

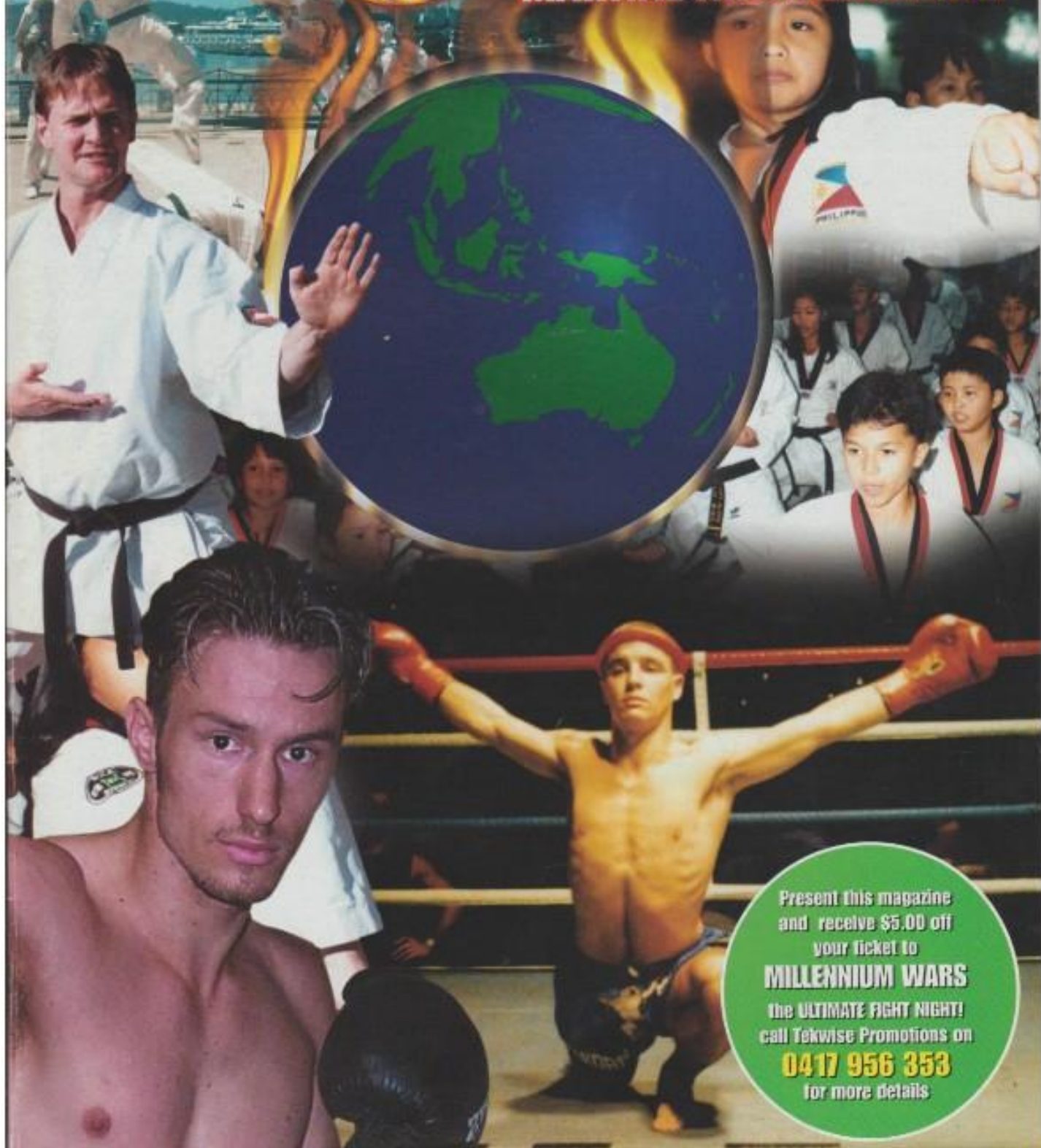
AUSTRALIA • MALAYSIA • PHILIPPINES

Issue No. 2 March 2000

THE

PHOENIX

MARTIAL ARTS MAGAZINE



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AIKI-JITSU : A Samurai Legacy

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Aiki-Jitsu is an abbreviation of the original name Daito Ryu Aikibujitsu.

It stirs the imagination to think of warring Samurai hacking and slashing with their deadly razor sharp katanas and one suddenly finding himself disarmed.

What good are blows and kicks against an armoured adversary?

