

SENSEI BUILDING

BY HAYWARD NISHIOKA

When people are often asked who are the person's who have had the greatest effect on their lives it is often a teacher or mentor. Of course parents have the greatest effect on our lives but we are often to close to them physically and emotionally to really see how they impact our growth till much later. Teachers on the other hand are distant enough to allow us to make a choice as to how we follow or not follow their suggestions. In the ancient world of martial arts the teachings of a master often made the difference of whether you would wake up in one piece or not or whether you would wake up at all for that matter. Thus the person who could train you to survive became, in a sense, your hero. It is no different today as in the past as the term sensei is a general honorific term attributed to instructors imparting knowledge that enhances the life of the recipient student, regardless of the field.

The term sensei comes from two Japanese "*kanji*" characters. The first part "*sen*" when written in Japanese means "before." The second character "*sei*" means life. Written together "sensei" means teacher, one who has had a before life or experience in a particular subject area before you have. Of course there are *sensei's* and then there are *SENSEI'S* In feudal contentious Japan prior to the Meiji modernization era one's selection of a good teacher could be crucial. Hopefully the sensei would have technical ability but perhaps more importantly, a lot of tested experience. These *sensei's* were revered and the best ones hired by reigning feudal warlords.

In 1868 the feudal Shogun system was abolished and the royal family was reinstated as the supreme ruler of Japan. This was due to the in-ability of the feudal system to deal with the inexorable changes that shifted the world while Japan hibernated in isolation for more than 250 years. This was the time of the industrial revolution, steam engines, bigger and better machinery, new gadgets, multi level

factory buildings, and larger towns and cities. In the s1600 and 1700s it was an easy matter to turn away an unwanted sailing ship from some foreign lands. Worse yet to capture, kill, or just throw into a deep pit those caught on their shores. This all changed in 1854 when Commodore Perry entered Edo harbor with a fleet of 7 well armed U.S. steam ships and Japan was forced to open its ports to the world.

Forward thinkers could see how far behind Japan was in comparison to the rest of the world and proposed means to catch up. Reforms were soon to come to Japan under the leadership of Emperor Meiji who is credited with building the first rail system, newspaper, postal system, National Army, and most importantly an education system for Japan. This was no easy task and not without descent from the existing power of the feudal shogun/samurai system. Anyone having seen the movie, “ The Last Samurai” got a glimpse into the problems of modernizing Japan. All that encompassed the old feudal system was being discarded, and all that was modern was to be embraced. It was during this time that the proverbial baby was about to be thrown out with the bathwater, but for a twist of fate.

While the Japanese martial arts of *yabusame*, *kyujitsu*, *kenjitsu*, *bojitsu*, *jujitsu*, *jitte*, *naginata* and *yari* of feudal Japan no longer held up as viable weapons against modern guns and bombs, they were transformed into an important cultural tool that set the tone for Japanese education. Like all ideas, they spring forth from someone’s mind: a mind that is in synthesis, adding thoughts to other thoughts and devising a new thought, and that mind belonged to Dr. Jigoro Kano.

While we mostly think of him as the founder of judo he was first and foremost a scholar; a polyglot in English, Chinese, and reportedly some German and French. Additionally he founded Japan’s Amateur Sports organization and was Asia’s first representative to the IOC and responsible for introducing many Western sports to Japan through the educational system. And, while the West had made its presence imperative in Japan via Commodore Perry, Kano in the long run made his incursion into education and the West via the Martial Arts (*Bu-jitsu*) by transforming it into the Martial Way (*Bu-do*). He did this through his beloved judo by demonstrating the finer qualities intrinsic to its practice. Qualities of searching for truth, searching for

excellence, building of body and mind, tenacity in the face of overwhelming odds, loyalty to a greater cause, mutual respect, and many other positive qualities necessary in building a strong society could be realized through its practice. While today the emphasis has been shifted to the making of champions Kano sensei's ideals where to build a better human being. These then are the same goals passed on by the founder that are espoused by the United States Judo Federation.

