

Two months in the “faraway land”

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37 years old

Hungary

Hungarian Kobayashi Dojos' Organisation

Honshin Dojo (instructor: SZABÓ Balázs 5. dan)

Practising:

aikido, iaido (ZNKR, Tosa Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu)

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The title was created by my five years old daughter because this is how she calls Japan. “Daddy is in the faraway land” she told everybody when I was away.

Before I start talking about my experiences I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Kobayashi sensei and Hiroaki sensei for the opportunity they provided for me. Many thanks for the knowledge they gave me and for all those free time activities they provided for me. Similarly, those two days spent with Masuda sensei and the three days in the “uchideshi sanatorium” with Yamawaki sensei will rest deep in my heart. And I would also like to thank Kobayashi sensei and Hiroaki sensei for their help in getting over my initial inexperience where their sense of humour was a great asset. I need to mention here how nice Yasuko sama and Miyoko sama were who helped me a lot from the background and they did a great deal of work for the Kobayashi Dojo to run it smoothly. And as we know, the respect of Yasuko sama is worth 5 dan.

It is natural that without exception I am very grateful to all the instructors and members of Kobayashi Dojo who, during trainings and in other times, treated me with true friendship and accepted me immediately.

Since the relationship of Hungarians with Kobayashi Dojo is quite old, I met a lot of instructors and aikidokas whom I greeted as old acquaintances. Kobayashi sensei, Hiroaki sensei, Masuda sensei and Koyanagi sensei have long time ties with my country. During conversation it was a pleasure to hear that many of them plan to visit Hungary on occasions of training sessions. It was wonderful to experience unselfishness, the strong attitude that is characteristic of the many of instructors and practitioners in Kobayashi Dojo. If there is any task outside the training, then the necessary number of participants is there and then immediately and it does not matter if the work lasts until midnight. The most important thing is that for the common aim everybody works in good spirit. It is obvious that this kind of attitude is the one that creates the very well organized and smoothly running world in the atmosphere where everybody helps the other. The main

point is that the task is performed immediately, since they appear not as an obligation but for the training to be as problem-free and happy spirited as possible and that everybody can concentrate only on the aikido practice.

Koyanagi sensei once told me the following: "Andy, do not be too elaborate and too polite when you have a question to a sensei. Kobayashi Dojo is characterized by short and concise questions and answers. It is a little bit different from what is usual in Japan." And yes, it really works this way, it works at Kobayashi Dojo, I have tried it, with proper carefulness, of course.

It is almost an impossible task to tell about the 2-month-long experiences in such a short length, that is why I am going to describe a couple of thoughts or episodes that influenced me most during my stay in Japan.

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One day Kobayashi sensei told Henrik (Henrik Agertz, Sweden) and me to get ready because in the afternoon we were going to the Meiji University, for the usual annual seminar. My friend Henrik who took part in this event 10 years ago, advised me not to be surprised at anything that afternoon. It was already a great experience that we travelled together with Kobayashi sensei. That was a bit stressful for a beginner uchideshi but I was prepared. (I will speak about it later). We arrived to the meeting place where we



were met by Meiji students, elegantly dressed in black, with boards in their hands.

We proceeded to the University. This is great – that was what I thought – it was that easy to get to the Meiji University... at least for two hours. When we entered the huge building our two escorts stayed with us ready for any of our requests. After we changed clothes we went to the big dojo which was really huge. There were three wrestling rings next to each other. When we appeared at the entrance of dojo the first surprise came. About 45-50 shodan-nidan-rank-aikidoka practiced on the tatami and as by magic, with a loud yame finished their practice, turned to us and bowed deeply. I even looked back because I was sure that Kobayashi sensei had arrived, but I was just standing in front of him... but it turned out that was done for us. Then they greeted us, they wanted to carry our bags So it was a bit embarrassing. Then the situation became clear. Kobayashi sensei is twice the

sensei here since he is the alumni of Meiji as well as aikido shihan and we are his uchideshi. Having realized this I felt great responsibility for each of my actions. We also started to practice, and I do not need to mention that everybody wanted to practice with us, they made us work very hard. It was followed by the loud command and the bow again because Kobayashi sensei entered the room. A lot of people ran to him, with lots of bows and bustling about. The training continued in the spirit of Kobayashi sensei, in a happy mood and with great dynamism.



