

SMAA JOURNAL



Shudokan Martial Arts Association • PO Box 6022, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-6022
<http://smaa-hq.com/> • shudokan@smaa-hq.com • 1-734-645-6441

ANNOUNCEMENTS

2018 SMAA DUES

Membership fees are due on January 1, 2018. Please be sure to pay your SMAA dues on time. You can either send a check to our headquarters or pay online at <http://www.smaa-hq.com/payments.php>. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and PayPal. This is a quick and safe way to make your annual SMAA membership payment.

We appreciate our members paying dues promptly. It makes life easier for the SMAA staff of volunteers, and it is representative of the type of self-discipline we are cultivating through the study of traditional Japanese martial arts.

DONATIONS & TAX DEDUCTIONS

The SMAA is a federally tax-exempt, nonprofit corporation. As such, your donations to our association are tax deductible. Send your donations, in the form of a check or money order (made out to SMAA), to our headquarters in Michigan. We'll send you a letter back acknowledging your contribution, which you can then use for tax purposes. We hope you'll support the SMAA in our goal to preserve and promote traditional budo and koryu bujutsu.

E-MAIL

Please make sure we have your correct e-mail address. Without this address, we can't e-mail you the *SMAA Journal*.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SMAA

1. To promote and aid in the growth of Japan's traditional arts and ways.
2. To assist the public in achieving spiritual growth and physical development through budo/bujutsu.
3. To further friendship and understanding between Asian and Western martial artists.
4. To establish goodwill and harmony among martial artists of various systems.
5. To offer Western martial artists access to legitimate budo/bujutsu organizations and teachers in Japan.
6. To give practitioners of authentic budo/bujutsu recognition for their years of devotion to these arts.

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修道館武道会

Do you have a new e-mail address? Have you sent it to hedavey@aol.com? If not, we also won't be able to send you SMAA publications, so please be sure to let us know if your e-mail address changes.

SMAA PATCHES

The SMAA HQ is selling official SMAA patches for your gi. They're great looking patches that embody the spirit and honor instilled in members of our group. They won't fade or bleed when you bleach them, and yet we've been able to keep the cost down. Each patch is basically a 3 ½ inch circle featuring our logo below:



Our patches were produced using state of the art digitizing and ultra-modern technology to create an accurate and attractive embroidered emblem. They feature tight stitches, sharp detail, clean lettering, and top quality craftsmanship. There's no jagged stitching, but we've still got plenty of stitches so that the background doesn't show through.

The patch should be worn on the left side of your gi jacket near your heart. SMAA policy mandates only one patch per uniform to maintain the sense of dignity associated with traditional budo.

These new patches are a great way to show your respect and enthusiasm for our group; we hope all of our members will order at least one. *And the best part is the patches are only \$5.00 (US) each!* (E-mail shudokan@smaa-hq.com about special shipping for international orders.)

To order, go to the "Payments" section of www.smaa-hq.com or send a check or money order made out to "SMAA" to:

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FACEBOOK PAGE



Have you been to the SMAA Facebook page? If not, you're missing out on the latest SMAA news, features, videos, photos, and information. It's easy and safe to join Facebook, and all you need to do is click the "Like" button to become a follower of our Facebook page. This is the fastest way to get SMAA news and updates, and we hope you'll drop by <http://www.facebook.com/ShudokanMartialArtsAssociation> and check it out. Once you're on Facebook, we hope you'll share our page with your friends and help us promote the SMAA.

SMAA ONLINE PAYMENTS

Did you know you can pay for your annual dues at our website using PayPal or a major credit card? You can, and you can also pay for gi patches and promotions in the same way. This is a much faster, and in some ways more secure, means of sending money to our headquarters. We hope more of our members will make use of this feature. Just drop by <http://smaa-hq.com/payments.php> for more information.

THE BEST OF THE SMAA JOURNAL CD-ROM

To celebrate its 15th anniversary in 2009, the SMAA created a special CD-ROM that contained a sampling of some of the best stories and articles to appear in the *SMAA Journal* since 1994. We mailed this free of charge to everyone in the SMAA as a way of showing our appreciation to our members.

