

SMAA JOURNAL



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ANNOUNCEMENTS

2020 SMAA DUES

Membership fees were due on January 1, 2020. Please be sure to pay your SMAA dues on time. You can either send a check to our headquarters or pay online at <http://www.smaa-hq.com/payments.php>. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and PayPal. This is a quick and safe way to make your annual SMAA membership payment.

We appreciate our members paying dues promptly. It makes life easier for the SMAA staff of volunteers, and it is representative of the type of self-discipline we are cultivating through the study of traditional Japanese martial arts.

DONATIONS & TAX DEDUCTIONS

The SMAA is a federally tax-exempt, nonprofit corporation. As such, your donations to our association are tax deductible. Send your donations, in the form of a check or money order (made out to SMAA), to our headquarters in Michigan. We'll send you a letter back acknowledging your contribution, which you can then use for tax purposes. We hope you'll support the SMAA in our goal to preserve and promote traditional budo and koryu bujutsu.

E-MAIL

Please make sure we have your correct e-mail address. Without this address, we can't e-mail you the *SMAA Journal*.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SMAA

1. To promote and aid in the growth of Japan's traditional arts and ways.
2. To assist the public in achieving spiritual growth and physical development through budo/bujutsu.
3. To further friendship and understanding between Asian and Western martial artists.
4. To establish goodwill and harmony among martial artists of various systems.
5. To offer Western martial artists access to legitimate budo/bujutsu organizations and teachers in Japan.
6. To give practitioners of authentic budo/bujutsu recognition for their years of devotion to these arts.

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修道館武道会

Do you have a new e-mail address? Have you sent it to hedavey@aol.com? If not, we also won't be able to send you SMAA publications, so please be sure to let us know if your e-mail address changes.

SMAA PATCHES

The SMAA HQ is selling official SMAA patches for your gi. They're great looking patches that embody the spirit and honor instilled in members of our group. They won't fade or bleed when you bleach them, and yet we've been able to keep the cost down. Each patch is basically a 3 ½ inch circle featuring our logo below:



Our patches were produced using state of the art digitizing and ultra-modern technology to create an accurate and attractive embroidered emblem. They feature tight stitches, sharp detail, clean lettering, and top quality craftsmanship. There's no jagged stitching, but we've still got plenty of stitches so that the background doesn't show through.

The patch should be worn on the left side of your gi jacket near your heart. SMAA policy mandates only one patch per uniform to maintain the sense of dignity associated with traditional budo.

These new patches are a great way to show your respect and enthusiasm for our group; we hope all of our members will order at least one. *And the best part is the patches are only \$5.00 (US) each!* (E-mail shudokan@smaa-hq.com about special shipping for international orders.)

To order, go to the "Payments" section of www.smaa-hq.com or send a check or money order made out to "SMAA" to:

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Have you been to the SMAA Facebook page? If not, you're missing out on the latest SMAA news, features, videos, photos, and information. It's easy and safe to join Facebook, and all you need to do is click the "Like" button to become a follower of our Facebook page. This is the fastest way to get SMAA news and updates, and we hope you'll drop by <https://www.facebook.com/ShudokanMartialArtsAssociation> and check it out. Once you're on Facebook, we hope you'll share our page with your friends and help us promote the SMAA.

SMAA ONLINE PAYMENTS

Did you know you can pay for your annual dues at our website using PayPal or a major credit card? You can, and you can also pay for gi patches and promotions in the same way. This is a much faster, and in some ways more secure, means of sending money to our headquarters. We hope more of our members will make use of this feature. Just drop by <http://smaa-hq.com/payments.php> for more information.

SMAA YOUTUBE CHANNEL

修道館武道会

Shudokan Martial Arts Association

Want to see some great videos of SMAA teachers, officials, and members? Now you can by visiting our YouTube channel. We're Shudokan1994, because 1994 is the year the SMAA was founded.

To see video of SMAA teachers and members, go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg5NIka6Ge0&list=PLS11_XCH8RkI868tRKZ0fdJFSeFGyNZ0o

To see video of the amazing experts that trained leading SMAA officials and teachers, go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcE7zBhv9Hs&list=PLS11_XCH8RkIV8liNZoXI93WI79BLE1NZ

POWER SENSEI NEWS

Guy Power Sensei is the Co-director of the SMAA Iaido Division. He was recently interviewed by *Martial Arts of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. Read the interview at <https://maytt.home.blog/2020/08/24/interview-with-guy-power-his-iaido-journey/>.