At the end of the training I got my second surprise when I started to fold my hakama, or to say more accurately, I was going to, since many of them wanted to prevent me from doing that, they wanted to fold it themselves. I tried to conceal my embarrassment and I thanked them many times, saying that this was my responsibility... I tried to do my best to prevent the attack, but then another fellow arrived who offered his help with taking the shower. I had to decline the offer this time very strongly.



After the practice we went to the most important event that follows training, i.e. to have a couple of beers, with some students from Meiji who usually come over for the training to Kodaira. It was a really pleasant time.

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Kobayashi sensei unexpectedly appeared at the door of Tokorozawa dojo and told us to be at the Kodaira station at 9 o'clock the next day because he is going to take us to Kudansha. My friend Kalle (Karl Linde, Sweden) and I were so anxious not to be late that we were there at 8.30 already. It was a good decision because Kobayashi sensei arrived there at 8.45.

We got on the train and after a couple of changes we arrived to the Kudansha station. Following Kobayashi sensei we stopped in front of a shop and we learned that he lived in that house in his childhood and now his brother was the owner of the shop.



Next to the house there is an Indian restaurant where Kobayashi sensei treated us to all sorts of delicacies. I have to say that during the 2 months in Japan I ate everything I was offered and I never had any problems. But after the Indian food I had a terrible stomach-ache for days.

After lunch Kobayashi sensei suggested visiting the park opposite the restaurant. He said goodbye and went to see his brother.

So we went to explore. As a matter of fact, I had no idea where we were. Only when I looked around in the park, I realized that Yasukuni Jinja can be found there. I read a lot about the place. After I visited the Yasukuni Jinja with great respect, I went to the



Budokan building and I managed to get home for the evening training. It was a marvellous day.

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There is one thing that developed to the skill level for me in Japan - if not the aikido techniques :-) - but the quick reaction to the unexpected. When Kobayashi sensei decided it was time to leave, he did so without any consideration, immediately, and we, the uchideshi, had to do so. We felt, however, that he was a little more patient with us, but only in the beginning and there were a lot of funny stories due to it.

In other times when we went somewhere by public transport we experienced that Kobayashi sensei is simply a genius about how to shorten the way. He found the gaps in the crowd of people and no matter that you were behind him you could not get through. In a big crowd you have no chance to keep the pace with him, especially when there were difficulties like buying tickets for another train or taking pictures. You had no chance to do that. Probably he got this gift from Osensei...

So I learned how to start from any situation and to follow him no matter how big the crowd was, even to buy a ticket from some sophisticated machine in no more than 10 seconds.

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The fact of the amount of respect Kobayashi sensei has in Japan, in his neighbourhood or in the aikido community could not be experienced until we were in the narrow dojo community. He is a real "head of the family" there who enjoys every moment spent in the community established by him. With all respect for him, but because of his friendliness I often forgot who he is in reality during some of our talks. But when we travelled to Iwama, as an old rule, we went to a "breakfast station" next to the motorway, and sitting at the table, I understood much more. Plenty of aikidoka arriving from all parts of the country, when they saw Kobayashi sensei, greeted him with great respect.

The trip to Iwama was on the 29th of April, which is a significant event every year in the aikido calendar. The Aiki Shrine Festival is arranged at that time. From all over the world and from the entire country people have a pilgrimage to this lovely little place to remember together the Founder and to experience the wonderful feeling of what aikido means to them and to all people throughout the world.



My first great experience was when I could have a look inside the old dojo and when I saw that Doshu and his family with their escorts were getting ready I also hurried to the shrine. On the side of the open shrine and on the tatami, the great old ones were already sitting and among them Kobayashi shihan, of course. I was very proud that I belonged to him! After the long ceremony finished, embu began. Of course everybody was interested in Doshu. And he was doing what he always did: he did the show clearly and smoothly. It was over soon.



After that we went to the park in front of the old dojo and we sat on big canvases spread on the ground, everybody grouping around their own shihan. We ate our lunch and soon I noticed that Doshu walked around the small groups and he sat down a bit everywhere for a little chat, taking pictures. It was very honourable.



Since it was good to have a little exercise after lunch, the best thing to do was to climb the nearby mountain to visit jinja on the top of it. It is important to know that the road from the dojo to the shrine was done by Osensei and when Kobayashi sensei was in Iwama he escorted Osensei on the mountain.



