

Additional Notes

Haifa Seminar Dec 2014

Introduction

I am very much honoured and happy to be here with you all, and to have been given this opportunity to speak to you about some of the Japanese words, sayings, teachings and customs that inevitably run through the art of Karate.

Firstly, I would like to clarify that I am not here to offer you any teachings.

Nor am I intending to speak as a Karate-ka, though it is not possible to remove that element from myself, for I consider myself yet to be in a very early stage of development, I am here as a person without a title.

What I would like to do today, is simply to share my journey as a human being, who happened to have been born and bred in Japan and its culture, and moreover, as a person who has left the country and seen it from the outside, then through practicing Karate in places far away from Japan, seen it again from much deeper within. I would like to explain how, through the course of many years, my understanding and interpretations of those aspects that are unique to my birth country, have deepened and evolved.

When Oded Sensei asked me to present a speech, my first thought was that I should be the last person to speak about Japanese culture.

That was mostly because, if I am perfectly honest, I have never consciously felt patriotic in my life. Not only that, throughout my time in Japan, both as a child and an adult, I quite passionately hated most customs and systems of my own country. So, my initial reaction to Sensei's proposal was "I should stick to offering linguistic assistance to the people who do not speak Japanese. I do have that ability. But I cannot act like a cultural ambassador that I am not!"

Then I thought twice about this, and realised that I have come a long way since I left Japan full of anger and hatred. I realised that I now see things very differently and so much more profoundly. The realisation came as a surprise. And I felt like sharing my personal story instead of mechanically translating the definitions of Japanese words, which can be done by

anyone who can memorise what is in the dictionary. Or, maybe you would even prefer reading the dictionary yourself in your own time rather than listening to me recite it.

I thought I should be speaking with my own words, telling an honest story of a person who felt very much confused and disillusioned to be Japanese, then slowly made her way to understanding and appreciating what was given to her as a default condition, and has now begun to restore harmony within herself.

I must stress that I did not come to this conclusion myself. I have been encouraged by people I trust and revere very much, including Yaguchi Sensei, Taka Maeshima Senpai, Miyuki Kuroha Senpai, and last but not least, Oded Sensei. They all have kindly given me very important pieces of advice and elements to form this speech on this occasion and I would like you to acknowledge that I did not come up with all that I am going to speak on my own, but with warm support and encouragement from these four wonderful people.

When I left Japan in 1998, though I only travelled to the UK as a tourist without any concrete plans, I knew I did not want to go back to where I came from. And in fact, I managed to stay in UK ever since. I have been so lucky and blessed in many ways.

Especially as I actively resisted the hierarchical thinking that along many other elements forms the backbone of martial arts, I had never been remotely interested in Karate or any other forms of Japanese art while I was in Japan. I suppose it would have sounded beautiful if I told you that I took up Karate practice in UK because I had finally come to appreciate my own background and culture after spending some time outside of my birthplace. However, it was not the case. I started practicing Karate to support my then partner to open his own Dojo. And he was not even Japanese. I ended up being trained by a non Japanese Karate-ka in UK without even being passionate about the art itself.

Knowing how I felt about the Japanese customs, my family and friends back home still seem to be finding it hard to believe how keen I have become on this art. I always tell them that I would never have believed myself either if anyone had told me that this was going to happen.

Anyhow, my first step towards Karate was made out of love, care and support for someone very dear to me, then the journey has slowly become my own, and now every step I take is made out of love, care and support for myself.

伝統

“dentou”

Tradition

伝 “convey, notify, propagate”

統 “continuity, connection, consolidation”

Since I was helping a qualified Karate-ka set up a Dojo without having much experience or skills myself, I decided to somehow compensate for the obvious shortcomings by studying and researching about the art. This was the first time in my life that I had felt that being Japanese could be “useful” for my life. I read a number of books, articles on various websites, and blog posts both in Japanese and English constantly comparing and cross-examining the contents. I researched the origin, history and the current development of different schools and soon realised that the concept and history of Karate were so much vaguer and more complex than I had initially thought. For some reason I had always believed Karate and other Japanese martial arts had existed for much longer than they actually have. I believed that they would fall into a category of “traditional” Japanese culture where in fact the four most well known schools of Karate (Shotokan, Shito-ryu, Goju-ryu, Wado-ryu) were all established less than 100 years ago. Scholars seem to debate on many aspects and some say Karate is of Chinese origin. Most of them seem to agree that it had a great and direct influence of Chinese martial arts. Every single one of them agrees that it developed in Okinawa before being brought in to the mainland Japan. Besides, when, for instance, Gichin Funakoshi Sensei started practicing Karate, present Okinawa was called “Ryukyu Oukoku” (Ryukyu Kingdom), which was then not part of Japan but an independent country. This has made me reconsider the definition and the use of the word “tradition”. Then I quickly accepted that a number of things that most people including myself perceive as “tradition” were in fact “fusion” that kept evolving, like everything else in life.

