



An Audience With TK Chiba Shihan in Wales

I started writing this article on the 1st of June'08. While having a little spare time on my hands between jobs, I thought to myself... "*what could a person expect while attending one of Chiba Shihan's seminars*", especially when I have never met or seen Chiba Shihan in person. Obviously there are countless video clips on Youtube that can be downloaded for ones personal perusal but would that help? Or perhaps I could get a better idea of what to expect by listening to the numerous "*bone crunching*", "*elbow cracking*" and "*wrist wrenching*" stories that are ever present and circulating within the Aikido community?

Imagine if an individual was to take heed of all the stories that are reverberating throughout the memories of many an aikido practitioner, perhaps there is sufficient enough reason to be a little concerned for life and limb...? Personally I don't believe it's good practice to fear your fellow man, although in saying that, a good practice is to always have a healthy regard for ones own safety when walking into a relatively unknown situation. Lets begin by outlining several facts about K Chiba Shihan 8th Dan.

T.K. Chiba was born February 5, 1940 in Tokyo. At 14 years of age, he began serious Judo training at the International Judo Academy.

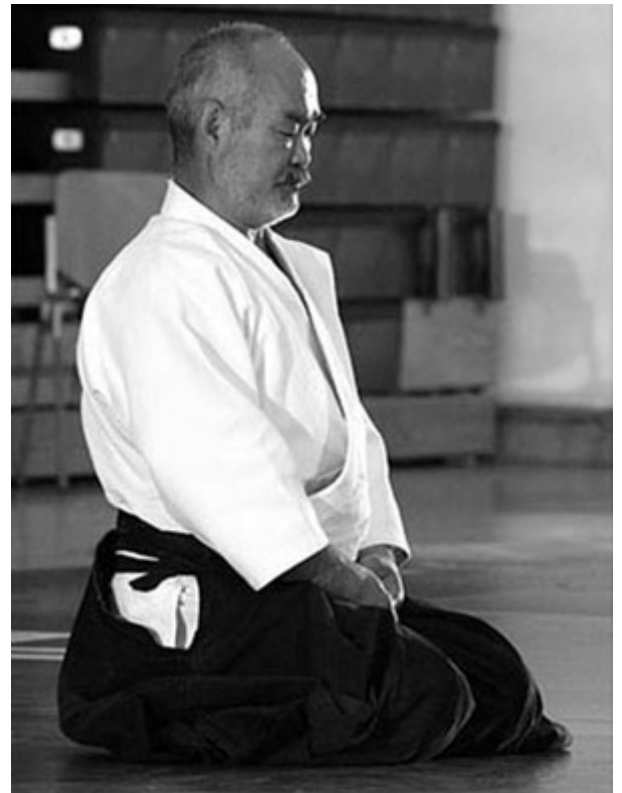
He began the study of Shotokan Karate at age 16. Dissatisfied with the martial arts he had studied, he began searching for the art, which would satisfy his yearning. In 1958 he found Aikido and began seven intensive years of live-in study as an uchideshi, or O-Sensei's private student, at Hombu Dojo. By 1960, Chiba Sensei earned the rank of San Dan, 3rd degree black belt, and was assigned to Nagoya City to establish a branch school and serve as its full-time instructor.

In 1962, he earned 4th Dan and began teaching at Hombu Dojo. Within three years, during which he taught at many local universities, Chiba Sensei completed his training as uchideshi, earning promotion to 5th Dan.

Chiba Sensei moved to Sunderland, England, in 1966. There he formed the Aikikai of Great Britain, which later changed its name to the British Aikido Federation. Currently Chiba Sensei is the technical director of the British Aikikai, a group formed by long-term students of Chiba Sensei in Britain.

