

Ishizuka Shihan

Speaking about Hatsumi Sensei



Hatsumi Sensei with Shuko in Ihen no Kamae

(Ishizuka Shihan has been training with Hatsumi Sensei since the 1960's. He is one of the original students who met Hatsumi's teacher, Takamatsu Sensei. Ishizuka Shihan runs his own dojo in Japan. He is a fulltime Tokyo firefighter, and was awarded the Highest Firefighter Recognition Award in the 1990's out of approximately 30,000 firefighters. Below is an article he wrote for Hatsumi Sensei's Sanmyaku Densho.)

Be Forever Young in Your Training by Ishizuka Tetsuji

My first encounter with Soke was in the spring of 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympics. I had dislocated my right shoulder during a Judo match at high school, and visited him for treatment [Hatsumi Sensei was a bone & joint doctor/specialist until 1990, when he retired from practicing it fulltime to dedicate more time to the Bujinkan.]. Even while I was being treated he would invite me to try this martial art, but my university entrance exams were just ahead and so I waited for them to finish, entering the Dojo in February 1966. I was 17. My first impression on joining can be summed up as: "How difficult these movements are!" I had tried a little Kendo and Shorinji Kenpo as well as Judo, but I remember feeling lost as these movements were of a totally different nature. It was just like the first time one tries to ride a bicycle.

At the time there were but few students --the ones who attended regularly were Oguri, Seno and Kobayashi, and others came off and on. Training started by clearing away the items in the dojo and cleaning it -- wooden floor, around 8 mats in size. Of course we practiced punches and kicks, and also throwing techniques and aerial somersaults. But as none of us were any good we kept breaking through the floorboards, and then training had to pause for a while as we got out a saw and hammer and all helped to repair the floor. We would pull up the floorboards right to the joists, cut planks to fit then knock them into place. Once the repairs finished the training started again. But as these repairs were done by amateurs, the planks were of different thicknesses and so the floor was quite uneven -- we were lucky never to have any injuries. There were often even nails sticking out...

Soke was 30 then, and we students were also in our late teens, so the training was very rough. Especially when Soke had been to see Takamatsu Sensei -- the training which followed was something else. Soke often reminisces that "my students were guinea pigs", and it is quite true: he would throw me by sticking his fingers into my nose or mouth and sending me flying. Of course it hurt... but if anyone said so he would just call out "that proves you're still alive!" At the evening session before a student called Dan [Doran Navon from Israel, Hatsumi Sensei's first longtime foreign student] was due to return to Israel, Soke said to him "Dan-san, tonight I'll give

you a present, a souvenir to take back to your country" and trained so hard with him it was unbearable. Even Dan [Doran] couldn't put up with it and ended up crying out "You demon! Sensei, you're a demon!"...We all burst out laughing... There was no end to the bruises or internal bleeding, but no matter how roughly Soke trained with his students, he never injured one of us. I am sure that is no different now. It is because he always has something spare in whatever he does. It is often said that "People who cause injuries just show how inept they are", and it is quite true.

About two years after I joined the Dojo, a former student from Waseda University Karate Club came to the training -- [We will call him] Mr. A. Hatsumi Soke asked me to train with him, so I agreed. Mr. A. thrust out his fist at my face. With a whack, I did an upper block from Ichimonji no Kamae. Mr. A grunted, and held his arm. No second punch came. "What's up?" I thought... His upper arm had swollen up and he couldn't move his hand any more. Apparently there was no question of a second attack.

Soke's house had weapons everywhere -- iron balls, bows and long weapons hanging from the ceiling, yari, naginata and blowpipes in the lintel, Shuko and various other weapons in cabinets. There were also trunks full of Makimono [lineage scrolls] and other old documents -- when they were aired in summer we had a chance to see them, which was very enjoyable.

Also, when we lacked energy in our training Soke would pull out a genuine Japanese sword and cut at us. He said "Jumping one Ken [about three feet] is useless: jump three!" We thought this was impossible, but once Soke cut at us sideways with full force, swishing through the air, we found we could jump three Ken without even thinking about it. "See, I said you could!" Soke sometimes used his own body to teach us Shinken-gata [combat-fighting techniques, as compared to sports-fighting techniques] like this. He really knows how to teach well.

One other important thing....At that time and until quite recently, Soke never took any tuition fees. Only recently has he come to accept fees from everyone for the sake of maintenance: he was able to support himself adequately with his professional work, and even managed to buy up a collection of weapons and written materials little by little. Soke told us that once money gets involved people tend to go a bit crazy. So what is important in the martial arts? I'm sure that if you think for a while you'll realize that it is not money, but training. Won't you?

[Written in the summer of 1995]