



David Shaner Sensei (7th Dan, Okuden)

Shaner Sensei is the Chief Instructor of the Eastern Ki Federation in the United States, is Japan Headquarter's Advisor to the Eastern Europe/Russia Ki-Aikido Federation, and was an uchi deshi (live-in student) at Ki Society HQ in Haramachi, Shinjuku-ku, Japan.

1. How did you come to practice Ki-Aikido?

I was interested in improving my performance as a ski racer. Eventually, I became a member of the Olympic Valley USA Ski Team. At the young age of 14 my sporting hero Jean-Claude Killy won three gold medals at the 1968 Winter Olympics in Grenoble, France. He said his “secret to success” winning consistently by fractions of a second was the practice of “yoga, breathing, and meditation”. I began to do the same, but was soon introduced to aikido by attending a demonstration. The language used to describe ki principles, as taught by my teacher Soshu Koichi Tohei Sensei, sounded like moving meditation which I thought was *even more applicable* to improving my ski racing performance where you need to be very relaxed at very high speed!

2. Had you practiced any other styles of Budo before that?

No

3. What was it that appealed to you in Ki-Aikido?

The idea that “You Are Stronger Relaxed” made total sense to me from a ski racing perspective. The ski racing Downhill Event, in particular, is really like a high-speed dance ... if your legs become stiff at any moment, it is a formula for a disastrous CRASH! It was amazing to me that peak performance, characterized by relaxation through bodymind unification (*Shinshin Toitsu*), could be immediately EXPERIENCED just by following the Four Basic Principles. This “was” back then, and “is” today, an enormously powerful educational process! One does not need to take another’s word for it. As an athlete, I was looking for practical, accessible tools that I could use immediately to improve my performance. Forty-six years later, I still use this teaching method to help students reach their goals at home, at work, and at play. And, all this is just the “how to” aspect of performance improvement. The real training (and appeal) would come years after I started when I was living in Japan as an *uchi deshi*. Spiritual awareness and growth is the most important outcome of serious training 24/7.

4. Who were your teachers?

The Founder (*Soshu*) of *Shinshin Toitsu Aikido* was my teacher - - Koichi Tohei Sensei (1920-2011). Another very close teacher was Iwao Tamura Sensei (9th dan), Chief Instructor of the Kanagawa Branch of Ki no Kenkyukai in Japan. At the time of his death in 2003, Tamura Sensei was the most senior of Tohei Sensei’s students teaching in Japan.

When I lived in Hawaii during my graduate school years, I had the pleasure of learning from Shinichi Suzuki Sensei (Wailuku, Maui), Takashi Nonaka Sensei (Hilo, Hawaii), as well as Seichi Tabata Sensei, Yukiso Yamamoto Sensei and Clayton Naluai Sensei all residing in the capital city of Honolulu (Oahu).

5. Who are your source of inspiration (past or present)? Why are these people your source of inspiration?

My continuous source of inspiration comes from *all my teachers and mentors* representing a variety of fields from athletics and martial arts to science and philosophy. While I never became #1 in the world at anything really, I did have the honor and privilege of studying and learning at the feet of some of the world's greatest teachers in their respective fields. I feel as though I had the close relationship of being an *uchi-deshi* (live in student) with multiple true "masters" of education. These include scientists Stephen Jay Gould, Edward O. Wilson; philosophers Elliot Deutsch, David Kalupahana, Roger Ames, and Thomas Patrick Kasulis; world-class ski racing coaches Bill Dyer, Jean-Pierre Pascal, and Philippe Mollard; as well as my ki-aikido teachers mentioned above. Of course, Tohei Sensei and my parents continue to inspire me every day even though they have all passed away.

6. What, according to you, is the most important goal of practicing Ki-Aikido?

The most important goal is evidenced in our motto at The International Ki Society.

"Let us have a universal spirit that loves and protects all creation and helps all things grow and develop. To realize the original unity of mind and body is the ultimate purpose of our study"

7. What is the most important thing you yourself have learned from practicing Ki-Aikido?

I have learned that "You are Stronger Relaxed" because when you realize your original and natural state, you experience that you are already one with the universe. Active training is learning to realize your true gifts that are already present within each one of us. Training is like peeling a banana; you simply remove the cover, the dust, the appearances that get in the way of true self discovery.