So, blending with his opponent's movements he throws him violently to the ground leaving his attacker stunned and disarmed. With a swift slash of the fallen Samurai's own sword he quickly beheads him and returns to the fray.

Such a sight may have been seen at the battle of Kawanakajima in 1561. Many retainers of the Takeda family were present at this battle and it was the Takeda family who developed Daito ryu Aikibujitsu.

A vast amount of modern Karate, Judo and Ju-jitsu techniques were developed from Daito Ryu Aikibujitsu and modern aikido owes its very existence to the ancient art.

There is a Japanese proverb, "Furuki o tazune atarashiki o shiru." This means: "study the old to understand the new". If we follow this concept we will realise how watered down modern Aikido is.

Fortunately not all modern Aikido is soft. Shihan Toshishiro Obata has done much research into Daito Ryu Aikibujitsu and he is rediscovering many of the ancient techniques.

Obata had the privilege of being the "live-in apprentice" of Gozo Shioda who taught the combat effective techniques of the Takeda Samurai.

Master Shioda was the student of Morihei Uyeshiba the founder of modern Aikido. Uyeshiba was reputed to be the best student that the great Sokaku Takeda had. Uyeshiba taught in the manner of Master Takeda. In fact, his training methods were so tough and injuries so frequent and severe that his school was called "Jigoku Dojo" -the Hell Dojo.

Unfortunately after a so called religious experience Uyeshiba softened his teachings seeing his Aikido as a means of uniting people in universal love.

Some of his senior students not liking this watered down system, left him and founded their own styles continuing to teach in the old effective techniques with a few of their own ideas incorporated.

Gozo Shioda founded the Yoshinkan style of Aikido, whilst Kenji Tomiki actually devised a sporting system to his combat arts.

Yoshinkan Aikido is taught to the Japanese defence forces and various law enforcement agencies throughout the world. I have a sneaking suspicion that the Aikido we see Steven Segal use in his movies is the Yoshinkan style. Whilst many deride Segal's Aikido as "Hollywood martial arts", I personally believe his technique is very good.

In the harder styles of Aikido blows and kicks are used to initiate a throw or hold and to finish off a downed aggressor. Frequent mention is made of "Metsubushi" the smashing of the eyes. This is a blow to the front of the face or side of the head, usually a hammer fist or a one knuckle strike in the manner of Ipponken.

Hard style Aikidoka (Aikido practitioners) are taught to use feet, fists, knees, elbows, and even head butts, just like practitioners of the kicking and punching arts are. I have never seen these techniques taught or used in the softer Aikido systems.

When learning Aikido you will be taught how to flow "ki, how to lead your opponents "Ki" and how not to be "Aikied" by him. Now here we are entering the realms of the mystical I am not going to stick my neck out and say Ki is a load of rubbish. In my opinion what these exercises do is teach you to concentrate and focus your strength.

Flowing Ki: How to unbalance or deceive an opponent and make him or her move to your advantage.

Leading Ki: Not allowing your opponent to do this to you. Not being aikied by him. None of these techniques will stop a bullet, a knife or a punch or kick unless you shift out of the way, or somehow block them.

Aikido requires considerably less

strength than say Judo and this makes it suitable for women and the elderly. Some Aikido instructors say that if a person can lift 8kg they can perform any aiki technique. But Aikido requires speed and co-ordination.

Quite rapid changes of position are required to execute many of the techniques. The ability to breakfall is supposed to come naturally as one practises. This may be so in the soft styles but in the hard styles, just as in Judo, the student needs to be taught. Techniques should be selected for the older person. If, like myself, the older person has kept the flexibility it is okay but it has been my experience that most older people fall with all the grace of a plank of wood. This usually results in them hurting themselves and giving up.

The natural movements used in Aikido utilise centripetal and centrifugal forces. To explain, the action of the tornado is centripetal while the "throwing off" action of a rotating wheel is centrifugal. For practice, a distance of about two metres between partners is taken, both Aikidoka adopting either the left or right front facing posture. Then very much like one step sparring, one partner attacks, the other defends using the appropriate technique designated by the instructor. These are performed Kata style. As the student progresses the attacks are random and the counter technique spontaneous.

More advance training using no preset attacks which are met with purely reflexive defences. This advanced training continues so that as a practitioner improves he will be assailed by several attackers at the same time. This type of training is far removed from the Kata style of the beginners' classes.

It is fast and furious and most enjoyable. I will follow up this article with a series of instructional articles with photos from the basic stances and footwork to advanced techniques.

AJ = HARMONY KI = SPIRIT DO = WAY

