



BROOKLYN AIKIKAI JOURNAL VOL II.1 THE MIRACULOUS

AKKAI
VOL
II.1

DISSOLUTION

by Andrés Cruciani

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud states the following:

[A friend of mine] was sorry I had not properly appreciated the true source of religious sentiments. This, he says, consists in a peculiar feeling [. . .] which he would like to call a sensation of “eternity,” a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded—as it were, “oceanic.” This feeling, he adds, is a purely subjective fact, not an article of faith; it brings with it no assurance of personal immortality, but it is the source of the religious energy which is seized upon by the various Churches and religious systems.¹

I do not know whether what I experienced constituted a religious experience or a miracle, but had I been raised in a religious household, I am sure I would say: I felt God. Here is what happened.

I had been practicing Aikido for about seven years when my Sensei began training with me in a certain manner—a specific way—that I had never felt before. Aikido can be somewhat confusing. It can seem brutal; at other times, choreographed. Such observations on either end of the spectrum—brutal, fake—can be true, yet to really understand the art, one must feel it.

In any case, my Sensei had begun training with me in this certain way, with a very light touch. I don’t know what it looked like, but the feeling of it—soft, receptive enough to feel the touch of a finger—was completely new. It was as though the art, which to a certain extent I thought I knew, had blossomed a flower I’d never seen before. Having grown accustomed to a rather brutal form of the art, it had never occurred to me there could be something so delicate and graceful within it.

I remember one instance in particular when Sensei was doing a standing *ikkajo*² with me. I was balanced on one foot, responding like a seesaw to the force he was exerting on my elbow, yet his touch kept getting softer and softer, and I was still supposed to feel the force and respond accordingly. The grip and touch on my elbow got lighter and lighter until there was barely anything to feel, yet I did feel it, this soft force, until, mindless, feeling without thinking, it seemed as though we were moving in unison. As though between my response and his force—light as trying to catch a bubble—there was no disconnect, no gap between subject and object. As soon as the training was over, I knew something quite wonderful had occurred.

¹ Freud, Sigmund, and James Strachey (trans.). *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010).

² An elbow lock.

I became rather obsessed with this style of training, this foreign Aikido territory. It was extraordinarily addictive, this melding of minds and bodies; this dissolution of barrier between action and reaction, between one body and another. Every class I attended, I hoped that he would train with me like that again.

Finally, after a week or two, I couldn't keep it to myself any longer.

"Sensei," I said to him one day before class, "the way you've been training with me is amazing. Can I train like that with someone else?"

"Try it," he said, smiling. "Choose a person and work with them the whole class and see what happens."

That class, after the technique was demonstrated, I bowed into the person next to me. Let's call her C. I thought to myself: *I'll try it with you.*

We began to train, and I imitated the way Sensei had been working with me. As I trained with C, my touch kept getting softer and softer, but I wanted her to react to this gentle touch. I wanted her to feel even the smallest amount of pressure. Our round of training ended together, another technique was demonstrated, and despite someone else bowing in to me, I turned and bowed in to C once more. So the class went: my touch getting lighter, more moves being demonstrated, me bowing back in to C until other students, perhaps offended, stopped bowing in to us. As I trained with her, I remembered Sensei describing this type of training as "fine-tuning an instrument," and, as my force progressively lightened, this is what I felt. When it was her turn to practice the techniques, she trained with me in the same manner—tuning me to the faintest of touches—until, finally, by the end of class, I felt as though we had recreated that sensation of dissolution between us.

Class ended. More occurred before what I am about to tell, but it's for another article—for what I've been aiming at this whole piece is actually not what happened at the dojo but what happened on the walk home.

It was night. It had recently rained, and the street's asphalt, the leaves of trees, the parked cars, all of it was shining, glistening. But it was not just the rain, for I have tried to recreate this vision on many a rainy night. No, there was something else in what I saw: it was all *resplendent*, glowing, and I was suddenly struck by the notion, the *feeling*, that everything I saw was of a single source, springing from the same well, and that all of it was pulsing and brimming. It was all one, and it was all marvelous and beautiful. I was filled with joy, euphoric.

I had experienced this after *sesshin* (sitting zazen for days). But this was different. It was after only an hour of Aikido. It felt wonderful. It felt precarious. I kept walking. The sensation, the vision, continued.

At a street corner, a homeless man called to me. I approached. I felt like I was talking to myself. I don't remember exactly how it went. I think I gave him some change. But I remember he wanted more. Having only a twenty-dollar bill on me, I said no.

The feeling, slightly but definitely, began to fade. As I arrived home, my girlfriend texted me asking me to meet up with her and her friend. I obtusely and obnoxiously replied that I was having an experience and did not want to lose it. The sensation continued, though again, it lessened. I went to sleep soon afterwards, and when I woke up it was completely gone. I have tried to re-create this experience many times since. Yet each time I aimed at re-creation, I had a worse result, for I was training, *being*, with a goal. With C, I had been training in a certain way but certainly not with the expectation of an oceanic oneness. I have felt instances of it since but never of such a duration. I do not know what it was, miracle or otherwise, and I do not expect it again, but I keep myself open to its recurrence, knowing that should it arise, the price for it will be much higher than twenty dollars or a drink. Let it come.