



OH Wonderful

The Last Samurai

Karate



Founder Soshu S. Oyama

Recently I saw a television ad for a new movie called The Last Samurai, starring Tom Cruise. In the preview, Tom Cruise was holding a sword and standing in a powerful action pose. This preview made a strong impression on me. I did not know the story, but I knew it took place in Japan in the time of Baku Matsu, during the last days of Tokugawa (the last days of the Shoguns).

The movie title, The Last Samurai sounded familiar. I remembered reading a Japanese book with a similar title, this intrigued me. I found the book and I read it again.

The book title, loosely translated into English, is The American Samurai. The author of the book is Ryotaro Shiba. Shiba is a very famous Japanese author. Japan has a rich history of excellence in literature. Two Japanese authors have won the Nobel Prize for Literature: Yasunari Kawabata (1968) and Kenzaburo Oe (1994). While Shiba has not won a Nobel Prize for Literature, it is my opinion, and that of many others, that his abilities as an author surpass those of the Nobel Prize recipients. Shiba's works are read by all people, from High School students to Intellectual masters. He has authored books and essays that cover a diverse range of subjects from intellectual essays to historical novels. It is my opinion that Shiba has significantly enhanced the quality and style of Japanese literature. Shiba has a reputation for meticulous research and accurate presentation.

When I read Shiba's The American Samurai the first time, the book had a powerful effect on me. It was as if electricity passed through my body. After I found the book and re-read it, the effect was the same – electricity. The American Samurai is a true story. Because of its powerful effect on me, and relevance to our members, I called Sempai Dale and told him, "I am going to write an article and want you to assist me." "Osu." To truly appreciate The American Samurai, we had to explain the historical background of both the people and the events of the time period.

The time was 1933, the event was a kendo sword tournament, Ten Ran Shiai. This was the most prestigious tournament in all Japan because it was held before the Emperor. The winner was Hisashi NoMa. Kendo critics and observers said that the sword genius that Hisashi displayed occurred only once every hundred years. However, this story is not about Hisashi, it is about his cousin Torao NoMa, who lost the final match in the Tournament to Hisashi.

Hisashi's family name is NoMa. This family founded the biggest publishing company in Japan, Kodansha. Torao was Hisashi's cousin and was adopted by the NoMa family. Hasashi and Torao were raised as brothers and studied in the NoMa family dojo under one of the highest ranking Kendo Grand Masters. Both boys learned quickly and were judged to be geniuses by their Grand Master.

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Of the two, Torao was the most talented. Many kendo critics attributed this talent to his bloodline.

Torao's bloodline came from the days of the Baku Matsu, known as the last days of the Shoguns. In Northern Japan there was the feudal state of Aizu. The Iino clan was the predominate clan of the Aizu. Yozo Mori was the top kendo master of the Iino clan.

Yozo was known for his skills with the sword and his bravery. In today's world he would have the name recognition of Tiger Woods. Yozo moved from Aizu to the Shogun capital of Edo (now known as Tokyo) to build up his skills with the sword. At Edo, his fame and reputation grew because of his abilities with the sword. After a few years, Yozo returned to Aizu to teach all the Iino samurai advanced sword skills. Yozo's title was, Shi Nan Yaku (fighting sword) head instructor. This is an extremely powerful position for a samurai because of the amount of influence he can exert.

At this time there were two factions competing for influence with the Emperor and for control of the government. On one side were the people who supported the Shogun system and on the other were those who favored a central government led by the Emperor. The conflict that started in 1868 between these two interests was called the Bo Shi war. This war was for the restoration of the Emperor. After the war was over, the Shogun no longer held control or influence in the government. The Bo Shi war was one of the bloodiest in Japanese history. It can be compared to our civil war. To add to the intrigue, the French supported the Shogun system and the British backed the Imperial government. The British and the French were backing the sides of this conflict that they believed had the best chance to win. At the time of this conflict the British First Minister was Sir Alcock and the French Minister was L. Roches

