sure that he will succeed.“ All my professor said was, „Sure he will!“

The following time I simply forgot to sleep. My days (and nights) were packed with school, double bass and partys. Followed by a Jazz band and a Rock band. My professor let me read the „Spiegel“ (a weekly German newsmagazine, known for its investigative journalism and critical views) and Eugen Herrigel's „Zen in the art of archery“ (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zen_in_the_Art_of_Archery) as well as articles on politics and education of all sorts. He was only scolding me when I did not practise and once he almost dismissed me. Gradually I started to understand his way of teaching. Strictness, faith, dedication, self-confidence and respect. Patience and even more patience. After a while I did not have any schedule any more. When the professor saw fit, I received 3 consecutive hours of tuition. All others had to wait. Some students become a magnet of sorts for other students and it was a matter of course to follow their lessons.

So there always were some students quietly following the lessons. I had to skip other lectures because I was receiving double bass lessons. During school holidays I was „allowed“ not to travel since my professor was coming to my house to teach the students that stayed around.

Sometimes his Japanese wife was accompanying him, thus I was getting more and more insight into Japanese culture and understanding for his teaching style. He was not only a teacher, but also a father, a friend, and an educator. Two of my Japanese fellow students are still friends of mine. They showed me a completely different kind of relation between student and teacher. During study, listening, and performance there were no objections whatsoever. The only criticism happened among a discreet group of students. Sometimes we felt wronged, disadvantaged or preferred. There also was some envy and jealousy. In the presence of our professor all these things became insignificant since we wanted to get all the knowledge and prowess from him we could.

Until today I see the professor as a teacher, friend and counsel. We address each other informally only since the last 20 years, anyhow this did not damage our mutual respect. Even when I started teaching at the academy I could always ask my professor for advice. When I altered my style and way of playing a little all he said was „I don't care as long as it stays music and does leave the foundation.“ My fellow students and me still play in the style of our teacher with some adaptations to our physical and mental characteristics — a natural development.

When I started training Aikido I recognised for the first time how proud he was of me. Just before that I got a good job: side by side with him I was a teacher at the academy and now I started training Aikido. His wife mentioned that Aikido and music have many things in common, they share the same path. I started in a school that taught the Aikikai style which I left after a while because to me the teacher appeared to be coarse and rude.

I changed to a school that was much closer to the Tendoryu style. On the other hand it was real „street fighting“ Aikido. Nevertheless the heartiness of these people let me stay with them for a good while. Some day one of the teachers told me „If you really want to learn Aikido, you have to go to Shimizu Sensei in Tokyo.“ During that time I already was in touch with the Tendoryu group in Hamburg and with Peter Haase who became my teacher for many years. Then I had the chance to better get to know Shimizu Sensei in his dojo Tokyo.

I could see a lot of parallels with my former teachers. My father, my doublebass professor, and now Sensei. Down to the present day I compare their firmness, occasional relentlessness, openness, heartiness, care and dedication. Some Asian teachers are convinced that Europeans will never be able to learn Budo or to understand Japanese culture. Where as Shimizu Sensei vehemently opposes these prejudices. Instead he is convinced that it is up to the individual what to make out of his teachings. Many teachers do not really teach in this sense. They come and go without really taking responsibility for their tasks and the people they are dealing with.

All these things supported me in learning from them and trying to be like them as a teacher. This did not mean that I had to deny myself, to conform or to please other just to maintain my advantages. Sometimes Aikido is more demanding than typical „leisure sports“ — some people have to maintain a family and/or a hard job. Still the costs are rather small unless you are travelling to Japan twice a year. The challenges are rather of a different nature: undistracted attention, readiness, respectful behaviour, alertness and mindfulness (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindfulness>).

Everybody is free to decide for or against it these principles. But to denigrate, to libel and slander does not comply with the honour of a Samurai or even a German (even if there appear to be historical counter-examples). We do not have to neglect our family — or even kill them.

An open word, face to face, can sometimes be embarrassing because in a world that is dominated by dull distraction and the well-being of the individual before the group these things appear to be unnecessary. Personally I prefer an embarrassing moment to a long time of quietly being ashamed.

If we have a problem it should be solved. This takes courage — more courage than attacking someone from behind.

The sentence „Nobody is perfect“ is gladly applied to oneself. We all like to enjoy the tolerance of others. We all like to receive these virtues. We should start to learn them and live them.

In the hope for a life of constant change, tireless learning und understanding.

With the warmest regards,

Eckhardt