

News from Honbu



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Sensei's Corner

Encounter: Mr. Murakami Ganichi
Senpai of Jinsei Shinkendo

The All Japan Toyama Ryu Iaido Federation was renamed in 1978 to The All Japan Battodo Federation, and the Tameshigiri competitions started. In 1979, the individual competitions were started for the first time. Of the 200 competitors, more than 95% were holding high dan rankings in either Kendo or Iaido, etc. I won the first individual Tameshigiri competition that was held under the Federation.

After the ending ceremony, I stepped outside and a man looking like a wrestler approached me as he smiled. He asked, "Aren't you Obata Toshishiro? Didn't anyone invite you to a party? Since I am heading to Tokyo, I can drive you back home. How about having dinner together." This was my first meeting with Mr. Murakami.

During dinner, we talked about Mr. Murakami's view of life and his abundant life experience. After hearing his story, I was moved because he had lived his life so fully and honestly. He had faith in his lifestyle and beliefs, he was very straightforward with a short temper but a big heart. He was also very successful in his business. I later found out that he was very popular in the Tokyo, Harajiku area, and had connections with many celebrities.

After I came home, I immediately spoke about Mr. Murakami to my wife. After the long conversation regarding Mr. Murakami, she asked me about the results of the competition and I simply replied, "I won". My point is, I was more moved by the fact that I met Mr. Murakami than winning a competition.

Several days later I received a phone call from Mr. Murakami, and my friend and I met Mr. Murakami at his restaurant and there was a sword that was just polished. My friend said he wanted to cut with that sword, then Mr. Murakami brought dry Tamami Omote. Usually the Tatami Omote or straw is soaked for a couple of hours in water, and a cutting stand is used when doing Tameshigiri, however there was no stand ready and the Tatami was dry, my friend

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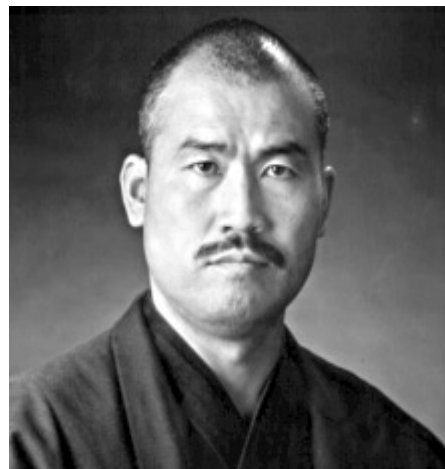
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therefore failed the Tameshigiri. Mr. Murakami asked me to try cutting it next. I put the Tatami Omote on the table and cut it quickly so the Tatami wouldn't fall down or fly, then I put the half of the cut Tatami Omote on the floor (one foot) and cut that also. Mr. Murakami was impressed by my cutting and remarked that I was indeed a great champion. He then gave me that sword and a Jinbaori with his family crest on the back, which was his family treasure. Mr. Murakami was the descendant of the Murakami Suigun clan. I was happy but surprised because he gave me his family treasure. I later met his wife, and she told me that he always spoke of me. He liked very straightforward and serious man. From Mr. and Mrs. Murakami's attitudes, I understood that they were very supportive of me and encouraging.

Mr. Murakami also told me that I was a true Samurai, and that a true Samurai needed a good sword, a horse, and a castle. He said that a modern horse was a motorcycle, and then he said he would give me a 1100 cc motorcycle. He said a Budoka 's castle was a dojo, and that he would build me a dojo one day. At that time I was riding a 50cc motorcycle and I heard that only one in 2~3 hundred people passed the test for driving a 750cc motorcycle. Therefore I told him that I would pass the test before I accepted anything.

In year later in the second Tameshigiri competition of 1980, I won first place in the individual Tameshigiri competition. After deciding to move to the U.S. a short time later, I informed Mr. Murakami on my decision. He told me that he believed I was going to change the society of Japanese swordsmanship and it was regrettable that I was going to the U.S. There were only a few men who dedicated their lives only in the profession of swordsmanship in Japan at the time. Mr. Murakami thought it would be difficult to teach swordsmanship in the land of guns. He told me that if I ever had problems in the U.S., I should sell the sword. If I still didn't have enough money, he assured me that I could borrow up to 20,000 from his former teacher that was currently the branch manager of a bank in Los Angeles, and Mr. Murakami would pay. To hear this was very encouraging. Four years later, I didn't sell the sword or borrow any money, and successfully acquired my green card. I flew back to Japan and greeted him letting him know that everything went well.

Nineteen years have passed and Shinkendo has finally been recognized and acknowledged over the world. In the July of 2002, I went back to Japan for a week to see my old mother with my seventeen year old daughter. I was sightseeing Tokyo with my daughter when I saw a old man pushing a bicycle-drawn cart of baked sweet potatoes up a steep hill in Harajuku drenched in sweat. I immediately helped the old man push the cart up the hill, while suddenly thinking to myself that Mr. Murakami lived in Harajuku and that I had to call him. At the exact same time, Mr. Murakami who had no idea that I was currently in Japan, called my home in Los Angeles. I received a phone call from my wife in Los Angeles to call Mr. Murakami. Even though I didn't talk with Mr. Murakami for years, I was wondering if my telepathy had reached him or if this was coincidence and I was surprised.