The cannons and rifles that the British supplied the Emperor's supporters were superior to those the French supplied to the Shogun forces. The Emperor's supporters were defeating the Shogun forces. Edo (Tokyo) fell and was under the Emperor's control. The Shogun forces regrouped in Northern Japan. The most tragic battle of the war occurred at the Aizu castle. In front of the Aizu castle was a small mountain (Rai Jin Mountain). Yozo was assigned the task of defending this mountain with his life. To lose the critical high ground would mean that Aizu castle was lost. The Emperor's soldiers surrounded the mountain and outnumbered Yozo's forces 100 to 1. The defenders of the mountain also included Torao, Yozo's 15 year old samurai son. The superior British cannons laid siege to the mountain. The cannon fire was so intense that all the trees and vegetation were destroyed and many of Yozo's samurai were killed. The Emperor's commander, Taisuke Itagaki, ordered his soldiers to charge the mountain. When they mounted their charge, it was described as looking like an army of ants swarming up the mountain, there were so many soldiers the mountain looked black. Yozo and the remaining survivors, including his son, charged down the mountain and engaged the enemy at close quarters, using only their swords. The fighting was intense. When Yozo would get into trouble Torao would come and help

him and when the son was in trouble the father would come and help him. The Emperor's commander's, Taisuke Itagaki, and his staff observed the fighting. The commander was impressed with the grace, movement and skill displayed by Yozo and his son Torao. They fought the samurai way, with courage and the sword. Taisuke Itagaki issued the order that they were not to be killed, but captured instead. The order arrived to the front lines too late, both had died. The father was lying on top of his son.

The Emperor's Commander's, Taisuke Itagaki, later became a cabinet minister and his face is on the Japanese 100 yen note. Yozo's daughter was Hisashi's and Torao's grandmother, so the blood of Yozo was in both cousins.

The book's author, Shiba, interviewed Kenjiro Yamakawa, who was an Aizu samurai. At the time of the battle he was only a young child, but he saw Yozo and his son fight and die. Whenever he described it, he would cry. After the war Yamakawa went to Russia and the United States. At Yale he studied physics, he returned to Japan and was the fourth President of Tokyo University.

That is the background, now the story of The American Samurai.

When the cousins, Hisashi and Torao, fought in the dojo, Torao was always the better fighter. When Hisashi and Torao faced each other in the Ten Ran Shiai, Hisashi scored two points against Torao. These points are similar to a wazaari in karate. Everyone was surprised, because Torao was so skilled it would be hard for someone to score one point and impossible to score two points against him. The kendo critics thought Torao had given the win to Hisashi. Only Torao knew the truth. Shortly after the Ten Ran Shiai, Hisashi died as the result of sickness and Torao changed his name back to his original family name (Mori Torao) and left Japan for the United States.

In 1934 Torao arrived in San Francisco, he had no job and no plan. He took a job as a farm laborer and eventually got a job working with a bee keeper. He never lost his interest in the sword, so he carved one out of wood. With this wooden sword he practiced by himself in the hills and fields. The beekeeper, Daniel Song, observed Torao practicing kendo. (The true spelling of Daniel Song's name is not known). Daniel Song told Torao that in the United States people did not study kendo, but they studied a similar art called Fencing. Daniel Song took Torao to Los Angeles to visit a fencing club.

Torao watched the fencing training and could not contain his excitement. When he picked up a foil, it felt like a fishing pole. Torao and the fencing instructor fought a five point match. Torao lost without scoring a point, because he didn't know the rules and did not know how to fight. On the way home, Daniel Song, explained the rules to Torao. Fencing was not cutting, but points are scored for stabbing. Because Torao was so poor, Daniel Song bought Torao all his fencing equip-

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ment.

Toraō started practicing fencing by himself, without an instructor or training partner. Kendo also has a stabbing movement, called tsuki. Kendo sword uses tsuki in conjunction with the cut. In fencing there are only stabs, no cuts. After training himself, Toraō returned to the Los Angeles fencing club and fought the same instructor. This time he won, scoring five unanswered points.

After another year of self training and reading about fencing, Toraō went to the Los Angeles YMCA fencing club. There he challenged the top 6 fighters to three point matches. Toraō scored 18 unanswered points. This was a new record for the club.

Afterwards he competed in the Los Angeles fencing tournament and won. He fought and won the American Fencing Championships and never lost a match. In two years he had advanced to the top of the fencing world. Tora means tiger; everyone called him Tiger Mori. In 1936, at the request of the American Olympic Committee, he became the unofficial coach of the American fencing team to the Berlin Olympics.

When WWII came he was sent to a Japanese internment camp in Colorado. In this stark, prison like environment he found Bushi Do (The samurai way of life). After the war he returned to Japan. He was disappointed with what he found. Japan was no longer as he remembered it, so he returned to the United States. In the United States he was determined to live the samurai way (Bushi Do). However, the American Olympic Committee sought him out and asked him to be the official American fencing coach for the Rome Olympics. He trained and took the American fencing team to the Rome Olympics.