Although our anniversary has past, it's still not too late to get a copy of this CD-ROM, which is packed with hard to find information about budo and koryu bujutsu. For \$8.95, plus \$3.00 shipping and handling (\$5.00 outside the USA), we'll send you *The Best of the SMAA Journal*.

Send your check or money order to the SMAA HQ. Supplies are limited to the number of CDs remaining.

SMAA YOUTUBE CHANNEL

修道館武道会

Shudokan Martial Arts Association

Want to see some great videos of SMAA teachers, officials, and members? Now you can by visiting our YouTube channel. We're Shudokan1994, because 1994 is the year the SMAA was founded.

To see video of SMAA teachers and members, go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg5Nika6Ge0&list=PLS11_XCH8RkI868tRKZ0fdJFSeFGyNZ0o

To see video of the amazing experts that trained leading SMAA officials and teachers, go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcE7zBhv9Hs&list=PLS11_XCH8RkIV8liNZoXI93WI79BLe1NZ

SMAA DUES INCREASED

For the first time in many years the SMAA will be increasing its annual dues. As of January 1, 2018, associate members will contribute \$25 annually and regular members will pay \$30 (US). As usual, dues are to be paid on or before the first of the year, and all payments go to support our international nonprofit association.

Please make a note of the fee increase, and remember that you can pay your dues easily and safely at www.smaa-hq.com. Your support of our 501(c)(3) corporation is always appreciated.

OHSAKI JUN, GOOD SAMARITAN

In the summer of 2017, Ohsaki Jun Sensei nonviolently apprehended a thief using his decades of training in traditional Japanese jujutsu. He was dining on the sidewalk of an outdoor café when he saw a young man steal a woman's laptop computer.

As the individual attempted to run, Ohsaki Sensei immediately captured him from behind using the unbalancing principles of Saigo Ryu and took him to the ground. Wrapping his arms around the thief's neck, he applied one of the potent shime waza,



Ohsaki Sensei controlling an opponent with wrist and shoulder pressure



Ohsaki Sensei teaching traditional jujutsu

“strangling techniques,” found in this jujutsu system. Controlling the man’s attempts to get away by compressing the vagus nerve and carotid sinus in the neck, Ohsaki Sensei kept him on the verge of losing consciousness by reducing blood pressure, making him unable to escape.

The café’s customers were shocked, yet still able to call the police. Fortunately, the police station was not too far away, but Mr. Ohsaki still had to keep the struggling thief under control for a very long ten minutes before help arrived. Nonviolently restraining an opponent for that amount of time takes a high level of skill.

More impressive still is the fact that the thief was almost twice the size of Ohsaki Sensei and less than half his age. Mr. Ohsaki is nearly 70 years old, but obviously in fine shape and taking falls (ukemi) each week for Saigo Ryu students young enough to be his grandchildren. His health, quick reflexes, and composure under pressure are a testament to the benefits of lifelong training in traditional bujutsu.

Once the man was handcuffed and the statements of witnesses were taken, he was removed from the

scene by the police. The café owner offered Ohsaki Sensei free coffee for life; and the woman, who’d retrieved her laptop by that time, thanked him profusely. Neither Ohsaki Jun or his opponent were injured, which is viewed as the highest level of accomplishment in Saigo Ryu, a traditional martial art founded on Buddhist principles of compassion by Saigo Kenji Sensei.