Kara-Te, the Name of the Art

唐手 China Hand

空手 Empty Hand

Another one of the biggest surprising discoveries for me in the first period of my study was that Karate originally meant “China hand” as opposed to “empty hand” as it is now widely known. Empty hand literally represents the physical fact that in most schools Karate-ka’s practice without weapons, and I do believe that it is also the most common interpretation of the name of this art for the majority of Karate-ka’s both in Japan and other parts of the world. I myself had never even thought about this any further until I stumbled across an article that said; Funakoshi Sensei officially changed the first Kanji (Chinese symbols) of the name of the art in 1929, quite recent in my opinion, to the current one that represents “emptiness” rather than “China”.

He referred to “The Heart Sutra”, a Buddhist scripture as inspiration. Although Karate teachings have never directly included any specific religious elements, the sutra’s teaching of selflessness, nothingness and fundamental emptiness inspired the concept behind the choice of this character.

The most famous part of the sutra reads;

色即是空 空即是色 (Shiki soku ze kuu Kuu soku ze shiki)

I only know this in Japanese version. Obviously, the original sutra was in Sanskrit and the Chinese translated it into Chinese symbols then the Japanese read the symbols in the way that phonetically suited Japanese language.

The most widely shared English interpretation of this phrase, according to the omniscient Google at the time of my 2 minutes research, which was about a couple of weeks ago, was; “All reality is a phantom, and all phantoms are real. ; The form is nonexistence, and nonexistence is the form”

The sentence almost does not make sense if we think in the way we normally think.

I do not have any intention to pretend that I understand this concept on any meaningful levels. Nevertheless my current interpretation of this in planer English would be;

“Everything we believe is real is in fact illusion and everything we believe is an illusion is in fact real – or has potential to become real -. Everything that is physically tangible is materialized out of elements that are not tangible, and everything that is not physically tangible exists by forming the things that are tangible. ”

This version is more comprehensive but at the same time it massively limits the context and reduces the layers of meanings contained in the strra.

The second half especially, is said to be the ultimate state to which a martial artist, or “bushi”, a samurai warrior should aspire. I can only imagine and speculate to have a vague idea as to what it feels to be in such a state. This seems to be completely beyond words and imagination and I am certain that one must experience the state of formlessness and nonexistence to understand the concept. This teaching works like a constant reminder to me of a very important fact that knowing about a concept is not the same as knowing it. Nonetheless, knowing about this has made me want to understand and experience it for real. It also made me want to share this with my fellow Karate-ka’s for I was convinced that many would be inspired just like I was and still am. It must not be difficult for you to imagine how glad I feel to be sharing this with you today.

何事も我慢せよ

“Nanigoto mo Gaman seyo”

All matters should be dealt with patience, tolerance, endurance and perseverance.

I am delighted to inform you that Yaguchi Sensei has entrusted me with this teaching given to him by Masatoshi Nakayama Sensei, whom Yaguchi Sensei regards as his master and mentor. Yaguchi Sensei told me that he has lived to this day embracing this teaching as a treasure. And with it Sensei sends his regards to every one of you.

The word “Gaman” holds so many layers of subtle meanings as many of Japanese words do. You can see my English translation of the short Japanese sentence is much longer with more words. This is the interpretation I naturally come up with today and I genuinely appreciate the importance of this teaching. However, it is also true that the word “Gaman” has a strong connotation of “self-sacrifice”, “putting up with unjust hardships” and “giving

up one's true desire". And that side was all I saw when I was in Japan. I could not understand why we had to put up with situations that did not seem rational, or why we had to give up something for no apparent reason. So I refused to accept any teachings of this kind if there was not a clear and satisfactory explanation. "Because that is the way it should be" was not satisfactory to a confused and angry young person. I was desperately seeking clear answer to my confusion, believing that would calm my anger down. Even Yaguchi Sensei might have had a hard time convincing me with this teaching. In fact, I felt an automatic rejection to this word "Gaman" when I saw it in Yaguchi Sensei's email. The word made me feel oppressed though I knew that it was purely because of the old feelings I had associated with this particular word as a child or a young person. There, all the unanswered questions from my young self surfaced. If fairness is good, why is it that those who put up with so much unfairness without saying anything are considered to be virtuous? Why is it that we have to give up so many things now to prepare for the future events that we do not even know will actually happen? Are they making us give up all these little and harmless things just to train us to be able to give up something bigger and more important when we grow up? Why do we have to sacrifice ourselves to keep others happy and pretend that we are happy to do so when we are not at all? I could not articulate my questions at that time as clearly as I can now, but these are the examples of them.

