

Gratitude from Behind Masks

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Japan is primarily a peaceful and amiable country. However, the fight against the invisible corona virus continues. Not just Japan, but around the world the requests to “Please cooperate in not doing ~,” and “Please do ~,” make it feel as though various freedoms were being stolen from us. On the other hand, many things that I took for granted in the previous lifestyle were brought to my attention. For example, knowing that I am alive, and the patterns of my daily life, as well as being able to go where I wanted when I wanted, all of these things that used to be commonplace are now special, and it is hard to come to accept these changes. It is said that there is a high risk to people who have reached advanced ages, but I have not paid much attention to my age until now.

Under these circumstances, how do we live life with the same relaxed feeling, how do we follow the directives for business and social life, how do we continue to safely hold Aikido practice? These questions fill my mind. But listing out things we cannot do, over and over again, does nothing. We must give our best efforts towards what can be done now in these circumstances to move forward. When I think about the two-month period the dojo was required to be closed because of the Emergency Declaration, the current situation feels like a dream. Without comparing it to the regular times, when I compare it to the worst times my heart becomes light. With sufficient protections against the spread of infection and while wearing masks, the Aikido Hombu Dojo reopened for practice on June 1st. At first, the no-touch only practice consisting of *taisabaki* and other solo exercises felt stiff and constrained, and there was a fearful atmosphere. Even so, I found meaning in that type of practice, and as the situation changed while watching it closely, we have been able to slowly return to a more regular practice style. From July 27th through August 7th we held *shochugeiko*, midsummer intensive training, in which 77 people participated in one practice every day. (2019: 110 people). The joy that comes from being able to practice is a great, precious gift.

Originally the 13th International Aikido Summit (General Assembly Sept 25 – 28th, Seminars and *embukai* Sept 29 – Oct 4th) was to be held for 10 days. This year, all the events planned to be held in Japan were suspended, and in the July issue of the Aikido Newspaper reports of the situations in various countries by the Japanese teachers who live there were included. It can be clearly seen that not just in Japan, but all around the world people are wishing for a situation where they can freely practice. Even without being able to put on the International Aikido Summit, and although many people around the world are still unable to resume practices, I can feel the connections that tie together Aikido practitioners from around the world. Just from watching the videos Dojo-cho made, I can feel that connection.

While fervently hoping for the creation of a vaccine and medical treatment to become available, there is no way of knowing when it will happen. Even with that though, with our hearts as one in the intention to beat the corona virus, and doing what we can now, I plan to live each day with gratitude in my heart. I am thankful that in these times you also have not forgotten Aikido.