A short time after he returned from the Olympics, he opened a dojo in Los Angeles where he taught both kendo and fencing. On January 8, 1968 at about 10:00 PM he was teaching a couple of students Iai (quickly drawing the sword). As he finished the draw he had a heart attack and fell down holding his sword. With a doctor and his students watching, he held his sword tight, smiled and died.

While he was alive he often told his closest students that “I came to the United States and here discovered Bushi Do (the samurai way), if I had not come to the United States I would never have discovered Bushi Do”.

I read The American Samurai and started to tear up. When I read it a second time I had the same emotions. I came to the United States and I really discovered karate, what is the true meaning of Kihon, Kata, and Kumite. If I had stayed in Japan I would have never discovered this.



Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

Most karate styles just punch and kick the air and call it Kihon (basic) training. I always questioned this. The basic training is very important to the development of free fighting. If Kihon does not have contact, you will never understand how the technique fits your body. In our style, contact is always used in Kihon training. This is why I wrote Karate Kyoten I-IV. If I had not come to the United States, I never would have discovered this.

I don't know how long I can move, but until the end I am dedicated to share my knowledge and experience with the members of our organization.

I am not sure this translation has done justice to telling the story of the life of Tiger Mori, but Sempai Dale and I did the best we could. I don't know the details of Tom Cruise's movie the Last Samurai. But Tiger Mori was the true last samurai, he lived Bushi Do.

TRUTH IS STRANGER THEN FICTION

Champion's Road "Karate Monogatari" 空手物語

by 拳気 一

Ken Ki Hajime

Chapter 1

My name is Zachary Appleton. I am twenty-one years old and a junior at the state university. I joined World Oyama Karate for no special reason, but I think I was trying to get my mind off of my girlfriend, who had just dumped me. I wasn't trying to be a champion or a street fighter. I just had plenty of time on my hands since Kathy left the picture. She was such a knockout, and a cheerleader for the school. We both left town for Christmas vacation, and when we came back in the Spring, the first thing she said to me was "Zach, I need to talk to you." We went outside and sat on a bench in the campus' center and she said to me "I think we are too young for this type of relationship. And I need to focus on pharmacy school. But also I want to spend more time with other friends." The point was: she was getting tired of me. She said "I still want to be good friends."

When I think back to it, I just remember this feeling that my whole world was turning upside down. My heart was freezing. Somebody hit me in the head with a baseball bat. She kept this smile on her face as she gave me a sideways hug and said "See you later!" I tried to find oxygen to breathe, but the whole world felt suddenly cold, and I was an old man, one hundred years old.

Well, my buddy Toby, he didn't have a girlfriend. He always talks like he is such a handsome guy, like he could get any girl he wanted. He was always bragging, but I never saw him go out with anyone. "Don't worry about it," he said. "You can do better than that. Look at me." I looked at him, but it didn't make me feel any better. "Come on," he said. "Let's go play some video games."

I couldn't get excited about the video games. I didn't have any appetite. I laid in bed at night, looking at the ceiling, and would stay wide awake until the sun came up and I heard the birds chirping outside. I knew I had to do something.

I'm an outdoors kind of guy. I'm never satisfied playing video games, watching movies, or just sitting around. I like to be outside, playing sports or walking through the woods, breathing in the fresh air. So I was interested one day when Toby told me about martial arts. He said he was experienced in it and, even though he was kind of chubby, he could do roundhouse spin kicks and everything, just like in the movies. "They have a karate school over on Main Street. Let's check it out," he said to me one day.

There was a big window on the front of the building, with the words "World Oyama Karate" overhead. I watched the students move in perfect rhythm in the windows, and it struck me as kind of pretty the way they moved.

As I walked into the dojo's front door, I was awakened suddenly from my dreams of karate-chopping actors by the strong smell of sweat. The smell was not so pleasant, but it made the air thick with a sense of power. Students were lined up on a large mat, facing a woman wearing a brown belt around what looked like white pajamas. She commanded the other students, with authority, in some strange language - Japanese I guessed - and they responded with unquestioning obedience.

