

Atlanta Gi Yu Dojo Workshop Takeaways

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Mu Kyu – Gi Yu Honbu Dojo

The 2017 Atlanta Gi Yu Dojo workshop was filled with countless laughs, hearty meals, robust conversation, and a continual dose of training. In general, the aforementioned assertions serve as stepping stones to build fellowship amongst members of any community; but arguably—specific to *bujutsu* or the martial arts—it is through endless hours of listening, observing, and training with these members that camaraderie and self-unity are forged. Sawada Hanae, *hanshi* or master-level instructor with the All-Japan Naginata Federation, states training is journey of repeated techniques and building spirit. She notes this internal test is centered on understanding failure and humility; and from lessons learned, students hone skills to make movement and thought fluid. To her, repetition is reinforced by spirit, and through spirit the body moves naturally without thinking. A cornerstone to this journey is the relationship between *shi* and *uke*, or doer and receiver, respectively. Hanae connects this bond to winning and losing, insomuch as the give and take between the two is a spiritual exchange that facilitates understanding of *budo* or way of the martial artist.¹ Specific to Gi Yu Dojo training and the Atlanta workshop, the application of this concept remains a consent during individual and group practice at the *honbu* or headquarters and was reinforced during the Georgia visit.

Complimenting Hanae's thoughts from reflection in his twilight years, famed duelist and undefeated swordsman Miyamoto Musashi underscored the importance of regular practice with a continued adherence to the natural principles.² While the former is essential for growth in *budo*, the latter likely is analogous to Musashi's five Scrolls: Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, and Void. In contrast, however, the natural principles may be interpreted as the basic skills; or in relation to practice, continual training in the basic skills. If true, then these rudimentary techniques certainly are strengthened by observing,

¹ Meik Skoss, *Koryu Bujutsu: Classical Warrior Traditions of Japan*, ed. Diane Skoss (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Koryu Books, 1997), 46-52.

² Miyamoto Musashi, *The Book of the Five Rings*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1993), 3-4.

listening, and critically analyzing instructions, conversations, and interactions with the *Sensei*—one who was born before or teacher—and other *budo* practitioners. For the Atlanta workshop, in-depth discussion of the basic skills was a common recurrence that touched all aspects of training and self-awareness; and moreover, served as a focus point to limelight the importance of building a foundation before expanding the structure.

Scholars and *budo* students Ratti and Westbrook declare that at the center of this foundation is the warrior and leader who, whether through following a natural or spontaneous inclination toward combat or adapting knowledge gained in other fields of human activity to the resolution of the problems of armed and unarmed confrontations, spent a majority of their life immersed in the forms of *bujutsu*. This individual is known as *Sensei* and is responsible for establishment, preservation, and transmission of martial theories and practices in its systematic fashion.³ The authors' erudite argument is difficult to conceptualize without trusting and following an authoritative source; instead, it is only realized—and fully appreciated—through *budo* study under a *Sensei*. Members of Gi Yu Dojo almost certainly are able to identify with this sentiment as students of the Dojo's *Kancho* or director, Sukh Sandhu Sensei. Whether training in evening sessions, attending workshops, or strengthening the mind through *Sensei* and student discussion, receiving Sukh Sensei's teachings of *jissen koryu bujutsu* or real combat classic martial arts alongside his pupils is a privilege and honor that continually tests an individual's mettle.

In summation, continual training of the basic skills is the foundation for firm structure and that sharpens the spirit to confidently and competently administer *jissen koryu bujutsu* techniques; ultimately, the building is constructed through failure and humility, as there is always a *Sensei* or senior student, also referred to as *Sempai*, observing and correcting. Dedication, practice, and willingness to receive battle-tested applications, along with unwavering respect for fellow students, *Sempias*, and *Sensei* are the hallmarks and requirements of individuals engaged with *budo*; but in the end,

³ Oscar Ratti and Adele Westbrook. *Secrets of the Samurai: The Martial Arts of Feudal Japan*. (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1973), 153.

Sukh Sensei's subtle statement during the Atlanta workshop should be remembered:
"The Arts don't bend for you, you bend for the Arts."⁴

⁴ Sukh Sandhu, discussion with Sensei, Lawrenceville, October 2017.