

Honjo Shigenaga parrying an exploding shell

Kuniyoshi, Utagawa (1797 – 1861).

and times should be available soon on the West Coast *Tai Kai* homepage and the Sword Forum as they plan the event. It is worth mentioning that the West Coast Swordsman have supported all of our events in Tucson. It would make excellent sense to start planning now for your participation in the 2009 West Coast *Tai Kai*. With this much advance notice, there will be few good reasons not to be there.

Nakamura Seminar

The Tucson members of the *Mizu Hi Kobukai* had the opportunity to attend an extra seminar in the *Nakamura Ryu* Style of swordsmanship. *Sensei Drawdy* of Virginia had a business trip to our area and offered to spend some time with us practicing the *Nakamura Kata*.

We went through the *Toyama Ryu* set according to the *Nakamura* tradition and reviewed the *Nakamura Seitei* forms. After the second session, *Sensei Drawdy* was presented with a custom made *Nakamura Ryu* sword rack and a print of “*Katsu Nen Ken*” as written by *Yamada Soke*. Later in the evening several people practiced some *Tameshigiri* until we ran out of *Goza*.

There is a good chance that this may happen again in the near future. We will alert members as soon as we hear something.

Watts, the ancient Sanskrit term, *Sunya*, is often miss-characterized simply as “The Void”. The main problem with this, is that calling the void by one name, implies that it is a singular concept. Mr. Watts clarified that a closer meaning of *Sunya* is, “**One is void without the other**”. There is no light without darkness, there is no *Yin* without *Yang*. One does not exist without the other. They are connected and inseparable (空, *Ku, sora, kara* = “Hole” also “Sky / Empty”). In the sense of a hole in the ground, there is no hole if there is no ground. It is somewhat like the old puzzle question, “How much dirt is in a hole one foot deep and six inches in diameter”? Answer; none, a hole is empty.

Relating this back to swordsmanship, “**There is no attack without defense**”. They are parts of a whole and do not really exist independently. More to the point, “there can be no interval between attack and defense”. They must be fully integrated. To focus only on one or the other will result in a total loss. There is no time to stop and decide what to do. There is no time to weigh your options. Your response must be quicker than “verbal thought”. Meanwhile, an attack cannot afford to contemplate the risk of action. **The key is No Stopping**. Mr. Watts calls this “The unstuck mind”. The Chinese name for this concept is *Mo Chur Chu*, “going straight ahead”. According to Mr. Watts this is fundamentally important for swordsmanship as well as the practice of Zen / Buddhism. A mind that is unstuck is capable of remaining alert to the whole situation (*Zanshin*).

Traditional *Kendo* training has an important early stage when you always seem to be getting whacked on the head. In fact, under the old system, a student was more of a live in apprentice who also did chores around the *Dojo*. It was not uncommon for the teacher to whack a student over the head outside of class as well. The point of this abuse was not designed to make the head any harder but to get the student to stop being preoccupied about being whacked on the head. Once the mind becomes unstuck from concerns about taking a hit, it is free to mount effective attacks. (Inspector Clouseau, “Not now *Kato*, you swine!”). At the same time, a good attack may also serve as the best defense.

A similar duality is wrapped up in the following notion;

How can the pacifistic philosophy of Buddhism be connected with anything so ferocious as the art of fighting?

Events Schedule

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| 2008 | |
| August 25 | <i>Senpokan Gasshuku</i> Costa Mesa, CA (USFBD) |
| 2009 | |
| Feb / March | <i>Mizu Hi Tai Kai</i> Tucson, AZ |
| May | <i>Florida Tai Kai</i> Palm Bay, FL (USFBD) |
| August | <i>West Coast Tai Kai</i> Costa Mesa, CA |



The Void

During a recent conversation with *Shihan Gettings*, the topic of “defense” came up in the context of sword strategy. He pointed out that many people have interpreted incorrectly from the *Musashi* classic, *Go Rin no Show*, that defense is somehow, not important. Happily, a piece of the puzzle also fell in to place several weeks later when a recording of Alan Watts was explaining the true meaning of *Sunya* (“Shunya”). It seems that there is a linguistic problem with many of the popular translations. According to Dr.

WestCoast Gasshuku

The third annual West Coast *Tai Kai* has been postponed until August, 2009. In the mean time, they have announced plans to hold a *Gasshuku* (“Training Camp”) this year in California. Details about specific seminars

Again, Mr. Watts has a good answer.

Now, in the hands of a man who is really both adept in Zen and adept in fencing, the sword of destruction can in a curious way become a symbol of mercy. For the highest school of Japanese fencing is called "The No Sword School." To be able, never to use the sword.