Today, my interpretation of the word is much wider and more positive. I still believe those are valid questions though I have long stopped blaming the adults who were around me for not answering. Maybe they did not know themselves. Maybe some knew but did not think I was mature enough to understand. I know some thought my asking these questions was so inappropriate they would never even consider answering. Looking back, I feel that it would probably have made very little difference if someone actually tried to answer me anyway. Most things you have to experience yourself to understand. And this reminded me of the fact that Japanese culture puts great importance on silent teachings that you absorb from physical and visual experience. For instance, as an apprentice of any master craftsmen, one would just clean his master's workshop, tools, and do everything that is not the actual "work" he is there to learn, for many years. Then, one day, the master will tell the apprentice, "I think you are ready". The apprentice would think that the master will finally teach him about the crafts, but the master will just hand him some tools and ask him to show what he can do. The apprentice tries and realizes that he has learned everything that he needed to learn, by being around the master and sneaking peeks while putting up with all the boring

chores. We use this word “steal” in a positive context when it comes to leaning something from great masters. They will just be themselves. You are in charge of observing and stealing their greatness to own it yourself.

After my initial reaction to the word “Gaman” had passed, I found myself crafting an “application” that would suit myself. I decided that this teaching means to me that “All matters should be dealt with patience, tolerance, endurance and perseverance, in the faith that even what seems unjust is there only because it is the most effective way in that particular moment to prompt your own growth” I do not know if Nakayama Sensei or Yaguchi Sensei would agree with this interpretation. But it encourages me and makes me have faith in myself and take responsibility for my own situation and state of mind, which will naturally bring harmony within myself. Only when I am in harmony with my own self, am I ready to be in harmony with others around me.

調和

“chouwa”

Harmony

Even this beautiful word was not a friend to me when I was in Japan as the concept was imposed upon me to fit in the system and comply with the rules. If you wanted to do something different, you disturb the harmony. If you voiced something that makes others uncomfortable, you disturb the harmony. Conforming to uniformity seemed to be an essential condition one was required to meet in order to preserve “the harmony”.

Japan is known for its people’s selfless behaviors and the trait was especially put in focus by Western media after the great earthquake and tsunami in 2011. A number of news programs showed footages of Japanese people calmly wait for hours for emergency supply without complaining or attempting to jump the queue, all the cars stuck in the traffic giving ways to one another, so on so forth. No panic or riot has been reported as far as I am concerned. Those were truly moving scenes. So quiet yet unbelievably overwhelming, that was the opposite side of the coin that I had been despising for years and years...

Nonetheless, even after witnessing this beautiful side of what I once loathed, I still do not

believe that uniformity is a necessary element in order to strike a perfect harmony. Diversity and the tolerance are. In music there are many different types of harmonies. There are major and minor chords that are familiar to most people. And there are dissonances that do not sound as “clean” or “right” but are deliberately used to make a tune more interesting and alive. A note that does not seem to belong to that particular place of the piece can add spices and characters to the whole structure. A wrong note, or rather, an outcast whom you can choose to ignore, fight against or make peace with. You will always find someone in your family, among friends, at workplace, or in the street, who plays a note that does not feel “right”. And you will always find within yourself some notes that do not sit well according to your own sense of harmony. You can choose to ignore, fight against, or make peace with those notes. I am not suggesting one is more superior choice than the others. Minor chords are not superior to the major ones or vice versa. It is a matter of personal preference and choice. I am suggesting that you can choose what note you play in any given moments depending on what kind of chords you wish to strike, and all chords have their own place in the whole piece. That to me, is true symphony that stimulates our patience, tolerance, endurance and perseverance for all that we can be.

