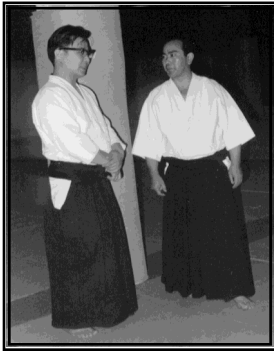


Xin Qi Shen

2020 Winter



Yoshihiko Hirata Sensei

Fast, smooth, powerful, and effective, comes to mind when I think about Hirata sensei's Aikido.

While studying Aikido with Bernie Lau in 1971 we had two guest come and watch our Aikido class: John Kanetomi and Doug Tsuboi. They told us they studied Aikido at the Seattle Aikikai with Hirata Sensei and Chuck and I should come down and visit. At that point in time we thought we were the only Aikido club in Seattle.



It turned out, that a week before, Bernie had come upon their club while patrolling Seattle's International district. He

passed the Budokan (306 s. Main St) and decided to take a look. He happened upon the Seattle Aikikai. Its chief instructor was 5th dan Yoshihiko Hirata from Hombu Dojo, Japan.

After the invitation, Chuck and I wasted no time and went to visit the Seattle Aikikai a few days later. What we saw was really amazing. This was advanced Aikido. Bernie had shown us a film of Master Koichi Tohei sensei but this was like seeing him for real. Hirata's Aikido wasn't only fast and smooth, it was done without apparent effort. We had studied with Bernie for over a year and our Aikido basics were solid and strong but compared to what we saw here our Aikido was pretty rough.



As we took to the mat for class, John and Doug paired up with Chuck and me, helping us with this different type of Aikido.

When Hirata was explaining a technique they would sit

besides us and whisper, commenting on what we should be watching or paying attention to as Hirata did the technique.

John and Doug were Hirata's advanced students, brown belts, 1 kyu. As we paired up with other club members Hirata kept an

eye on us and continually insist we didn't use as much muscle or strength as we were use to. Relax! Easy! Extend Ki. Words I heard often.

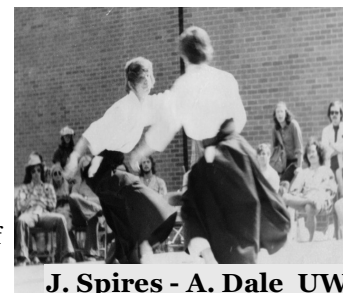
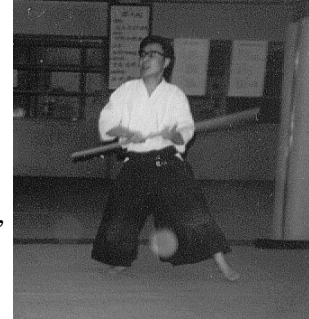
After our first class Hirata invited us to visit anytime. Needless to say we started attending his classes regularly.

Bernie's classes were Tue & Thurs 3-5. Hirata taught Mon-Wed-Friday 7-8 & 8-9. First hour was beginners second was continuing. Friday 8-9 was advanced and jo (short staff) class which we were permitted to join.

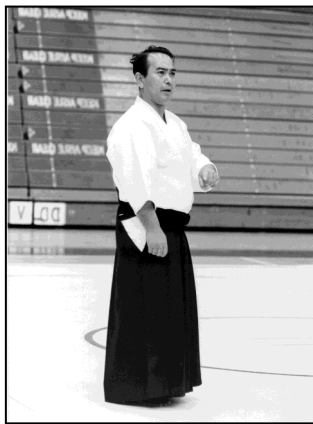
As the year went on, Bernie's police and undercover work required much of his time so he arranged for his group, Chuck, me, and two others at that time, to merge with the Seattle Aikikai. All our sessions were moved to the Budokan Judo Dojo. When Bernie stopped teaching we became full time students of Hirata sensei. Shortly after that Chuck and I joined John and Doug as being his favorite ukes for demonstrations and techniques. Hirata seemed to give us special attention

We found out that Hirata, though studying with O'sensei, was a disciple of Koichi Tohei, chief instructor of Aikido Hombu Dojo

(Headquarters). Hirata was one of his special students trained to spread Aikido outside of Japan. Though I don't



J. Spires - A. Dale UW



have any history on Hirata's background it was said Tohei took him under his wing after Hirata's parents died.

Hirata was sent by Tohei to Seattle to take over an Aikido club taught by Tom Katuoshi, brown belt. Tom's top two students were John Kanetomi and Doug Tsuboi. After Hirata arrived Tom was

promoted to shodan and shortly moved back to Hawaii. John and Doug continued on with Hirata.

In addition to Aikido, Hirata and his wife, Mihoko, taught the Suzuki Method of Violin that focuses on teaching children.

As we continued to study with Hirata sensei we had the luck to meet and learn from some of the top instructors from Aikido Hombu. Many were friends of his, but it was common for any instructor from Japan to pass through our school, teach a workshop and then move on.



All of these visiting instructors were Tohei's finest and many of them went on, founding their own branch and organizations of Aikido.

Of the instructors was Imazumei shihan, at that time he was considered Tohei's successor until he split and started his own method. Another great was Toyota shihan. Who also was thought to be on the track to succeed Tohei but after some disagreement founded his own school of Aikido. Koichi Kashiwaya was sent to



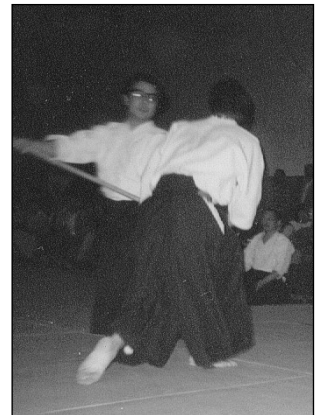
Opening demo for Tohei

assist Hirata and taught here for a while. He is currently the chief representative in the US of Tohei's organization: Shin Shin Toitsu Aikido and Kit Society.

One of my favorite visiting instructors

was Rod Kobayashi from California. I've never since seen an Aikidoka move that fast and gentle. Whenever Tohei would tour the U.S. Seattle would be his first stop. He taught 3 seminars here and we were lucky, not only to be his ukes but also hang around after classes and be at dinners and parties with him. Also whenever Tohei would show up we had a who's who of high level Aikido masters visiting and helping him out.

Chuck was attending the University of Washington at the time we started with Hirata and Chuck was encouraged to start the UW Aikido Club. Hirata would visit and teach once in a while. I'd skip school to help Chuck with the class and uke for him. Eventually I became chief instructor, as Chuck wasn't able to keep teaching.



In 1974 there was a big split in the Aikido world due to Tohei and the main headquarters and Ueshiba family having different thoughts on teaching Aikido and what to emphasize. This once big, happy, harmonious organization became a political mess. *(The split was so bad the Hombu wrote Tohei out of all future references in Aikido history!)*

Tohei's students or followers weren't permitted to train in the main headquarters. All Aikido students were forced to take sides. Hirata and the Seattle Aikikai, of course, were part of Tohei's new Shin Shin Toitsu Aikido (Mind & Body unified as one Aikido). During this time Tohei was in Seattle and I was promoted to 1st degree black belt from him. It was one of the first black belt certificates of his new organization.

Classes hence started to emphasize more on the mental and energetic aspects of the art instead of the functional part. Hombu



emphasized mostly the functional aspect. Shortly after this split most of Hirata's blackbelts realigned with the Aiki Hombu through Bernie Lau and formed the Washington Aikikai. We moved to the Seattle Dojo (Judo dojo) 1510 S. Washington St.