

The Joy of being Uchideshi at Kobayashi Dojo Anastassia Ignatova

People often ask me why I practice aikido. My initial thought has always been: For pleasure, for the joy of doing it, for self-improvement and finding inner peace. That answer was not very popular though and during the last 10 years I have been practicing aikido I learned the well liked one: For self-defense and to get stronger.

At the end of my stay as Uchideshi at Kobayashi dojo I feel confident to use only my first thought answer now on. After intense practices with so many people, under the leadership of different instructors, I finally understand that there are much more people to practice aikido with joy and mainly for the joy. At first place, it is impossible to not sense Kobayashi Soshinhan great happiness spread all the time he is around. Once cannot but admire a person with such great respect and warm look, with soft touch and straight results.

On the other hand Hiroaki Kobayashi Dojochō have always impressed me during each of his seminars I attended. I did not expect he would impress me even more when he is on his territory. Practice around and with him seems to make people comfortable and safe. Watching his movements, so quick and in the same time very precise, makes you understand in a way the beauty of Aikido.

I feel more than lucky to have been part of the practices led by Kobayashi father and son during this month.



Uchideshi life is exciting and tiring at once. However, hard trainings and work around dojos seems to have rolled swiftly. We were only two Uchideshis during this period (few days before our departure a third one -Erica, joined us) and we have must of share all good and all tough moments. Happily we made a great team with Nikola san. Having numerous duties related to the good looking and good running dojos, and happy Senseis, turned to have a positive effect on us. We got pretty organized and on time (with small exceptions of course).

That was the perfect opportunity to be part and to observe closely almost every detail of how dojo runs, which will be very helpful once I open my one dojo back home. Regarding the lack of sleep, as a mom of two bright kids, this did not affect me. I would say I had fairly enough non-disturbed sleeping hours.

Uchideshi obligations would rather be hard, close to impossible, to accomplish without the guidance and close inspections of Kasahara sensei. There

were a lot of strict looks together with useful hints in Bulgarian language. One of the things I will remember from him is that we are training martial art and thus, we must accomplish things as artists.

Uchideshi experience does not consist only of practices and dojo tasks.

One of my very thrilling out of practice event was the participation to the Honozumo. Kobayashi Soshinhan invited uchideshis and a couple of other members of Kobayashi dojo to the Ceremonial Sumo Tournament that took place at Yasukuni Jinja Shrine. We had exceptionally good places thanks to the generosity of Soshinhan. Something more, we were able to shake hands with sumo wrestlers and I even had a small talk with Aoyama Koosuke who is Bulgarian.



The other highly pleasant cultural experience I had was the attendance to a Tea ceremony. I was invited to, together with Nikola san, by one of the volunteers teaching Japanese language in the community center we used to visit. Takako san hosted us at her home. For the female part we were proposed to wear a traditional kimonos. As a typical girl, I totally loved this part.



Then tea ceremony started, we were served a meal, including sake and small sweets. Our host was so precise and sophisticated while preparing the tea that I could not remove my eyes from her. At the end the hot Matcha tea just cleared all my tastes and my mind.

I learned so many things during my stay as uchideshi in Kobayashi dojo.

I learned a lot of Aikido techniques, and then I learned that Aikido is not only techniques. Aikido is spirit to feel and to spread. Yes, during ones Aikido way, as everything in life, there are obstacles and hard times. However, keeping high spirit and being positive makes our day a smiley one and every

overpassed difficulty is a small step in our personal growth.

At the end of my stay I feel:

grateful for this opportunity;
peaceful and proud of myself;
thankful to everyone I have the chance to met;

Thank you Kobayashi Soshinhan, thank you Hiroaki Kobayashi Dojocho, thank you Yamawaki sensei, thank you Kasahara sensei, thank you all other Kobayashi dojos' instructors and aikodokas! Thank you for letting me be part of your lives and culture.

どうも ありがとう ございました

P.S. This days I was in Japan were quite remarkable ones – on April 1, the new Reiwa era was announced; on May 1, was the day of the new Emperor's accession; this year, 1019, was the 50th anniversary of the Passing of Founder of Aikido, Grand Master Morihei Ueshiba; Lucky, lucky me!