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February 6, 1989, heralds the beginning of the Chinese New Year, 4687. To the millions of Chinese who have a deep and abiding faith in the ancient knowledge of the *I-Ching* and Chinese Zodiac this is the year of the Earth Serpent.

Persons born in this year are said to become deep thinkers, who speak little but have tremendous wisdom. They usually have a profound sympathy for others. Determined in what they do, they hate to fail at any task. As with any serpent, the word is *caution!* The year will be best spent in reflection and planning rather than overt or brash actions. Earth Serpent years are said to be ones in which the arts are often more prosperous than business. We shall have to wait and see.

It has been my experience that the Chinese astrological calendar and its predictions are usually much more accurate in forecasting trends in a person's life and society than its Western counterpart. I suppose part of this is due to the fact that the Western, or European, astrological system is founded upon such pseudo-scientific principles as the gravitational pull of stars on newborns.

The Chinese way seems much more practical. Their system is based upon thousands of years of observations of nature, mathematics, observable phenomena of cyclical change and human psychology. Chinese calendars are divided into twelve divisions, each assigned an animal of the Chinese Zodiac. These are: Dragon, Serpent, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Bird, Dog, Boar, Rat, Bull, Tiger, and Hare. Each of these creatures is used symbolically to represent states of change in philosophy, psychology and certain tendencies in the behavior of matter and

## AIKIDO AND THE CHINESE ZODIAC

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energy in the physical universe.

The meaning of each animal symbol depends on the four seasons and the five element theory of Chinese medicine and cosmology, which are linked to the timeless wisdom of the Book of Changes, or *I-Ching*. It should be noted that the twelve animals, as associated with the calendar, correspond not to the months of the solar year as used in the West, but to the lunar calendar. Lunar months, measured in increments of thirty days (approximately), do not coincide with those of the Western solar calendar or the astrological signs of European origins.

Blending the twelve animal symbols with the elements creates a cycle of sixty years ( $5 \times 12 = 60$ ). Each animal will be associated during this period with each of the five elements. This will give rise to five very specific characteristics or personalities being associated with a particular animal over a sixty year time span. Thus, we have the year of the Earth Serpent in 1989, the Iron Serpent in 2001, the Water Serpent in 2013, the Wood Serpent in 2025 and the Fire Serpent in 2037.

This 60 year span is significant as the Chinese considered it the normal span of a human life. Those living beyond their sixtieth birthday were said to be entering a second phase of life in which their spiritual nature becomes ascendant. Animal symbolism for the sexagenarian during these higher years also takes on more spiritual significance during this period.

This issue of *IAM* focuses upon the art of Aikido. Let us study the Chinese Zodiac as it relates to the birth and life work of Aikido's founder, Morihei Ueshiba.

Ueshiba was neither strong nor powerful as a child. In his youth, to counter his physical weakness he trained in the hard forms of martial arts and became quite muscular and aggressive. During middle age he tempered somewhat and developed what some might describe as a spiritual zeal. This eventually transformed his external hard martial

knowledge into an internal spiritual quest. At his death he had become a symbol of peace and loving compassion to his followers.

### UESHIBA'S ZODIAC 1883, YEAR OF THE WATER GOAT

The birth year sets the tone for one's life. Those born in the year of the Water Goat are said to be possessed of the qualities of sincerity and sensibility. They are almost always nature lovers (Ueshiba practiced Shinto, a form of nature worship). They prefer peace to war, calm to storm, and art to business. They thrive on country living and, as Thoreau said, "March to the beat of a different drummer." The Goat person is unrivaled in compassion and tenderness. Add the element of Water and we have a personality that is capable of extinguishing any and all opposition that has a violent or Fire-like nature. The almost magical martial arts ability to completely neutralize an attack comes from the principle of Water (the Aikidoist) absorbing and redirecting an attacking force (Fire).

### 1943, YEAR OF THE WATER GOAT

During the first 60 years of his life, Ueshiba molded his system, blending martial arts, philosophy and religion. Now in the second phase of his life, he began the real spiritual journey that was to bring Aikido out of the realm of the ordinary martial arts and make it the first true internal Japanese martial arts system, based upon the principles of harmony and compassion for one's fellow man. He had 26 years in this "second life time" to enjoy and to teach.

### 1969, THE YEAR OF THE EARTH BIRD

Ueshiba died. It was in his last year that he said he wanted his art to make men free like the spirit of a bird that is unbound by any earthly limitations.