



AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES NEWSLETTER

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Volume VII. Number 5.

May 1, 1991

Master Adam Hsu Seminar

On March 30th and 31st, Master Adam Hsu (Hsu Chi) from Oakland, California, conducted his 2nd very successful seminar at the dojo. About 20 members participated the two day seminar which covered Chen Family Style Tai-chi and Ba Qua Chuan.

Master Hsu stayed in Los Angeles through April 2nd and visited Black Belt Magazine and other publication companies looking for financing for his series of videos on Kung Fu. He hopes to use the money to finally build his dojo, a dream since he came to this country over fifteen years ago.

Sensei first met Master Hsu as fellow participants in the International Martial Arts Exhibition at the Oakland Convention Center in 1975. We hope to organize Kung Fu seminars in Japan for Master Hsu with the hope that this may speed up the materialization of his own school.

News Items

The dojo would like to thank David Wisotski for having the faucet in the dojo kitchen and bathroom fixed.

Thanks goes to Sam Onate to donated his services to repair Sensei's broken down car.

Thanks to Andrea Guild for her donation to Sensei on his birthday.

Special thanks to David Ito for helping to take care of Sensei's Altadena home.

We welcome back Robert Masuda who recently went on a trip to Japan.

We also welcome back many other students whom we have not seen for a while.

If you have a friend whom you have not seen in the dojo for a while, please give him a call and encourage him to resume training.

PROMOTIONS

These promotions were presented on April 26, 1991, on the occasion of O-Sensei's 23rd Memorial Service.

1st Kyu

Ismael Araujo

2nd Kyu

Hieu Nguyen
Shawn Pak
Eric Rodriguez
Kevin Chiu
Lorraine Rowan
Steve Tarango

3rd Kyu

Monika Alvarez
Jeff Bey
Norm Lew

4th Kyu

Gary Chang
Robert Masuda
Sam Onate
Ann Enomoto
James Hemseth
Rick Parent
Joe Quinn
Marcel Labbe

5th Kyu

Kevin Arnold
Johan Bey
David Ito
Rodney Craig
Leo Mora
Dan Wong
Andy Kissil

6th Kyu

Abel Perez
Michael Russo
Geroge Machkalov
Ray Primrose
Joseph Torrez

Special Promotion

On the occasion of O-Sensei's 23rd Memorial Service on April 26, 1991, Mark Moore has been presented with an honorary rank of 1st Degree Black Belt.

Congratulations

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May 2nd - 5th. Hataya Sensei from Japan.

May 4th. Demonstration for the Japanese American Cultural Center. Children's Day. JACCC.

May 5th. Demonstration for the Japanese Village Plaza. Children's Day. Little Tokyo.

May 11th - 12th. Special Weekend Seminar by Seichi Sugano Sensei, 7th Dan, from the New York Aikikai.

May 15th - 21st. Hataya Sensei from Japan.

May 21st - May 27th. Furuya Sensei to Japan.

Mid June. Demonstration for Handicapped Children. Details pending. Please participate.

June 24th - 30th. Igarashi Sensei, 6th Dan, from the Hashimoto Dojo, Tokyo, Japan. Igarashi Sensei is the Aikido teacher who accompanied Kobayashi Sensei during his last visit.

July 4th. Independence Day. Special morning class. 10:00am.

August 12th. Nisei Week Aikido and Martial Arts Demonstration at the JACCC in Little Tokyo.

Please mark your calendars for these special events. Everyone is invited to attend and participate.

Membership Drive

We need to draw in more members into the dojo. Those who introduce a friend into the dojo, will receive a free uniform. Limit of three uniforms per student. Please help to bring in more students into the dojo through word of mouth.

We are also trying to build up our membership for the upcoming purchase of new mats for the dojo in July and also to pay off our old telephone bill. We need everyone's help. Thank you so much for your cooperation and effort.

O'SENSEI'S MEMORIAL SERVICE ON APRIL 26, 1991

On April 26, 1991, from 7:30pm, we conducted one of the most important events of our dojo, the Memorial Service for O-Sensei, the Founder of Aikido. This year, we observed the 23rd Anniversary for his passing.

