

Shotokan-Ryu-Kase-Ha-Instructor-Academy

Newsletter 05/03

Dear karateka,

Have we ever asked ourselves, why we do practice budo, traditional martial arts and why we do follow a certain philosophy and way of life that, to many, appears antiquated. The answer to this question is more complex than it initially seems to be. Budo is more than perfection of techniques and movements. Budo has defined, for hundreds of years, a certain class of people, the warrior class, whose power, ethics and sense of duty have shaped society. The physical skill and mental development from budo practice are unique. Hand to hand combat, especially against edged weapons, is the most demanding of human physical endeavour, since it demands the outmost skill, both physical and mental; it develops abilities that separates the adept from others and elevates technique, reflexes and intuition to the highest levels. For the warrior this ability represents responsibility and honour. Any society that loses these virtues is a poorer one; and its future is? This is the contribution of classical budo to modern societies. Shotokan ryu Kase ha practice emphasizes the budo approach, simply in order to assist the development of these abilities, not for the benefit of practice per se, but for the benefit of practitioners and ultimately society.

Budo Themes : The Sensei; who's that man?

The loud voice filled the air in the dojo, "line up". Silence followed the atmosphere; karateka stopped self warming up and moved quickly and quietly to form a straight line facing kamiza. A man, stood in front of the line, facing them. On command, "sensei ni rei", karateka in line, already having taken the seiza (kneeling) position, bowed to him while he was returning the bow. "Who's that guy?" the unfamiliar visitor asked one of the karateka who had already finished training and was leaving the area. "He is the sensei".

Although in this fictitious conversation, the question seems naïve, have we ever thought, seriously, who really is this person that we all call (or in our case being called) sensei?

In general terms, sensei may be roughly translated as "teacher." However, the literal meaning is "one who was born before;" i.e., someone older to you. Therefore, in terms of an art, he is the one with the more experience who can guide you along the do, the way. It is clear that sensei is not synonymous with "saint," "prophet," "religious saviour" or "divine being." Therefore, who may be called as sensei? The term is used in modern Japan to refer to teachers in educational institutions, in classical arts and crafts, in taiko drum clubs, medical doctors, professors, martial arts, dance, music, etc; in short, all manner of teaching-learning environments. Although the literal term does signify

that the person has some kind of age and maturity, there is no set age marker as to who can be called a sensei. A young person in his/her twenties teaching kindergarten can be called a sensei, as can a 90-year old master of archery.

What a sensei is expected to know? This is very complicated to be answered lightly. I will try my best to express my personal opinion and approach to the subject.

>From the technical point of you, the sensei should be aware of all the principles of his art. He should have an adequate knowledge of the technical details, knowing not only to perform but to explain as well the details and principles of each technique. He should carry on his shoulders a certain baggage of training not only in quantity but in quality as well. It is through this quality in training, that he has developed a certain quality in character, which will allow him to guide his students along the path. He is the leader of the dojo and an example and inspiration for his students. On the same time, treating him like a cult leader, who has all the answers to what's messed up in your life, is just bizarre. To put things in order THE SENSEI IS A PEDAGOGUE. In this context, paying proper respects to one's sensei is the only right thing to do.

In addition to that knowledge, the sensei is expected to know some things more. He is expected to be aware of ryu's history and tradition. Martial arts are based on tradition and practitioners like to know the history and lineage of their ryu; they like to know that they belong to a chain of people who stems its origin a number of decades (or centuries?) ago. He should provide advice on physical fitness and health development, for his students. He should be able to treat certain injuries which may occur in the dojo during training. He should be able to....But although he is expected to have a broad knowledge, he must be ready to say to his students "I do not know but I will look after your question". Above all he is a human being not a god on earth.