I called Mr. Murakami and arranged for a meeting. While standing at the station, my daughter asked me what he looked liked so she could spot him, I replied that I would know as soon as I saw him. Then, out of the crowd, a 70 year old man in appeared with a 1,100 cc motorcycle and my daughter asked me if that was him. We went to his house and his wife said, "Mr. Obata, it's been nineteen years." I passionately spoke of the Kuyo Junikun and Hachido philosophy to Mr. Murakami in a private room. I explained that I made the Kuyo Junikun and Hachido philosophy in order for the training of my mind and spirit as well as training for Shinkendo students. He commented that he read many books to train his mind and spirit, and that the Shinkendo philosophy was truthful and easy to comprehend. He said it was rare for a person in Japan to be thinking so deeply about martial arts. He then took out a long sword, and said that he was thinking about giving to me when we met. He asked me to take it back to Los Angeles and use it for Shinkendo. As we were going back, my daughter told me that she never met anyone more energy and spirit than my father until she met Mr. Murakami.

From the first time I ever met Mr. Murakami, I realized he was a very serious man, and I had made him my life's senpai. The gradual spread of Shinkendo is my way of showing gratitude to him.

-Jinsei Shinkendo Toshishiro Obata

On Tachiuchi - by James Huang

Sensei: James, please write something about tachiuchi for the next newsletter.

James: Hai! (blank look)

Sensei: Anything is okay. Write about how you like tachiuchi with Saito, don't like with someone else.

James: Hai! (blank look)

Sensei nods, satisfied, and walks on.

I always disliked sparring when I studied Okinawan Kempo as a kid, mostly because my opponents always seemed to have an uncanny knack of hitting me often and hard, but with time, perseverance, and a lot of patience, I grew to hate it. No, that's not entirely true, I did actually like it when it was more freeform, no-holds-barred play. So it's with some surprise that I say now that I like tachiuchi, which is not freeform, but 'rehearsed'.

At first, when one of my mentors, Saito-san, told me it was 'rehearsed sparring', I thought "Well I don't think I can learn much from tachiuchi if it's rehearsed" - and "That sounds too easy, not dangerous at all." - and I admit the I-hate-sparring part of me said "Oh good, well, at least it won't hurt." All of these were fairly quickly proven to be wrong. A few sessions of having Saito-san, Sammy-san, and Nathan-san, not to mention 5-foot and not many inches Yoko-san chase me around the mat with quick, fast, hard strikes taught me some good lessons in humility. If I'm leaving anyone out, don't feel bad, I'm sure you've thrashed me pretty good, too. Let's just assume you have and leave it at that. I'm not much on vanity.

Anyways, I realized as I licked my wounds (mostly bleeding knuckles and damaged ego) in the corner of the dojo, that not all was as it seemed. Tachiuchi can be bad-ass. And fun. And can teach you a lot. But at first, it can be scary, especially when you're up against a much faster, more powerful opponent.

"How to survive against Sammy"

Many times I've wished someone would write a pamphlet or handbook on that subject. I mean, it's bad enough that Sammy actually duct tapes the monouchi part of his bokuto as if to say 'I've whacked people so hard with this stick that it's actually falling apart.' Then there's the fact that Sammy's really been working on his policeman smiles. So when you're facing that taped bokuto raised over Sammy's shaved noggin, what do do? Let me offer a few tips of hard-earned advice. (These rules can also be applied to tachiuchi against anyone of higher skill- I can think of several.)

DON'T WHIMPER!

This sounds obvious, but it's not as easy to achieve as you might think, particularly when that first crashing blow smacks your own bokuto into your poor tender head. Just 'take it like a man' and do your best. I think they respect that and let you have more breathing room that way.

GET SAITO-SAN TO PRACTICE WITH YOU

I am probably the luckiest martial artist in the world, as I've had access to lots of talented fighters, including of course Sensei himself. But I also have to give my thanks and no small measure of any skill I have to Saito-san's patience and steady teaching. He's got his own dojo now, so I unfortunately can't practice much with him, but there was a time when every night after class, Saito-san would give me the 'tachiuchi' look, which consisted of a slight tilt of the head, and the shake of a bokuto. 'Tachiuchi anyone?' I was a glutton for learning from him. He was so patient, skilled, and such a good teacher, that I began to like tachiuchi a lot. So, if you can't find Saito-san to practice with, find someone like him, or anyone who will practice with you often. You won't regret it! It's fun, and you'll learn a lot.

MOVE

What can I say? We've all had sempai paralysis, and certainly Sensei paralysis before. But if that strike is coming, just forget about correct or not, if you don't move, you'll take the full force of the strike, not a good thing. And take your fingers with you. Don't want to end up with tape on your head and fingers instead of your bokuto.