This year, the service was conducted by Reverend Haku-jin Kuroyanagi of the Zenshuji Soto Mission. About twenty students attended.

Kuroyanagi Sensei recited the Heart Sutra and each member offered incense to O-Sensei's memory. Flowers and O-sonae (Japanese offering cakes) were donated by Ms. Kyoko Arai of the Zenshuji Temple.

After the ceremony, Kuroyanagi Sensei spoke a little about Aikido and Buddhism. He asked the members this: When an opponent attacks, when is it your opponent's power and when is it your power? When the baby is in the womb, which part of the blood belongs to the mother and which part belongs to the fetus? We think we are independent, but actually we are all connected in some way. This is called interdependent co-origination.

Later, Sensei told me that he also wanted to say that when we eat something, part of what we eat and digest in our bodies turns into excrement but part of it turns into our "life energy." He said that we often get the two mixed up. The teacher receives and digests the teaching and passes it on to his students. Students often don't realize or confuse that part of it looks very good and part of it looks very undesirable. Essentially it is the same thing. There is a Zen saying that "even shit can look delicious." Can you understand?

John Stevens Sensei Visits Our Dojo on April 27, 1991

John Stevens, an Aikido teacher and professor of a university in Sendai, Japan, visited our dojo on April 27, 1991 to conduct a one-day seminar on Aikido and Aikido weapons. He is visiting in Los Angeles to give lecture at the County Museum of Art for their special exhibition of Zen paintings. He is a well known author of many books on Zen, Aikido and calligraphy. We hope he comes back to visit us again. About twenty members attended.

Sensei was preparing for Bishop Yamashita's daughter's Tea Ceremony and was regrettably unable to attend the seminar which was a big success.



ANCIENT WAYS

What Does a Black Belt Really Mean?

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

Through the popularity of this column, I get correspondence from all over the country. And the most commonly asked question is, "How long does it take to get a black belt?"

I don't know how this question is answered in other schools, but my students know that asking such a question in my dojo would set them back several years in their training. It would be a disaster.

Most people would be overjoyed if I would say it takes just a couple of years to get a black belt, but unfortunately it does not. And though I am afraid most people would not be happy with my answer, I think the general misconceptions about "what is a black belt?" should be clarified as much as possible. This is not a popular subject to discuss in the way I am going to. Indeed, I warn my students not to ask this question in the first place. The answer is not what they want to hear.

How do you get a black belt? You find a competent teacher and a good school, begin your training and work hard. Someday—who knows when—it will come. It is not easy, but it's worth it. It may take one year; it may take ten years. You may never achieve it. When you come to realize that the black belt is not as important as the practice itself, you are probably approaching the black belt level. When you realize that no matter how long or hard you train, there is a lifetime of study and practice ahead of you until you die, you are probably getting close to a black belt.

At whatever level you achieve, if you think you "deserve" a black belt, or if you think you are now "good enough" to be a black belt, you are way off the mark, and, indeed, a very long way from reaching your black belt.

Train hard, be humble, don't show off in front of your teacher or other students, don't complain about any task and do your best in everything in your life. This is what it means to be a black belt.

To be overconfident, to show off your skill, to be competitive, to look down on others, to show a lack of respect, and to pick and chose what you do and don't do (believing that some jobs are beneath your dignity) characterize the student who will never achieve black belt. What they wear around their waists is simply a piece of merchandise bought for a few dollars in a martial arts supply store.

The real black belt, worn by a real black belt holder, is the white belt of a beginner, turned black by the color of his blood and sweat.

O-Sensei, the founder of *aikido*, always wore

a white belt, saying that he was only a "beginner" in aikido. Another great martial artist once said, "Ah, the black belt I wear is only good to hold up my pants."

Training's Pattern

The first level of black belt in Japanese is called *shodan*. It literally means "first level."

Sho (first), is an interesting ideograph. It is comprised of two radicals meaning "cloth" and "knife." To make a piece of clothing, one first cuts out the pattern on the cloth. The pattern determines the style and look of the final product. If the pattern is out of proportion or in error, the clothes will look bad and not fit properly. In the same way, your initial training to reach black belt is very important; it determines how you will eventually turn out as a black belt.