Considering all of the high ideals and positive qualities of judo and the martial way, we have to ask ourselves who will insure that judo will continue to be taught and practiced correctly? How can we be assured that the principles learned in judo will continue to have relevance to our student's and our society? As our past and current group of sensei's fade into U.S. judo history allow me the liberty to mention just a few names of sensei's, to reflect upon who have had a profound affect on not just judo but on having made the lives of those they touched better. Most certainly many names of these pioneer sensei's may be unfamiliar, and many will be missing, but by your thoughts they may be included: Yamauchi Sensei, Seigo Murakami and his son Roy, George Yoshida, Benso Tsuji, Lanny Miyamoto, Hiro Fujimoto, Mits Kimura, Donn Draeger, Kenneth Kuniyuki, Ryusei Inouye, Min Oyama, Takashi Kikuchi, Jerry Nitta, Pop Moore and his son Roy, Mel Bruno, Kenso Kiyohiro, Frank P. Fullerton, Mas and Vince Tamura, Toru Takamatsu, Nick Fukuyama, Tim Dalton, Kaimon Kudo, Shigeo Tashima, Hank Kraft, Yasuyuki Sakabe, Kenso Kiyohiro, Al Holtman, Kiro Nagano, Ted Kawasaki, Tosh Higashi, Hank Okamura, Toshio Tosaya, Masaru Harada, Tom Watanabe, Ted Kawasaki, Frank and art Emi, Moon Kikuchi, Tosh Tosaya, Ben Palacio, Sachio Matsubara, Eichi Koiwai, Tasuke Hagio, Keiji Horiuchi, Tamo Kitaura, Johnny Osako, Masaaki Nakaoka, John Ogden, Shag Okada, Jim Onchi, William Kaufman, Hikaru Nagao, Mas Yamashita, Bernie Lepkopfker, Luis Furukawa, George Uchida, Kenzo Uyeno, Isao Wada, Paul and Phyllis Harper, Sachio Ashida, Steve Bell, and the more recently departed Fujitani, Ken Carson, Bill Castro, Rusty Kanokogi, and Keiko Fukuda. The names surely evoke many fond memories of the golden era of judo's beginnings in the United States and the part they played in building it.

Now the question is, in this sociologically changing time, who will be giving back to judo? Who will be our next great sensei's?

Where will they come from? What training will they have to have in this new era of the “me” generation? Do we as an organization have a method of making the next generation of instructors? Will there have to be new incentives to motivate judoka to the next level? Should we as an organization assume the responsibility of building a bigger and better organization? If so, how do we do it? Is it through the next generation of sensei’s that the legacy can be continued? But now, where will the next generation of sensei’s come from?

The next generation of instructors will most likely come from the ranks of our upcoming senior black belts. But again, if we as an organization have been placing our emphasis only on our juniors and conceded our senior program to USA Judo, does this not lessen our chances of developing the next generation? Wouldn’t a better model be to also support our own Senior Program and to support our best senior athletes to represent us on our American Judo team’s. Next year we will be taking a large step forward by adding to our junior championships a senior championship component. Additionally we as an organization could possibly be developing and encouraging instructor programs for our senior members.

What qualifies an individual as a *sensei*. By the previously given definition anyone who can teach another a throw or pin would be a sensei, but this could not be so for there should be purpose and order to instruction. Example: Would you teach a throw to students before properly instructing them in safety matters like warming up, or how to fall correctly, or selecting the right partners and not just your kid sister who has never done anything physical? And, how about judo etiquette? How about curriculum? What of the purpose for the practice of judo? Oh, and what to do in case of a possible medical emergency? Traditional *sensei* would know these things.

Some sensei’s come to teaching these concepts naturally and from years of experience and continuity of activity. This is the reason most promotion boards have as one of their criteria’s for promotion, “time in grade.” Another way to guarantee that a *sensei* can be validated is through the certification process. For teachers in the education system it takes about an extra year or more over a Bachelor’s degree to finish up one’s pedagogical degree. Then there is usually a State run examination to qualify as a primary or

secondary education instructor. Higher education requires at least a Masters degree or a PhD.

In judo our education is ongoing and our test is the response we get from our students and parents. If we are good enrollment is usually healthy and parents and students are content. If the program is very good there will usually be an increase in enrollment. Some judo organizations have a formal instructor certification program. In United States the USJF has the most standardized system of teacher certification for judo. The USJF teachers Institute program is run by 7th Dan, Mitchell Palacio, a professor of physical education at City College of San Francisco. While the complete program lasts for only two days the course comes complete with a Instructor's Manual and Work Book written by Nishioka and Palacio, and an on line test that must be passed, along with papers and teaching presentation's that must be given as well in order to receive a certification, still few have taken the courses. Why?

The USJF Instructor Certification Program includes in it's curriculum the following areas: History of judo, Philosophy of Judo, Ethics, Biomechanics of judo, Teaching Tools, Systematized Teaching Method, and Risk Management. These are the areas deemed necessary for the basic instructor to have a working knowledge to instruct judo. Additionally the instructor candidate will be asked to demonstrate approximately 35 judo techniques at demonstration quality. This is only a starting point from which our future instructors are developed.

You --- all of you need to look to all those within your *dojos* and ask yourself who would be good candidates to be a good *SENSEI*? Not everyone will fit the bill, but for those who do, the next step is to encourage them to take the next step. All it takes is to just say, " You did a good job in showing that technique." followed by one of the following:

1. 'Have you ever thought about teaching or starting your own club?"
2. "Have you thought about becoming an assistant instructor?"

3. “I need you to get just a bit more training because I need you to start up a satellite program?”

We often forget that we as *sensei*'s have enormous influence over our students, and just a simple few words of encouragement can go a long ways to bettering judo development. Let us all take a moment to think of developing our next set of first line leaders, the *SENSEI*.