Power Sensei is a direct disciple of Nakamura Taizaburo Sensei. Nakamura Sensei, Hanshi/tenth dan Toyama Ryu Iaido, was the founder of Nakamura Ryu Batto-do and the leader of the International Iai-Batto-Do Federation. Iaido is a modern form of Japanese swordsmanship, while batto-do equally emphasizes combat effectiveness, self-cultivation, and cutting of objects. Both disciplines are designed to cultivate the mind and body through the use of the sword.

Power Sensei received a Renshi title/license and a seventh dan in Toyama Ryu and an okuden certificate of proficiency in Nakamura Ryu batto-do. In 1994, he received a densho (a classical catalog of a ryu's techniques commonly given as a sort of high-level diploma) from the founder of Nakamura Ryu. He is one of only 50 people in history, and he is the only non-Japanese, to have received this honor from Nakamura Taizaburo Sensei. Power Sensei was

appointed by Nakamura Sensei, just before he left Japan, to head the International Iai-Batto-Do Federation in the USA.

SMAA BOKKEN WORKSHOPS

We hope you enjoyed the free SMAA Bokken Workshops offered by Nicklaus Suino Sensei, SMAA Iaido Division hachidan. The online classes took place each Wednesday evening from August 19 through September 16, 2020. They were well-attended, and we hope to present more similar events in the future.

The idea behind these workshops was that training with the bokken, "wooden sword," would be something that could be conveyed to some degree, at least at a basic level, using Zoom video conferencing. While this format has obvious limitations, we're all experiencing a new way of living brought on by a pandemic, which requires some modifications in behavior if we're to continue to practice budo.

Bokken training is useful for students of Japanese sword arts like Iaido, kendo, and koryu kenjutsu. However, any martial arts student can benefit from studying exercises using a bokken, a common and safer substitute for an actual samurai sword. No prior experience was needed for these workshops.



Suino Sensei teaching Iaido

Training with a bokken can be a useful supplement to many types of martial arts. It can increase balance, coordination, and concentration, while you learn more about an important aspect of old Japan and samurai culture. Plus, with many dojo around the world unable to open, Suino Sensei's workshops

were a valuable means of continuing martial arts training during the pandemic. Unique and free workshops like the ones offered by Suino Sensei are just one of the many benefits of belonging to the Shudokan Martial Arts Association, a nonprofit organization.

KATA GEIKO AND SEISHIN TANREN

By H. E. Davey

Kata (形) is one of the most common words that you'll hear in association with both the ancient martial arts (koryu bujutsu) and their modern offshoots (gendai budo or shin budo). Kata means "form," as in the formal practice of prearranged techniques. It is universally used in traditional Japanese martial arts as a key method of training the mind and body.

I realize that some contemporary martial sports place less emphasis on kata, especially in the West, but this is a relatively recent development and one not necessarily endorsed by top teachers in Japan. And even in these martial sports, kata continues to exist in some manner.

I'm also aware that Ueshiba Morihei Sensei, aikido's founder, is quoted as saying something along the lines of, "Aikido has no form." But this can be interpreted literally or in a more esoteric and philosophical sense, with the latter being something that Ueshiba Sensei was fond of doing. Regardless, the fact remains that his prior training in Daito Ryu was based on kata geiko (形稽古), "kata-style practice." That's how he developed his legendary skill, and the same can be said of the Tenjin Shin'yo Ryu and Kito Ryu that were studied by judo's founder, Kano Jigoro Sensei. Both forms of ancient jujutsu also base their curriculum on kata geiko.

What's more, after Ueshiba Sensei passed away, several offshoots of his original aikido created kata as a means of more effectively handing down what

he taught. And even in aikido dojo that don't use the term kata, or that don't officially have set kata to be learned, students are still essentially engaging in kata geiko.

Members of such dojo commonly will practice a series of techniques that they'll be tested on for kyu and dan ranks. These sets of test techniques, which are performed in a prescribed sequence and in a predetermined way, are more or less kata. And in each class, the sensei will demonstrate some of these techniques in a precise manner, which the students will then try to copy repeatedly. This is kata geiko regardless of how it's described.

KATA GEIKO: AN OMNIPRESENT TRAINING METHOD

Many martial arts enthusiasts have heard the term kata used in karate-do, where kata are often a series of predetermined solo techniques directed toward imagined opponents. Karate-do is an Okinawan variation of Chinese martial arts, which also place a heavy emphasis on solo training. Traditional Japanese martial arts, however, are frequently different from this.

While individual kata practice exists in Japan, aside from arts like karate-do, iaido, and kyudo, it is less common. In judo, jujutsu, aikido, kendo, koryu bujutsu, and more, kata training typically involves two people. The opponent is actual, not imagined, which allows participants to learn to control distance and timing.