They are parts of a greater whole. Our own school philosophy has this element of duality. The life giving sword is the same sword that can destroy life. There is only one sword.



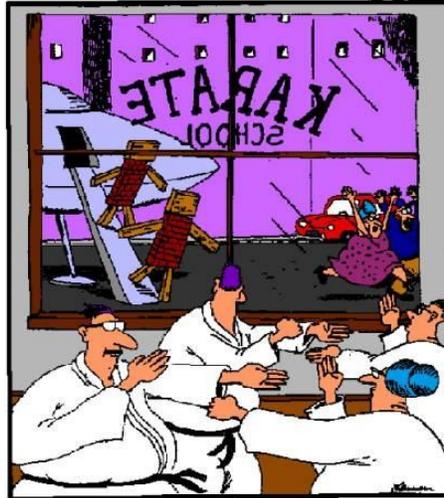
Shrine Dedication

Yamakawa Dojo celebrated the installation of an official *Shinto* shrine in May. Several members and friends were on hand that evening to ensure that all went smoothly. Mr. Winton performed the ritual of dedication and every person present, played a role in the ceremony. Several people also noticed an early season dragonfly (*Katsumushi*) that visited the room during the proceedings. It flew past the first row, wheeled past the shrine and landed on the wall near the slogan, "*Katsu Nen Ken*". This evening was also made auspicious by the installation of a new poem in the *Tokanoma*. **Akiyo Tsukada**, who is a certified Japanese calligraphy teacher, presented Dr. Gettings with a scroll containing one of *Soke Yamada's* favorite poems. The essence of this poem says,

*... The secret of *Iai* means not hurting anyone and not being hurt by the opponent. It is the way of calmness lying in your mind.*

It now hangs in a place of honor where it will be studied each week by students of the sword.

We rounded out the evening with a traditional feast of pizza, beer and rowdy conversation.



The class abruptly stopped practicing. Here was an opportunity to not only employ their skills, but also to save the entire town.

Edo Period

First, we must explain how the Eras of the calendar were named in traditional Japan. Since the *Meiji* Period, a rigid practice of declaring a new Era only after an Emperor died has been followed, but before Emperor *Meiji*, it was up to the discretion of the current leaders to proclaim a new Era. Sometimes this coincided with the death of an Emperor, but at other times it was designed to mark an important event or dispel bad luck. The most recent historical periods are;

- Edo period** (1603 - 1867)
- Meiji period** (1868 - 1912)
- Taisho period** (1912 - 1926)
- Showa period** (1926 - 1989)
- Heisei period** (1989 -)

So during the *Edo* Period, 36 Era names were actually used by people for official documents and to sign important works of art. The government of *Edo* ruled Japan for 264 years, and only later, became known as the *Edo* Period. So when we find a date on

antique items, we can find the words '*Taisho*', '*Meiji*' or '*Showa*', but we never find '*Edo*' on an authentic Japanese antique. A full list of the Japanese Era can be found in the reference material of **The Samurai Sword** by John Yumoto.

Perhaps of greater interest is to put the time period of the *Edo* into Western historical perspective. In 1603 the first production of *Hamlet* was performed in England, 1771 the first water powered cotton mill was built by Richard Arkwright, 1776 the Declaration of Independence, 1789 the French Revolution, 1800 Napoleon invades Italy, 1839 the Opium Wars begin, 1853 Admiral Perry sailed his heavily armed fleet of "Black Ships" in to a bay near *Edo*, 1860 Lincoln was elected the 16th President of the United States. So the *Edo* Period started with *Hamlet* and ended with Lincoln, and during most of that time Japan remained closed to outside visitors and influence. After this time, when people of Japan were exposed to Western culture, they launched themselves into the modern era with amazing zeal. Even the language of Japan was considered for change. At one point, a serious debate took place to consider changing the official language of government and commerce to French. Fortunately, the people of Japan recognized the value of their own traditional culture, before it was lost. Perhaps this unique mix of new and old is responsible for the mystery and allure that brings us together to study these traditions.

Annual Dues

It is that time of year again. We need to pay our dues to the *Mizu Hi Kobukai* (Local) and to the *Shin Shin Ryu* ("Sekiguchi", Japan) organizations. The fees are;

- \$ 30.00 Shin Shin Ryu**
- \$ 20.00 Mizu Hi Kobukai**

Please pay Dr. Gettings so that he can send everything in by June 1st, 2008. This bit of money helps keep the wheels turning in these organizations and allows us continued access to our expert teachers.