The students were stretching their legs. I could tell that some were less experienced, as they struggled to reach down for their toes. Others, wearing belts of yellow and green and brown sank effortlessly to the ground, legs spread out flat on the ground into perfect splits. The Japanese words were unfamiliar to me, but I believed she was counting, creating a rhythm for their stretching: "Ich! Ni! San! Ich! Ni! San!" The room seemed like a new and mysterious world to me.

Toby and I dared not interrupt this ritual. We stood for awhile, watching the class. Each student suggested an interesting history. I noticed a pair of middle-aged men with brown belts who turned to face one another. They began to punch and kick pads on one another's arms. The impact of each blow seemed enormous. One had the face of a gentle father, a man I might see in an office building or passing by at the bank, but his whole body seemed to form into one solid and deadly muscle. His sparring partner looked very ordinary as well. But as I looked toward him, he caught my eye for a moment, and I felt incredibly intimidated.

My trance of awe was broken in an instant when the woman who earlier led the stretching say to me "can I help you?" loudly from the mat. Toby and I both stammered a little, still intimidated, and then finally I said "Oh. Um. We were just watching."

"Of course," she answered, and went back to her students.

We continued to watch as two slight women faced each other and crouched into fighting stances. One kicked two thick pads on the other's arms, and I was taken aback by the loud pop that echoed through the room with every blow. One kick seemed aimed at the head, and the other woman moved her arm up to block. She was bent backward a bit as her body absorbed the impact. The next kick was aimed at the shins, then the next for her partner's ribs. They were kicking hard, and I began to wonder if this was the right place for me.

As the class's hour neared the end, the instructor called up the two average-looking men from earlier for what she called a "contact fight." Without pads or protection, the two men launched into a series of punches and kicks and blocks. This looked incredibly dangerous. But I noticed that they combined their contact with a precise sort of control. They were hitting one another not brutally, but gracefully. I thought to myself "I would die!" in this kind of fight. But deeper inside, I was growing excited.

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After the class had ended, the woman in the brown belt who led the class approached Toby and I. From this new and closer angle, I realized that this fighter was a beautiful blonde girl, slightly younger than myself. I'd guess 20. Her hair was tied back into a pony-tail and her beautiful face glimmered with a heavy layer of sweat. I immediately assumed the veneer of an innocent, pure, helpless college boy - I knew she could kick me hard if she wanted. She explained to us the details of the class, the schedule, the costs. I watched her as she spoke, but could hardly pay attention to the schedule she was describing. I was entranced by this rare combination of strength and beauty. Toby's silent attention let me know that he was equally drawn in. She asked "have either of you ever had any experience?"

I pointed to Toby. "Oh yeah, Toby's had a lot of experience."

He stammered, embarrassed, and flashed me a look that said "Shut ... up..." but his mouth said "Oh, no.. Heh heh.. just a little bit when I was a kid."

"Oh no, that's not true," I said, laughing a little, "He's mastered most all of the martial arts."

I was laughing, and he was smiling in a bit of embarrassment, when she said bluntly and sternly "This isn't like the movies here. This is real stuff." Her words were like a kick in the head. Our laughing and smiling stopped when we realized her seriousness. We each took a copy of the schedule from her and politely thanked her.

As we got into my car, Toby turned to ask me what I thought of all this.

"A little bit scared," I said, "but excited."

"But..." he said, "You think she's cute?"

"What?" I said, and acted shocked that he would ask me this. But then I smiled to myself and said "Yeah.. she's really pretty."

As had been our weekend ritual, Toby and I picked up a six-pack and headed to our apartment. Toby bragged a little about taking karate when he was a kid. I listened to him, but could only think back on that day. I was thinking "Karate may be good for me." The smell of sweat is not so bad.

Chapter 2

It had been a couple of days since our first visit to the dojo. I had enough money to begin the classes, and so Toby and I returned to the karate school to sign up.

I'd always understood that money is an important and rare commodity. I work in a restaurant for every dime I've got, and



Toby delivers pizzas. But this wisdom somehow never translates into wise decision-making. Going to the bar with friends, buying video games and CDs, all of this usually amounts to empty pockets. If you asked me later, I could almost never tell you where my money had gone, yet it always seems to disappear.

It is with these thoughts that I began to doubt once more my decision to pay for karate lessons - to pay for sweat.