In the martial system I learned, students start by practicing handed down sequences of paired techniques, which are designed to internalize a principle (or principles). Once these principles are absorbed, advanced practitioners create personal variations, such as applying a throw or immobilization against a different attack than is found in the classical kata. Eventually, students practice randori, in which they defend against any unexpected attack and intuitively create techniques in the moment (based on principles internalized through kata training).

Kata-based practice is a time-honored, intelligent, and progressive way of building up skill in a martial art. The kata are taught in a specific sequence, allowing students to gradually and scientifically develop their abilities in a way that's easily understood. And the ultimate purpose of kata geiko is seishin tanren (精神鍛錬), "to forge the spirit." If you're just getting started in Japanese martial arts, you might wonder why that's important.

SEISHIN TANREN

You probably know that most Japanese martial arts can be traced to the feudal-era military training of the bushi or samurai, Japan's medieval warriors. This is certainly the case with koryu bujutsu, ancient martial traditions established before the Meiji Restoration in 1868. And while it's true that some modern budo created after this date moved rather far afield from their ancient ancestors, everything comes from something, and budo comes from the age-old teachings of koryu bujutsu. This means modern budo is at least indirectly influenced by samurai culture and mentality as well.

Some people mistakenly believe that the samurai were only concerned with physical training and combat application. While this might be true for some martial traditions, others had a workable

spiritual component. This isn't a recent development. The question is why.

Traditional Japanese martial arts, as opposed to some martial sports, are concerned with living and dying, in that the samurai had to face the reality of death more than most people. In this respect, martial arts that evolved from samurai practices are similar to religion, which also deals with death. Similar doesn't mean the same, and few forms of koryu bujutsu or gendai budo are actual religions, but they do often have a spiritual aspect to help students find calmness in action and the ability to face adversity with composure.

Without this capacity for calmness under pressure, no martial arts technique will work in real combat. We will simply freeze.

But not every martial arts school recognizes this. At my dojo, students practice meditation and exercises to aid in controlling the mind, because without mental control, kata geiko is rarely effective. This isn't something that can be fully resolved with hard, aggressive classes, because regardless of the severity of the practice, it can't truly recreate the chaotic stress of combat. A different approach is needed for practical martial arts, and this approach can also tremendously help us in our lives.

And all of this is why the SMAA promotes training based around the two central pillars of classical Japanese martial arts: kata geiko and seishin tanren. The use of handed-down kata helps our members, regardless of division, to forge their spirits to face the stress of combat and the uncertainties of life. In this way, folks in the SMAA learn to protect themselves, and live well, while they develop the spiritual strength needed to make a positive contribution to their communities and the world as a whole.

THE BODY IN BUDO

By H. E. Davey

It's clear that in budo, as well as in daily existence, the mind motivates and controls the body. It is equally obvious that a positive, focused mind will have a stronger and more positive effect on the body. Nevertheless, unless the body is in its right, natural, and optimal condition, it will often fail to quickly, accurately, and competently react to the commands of even the most concentrated mind. The innate harmony that exists between mind and body, which is one of the secrets behind the mesmerizing power of martial arts, is weakened by an inefficient use of the body. So, let's look at the role of the body in budo.

USING THE BODY IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

As human beings, we're born, live, and die as part of nature. This is fairly obvious, but many individuals fall short of considering its real meaning as well as how it relates directly to their lives. That is, simply being part of nature is no guarantee that we'll act as if we're part of nature, i.e., naturally. Plants or animals rarely act in an unnatural manner which is contrary to their true makeup. Human beings are also natural beings, but at the same time, we're conscious entities. We therefore have free will and must make the choice to not merely be part of nature, but to faithfully follow the laws of nature.

In many ways, to relax and follow our true character is to be in accord with nature. Relaxation is essential for mastering budo, and while many teachers of the martial arts recognize this, they're often at a loss as to how they should teach it. However, without a relaxed condition, it's difficult to achieve speed, stability, and power in koryu bujutsu or modern budo.

These are, moreover, established arts of self-protection, but the concept of self-protection must extend to other aspects of life beyond physical

combat. Even if the student of Japanese martial arts can easily defeat one or several opponents, this has little meaning if he or she is incapacitated by stress-related ailments, such as high blood pressure or chronic ulcers, which may indicate that the individual has failed to derive all of the other potential benefits from budo. Ultimately, the concept of self-protection must be broad enough to encompass defenses against both physical and mental illnesses, including stress-related afflictions. While few people experience regular physical attacks, most people are "attacked" by stress on a daily basis, and budo (when it is correctly practiced) can help them to overcome nervousness and tension.

