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Experience Aikido “The Martial Art of Peace” at Shioda Gozo Memorial

Article by Chris Mikkelsen, an Aikido practitioner since 2013.



The Kyoto Budo Center is a facility dedicated to Japanese martial arts. Located next to Heian Jingu Shrine, the Budo Center has traditional gardens surrounding buildings where visitors can regularly see the practice of martial arts such as kyudo (archery) or kendo (fencing). This summer, visitors can also see a special event. In late June and early July, the Budo Center is hosting international aikido seminars in memory of the late aikido teacher, Gozo Shioda (1915-1994).



Gozo Shioda (1915-1994) founded his own aikido school “Yoshinkan”

Aikido, which is now practiced throughout the world and known as the Martial Art of Peace, was created by martial arts legend Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969), easily recognizable by his sage-like long white beard. Aikido’s soft and circular joint locks and throws to subdue or redirect attackers without injuring them are based on principles Ueshiba studied while living in Ayabe, a village in the countryside northeast of Kyoto’s Arashiyama mountains.

Gozo Shioda met Ueshiba in 1932 at the age of seventeen. Already an accomplished judo practitioner, Shioda was overwhelmed by Ueshiba’s new martial art and dedicated his youth to mastering aikido, rising every day at 4:00 am to run several kilometers to Ueshiba’s dojo (martial arts

school) for practice.

Although living in Tokyo in the 1930s, Ueshiba periodically took Gozo Shioda to Kyoto for spiritual renewal. They and a few other students would go up to Kyoto’s Kurama mountain for a few weeks of intensive training in summer. In his memoir, Shioda describes how they ate a near-fasting diet and trained three times a day. On Mt. Kurama, they trained in a forest clearing where the famous 12th-century samurai, Yoshitsune Minamoto, is said to have learned martial arts from tengu – mythical red-faced, long-nosed creatures that live in the mountains around Kyoto.

Later, Shioda won first place in an all-Japan martial arts demonstration and became famous through performances before large audiences and appearances on TV variety shows. From both Japan and abroad, celebrities and members of royalty came to see his aikido in person. Shioda taught aikido at his school – called the Yoshinkan – until his death in 1994.

This summer, in memory of Shioda, students of aikido from around the world will travel to Kyoto for seminars taught by some of Shioda’s senior students. Shioda accepted anyone dedicated to serious training, including uchideshi, or “live-in apprentices” who lived at the Yoshinkan school. Uchideshi life is a traditional Japanese style of learning that originated in Kyoto’s arts such as Noh theater.

By living with a teacher, an uchideshi can fully absorb how the teacher practices an art. Today, Shioda’s senior students live in Japan and abroad, as far apart as Canada and Australia, and maintain ties through the international Yoshinkan Aikido Fellowship. The Fellowship will gather in Kyoto from June 29 to July 3 for the 2023 Shioda Gozo Memorial.

Butokuden, the Budo Center’s 19th-century main hall

Black belt testing, technical seminars, and demonstrations will be held at the Butokuden, the Budo Center’s 19th-century main hall, built with an elegant karahafu (curved gable) roof. The Butokuden and the grounds of the Budo Center are open to visitors to roam around. The Memorial’s main event will be an aikido demonstration from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm on



Sunday, July 2. However, the seminars can also be observed, and visitors at other times can watch the regular martial arts practice.

Reflecting on why Gozo Shioda’s students are still motivated to come together 30 years after his death, Kyoto resident and uchideshi, Jacques Payet remarked, “Shioda-sensei acquired skill through dedicated training. Then, he provided others with special opportunities to pursue that same path. We who received those opportunities feel a sense of responsibility to perpetuate his legacy and pass it to the next generation.”



Learn more about the Butokuden:

www.DNBK.org

www.Kyoto-Sports.or.jp/facilities

— about the 2023 Memorial:

www.YoshinkanAikidoFellowship.com

Read in depth:

— Shioda, G. Aikido Jinsei: My Life in Aikido
(Shindokan

Books)

— Payet, J. Uchideshi: Walking with the Master
(Shindokan Books)

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