In January, 2015, we celebrated the first 50 years of aikido in Australia with a wonderful seminar in Melbourne led by Doshu Ueshiba Moriteru and attended by friends, trainees and teachers from around the world.

We welcomed the start of the next 50 years when successive generations will keep alive not only the form and spirit of aikido but also the heritage and example of Sugano Shihan and the other great teachers of his generation who worked so hard to ensure that people around the world have full access to this wonderful art.

We marked the celebration with an important forum – ‘The Journey of Women in Aikido’ – at which senior instructors from around the globe (who also happened to be women) shared and discussed ways we can all ensure that aikido is open, equal, positive and welcoming to both sexes.

I was very interested in the following: if women make up half the population of an average community, how come they make up such a small part of our aikido population? Are there things we are doing badly or wrong? Are there things we could be doing differently, or better? I’m inclined to agree with a close friend and fellow trainee who said to me years ago that she felt it very possible there might be qualities to aikido that would only become apparent when there were very high ranking females throughout the echelon of senior teachers around the world. This would take time, she added, and wasn’t a situation that could be contrived. It would come naturally.

Well, the world has changed since then, so that, while sadly acknowledging the passing of outstanding figures such as Sugano Sensei, we can also happily note increasing numbers of senior trainees, teachers and shihans who are female.

One night in our local dojo, I looked around and suddenly realised that I was the only male among the trainees. It doesn't happen all that often, but the point was that I hadn't noticed because the training was as great as ever. Aikido is no more the province or property of men than it is an
art that can only be understood by people who are Japanese. If it truly is, as O Sensei said, a universal idea, then it will only be completed when we can all contribute to and receive from it, freely and equally.

Sugano Sensei sometimes described aikido as a way ‘to cultivate a human being’. He didn’t say it was a way to cultivate men – or women – only. Aikido was for all of us.

The forum was a great success and allowed a number of important perspectives to be heard. In my own case, I found myself considering issues and situations experienced by many trainees that I never had to deal with in my own life simply because, as a male, I was not confronted by them.

At time of writing, I have not yet seen any of the essays that will appear in this book. So, as with the forum, I look forward with interest, excitement and the hope that this small volume will contribute real value to the future of aikido.

The Aiki Kai Australia Teaching Committee and Sugano Foundation Trustees believe that this is a wonderful initiative and recommend it to all students and instructors. We also thank the instructors from around the world who have made it possible, especially the editor, Linda Godfrey Sensei.
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