In fact, if the martial artist doesn't learn to remain composed during moments of extreme stress, it's doubtful that any of the techniques that he or she has studied will be of much use. Basically, the mind moves the body, while the body acts as a reflection of the mind. Thus, if we lock up mentally in a traumatic situation, we freeze physically as well, and we will be unable to execute any effective action.

Many may realize this, but few seem capable of actually achieving relaxation in action. This isn't because relaxation is unnatural or especially difficult. On the contrary, the difficulty often arises from certain mistaken beliefs and incorrect habits (such as sitting and/or standing with the shoulders slightly raised, which produces tension, stiff shoulders, and headaches; instead of relaxing and letting the shoulders fall into their proper place naturally). For example, many people, either consciously or unconsciously, believe that relaxation is comfortable but also impotent. At the very least, they seem to feel that relaxation doesn't allow a person to manifest great physical power. Some people, in addition, have come to believe that when they're relaxed, they aren't working hard or doing their best.

Once this idea becomes part of one's subconscious, it influences all of a person's conscious actions. Therefore, in an emergency or stressful situation, we find ourselves unable to relax even if we want to. One of the fundamental tenets of budo holds that as we deliberately and consciously train ourselves to relax and remain calm during attack, we also cultivate the ability to relax under stress as a subconscious habit, which beneficially affects our daily lives.

POSITIVE AND FUNCTIONAL RELAXATION

At the same time, it's important to realize that both positive and negative forms of relaxation are possible. However, for many individuals, the distinction between the two isn't clear. Clarifying the difference between these two conditions has been addressed in koryu bujutsu since ancient times. The *Tengu-geijutsu-ron*, written in 1730, states, "Weakness and softness are not the same. Rest and slackness again are not the same. Rest does not let go the living Ki; slackness is near to dead Ki."(1) (Ki—氣—is a common word in a number of ancient martial arts. It means "life energy.")

Positive relaxation implies a dynamic posture in which the mind and body are in harmony. When the mind and body function as a single unit, we're in our most natural and relaxed state, but we are also filled with power. Negative relaxation is to relax without this state of harmony. It is a state of both physical and mental limpness, one that amounts to surrendering vigor, while positive relaxation is a condition that's filled with vitality but free from unnecessary tension.

In martial arts, and in everyday life, we need to realize a posture and attitude that's not tense but also not limp—an "alive" condition which is balanced between tension and collapse. Relaxation and collapse aren't the same conditions, and each produces different results in terms of mind-body unity and the flow of life energy.

HARMONIZING WITH GRAVITY AND THE HARA

To continue, one of nature's laws is that of gravity. Everything, including the human body, gravitates. In other words, the weight of objects is naturally inclined to settle downward. This simple observation has the potential to produce profound changes in the way one chooses to function in life and in martial arts.

Because everything in nature tends to settle or fall downward, to relax and harmonize with nature allow the weight of the body to settle downward in a natural, relaxed way. Any object, such as the human body, has a center of gravity. However, a stable and therefore calm object's center of gravity has settled internally to a relatively low point, while an unstable object possesses a higher center of gravity.

If we adopt a fully erect, aligned posture that doesn't sag or cause us to slump, our upper body's weight settles at a point below the navel. This spot equals our physical center of gravity and center of balance. In koryu bujutsu and gendai budo, it's commonly referred to as one's hara (腹), and this concept has a long and complex tradition in Japan. Kyudo (Japanese archery) authority, Jackson S. Morisawa Sensei writes:

The Japanese have a saying, 'Keep your mind in your belly.' It means to concentrate oneself in the 'Hara' which is the center of one's spiritual energy. The spirit is the controlling agent of our existence and it must be mobile ("no stopping") in any place at any moment . . . However, if one consciously imprisons the mind in the lower region of the abdomen, it will be prevented from operating elsewhere. From the Hara, let the mind fill the whole body, and let it flow throughout the totality of one's being. (2)

Morisawa further explains:

Hara is the seat of life, the center of intrinsic energy, which must be practiced for all higher developments.

