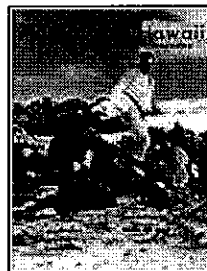


Tommy Morita's Conquest of Enlightenment

by Frank M. Toyama

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Bigotry, prejudice, conceit and all the other vices are said to be stemmed from ignorance. Those who criticize another art, person or whatever, and has little or no knowledge of the subject remain just that, ignorant. But for those few people who seek knowledge outside of their own realm, are the ones who benefit by enlightenment.

Tommy Morita, and 8th dan black belt currently teaching Matsubayashi Karate has journeyed far and wide for his knowledge of the Martial Arts. For Morita carries a black belt in kendo, kenpo, Okinawan and Japanese karate, Kobudo and Jujitsu, a brown belt in judo and has some training in Tai Chi and Gung Fu.

Fifty-five year old Morita, born and raised in rugged island fashion, believes in teaching his black belts "anything that may benefit their karate training," and will explain his views of each strength and weaknesses each system has: including the weaknesses of his own.

Morita began his hearty career in the self defense world before his twenties. As a scrappy fighter of 112 or 118 pounds, Morita was a Big island boxing champion and the fighter of the year in the war years of the early forties.

After the war Morita got interested in Kenpo after witnessing a demonstration and began learning the art in 1949 under professors M. Oshiro and J. Emperado.

However, it wasn't until the 60's that Morita picked up most of his variety of knowledge in the Martial Arts. In 1961, Morita and several Hawaii karate practitioners brought Master

Chitose over from Japan to personally teach them karate. Morita stayed with Chitose for several years and later learned some Tai Chio at the Old Mun Lun school under Professors Lee and Chock and a little Gung Fu. In 1965, Morita left for the Orient in search of a style he could really like and stay with. In Kowloon, Morita learned the Buddhist style of Gung Fu under Professor Chen Dow but this system did not appeal to him. Faith took its inevitable course when Morita visited Okinawa and met Shoshin Nagamine, leader of the Matsubayashi style of Okinawan Karate.

"One day in Naha, while I was waiting for a 2 p.m. appointment to meet and watch the Goju ryu school, one of my friends persuaded me to visit a Matsubayashi school along the way first," Morita remembers. "This is where I got hooked. However, I also met the Masters of the Uechi and Goju ryu schools, and although the choice was very difficult for me to make, I finally decided on the Matsubayashi School of Karate, not because of its superiority to other Okinawan Karate schools, but because of the unassuming, down to earth personality of its leader, Master Shoshin Nagamine," comments Morita. "The naturalness of the Matsubayashi system of training without stress or strain, the genealogical background of the school and the extensive Martial Arts knowledge of the present day Master influenced me into affiliating with this particular Martial Arts school."



Okinawan weaponry is one of the pride and joys of the Matsubayashi system.

Matsubayashi Karate, a branch of Okinawan Shorin ryu originally known as the Tomari style of Okinawa te, was founded by Kosaku Matsumura in the early 1800's. Kosaku's disciples, which were Shoshin Nagamine's instructors, include Motobu Choki, Kyan Chotoku, and Arakaki Ankichi. Kosaku's brother Soken was the leader of the Kobayashi system of Shorin ryu and some of their third generation instructors include Gichin Funakoshi and Chosin Chibana.

"As one delves deeper into the realm of Okinawan Shorin ryu, one can almost feel the revered presence of the Martial Arts masters of the past. The uniqueness of our system is in knowing that ours is the original karate almost pure in its forms, discovered by the originators of modern day karate the Okinawan masters," Morita says.

Despite sometimes appearing as a firm traditionalist, Morita is a strong believer and admirer of Master Nagamine's flexible philosophy.



8th dan black belt Morita with his top disciple 5th dan Rodney Shimabukuro.

"Too many of the old Masters adhere adamantly to the old system of training and philosophy, and will not adapt to the modern trend with people whose thinking was not as idealistic and rigid as that of the people of the samurai era," Morita explains. "Nagamine has the acumen to realize that strict adherence to the past could be detrimental to its progress in this day and age."

