

“Thoughts About The 9th annual Gi Yu Dojo Seminar”

Chuck VanDine

Dojo-cho

Yon Dan Gi Yu Honbu Dojo

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As expected, the 9th Annual Gi Yu Dojo Seminar was marked with several milestones. First, Samuel Foster conquered the Yon Dan test. Second, Laura Benton demonstrated skill and determination during her Shodan test, which she passed with flying colors. Finally, with a collective sigh of relief, we finished the ShinKen Gata, a bitter sweet departure from the ShinKen Gata.



As I reflect on the seminar, the aforementioned milestones dominate my thoughts. At the Gi Yu Dojo, passing your Yon Dan is not a small accomplishment. There are over 60, in-depth katas to be performed with meticulous attention to detail and an unrelenting spirit. While performing these kata, an understanding of the tactics of the kata must be evident. This understanding is demonstrated by your ability to move your uke into your strike or, what I like to call, “funneling.” The memorization of 60 plus techniques, attention to detail, unrelenting spirit, and “funneling” of your uke makes Yon Dan an incredibly physically and mentally challenging test.

Two men attempted to pass Yon Dan this year; one passed and the other did not. The former, Sam Foster, has been contemplated challenging this test for several years. The latter, James Sutton, only recently decided to challenge the test. Both of these men had high spirits at the end of this test and both left the dojo that night with broader shoulders.

Sam’s martial arts philosophy is “to become what a Masai elder described as a great Morani (warrior): When the moment calls for fierceness a good Morani is very ferocious. And when the moment calls for kindness, a good Morani is utterly tender. Now what makes a great Morani is knowing which moment is which.”

This is a very simple concept, yet difficult to fully embrace.

During the test, I truly believe Sam fully embodied the great Morani. While showcasing his techniques, his uke James had a hard time keeping up with his strikes. This came as no surprise considering James had decided to test for Yon Don only three months prior to testing and was still understanding the movements. I will talk about this later in this article. In the beginning of the test, Sam's attacks were quick and powerful. When Sam sensed James was struggling, he appropriately lightened his attacks. Then, Sam sensed that James was having his second wind, at which point Sam picked up his speed and power again just as his philosophy of hard and soft per being a Great Morani would. After all the years of contemplating testing for Yon Dan, Sam conquered the test with great skill and determination. .

James was equally as impressive during the test. In the short amount of time he had to prepare, James nearly memorized the entire test. However, the most impressive aspect was James's attitude after failing the exam. Without hesitation, his words were, "I'll pass it in October." His unwavering resolution and eagerness to get back to work showed his true budo. Ironically, this year's theme to the seminar was, "Shoshin Wasuru Bekarazu," or "We should not forget our beginner's spirit of excitement and humility of starting something new." At the end of his test, James was most excited and humble. Eager to get back to work and accomplish his objective of conquering Yon Dan.

I hope next year's seminar, which will mark our 10th year from separating from the Jinenkan, will be just as exciting. These last ten years would not have been possible without you! What makes the annual seminar great are not the techniques or the scrolls necessarily, rather it is your individual accomplishments. Take the next few weeks to dwell on what you want to accomplish over the next year. Perhaps you want to challenge your next test, have perfect cuts during TameShi Giri, master the "KawaSemi," attend all 5 sessions of the seminar, or mentor someone in the tests...the opportunities are numerous. Once you set your goal- write it down and make it happen!