Toby and I drove my old Honda Accord to the school. The pretty girl from the last time said that we should come several minutes before the lessons begin if we wanted to join. We stepped into the dojo and the smell of sweat struck me once again. My excitement was renewed as I recalled the sense of power, of passion, that this smell struck within me the last time. I also remembered the intimidation I felt, though, and I looked at Toby for a moment, questioningly. "I don't know, Toby. Are you sure about this?" But we moved forward toward the counter.

There was a different woman at the counter this time. I must admit to being a little bit disappointed. I was hoping to be met by the blue eyes and blonde ponytail that met us last time. This woman was polite, though. She began to explain the costs. Registration fee: \$30, text book: \$15. I was surprised to learn that we'd be using a text book. But - I guess I had to buy it. I knew because when my eyes question this cost, she says plainly: "You must buy it." The costs kept rising.

She said we needed to buy shin pads. I explained that I already had shin pads, from playing soccer. She explained that these shin pads are different. They protect the top of the foot, where the bones are the weakest. This made sense to me when I thought about it. This is why soccer players wear shoes. In any case, every time she opened her mouth, dollar signs poured out. I could hear the cash register "Cha-ching!" with the explanation

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of every new cost: pads, uniform, book, and registration.

She sized us up for uniforms. I'm 5'10" and weigh around 165. She said I'd either need a size 6 or a size 5. "What's the difference?" I asked.

"Five dollars," she responded, and I prayed to fit into the smaller size. I was lucky. The cheaper uniform fit me (so she said – it actually seemed *big* to me) and I breathed a sigh of relief.

The unfortunate Toby is shorter, but wider than me. He is 5' 6" and weighs around 220 pounds. Not much of this is muscle. He insists that he used to look like Bruce Lee, back in his earlier days of martial arts mastery, but I know he is joking. I guess times have changed for Toby. Toby tried on a size five, but the top wouldn't fit. The woman told him he would need a size 6. He practically begged her for a discount. "Can't I wear a size 5 pants and a size 6 top?"

"Of course not," she said. "You need a size 6." He tried on the size 6 pants. "These are too long!" he complained to her, probably still pushing for that five-dollar discount. "Just snip it," she said. "But not too much."

"Now, you can wear a t-shirt under these if you want," she told us. "But not anything with advertisements on it." She paused and looked at Toby's shirt "Especially not beer ads." We all laughed at Toby's Bud Light shirt – his favorite one.

She called one of the students who was warming up and told him to take us upstairs. "These gentlemen," she called us. A middle-aged guy introduced himself as Jim. "Are you guys experienced?" He asked us. I start laughing and made my favorite joke about Toby. "Yeah," I said. "Toby was once a very strong martial-arts guy." And he replied his favorite reply: "Shut up."

There was some trouble with the pants. I couldn't tell which side was the front and which was the back. There was no zipper, just a draw-string, like pajama pants. Jim explained the pants to me. I fumbled through putting on the belt. I couldn't figure out how it tied. I was a little embarrassed as Jim helped me through it a final time. Toby tied his on easily and smiled – I guess he still remembered how from his younger days.

After we were all dressed and ready, we looked at ourselves in the mirror. I thought we looked huge, like the Swedish bodybuilders from Saturday Night Live. A strange feeling came over me. I could tell that Toby felt it too. I looked at his image in the mirror, and his face was very stern and serious. He had a warrior's look in his eyes. The swift snap of the belt created a seriousness in my mind and in my spirit. Yet I felt nervous and unsure.

We went downstairs and started onto the mat with the other students. Jim stopped us and explained that we must say

a strange word, "Osu!" as we got onto the mat and as we leave it. He showed us how to cross our arms and bow. He explained to us that "Osu" means patience, respect, and appreciation. He told us to use this term to signify nearly everything. To say "yes:" "Osu!" To say "no:" "Osu!" Whenever an instructor tells us do something, always say "Osu!" If we don't understand: "Osu!" If we do understand: "Osu!"

This seemed like a joke to me, but Jim was very serious as he spoke. "Don't talk at all during the lesson," he explained to us, except to say "Osu!" He saw our confusion, and assured us that our first few lessons might be tough, but it would be easy going as the weeks passed.

It was almost 6 o'clock, when the class was to begin. As the other students approached the mat, I looked around for the girl with the pony-tail and the brown belt, but I didn't see her. Toby and I stood in a corner of the mat. I looked for him to say something positive. "What do you think, Toby?" He only said that this was different from what he had experienced. He took kung fu, a Chinese technique, and the Japanese terminology here seemed different. The people around us seemed to be warming up. We tried to imitate them, stretching our legs and arms, but everything was uncomfortable.