There have been many great martial artists who were very loyal to their masters throughout their lives. And there have been many others that chose to leave their Dojo to seek their own ways. Shuhari (守破離) is a word that describes three different stages of acquiring mastery. First stage “shu” (守 protect, preserve, obey) is where one religiously trains to master original forms and fundamental disciplines. In the second stage “ha” (破 break, tear, destroy) , one is ready to be innovative having mastered the fundamentals, and innovation inevitably breaks the original teachings. The third stage “ri” (離 separate, part from, detach) is for one to transcend all that he has learned in the first two stages. Those who left their masters chose to walk this path. Some were disowned by the Dojo permanently, despised for being disloyal, and blamed for disturbing the harmony. It is not hard to imagine that many of these outcasts evolved into grand masters of kinds that had never existed before. Again, I would like to stress that I am not suggesting one way is better than the other. Many of those who remained loyal to one master and stuck by his teaching have also become great masters and they are the ones who supported and conserved good Dojo’s and any other organizations. Every coin has heads and tails and you cannot have one side alone. With light comes a shadow. Heads and tails, light and shadows, they are all different forms of the same thing, which means there is no better way or even right way.

Recently, I have consciously been asking myself what choices I would make if there was no right or wrong, easier or harder, better or worse, security or risk, profit or loss. At the beginning, it was really hard. Whenever I felt that I had to make a decision of any kind, I could see that my built-in automatic selection system start analyzing and calculating to find the “best” decision, which, according to my own system, has the best success rate with the least amount of risks, is the easiest possible, and commands approval of the people who are dear to me, so on so forth. And the most amazing part was that I was not even aware that all these calculations had been constantly in progress for such a long time. Even after I clearly acknowledged what was happening in my little head, it was not easy to switch off that persistent calculator that believes itself to be on a mission to save me from potential disasters and failures. Total illusion. But I had long been controlled by it without even noticing any of its activities. Habits I did not know I had, formed with all the teachings I came across in the past. It did not seem to matter whether I accepted or denied the teachings. They were all there in one form or the other. Even the teachings that I could not agree with had a remarkable impact on my decision making process. It was fundamental fear I had deep within that appointed all that I had been taught regardless of the contents. Surely it was a self-preserving mechanism that failed to preserve myself but caused internal conflicts as the beliefs and rules contradicted one another. I had long resisted and fought against what I perceived as unjust, and finally came to know that there was no way I could win the battle. All the confusion, conflicts and dysfunction were happening within me before anywhere else.

One of the important decisions I made recently was to accept Oded Sensei’s request for me to give this speech at this seminar. As I mentioned at the beginning, my first reaction was “I am not qualified to do such a thing”. At the same time, I could feel tingling excitement in my heart. Still, my mind went on to say “I am not ready for this”, “What would Yaguchi Sensei think?”, “What if no one wants to hear what I have to say?”, “What if I could not deliver?”, “Even if I managed to deliver a speech, it may not meet Oded Sensei’s expectation and end up making him look bad to have appointed me to do such an important thing”. I could see all these mumbles in my head were coming from fear of disappointing both others and myself. Fear of failure. I acknowledged that and decided to take up the challenge. I did not consult anyone to have approval or advice before taking a decision for I thought it would defy the purpose of the action. I asked Yaguchi Sensei for his input after I had already made my mind and said yes to Oded Sensei. And I did not do it to have Yaguchi Sensei’s approval. I

did so because I truly wanted to have his essence in this seminar since I had been looking forward to being taught by him, like all of you must have been. I did not even know if it was an appropriate thing to do and I was really not sure if Yaguchi Sensei would reply to such a request. However, I was convinced that it would be the best thing I could do in my power at that point of my life, and Yaguchi Sensei warmly encouraged me and entrusted me with his words. If I believed in a ridged system of hierarchy that I was taught to obey in Japan, I would never have dared.

Hierarchy
階級制度
and
Seniority System
年功序列

You must be already sensing that I am now going to talk about my conflict with hierarchy. The kind of hierarchy that I faced when I was in Japan was predominantly “seniority system”. Since I never officially belonged to any organizations as an adult, my experience was limited to this type that one would have in schools, which means the system does not function based on one’s position or social status but age. It does not have a shape of pyramid but a column.

