

TRADITIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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## Kancho's Corner

Osu

### **Training can be Urgent... by Ellis Amdur**

Throughout my career in martial art training, I would say that the majority of people I've met – my fellow students, my peers or acquaintances, are people who are happy to train with what they think is an exemplary teacher. For a number of reasons, however, (lack of drive, humility, reticence to push themselves forward . . .), they act as if they have an endless amount of time to learn the system.

That's not so. Your teachers age, and as they do so, invariably, they cannot move as they once did. Some not only lose skill, but they lose knowledge. Others lose wisdom itself. Still others change: what seemed so important once is irrelevant to them as they approach, ever closer, to death, and their students' mastery of their particular combative art no longer seems that important. In other words, their fire has burned out.

Some teachers continue to burn, training themselves rigorously even into old age, still discovering new aspects of their art. However, even if aspects of their art become more sophisticated and deep, there are often certain physical actions that they can no longer perform.

Yet the student, quite naturally and sincerely, imitates the teacher, as they are now—particularly if they've no memory of him or her in earlier days. For example, when I first went to Japan and met Donn Draeger, he invited me to train in *Shindo Muso-ryu*. (it was, in a sense, the 'entry

level' *koryu* for young people he was mentoring). There were a number of reasons I chose not to enter *Shindo Muso-ryu* or establish such a close relationship with Donn (I hadn't travelled half-way around the world, giving up the life I knew, to land easily within the protective tutelage of someone who had been 'there' first...I wanted to find my own 'there,' different from his).

In any event, the most important reason was watching Shimizu *sensei*, already old, shuffling his feet in 15 cm steps, and watching huge guys copying him, shuffling their feet and swinging their *jo* and sword much like their rotund elderly teacher.

I recently got a bad hip injury – it's improved somewhat, but it's unclear at this point if I'm going to make a full recovery on this latest injury. After a month-long break, I've been training for a week and I'm crippled in regards to certain movements. For example, I cannot do a *ke-ashi*, the emblematic kick of *Toda-ha Buko-ryu*. So when people ask me how to do this technique – or any one of a number of others that I can't (at least right now) accomplish, I can merely explain it (but verbal explanations may well be inadequate) or refer them to archival films on our website of myself or my teachers in earlier days.

But my understanding may well have changed since that film, and anyway, that is not even close to the experience of observing your teacher in the flesh, or even more important, experiencing them use a technique to 'kill' you over and over. Learning with the flesh is not the same as learning with the eyes or ears.

My point is: do not be complacent. Do not approach learning at a leisurely pace. Train as if your life depends on it (it may), and as if this may be the

## Kancho's Corner Cont'd

only opportunity to learn this particular bit of information (that may be true). If you don't hear it, perceive it, embody it now, the opportunity to learn it may never come again. Or without seeing your teacher perform the technique, without an opportunity to feel yourself impacted/defeated by it, you will never conceive of what it really means.

As those in my Valencia Dojo can quickly recall this week, I taught a nuance in the use of the sword vs *naginata* that an outside observer will never perceive, but a practitioner, weapon-to-weapon, will definitely experience. It radically changes your effect on *shitachi*, allowing you to have time and space to accomplish *taisabaki* (body-displacement) to get in an advantageous position. It's something I just discovered myself, after struggling with this technique for almost forty years. However, what if, a few years from now, I can no longer do it? If not learned now, lost forever.

As I learned myself in Japan, I 'forced' my instructors to teach me through my sincerity. Not by demanding they teach me this or that – I never did that. Rather, they taught me something once; they showed me something without explanation; I observed, sensed them doing something and I **caught** it. Because I paid attention, they were honor bound to teach me.

But there's limited time. If you take it easy, if your life is so rich and interesting that, for you, martial arts is just one of several rewarding activities that you do, your instructor will not be compelled to teach the fierce student, not be willing to teach the indifferent, nor able to teach the one who hasn't even learned the early steps. There is so little time that you must act like there is NO time.

You have to grab those moments and learn them: not only because you never know if your teacher will show or explain them again, but more importantly, in a relatively short period of time, he or she may not be ABLE to manifest them.

*Sensei David*

It's a terrible thing, I think, in life to wait until you're ready. I have this feeling now that actually no one is ever ready to do anything. There is almost no such thing as ready. There is only now.

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## Members Corner

### Martial Arts and the Benefits of Psychology



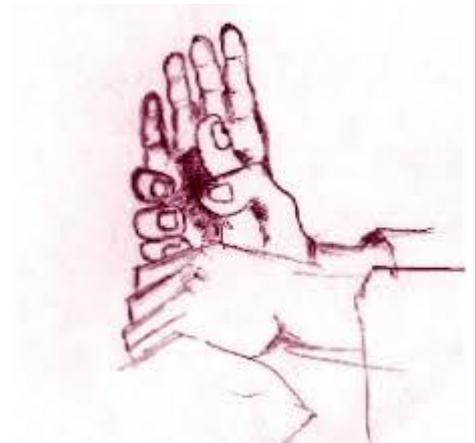
How many forward rolls have you performed? How many thousands of times have you completed the kihon dosa? Why did you do so many? While simultaneously working through a degree in psychology and a black belt, I found that understanding psychological concepts helped to answer many of my martial arts questions.

One reason for repeating a technique many times comes from the mechanical response from the brain that builds synapses. The first time you learn something new, a connection forms in the brain. When you perform a technique, repetitively, an even stronger connection is formed. Just as a pathway through the bush becomes more defined with use, so will the connective pathways in your brain. The more you practice a technique, the easier it is for the electrochemical processes in your brain to repeat with ease. In summary, your brain will perform the cognitive aspect more quickly. Which allows your body to perform the physical aspect of the technique more efficiently.

Another theory is that of behavioral conditioning. Behavioral theorists support the concept of physical practice improving performance. For instance, if you want to teach a student a particular technique, shouting for him to perform is not an efficient teaching method. Instead, having them practice it slowly and rewarding successful efforts with verbal praise will increase ability. When the student is continuously being successful at a slow pace, slowly increase the speed of your attack. When this has been cemented, proceed to full speed, occasionally rewarding them for their good work. With enough practice, the technique becomes a reflex, no longer requiring thought.

Social psychologists also have researched individual performance levels in response to stress. They have found that a person's performance can either improve or decay under pressure, depending on the level of challenge. Clinical psychologists have found that black-belt students perform drills more efficiently when they are involved in a grading, whereas colored-belts perform less efficiently under the same conditions. Why? Because the black-belt students have practiced the technique so much that it becomes a habit.

From a psychological perspective there are now several reasons why you need to continually practice your techniques. If those reasons are not enough, do it so Nikajo Monday doesn't happen.



## Upcoming Events



### Budo Seminar

6th, 7th, & 8th, July 2018

• Shinto Muso Ryu Jojutsu • Shinto Ryu Kenjutsu & Iaijutsu

Suitable for practitioners of all styles aged 15 years + and any level of experience  
Enquiries and bookings: 5445-9116 or info@kenshin.com.au



Proud to be hosting  
**Hombu Dojo Dojocho,**  
**Masahiko Noriki Shihan**  
 for the first time in Australia

Seminar and demonstration will be held at Aikido Yoshinkai NSW

Noriki Sensei received the title of Shihan (master instructor) in 2012 and was appointed Hombu Dojo Dojo Cho (head of dojo) in 2017. He is ranked 7th dan and has previously taught or assisted in seminars in Germany, Russia and the Ukraine.

**Sat 9 June – Monday 11 June**

3 day - \$250 Book and pay by May 5 - \$200

Enquiries: **0422 522 888**

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