On harmony, Efforts towards Effortless Being, and Remembrance; Some Notes on Chiba Sensei's Notion of Martial Awareness

By Amnon Tzechovoy, July 2007

For years a certain question kept bothering me, a question I would like to share with my audience: if the art of Aikido is inherently natural and is of harmonious flow, why should one exercise for so long, and be intensely engaged in the endless Aikido practice in order to gain the smooth, effortless motion, the so-called natural, spontaneous movement.

Now, Chiba Sensei's essay The Study and Refinement of Martial Awareness provides, so I think, invaluable clues for answering questions such as the one mentioned above concerning the efforts needed for gaining effortless motions. To begin with, Chiba diagnoses ailments inherent to our Western civilization, ailments which obstruct access to man's and woman's innate nature. Thus, Chiba sees in over-developed mental activity and conscious behavior a major shortcoming of our Western culture; such over-development interferes, according to Chiba, with the deep fundamental logic of nature. Such logic – manifest in the behavior of animals – becomes almost inaccessible for man and woman. Union with nature is the highest achievement and horizon open for mankind. It means among other things a good deal of forgetfulness towards many layers of conscious mental activity. One has to renounce many of the benefits offered in the West for over-cogitative, incessant rational verbalization. In my view, Chiba insists on the necessary return to instinctual way of life free of all sorts of cultural coverings which prevent man and woman to be one with nature. This oneness with nature is equivalent to Chiba's notion of complete, totally open martial awareness. As he says:

> I consider the term "martial awareness" to be largely associated with type of instinctive spontaneous sensitivity which gives rise to action that is altogether natural.

Thus, Chiba's ideal of union with nature is, as I understand it, *re-union* with our lost heritage and potential of self-identification with nature. As suggested above, it is so difficult – and thus in need of excruciating, repetitive Aikido training - because of the present way of things in our Western civilization.

At this point I would like to contribute a hypothesis concerning the dynamics of the Aikido return to nature and its forces, as I understand it. For the question remains: How can we understand the process of Aikido transformation as reaching, in Chiba's terminology, true martial awareness? Since in Chiba's thought Aikido discipline is closely associated

with consciousness (the concept of martial awareness is of this quality), we need to think in terms of transformation of consciousness in order to understand ourselves as Aikido-practitioners seeking to attain to our goal (martial awareness). It is of course a long way stretching ahead of us (I mean thinking of Aikido transformation of consciousness). What concepts can we use in our reflection on Aikido development? Here, in this paper, I suggest that in-depth memory, remembrance or recollection, are helpful in our preliminary effort at connecting Chiba's thought with the psychology of Aikido consciousness.

I borrow the concept of in-depth memory from the great Plato. In his dialogue titled Meno he says:

> Socrates: If the truth of all things always existed in the soul, then the soul is immortal. Wherefore be of good cheer, and try to recollect what you do not know, or rather what you do not remember.

In this beautiful dialogue Socrates brings a boy to realize that he knows a certain mathematical truth (the Pythagoras' theorem) by progressive recollection thereof. The boy is a simple servant; he has never learned any mathematics. But lo, he brings to life a deeply buried memory of a sophisticated mathematical truth! He successfully retrieves an almost inaccessible piece of knowledge. Thus, knowledge, according to Plato, is truly in-depth remembrance of being and cognitions available beneath our current behavior and awareness. This is the type of universal, deeply buried or concealed, non-individual mode of remembrance and awareness implied in Chiba's conception of martial awareness.

There are obviously big differences between the type of awareness possible to man and woman according to Plato and that type of awareness implied by Chiba. I am using Plato's theory of knowledge (or awareness) as memory in order to start thinking on Aikido practice What matters to me is the existence of layers of being made newly accessible by various means of remembrance, layers made available to us by virtue of our real, already in existence nature. We do not create martial awareness out of nothing. Chiba recommends spontaneous, smooth, elegant, instinctual motion. As I understand it, he means to say: we Aikido practitioners move towards effortless martial awareness by means of efforts towards a very special type of remembrance. Thus, by our harsh Aikido discipline and efforts we come to remember and be who we truly are, also perhaps who we have really always been.