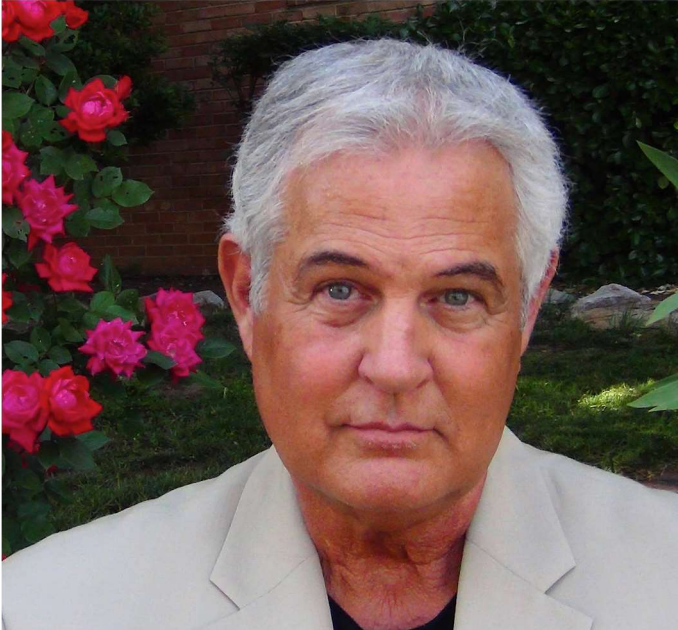
After the event was over, Ohsaki Sensei went to the dojo that evening to practice, much as he has most evenings since he began martial arts training in Tokyo over 60 years ago. He has been a member of the SMAA Board of Advisors and the SMAA Jujutsu Division for many years. He’s one of several martial arts experts from Japan that endorse SMAA ranks and activities.



Ohsaki Sensei demonstrating Saigo Ryu

THE DEATH OF JOSEPH RIPPY, A FINE MAN

By William Kelch and Nicholas Rippy



Rippy Sensei

Joseph Bryson Rippy, 69, a Japanese martial artist of note, passed away in Knoxville, Tennessee on August 18, 2016. Rippy Sensei was born in Burlingame, California on October 9, 1946, and resided in California and Texas until the age of six when his family moved to Tennessee. Joseph Rippy can aptly be described as, in addition to being an extremely skilled karateka, a humorous, gentle person who prided himself on strict adherence to courtesy, etiquette, and good manners—characteristics that we should all strive for. Three sons, Kelly, Jeremy, and Nicholas survive him.

Mr. Rippy began studying Wado Ryu karate-do at age 16 with Cecil Patterson Sensei, the founder of the U.S. Eastern Wado Ryu Karate Federation (USEWF) and other teachers associated with the USEWF. He was promoted in the USEWF to shodan in 1968 after about five years of study, nidan in 1970, sandan in 1973, yondan in 1977, godan in 1984, rokudan in 1986, and shichidan in 2012. Rippy Sensei's martial arts education was so extensive that we don't have

space to provide a comprehensive description of it, but it involved many years of practice in various dojo, tournaments, seminars, and direct and indirect contact with many very advanced martial arts practitioners.

Among these advanced practitioners were the three generations of grandmasters of Wado Ryu karate-do. The first was Otsuka Hironori Sensei, who founded Wado Ryu in 1934, his son Jiro (who became grandmaster and took the name Otsuka Hironori II when his father passed away), and Jiro's son Kazutaka, the present grandmaster who became Otsuka Hironori III on the passing of his father. Rippy Sensei trained under and knew well all three of these very distinguished gentlemen and incredibly skilled karateka.

One anecdote illustrates Rippy Sensei's marvelous skills as a karate-do practitioner. I (Kelch) was his student for about 25 years, and I was always very



Back row from left: Joseph Rippy, SMAA rokudan; John Patterson, United States Eastern Wado Ryu Karate Federation President; William Kelch, Rippy Sensei's student and SMAA nidan. Front row from left: Hironori Otsuka II, second Wado Ryu grandmaster; Hironori Otsuka III, present and third Wado Ryu grandmaster

impressed by his many skills. But I was much more than just impressed by his ability to generate energy in a punch. I was always astonished! Mr. Rippy could, seemingly effortlessly, generate huge amounts of kinetic energy with just a twist of his body and the extension of his hand – extension of his whole body mass would really be a better way to put it. I've practiced with lots of other karateka, and I would not want to be punched in anger by many of them, but Mr. Rippy seemed in a class by himself. The slightest tap from his fist made a student realize just how devastating a punch can be. And he made it look so simple!

Rippy Sensei was a marvelous teacher, and his teaching skills were widely known and certified. He was awarded sixth dan and Shihan ("Professor") teaching certification by the Shudokan Martial Arts Association Karate-do Division in 2008. He taught in the University of Tennessee Sports Program from 1982 until 1990. He was a specialist in teaching children, including teaching special needs children, and designing karate-do training games for children that helped youngsters focus on their techniques.

