

# Japan - The Aikido



*Group picture at Tenjin Dojo of all the participants at the seminar.*

On the first day in Japan, Thursday the 16th of April, we had been invited to come train with Suganuma-sensei in his dojo, one of the older dojos in Fukuoka. Upon arrival, it became apparent that Japanese dojos and Norwegian dojos have some differences. The door went straight out and it was wide open. It was at least 20 degrees celcius this day, and the windows were also open. In Norway, due to the cold, this wouldn't be possible. However I enjoyed the feeling of being less inside, so to speak, due to the openness of the dojo. Not having met Suganuma-sensei, or any other Japanese martial artists, I was very much excited, and a bit nervous.

We were welcomed warmly, and showed to the changing rooms. The dojo's bathroom contained a traditional Japanese toilet, the kind that you squat over. That in and by itself was a new experience. When training started the atmosphere in the dojo was practically electrified. Everybody was focusing 100%, and being one out of three of probably 25 Aikido practitioners without a hakama, I felt like a complete novice.



*Bjørn Eirik posing in front of the kamiza in Suganuma's old dojo.*

But again Japan and its residents took me in with open arms. I got to train with a lot of fantastic people, and try out my limited Japanese to be understood. You see, many Japanese people don't know English. I was inspired by the other Aikido-practitioners, and by the time one hour had passed, the sweat was running and the water bottle was much appreciated. A nice tradition in Suganuma-sensei's dojo is to sit down and have tea and a little cookie or dessert after training, and naturally we lingered to take part in the social aspect of the "dojo life".

The next day, we only came to the evening practice. (Vetle and I had overslept terribly, and thus missed morning training. It was super-embarrassing...) After going out and about, and even buying myself a kimono, we went back to the hotel. We barely had time to change before we were to meet up at the reception to go. This time, the training was in a tiny, old and traditional dojo in Tenjin called Takasago Dojo. It was super-cozy and super-stuffed. How many people we were I don't know, but you had to be constantly aware of where you were falling, moving, and even standing! The spirit was practically oozing out of every nook and cranny in the dojo. People were even training off the mat by the entrance! When training ended, people just kept on training. I went over and asked Suganuma-sensei whether practice was over or not, and he said, yes, it was. As people just continued, we got to see the other countries' embukai, since they were practicing it. Each country was jawdroppingly skilled, and each and every one of them astounded me, without fail.



*We were eager to take part in the "dojo life", but a little insecure about coming off as rude.  
Or I was anyway...*

The following morning, Saturday the 18th of April, we got up in time and went to practice at 10.30. (We scheduled about 5 alarms.) This time, we went to Tenjin Dojo, the biggest dojo we had trained in yet. Because Suganuma-sensei had other business to attend to, someone else from the dojo held the training. As with the other dojos in Japan the mats were surprisingly hard, and people were wearing knee pads underneath their dogies. I figured I should get a pair of those at some point, especially since I'm planning to come back as soon as possible! After training people lingered for at least an hour to practice their enbu (demonstration) for the following day. Dimitris-sensei and Vetle stayed as well to practice bokkendori (disarming someone with a sword) and Aikido. There were some amazing ukemi there, the kind that I really want to be able to do someday. A group of girls also danced, and it was beautiful! They had purple headbands, white fans, and a hakama with the sides "pulled up". Before we left I chatted with a lovely girl named Mayumi, something I enjoyed very much. She was very impressed with my Japanese, even though it was limited. I actually got a lot of good comments on it during the trip, which made me super happy!

Later that day we had evening training. This time I had taken the liberty to rent bicycles for us. Dimitri was astounded, which I found very amusing. The sight of my teacher ruling the bicycle and the streets of Fukuoka was priceless! The big difference between this class and most of the others we had attended were the amount people not wearing a hakama. In all the other trainings Vetle and I were two of usually about five people without a hakama.



*Vetle, Dimitris, Bjørn and I with Suganuma-sensei in the middle, standing in front of the kamiza in Takasago Dojo.*



*Training in Takasago dojo. This was the fullest dojo I have ever seen!*

This time however, about half the group didn't have a hakama yet, and thus we got to practice some basic stuff again. It was Nakamura-sensei who held practice this evening, as Suganuma-sensei still had businesses to attend to. This training was the last training before the enbukai the following day.

When I accepted the invitation to go to Japan I was not really sure what to expect. I had heard many stories of how hard the training was, of how I would practically melt and fall apart from mere exhaustion and the sheer amount of knowledge entering my brain, and of how challenging it would be. I was almost a bit scared when we were finally on the plane. Back then I wondered: "What kind of mess have I gotten myself into this time?" My worries were proven unnecessary though, and for that I was grateful. It was a very challenging trip, but nonetheless extremely fulfilling. The people I met and trained with were fantastic. Truly marvellous people. I look forward to going to Japan on the studytrip next year, both with glee, and with reverence.

Thank you for reading.

*By Fride Eilin Blindheim, April 2015*