When I was a very young child, I played with other children like any child would do in any part of the world. Some were older and some younger than I was and that did not mean anything to us. Things changed drastically after I graduated primary school and entered junior high school. I was 12 years old. There I was told that I now had to refer to my friends who were, a year, some just a few months older than I was, as “senpai” (senior) and use “keigo” (polite language) when speaking to them. My reaction to that order was of course, “No way!”. I was not willing to change my attitude towards my friends or other children just because I changed schools. That did not make any sense whatsoever. I kept calling older children by their names and speaking in casual terms. It did not go down very well. Other children did not seem to have problems with the change. Some older ones even seemed to enjoy their new status and power over the younger ones. I was often summoned by the older

children and was confronted by them. They demanded that I showed respect by calling them “senpai” and use “keigo” when I spoke to them. They stood in a circle and put me in the middle when telling me off for my “cheeky” behavior. My answer to them was “No one demands special respect from me just because they were born a few months before I was”. They threatened me by declaring that I would be “lynched” if I kept being the way I was. Yes, “lynch” was a word they often used to threaten younger children in both junior and senior high schools back then. I have never actually been “lynched” but I know that a couple of boys in my class got beaten up by older children despite calling them “senpai” and speaking in polite terms. They were punished for “inappropriate behaviors” whatever that meant. Again, I was lucky and blessed as there were a few older children who did not mind my being the way I was. Especially the ones in a drumming club that I belonged to. We played music together and they never demanded me to behave in a certain way. They were rock ‘n’ rollers. However, my teacher was concerned about my behavior and warned my mother. My mother is a very gentle and soft-spoken lady, quite opposite of myself when you see what appears on the surface. But she is my mother and was by then used to being told by concerned teachers that I acted irrationally. She always asked me why I did what I did after a meeting with teachers. Her favorite episode happened when I was 7 years old. In Japanese primary schools all children are required to wear a nametag on the left side of the chest at all time. If you forget to wear it, you will be warned and sometimes punished. I was a forgetful child and often went in without wearing my nametag. My classroom teacher kept telling me that I needed to wear it for all the teachers at school to know my name, so that they would know who I was. It sounded like a good reason so I tried my best to remember to put the tag on my clothes everyday. Then one day, the schoolmaster approached me when I was with a friend. He asked me what my name was, in a very gentle voice that adults often employ when talking to children. I thought it was patronizing and felt angry. I said to the schoolmaster “You should know. It is on my nametag”. My friend was completely freaked out and tried her best to stop me. But I was not going to give in. The purpose of the nametag had to be served. Then the schoolmaster said “You, little ***** piece of first-grader!” in a completely different tone of voice. I could not believe my ears. And I responded with all the bad words I knew that I am not going to share with you here. The schoolmaster left while repeating his words. A few days later, my mother was informed about this event by my classroom teacher. She asked me why I refused to tell my name when the schoolmaster asked. I told her that I had been forced to wear a nametag so that everyone could know my name without asking me

therefore he should have read my nametag and I knew he had done so anyway before asking me, plus I found it disrespectful that he assumed a small child like me would not even notice it. My mother said, "I see. You had a good reason to act the way you did". Then I mentioned what he said to me after, and how I responded to that. It turned out that she was not informed about that bit. She looked surprised and a little concerned, then told me in her soft voice "That was not very adult-like of the schoolmaster but please do not use words like you did to anyone however right you think you may be". That was all she said and I was dismissed. That is to say, my not referring to older children as "senpai" was not a serious matter to my mother. Again, she said to me "You have your own good reason to act the way you do and I personally do not see any problem."

Those are the examples of hierarchy I experienced as a child in Japan. And I did not like it one bit.

A year later, came my turn to be addressed as "senpai" by the freshmen. I asked them to call me by my name and not to use polite terms. They seemed surprised at first but then quickly got comfortable with our arrangement.

Overall, I enjoyed great friendships without feeling superior or inferior to any of the older or younger students around me.

礼

"rei"

Bow

When I first started Karate, bowing in "seiza" position was one of the things that I felt uncomfortable with. It made me feel like I was giving in to the hierarchical system that I had denied with all my might since I was small. Nevertheless, I respected the custom. After all, no one forced me to practice Karate. Whatever the reason, I decided myself, to be in that environment. So I quickly learned to adapt. After a while I felt that it was not a big deal, that it was one of the ways to exchange mutual respect and nothing more or less. Then the real breakthrough came when I first attended a seminar with Yaguchi Sensei where I had a glimpse into the depth of Karate that I had never imagined existed before. Something much greater and deeper than my mind could ever anticipate was actually there and it even felt

almost tangible. After the seminar, I sat in seiza, straightened my back, and placed my palms in angles on the floor to lower my head, in heartfelt joy and gratitude. My thoughts drifted to the ancient time when someone came up with this unique form of expression, using his whole body to show how grateful and joyous he felt by touching the presence of a great master. For me, it was not about titles or ranks, not even what Sensei taught me, or how virtuous his personality seemed. It was for what I perceived as sheer life force that was uncompromisingly surging. The very life itself that has been lived to its full potential without hesitation. That force touches people's souls effortlessly in the depth that words can never reach. It directly resonates with others' own life force and awakens their true potentials. To me, the results, the end products did not matter. The source did. The source, the force, and the life itself that were radiating through Yaguchi Sensei's presence, were what I was bowing to with all my heart.

