



Sugawara no Michizane

Yoshitoshi, Tsukioka, (1839 – 1892)

## Events Schedule

**2009**

**October 23, 24** Bakersfield Tai Kai  
Bakersfield, CA

## Goza and Grill

The members of the *Yamakawa Dojo* gathered in June for a day of *Tameshigiri* and good food. We spent the morning at the tea house *Dojo* behind Dr. Getting's home cutting targets and exchanging wit and pithy "Observations". This session was concluded with a "Control Cut Challenge" and a general clean up.

Later in the afternoon we reassembled on Dr. Gettings patio for grilled food and good conversation. One particular favorite was grilled zucchini and asparagus with lime and salt. This went well with a Sapporo Beer or a soft drink. Bratwurst and orzo salads were followed by some wonderful desert tarts. What a great way to celebrate the beginning of summer. Perhaps we will repeat this next year.

## Independence Day

*Sensei Ken Wintin* retired in July from his service to the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, outside of Tucson. He has been the longtime fish and reptile specialist at that world class facility. Several members have been to his reptile lectures and everyone has benefited from his field craft advice regarding poisonous snakes and lizards.

*Nothing about being bitten by a snake, makes you a surgeon. Do not cut the skin near a bite like they do in the movies.*

*The best piece of equipment for snakebite is a cell-phone.*

*Yamakawa Dojo* celebrated this new phase in his life with a gathering at Dr. Gettings' house and grill.

He is looking forward to more free time to pursue his interests.



## Tucson, Enbu

Each year in Tucson there is a festival of culture and food near the center of the city. Clubs and organizations set up booths and tables in an effort to connect with others who may share their interests. The **Tucson Meet Yourself Festival** runs for one weekend a year and also hosts many displays of music and art in the outdoor space of the city. This year the three *Dojo* of Tucson put on a coordinated *Enbu* of *Kata*, *Kumitachi* and *Tameshigiri* for the assembled crowd. The sword demo was a pleasant experience in the early morning shade of downtown buildings. The blade-work and spirit of the group made a big impression despite having to compete with the running race finish line and other simultaneous events. Due to the fact that we were situated on the lawn near the finish line, **Irene Swanson** was able to run a good 5k race (First place in her division) and join us in time for the second session of the demo. Congratulations Irene!

## Tai Kai, Bakersfield

Members of the *Yamakawa Dojo* and the *Mizu Hi Kobukai* have been invited to a *Tai Kai* of Japanese swordsmanship in Bakersfield, California in October. This is the inaugural effort by **Sensei (Robin) Ramirez** to host an event of this magnitude. Several people from Tucson have eagerly made plans to attend this year's offerings of seminars and events. Sensei Ramirez has been a stalwart representative of the *Eishin Ryu* at the previous *Tai Kai* in the West and Southwest. His particular skills are also noted and sought on matters of sword repair and *Tsukamaki*. He is a local source for expert information and service on authentic repairs and handle wraps. Perhaps, now that he is hosting an event instead of competing, others will have a chance to win some of the contests of art and skill. We wish him great success in this and future ventures.

## Sugawara

*Sugawara, Michizane* (845 – 903 AD) was an Imperial Court historian and scholar for Emperor *Uda* of Japan. He was also reputed to be a talented poet of high regard. His story is an important part of Japanese history because he was ultimately demoted and disgraced due to an intrigue crafted by a rival. Despite his loyal service to the Emperor and his unwavering assertion of his innocence, he remained at a lowly post in exile until his death in 903. Shortly after his demise, there was a period of plague, drought and a series of natural disasters. At the same time the new Emperor *Daigo*, lost his sons one after the other. If that was not enough, *Kyoto* then suffered severe storms and the palace was struck repeatedly by lightning.

The orthodox interpretation of this was that *Sugawara's* spirit was wreaking havoc on the land for his unjust treatment. Shortly after these events, the records were amended, restoring his title and office. The order of exile was burned and they also built a *Shinto* shrine in *Kyoto* called **Kitano Tenmangu** (Est. 947AD) that was dedicated to *Sugawara*. Just to make sure, in 986 AD he was elevated to a *Tenjin-sama* (Sky deity) and is regarded today as a patron *Kami* of scholarship and calligraphy. His story is firmly rooted in the folklore and history of Japan and he is now considered a symbol of justice. Or perhaps an object lesson of "Justice, or else!" He is also associated with the plum blossom due to

his longing for his garden trees, while in exile. Depictions of him in woodblock prints, clothing art and statuary often include the theme of his control over violent weather, especially lightning bolts.

