

Midori Yama Budokai: *Hanshi's Corner*
Written by Ron Rogers *Hanshi Meiyo Kyoju*

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Ichigo, ichi e: One life, one meeting

**The warrior stands-falls
To the mighty ovation
Of one hand clapping.**

Ron Rogers

Kase Taiji and Kase Ha Shotokan Ryu Karate-Do

Kase Taiji was born in Japan on January 9th, 1929. At 74, he remained fully active even though he suffered a heart attack on the 31st of May 1999, from which he had to be "re-animated" with electro-shock treatment. He was hospitalized for twenty days in an American Hospital in Paris.

Kase had already started practicing *Judo* at six years of age, and received 2nd *Dan* in 1944. " In 1944 anyone who owned a *katana*, a firearm or who practiced *karate* had to inform the police, as any of the three were considered a weapon. This was not the case with the other martial arts. As a young Marine Cadet of fifteen, he saw Funakoshi Gichin's book *Karate-do Kyohan*, which generated his interest in *karate*. Funakoshi had retired from teaching and passed leadership of the *Shotokan* to Yoshitaka, his third son. Yoshitaka was given a seal for this authority. One of the earliest encounters give some insight into Kase's indomitable character. Yoshitaka refused permission for Kase to learn *karate* because he was too young. Kase returned to kneel quietly in the *dojo* every day, refusing to leave when told, until he had convinced Yoshitaka that he was serious, and was finally accepted. Think of the courage required of a teenage boy to do this in the face of reputedly one of the greatest exponents of *karate* of the Twentieth Century!

Master Gichin still gave some instruction, as Kase remembers one occasion when he was shown how to make a fist by the old master. This was the form shown in Funakoshi's first books, but by then more or less obsolete. The index finger is stretched out so that it rests on the palm at the base of the thumb. Yoshitaka noticed this and asked Kase, "Who showed you how to make a fist that way?" Although a little hesitant the young Kase replied that it had been Yoshitaka's father. "My father taught you that?" said Yoshitaka. He corrected Kase's fist stating that it was the old method, and not used then.

At this time, he was practicing both *Judo* and *Karate*. He was working to obtain his 3rd *Dan* in *Judo*, stopped practicing it, since *karate* took most of his time. He personally knew Mifune Kyuzo and Kimura Masahiko, and one of his training partners in *judo* was Oyama Masutatsu. He also practiced some *Aikido*, getting to know the founder Ueshiba Morihei. Kase referred to *Aikido* as "*Daito-ryu* plus Shintoism." Kase also met Sagawa Yukiyo, a ninety-odd year old expert in *Daito-ryu*. Kase said many believed Yukiyo to be second only to Takeda and better than Ueshiba, Both Noriaki Inoue, *Aikido* master, and Egami Shigeru, of *Shotokan* stated that Kase "had an incredible level of skill." Funakoshi Yoshitaka's believed that *karate* should develop continuously. Okuyama took this idea to its full potential. He didn't believe in hundreds of mechanical repetitions, but was always searching for the true technique.

The training at the *Shotokan* was very hard, because of the war. The attitude toward training was very serious. Funakoshi Yoshitaka (Gigo) developed *fudo dachi*, which is used extensively by Kase Sensei. A great deal of *gohon*, *sambon* and *jiyu-ippon kumite* was practiced, and every effort was made to hit with the attack. One variation of *sambon kumite* was a "rushing" style where you tried to catch your partner, and practitioners were hurt or injured during practice. Yoshitaka taught a "speed plus power" *karate*. Kase carried on this concept in his teaching. He would have the class first practice the blocks with a full range movement and maximum power (*o-waza*). Next, the movement had to be reduced, first to a half-range movement (*chu-waza*), and then to just a few inches (*ko-waza*). One still had to retain the power, so that even short-range blocks would be able to hurt the opponent's attacking limb, or knock the opponent away. Kase explained that during *kumite* you should be able to go "from zero to one hundred percent" in an instant. Kase Sensei mentioned that Yoshitaka's group, the Nakano School, was involved in teaching secret agents. Kase stressed that the authorities had gone to Yoshitaka and asked him to teach but some of Yoshitaka's pupils advised him against direct involvement. Okuyama Tadao was actually sent to teach. When asked what he taught, Kase replied, "Killing technique!" Kase studied with Okuyama Tadao in the post war period and stated that Okuyama had "a special kind of power, not from the muscles, not from *kime*, something else." When asked about it, he simply shook his head and smiled. Egami Shigeru is believed to have gotten some of his later ideas from Okuyama. Kase stated that, of all that generation, Okuyama was "the highest." At one time Okuyama had gone into the mountains to train (*yamagomori*), just as Oyama Masutatsu. Later he became involved with the Omotokyo sect of Shintoism. This same group influenced Ueshiba Morihei. Okuyama became the bodyguard of the head of Omotokyo and lived in the group's headquarters.

