

Excerpt from

The Floating Bridge of Heaven

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photo: Geoff Nix

I would try to grab Osensei's arm with all my strength, but it was an entirely different feeling than grabbing someone else's arm. Try as I might, I was unable to use my force. Osensei must have been moving before I was able to get a good grip on him, but I couldn't tell when he began to move.

Osensei's *ki* was in motion. His mind was not fixed in one place. So trying to take hold of Osensei was like trying to grasp water. Even if you manage to get it in your hands, the next thing you know, it's gone. You can't hold on to it. Like a cloud--you can't grab a cloud no matter how hard you try.

We must train and train, until we have a natural state of mind: a mind like water, like a cloud. We must continue our training until we have no consciousness of having an opponent at all.

“ Osensei would be talking, setting it up, and pretty soon you'd start to feel like you were drawn into a cloud. ”

We must go completely beyond winning and losing. If your partner comes to grab you here, you have moved there. If they try to push you here, you have gone over there. There's nothing to hold on to. As *uke*, after a while you become tired and can't continue to attack. That's the way I felt, taking *ukemi* from Osensei.

Osensei would do demonstrations during class, with the feeling of showing us something interesting. We'd be practicing a technique, for instance *kokyu-ho*, and we wouldn't be getting it very well. Then Osensei would call for our attention.

“You, come on over here,” he'd say to one person. “And you over there, go and get a *gi* belt. Tie it around me and pull.” Or “Here, push on my head,” he'd say, and he'd invite two or three people to push on him. Osensei would be talking, setting it up, and pretty soon you'd start to feel like you were drawn into a cloud.



Osensei would sit there on the tatami with his legs outstretched, and there would be absolutely no reason why I couldn't expect to push him over. But when I pushed on him from the front, to my amazement I would be unable to push strongly. I would push hard, but my own feet would be slipping out from under me. Then one of the people pushing on Osensei would start to fall, and we'd all come crashing down. It was impossible to resist.

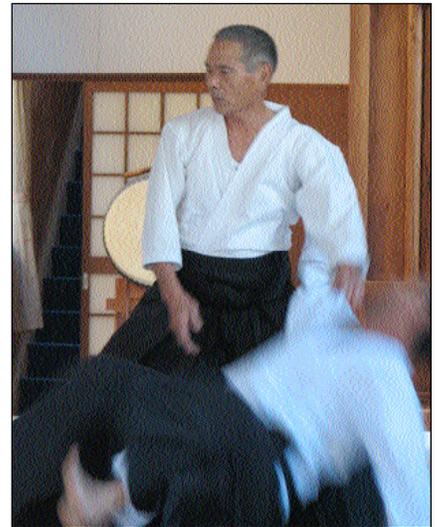
People enjoyed it when Osensei taught technique. But when he spoke about the purpose of Aikido and used the names of the *kami* [spirit(s) of the universe], we didn't listen carefully enough.

Osensei didn't talk about things like footwork, or how to use your strength, or how to relax. When Osensei taught about technique, he would talk about *kami*. For instance, before Osensei led us in *Shin Kokyu* [*misogi*: purification practice] he would say, "First, you must stand on the Floating Bridge of Heaven [*ame no uki hashi*]." I didn't understand what he meant, and like the others around me, I was impatient to train.

Now, I feel that Osensei was talking about how to stand in a fundamental, natural posture. These days I understand Osensei's words about standing on *ame no uki hashi* to mean that we must begin in a natural state of mind, a fluid state of mind that is not fixed in one place. Stand naturally, with your mind on the Floating Bridge of Heaven: a clear, egoless state of mind.

And as it is a *floating* bridge, using a lot of strength is unnecessary. You can't use force or resistance, and neither can you simply go limp. So Osensei's words "stand on the floating bridge of heaven" point to a natural way of standing that is not so much a matter of what you do, as it is an indication of the existence of an incredible power.

It is important to let people know what Osensei said. Then in the future, those who are interested in what he taught will think about Osensei's words, and explore what he meant when he told us, "First, you must stand on the Floating Bridge of Heaven".



From a forthcoming book entitled **The Floating Bridge of Heaven**, by Motomichi Anno Shihan, 8th dan, direct student of Osensei; chief instructor, Aikido Kumano Juku Dojo, Shingu, Japan, and Linda Holiday, 6th dan, chief instructor of Aikido of Santa Cruz, California, USA; student of Anno Sensei since 1973.

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