Hara is also referred to as a state of mind in the development of one's character. One who controls the Hara is not likely to lose the balance (composure) and is able to maintain the vital center of energy when something disturbing happens or when one overreaches oneself. . . . One learns to anchor oneself in the Hara and can shake off disturbances of the body and mind and ultimately reject the ego to return to the deeper power of "original being." One who has Hara is patient in all situations and calm in the face of adversity. (3)

Traditionally in Japan, people believe that if a person is going to manifest his or her greatest strength, he or she must focus power in the abdomen. On one level, this general statement is correct. More specifically, however, we must focus the *mind's power* and concentration in the *lower* abdomen, or *tanden* (丹田). Even more specifically, a person should concentrate mental energy at a point, or natural center, within the *tanden*. This point is often believed to be three sun below the navel. (Sun is an ancient Japanese measurement; three sun equals about 9.9 cm.) If one adopts an erect, relaxed posture, the center of gravity settles at this spot in the lower abdomen, which corresponds to our center of balance. By dropping concentration to this point, it's possible to powerfully interlock the mind and body, thus achieving a positive form of relaxation. This harmony of mind and body, in turn, results in an exceptionally stable posture and vital psychophysical condition.

The posture/attitude is extremely powerful, and it's stable to the point of being seemingly immovable. However, in this state we're instantly capable of quick reaction and fluid movement. By repeatedly studying, through budo, the differences between limpness, relaxation, and tension, it's possible to

impress these vital distinctions upon the subconscious and create a new, positive habit of energetic or positive relaxation. In this way, we can train ourselves to maintain a relaxed but dynamic state, in which we're ready to calmly meet any emergency or stressful situation in everyday life.

Moreover, by being aware of our posture, it's possible to cultivate a kind of usable relaxation, which due to its potent and dynamic nature, can be utilized, as well as maintained, even while under extreme stress. Basically, we want to avoid a posture that's sagging and appears small, collapsed, or withdrawn. We also want to avoid adopting a tense, rigid stance when facing an opponent. Try to cultivate a posture that's completely erect and relaxed, without becoming rigid—a large presence.

When we use martial arts as a vehicle to test and develop our ability to remain relaxed under pressure, it becomes much more than a mere form of self-defense, and it can be thought of as a kind of moving meditation that allows us to cultivate real and unshakable calmness. Ultimately, in budo and in life, tranquility is strength.

TRAINING THE BODY IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

Martial arts practice is a form of physical exercise, and it's essential that practice in budo be conducted in a natural manner. Without naturalness in the way we train our bodies, it is inevitable that we'll sustain physical injury, making continued practice difficult.

The body must be trained in a gradual manner to avoid damage. It's almost laughable that some followers of koryu bujutsu and modern budo began training in order to protect themselves from violence as well as injury, and in the process, often severely and repeatedly injure themselves.

To continue, as numerous physicians and sports specialists will confirm, the best way of warming up for any physical activity is to gently perform the movements of the activity itself. In judo, jujutsu, and

aikido, for example, students should begin their practice session by performing ukemi, methods of falling safely that are similar to the ways they'll be thrown in the course of training. This is, in my opinion, superior to beginning a class with push-ups and sit-ups, exercises that have a more indirect relationship to these martial arts. (This isn't to say that push-ups and sit-ups are bad, or that we shouldn't engage in a variety of physical exercises during our free time as supplemental training. In fact, because flexibility and relaxation are essential in martial arts, my students also participate in the supplemental study of Japanese yoga.)

NATURAL, GRADUAL, AND SYSTEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

What's more, practicing ukemi can be thought of as "applied gymnastics," which is capable of increasing muscular strength, flexibility, aerobic endurance, and coordination. However, it's important to start with softer falls, and then gradually, increase the intensity of the ukemi. Actually, over the course of a lifetime, an individual will probably trip, slip, or fall to the ground, more times than he or she will need to throw another to the ground, and the likelihood of injury is just as great in accidentally falling as in being attacked. Still, few seem to regard effective falling skills as a critical part of practical self-protection, which they most certainly are.

I used the example of ukemi in judo, aikido, and jujutsu, because these are the arts I'm most familiar with. But folks practicing other marital arts can use the ideas I'm introducing to finetune their warm-up routine as well. Think of what you're going to be practicing that day and try to have the warming up exercises relate to that activity. Take these allied exercises and find ways to progressively intensify them, so that you can enhance strength and conditioning while you prepare your body to swing a sword, get thrown, draw a bow string, or whatever types of actions your martial art commonly features. The main points are simple: make the warm-up exercises something that's similar to what you

actually do in practice and build up your endurance, flexibility, etc. gradually.

How gradually a person builds up to practicing with greater intensity is determined, to a degree, by that person's age and physical condition. It's possible for older individuals who possess enough willpower to study martial arts, providing that they build up the severity of their practice progressively. It is, of course, important to practice as vigorously as possible, realizing that it's always possible to use less intensity when actually attacked, but it is extremely difficult to suddenly find more ability and confidence when it hasn't been previously cultivated. But we need to realize this intensity of practice over time.