## Kigurai

Modern Japanese language uses this term in everyday situations to describe pride or arrogance, (i.e. *Kare wa Kigurai ga Takai* – “As for him, the pride is high”). However, like many things Japanese it takes on new meaning when used in the context of martial arts training. *Kigurai* (気位) in many situations may have negative connotations, but among trained swordsman, this as an attribute you are to cultivate in small doses. One of the reputed benefits of *Kendo* and *Iai* is said to be “posture”, but perhaps more descriptive would be to use the term, **bearing** or **presence**. The activities of looking into the eyes of another capable fighter and trading blows or controlled cuts, builds a mental resiliency that allows you to put thoughts of danger aside. This capacity is critical when navigating difficult situations. A mind that can remain balanced and calm during periods of chaos is both rare and valuable. Several *Budo* maxims speak to this, such as, *Fudo Shin* and *Hei Jo Shin*, “A balanced spirit” or “A tranquil spirit”. They also imply a certain level of aloofness to minor concerns like bad weather or minor injuries. A person that has *Kigurai* or *Fudo Shin* is focused on moving forwards and is not bogged down by small details. It is said that this is an attribute that can be readily seen or experienced by others. Perhaps it is most akin to good **Stage Presence or Poise**.

A great example of the imperturbable mind of *Hei Jo Shin* can be seen on a golf course any day of the week. Most people who play golf, learn the basic strokes and can easily hit a ball in a straight line. Ask someone to hit an easy shot down a straight fairway, and most can do it with success. Now, add some minor peril to the same shot. Add a pond or sand trap and you will see shots landing there as if there was some kind of magnet hidden in the ball and the obstacle. Without training, most people cannot ignore the hazard. In fact, it becomes foremost in their thinking, so that the shot naturally lands there. They look at it, worry about it, and their mind is unbalanced. A trained golfer will step right up and hit a routine shot a

moderate distance without too much consideration of the potential problems.

The poise or stage presence that can be developed in *Iai* is the same skill that is pursued by an Olympic athlete when they compete in large events. They are cultivating the ability to put the high stakes to the side, and perform to the level of their preparation at all times.



## Hyoshigi

The *Hyoshigi* (拍子木) is a traditional device for making distinct sounds before announcements and also as a device of the Japanese theater and *Sumo* events. It is two pieces of hardwood or bamboo that are struck together to make a loud “clack!” that is recognized as a signal. In *Sumo* it signals the transitions between bouts and in Japanese theater it is used for the beginning and end of a scene. It also has sound qualities that are recognized as particularly Asian. Many musical and theatric performances also use this percussion device to convey the tempo of the action.

Perhaps most memorable is the building tempo before the pivotal action in a story. The cadence of this instrument may start off in a languid rhythm as the actors appear in the same orbit. However, it begins to increase and cause an urgent sense of anticipation as it becomes more obvious that there will be a confrontation. The tempo builds right up to the brink, at which point there may be a peal from a flute, like the sound of screeching tires before the crash.

This same tempo is the basis for some styles of sword kata as well. It has been speculated that this building pattern from

slow to fast, has a hypnotic or meditative effect. While there is no doubt that a response to an attack must be swift, there is some indication that a gradual build up of motions and actions in a preemptive strike may fly under the radar of the **Reticular Activating System (RAS)** of the brain.

This is perhaps best observed in a napping cat. Cats are famous for being aware of their surroundings. They “Perk up” at the scurrying sounds of a mouse or insect. A napping cat will have its ears up and abrupt sounds will cause them to scan the area. If there are no more sounds, that cat may never open its eyes to look for danger or opportunities. It is known that the feline brain has a highly developed Reticular Activating System that allows the brain to remain in a low level of arousal until it is necessary to respond to a stimulus.



The human brain has a similar arrangement of neurons in the brain stem. Slow, evenly paced stimuli do not irritate the system enough to trigger the defense systems. But loud or abrupt stimuli will cause the human brain to come to attention. The heart rate will rise, brain activity will spike and there may be a squirt of adrenaline from above the kidneys into the blood stream. So, if you want your enemy to jump up and kill you, make a face, grab your sword with reckless speed and noise and yank it out of the scabbard. This will give no doubt that an attack is coming. If you want the advantage, rise to your knees as if you were off to use the *Obenjo*, and let the action build gradually. Your attack may be complete before the opponent knows that you have moved.