During 1970, he was awarded the title of Shihan, meaning "teacher of teachers," and received 6th Dan as well. In 1975, Chiba Sensei returned to Japan and served as Secretary of the International Department of Hombu Dojo. During this time he also studied Zen meditation in Shizouka Prefecture

In 1981, he accepted an invitation from the United States Aikido Federation (directly affiliated with Hombu Dojo, Aikido World Headquarters, and currently headed by Moriteru Ueshiba Doshu) and moved to San Diego, California. There he formed San Diego Aikikai. Currently he is Chairman of the Teaching Committee of Birankai International. He holds the rank of 8th Dan.





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To say that K Chiba Shihan has obtained a vast amount of experience, knowledge and understanding in the art of Aikido, would indeed be a gross understatement in its purest form. So with this fact in mind, I have decided to stop aimlessly pondering on *"what to expect"* and begin to consciously focus on opening my mind in preparation to receive the wealth of *"what is on offer"*.

My rail journey began at 0630am Saturday the 2nd of August'08. Justin Marchant and I were to meet at the Euston Rail Station in London at 0730am for the second stage of our journey.

A further four hours by rail and 2 changes in trains would lead us to a small university town on the west coast of northern Wales called Bangor (pronounced Banga) where we would attend the British Birankai Summer School in the celebration of TK Chiba Shihan's 50th Anniversary in Aikido.

On our arrival we were given a warm yet amusing welcome after needing to clarify that my accent was from New Zealand and not from France....usually I get called an Ozy so this was rather novel and less insulting. We were introduced to three of the Birankai UK senior members Joe Curran Sensei, Davinder Bath Sensei and Paul Robinson Sensei.

The week long seminar consisted of 31 lessons, Chiba Shihan 6 lessons, Miyamoto Shihan 8 lessons and the remaining 17 lessons were to be taught by the British Birankai appointed Shihan and instructors. Unfortunately we could only spend the weekend training and so aimed to gain as much from the two days as humanly possible.

Many of those who attended made the most of their training time changing partners, shaking hands and dripping sweat on each other while smiling as they were swinging their uke too a fro like Raggerty Anne Dolls by grabbing the collar of the Keikogi...an interesting practice I thought, which begged the question every time I was uke...

"What if I only had a T-shirt on, or my silk PJ's?"



TK Chiba Shihan performing Tenchi Nage

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But I was there to see one person, TK Chiba Shihan the celebrated Aikidoka with a reputation for having an intense martial instinct. To my delight T Miyamoto Shihan who is a very frequent visitor to the colonial shores of the New Zealand Aikikai was also in attendance to share his approach and individual application of Aikido technique.

Miyamoto Shihan taught the 2nd class on the Saturday and after a little head rubbing and a very polite... " *So where are you from...?*" upon explanation we both laughed and I received a hearty hug. Had I have known this meant I was to meet the mat several times at a great rate of notes a little later on I would have quite happily accepted a distant handshake....ouch!

During his class the enjoyment in the occasion was obvious to all with his constant smiling, laughing and shaking his head at times as if to say "*unbelievable*" while demonstrating techniques with various uke's. And as always all uke's struggled to keep their balance while staying connected. They were being twisted and manipulated at will into positions that surprised us all, not to mention the uke's.



TK Chiba Shihan performing Kokkyu Nage

The following class was what we all were waiting for and Chiba Shihan didn't disappoint....to be honest my photography doesn't do Chiba Shihan's technique the justice it deserves! Let alone my words.

50 years of improving ones own technique to the level that you are able to command another individual or individuals body movement with the slightest touch of pressure. This is what I saw and felt as I was lucky enough to receive a few kind words of correction and ukemi. There was no brute force or aggressive nature contrary to the tales that frequently start with "*back in the day...*" rather the opposite thankfully, as I witnessed Chiba Shihan being very relaxed and fluid, yet extremely precise and attentive at the same time to uke's movements....absolutely impressive!

I bet your thinking that's crazy he traveled for 10hrs for 1 lesson with Chiba Shihan...how can that be worth the effort....I can assure you it is!

Congratulations on *50 years* of Aikido TK Chiba Shihan

by Simon Puffett 02/08/2008