There are steep steps leading up to the shrine where Kobayashi sensei told us that he had to push Osensei up the hill by his backside. Of course, taking into consideration the generation change, it was my task to push Kobayashi sensei up the hill. The lunch must have been a bit heavy because the pushing was a bit bumpy, especially when the sensei leaned back jokingly :-)



The shrine itself was amazing as well as the landscape, which was the prize for all hardship.

I am very grateful to Kobayashi dojo for taking me to this event.

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We could hardly wait for all Wednesdays. The program was very busy that day, but after the Tokorozawa morning training the uchideshi were invited upstairs where Miyoko san was waiting for us with delicious breakfast.

During breakfast Hiroaki sensei sometimes shows his great natto test. Kasahara sensei sometimes mixed together the fermented soya beans with onions and something else in a big dish. He did it very accurately since he wanted to leave some time for the gaijin to get used to that sticky squelchy liquid that the Japanese love so much and which is also very healthy food. When talking about natto the Hungarian saying is true that if something is healthy, it is either ugly or immoral :-)





The main point of the morning is Hiroaki sensei's lecture in front of a carton sheet. On this Kaho chan drew the offer of the coffee machine, with the corresponding prices. I chose Cafe Latte Macchiato and I took the price of 280 ¥ seriously, and I took the money with me for the next time. I do not need to describe in detail the laughter.

I asked for some honey with my coffee and they remarked that these Hungarians over sweeten everything... Next Wednesday morning the honey was on the table; Myoko san is a very polite host.



After breakfast we had to run to get to Kodaira for Komine sensei training. She is a cute small Japanese lady with 5 dan. It was not easy to intensively participate in her training with full stomach. It was always a real effort for us, the uchideshi.

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On one of the instructor days I was talking to Masuda sensei and I remarked that I missed excursions and being in the forest. Masuda sensei replied that he will take me to Nikko and we will have a trip in the forest. Although I had already been in Nikko with Kobayashi sensei, Masuda sensei planned to show me the Kegon waterfall and not the church complex. I was really pleased because I am really fond of mountain excursions the sight of mountains.

So the day of the mountain excursion arrived, we met at the railway station and started off to Nikko. We reached our destination quickly because we travelled by a super-fast direct train. We changed to a bus at the already familiar station and we got to the waterfall and the lake. I have to mention that the weather that day was very cold and foggy, it was raining and the wind blew too. It is obvious that Japanese people do not make excursions in weather like this. It must have been so because there were only three people on the bus; Masuda sensei, me and the bus driver. As the bus was climbing higher, the fog and the clouds became more and more dense. I could hardly see the driver :-)) and this situation was so funny that eventually I could not take photos because of laughing.



So the bus arrived and next to the bus station there were some snow piles. Our first trip was to the waterfall. From the observation terrace we "listened" to the sound of the Kegon waterfall (because of the fog).



Then we went to the local history museum where the main thing to see was a 7.2 shaku-long sword. Masuda sensei told us that these swords were handled by three people and in the battle they were used against horses so that the legs of the running horses were cut off. It must have been terrible.

After visiting the museum we walked briskly, because of the cold, on the bank of the lake. As a matter of fact, I was almost running and I was very cold. Masuda sensei was a real gentleman in this situation, too and he amazed me with his question whether I wanted a boat excursion on the lake. I have to apologize even in retrospect for that definite, Prussian style "no" I answered the question with, which is very unusual in Japan. Actually, I wanted to swim in the lake :-))



Naturally, it was easy to refuse, because the next stop of our journey was the famous onsen nearby the lake. I spent incredible amount of time soaking in the hot water and only then I could look through the window of the bath and think about the mountain tops hidden in clouds. I have to admit frankly: these were the best moments of mountain excursions, to observe the mountains sitting in hot water up to my neck. Well, I had to be in Japan to figure that out.

Later we observed the Kegon waterfall, although I was already familiar with its sound, and the mountains with Masuda sensei again...on the internet, sitting in a dry, warm room.

At the end of the day we went to an authentic Japanese toriyaki dinner where the owner who was from Bangladesh and who was also the cook and the waiter, told us the story of his life.



