

Featured Dojo-cho, January 2010



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It was Amsterdam 1995, I practiced Pentjak Silat (Indonesian martial art) for some time, and our group was part of a demo session on a mixed martial art gathering. On that day a lady in a wheelchair performed aikido, and I was stunned. Something in my body responded strongly to the harmonious movements, the mystery of the setting. My mind couldn't grasp it, but what I saw inspired me. It didn't turn me immediately towards aikido practice, but the memory stayed with me till I decided in 1997 to start an introduction course of aikido at a local centre. The teacher was Wendelina Timmermans. After the intro course it was clear that I wanted to continue this path, and visited some dojos in order to find the teacher and circumstances in which it felt good to me to train. And I found it in the dojo of Lewis de Quiros; clarity, precision, zanshin, passion for this martial art – I still hear myself saying “this is how I want to learn and feel it”. Looking back at that period of time it made sense that I needed those principles in my life in general, and the mat was providing me a laboratory to explore my relationship to myself, others and my life. From day one aikido was not only a martial art to me. It was and still is a path to me.

Unfortunately Lewis had to stop training for an unknown time and some senior-students continued teaching. I continued training with them,

visited many seminars, but my hunger for a fulltime training and deeper approach grew bigger, and I decided to travel to a dojo for an uchideshi time. When a friend of mine explained the training of Patrick Cassidy in Fresno, California, I became very excited about the way of training, which contains exploration of freedom of movement, the nature of our true being, yoga and meditation. My flight ticket was booked fast. And it was not my last visit; all together I've enjoyed aikido in California for almost one and a half years. With Fresno dojo members I've travelled to LA, San Diego, San Francisco area and met so many inspiring pioneers. My half year trip in 2003 was a dojo-hopping trip, from San Diego to San Francisco; being uchideshi in San Diego with Dave Goldberg, in Fresno with Florian Tan and in Berkeley with Kayla Feder. In 2003 Patrick left the States and settled with his wife in Switzerland. Since 2000 he became my ranking teacher and I was happy that he would be much closer to Holland. From 2004 till 2006 I joined his dojo in Montreux as a staff-member and senior-instructor, teaching adults and kids, while training fulltime.

In 2001 Miles Kessler visited Fresno for a visit. I met him in Lewis' dojo two years before. Now in Fresno, Miles and I connected up well and stayed in touch for years to come. His seminars in Europe were great opportunities to join and help him. In Holland I organised seminars and retreats with him; retreats where meditation and aikido inquiry took place. We felt that there was a hunger for depth in the practice.

Being uke for aikido teachers, performing in demonstrations, and supporting teachers have been great opportunities for me to learn a lot, in depth and fast. And it gave me enough confidence to organize seminars with them since 2002, even though I didn't have my own dojo. I felt it was a great gift to offer to the aikido community a taste of other perspectives and inspirations, including and beyond form. It is my belief and own experience, that if something touches deeply, learning then comes out of genuine interest and love for the art. If there is a resonance within you, within your whole being, that is something to listen to and worth exploring. And this resonance has always been my guide in connecting up with teachers that are waking up and linking my body-mind-heart-soul. Not to become a copy of them, but to discover my own being and path in the practice and life.

While the mind can help me with clarifying technique, form, movements, etc. another guide is the heart, to open it and welcoming the unknown, of that which meets within and out. And it is the direction or intention of harmony and freedom that carries this whole carnival. The True, the Beautiful and the Good are related. To share this with others is a wonderful gift.

A psychosocial/transpersonal counselling education had been in the back of my mind for a long time. It was a natural progression for me. But I had to make a big sacrifice. I had to leave the Swiss dojo and friends because

the four year education was back in Holland. It was 2006 and the first time aikido became a second priority. This was not an easy transition but I knew deeply that it was the right decision. I am grateful and happy to still stay in contact with my Swiss friends.

Coming back in Holland in 2006 I had an opportunity to continue training and co-teaching at Lewis' dojo for two years.

And since September 2009 I've started my own aikido club in Amsterdam with a weekly class. It is a small group of inspiring adults. The aikido classes have an integral approach, a perspective that includes principles, form and formlessness. That inquires the relationship with ourselves and others. That explores freedom of movement and being. That enjoys the crafts and form of the art, the potentials and possibilities for transformation. It is my intention to teach more classes in the near future, for adults and kids. With my background in counselling and aiki-principles I'm hoping to have a supporting role in social work modules. The first stepping stones are already made. Next to the counselling education I've received the Certificate of Mindfulness Trainer, and am facilitating mindfulness programs in Amsterdam. And with friends I recently set up a Platform to explore body work with aikido. Most of these initiatives I facilitate now through my company AikiContact. Links, that is what I have seen through all these activities and directions. Links in such a way that, even if there are many styles and forms, we are able to come together to share the practice on common ground. Then differences become colours that enrich and inspires us if it is welcomed by the heart, with the mind as a helper, not a dominator.

When I was back in my hometown Amsterdam during my years of travelling, and since 2006, I've continued training at Lewis' dojo as well. Luckily his stop was temporary.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

There were so many great moments that makes it hard to choose. And I am grateful to have met and shared the mat with so many wonderful teachers and aikidoka's. Yet, I prefer to write about two experiences that made a big shift in my development.

The first one was when I was in Fresno in 2000. During a regular aikido class Patrick helped me and my training partner, and he used me as an uke. Then he suddenly stopped and asked me "What is it that you want to protect?" I broke down in tears. The walls of protection and tension (of fear) crumbled down and I saw how I imprisoned myself for so long. The hardness was melting down. And I started to experience more and more how it felt to be free.

Then the second moment is for me linked to the first, as a next step in my practice. It was 2001 in the office of the Fresno dojo. At that time I was preparing for shodan together with three other friends. It was shortly before the test. We received the question "What is it that you want to express in your shodan test?" We knew the whole curriculum and that we

should expect anything. But the question was not about the form. It was about our being; our soul; our true self. An authentic place where we can come from to wholeheartedly face fear, anger and suffering, and transform arrows into flowers.