REGULAR AND ONGOING PRACTICE

Likewise, it's necessary to train the mind and body in a systematic, unrelenting manner. To practice sporadically is not only ineffective, but potentially dangerous, in that it places sudden demands on a body that may have fallen out of condition. Simply put, it's better to exercise a moderate amount on a frequent basis than to practice a great deal every once in a while.

It is also important to remember that the mind and body are in a state of flux, rarely remaining in the same condition for long. Likewise, all of nature exists in a state of continuous change. The extraordinary benefits of budo practice lie in a lifelong process of training. If we cease to practice, no matter how long we've been studying, or how talented we are, both our health and ability suffer. In other words, martial arts training is valuable only as long as we're, in some way, actually engaging in it.

For example, from time to time, students sometimes wonder if the large amount of time they put into their practice is worth what they're getting out of it. While this seems to be a reasonable question, it actually reveals a fundamental lack of

understanding of Japanese cultural arts, which is, unfortunately, not uncommon. In essence, the time we put into the practice of an art is what we're getting out of it. It's the process of training that's valuable, not some eventual goal or by-product of training. Life only exists at this instant. The past and the future, in a way, reside only in our thoughts as self-created, artificial realities. In budo, we train to rest peacefully in the moment, and in our timeless observation of the moment, we realize a condition transcending fear and duality. . . a state that is both eternal and infinite.

In this sense, the practice is the goal, just as walking along a path is to be on that path. To practice budo with genuine awareness is to simultaneously sense the benefits of budo practice itself.

I also occasionally meet individuals that inform me that they're black belts (yudansha) in some form of budo. However, in the course of the conversation, it becomes clear that some of these folks haven't engaged in any aspect of their art for years. Rather than saying that *they are* black belts, it would be more accurate for them to say that *they were* black belts, because it's possible for many people to participate in budo in some way even as they age. (Having a hard time entering tournaments? How about just training for the joy of training? Having trouble practicing the way you once did? How about modified training regimes that take into

consideration injuries and age? Can't hardly move at all? How about teaching and helping others the way you were once helped? What about writing articles like this one? There's often some way to continue to be involved with budo if we really want to.)

In fact, through gradual, constant, and systematic martial arts training, it may be possible to continue to develop even as one ages since the martial arts amount to a never-ending study. Budo is an art which has stood the test of time and remains capable of vitally transforming the lives of its participants for generations to come.

Notes:

(1) Trevor Leggett, *Zen and the Ways*, London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 197.

(2) Jackson S. Morisawa, *The Secret of the Target*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 19.

(3) Ibid, p. 100.

About the Author: H. E. Davey has studied traditional Japanese martial arts, in Japan and the USA, for over 50 years. He is also one of the founding members of the SMAA. An eighth-degree black belt with the SMAA Jujutsu Division, he's the author of several books on time-honored Japanese arts and methods of personal growth, many of which can be found at www.michipublishing.com.

BECOMING SENSEI

By Wayne Muromoto

I have reached a surprising (well, surprising to me, at least) benchmark in my life in that, in the martial systems and tea ceremony that I focus upon in my spare time, I have achieved a dubious distinction of becoming one of the senior members. I'm what we impolitely call an "old fart." Lest it seems an exalted, superior position, it comes with the heavy burden of shouldering more responsibilities.

As a senior, I am in that funny moment when I'm transitioning from sempai (older student) to sensei. In some systems, I've been teaching for a while, but I always would shy away from having the club members call me "sensei." Now no longer. I need to become a sensei, not just for me, but for my students.



The author (left) with his teacher, Ono Yotaro Sensei, the current headmaster of Bitchuden Takeuchi Ryu

As one of my teachers said, “Even if you know only one kata, then you can teach that one kata. It’s not the number of kata you know. It’s the quality of your instruction that counts.” Assuming that mantle also gives me the position to develop, nurture and protect my charges, to certify them and to authenticate their training, raising them up to become the next generation that will pass on the system.

It’s not a responsibility I really wanted. I just wanted to train hard. But it comes with the territory of having your own little dojo, running it your own way, and having a direct connection to your headmaster.

And sooner or later, anyone who has trained for any length of time will end up teaching. Whether it’s as a fully certified instructor, or more informally as a sempai to newer students, you are always teaching others from the moment you first learn something for yourself. It’s inevitable in a social environment.

