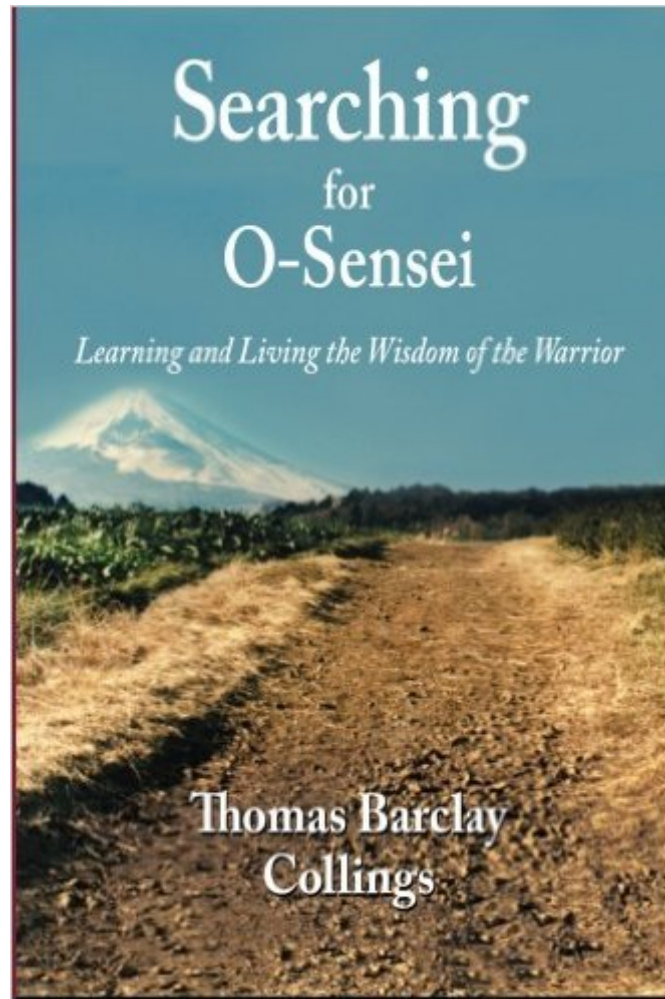


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# Searching For O'Sensei: Learning And Living The Wisdom Of The Warrior



## Synopsis

Whether or not you have an interest in martial arts, you will find your heart and mind stirred by *Searching for O-Sensei: Learning and Living the Wisdom of the Warrior*. With an engaging blend of honesty, humor, and compassion, author Thomas Collings shares his long journey of dramatic encounters with martial arts and Zen masters throughout Japan and China. Return with him to the "mean" streets of New York City where this most unusual Zen street cop must use the ancient wisdom of his teachers to survive violent situations, and resolve life or death conflicts. *Searching for O-Sensei* is both an engrossing memoir and a profound exploration of teachings by the martial arts legend and spiritual teacher Morihei Ueshiba, who infused tactical skills of the warrior with life changing spiritual insights. A lifelong fascination with mystical traditions of Asia takes Collings on adventures which offer a rare glimpse into the lives of several extraordinary 20th century Asian masters. After years immersed in Asian Zen, sword, and martial arts study, the author finds himself back in New York City as a law enforcement officer during the height of the crack cocaine epidemic. His daily encounters with addicts, drug dealers and parole violators test the depth of his warrior skills, wisdom, and commitment to the spiritual principles embodied by his teachers. Ride along with a peace officer caught in a violent world, using wisdom gained from "budo" training and the teachings of O-Sensei, to bring awareness and clarity to the "fog of war" that engulfed many drug infested neighborhoods during the 1980's and 90's. The reader shares in a wealth of examples how these principles can manage volatile situations and aggressive behavior. Collings also examines the exhibitionistic and "performance orientation" of modern martial arts, offering ways in which O-Sensei's "battlefield awareness" approach can refocus training on more practical skills for protection and defusing violent situations.