CHEAT

Take cheat steps. If you don't know them, have someone teach them to you. Yoko-san taught me a nice one in Juppon, not going in too far if you're testing the opponent, and that way you can back up quicker on the defense. Nathan-san taught me a good one in Omote, about keeping steady pressure. I guess that's another thing about tachiuchi- and Shinkendo and Aikido in general, is that there are many layers. I think gradually when you begin to realize that tachiuchi is not a set of routines, but more like combat, it gives you another level of insight. You begin to make it more spontaneous for yourself, and start to naturally 'feel' why you're striking this way or why you're defending that way against the incoming attack, and start to build natural reflexes against certain strikes. It's nice if someone explains, and I've been lucky in that regard, but I think tachiuchi gradually reveals itself in time.

BE A SAITO-SAN FOR SOMEONE ELSE

Give back once you've learned. If someone's struggling or you see they hate tachiuchi and you don't, help them to like it! You might learn something from it, and you'll have their undying gratitude for it.

To conclude like the old vaudeville routines, the 2 things I've learned from tachiuchi are distance, timing, and harmony.

Wait, the 3 things I've learned from tachiuchi are...

Tachiuchi to me is like wine, curry, and the best relationships - they get better with time.



MARCH MADNESS FOR THE MARTIAL ARTIST

The Tatsumaki Dojo in Springdale AR. held its annual seminar with Obata Kaiso during spring break on March 14 th, 15th, and 16 th . Held at the intramural recreational sports complex, on the campus of the University of Arkansas, the facility was all but empty except for the swarm of martial artists that showed up for an exceptional weekend of training. Contributing to this year's success was the loyal members of Kaiso's organization that traveled from as far away as Atlanta, GA, North Liberty, IA, Tupelo, MS, and Conway, AR.

This year's training was expanded to include Jojutsu arresting techniques and Bojutsu to complement the already rich curriculum of Shinkendo, Aikido and Toyama Ryu. Nathan Scott Sensei accompanied Obata Kaiso and was thrashed about in the usual uke manner. Scott Sensei received a loud round of applause after Obata Kaiso preformed a jujinage with the Jo that catapulted him into an orbit that astonished everyone.

Following a solid day of training on Saturday, the group gathered at the Panda Chinese Restaurant for a buffet style dining. Shortly after dinner, Sensei Randy Beard, on behalf of the Tatsumaki Dojo, presented Obata Kaiso with 100 bronze organizational challenge coins. After the history of the challenge coin was told, Kaiso eagerly passed them out to all participants. Following the toast to the day's success, most everyone retired to their room in order to get good nights sleep. Sunday's final day of training was a welcome review of the weekend's massive amount of knowledge that Obata Kaiso revealed to us. For this, we will ever be indebted.

Until next year, train hard, and "Tanren shite kudasai."

Tatsumaki Dojo
Shibucho Randy Beard

THE GOOD ANGLE OF VENUS



I began classes at Honbu dojo in the month of November 2002, but didn't have much time to commit to classes five days a week. The aerospace industry can be taxing on ones time, and with my new job at Northrop Grumman this was surely the case. I remember the beginnings of my Shinkendo as rather routine. One of our senior students, James Huang, would consistently help me with learning Goho Battoho techniques, while Saito Sensei would consistently remind me to remain dignified and help me with my form. These two people were the most instrumental in the early days of my Shinkendo, helping me to understand what was expected of me and reforming my technique. It wasn't until January of 2003 that I began coming regularly and training hard with fellows like Istvan and Joe. The three of us showed up consistently before our February test, and together developed an increase in spirit to aid us with our Shinkendo. Obata Sensei has reported that one Kiai of Istvan is worth five men. This is quite true and I challenge myself every time to be as powerful as he. Together we trained hard to test in Aikido, Shinkendo, and Toyama Ryu. This would be my first test and I wanted to be sure I could pass. I of course was very nervous when my first test came the first week of February. I was concerned my performance would lack luster and Obata Sensei would drop kick my butt to the nearest spaceport, but fortunately this wasn't the case. Shortly after my test Obata Sensei began to ask me questions concerning the nature of astronomy.

At first his questions were simple and my memory was fit for the task. Soon after he began to ask much more detailed relationships between the planets, the angles they make with the sun and earth at aphelion and perihelion, and relative sizes of objects compared to earth and common items in everyday life. I would spend my lunch hour at work mathematically calculating the questions he asked me. While I probably could I have looked up the answers sorting through voluminous web pages on trivia, I decided to calculate it by hand. It feels much more rewarding, brushes up my math skills, and allows me to open up those dusty astronomy books to find all the relevant constants: Radius of the sun, earth, moon, and distance in kilometers between them. So here starts Jon's little corner of astronomy questions to all the dedicated readers out there. I'll post questions each month and give the answers the following month.

If the Sun were as large as a golf ball, how big would the earth be in relative size?

What is the angle between the Sun, Earth and Venus, when Venus is at it highest point in the sky?

How many Earths would fit in the Sun stacked side by side? (Assuming they didn't burn up!)

Good Luck! Life is Shinkendo.

-jon

Jonathan M. King

Ichimonji