

Sword and Spirit

The Journal of Itten Dojo

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— Benefits of Budo —

Regardless of the times in which you live, or the circumstances of your life, success largely depends on things you can control:

- **Building a foundation of strong relationships in a community of mutual support and achievement.**
- **Forging a disciplined and positive mindset.**
- **Enhancing your physical health and capabilities.**

These are exactly the benefits membership in an authentic dojo provides.

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March Madness

Last month was one of the busiest, if not *the* busiest, 31 days in the history of our dojo. Every weekend there was something special going on, including training trips both out of the state and out of the country. And it's looking like this won't be an especially unusual schedule in coming months—there are a lot more seminars coming up here and elsewhere (including, again, Canada) and other special events on the horizon. More about that later; let's talk about all that happened in March.

Something I would have never anticipated—my first karate practice in about 30 years. Kazoku Isan Dojo is located in New Cumberland, a nearby community. The dojo was founded and is led by Michael Sheffield Sensei, who was a student of Ralph Lindquist Sensei in the last years of Lindquist Sensei's life. It was in Lindquist Sensei's Isshinryu karate classes at the Harrisburg YMCA that I met my wife, Rosanne, as well as Alan and Deb Starner. Sheffield Sensei works closely now with Jim Kotzman Sensei, who was one of my closest friends and training partners back in the day.

Sheffield Sensei invited me to visit his dojo for class the evening of March 1st, to train along and possibly share a technique or two. Even better, this was an opportunity to reconnect with Kotzman Sensei. I had a wonderful time. Sheffield Sensei (the tall fellow beside me in the photo on the next page) is a superb technician and highly innovative instructor. In the photo, Kotzman Sensei stands to my other side. I'm especially grateful for Sheffield Sensei's invitation, because it has led to more good things. I'm also grateful that my old karate-gi still fits...

The next Friday, I visited Kotzman Sensei at his home in York, where we trained for a bit more than an hour in his private dojo located in a separate building that was originally a garage. I'd told him that I would like to relearn *Wansu* kata from Isshinryu (my favorite back in the day and my go-to form for competition). We worked on the kata and then traded insights. I shared the body mechanics and principles we're being taught by Suino Sensei, while Kotzman Sensei shared analogous approaches that he and Sheffield Sensei are developing. Some really ingenious approaches. It was fascinating to discover the degree to which we are on parallel paths. While the Isshinryu





guys have some different and unique answers to the same “problems,” there is a surprising degree of overlap. I had noticed this right away the previous Friday evening and realized that in the “Introduction to Iaido” seminar I’m presenting to Sheffield Sensei’s group on April 20th that I’ll be able to dive a little deeper than I anticipated in the three hours available. Going forward, Kotzman Sensei and I are going to alternate visits between his dojo and Itten, and continue to collaborate—his first visit here will be on April 26th.

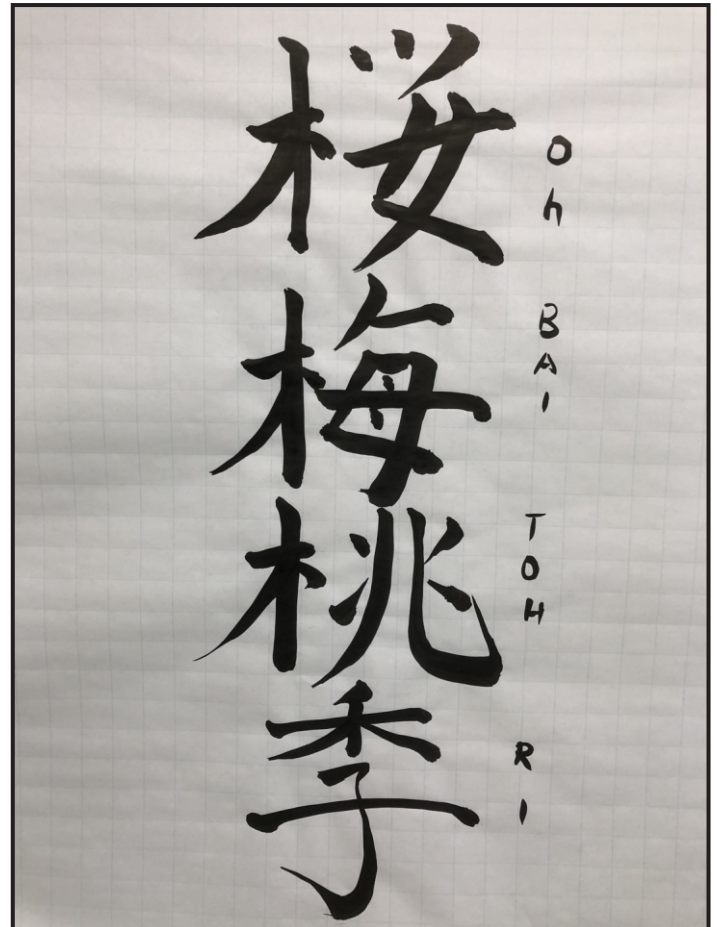
The next morning at our dojo we had the first *shodo* (calligraphy) class for the month. We usually have two classes each month, on the second and fourth Saturdays. For spring, Baily Sensei chose for the topic of the class the kanji (character) 桃 (*momo*; “peach”). As described by Sensei:

“I chose this kanji because we celebrate *Hinamatsuri* (Girls’ Day) on March 3rd. *Hinamatsuri* is also known as *Momonosekku* 桃の節句, meaning Peach Festival. This is because, in the traditional Japanese calendar, this was the time peach trees blossomed. The second reason was because peach trees were believed to be sacred and cleansed evil vibrations. It’s a very beneficial tree for us!

“Then I shared the concept of *Yojijukigo*, meaning a ‘four-character compound,’ or ‘four-character idiom,’ or ‘four-character idiomatic phrase,’ or ‘four-character idiomatic compound.’ My example was 桜梅桃李 (*Oh-baitouri*).

“OH-BAITOURI—this word teaches us the incomparable notion of non-comparison. While all these

beautiful flowers which mature to become juicy fruit, *Oh-baitori* seeks to celebrate the uniqueness of each of them. Peach with its juicy-sweet flavor is distinctly different from the tart sweetness of the plum; both are equally enjoyable to eat, and comparing between the two to determine which is better is futile.”





On Monday the 11th we had our monthly online session with Suino Sensei and the class at JMAC. These are always packed evenings, with iaido from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., a rushed change of uniforms for those of us doing both classes, and jujutsu from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. Although in-person training is best, prior to experiencing these online sessions I would not have believed just how beneficial the classes have turned out to be. This is true for at least three reasons. We get to experience the normal routine at JMAC so that we're better able to replicate Sensei's preferred format for classes here. There are always critically important insights conveyed by Sensei during the classes—and it's astonishing the degree to which he can spot and correct our errors through a video connection. Finally, we always have a few minutes after the formal classes for a question-and-answer session with Sensei, during which we can bring up anything related to our iaido or jujutsu training.

The morning of Friday the 15th, Christopher Migatulski and I headed back to JMAC in Ann Arbor, Michigan, for the second time in barely two months. We went to attend a seminar with Satoh Tadayuki Sensei, an incredibly skilled technician and instructor. According to Satoh Sensei's biography on the website of his

organization (www.renaissanceyawara.com),

“His father, Gohachiro Satoh, was a well-known judo teacher in Shizuoka Prefecture and attained an 8th Dan. Gohachiro was a peer of Jigoro Kano and a contemporary of such famous Judoka as Mifune, Nagaoka, and Kenji Tomiki. Satoh's father sent Tadayuki to study at Waseda University and learn from Tomiki. When he first enrolled in Waseda, Satoh trained in both Judo and Aikido, but in his second year of college made the decision to focus solely on Aikido. From the time of his enrollment in Waseda until Tomiki's death in 1979, Satoh Sensei would spend Sundays having tea and training with Tomiki. Satoh was appointed to be Shihan in Aikido of Waseda University in 2007 by the senior Tomiki Aikido Association of Japan, a post that had been vacant for over 20 years since the Tomiki's death.

