



An Interview with Alan Wade Sensei – Gisborne

by Jeanie Benson

Alan Wade and his dojo held an excellent seminar to commemorate 40 years of Aikido training. Many Aikidoka from all over the North Island came for some excellent training and teaching.

The seminar was taught by Alan Wade Sensei 6th Dan with guest Instructor Nobuo Takase Shihan and we all had the opportunity to benefit from some really interesting philosophy. The Gisborne dojo members were really welcoming to us all and we really appreciated the warm hospitality, the great food and the company. While there, we had the opportunity to interview Alan Wade Sensei and learn about his fascinating time with Aikido. Read on!

When did you first begin Aikido?

I first saw Aikido in Leicester, England in late 1966. I joined the local club after I met an old friend Fred Brown. He told me to stop wasting my time in the pubs and clubs of the town. (I didn't and don't think that was wasting my time at all!). Anyway I went along for a look at this "Aikido" thing. Fred was graded 6th kyu and he learned by going to Birmingham each Tuesday night to practice there. Then on Wednesday he would show us (as well as he could remember), what he had seen the evening before.

This went on for a few months until we heard about this young Japanese 6th dan that had started up in London and was interested in forming a national organization His name was Kazuo Chiba and we knew nothing about him. We had already mastered techniques such as "sheer agony" and "koteg-ouch" – but we needed more! So we invited Chiba Sensei to visit our dojo for a weekend each month to get us up and away on a "crash course". In between his visits we would go to wherever he was running a seminar in the UK as well as the week long summer schools. Our training went from once a week to 3 – 4 times per week and in the end, almost every day.

Who was your first Sensei and what did you learn from him?

From Fred we learned the basics and one of the most important lessons of all – that you can create something from nothing. All you need is the interest and enthusiasm – there are no boundaries, or limits!

From Chiba Sensei I learned the meaning of both physical and mental pain, how to accept them as part of the process of creating the correct attitude to condition body and mind. He was renowned for his hard aggressive techniques, but we were unaware of this at the beginning. We believed this was



Alan Wade Sensei guest Instructor at the Hong Kong Aikikai 35th Anniversary



the correct way, so we trained with equal vigour and aggression for years. Our bodies became strong, yet supple and I really did feel good all over. Chiba told us that the dojo is “a battlefield where we fight to defeat our own ego – this is the hardest fight of all! Those early years of severe training were the foundation of our understanding of Aikido.

You’ve obviously been teaching a long time. Where and when did you first begin teaching? How has your teaching changed over your 40 year career?

When I arrived in New Zealand and moved to Gisborne in 1975, there was no Aikido club established here. So I borrowed the Judo dojo one day a week for a while and there I taught my first real class. My techniques in those early days were as I knew them – hard and strong. But as time has moved along and my own age creeps up I have become gentler. My techniques have improved and are more correct but softer. Teaching alters with time and this is due to the influence of the other Aikidoka one trains with. It’s a process of always learning, always correcting, and always improving. The biggest influence comes from ones own students – they teach you more than you realise.

When did you first join Aikido Shinryukan?

I can’t honestly say when I joined Shinryukan because it was so long ago. But I am glad that I did because of the training and great people I have met over the years. There are always the opportunities to visit so many clubs throughout the country and train with new Aikidoka.

A lot of people travel to interesting and exotic places to learn Aikido. Tell us about your favourite places to travel and do Aikido?

I have visited many countries and trained there and all were memorable. I have trained in the UK, New Zealand, Rarotonga, China, Singapore, Hong Kong, New Caledonia, and of course Japan. I think I enjoyed them all about the same. Hopefully there will be some more wonderful places in the future that I can visit.

What advice would you have to offer for a young Aikidoka?

Advice to young Aikidoka—well —everyone is different (I noticed this at an early age). But the best way to progress is with enthusiasm, nothing was ever achieved without enthusiasm. Ask questions and then more questions, train long, hard and often but mainly just enjoy what you are doing. Maybe take notes but don’t concentrate too hard on learning – make sure to have lots of fun and the knowledge will come. I guarantee it! I still do it for fun because once it ceases to be fun then it becomes a chore and the enthusiasm fades. It is a lifelong experience so take your time. Don’t create heroes and remember that the person you are trying to control is yourself because your partner is there to help you with this. Build your techniques like a brick wall with good foundations. You don’t need to build the wall, you only lay bricks. The wall is then created from your effort, not by you. Good Aikido techniques are built the same way.



What do you think Aikido can give people?

Aikido creates self-discipline where one gains self-control and self-respect which lead to a good feeling of physical and mental well-being. And at the end, you have a workable self-defence form which you can enjoy often by training with many like-minded people.

What advice would you have to offer the more experienced practitioner on how to still enjoy Aikido after many years?

Enjoying Aikido after many years. It really starts at the beginning, learning break falls, correct body movement and always stretching and warming up before training. It's important to avoid injuries early on - especially shikko because if it's done incorrectly it can ruin ones knees all too soon! What one person can do, anyone else can do too.

There are people who have a limb short or no feet or some other disability and they often succeed. So with two feet and two arms we can find nothing to stop us, only our doubts. Being alive is a wonderful place to be but it can't be experienced from an armchair.

Get up, get a grip and laugh at anyone who says you are too old. "Ha Ha I say to you!" I have a passion for Aikido that has been in two thirds of my life, so any advice to anyone who has trained for many years would be futile. By this time it is such an important part of your life and is totally enjoyable anyway.

What do you think are the major benefits of Aikido to people's lives?

Aikido has benefits in many ways. The physical training creates a healthy, fit body and builds good posture. It keeps the body toned and supple, while breathing properly encourages good blood flow too. One learns harmony which overlaps into daily life and helps us in our work or social lives to overcome some of the hassles and problems that occur – with calmness and purpose.

Aikido is a hobby to be enjoyed. As such it creates a wide circle of friends, gives one a purpose in life and may give the opportunity to travel. But for the Aikidoka the best thing is a great feeling of wellbeing which comes from the fitness and the confidence and positive attitude.



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What is the most important benefit Aikido has brought to your life?

As a young person I was painfully shy and couldn't manage to speak unless it was really necessary and was something simple. My mother wouldn't send me to the shop because I would go to pieces if I was asked anything.

I never pushed myself and in the beginning I think I kept on with Aikido because I wasn't brave enough to not go on. As I made progress I sort of expressed myself with my training. I now had something I could hide behind and the more I improved the bigger the shield was between me and the outside world. As I improved, so my confidence grew and I had something which became a support.

I soon found I could stand up in front of a class and confidently teach. I would think "You are not looking at me you are looking at my Aikido". I believe that my time with Aikido has made me what I am. Of course I still am a little shy when it is me just being me, but I am a million times more confident than those years ago.



Alan Wade Sensei 6th Dan Aikido Shinryukan Gisborne New Zealand

Gambate everyone – see you all over the next 40 years!