

Midori Yama Budokai: *Hanshi's Corner*
Written by Ron Rogers *Hanshi Meiyo Kyoju*
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Ichi go, ichi e: One life, one meeting

The Founder Of Aikido



Ueshiba Morihei

1883 - 1969

Ueshiba Morihei Biography

Ueshiba Morihei - Martial artist and founder of *Aikido*. Known as *O Sensei* ("Great Teacher") by *Aikidoka*, he was born December 14th, 1883, in Wakayama Prefecture (now Tanabe), Japan to a farming family. Of five children, he was the only son. He inherited a *samurai's* determination coupled with an interest in public affairs from his father Yoroku. From his mother he gained an intense interest in religion, poetry and art. As was Funakoshi Gichin, Ueshiba was also a sickly child. This led to his preferring to stay indoors and read rather than playing outside. Miraculous legends of the wonder-working saints "*En no Gyoja*" and "*Kobo Daishi*," were some of his favorite stories. In addition, esoteric Buddhist rituals fascinated him, and he, at one time, considering becoming a Buddhist priest.

Yoroku would recount the tales of Morihei's great-grandfather "Kichiemon," said to be one of the strongest *samurai* of his day. Ueshiba's father encouraged him to study *Sumo* and swimming. Morihei finally realized the necessity of being strong after his father was attacked and beaten by a gang of thugs, hired by a rival politician.

Morihei was bored in school, as his nervous energy needed a more practical outlet. Nor did several jobs seem to challenge him. During a brief stint as a merchant, he came to realize he had an affinity for the martial arts, and greatly enjoyed his study of *Jujutsu* at

the *Kitō-ryū* *dojo* and Swordsmanship at the *Shinkage Ryū*. The former was the same style studied by *Jigorō Kanō*. Unfortunately, he developed a severe case of Beriberi and returned home. However, he was rewarded, as this is when he met, and later married Itogawa Hatsu. Ueshiba is known to have studied several martial arts in his youth. He did not train extensively in most and even his training in *Yagyū Shingan-ryū* was sporadic due to his military service. Records show that he trained in *Tenjin Shin'yō-ryū jujutsu* under Tozawa Tokusaburō for a short period in 1901 in Tokyo; *Goto-ha Yagyū Shingan-ryū* under Nakai Masakatsu from 1903 to 1908 in Sakai, and *judō* under Kiyochi Takagi in 1911 in Tanabe. It was only after moving to the northern island of Hokkaidō in 1912 with his wife, as part of a settlement effort, that his martial art training took on real depth. For it was here that he began his study of *Daitō-ryū Aikijujutsu* under Sokaku Takeda. In Ueshiba's own words: "At about the age of 14 or 15. First I learned *Tenjin Shin'yō-ryū Jujutsu* from Tokusaburo Tozawa Sensei, then *Kitō-ryū*, *Yagyū-ryū*, *Aioi-ryū*, *Shinkage-ryū*, all of those *jujutsu* forms. However, I thought there might be a true form of *budō* elsewhere. I tried *Hozoin-ryū sojitsu* and *kendō*. But all of these arts are concerned with one-to-one combat forms and they could not satisfy me. So I visited many parts of the country seeking the Way and training, but all in vain. ... I went to many places seeking the true *budō*. Then, when I was about 30 years old, I settled in Hokkaidō. On one occasion, while staying at Hisada Inn in Engaru, Kitami Province, I met a certain Takeda Sokaku Sensei of the Aizu clan. He taught *Daitō-ryū jujutsu*. During the 30 days in which I learned from him, I felt something like an inspiration. Later, I invited this teacher to my home and together with 15 or 16 of my employees became a student seeking the essence of *budō*."

He regained his health during the Russo-Japanese War period, and decided to enlist in the army. Standing at just less than five feet tall, he failed to meet the minimum height requirements. He was so upset that he went immediately to the forests and swung on trees trying desperately to stretch his body out. On his next attempt to enlist, he passed his examination and became an infantryman in 1903. He impressed his superiors so much his commanding officer recommended him for the National Military Academy. For various reasons he declined the position and resigned from active duty.