形から入って心に至る

(kata kara haitte kokoro ni itaru)

Start with the form then the heart will follow

Until that moment, I was very skeptical about this teaching.

I did not consider any forms or rituals performed by someone who did not truly believe in them to be meaningful in any sense. I still believe it is especially pointless when one is forced to do so. However, I got to the point where I truly felt that I understood the meaning of "rei" (bow) because I kept bowing even when I was not comfortable with the idea. The realization would not have come had I completely refused to bow in the first place. So, I unintentionally proved that this method works. At least it worked for me on one occasion. At the same time, I wonder what would have happened if I was forced to perform rituals that I did not wish to. I can only imagine that it would have been damaging in many ways but I do not really have the answer because I have not experienced that version of event. In any case, I believe all profound teachings are double-edged swords. And those who were called great masters and mentors must have known how and when to apply those teachings. Blind faith in a double-edged sword can be fatal. There is a phrase in Japanese "右へ倣え" (migi he narae) which means "Follow the one stands on your right". You must be familiar with this

practice without knowing the phrase, since when we line up in Dojo the highest-ranked, most senior Karate-ka stands on the farthest right, then the ranks lower towards left. You are supposed to follow the person on the right because he or she is senior and superior and should know better. Funnily enough, despite the actual practice, this phrase is often used in a negative context to remind us not to fall into a trap of blindly following the order from the above. Many have used this phrase to describe the unquestioning hierarchical loyalty of 100 million Japanese people that led the country to start the Second World War. And we all know how it ended. Japan became the only nation in the world that has been hit by nuclear weapons.

We find contradictions in most teachings if not all, when we dig deep. Moreover, things do not work the same way twice. Even when they look similar or almost identical, no two events are the same. Throughout the history, countless masters and sages have strived to express their wisdoms in various ways and created their original methods to achieve mastery yet no one has succeeded to establish a method that works equally for every one. I wholeheartedly welcome this “failure” by celebrating the diversity of us, the human race. It leaves us with a margin to wonder and explore what the best thing to do next would be, what feels right in a particular moment, what attracts our attention and why. Through trials and errors one’s path becomes his or her own and no one else’s. Even your Sensei cannot decide it for you. Sensei lives his or her way and we can only be inspired to live ours.

先生

“sensei”

One who has lived first

This must be one of the most familiar words to all Karate-ka’s in any countries in the world. Everyone knows that it means “teacher” and that is precisely what it means in Japan as well.

The funny thing is, neither of these two symbols that make up this word suggests anything to do with teaching, studies, or being someone to offer wisdoms to the others.

The first symbol represents “first, before, in advance, previous”. The second “birth, live, life”. According to the symbols, “sensei” is not exactly someone who “teaches” something. Sensei is

a person who has been born before you, and has lived life before you. I must confess I was not the one who pointed out the symbolic meaning of this word. My dear friend and big “senpai” Taka Maeshima suggested this in one of our geeky conversations about martial arts and ancient cultures. I was so impressed that I told him that I had to have this in my speech, and I thanked him before he had time to say anything. So I am now giving the credit to the person who deserves it! The concept has been presented by Taka Maeshima.

One who has lived first, that is what Sensei means. When I heard this I immediately thought of the day I first felt an urge to bow sincerely to Yaguchi Sensei. As I explained earlier, that urge was not created by his rank, age, experience, Karate skills, teaching skills or anything else to do with social status or abilities. And it was not even for the warm and kind personality Sensei has. It was for something that transcends them all, and the life lived uncompromisingly without hesitation. Sensei has been living life before us, and that made Sensei a sensei.

When I say uncompromising, I do not mean forcing or controlling things in the way that is preferable to one. It is quite the opposite of that. When you see a bigger picture and want to achieve the very best in that scale rather than worrying about your individual needs or convenience, you are in the state of living uncompromisingly. I am not talking about self-sacrifice at all. Again, quite the opposite. You allow yourself to be all that you can be without worrying about your pride or convenience or fear that will inevitably be part of the reason behind your personal and individual desires and wishes.

Through life, through Karate, and many other things, I have come to realize that I ultimately care about one thing. To live life to the fullest, guided by uncompromising surge of life force within and see where it takes me. Just like great Sensei’s have.

Nao Masuda