In my many years of teaching, I have noticed that the students who are solely concerned with getting their black belt discourage very easily, as soon as they realize it is harder than they expected. Students who come in just for practice, without concern for rank or promotion, always do well. They are not crushed by shallow or unrealistic goals.

Some time ago, I had an elderly gentlemen come to my dojo to sign up for practice. He was 69 years old, and had acute bursitis in the shoulders. He said that his doctor recommended that he take aikido, but he was not interested in rank or promotion. He just wanted to get a little exercise for himself. I didn't try to push him in any way but let him come to practice and enjoy himself. I was surprised how well he did after several years. In fact, a visiting master-instructor from Japan looked at him and said to me, "Why is he not wearing a black belt? He is very good!" In addition to the student's immediate promotion, he cured most of his bursitis as well.

On the other hand, there is the famous story about Yagyu Matajuro, who was a son of the famous Yagyu family of swordsmen in 17th century feudal Japan. He was kicked out of the house for lack of talent and potential, and sought out the instruction of the swordmaster Tsukahara Bokuden, with the hope of achieving mastery of the sword and regaining his family position.

On their initial interview, Matajuro asked Tsukahara Bokuden, "How long will it take me to master the sword?" Bokuden replied, "Oh, about five years if you train very hard."

"If I train twice as hard, how long will it take?"

inquired Matajuro. "In that case, ten years." retorted Bokuden.

Finding a Focus

What do you focus on if you don't focus on attaining your black belt?

It is easier said than done, but you must focus your energy on practice. However, to think, "I will concentrate on my training to get my black belt," is simply playing mind games with yourself and will ultimately lead to your own disappointment.

Can you simply think, "I forget about rank completely?" Can you simply say to yourself that you will never achieve it? Will you always be attached to your black belt, allowing the idea to linger in the back of your mind? In other words, can you simply concentrate on your training without regard to anything else? Can you finally realize that your black belt is nothing more than "something to hold up your pants?"

You should also realize that although you master all the requirements, the correct number of techniques, all the required forms and put in the appropriate amount of hours of training, you may still not qualify for black belt. To achieve black belt is not a quantitative entity which can be measured or weighed like buying string beans in the market. Your black belt has to do with you as a person.

How you conduct yourself in and out of the dojo, your attitude to your teacher and fellow students, your goals in life, how you handle the obstacles in your life, and how you persevere in your training are all important conditions of your black belt. At the same time, you become a model to other students and eventually reach the status of teacher or assistant instructor. In the dojo, your responsibilities are greater than the regular students and you are held accountable to much, much more than those junior to yourself. Your responsibilities are great as a black belt holder.

Achieving Training Focus

How do we focus on our training?

Successful training means, to a great degree, that we look at what we do from a reasonable and realistic viewpoint. More often than not, we are not looking at realistic goals but at dreams and delusions. Do you want to excel in martial arts as a way to improve yourself and your life, or are you motivated by the latest cops and robbers movie? Is your practice motivated by a strong desire to



The Japanese ideograph for shodan is composed of the radicals for "cloth" and "knife."

enlighten yourself, or do you simply want to imitate the latest martial arts movie star? Although experienced martial artists may snicker, it is amazing how many inquire about martial arts saying they want to be just like Chuck Norris or Steven Seagal. But those people are themselves by their own efforts. You are yourself. We all have our heroes, role models, and our dreams, but we have to separate our fantasies from the reality of our training if our training is to be meaningful and successful.

Reality

Training has nothing to do with rank or black belts, trophies or badges. Martial arts is not simply playing out our fantasies. It has to do with your own life and death. It is not only how we protect ourselves in a critical, lethal situation, but how we protect the lives of others as well. You cannot be another person, whether he is a movie star, great teacher, or multi-millionaire. You must become yourself—your true self. As much as John Doe dreams about becoming James Dean, Bruce Lee or Donald Trump, he can only be John Doe. When John Doe becomes John Doe, 100 percent, he has become enlightened to his true self. An average person only lives 50 percent, or maybe 80 percent of his life and never really knows who he is. A martial artist lives 100 percent of his life and becomes impeccable. This is what the true black belt holder must come to realize within himself. He is no other than himself, and his practice leads to enlightenment into the nature of his true self, his real self. This is the essence of our training in martial arts.