Morihei returned home to the farm now eager to continue physical training, having grown strong during his time in the military. His father built a *dojo* on his farm and invited a well-known *Jujutsu* instructor, Takaki Kiyochi, to tutor his son. Young Ueshiba became stronger and found he possessed great skills. He became more interested in political affairs during this period. In the spring of 1912, at the age of 29, he and his family moved into the wilderness of Hokkaidō. After a few years of struggle, the small village started to prosper. Ueshiba had grown tremendously muscular, especially in the power he possessed in his arms, which became almost legendary. During this period, he journeyed to China and Mongolia.

It was in Hokkaidō that he met Takeda Sokaku, grandmaster of *Daitō-ryū Aiki Jutsu*. After meeting Takeda and finding he was no match for the grandmaster, Ueshiba forgot everything else and threw himself into training with Takeda. After about a month, he went back to Shirataki, built a *dojo* and invited Takeda to live there, which the grandmaster accepted. The technical curriculum of *aikidō* was undoubtedly most greatly influenced by the teachings of Takeda Sokaku and his system of *aiki-jūjutsu* called *Daitō-ryū*. Although disputed by some, the ledger books of Takeda clearly show that Ueshiba spent a great deal of time training in *Daitō-ryū* between 1915 and 1937. He

received the majority of the important scrolls awarded by Takeda at this time including the *Hiden Mokuroko*, the *Hiden Ogi* and the *Goshin'yo te*. Ueshiba received his *kyoju dairi* certificate, or teaching license, for the system from Takeda in 1922. Takeda had not yet implemented a *menkyo* license, or highest level of achievement license, into his system at this time. He also received a *Kashima Shinden Jikishinkage-ryu* sword transmission scroll from Takeda in 1922 in Ayabe. Ueshiba then became a representative of *Daito-ryu*, and toured with Takeda as a teaching assistant and taught the system to others under the *Daito-ryu* name

Ueshiba received word of his father's serious illness, and sold off most of his property and left the *dojo* to Takeda. He would not return to Hokkaido. On his journey home, he impulsively stopped in Ayabe, headquarters for the new Omoto-kyo religion. He met the master of the new religion, Onisaburo Deguchi and stayed three additional days. When he got home, he found that he had stayed away too long and his father had passed away during his absence. Ueshiba took his father's death very hard. He decided to sell off all his ancestral land and move to Ayabe to study Omoto-kyo, a pacifistic religion. For the next eight years, Ueshiba studied with Onisaburo Deguchi, taught *Budo*, and headed up the local fire brigade. Ueshiba Morihei's art of *Aikido* is heavily influenced physically by his study of *Daito-ryu Aiki-jutsu*. Onisaburo Deguchi and the Omoto-kyo religion influenced the spiritual side of his art. As a pacifist, Deguchi was an advocate of non-violent resistance and universal disarmament. He was noted to have said, "Armament and war are the means by which the landlords and capitalists make their profit, while the poor suffer." What is intriguing is that a man of this belief could become so close to a martial artist such as Ueshiba. However, Deguchi stated to Ueshiba that Ueshiba's purpose on earth was "to teach the real meaning of *Budo*: an end to all fighting and contention." Due to this association with Onisaburo, Ueshiba had several spiritual experiences, which so impressed him that his life and his training were forever changed. As related by Onisaburo, he realized the true purpose of *Budo* was a love that cherishes and nourishes all beings. Ueshiba once stated that Takeda Sokaku opened his eyes to the essence of *budo*, but his enlightenment came from his *Omoto-kyo* experiences. Deguchi encouraged Ueshiba to separate from *Omoto-kyo* and go his own way.

