

Aikido, Spirituality and Misogi

Doshu was a tremendously precise Master of Aikido technique, but an even greater brilliant philosopher. In a way he was a force of nature. As a gifted freethinker, he has shown a way to anchor spirituality (and humanity) in Aikido independently of faith and religion with his constantly evolving philosophy.

For me the loss of spiritual connection and resonance in life is a gateway to cruelty, fighting and war (all of which begin on a small scale within us, with a bad relationship with ourselves, with life and with others).

I think without Doshu, it will be difficult enough, but not too hard to keep and develop good Aikido technique. We do have many highgrade teachers.

The bigger challenge will be to continue the philosophical part.

To keep on track with this integration of spirituality/ life-philosophy in Aikido we should focus especially now that our Doshu is gone on the two designated spiritual practices in Aikido: Meditation and Misogi.

Through spiritual PRACTICE we have to keep alive the spiritual dimension of aikido.

We need spiritual PRACTICE to develop maturity and benevolence and to find our duty in life. Otherwise there is a danger that ego power games, selfimportance or self-pity, the need for approval etc. conquer our Aikido-practice, without even realizing it.

Probably everyone has already experienced on the Tatami what it feels like when someone with unbalanced personality, bad habits, crappy moods and undifferentiated attitudes practices a so-called Aikido technique with you.....it creates neither harmony nor beauty.

The study of technique can not solve this problem. You have to study life and yourself very honestly. Misogi and meditation are a good way to go for this.

Misogi and Meditation can be like two guard rails for the Aikido path.

My hope is that PRACTICE will lead to an ability to live, understand, teach and develop the philosophical part of Yoshigasaki's Aikido teachings.

Besides teaching life philosophy during aikido seminars or in books Doshu applied some of the ideas he thought to be important for a correct way of living in Furusato.

These ideas were shortly:

*Practice together,

*live together

*do not use money

*do gardening

Since the beginning of my Aikido practice in 1988 I also felt drawn strongly to Misogi.

So in a way it was logic not only to found an Aikido dojo (for women) but also to create some years later a dojo completely dedicated to Misogi.

After many years of inspiring Misogi experiences in Furusato – be it as a participant or as a seminar leader - it was time to bring the ideas, that Doshu had seeded in Furusato to full blossom at my home in Peusenhof, which is located 80km north of Nürnberg in Germany and easy to reach.

Every year since I founded the Misogi dojo, there is – and will continue to be -a Misogi retreat from friday to monday on the last weekend of April. Sometimes international participants, sometimes locals. Usually I offer another Misogi retreat in the fall and several one day Misogi experiences.

So what is the idea of practice together, live together, do not use money, do garden work?

Misogi PRACTICE (together)

What is the kokoro (the heart)?

It can feel the sound of the wind through a pine tree on the calligraphy.

It can not be visible, it can only be felt

(Poem by Betto Matsumoto)

Misogi means purification and in a way you force body and mind to act as a unit when you practice it for hours and hours and hours. A Misogi session of 30 minutes is good and gives you an impression of what you are doing. To deepen your experience and get the full benefit of Misogi you have to practice for several days. And with every retreat you go deeper.

The unity of mind and body leads to harmony.

Sound

In Peusenhof we practice Misogi indoor and outdoor with a bell or with bokken using the sounds of To Ho Ka Mi E Mi Ta Me.

You have to find harmony between sounds and movement and this means sound is absolutely important to Misogi practice.

If you don't make sound it won't work.

The vibration of the sound (your own and the sound of the group + possibly the bell) shakes the armor that encloses your heart and prevents unconditional love.

Doshu said: if you follow me, you follow the way of love and respect!

What are you doing to prevent that from being a nice empty phrase?

Everyone has to find their own sound (Sensei: you have to find your own duty in life!), if your sound is missing, the big picture is missing something.

Do you know your own sound? How do you bring it out?

I imagine life as an orchestra that can ring out in full harmony and beauty. Imagine playing a piece of music with multiple instruments and being able to be and hear any instrument at any time, any second. If an instrument is missing with its tone, the whole piece of music is missing something. And even if an instrument thinks it has to adapt to the left or right instrument, a note is missing. If you don't find your tone, your own sound, the piece of music in this world is missing a tone. Your tone. And the world is already missing something. You are missed in this world with your tone, your way.