It was really nice of Masuda sensei that he took my “desire to make excursions” so seriously. That day was one of my best experiences in Japan. I had a really good time, truthfully.

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On Sundays Yamawaki sensei usually had his training in the Tokorozawa dojo. At the teatime after the training the sensei said the following: “Andy, you will visit me for three days, I arrange the rest with Hiroaki sensei”. I did not know then how lucky I was. In the evening Henrik (Henrik Agertz, Sweden) told me about Tsumagoi, so I was really impatient. I really admired Yamawaki’s indirectness and the fact that there were no problems - only solutions.

Even the journey from Tokorozawa to Tsumagoi was very interesting. The landscape is exceptionally beautiful, especially when we reached the mountains and there were beautiful pine trees along the road. There was the music of Beatles all along the way which was accompanied by Yamawaki sensei’s singing quite well. On top of everything, we were travelling by my favourite car type, Subaru. Eventually we arrived. The wooden house, the family, the dog called Yuki. The dojo... I was amazed.



In the evening Ukai san asked me to teach him iaido, and to show him something interesting. I agreed and asked him if we could start at 7 in the morning. Ukai san was very surprised and told me that there was no morning training there. I smiled with understanding because I knew that Ukai had just finished a two- year period of uchideshi.

Those two days gave me a great deal of experience, the training the dojo community, cooking goulash, visiting the onsen.



And last, but not least, I had a chance to see the everyday life of a not typical Japanese family.



I thanked Yamawaki sensei and his family again for their caring and being so nice to me.

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Koyanagi sensei asked me one day about my plans for the 10th and 11th of April. I already had some experience and I knew that a question like this is actually a polite invitation for what I was going to do, so I was listening with interest. According to the calendar, it was time for the Fuji Area Camp. The name of the camp somehow reminded Fuji and I was especially interested because it was my long time dream to meet Fuji san.

In the morning we were in a hurry to be on the arranged place and we continued by car from there. Soon we reached the pension. The weather was cloudy. It was raining a bit. Then I could not even think of what the clouds were hiding when I looked out of the window of my room.

The others told me that dinner was at 6, we must be there on time. Of course, it could not be a problem, the restaurant was on the ground floor. But when I looked through the window I saw the shape of an enormous mountain. And only then I realized how close I was to Fuji san!



The sun appeared and as the wind blew the clouds, I realized why it is said that the Fuji san has at least 100 faces. I think there may be even a thousand. I did not stop taking pictures. Suddenly I looked at my watch and I got a shock. My God, the dinner had already been going on for 4 minutes... and I ran downstairs. Well, I hoped to slide in unnoticed, they ate anyway. I entered the room and I saw that everybody sat around the table with Koyanagi at the head of it. He looked at me and the only thing he said was” Andy! We are waiting for you! “



At that time there was no sense to explain anything, that the dream of my life came true in the past half an hour, the fact that I saw Fuji and I fell in love with it... I think Japanese people use the following expression in cases like this:
 “moshi wake arimasen”

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On March 16th my big dream came true because I could participate a dan examination in Hombu. Henrik asked me to be his uke on his 2nd dan exam. Henrik has routine because 10 years ago he passed his shodan exam also in Hombu. 2 or 3 weeks before the exam we started to prepare with the other uke, Izumi san. The big day soon arrived when the entire Hombu dojo was occupied by the Kobayashi Dojos. Since I was there for the first time I walked on all floors and admired the building. The building is more functional than Japanese but the fact is that this place is considered to be the 1st milestone of aikido nowadays.

Before the exam preparation took place in a big room upstairs and was supervised by a high ranking sensei. I was amazed by the silence that was a must of training. Only those could enter the room who wanted to train. Soon the exam took place and we passed it without being nervous and with no problems and it was followed by the celebration.



At the end of the day of the exam there was another party where a lot of people had very good time. It is obvious that after a day like this people need to cool down...



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For a uchideshi beginner, especially if the person is from Europe, selective rubbish collecting seems a nightmare and chaos in the first weeks. The method of collection are totally different from the ones at home, not to mention the fact that every day they come to take different packages, and there is also rubbish that cannot be categorized. I realized quite soon that I cannot be wrong if I go outside and see what the others put under the net. For that sometimes you had to fish around in the rubbish but it was worth because in

a weeks' time you became a perfect rubbish selector. I tried to do my best in this task, I even made a notice board where I wrote Hiroaki sensei's loudly said "Andy dame, dame!" and the following exceptions. Then there were surprises and misunderstandings. The main thing is that the question of selective rubbish collection is dealt with on a very high level in Kobayashi Dojo, as the picture illustrates it too.



