

# NEWSLETTER



No.102 March 2004

AIKIDO YOSHINKAN BRISBANE DOJO

## ◎ Report of February

New members 14      Total number of adults training 77      Total number of children training 51

## ◎ Results of Getsurei Shinsa on 28<sup>th</sup>

|                               |                  |                           |                 |                 |                  |
|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| <u>Jun-3<sup>rd</sup> kyu</u> | Paul Neale       | <u>8<sup>th</sup> kyu</u> | Chris Davis     | <u>3Y4 step</u> | Lee Stemm        |
|                               | Stian Selland    | <u>9<sup>th</sup> kyu</u> | Johan Brink     |                 | Brent Weston     |
| <u>4<sup>th</sup> kyu</u>     | Matt Carpenter   |                           | Myles Frost     | <u>2Y5 step</u> | Douglas Buchanan |
|                               | Chris Neucom     |                           | Darrell Devoer  | <u>2Y2 step</u> | Ross Mowatt      |
| <u>8<sup>th</sup> kyu</u>     | Joshua McCormick |                           | Marcus Lambinon | <u>S5 step</u>  | Michael Bannah   |
|                               | Jasmine Burge    |                           | Tanya Farmery   | <u>S4 step</u>  | Albert Lu        |
|                               | Mark Frost       |                           | Matthew Paul    | <u>S3 step</u>  | Ken Carse        |
|                               | Ryan Slavin      | <u>3Y11 step</u>          | Jason Palmer    |                 |                  |

## ◎ Events in March

### 1. Sogo Shinsa

- ◆ Saturday, 27<sup>th</sup> 1:00pm~
- ◆ Shinsa training starts from Saturday 13<sup>th</sup>.

### 2. This Month's Holiday

- ◆ 29<sup>th</sup> Monday Dojo Holiday

## A bit of knowledge for Aikido

### Yashiro (Shrine)

At most dojos in Japan where people train Budo (Japanese martial arts) everyone commences the training with a bow to the 'shrine' on the command, "Shinzen ni rei." Those who train in sports centres where there is no shrine set-up, usually hang a photo of the founder of the style or some sort other alternative in front of the class to bow to. For us, the Japanese, we do not question this action, as this is the custom practiced by martial arts practitioners and has been for a long time.

For Western people, however, there is a different attitude toward this Oriental or Japanese-like ceremony of bowing to the shrine before training. Some people find it interesting, some feel an aversion to it, and some find pleasure in this ceremony and learning a foreign culture. It is natural to feel any or all of these emotions. For Japanese martial arts practitioners, it is a moment to become focussed for the strict and severe training to come.

Since I often get questioned about the shrine at the front of the dojo and why we bow to it, I would like to explain a little about the background of the shrine and the ceremony.

Well, the first question is what is 'inside' the shrine. There are various contents in the shrines of dojos in Japan and this is dependent on each dojo owner's principle. For example, in the shrine of the Headquarters of Yoshinkan there is a talisman of *Takemikazuchi-no-mikoto* which you can purchase from Kashima Shrine (military God's shrine). *Takemikazuchi-no-mikoto* exists in Japanese mythology and holds a great reverence and faith for military men because of his achievements in battles at the time when the 'myth' actually occurred more than 2,500 years ago.

'Yashiro (shrine)' means "a place where God descends" in the dictionary. So, according to this interpretation, *Takemikazuchi-no-mikoto* is meant to 'descend' to the Headquarters' shrine. There are other examples of military Gods existing in different dojo shrines, like *Yamatotakeru-no-mikoto* from Japanese mythology; *Marishiten* who was the guardian deity of military men from India; *Toshodaigongen* was well known as *Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa* who terminated 100 years of the Warring State Period in Japan. Although we call those three 'Gods' they were only people, in fact Japanese ancestors.

*Takemikazuchi-no-mikoto* and *Yamtotakeru-no-mikoto* are both imperial ancestors who achieved a remarkable feat for the establishment of Japan as a country hundreds of years BC. Because of their feats in the war their stories were handed down from generation to generation especially in the

martial arts field and still exist today. This has made martial artists want to have them in their dojo shrines to receive the feeling of their great feats on the military fields.

The increase in consciousness towards military affairs rose during the peaceful period, Edo Era, which lasted for 260 years. During this period, the Samurais consciously began to seek the path of cultivating the spirit in their martial training at the dojos instead of learning the skills of killing. The meaning of 'yashiro' in the dojos shifted from the guardian deity that gave protection to a man or a family in the battles, to being a ritual in martial arts training.

The Brisbane dojo Shrine is empty and the shrine itself is a plain box made of timber. Therefore it is an issue for us who train at the dojo to decide its meaning.

I bow with a deep gratitude to the founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, and the founder of Yoshinkan, my Master, Gozo Shioda before and after each session. When I say the 'yashiro' is a wooden box, the photos of both founders are on plain paper. But we can appreciate heartily the achievement of Master Ueshiba or feel the obligation to Master Shioda through these photos. This is why humans are magnificent and can discover meaning in plain materials.

It is said that the Bushido (Japanese martial artists' spirit) respects courtesy heavily but it is not about the form, but the attitude of mind, the mind of respect and gratitude. A 'bow' is the expression of respect and gratitude for Japanese people.

There are lots of factors we can learn: the mind of gratitude and respect in the dojo; having a place where we can learn Aikido which was formed as long as 900 years ago; having one's training partners who we really need; having senior students to learn from; having junior students to teach (through trying to teach the seniors learn techniques more clearly); appreciating the pain we receive when we learn techniques as that's the way we can improve techniques and make our body stronger, and so on. In the dojo we cultivate the mind of appreciation and respect to others all the time throughout our Aikido training.

In the past, during the war period, people were very responsive to death and life as there were battles of killing every day. They appreciated the moment when they could train at the dojo because it meant that they still had their lives. They deeply thanked the guardian deity and its grace with a bow to the shrine before the training. And after the training they prayed desperately with a bow to give them further protection on the battlefield. This form was taken over in the dojos until today and this is why we set the shrine and have a ceremony of bowing in each dojo, as the custom now.

Today, the techniques taught at the dojos are not the means to kill people but the implements to cultivate and nourish our minds. The dojo used to hold a bloody air to learn killing skills, but now, it is filled with gratitude and respect through learning each technique with the mind of harmony and of helping each other. This is a great culture of the dojo.

Since 'yashiro' is something very familiar for Japanese people, I myself never really thought about its meaning and always had a problem answering the students' questions about it. This time, I had a good opportunity to sit and think what the wooden box truly is. Next time when I am asked about the shrine I think I will answer that the wooden box sitting in the front of the dojo is a symbol of the dojo and its content is the daily minds of gratitude and respect of our dear students.

**Michiharu Mori**