

December 1st, 2010

To Kobayashi Dojo family



Hello everyone. My name is Afef Chalouf, an aikidoka from Tunisia. I was pleased to participate to a training session in Kobayashi dojo as an uchideshi in October and November 2010.

The uchideshi life was rather hard. I had to practice two or three times every day except on Mondays, which was unusual for me. At the same time, I had to take care of Kodaira dojo and partly Tokorozawa. It consisted on many tasks, cleaning the dojos, preparing the breakfast on Fridays....There were many rules to follow. Many tasks were complicated. Others were exhausting, like sweeping the street around the dojo. We were in autumn. Leaves were continuously falling. Many times, the quantity of leaves in the street was actually huge. When the street was wet after rain, it became even harder because the leaves staked to the ground. When it was windy, it became a challenge. In the morning, it was so cold that our hands were freezing. Right after we finished sweeping, the street was already covered with leaves again. It was actually discouraging. It is as if the tree beneath the dojo was laughing at us. Sometimes, while sweeping, I reminded the Greek myth of Sisyphus, the story of the man who had to push a rock up a mountain for the eternity. On the top, the rock rolled down and he had to start over, again and again.

However, in fact, things were not that terrible. With time passing by, I came to think there was a tight link between sweeping the street and practicing aikido. It was actually a lesson of patience and perseverance. With aikido too, we have to repeat and repeat again, tirelessly, the same techniques. In aikido too, although we are progressing, we always feel like we were at the same point. Observing leaves falling from the trees could also be a lesson of sensitivity. I wished I could be able to transform in a leave when doing falls. On the other hand, while sweeping, I often enjoyed being outside smelling fresh air. When it was sunny, it was so nice. From time to time, when I was alone, I stopped for a while, just to contemplate the fascinating yellow reddish autumn leaves. And I was stunned how beautiful they were. It was nice seeing the leaves falling from the trees, flying, spiraling, hesitating, and then, falling gently on the ground. It was nice hearing the light noise they did when they touched the ground. I had the opportunity to collect some leaves which I am keeping as a precious souvenir. Sometimes, people from Kobayashi joined for help. Many times, the senseis themselves participated. Even Kobayashi Sensei did. From time to time, one of the neighbors addressed us a smile while passing by and we were happy to show that aikidokas were contributing to the cleanliness of the neighborhood, and for a while, the hard work turned into a source of pleasure

and serenity and I forgot the tiredness and I forgot the cold and I forgot my freezing hands. ‘*The struggle itself was enough to fill a Man’s heart.*’ That was the lesson we could learn sweeping the street, and so can we say about aikido, and so can I say about my experience as an uchideshi in Kobayashi dojo.

Although it was hard and exhausting, it was an extraordinary experience. The aikidokas of Kobayashi Dojo were so nice, so wonderful. From the very first day, I felt like I was in my family. In spite of my white belt, I never met any difficulty finding a partner during practice. I had the opportunity to practice with high level aikidokas, and a few times with Kobayashi Sensei as well. In Kobayashi Dojo, I have never felt myself small or less than anyone else because of my white belt.

When Kobayashi sensei demonstrated the techniques before us, he called not only the advanced people but also the beginners. When we started or ended the keiko, we were allowed to sit in the line without any grade preferences, so it didn’t matter whether you were a beginner or a 6th dan or a sensei.

It was also nice to see all aikidokas cleaning the dojo after class. Every day, a member of the dojo brought some cakes or sweets for tea time, then we sat together and enjoyed a nice conversation, and to get to know each other a little better each time.

I was deeply moved by the noble gestures from Kobayashi dojo. For instance: Kobayashi sensei, Hiroaki sensei and their wives treated me as a family member, they often invited me over their places for breakfast, or family parties. They also took me sightseeing.

I was pleased to be invited by Yamawaki sensei’s family to their house in Tsumagoi as well.

Suzuki sensei was patient and took good care of me when I hurt my leg.

Uchino sensei has touched my heart with his warm hearted words of concern about me, such as “It’s very cold! Please Afef san don’t catch cold” or “dress warm” or “are you sure you have enough futons?”

Once, Kanda sensei surprised me with a nice gift: a homemade orange jam.

Mikio sensei invited me to his dojo and I still remember the dinner we had with his nice team.

Kasahara sensei borrowed me a belt each time I forgot mine (I was so tired that it happened many times).

And there was Barbara Sensei.... So wonderful with her tenderness and her discrete advices....

Not to mention all the kind gestures and gifts from other senseis and so many members of Kobayashi Dojo.

If I were to define Kobayashi dojo, the key word would be: *kindness*. Thanks a lot to all the Kobayashi Dojo Family.

It was great!