In 1927, master Ueshiba moved to Tokyo where he founded his first formal *dojo* in the Ushigome district of the city. This is the present site of the *Aikido* World Headquarters. Today it is known as the *Hombu Dojo*. While the *dojo* was being constructed, many high-ranking instructors of other arts, such as Jigoro Kano, came to visit. They were so impressed that they would dispatch their own students to study under Ueshiba. Moreover, it was here that Ueshiba gained national prominence as a skilled martial artist when he defeated an Imperial Navy officer, who was highly skilled in *kendo*. For the next year, many persons attended Ueshiba's teaching. Two of them were Tomiki Kenji, who went on to make his own style of *Aikido*, and the famous Admiral Takeshita Onisaburo. His son Kisshomaru Ueshiba became the second *Doshu*, the official heir and maintainer of *Aikido*, until his death in January 4th, 1999; the current *Doshu* is Ueshiba Kisshomaru's son, Ueshiba Moriteru.

In 1931, the *Kobukan* was finished, and in 1932 the *Budo* Enhancement Society was founded with Ueshiba as Chief Instructor. Many of Ueshiba's top students began at this time. Among them were Shioda Gozo, Shirata Rinjiro and others. Up to the outbreak of World War II, Ueshiba was extremely busy teaching at the *Kobukan*. In addition, he held special classes for the major military and police academies.

In 1942, he left the *Kobukan* in the hands of his son Ueshiba Kisshomaru and moved to the Ibaraki Prefecture and the village of Iwama, due to a divine command. He longed to return to the farmlands, and had often said that, "*Budo* and farming are one." The *Kobukan* had lost many students and instructors in the war, and he was tired of city life. At Iwama, he built an outdoor *dojo* at the now famous Aiki Shrine (*Aiki Shuren Dojo*). Iwama is considered by many to be the birthplace of modern-day *Aikido*. Prior to this move, his system had been called *Aikijutsu*, then *Aiki-Budo*. It was still taught primarily as a martial art rather than a spiritual path. The early form of training under Ueshiba was characterized by the ample use of strikes to vital points (*atemi*), a larger total curriculum, a greater use of weapons, and a more linear approach to technique than would be found in later forms of *Aikido*. These methods are preserved in the teachings of his early students: Tomiki Kenji founder of *Shodokan Aikido*, sometimes called *Tomiki-ryu*; Inoue Noriaki, who founded *Shin'ei Taido*; Mochizuki Minoru, who founded *Yoseikan Budo*; Shioda Gozo, founder of *Yoshinkan Aikido*; and Saito Morihiro, who preserved Ueshiba's early form of *Aikido* sometimes referred to as *Iwama-ryu*. Many of these styles are considered "pre-war styles," although some of the teachers continued to have contact and influence from Ueshiba in the years after the WWII. As Ueshiba slowly grew away from Takeda, he began to implement more changes into the art. These changes are reflected in the differing names with which he referred to his art, first as *aiki-jujutsu*, then *Ueshiba-ryu*, *Asahi-ryu*, *aiki budo*, and finally *aikido*.

From 1942, when the name *Aikido* was first formally used, to 1952, Ueshiba consolidated the techniques and perfected the religious philosophy of *Aikido*. As Ueshiba grew older, more skilled, and more spiritual in his outlook, his art also changed and became softer and more circular. Striking techniques became less important and the formal curriculum became simpler. There was a greater emphasis on what is referred to as *kokyu-nage*, or "breath throws." These are soft, blending techniques which utilize the opponent's movement in order to throw them. Many of these techniques are rooted in the *aiki-no-jujutsu* portions of the *Daito-ryu* curriculum rather than the more direct *jujutsu* style joint-locking techniques.

After the war, *Aikido* grew rapidly at the *Kobukan* (now called *Hombu Dojo*) under the direction of Ueshiba Kisshomaru. Ueshiba Morihei had become famous as "*O-Sensei*," or "The Grand Teacher," the Master of *Aikido*. He had also received many decorations from the Japanese government. Right up to the end of his life, *O-Sensei* continued to refine and improve his "Way."