To Ho Ka Mi E Mi Ta Me

To awaken kokoro, to create this receptivity and resonance with life and to find your original sound and your invisible original inner movement we use in Misogi the sounds To Ho Ka Mi E Mi Ta Me.

It comes originally from a recitation purification ritual from the Shinto religion and has very old roots. All that matters here is that the sounds are repeated thousands of times. Of course the kanji in which these sounds are written have a meaning but the kanji refer only to the sound meaning and not to the kanji meaning (like sword, mirror, jewel, joy etc.). As far as I know you could also choose other kanji with the same pronunciation. These sounds are said to have a deep meaning; I don't know if this is true or not. For me this

reflects, that the real world cannot be described through words, pictures or symbols. I suspect that the meaning of the sounds – if there is a meaning - opens up differently for everyone, according to the very own sound that you are.

Besides everything else Misogi is a practice for stepping into silence. It brings a deep deep silence to the noise of our internal dialogue, our alltime daily life brain chatter and our unbalanced emotionality.

LIVING TOGETHER

In our western societies we often have an excessive emphasis on individuality, selfishness, possessions, material wealth.

There is an exaggerated need for distance, one's own space and at the same time for recognition and peer groups.

On the other hand we lose respect, are confronted with hate speech, intolerance, bullying and so on.

We tend to forget that we are not and cannot live alone, separated from other living beings.

So we have to relearn what it means to live together.

No theory, no videoconference, no zoom meeting or online experience can teach you this.

What does it mean to live in a community?

Everyone giving what he or she can do best, do the things that have to be done like cleaning and cooking, see the relationship between giving and receiving. Gaining through just being together as real human beings.

A Misogi seminar is a laboratory for that. It is a challenge and a blessing at the same time. To promote this learning the dojo in Peusenhof offers a group dormitory and no private sleeping space.

In order to respect others you have to learn to accept them completely.

“To accept” is independent from emotional responses and intellectual understanding.

You should be able to accept everything, doesn't matter if you like it or not.

Just accept.

Acceptance is a very physical ability, a bit similar to eating. You eat, digest it, your body takes what is needed and the rest goes out in a transformed way. You have to learn this physical ability to accept, otherwise you will not understand respect for other humans or better to say for all forms of life. Learning acceptance can be a challenge, but it is worth it. If you do not understand acceptance you cannot absorb Ki in an Aikido technique.

DO NOT USE MONEY

Our society is driven mad by the domination of money and its rules. People being superrich and having more than they ever need, others being very poor having less than they need for living .

People tend to forget, that the basis of life is not money but relationship.

To remind us of this Doshu implemented the idea of „ do not use money“ as a rule for a correct way of living in Furusato. This rule is applied as well at my Misogi dojo in Peusenhof and will not be diluted there by a rule like „sharing the cost“.

Of course I know that it is in a way the way of a heyokah/ the sacred clown, because maybe you use money to buy the food you will bring to the seminar. But still it is a very

valuable inspiration not to use money while you practice, live, eat and work together with others.

DO GARDENING or work with your hands on the infrastructure of the place where you are (temporarily) living

First of all you learn through this work, that the sense of work is not to make money or to be liked but to create a better environment for living. Your work will help you and us residents in Peusenhof to continue a good life in harmony with nature.

If work is only done to earn money and does not create a better environment and improve the condition for life (your life, life in general and the life of others) it has to be questioned deeply.

As Doshu mentioned often garden work or working with your hands helps to use your brain in a correct imaginative way instead of an intellectual „digital“ way of thinking.

During a Misogi retreat one often experiences that questions that arise during Misogi practice in the morning find their answer during garden work in the afternoon without even thinking about the question. Or the question itself gets transformed and deepened through garden work.

Misogi often brings your inner dialogue (always talking reasonable nonsense) first to full blossom and then to deep silence. Garden work expands the space of silence, deepens your relationship to nature and helps you to listen to your true nature.

Since it is very healthy for the body and strengthens the unit of mind and body the Misogi practice in Peusenhof is combined with a traditional Japanese walking exercise using sound as well.

During your stay in Peusenhof you practise to fast from your usual media habits (smartphone, computer, radio, television) – what a silence.

I am fully dedicated to continue the way of Misogi as I was taught by my teachers. So if you have any questions about Misogi or necessity for different offers for Misogi practice. contact me

Kokoro wo komite/ with all ones heart.

Vera Smitt