In 1945, the *Shotokan* was destroyed in a bombing raid, and then Japan surrendered, and shortly after Funakoshi Yoshitaka died. This happened all within a few months. *Karate* practice stopped for a time, but slowly began to grow. Master Kase was not able to find a *dojo* in which to practice, so he went back to *judo*, until Funakoshi Gichin reassembled the *Shotokan* group. In 1946, he obtained *Shodan* (1st Dan) in *Karate-do* and in 1949, when he was captain of the team in the Senshu University, he obtained *Sandan* (3rd Dan). One year later, Nishiyama Hidetaka received *Sandan*, making Kase his senior. *Karate* escaped the American Forces ban placed on *judo* and *kendo*. Kase explained that the *karate* groups described their art as of "Chinese origin" rather than Japanese, so the Americans permitted them to practice.

In Japan, one of Kase's tasks was to train the J.K.A. instructors in *kumite*. Among these instructors were Enoda, Ochi, Shirai as well as many others. In the post-war period of 1945-52, Kase won many fights and ended up with real combat experience. *Karate* groups would get together for joint training (*kokan geiko*). Frequently, these sessions would get very physical, especially when style rivalry was also involved. In 1949, *Shotokan* Universities of the East of Japan went to *Kyoto* to meet the Universities of the West. These were mainly *Goju* stylists, and some *Shito-ryu* stylists. Before *kumite* began, the *Shotokan* seniors told the students that this was to be "non-contact!" In reality, it was clearly understood they really meant "contact!" Since the *Goju* seniors gave a similar "pep talk" to their students, the *kumite* rapidly developed into a bloodbath. Many participants of both groups were knocked down, knocked unconscious, or had teeth

knocked out. Little known is that Kase was responsible for taking care of the "challenges" to the J.K.A. On this occasion a meeting was held as to whether the *kumite* should stop due the injuries that were occurring. Kase was of the opinion that as long as they could stand up they should continue. However, it was agreed that the captains should fight, and Kase faced the captain of Ritsumeikan. Kase succeeded in knocking him down without getting injured himself. Kase insisted he was lucky as he just managed to evade the opponent's *haito*, which brushed through his hair. During this time, Kase enrolled at Senshu University and continued his training becoming captain of the *karate* team. Hironishi Genshin was the *sensei* and his training was hard. Kase also went to Chuo to train with Egami Shigeru who, according to Kase, had "very sharp technique." Kase passed his 3rd *Dan* grading in 1949 before a panel of seniors from all the universities.

In the 1950's, different *Shotokan* factions broke away from each other. There were technical differences not only among the groups, but also among those who had been serving in China, Manchuria, and other parts of the Japanese empire. Kase joined the JKA as one of its senior members. Takushoku University men predominantly ran the JKA of that time. Kase came from Senshu University, a rival group, but he did not have trouble with the Takushoku faction, primarily due to Nakayama Masatoshi. Nakayama "had a good heart and wanted everybody to work together." Kase was involved in formulating the first contest rules for JKA and as a senior instructor he was responsible for teaching the first generation of international instructors. In 1965 Kanazawa Hirokazu, Enoeda Keinosuke and Shirai Hiroshi made a world tour with Kase, assisting in demonstrations wherever they went, and deferred to Kase as the senior.