Another anecdote illustrates Mr. Rippy's teaching skills and his truly remarkable knowledge of karate-do, body movement, and muscle recruitment. Many



Rippy Sensei in his youth

times as I (Kelch) was studying various kata, Rippy Sensei would observe me stumbling about. He corrected me here and corrected me there, and gradually my technique would improve—at least a bit. But, occasionally, I performed so clumsily that he had to dig deeply into his teaching skills. He would seriously ponder my ungainly movements and then say something like; "I think you should press a little harder with the little toe on your right foot when you make that move." Despite my deep respect for my sensei, I was still skeptical, thinking to myself, "Little toe on my right foot! Are you serious?" But I did as I was told, and amazingly—voila! The increased pressure on the little toe—of the right foot, not the left—did the trick. Yikes! My next thought, again kept to myself of course, was, "How in the world did he figure that out?" But he did. His teaching skills were transcendent.

Rippy Sensei participated in innumerable martial arts tournaments and seminars as a competitor, judge, student, and teacher. Prominent among these events was his involvement in the 20th International Wado Ryu Championships and 50th Annual Wado Ryu Anniversary in Tokyo, Japan in 1984. He also served as a Senior Advisor for the Shudokan Martial Arts Association from 2008 until his death.

Rippy Sensei's interests were quite varied, but tended toward things related to Asia including, of course, Japanese and other Asian martial arts. In the intellectual sense, he was interested in kendo, iaido, aikido, aiki-jujutsu, kung fu, and several other styles of karate-do, including Goju Ryu, Shito Ryu, and Shotokan. While not a "hands on" practitioner of all these martial arts, he was skilled in the use of the bo ("six-foot staff"), confident in at least the rudiments of using the nunchaku, and very advanced in jujutsu-like techniques, which is an integral part of Wado Ryu karate-do. Rippy Sensei was by no means a one-dimensional martial artist.

Mr. Rippy had some eclectic interests beyond the martial arts. He was intensely interested in manga,

serialized Japanese comic books, and he left behind a very large, impressive manga collection with many items in mint condition. He was very interested in cinema, particularly martial arts and “strong man” cinema. Zatoichi, the blind Japanese swordsman, was one of his heroes as were Steve Reeves (Hercules) and Gordon Scott (Tarzan). Rippy Sensei also enjoyed studying feng shui, and he completed basic and advanced classes offered by the American Feng Shui Institute. (Feng shui is a Chinese philosophical method of harmonizing with the surrounding environment. It is related to Taoism.) His academic education included an A.A. degree from the Volunteer State Community College in

Gallatin, Tennessee in 1980 and a B.A. degree in Asian studies from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1982.

Finally, Joseph Rippy was my friend and a fine man. I miss him terribly. I pray for him, and I hope to see him again someday.

About the Authors: William Kelch Sensei is a nidan in the SMAA Karate-do Division. He has also received Fuku-shido teaching certification from this division, and he’s a past contributor to the SMAA Journal. Nicholas Rippy is the son of the late Joseph Rippy Sensei.

THE MIND IS UPRIGHT

By Nicklaus Suino

The late Yamaguchi Katsuo Sensei, iaido 10th dan, wrote a forward to my first book *The Art of Japanese Swordsmanship*. He wrote, in part, this:

The secret to iaido is a calm spirit. With a tranquil heart you put your hand on the hilt of your sword—in a split second your hand moves to cut down the opponent and resheath the sword—then return to your composed mind. A serene spirit must be cultivated at all times. It is said that the sword is like the mind, and if the sword is upright, the mind is upright. But if the mind is not upright, the sword can never be wielded properly.

IT ONLY SOUNDS SIMPLE

I've been teaching iaido since the fall of 1992—that's 25 years if I'm counting correctly—and among the few things that I am absolutely sure of, this is one: keeping a composed mind during iaido practice (or the practice of any other martial art) is incredibly difficult. How do I know? Well, besides struggling

with it myself for all these years, every martial artist who comes through our doors struggles with it.