A stocky Japanese guy with a black belt walked onto the mat – "Osu!" He walked to the front of the mat and spoke sternly: "line up!" His command is so powerful. He directed us to make two lines. I looked around at the others and tried to get into a line. I stood there and crossed my arms in front of me. He told me to put my hands in front of me and to hold my fists tight. I could barely understand what he was saying, though. His accent was so thick.

I began to feel completely odd, and just hoped that I could copy the others in the class enough to survive. He told us to get on our knees, and I copied everyone as they kneeled down. "Mokuso!" said a brown belt that kneeled beside him. "Fists tight! Back straight! Close eyes!" Everyone closed their eyes. I knew we were supposed to be meditating, but my heart was beating fast and I could not relax. "Bow to Saiko Shihan!" he said, and motioned to an empty space in front of the mat. I felt that I was bowing to an invisible force, but I complied. I just followed everyone else. The black belt then said "Stand up!" Now it is time to begin. Here comes my first karate lesson.

Chapter 3

"Stand up!" said a very powerful voice. I knew that this was what he had said because everyone around me began to stand up. I couldn't understand his accent. The instructor, who I later learned had won several knock-down championships, was called Ken, which means "fist." Everyone called him Sensei. He stood in the center of the mat, directly facing me. I felt so lucky.

He looked at me sternly, and his stare felt like he was shooting a thousand arrows into my body. His mouth was smil-

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ing, but his eyes were so serious. When Sensei finally looked away from me, I looked toward Toby. He seemed more nervous even that I was – stiff and awkward, trying hard to hold his back straight and to look stern. Some strange sounds came out of Sensei Ken's mouth. I had no idea what he said. I looked at him like a deer caught in headlights, my jaw loosely hanging open. Sensei looked at my eyes, then down at my feet. I looked down at his feet and his toes were moving up and down. "Oh," I think, "toes up and down!" And I try and copy what he is doing.

His accent made his words so difficult for me to understand. But his eyes spoke powerfully enough. The whole situation reminded me of a math class I took once. My professor was from India. I couldn't understand a single word he said, but there he was, in front of the class, trying to explain complex mathematical formulas. His voice was more like a lullaby than a math lesson. I could always count on a nice nap when that class came around. But this accent is different. If his voice was a lullaby, Sensei's is like a kick to the head.

I tried to mimic the stretches he commanded by watching his body and attempting quickly to catch up. He spread his legs out into a split. I tried to do the same. I sank to the floor only so far, and then had to support myself with my hands to keep from falling and to keep the pain from becoming too great. I twisted to look over at Toby. He's higher off the ground than I am! He was telling me just last night that he used to be able to kick someone in the face, easily. I'd like to see him try and kick someone in the stomach nowadays.

"Ich! Ni! San" comes from Sensei's mouth. I thought he must be counting. He shouted these numbers right at me, like he was telling me to go down farther. I tried, but could hardly stand the pain. Toby's face was already red and pouring out sweat. I thought he must be over-acting, trying to impress the instructor or something. He had a face that said: "look at me! I'm trying so hard!"

Sensei said: (I think) "Keep breathing! Don't hold air! Nice and easy!" Finally, after this stretch and several other equally unpleasant positions, we were done warming up. I was already sweating. It was the middle of September, and the air outside was still very hot. After warming up, Sensei Ken divided us up into groups. It seemed like there were about twelve people total in the class. A couple of the students were blue belts – the rest were white belts, like me. He called Jim forward, and spoke something to him as he pointed toward Toby, a woman named Caroline and me. Jim said "follow me," and so we did. We stood in a corner of the mat in a line in front of Jim. Caroline was in the middle, I was to her right, and Toby to her left.

Jim's eyes weren't nearly as powerful as Sensei Ken's. This made me breathe a sigh of relief. This guy spoke *my* English, an English I could understand. He was American. Seemed very strong, but not as powerful as Sensei Ken. I couldn't believe my ears when he opened his mouth and pronounced something like "Micky Assey My." More Japanese! "Sand Chin

Dutchy." "What is this guy saying?" was the expression on Toby and Caroline's faces.

"Repeat after me!" he said. And then again Mawi Asau-Muo."

We opened our mouths and it sounded like "Mawah Awah Mah." He smiled, then he began to slowly guide us through each word. "*Migi... Ashi... Mae.*" We uttered something only slightly similar to that. He smiled and said "close enough."