In early spring 1969, *O-Sensei* fell ill and told his son, Kisshomaru, "God is calling me...." He requested to be returned to his home that he might be near his *dojo*. On April 15th, his condition became critical. As students made their last calls, he gave final instructions, telling them, "*Aikido* is for the entire world. Train not for selfish reasons, but for all people everywhere."

Early on the morning of April 26th, 1969, the 86-year-old *O-Sensei* took his son's hand, smiled and said, "Take care of things," and died. Two months later, Hatsu, his wife of 67 years, followed him. *O-Sensei*'s ashes were buried in the family temple in Tanabe. Every year a memorial service is held on April 29th at the *Aiki Shrine* in Iwama.

There are roughly four generations of students of Ueshiba Morihei:

The first generation (pre-war, c. 1921 – 1935) includes: Akazawa Zenzaburo, Hisa Takuma, Hashimoto Masahiro, Konishi, Yasuhiro, Inoue Noriaki (nephew of Ueshiba

Morihei), Iwata Ikkusai, 9th *dan Aikikai*, Kamada Hisao, Mochizuki Minoru, whose 10th *dan*, was received from the International Martial Arts Federation, Murashige Aritoshi, Shioda Gozo, founder of the *Yoshinkan Aikido*, Shirata Rinjiro, 9th *dan*, Takeshita Isamu, Tomiki Kenji, who was awarded the first 8th *dan* in *Aikido* in 1942, Yonekawa Shigemi and Yukawa Tsutomu.

The second generation (war, c. 1936 – 1945) includes the following: Abe Tadashi, 6th *dan*, Hirai Minoru, founder of the *Korindo*, Osawa Kisaburu, 9th *dan*, Sunadomari Kanshu, 9th *dan*, Tanaka Bansen, 9th *dan*, Tenryu Saburo, a famous sumotori, Tohei Koichi, the, only 10th *dan* awarded by Ueshiba *and* approved by *Aikikai*, Hikitsuchi Michio, 10th *dan* verbally awarded by Ueshiba, opened *Shingu's Kumano Juku* in 1951 when he was 7th *dan*.

The third generation (post-war, c. 1946 – 1955) is composed, in part, of the following: Abe Seiseki, 10th *dan*, Arikawa Sadateru, 9th *dan*, Kato Hiroshi, 8th *dan*, Kobayashi Yasuo, 8th *dan*, Kuroiwa Yoshiro, 6th *dan*, Nakazono Mutsuro, 7th *dan*, Nishio Shoji, 8th *dan*, Andre Nocquet, who was the first European *uchideshi* 8th *dan*, Noro Masamichi, 6th *dan*, founder of *Kinomichi* (Way or Path of *Ki*), Saito Morihiro, 9th *dan*, Saotome Mitsugi *Shihan*, Tada Hiroshi, 9th *dan*, Tamura Nobuyoshi, 8th *dan*, and Yamaguchi Seigo, 8th *dan*.

The fourth (and last) generation from c. 1956 – 1969 is made up, in part, of the following: Chiba Kazuo, 8th *dan*, Terry Dobson, 5th *dan*, Endo Seishiro, 8th *dan*, Robert Frager, 7th *dan*, Homma Gaku is the founder of *Nippon Kan* and was the last *uchideshi* Ueshiba trained before he died, Ichihashi Norihiko, 8th *dan*, Imaizumi Shizuo, 7th *dan*, Kanai Mitsunari, 8th *dan*, Kurita Yutaka, 6th *dan*, Maruyama Koretoshi, is the founder of *Aikido Yuishinkai* International, Maruyama Shuji, , 6th *dan*, is the founder of *Kokikai*, Masuda Seijuro, 8th *dan*, Robert Nadeau, 7th *dan*, Shimizu Kenji, 8th *dan*, Roy Suenaka, 8th *dan*, Sugano Seiichi, 8th *dan*, Sukanuma Morito, 8th *dan*, Tohei Akira, 8th *dan*, Tomita Takeji, 7th *dan*, Yamada Yoshimitsu, 8th *dan*, and Kobayashi Hirokazu, founder of *Kobayashi Aikido*.