Men typically fall into the trap of believing they need more strength. That tends to make them seek out weight lifting or other activities that don't improve their core skills much (and may actually get in the way), and it also tends to make them excessively focused on trying to "win" when their time would be better spent trying to learn.

There are exceptions, but women typically fall into the trap of self-doubt. They are less likely to move forward independently. Some personal exploration is necessary to become very, very good at a martial art, even if it means a little time apparently wasted. With more deep independence would come more spontaneous growth. Also, some women seem reluctant to demonstrate physical strength, though I am happy to say this trend is diminishing recently.

More self-assurance for the typical woman, less muscle headedness from the typical man—each would go a long way to help. But besides the



Suino Sensei practicing Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu iaido

generalizations, there are all sorts of mental traps that prevent us from being as good as we can possibly be. Being too thoughtful, comparing ourselves to others, a low self-opinion, unrealistic dreams of becoming a samurai, believing that getting high is a good substitute for clear-headed practice, focusing on combat effectiveness during times when the point of the training is to learn new skillsets . . . the list goes on and on.

The analysis instead should always be: how do I do the basics very, very well, with no excessive muscle tension, with full presence in the moment, and without assigning a tactical value until my understanding of the exercise (kata, ippon kumite, nage waza, etc.) is very deep?

SO HOW DO YOU DO THAT?

Start here:

Learn to breathe properly. Focus on maintaining your breathing according to the dictates of your art.

Learn to relax. Focus on staying as relaxed as possible, using just enough muscular effort to accomplish the moves.

Learn to perceive. Focus on knowing what your body and mind are really doing rather than accepting what your senses tell you. This is a lot harder than you might think.

Learn to meditate. It will help you breathe properly, and it will help you learn to relax, but there's a more important reason. Becoming adept at meditation will help you separate yourself from the nonsense that your mind constantly spews at you. You'll learn what it feels like to have a composed mind, so you know what to look for in the midst of martial arts training.

IF I COULD SHARE ONE THING . . .

If I could share just one thing with you today, it would be this: find some way to stop.

Stop trying so hard to beat others in randori. Stop trying to be the fastest. Stop trying to know it all about your martial art. Stop thinking you need to get a new kata or a new rank. Stop letting your smaller self rule you, and get quiet enough to hear your higher self. That voice is very quiet, so you will have to listen carefully.

One other good way to quiet yourself is to immerse yourself in martial arts practice with no expectations. Move smoothly. Keep your eyes open. Don't strive. Let the joy of the techniques sink into your heart. Smile.

About the Author: Nicklaus Suino Sensei is the author of several well-regarded books on budo. One of the founding members of the SMAA, he is an eighth-degree black belt in iaido, an art he studied in Japan under leading authorities.

SEMPAI: TREASURES OF THE DOJO

By Wayne Muromoto

In any dojo, the sensei, the main teacher, is the central pillar. He sets the pace, level and atmosphere. But if the sensei is the central pillar in the grand tent of a training hall, the treasures are good sempai, senior students.

I use that adjective “good” because mediocre ones or lackadaisical ones really don’t matter much, one way or another, and bad ones are destructive to the dojo environment, causing degeneration in training quality even if the teacher has all the best intentions. I’ve experienced all three types of sempai both as a student and a teacher.

First, some definitions: sempai is a Japanese term meaning one’s seniors in an educational or work environment. In public schools, for example, a sempai can be a student of your own high school, who graduated a couple of years ahead of you. He will always be your sempai, no matter what, because of his/her seniority to you, and you are the kohai, or junior student. It is also used in an office environment, such as if a fellow clerk has more experience than you in the same position by some years, or even months or weeks. In martial arts, therefore, a sempai is someone that has been training longer than you.

It tracks, somewhat, the levels of ranking, although not quite entirely. Students who rise up quickly to surpass more senior students may have a higher rank, but in the Japanese frame of mind, that still won’t make you sempai to the more experienced student who may not be as technically and athletically talented. This has implications, which I’ll get into later.

Being a sempai is a fluid, dynamic position dependent on individual relationships within the group. You can be sempai to one person, but a kohai

to another. Think of it like being an older brother to a younger sibling, but a younger brother to an older sibling. It’s your place in the hierarchy of who showed up first.