“In recent years, Satoh has been passionate about exposing the world to the connection between Kodokan Judo and Tomiki Aikido and to help a new generation both understand and appreciate the true intent of Kano's Judo as well as the immense contribution Tomiki made in his research and fusion of the principles and techniques of Kodokan Judo and Aikido. Due to Satoh Sensei's unique history and connection to both the founder of judo as well as Tomiki Aikido, he is uniquely qualified to teach on the original tenets of each art as well as their historical and technical connections.”



When we arrived back at headquarters: From left, Suino Sensei, Satoh Sensei, and Gage Sensei. Three of the greatest martial arts instructors in the world, in one place (and Mrs. Satoh, on the right).

Training with Satoh Sensei exceeded all expectations. I'd been told it would be good, but I had no idea that the





technical expertise, historical details, and philosophical insights embodied in Satoh Sensei's manner of instructing would be so stunning. At the conclusion of training on Sunday, we were delighted that Satoh Sensei happily agreed to pose for a photo.



In addition to being, as I've already mentioned, a technician and instructor of astonishing skill and insight, Satoh Sensei is a true gentleman, exceptionally kind and considerate. And, Mrs. Satoh is at least his equal in the kindness and consideration categories! We need to bring a lot more of our dojo members the next time JMAC hosts another visit. No kidding—these seminars with Satoh Sensei are like budo graduate school.

After very little downtime in the intervening midweek, the same contingent as last year, plus one, headed to Kitchener, Ontario, for the Iaido Training Camp hosted by Randy Dauphin Sensei of Legacy Martial Arts and Fitness (www.legacymartialartsandfitness.com) and taught by Suino Sensei, ably assisted by his iaido senior students (one of whom is Dauphin Sensei). In addition to me, our contingent included Alan Starner, Charles Hudson, Jake Sterner, and Roman Villalobos.

Because these training camps are open events, there are a lot of people in attendance that may not have even held a bokken previously. Last year, I had the mistaken notion that, due to the mixed levels of experience in the participants, the primary reason to go was just to support the event, and that there wouldn't necessarily be a whole lot of learning. Boy, was I wrong. We came back with a van load of corrections and new insights. So, this year I knew what to expect, and I was not disappointed (especially because at some points the participants were split into separate groups according to experience).

One of the most enlightening portions of the weekend was the 1st Annual Yamaguchi Katsuo Memorial Tournament. This will be a regular feature of the training camp going forward, and is a competition honoring Suino Sensei's teacher.



In the black-belt division I managed second place and Alan tied for third with Dauphin Sensei's student Andrew Percival (the three of us actually tested for black-belt together, at JMAC). This was the first time Alan and I ever competed against each other, in anything. JMAC's Beth Wiggert took first place in the black-belt division—she and I had to do multiple runoffs and Beth just nailed it!

Charles placed third in the below-black-belt division. One of the people he was competing against was Shaun Benson Sensei ("Sensei," because he is a highly-ranked black-belt/instructor in karate).



Fortunately for Charles this was a duel of swords and not sixguns. Benson Sensei portrays John Riley in the current MGM+ television series *Billy the Kid* and, over the course of the first two seasons, has blasted a variety of people into oblivion. Fortunately for all of us, in real life Benson Sensei is a really nice guy!

A few days after our return from Canada, my book, *A Journey of Sword and Spirit*, was published on Amazon, in both print and Kindle editions. Subtitled *Itten Dojo Through Three Decades and Lessons Learned Along the Way*, the book is a history of the dojo and a selection of articles from this journal that illustrate the transformation

of our practice from what it was to what it has become. That transformation is reflected in all of us, personally. The subtitle could well have been, *Why We Love Suino Sensei and JMAC*. The difference in our lives resulting from our association with JMAC is profound.



On March 30th, Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, hosted a Cherry Blossom Festival. Bailey Sensei had been invited to demonstrate shodo at the event. She agreed, and then suggested that the Festival really needed to have an iaido demonstration, as well. It turned out to be a case of "adapt and



overcome,” as the platform we were told we’d be using for our presentation was very small and uneven. Working on slightly muddy grass was better. In addition to providing brief explanations of what we were presenting, our program included a selection of solo iaido forms, the *Tachiuchi-no-kurai kumitachi*, and even some bokken fencing. All went well, regardless of the less-than-ideal footing, and feedback from the event organizers was highly positive.