In my professional life, I also teach, primarily digital art and photography, which is experiencing a surge of interest among youngsters. My classes are always filled, thanks to the relevance the field has in this day and age of electronic media. Prior to teaching college, I taught for some ten years at a high school, so I’ve had over 20-odd years’ worth of experience teaching.

One of the things I’ve learned is that formal teacher training is a real plus in your kit of tools, but it only prepares you for half of the reality of running a classroom or dojo. Taking courses in education gave me the theoretical framework of education philosophy, the technical essentials of lesson, course and program preparations, and the psychology of teaching and learning. But how you perform “on the ground” as sempai or sensei really depends on how you can bring out your unique positive social traits to the fore.

I’m not by choice a naturally gregarious person. As my wife observed, unlike her, I could be pretty satisfied just working in the yard, walking our dog and reading, and I seem to get enough socialization just with her and a small group of friends. So, getting up in front of a classroom or in the dojo was a stretch for a reclusive guy like me. But I’ve learned to “put out,” to a point where teaching has become somewhat enjoyable.

And so, as an older codger, here’s my advice: the sooner some of you realize that part of your responsibility for being in a ryu is passing it on to the next generation, the better. It’s not only the role of the sensei. The sensei needs your help, if you’re a sempai. If you abrogate it and keep pushing that responsibility away, you’re forcing the teacher to shoulder all the burden, and you infantilize yourself. That’s not how real teaching and learning occurs. In a free-wheeling classroom environment (watch kindergarteners or elementary school kids), the teacher is the one-to-many center of knowledge who passes out information and controls the classroom, but there is ample room and time for

kids to teach other kids. This is called peer-to-peer or collaborative learning. To shirk this and shrug, “I dunno, I’m not the sensei,” is false humility. You’re not the sensei, yes. But you may know something more than the guys who are newer than you. So, you help them, like an older brother or sister helps their sibling figure out a math problem. You’re not the teacher, but you can help.

That’s not to say you lord it over your kohai (younger student) like a mini-dictator. I’ve seen too many blue and brown belts in a karate-do or aikido class take on airs of superiority well above their station. They’re not trying to help. They’re trying to assert their tiny little bit of snobbery because that’s all the status they think they have in their pathetic lives.

I remember donning a white belt even though I had four years’ worth of aikido training and over ten years of competitive judo (plus some karate-do), becoming one of the main uke for my sensei, when I entered a new aikido dojo. I paired up with a young, smug blue belt who needed a shave and a bath, and as I tried to refine my Shiho Nage, he kept poking me in the armpit to suggest that I was open for a counter. I was trying to move slowly to refine my movement, but he kept smirking smugly and poked me as we did it to each other, me slowly trying to take apart the kata and he doing it as fast and as strong as he could to impress and intimidate me. I thought, “This guy shouldn’t be doing it this fast to a white belt. He’s not that good, and he could hurt somebody who was really a newbie.” I could handle it. But he wasn’t trying to help me by working with me. He was just immersed in his own ego gratification.

Finally, I thought I got the movement just right, and I had about enough of his poking me in the armpit, so I threw him at full speed, disbalancing him and then slamming him and bouncing him on the floor. He had his fingers all set to poke me again, but at that exact moment, my disbalancing threw him off, and then before he could recover, I had slammed

him to the mats. The bulging-eyed look of fear and surprise in his eyes was priceless. He bowed out and subsequently avoided training with me for the rest of my stay at that dojo.

On the other hand, I’ve been in some really well-oiled dojo where senior students were incredibly helpful without any hint of smugness. They would be patient with me, pointing out problems, helping me to fix them, reworking my footwork. Coupled with the sensei’s direct instructions, progress in a dojo like that would always be rapid and enjoyable.

So, everyone teaches, even students, in a smoothly functioning dojo or classroom. But there’s a difference between helping to teach and feeding your own ego.

How do you teach? Ah, there’s the rub. There are as many ways to teach as there are personalities. Given the basic format of a ryu, or the expected content of a class, how you present the material is a matter of the teacher’s personality, experiences, and also how much the teacher relies on his own teachers’ examples.

Recently, a question arose in a koryu discussion group about how different dojo teach koryu in different ways, as if, perhaps, there was only a couple of “right” ways. I’ve been bumming around enough dojo long enough to realize that there are many, many ways, and many of them can be construed as “traditional.”