In proper usage, the term sensei is used after the person's last name, for example, Jones sensei. This is the Japanese way of giving titles in conversation. Thus, you wouldn't say Sensei Jones, although this is a Western way (as in Mr. Jones, or Captain Delta). Recently, some Western martial arts people have tried to use more exotic labels for themselves or others, such as Dai-sensei, soke-dai, and so on. This practice shows a lack of understanding of the Japanese language (and therefore calls into question their authenticity). Actually, soke-dai, or shihandai doesn't mean "big grandmaster." Soke does refer to a master instructor of a hereditary (and often family-inherited) school. Also in this case, the word dai in Japanese does not mean "big," but "in place of." Thus, a shihandai or soke-dai is "someone who teaches in temporary place of" the main instructor, for certain reasons, such as the incapacity of the soke due to injuries or illnesses, etc. No one is called Dai referring to his "bigness" or "highness." As is the case of aikido's founder Ueshiba Morihei, he is referred as O-sensei. This long O- actually meant "big" or "main" sensei. Some classical martial arts schools, or koryu, have

terms that are unique to their schools that do, indeed, refer to levels of expertise. In certain ryu the head instructor, the inheritor of the tradition, is referred as kancho, or "leader (-cho) of the hall (kan)."

This term has been also used in other arts and crafts schools.

It is worthy to note that, the way a sensei is treated in Japan is based on deep-seated cultural traditions, most of which have been transferred to budo. We, as westerners, have some difficulties to understand these traditions in their full extent, but apprehension of them, will allow us to walk the warrior's way, budo, to its full extent.

Reports No reports this time, I hope next time you will send me your contributions

Recommended Courses:

You will find attached the latest program of courses by Kase sensei for 2003 and 2004. In the immediate future, Kase sensei will teach in Luxemburg on 10-11 May, in Frejus, France on 30-31 May, in Setubal, Portugal on 14-15 June, in Erfurt, Germany on 28-29 June and in Andorra on 23-27 July. If you are interested in kobudo / kobujutsu Dirk FIERET organizes a series of courses in his dojo, Budoclub Fieret on 17 May ; 21 June 2003, as well as a course with Dirk Heene and Julian Mead on 23-25 May. More information on these courses as well as in courses with different instructors, you may find in www.kamikazeweb.com/events Please be reminded that information relevant to courses, by SRKHIA instructors, will be given every month, in the same way, provided you have informed me accordingly. I apologize but, due to certain technical difficulties that I have encountered, I am not able, for the time being, to distribute, by e-mail, posters etc to large numbers of recipients. However I forward them to Frank Schubert for insertion in his Calendar of events in the above mentioned site. By the way, Frank has redesigned his site www.kamikazeweb.com <<http://www.kamikazeweb.com/>> ; the outcome is an excellent one, worthy to visit.

Membership status:

Since my last e-mails asking payment of membership fee from those who had not do so yet, certain colleagues paid their fees, however not everybody did so. A last call is given now with closing date 31 May 2003. If someone still fail to do so, his membership status will become dormant , meaning he is suspended from all Academy activities during 2003.

I would remind that the membership fee is 60 Euro or 36 British pounds. Payments may be done, either by bank transfer to our account: Natwest Bank Ltd, Cheltenham Branch, 31 Promenade, Cheltenham, GL50 1LH, UK, Sort Code 60-05-16, Account number 16412087, Beneficiary Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha Instructors Academy (attention, in this case you transfer only British pounds), or by a bank cheque or international money order, made payable to Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha Instructors Academy and posted to our Treasurer, Alan Armstrong, 19 Jubilee Drive, Bredon, Tewkesbury, GL20

7QJ, England, preferably by registered mail (attention, cheques could be either 36 British pounds or 60 euros, whichever is more convenient to members). You must not forget to mention the name(s) and the year. I am still missing application forms from DE SCHAHT Eddy, from Belgium, ACHILLES Wilfred, from Germany, SWOREK Robert, RYBARCZYK Richard, from Poland, and WATT Richard, from UK/Scotland. An application form is absolutely necessary for membership and failure to do so will result in non acceptance as member, despite any payments already made. Therefore I am asking from these friends, as well from those who can convey them the message, is to submit the application form as soon as possible. A new failure to do so by 31/5/2003 will result in suspension of their membership (dormant status).

Before closing I invite you once more to send me your contributions to our Newsletter, in any form, reports from various courses you have attended, inputs to the Budo themes , etc.

Stay strong and train hard till the next Newsletter will arrive at your PC.

Oss
Spiros G. Drossoulakis