Achieving Your Black Belt

Think of losing your black belt, not gaining it. Sawaki Kodo, a Zen master, often said: "To gain is suffering; loss is enlightenment."

If someone were to ask the difference between martial artists of previous generations and martial artists today, I would sum it up like this. Martial artists of previous generations looked upon their training as "loss." They gave up everything for their art and their practice. They gave up their families, jobs, security, fame, money, everything, to accomplish themselves.

Today, we only think of gain. "I want this. I want that." We want to practice martial arts but we also want money, a nice car, fame, portable telephones and everything that everyone else has.

Shakyamuni Buddha gave up his kingdom, his

palaces, a beautiful wife, and everything else to finally seek out enlightenment. The first student of Boddhidharma, considered the founder of Shaolin kung fu, cut off his left arm in order to study with his teacher.

We don't have to take such drastic measures to learn martial arts today, but we should not forget the spirit and determination of the great masters of the past. We must also realize that we have to make sacrifices in our own lives in order to pursue our training.

When the student looks at his training from the standpoint of loss instead of gain, he comes close to the spirit of mastery, and truly becomes worthy of the black belt.

Only when you finally give up all thought of rank, belts, trophies, fame, money and mastery itself, will you achieve what is really important in your training. Be humble, be gentle. Care for others and put everyone before yourself. To study martial arts is to study yourself—your true self. It has nothing to do with rank. A great Zen master once said: "To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to understand all things." ★

Reverend Kensho Furuya has authored books on aikido, swordsmanship, Japanese swords and traditional Japanese martial arts. He is the chief instructor and director of the Aikido Center of Los Angeles and the head instructor of the Los Angeles Branch of the All Japan Battodo Federation. He teaches in his dojo everyday and also works as a Zen monk for the North American Headquarters of Soto Zen Buddhism. He welcomes all inquiries and questions on Japanese martial arts sent to Aikido Center of Los Angeles, 940 East Second Street #7, Los Angeles, CA 90012.
—Ed.

Correspondence:

From the July, 1991 Issue of Martial Arts Training:

Ancient Ways for Today

The article that Reverend Kensho Furuya wrote in the November, 1990, issue of M. A. Training, "To be Discouraged is a Part of Training," was excellent. His writing has influenced me a great deal. Thank you. Reverend Furuya.

His comments were interesting and enlightening. The article can be applied to all of life, and not just martial arts. Every time a form or class looks like it is going to be too tough, I just remember that quitting means defeat. Reading future Ancient Ways columns will be something to look forward to.

Christophere Nelson
Springfield, MO.

Message from Sensei:

"Weaving A Rope"

There is an old proverb in Japan: "Weaving a rope to tie his hands, after the robber has come and gone." Letters like to above come to the dojo and the Black Belt Offices all the time. People from all over the country, and from many foreign countries as well, write to me asking me questions all the time. Some people have referred to me as a "walking encyclopedia" of martial arts. Yet, I get very few questions from my own students who see me everyday. Most of the time, my students ask me at the wrong time or when there is really no time to discuss anything or when it is much too busy. On those occasions, all I can say is "no." That is why being with or spending personal time with the teacher is very important. At the temple, most of the most interesting lessons from the Bishop, my teacher, comes when we are just spending time together, drinking tea or having lunch. I never hear anything at formal occasions or times when many people are around. This is the most beautiful and spiritual aspect of the relationship between teacher and student. "Weave the rope, before the robber escapes!" Today, we are much too busy with our own selves to spend time doing anything. When O-Sensei passed away, he was very lonely because everyone was so busy with their own lives. He used to watch television in the evenings with the janitor, the two all alone in the big dojo. Only the lowly janitor was so happy with his company. I wish I could have been there to benefit from his teachings and company! I think of this every year during his Memorial Service. Gassho.