

True Story by Terry Dobson, the first American Aikido Master trained in Japan

The train clanked and rattled through the suburbs of Tokyo on a drowsy spring afternoon. Our car was comparatively empty, a few housewives and their kids, and I gazed absently at the drab houses and dusty hedgerows.

At one station the doors opened and suddenly the afternoon quite was shattered by a man bellowing violent incomprehensible curses. The man staggered into our car, he wore laborer's clothing and was big, drunk and dirty. Screaming, he swung at a woman holding a baby, and the blow sent her sprawling into the laps of an elderly couple. It was a miracle that the baby was unharmed! Terrified, the couple jumped up and scrambled toward the end of the car. The laborer aimed a kick at the retreating back of the of the old woman but missed as she scuttled to safety. This so enraged the drunk that he grabbed the metal pole in the middle of the car and tried to wrench it from its station. I could see that one of his hands was cut and bleeding.

And as the train lurched ahead, it's passengers frozen with fear, I stood up. I was young then, some 20 years ago, and in pretty good shape. I'd been putting in a solid eight hours of Aikido training nearly every day for the past three years. I liked to through and grapple, I thought I was tough. But, my marshal art skill was untested in actual combat.

As students of Aikido we were not allowed to fight. I could hear my teacher's words, "Aikido is the art of

reconciliation, he who has the mind to fight has lost his connection with the Universe. If you try to dominate people, you are already defeated. We study how to resolve conflict, not how to start it."

The words kept going on, over and over in my mind. I tried hard I even went so far as to cross the street to avoid the "Chemperas", the pinball punks who lounged in the train station. But my forbearance exalted me, I felt both tough and holy. In my heart however, I wanted an absolutely legitimate opportunity where by I might save the innocent by destroying the guilty. "THIS IS IT!" I said to myself, getting to my feet. "People are in danger and if I don't do something fast they will probably get hurt."

Seeing me stand up, the drunk recognized his chance to focus his rage. "Ah-Ha! A foreigner, you need to learn some Japanese manors!" I held on tightly to the commuters strap overhead and gave him a slow look of disgust and dismissal.

I PLANED TO TAKE THIS TURKEY APART!

But! He had to make the first move. I wanted him bad, so I pursed my lips and blew him an insolent kiss.

"All right, you're gonna get a lesson!" he said as he gathered himself for a rush at me.

In a split before he could move someone shouted,

"HAY! HAY!"

It was ear splitting, but I remember the strangely joyous lilted quality of it.

I wheeled to my left, and the drunk to his right, and we both stared down at a little old Japanese man well into his seventies; sitting there, immaculate in his kimono. He took no notice of me but beamed delightfully at the laborer as though he had a most important, most wonderful secret to share.

"Come here! Come here! Come here and talk to me."

The big man followed as though he were on a string. He planted his feet belligerently in front of the old gentleman and roared above the clacking of the wheels,

"Well why the hell should I talk to you anyway?!"

The drunk now had his back to me, if his elbow moved so much as a millimeter I'd drop him in his socks!

The old man continued to beam at the laborer,

"Wat'cha been drink'n?", he asked, his eyes sparkling.

"I been drink'n Saki", he said. Speckles of spittle spattered the old man.

"Oh! That's wonderful, simply wonderful! You see, I like Saki too, every night me and my wife, (she's 76 you know) we warm up a little bottle of Saki and we take it out into the garden and we sit on the old wooden bench and we watch the sun go down, and we look to see how our Persimmon tree is doing, my great-grand father planted the tree and we worry about weather it will recover from the ice storms we had last year, our tree is doing better than I expected though, especially when you consider the poor quality of the soil.

It' s gratifying to watch when we take our little Saki and we go into the empty of the evening - even when it rains."

And he looked into the laborer's eyes, his own eyes twinkling merrily. The drunk struggled to follow the old man's monologue as he slowly began to soften and his fists began to unclench.

"Ya, I love Persimmons too."

"Ya? And I'm sure you have a lovely wife too!"

"No, my wife died."

And, very gently, slowing with the motion of the train, the big man began to sob.

"I don't got no wife, I don't got no home, I don't got no job, I'm so ashamed of my self."

And the tears rolled down his cheeks as a spasm of despair rippled through his big body.

And now it was my turn, standing there in my well scrubbed youthful innocence; my "make this world right for Democracy" righteousness. I suddenly felt dirtier than he was. Then the train arrived at my stop and the doors opened. I heard the old man cluck sympathetically,

Tish, Tish, Tish, Tish, Tish. "My, My, My. My, My, My. My, My, My. Very difficult predicament. My, My, My. You come here, you tell me all about it."

I turned my head for one last look as I stepped off the train. The laborer was sprawled on the seat, his head in the old man's lap; the old man was softly stroking the filthy, matted hair:

"My, My, My, My. You tell me all about it. Such a difficult predicament. You tell me.....".

As the train pulled away I sat down on a bench. What I had wanted to do with muscle had been accomplished with kind words. I had just seen Aikido used in combat and the essence of it was love. I would have to practice the art with an entirely different spirit from this day forward. It would be a long time before I could speak about the resolution of combat.