Setting aside the kinds of teaching that are just plain bad (and you definitely know when you have an awful teacher, just as college students know when they have an instructor who doesn’t know what he’s talking about and doesn’t know how to teach), there are many ways a sensei can structure a class. The structure will also depend on the kind of students he encounters, the number of students in the class, and the a priori technical abilities the student brings to the class. In a small group, you don’t have to have such regimentation in training. You work more one-

on-one on particular strengths and weaknesses, going at the individuals' own speed. In a very large group, you have to move the entire group along en masse or learning would be more chaotic. The happy spot for midsize groups is somewhere in between one-on-one and large-group production-line training.

In terms of different teaching styles, I had one teacher in iai who would observe your kata and then simply say, "That's wrong. Do it again. And keep doing it again until you get it right," and then he would walk away. That's about all the instruction he would usually give, leaving it up to his sempai to teach you what, in fact, you did wrong. He was gruff and spoke very little, but he was also one of the great perfectionists among the teachers I knew, and my iai improved greatly under him and his capable sempai. I had another teacher in iai who was the exact opposite. He would elaborate on a new kata, show me the technique several times, correct me, and explain any esoteric meaning that might be attached to the kata. He would linger to watch me long enough to say, "Well, you got it more or less, but you need to do this, and that..." and then he would wander off to help another student. The two teachers taught on different nights. Together, they improved my iai incredibly fast. So, there's no right or wrong way in terms of these approaches. They both seemed to work, especially in tandem.

For the most part, however, the modern shin budo and older koryu teachers I stuck with usually had similar attributes. They were superlative examples, technically. They could demonstrate, discuss and break down the kata. So, they could show by example and also explain verbally. They could also observe and correct my own movements to get my technique right. How they structured their classes, exercises and led kata training, however, was all over the map.

The daunting task, therefore, of a teacher is to first be a good example for your students. That is why my koryu teachers, when I told them I was returning

to Hawaii, encouraged me to teach. Both my iai and jujutsu sensei said, "You can't improve much on your own. You need to have people around you. And if you teach, even if you think you don't know much, you will be forced to think about the kata more deeply in order to truly grasp the waza, and so by teaching, you are furthering your own learning."

I am reflecting on this aspect of training, too, because I just finished the New Year's celebrations for my tea ceremony group. We held a large chakai ("tea gathering"). As usual, nobody wanted to be "first guest" at the event because that's the highest position of honor for the guests. It goes to the person with the highest status, and the first guest is responsible for representing all the other guests assembled in the *tatami* mat tea room. So, we spent the usual few minutes trying to sit in places other than the exalted first position, close to the host. Finally, one of the tea sensei in the preparation room came out and said, "Wayne, you are going to sit there," because they needed to get the chakai started. All this enryo (holding back out of humility) was taking too damn long.

I was, in fact, the chief operations officer for the group, so that position did hold some amount of relevant prestige and weight, but I also realized that more and more of us middle-agers have to step up to the plate. The second guest sitting next to me was retired, in her mid-80s. The other ladies after her were largely in their 70s and 80s. There was a scattering of younger teens and middle-aged folk, but not enough. If we more seasoned but still relatively "young" folk always keep holding ourselves back, we run the risk of opening a huge gap between our generation and our teachers. Our sensei in tea (and in koryu) are aging before our eyes. They need help. They need the younger people to step up to the plate, not just as main guests and taking charge of hosting, but also as teachers and leaders.

So folk of my generation and younger, those of us Baby Boomers and the tail-enders, we're seeing our

teachers hitting their twilight years. We're being encouraged (or not) to teach more, to run things more. Maybe some sensei are still afraid of letting go. They're like parents who are having a hard time letting their children go off to college. It's our responsibility to at least help them with things that they do let go of, because pretty soon they're going to be gone, not in a matter of decades, but in a few years. Or even, God forbid, months. And we ourselves are in transition, heading into our own autumn years. As I look over the broad scope of decades of training in tea and koryu, I see that we're just a link in a long chain, and even as we have to assume responsibilities, we also need to push some of the responsibilities down the line, to younger folk. To teach them not just how to train, but how to teach, because we're not getting any younger, either.

A good teacher, therefore, especially in mid-career, is not just teaching students to be students. He/she is teaching students to become their own teachers, their own fountain of knowledge. To forever make a student dependent on you, to hold a student back, is to forever infantilize the student. It only shows the insecurity of a teacher to do so. And a student who only wishes to be spoon-fed everything, even after years of training, needs to grow up, to stumble more on his own, to pick himself up and try again, as we did, and as our own sensei did years before us.

About the Author: Wayne Muromoto is a member of the SMAA Board of Directors and a frequent contributor to the *SMAA Journal*. Based in Hawaii, he has decades of training in Bitchuden Takeuchi Ryu jujutsu and Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu iaido, both of which he studied in Japan under top experts.

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