Because of the relative nature of being a sempai, I found it curious when a friend of mine returned from a seminar he gave to a karate–do group. He said he was somewhat taken aback when, at a dinner hosted by the club, the sensei gave out “sempai” certificates, with “sempai” patches that the students could stick on their training outfits, along with the usual belt promotions. I guess the teacher figured out another money stream by devising the sempai “ranks” and patches. But it really makes no sense, because you can be a sempai to one person and a kohai to another. Then again, I’ve seen “sempai” patches affixed to the sleeves of karate students in other organizations, so, well, maybe I’m behind the times and need to get with the newfangled schemes to make more side money.



Wayne Muromoto teaches jujutsu, iaido, and tea ceremony in Hawaii

The thing with being a sempai is that, in general, you are expected to have a wider knowledge of the workings of the group from your more extensive experience, even if it's but a month or two more than your nearest kohai. Beyond the basic technical expertise of the system, you know what went on before, in the past, before the newbies showed up. You know where the skeletons are in the closet, so to speak. And that knowledge is constantly being built up as you add to it, year after year, with additional experiences. As you age and mature, you also bring to bear your personal, professional and other experiences as well, rounding out your knowledge with what we can describe as a kind of wisdom, a view of the wider implications of what you are pursuing within the dojo. It comes with age, and it comes with maturity. That doesn't quite exactly correlate with technical expertise, you see. So getting old is generally a pain the rear end, but at least age should give you a more mature outlook on life. Perhaps.

Within a dojo, therefore, you could be a 30-year-old and sempai to a 60-year-old new student, because you know more about the dojo and its workings than the beginner. On the other hand, being his sempai in martial arts doesn't necessarily make him your kohai in other things outside the dojo. He could be an experienced medical doctor, and you could be just finishing up medical school, so in that case, he's your sempai when it comes to the professional world. So you see how relative being a sempai is? That's why I'm not so sure patches that declare you a "sempai" are really appropriate. One person's sempai is another person's kohai. And that same kohai of yours could be a sempai to you in some other endeavor.

Another misunderstanding might be the role of a sempai. Primarily, having the designation over other newbie students is not like having carte blanche to bully them, abuse them, or denigrate them. In Japanese culture, a sempai is like an older brother or sister. And that means an observant and protective older brother, and you assume huge

responsibilities, not privileges. You have to make sure the newbies are learning properly, they have the proper attire, and they are following the proper etiquette. If they screw up, it's as much your fault as it is theirs because they were supposed to have been prepped by you.

Wait, you say. Isn't all that teaching the role of the teacher? Yes and no. A teacher sets the standards, yes, but as a student progresses, he should also be internalizing the technical, social and etiquette aspects of the dojo so that he also expresses them. Sempai become role models, like the main sensei, and they assume teaching responsibilities both informally and formally. As sempai mature, the teacher can focus less on the minutiae of some basic technical skills and dojo formalities and move on to teach more advanced processes to students. If the teacher is forever pulling back in order to teach everyone at all different levels, that's not the optimum use of his time or energy, when sempai should shoulder some of the burden and help with the teaching.

In educational theory classes, I learned the sempai-kohai relationship is very much like a peer relationship between students. Many people think pedagogy is one to many; one teacher is the sole arbiter and instructor to many children in the class, but close observation of successful classrooms show that students with more skill and experiences augment learning by helping other students. In a classroom of homogenous-aged students, it's not so much sempai-kohai but those with skills helping those with lesser skills "get it." In a Japanese environment, it extends beyond one's peer group to include those senior to you and junior to you in a learning environment who help you with your training and education.

In educational theory, the best type of learning occurs when you have not only a healthy teacher to student(s) relationship, but you also have peer to peer teaching, or what one of my educational professors (Ann Bayer), called "collaborative



The author teaching Takeuchi Ryu

apprenticeship” learning. It’s not just one-to-many (one sensei to many students), it’s a multifaceted many-to-many.

In my own ryu, good sempai are a necessity. My main teacher and his top students do not make a full time living teaching martial arts. They have successful professional careers, and there are times when they have to miss regular training dates. My teacher is a landscape architect, and he has enough sempai to carry through any training days he may miss without worry. Likewise, his top two students in Japan, who run dojo in Tokyo, are high-level officials in the banking industry and non-government organizations; so they, too, rely on sempai to cover for them when work precludes training.