Perhaps this is the same attitude and belief Morita carries today, for he is not against his students learning different kinds of Martial Arts but teaches it himself. However, Morita believes that traditional Matsubayashi katas should be kept original and that Kenpo and Gung Fu should serve only as an aid in his students Karate training.

Sparring techniques are left primarily to an individuals own style. Many of Morita's students take up a sort of boxing-karate stance when free sparring in class. Although free sparring usually leads to kind of tournament atmosphere which Morita is reluctant in conducting, Morita feels that free sparring is a good aspect of karate training.

Tournament Scene

"Tournaments may become a necessary part of our training cycle, but promoters are over utilizing the services of their younger students," says Morita. "Some of these tournaments results in severe emotional trauma of youngsters from injuring their competitors or having to observe the antics of their teachers whose conducts and behavior are unbecoming of one who should be setting an example of fair play, honesty and good sportsmanship."

Despite this feeling, Morita does not wholly object to tournaments because he feels tournament fighting brings challengers of different styles together, giving them the experience "to better prepare themselves when forced to do so."

"What I object to, Morita says, "are teachers who tell their students to win at all cost, for the glory of the school, themselves, and THEIR TEACHERS and this aggressive type of fighting results in many unsportsmanlike behavior on their part."

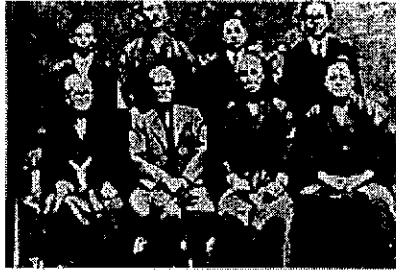
Morita feels some of the judges and referees actually cheat and set a bad example for the younger participants and spectators.

"If one youngster receives an adverse psychological reaction, it is one too many!" states Morita. "Finally the utilization of these impressionable youngsters for money making schemes are so abhorrent to us who feel that to instill these aggressive tendencies in one so young, urging them to win at all cost, creates a negative attitude towards the very thing we

all strive to teach - DISCIPLINE!"

Karate Discipline

Morita believes that students enroll in a karate school either because of five reasons but they all have a common denominator; learning how to defend themselves.



Ancient Okinawan Karate Masters.

"Some students enroll because of the magic pull of the name itself, others seek a school that concentrates on tournament fighting, others because it is the only one available in his area, and still others enroll because of the easy access to higher rankings, and finally some students enroll because of genealogical affiliations with some headquarters located in the far east," says Morita. "Whatever the reason, all students without exception, seek as a basis for learning the art, a deep desire to learn how to defend himself. In this respect, most schools are capable of teaching it to a high degree."

However, Morita discourages over emphasis of the self defense phase from the beginning, because he feels this leads to an "aggressive nature which prohibits his learning the most important phase, discipline." Morita believes that if a student sticks and concentrates on the discipline and physical fitness part of their training, "the self-defense aspect fits perfectly into his method of training, making him a strong defensive karateka."

Students of the Karate Federation of Hawaii train on Tues., Thurs., and Sat. with Sundays being a special day for black belts only. Usually seven or eight black belts bring a large black bag filled with weapons and a bo wrapped in a long black cloth to class.



Present day master of Matsubayashi system Shoshin Nagamine. Arakaki Ankichi. Motobu Choki.

Okinawan weaponry or Kobu Jutsu, is one of the pride and joys of the Matsubayashi Karate system and Morita teaches his students the movements and its applications of the sais, bo, tonfa and nunchaku. In fact, Morita personally teaches a course for women only on the practical self-defense applications of the nunchaku at the YMCA.

Today, Morita is semi-retired from the Martial Arts and feels confident that his instructors under him will spread his teachings well.

But Morita wants not what his instructors can teach what he has taught them, but what his instructors can learn more from others.

"If the opportunity is there to learn different things from different styles. I wish that my boys would pick it up," Morita says. Perhaps the wealth of Martial Arts knowledge Morita has absorbed in the past 25 years has enlightened him well for he sees the values in each different art and is always willing to keep learning. Perhaps Sensei Tommy Morita wishes only the same enlightenment for his disciples. For enlightenment comes to only those few who pursue it.