8. How would you explain Ki-Aikido to a layman?

I would not explain anything. I would let them experience for themselves (Jp. *Ki ga tsuku*) what true unification means. The key is self-discovery. Ki-Aikido is not something you can understand through reading a book, watching a video, or listening to lectures. However, by understanding Koichi Tohei Sensei's very clear pedagogy, it is possible to take the mystery out of discussions of Ki Development, Ki Meditation, Ki Breathing, Kiatsu Therapy, Ki-Aikido Waza, and *Sokushin no Gyo* (Bell Meditation). These are what Soshu Tohei referred to as the Five Disciplines of *Shinshin Toitsudo* (which literally means "Bodymind Realization"). Each require that you perform these activities with mind and body unified and this can be experienced by anyone in a matter of minutes.

9. What relationship is there between Ki-Aikido and violence/selfdefence?

Ki-Aikido is wonderful for self-defence. It is particularly useful for arrest control situations used by security personnel and law enforcement officers. I have had the pleasure of serving as a Deputy Sheriff in Aspen, Colorado USA as well as teaching law enforcement officers and security professionals. Of note is the obvious ability in the martial art of Ki-Aikido to control another with just one hand. This feature enables and facilitates the use of handcuffs necessary in arrest situations.

10. The literal translation of the Japanese characters often mean something else in comparison with the meaning how they are used in the world of Budo. I.e. the characters for "Zanshin" mean something like "stand firmly".

We would appreciate if you would be so kind to share some more of these kind of terms with us.

The term “*Zanshin*” has many uses in different contexts, including Mahayana Buddhist Practice/Meditation. My teacher Soshu Tohei often used this term when describing the difference (in English) between being “immobile” and “immovable”. As you mention in the question, you might stand firmly because you are scared or frozen or stuck (Soshu Tohei calls this “*Teishi*” or “Dead Calmness”); however, *zanshin* means you are immovable because you choose to stay firm (Soshu Tohei calls this “*Seishi*” or “Living Calmness”). With *zanshin* you experience dynamic power running through you as a result of your experience of connection to the universe itself. With *zanshin*, you can move in harmony with the universe at anytime with power, purpose, and grace.

11. Unfortunately for most of us our knowledge of the Japanese language is too limited to accomplish a firm understanding of the nuances of these terms. Would you please be so kind to advise us how to improve our knowledge of these terms besides much training? i.e. is there a book which explains these terms?

Well, I could be selfish and recommend my new book with an extensive index and glossary indicating where key terms are explained in the book. It is 400 plus pages and contains many stories related to your questions in this interview. The new book is called **Living With The Wind At Your Back** and can be obtained by going to www.davidshaner.com. I hope the book will be available by the time this interview is published. We are looking at a Summer 2014 release date.

I would also recommend Curtis Sensei’s book **Letting Go** as it also has accurate explanations and definitions of key terminology used in our practice of *Shinshin Toitsu Aikido*. Both books are available in Russian and English.

11. Has your perception of Aikido changed throughout the many years you’re practicing Aikido?

Yes, indeed. And, my perceptions of Aikido continue to be enriched as I am still learning and discovering new things almost every day, especially regarding my teacher’s true genius communicating universal principles. The universal principles can be applied at home, at work, and at play.

12. Would you please be so kind to share your thoughts on the future of Aikido?

With the passing of my teachers, I feel a great responsibility to do my best helping to prepare the next generation of instructors. My experience is only that of one man, but I have learned that the real value of practicing Ki-Aikido is the application in daily life. This was my teacher’s real gift to the world – he taught us how to experience our original and natural connection to the universe itself. With this kind of experienced connection, a mind-set is born in which you seek to serve others willingly and kindly to the best of your ability. After all, you and others are not separate. That is the illusion of what Soshu Tohei call “Relative Thinking”. In reality, we are all connected deeply. Our lives and our bodies cannot be sustained without continuous connection at every moment. At a fundamental level you need food, water, and air or else you simply cease to exist! Through what Soshu Tohei describes as cultivating “Absolute Thinking”, we can experience that we truly are brothers and sisters; we are One with the Universe. This is why Aikido is called an Art of Peace and is so relevant for future generations.