Sempai are, indeed, treasures in these cases, because they build up a level of expertise and knowledge that is not dependent solely on one person, one teacher. They also are, in a way, training to become sensei of their own dojo, so being sempai is a step along the way to that independence. Not that every sempai wants to be a teacher with his own

dojo, but they should be training towards having that ability in case something happens to their sensei.

Bad sempai tend to see their roles more as an ego thing, not so much a responsibility to shepherd the newbies along. I was in one very small group whose teacher was one of the finest gentlemen I ever had the privilege of studying under. But at the time, his senior students were a volatile mix. On days when the teacher couldn’t make it to practice, the senior students tried to lead the class. Inevitably, it used to lead to heated arguments between two of them, with them yelling and swearing at each other at the top of their lungs, and the third senior just playing passive-aggressive and wandering off to practice by his own self in a corner. I loved that sensei. I couldn’t stand the sempai, so I left the group.

I’ve also seen indifferent sempai. They don’t really harm the dojo, but they don’t contribute in any meaningful way. They are in it to train themselves, and don’t look much past that to helping other students. For them, even though they’ve had years of exposure to their teacher, they still infantilize their own selves and look to the teacher for every piece of guidance and teaching, and don’t understand the responsibilities that come with being a senior member.

It vexes me, but it’s not something a teacher can easily correct, like a problem in a kata. That’s because you have to correct the way a person perceives his entire world and how he fits into it. It’s not just how they interact in a budo setting, it’s how they of interact with other people in any social environment. Some people tend to be good sempai and some don’t because some very naturally accept responsibility and some just shuck it off. Is the attitude one of give me, give me, give me, or is it a mutual give and take?

I’ve also been blessed by and large with some very good examples of sempai, too numerous to list

individually, both in Japan and in the States. They have been sempai to me, and I have managed to train up some good sempai. The sempai to me have given me insights and subtle details to the budo I study that often are glossed over by the sensei. Through their guidance, I've managed to deepen my grasp of those arts.

I was also lucky to have cultivated several senior students of mine who are great examples of sempai. Unfortunately, they moved on after reaching a higher level of expertise because they were also burdened with personal and professional responsibilities. To the ones who are most capable, go the most responsibilities.

It's not a cultural thing. The good sempai I am discussing are both Japanese natives and non-Japanese. One of my own sempai that I trained, who I ended up treating like a younger brother, went on to be a kind of sempai in his military career. After three tours of Afghanistan, including leading his own cadre of soldiers and training them to survive under his leadership, he's now Stateside training a whole new generation of soldiers in his role as a sempai of soldiering. But he has those skills. When he trained with me, he watched, listened, learned. He learned the techniques of the school, but also he paid careful attention to how I positioned myself while teaching, how I mentioned some things in an

offhanded way as a suggestion but he picked up my tone of voice to understand the deeper implications and expressions, how I worked with the students and tried to make them focus on particular aspects. He absorbed all those things internally and became an embodiment of the ryu, not just a decent but superficial mimic. He took all those skills of observation and learning and applied them in a life-threatening arena.

Can the system of sempai-kohai be abused? Certainly, as the example of the yelling sempai demonstrates. I have heard of some professional martial arts instructors making their senior students teach classes for free, without any remuneration, as a kind of "training" to be a sempai. That's taking advantage of captive labor, if it is overused. Abuses of this system abound, even in Japan. But the case is more often that having a good group of sempai in a dojo is a boon. They add to the entire learning environment, they enhance the sensei's teaching, and they give the newer students alternative ways to understand a lesson. Good sempai are a treasure, and should be nurtured.

About the Author: Wayne Muromoto is a member of the SMAA Board of Advisors and the editor of *The Classic Budoka* blog. He has extensive training in Takeuchi Ryu jujutsu and Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu iaido.

**Shudokan Martial Arts
Association**
PO Box 6022
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-6022

Phone:
1-734-645-6441

E-Mail:
shudokan@smaa-hq.com

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