France was his home for over thirty years. Henry Plée, the founder of French karate, was instrumental in bringing Kase to France. Plée had organized his summer course at St. Raphael and had booked Hiroshi Shirai to teach. Shirai couldn't make it and he arranged for Kase to come in his stead. Initially, Plee was hesitant about Kase, but Kase had a good rapport with the students, and in terms of *karate*, "a formidable technique." Kase was strict in teaching *kihon* and *kata*, but his *kumite* technique was much freer. The important things in *kumite* were timing, movement, and power applied at the right moment. At the end of the course, Kase was asked by Plee to teach at his *dojo*. Kase Sensei was a small man but one who mastered the sense of combat. He was exceptional as he practiced two forms of *karate*. The first was based on combat, and the second on the practice of the fundamentals. He possessed the simple strategy: of adapting to his opponent. He would see an opening, and with his sense of timing, he moved in. His strength came from his experience of real combat. Of great help was his *judo* experience with its principles definitely present in his method of fighting. He learned well the way bodyweight moved, and knew when the opponent could or could not attack. His *judo* training taught Kase when the opponent was in the process of transferring his bodyweight and could not attack. At that moment, Kase Sensei would perform his famous deep attack. He loved fighting and never refused a match. Patrick Baroux was European *karate* champion in the 1960's, and told Plee he (Baroux) believed he could best Kase in *kumite*. When Plee told Kase, Kase, said quite simply, "No problem, whenever he wants." When they met, he let Baroux do two or three techniques, then stepped up the pace. He soundly defeated the European champion.

Kase typically taught *Hachi Ho Gyaku-uraken Waza* at his one-day seminars. Training involved stepping at angles and spinning around the opponent. In daily training, students

were required to understand *kata* thoroughly. They mastered four directions of execution: *omote* (left side, also standard form), *ura* (right side, also opposite), *go* (*kata* performed by moving backwards; from the end of the *kata* to the beginning), and *go-ura* (backwards, opposite direction; moving from the end to the beginning on the opposite side). Next came the *bunkai* and *oyō* interpretations. They learned to move off the line, how to breathe in different ways and how to use their *hara* properly to correctly perform *kime*. It was learning about the use of *hara* that was an early indication of just how different an instructor Kase Sensei was. Kase also taught *seite* and *hente*, or blocking with one hand and countering with the other, and blocking and countering with the same hand. He was still with the JKA and remained with them until the political problems of the 1980's. He left JKA and set up his own organization. He was never a politician and just wanted to do *karate*. The break allowed him to do practice the way he wanted. For instance, in 1981, after recovering from a heart attack he went through *kata* taking the form apart and showing, among other things, how to best position the body in relation to the opponent. Kase stressed that his style (*Kase Ha Shotokan Ryu Karate-Do*) was "*budō karate*." Kase acknowledged three phases of *karate*: the Okinawan phase; the Japanese phase; the Yoshitaka phase. Kase's students contend there is a fourth phase – the Kase phase. Kase was noted for his kicking techniques and created the *kaiten geri*, or rear kick with the forward leg.

Kase Taiji passed away on 24 November 2004, in his adopted hometown of Paris, France. He is survived by his wife, two daughters and a grandson.

Keage and Kekomi

Prior to the 1960's, these words were not used in conjunction with kicks. Today *keage* refers to a snap kick and *kekomi* refers to a thrust kick. Originally, they were referred to as *keriage*, or kick up, and *kerikomi*, or kick in. *Keriage* was shortened to *keage*, and would be written as ke'age in English. Similarly, *kerikomi* would be ke'komi. When today's styles refer to *mae geri keage*, they are actually being redundant, much like the American "taxicab."

Kokoro/Shin: Mind or Heart (also, Soul)

Following is a list of words relating to the mind or heart as used in Japanese martial arts. This list is by no means comprehensive!

Kokoro-e is a serene state of mind.

Mushin no shin refers to a serene and understanding mind; literally "mind of no mind"; i.e., one's mind is receptive to whatever it receives without judgment.

Jishin, or "self-mind"; that is, self-confidence.

Isshin or "single mindedness"; this is giving oneself up totally to a situation without any thought of consequences; a state of being totally focused.

Genshin is the ability to anticipate an attack and is related to *sen sen no sen*.

Fudoshin refers to the imperturbability of the mind in an emergency; one does not lose control.

Zanshin, or "remaining mind"; this is a mind that remains ready to continue to follow up or defend after having completed the necessary technique; it also remains aware of the surroundings.

Jinshin is a benevolent mind; one of the five virtues (Gojo).

Rambo

This one is just for fun. The action hero's name in Japanese is made up of two characters:

Ran (becomes *Ram* with the second character) means confusion.

Bo means violent or disorderly.

When combined into *Rambo*, the new word means extremely violent or wild.

Amazing how it fits, isn't it?