

# Japan - The Enbukai



*A magnificently grand group of children on stage for their enbukai.*

The trip to Japan, that contained so many impressions and new sights, existed mainly for the grand event of Suganuma-sensei's 45-year Aikido anniversary. The event was held on Sunday the 19th of April. I had somewhat mixed feelings about the event. I was super eager to see what the birthplace of Aikido had to give to the world and to see new and interesting techniques, but also a bit nervous for how it would be; the social interactions, speaking Japanese with these new people, not to mention that I was wondering what would happen at all. I had no clue. I mean, being invited to Japan by Dimitris-sensei, going to Japan and seeing all this culture was literally a dream come true. I was very proud within myself when everything was done and paid for. I mean, who would have thought? I just hope Dimitris still thinks it was a good idea to bring me, and that I behaved like I was expected to.



Being a Norwegian in Japan makes for many culture clashes.

We got up at 9 am that Sunday and left the hotel at 9.45. We took a cab to Fukuoka Sun, a stadium of sorts that would house the grand event, and arrived about an hour before the whole event was to start. It was scheduled to begin at 11 am.

*Bjørn Eirik throws his partner fiercely. They did a great enbukai.*



*There were many speeches before the enbukai started.*

Dimitris-sensei and Bjørn Eirik Olsen-sensei met a lot of friends and acquaintances in the hallways before we went to find our seats. It was great to meet all these new people, and to get a better perspective on my teachers' place in the Aikido world. I was really grateful that we had Bjørn Eirik with us when out and about in Fukuoka, and it was particularly in these social settings I thought he *really* gleamed with his Aikido and Norwegian/Japanese-ness. To have someone like him as a "bridge" between the countries meant a lot to me. He could maneuver the language and streets oh so much more effortlessly than me, and it was clear that he was liked amongst the Japanese Aikido practitioners. It was also very nice to see Dimitris-sensei in settings I hadn't seen him before, and to observe the social structure in the Aikido community and in Japan in general.

From beginning to end, the enbukai lasted 4 and a half hours. It was literally 4 and a half hours of expertise, precision, dedication and raw skill. The stage was brimming with students of all ages, from all over the country; in fact, from all over the world. There were people from Germany, Canada, Norway (Duh!), Israel, Australia and Malaysia. Maybe there were people from even more countries that I didn't get to meet. In fact, I have no idea. I had enough just keeping my head on



*Dimitris and Vetle in full concentration during the enbukai.*



*Dimitris and Bjørn Eirik gets the necessary information before we find our seats for the enbukai.*

my shoulders and paying attention to everything that was happening. During the enbukai, different clubs and countries showed off several groups of people. A couple of times, there were hundreds of (or at least that's what it seemed like!) children on stage doing jo-kata, ukemi and basic techniques. How old they were, I don't know. They were tiny. Even Doshu himself (I guess one could look at his position as a "president" of Aikido as a martial art?) performed! The ukemi of some of the participants was absolutely droolworthy. I simply don't know how to express it any better.

When the enbukai finally ended, everyone gathered in the hall to mingle again. There would be a sort of buffet that we had bought a ticket for beforehand. There had been probably fifteen hundred participants and viewers for the enbukai, and even though there were less people during the buffet, it was still overflowing.



*Buffet entertainment. The girls were using bells to play songs together.*



*Doshu on his way out after the buffet. An exclusive party awaited.*

The sheer amount of pressure in the main room was too much for me some of the time, so I had to go out. I sat down and spoke with many interesting people while resting my head a little, so it was nice anyway. There was even this guy asking Vetle how to get a girl (and was referring to me). It was pretty funny, as we had been served alcohol. I actually thought it was pretty bold of him to come over and ask like that, in English even. In a good way, of course.

After having been called up on stage for Bjørn Eirik's speech and watched the entertainment provided during the buffet, it was time to leave. There would be an even more exclusive party of sorts later that evening, and Dimitris-sensei and Bjørn Eirik-sensei was invited. Naturally, we weren't. Dimitris told us later that he was one of the lowest graded at the party. That puts some perspective to it. As we went back to the hotel, I contemplated what we had just experienced. We would go home the next day. Four days in Japan. It had felt like more than a week. So many impressions, so much fun. And a lot of Aikido. I hope to be able to experience an event like that again, but maybe then with a better Japanese vocabulary, and more Aikido experience. Maybe I'll even be on stage next time?

Thank you for reading.

*By Fride Eilin Blindheim, April 2015*