He explained that the terminology is important, and that we would catch onto it as time passed. I didn't understand what was so important about it. I don't have to learn Japanese to punch and kick! But I tried to understand. He explained that "*Migi*" means "right;" "*Ashi*" means "foot;" "*mae*" means "front." "*San Chin Dach*" is the name of the stance he showed us.

He showed how to do the stance, turning our feet inward at a shoulder's width apart, and we followed as he puts both hands in front of his body, arms stretched out straight, and fists tight. We all pulled our hands slowly back to the sides of our chests, inhaling; then we pushed them back out again, and exhaled. I looked out of the side of my eye at Toby. He seemed to be a little better at this than I was.

Jim said "straighten up your knees!" Then he made us bend them again. I could tell a tremendous difference in the stance when my knees were bent.

"Notice the difference?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said.

"Not 'yeah!,'" he reminded me sharply. Say 'Osu!'"

"Osu!"

"With all hand techniques," he explained, "the power comes from the legs. Whenever your knees are in the correct position, your balance is spread throughout the body. All the power can come together into one place."

It was a good feeling I had. I could feel what he was saying. He explained to us that the power and the focus of the mind and spirit come together correctly only when the stance is done correctly.

He showed us how to punch. "Whenever you punch with the right hand, you are not only using your right hand. You must use your total body. When the right hand moves forward to punch," he explained, "the left hand must come back to the body with equal force."

Champion's Road "Karate Monogatari" 空手物語 ... Continue

Whenever Caroline and I punched, our bodies fell forward slightly. I kept losing my balance and falling out of my stance. "Try to make your stance stronger," Jim told us. "A weak stance makes for a weak punch. Lose your balance and you're dead." He laughed, though, and told us that after a couple of weeks we'd feel more comfortable with it.

Toby's stance was pretty good, Jim said, but told him that he needed to make a tighter fist. He could tell Toby had had a little experience, I think. I started to make a joke about it, but decided that this probably wasn't the best time. I did start to smile a little bit though. I looked around to make sure nobody saw me.

"You're going to bust your wrist if you don't make a stronger fist!" He told Toby. "Contact-style karate requires a tight fist!"

Toby said: "Osu!"

Chapter 4

I tried to punch as hard as possible, but somehow always lost my balance. The more powerful my punch, the farther my body fell forward. Jim tried to correct my stance. He explained my loss of balance as a simple beginners mistake: "Most beginners try to punch very hard at first, so their upper body shifts forward in front of the knees."

He showed us how to maintain a strong stance, keeping our entire body balanced, distributing weight equally on both the right and the left. Mine and Caroline's stances were both too narrow, he explained. "Keep your legs shoulder width apart. Make sure you have a comfortable upper body position, with shoulders relaxed. Whenever you punch with your right hand, pull the left hand back toward your body with equal force (*hi ki te*)."

He explained that even advanced students often misunderstand the correct way to punch. When punching right, they only use the power of their right arm; when punching left, only their left arm. "If you use the force from both arms," he explained, "you can utilize your full body strength."

I corrected my stance, just as Jim showed me, and tried the punch again. I immediately understood the difference! I felt more balanced. I could feel more power in each punch. I smiled as I realized that I could keep punching over and over like that – left, right, left, right – without losing balance, if my form was correct.

My impressions of karate before had been like it's depicted in the movies. Something about it always seemed so mystical, so mysterious and strange, like some ancient religion. But, as I realized the importance of simple concepts like balance and stance, I understood martial arts in a new and different light.

Karate has a very strong rational, logical side to it. This made sense.

After we practiced our stances and punches for awhile, Sensei Ken said powerfully: "Jim, get in the mat!" I didn't understand what he said at the time, but I figured it out when Jim dashed back toward the mat. We followed him. "Let's stretch!" said Ken's commanding voice.

Toby, Caroline and I must have all be thinking the same thing when we heard the word "stretch." We tried to creep into a back corner of the mat, out of the sights of Sensei Ken. He must have realized our ploy, though, because he shouted "Get in front! Don't run away. You can't hide in here!" I was a little embarrassed. I guess we *were* trying to hide. We had no choice but to rush to the front. "Hurry up!" he said. All the more experienced students pushed us toward the front with their voices, with a drawn out and laughing "Oooooosu!"

To be Continue



World Oyama Karate Newsletter - Fall, 2003

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