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## Customer Reviews

Full disclosure first: Thomas Collings and I have not met, but I think it is very possible that on numerous occasions, he walked out of a room five minutes before I entered, or vice versa. His years aikido in the 1970's, at least, and his later career are rather startling parallels to my own. So this review may be a little more personal than some. As some of the readers may be aware, I wrote a book entitled *Dueling with O-sensei*. I think that the similitude of the titles is fortunate, because it shows how two people can encounter the same people and situations and experience them differently. Tom's title reflects a man maybe more at ease with studying a path of knowledge than mine was. I went kicking and stomping all the way. Enough about 'us' - what of his book? Tom is so spot on regarding the milieu of aikido training in NYC and in Japan at the Aikikai headquarters. For me, one of the highlights of the book was his character sketches of men I knew and some I studied with. Knowing these people well, I can attest to how well he portrayed them - and with such a generous spirit. He truly was on a path of learning, and therefore, he can write about even negative experiences as essential lessons that he needed. If there is any criticism I might have, the chapters on personages was a little unbalanced. There were people I wished he would have written more about. After a longer character sketch of five or six pages, a one page chapter on an equally remarkable person was a slight disappointment. Nonetheless, he was writing on how significantly the person affected him. Real life is not always balanced. Tom has had a several decade career in law enforcement - in particular parole/probation.

Searching for O'Sensei: Learning and Living the Wisdom of the Warrior  
Thomas Barclay Collings  
Long Island Asian Studies Center, LLC 2014, Long Island, NY, 337 pp.  
Since the early Eighties, a surprisingly extensive literature has grown up around the Japanese martial art of Aikido, and the man regarded as the Founder of Aikido by the art's practitioners, Ueshiba Morihei. Most of those works fall into one of a few, by now predictable, categories: breathless quasi-official hagiographic accounts of Ueshiba's life and exploits; sectarian manuals of technical instruction intended as reference works for students associated with a particular teacher; rather woolier and yet more thinly sourced works purporting to reveal the spiritual roots, trunk, branches, and fruit of the thought of the Avatar Ueshiba; and a subgenre of memoirs of Ueshiba and his teachings primarily intended to advertise the critical respects in which the memoirist was closer to Ueshiba than any of

his fellow students, and thus, the most appropriate vessel for conveying his teaching to the broken and imbalanced world which hungrily and desperately awaits this revelation. In some of these works, whether because of a lack of material on any particular of these topics, or a perceived need to cover all the bases, the author has decided to shoehorn all of these elements into his manuscript or, to paraphrase Norman Mailer, these "Advertisements for Himself.

Searching for Oâ™Sensei is an entertaining read, as Mr. Tom Collings takes us on his personal odyssey of beginning martial arts as a teenager in New York, traveling to Japan to study with some of the most notable Aikido teachers in the world and of returning to New York to apply aiki principles to real life situations in police work. Tom describes his experience cross-training in Chinese internal disciplines and how it integrates into his practice. He talks about Oâ™Senseiâ™s message of compassion and the heightened awareness that comes from staying in touch with the flow of universal energy. Tom gave plenty of examples of how his interpretation of Takemusu Aiki played out in his work as a parole officer. Tom writes about the day-to-day practice at the Aikikai Headquarters in Tokyo, following Chiba Sensei to live in a remote Japanese village to practice Zazen and aikido, finally ending up in Oâ™Senseiâ™s country dojo to study under Saito Sensei. The reader gets to be a fly on the wall in many of the best aikido dojos in the world. You get a personal look at the teachers and high ranking students of the day. Additionally, I enjoyed his anecdotes about teaching English in Japan. One really gets to know what it was like to be non-Japanese, making a living in Japan to support a martial arts lifestyle. I laughed so hard as his stories reminded me of the experiences that my friends and I had, teaching English in Japan. He described many teachers and training partners both Japanese and Non-Japanese that I knew well. In most cases the reader gets a fairly accurate picture of all the notable characters. My only criticism is that I think he is a little too kind in his description of some of these characters (including myself).

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