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I was really surprised that during my stay in Japan that even in Tokyo cold weather was so persistent. In Tokorozawa dojo the night temperature went under ten degrees until the last days of my stay (end of April!). Not to mention Kodaira dojo, which, as it was mentioned by Kobayashi sensei, was especially cold. By the time I started to believe that this is the normal weather, I was informed, that there was no such cold spring in the past 50 years. I was very "happy" about that. And then there was a surprise, in the form of snowfall, and not once but twice: on the 9th of March and on the 17th of April. Of course a good uchideshi always clears everything, even the snow.



After the snowfall at night we did not even think of clearing the snow from outside the dojo because at daytime the temperature reached 20 degrees and even the sun was shining. But for the order coming from “above” we had to clear the snow, so there were two piles collected. So in the morning the street in front of the dojo was the best.



Then in the afternoon when Hiroaki sensei saw that there was no trace of snow in the street and there were two big snow piles at his place, he told us to take the snow in front of the house on the surface so that it can melt. So we saved the snow and we were laughing while watching that the pedestrians walked amazed in front of the snowy entrance. It looked as if a freezer exploded.

Koyanagi sensei reflected about this event so simple, with smile: "Andy, this is uchideshi life... he-he-he!"

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At the end of my report definitely want to thank Koyanagi sensei, Kasahara sensei and Shinozaki san for their indirect and practical advice and that they provided me with the spirit: "necessary for uchideshi life"



I will never forget my uchideshi comrades and friends: Mikhaela, Henrik, Kalle from Sweden.



They were always excellent and helpful partners. Thank you very much for all the support and our mutual experiences. *Tack så mycket!*

This two months strengthened my future intentions in connection with budo, as I saw the lifestyle and the commitment towards aikido which is represented by the Aikido Kobayashi Dojo in Japan and all over the world.

Sensei gata to minna sama ni makoto ni arigato gozai mashita!

Andy yori

...and a special gift for my Japanese friends:



グヤーシュ・スープ（12人分）

材料:

牛肉（1.5 キロ、出来ればうちもも）赤ワイン

（1本、Villanyi種類、辛味。増田先生も大好きなワインです。彼は料理を作るとき近くにいないほうがいいかも・・・（笑）たまねぎ（二つ）にんにく（一つ）ベーコン（200 グラム）油（こさじ6杯）にんじん（五つ）トマト（三つ）じゃがいも（サイズによって六つ・八つ）パセリ（1袋）調味料：塩、ペパー（コショウ）、辛いハンガリーのパプリカ、辛いpaprikakrem, Komenymag[ひめういきょう] Baberlevel[ベイリーフ(ローリエの葉)]

作り方

たまねぎ、にんにく、ベーコンを細かく切ります。なべを油でいためます。たまねぎ、にんにく、ベーコンを入れて、すこし混ぜます。塩、ペパー、Komenymag[ひめういきょう]、Baberlevel[ベイリーフ(ローリエの葉)] も入れます。

たまねぎの色はちょっと茶色になったら、辛いハンガリーのパプリカ、パセリ、トマト、200ccのワインを入れます。

（Pirospaprikaは焼きすぎすと苦くなりますので、じゅうぶんに気をつけて下さい。）

料理を作りながら、ちょっとワインを飲んでもいいです。（笑）四角の形に切った牛肉も、辛いpaprikakremも入れます。

もう少しいためてから、水を入れます。（なべの中身の上まで）火を真ん中に調整して（小さくないし、大きくないし）

40分ぐらい煮込みます。あと、丸い形で切ったにんじんを入れます。

20分ぐらい待っていて、四角の形に切ったじゃがいもを入れます。残っているワインをもう少し入れてもいいです。

30分後試してみましょう。（どんな味か、肉は柔らかくなったか、など）

グヤーシュ・スープを食べたら、おいしいハンガリーのパンもあったらいいです・・・出来上がると小林先生に電話をかけて誘いましょう。

そして、美味しいスープを召し上がってください。