Our contingent included Alan Starner, Charles Hudson, Roman Villalobos, Lee Myers, and me.



The final noteworthy development in March was the addition of a beautiful piece of framed calligraphy to the entrance area of the dojo. For her demonstration during *Kagami-biraki*—our (lunar) New Year’s observation in February —Bailey Sensei brushed the Japanese proverb, “*Warau kado ni fuku kitaru.*” The translation is “Luck will come to the house where there is laughter.” Sensei explained, “This proverb means that good fortune will visit a house from which the sound of laughter never ceases. After laughing, one’s mood becomes brighter and one’s feelings are calmer, and laughter also gives an impression of amiability, creating a relaxed atmosphere. I think our dojo is just like this!”



As I mentioned, the pace of special events won’t be letting up any time soon. Here’s the plan (at this point, anyway) through summer:

- April 20—“Introduction to Iaido” seminar, at Itten Dojo, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. While primarily for students of the Kazoku Isan karate dojo, this event is open to all members of our dojo. Our regular classes will not meet that morning.
- April 27—Shopping trip to the Mitsuwa Marketplace in Edgewater, New Jersey. The Marketplace has Japanese groceries, cosmetics, books, shodo supplies, appliances, housewares, and restaurants. We’ll depart the dojo at 9:00 a.m. to arrive at the Marketplace by noon. After lunch we’ll have all afternoon to shop and then, after getting dinner, we’ll return to the dojo. This trip is open to family members.
- May 11—Shodo class.
- May 17–19—Iaido and Jujutsu Seminar with Suino Sensei and JMAC assistant instructors, at Itten Dojo, to include rank-testing. Iaido sessions will be Friday from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. and Saturday from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Jujutsu sessions will be Saturday from 12:00 to 2:15 p.m. and Sunday from 8:45 to 10:15 a.m.
- May 25—Shodo class.




- June 8—Shodo class (assuming Bailey Sensei has not yet gone to Virginia to teach at the Governor's Japanese Academy).

- June 22/23—Iaido Training Camp with Suino Sensei, in Toronto, Ontario. So far, two of us are going.

- June 29—JMAC 18th Anniversary. We've arranged a 12-passenger van to attend the festivities, and will add additional vehicles if necessary. It's likely there will not be training. The plan at this point is to travel out on Friday the 28th, use most of Saturday for shopping and exploring Ann Arbor, attend the anniversary dinner that evening, and start for home Sunday morning.

- July 20—"The Crucible," at JMAC. This is a 12-hour, lock the doors, non-stop training event that by all accounts is transformational. Sessions include karate, judo, jujutsu, newaza, and other activities. Even first-day students have participated in past events, so just because you don't train in all the listed arts is no reason not to attend. This will be my first time; I'm hoping to convince others from Itten to join me.

- August (date to be determined)—A seminar visit by Miguel Ibarra Sensei of the Yamabushi Jujutsu Aikijutsu Ryu dojo in Bronx, New York. Learn more about him on his website, yamabushijujutsu.weebly.com. 



A few final scenes from the Iaido Training Camp and tournament. On the left, Jake Sterner executes a precise, horizontal cut during his competition set. Roman Villalobos is in the middle photo, executing a cut that would in reality target the forearms of an opponent. On the right, Nick Miller and Dan Holland demonstrate bokken fencing, a training paradigm they are credited with creating. Full power and full speed, the only rule is "don't hurt your training partner." While incredibly dynamic, bokken fencing is not intended to be combative. Rather, in the words of Suino Sensei, this type of training is intended to induce "a joyful flow state" in the participants. Bokken fencing is unique to the JMAC approach to iaido and just one example of why, for me, training with Suino Sensei in iaido is everything I ever wanted in a study of Japanese swordsmanship. When we first started on this path, I had no idea whatsoever where it would lead.

Robert Wolfe, chief instructor of Itten Dojo, began martial arts training in 1975 while attending Bucknell University, where he earned a degree in Japanese Studies. Mr. Wolfe has taught since 1985, and with his senior student Alan Starner founded Itten Dojo in 1992. His articles on martial arts have been featured in numerous publications, including the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* and *Bugeisha*.

