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**World Oyama Karate**

**Honbu Newsletter** Issue 8 - Summer, 2005

By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

# Meaning of Black Belt



Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

I will begin by reminding you of what it means to be a Black Belt. The Black Belt is the symbol of power in the martial arts world, and anyone who wears it represents the organization. I told you this in newsletter issue #3 in 2004. Now I will show you the deeper meaning of Black Belt and what it takes to get there.

Almost anybody who begins taking Karate, for whatever reason, has a dream. That dream is to one day put on the Black Belt. I think this is not such a silly idea. Karate is not a team sport. Each student is on an individual quest. And so, in my opinion, anyone who is dedicated in their training can one day achieve this dream and wear the Black Belt. A student must train very hard to discover himself or herself and eventually reach this level. Of course it is not easy, but the path is well defined. It is difficult to reach your highest potential, but the way is not mysterious. The Karate techniques that I teach were discovered in ancient times to work perfectly with the human body. It is a scientific fact on how the body works, and this has not changed over the centuries. Karate is a rational, logical scientific system of techniques. And so, if you study hard to learn these techniques, and if you are dedicated to building yourself up both physically and mentally, then you will discover yourself and one day put on that Black Belt. Everyone has this potential. That is the beauty of Karate. It is all up to you. If you challenge yourself – if you fight yourself – anyone, even a couch potato, can achieve the Black Belt. You just have to have the courage to continue on the path.

## Meaning of Black Belt ... Continue

There are a million good reasons for starting Karate no matter what your age, sex, or statue in life is. Each new student – whether young or old, man or woman, businessman, housewife, law enforcement officer or whatever – has their own reasons for beginning Karate. If these are just idealistic, mental reasons, the student is in for a real physical shock. For example, if a student signs up for Karate just because he or she thinks it would be “really cool” to be a Black Belt, then the hard work of the first class hits them like a thunder-bolt! For a person like this, feeling good about Karate is just in their head, and the vision will soon evaporate. Many students are lost at this point. They have to get beyond this mental world to understand the true value of Karate. To do this, they must get through a few hard physical workouts. After this, then they really know what it means to feel good. After a hard training, just a cool, refreshing breeze through your hair makes you feel good. If you don’t sweat, then you will never discover yourself, and you will never get anything out of Karate. If you push yourself in training, then eventually your mental and physical well-being will come together in harmony. It won’t be like this all the time, though. It’s not that sim-

ple. One moment you feel the harmony, and then the next moment, it fades away. That’s why you have to keep trying. You have to continue.

When I started Karate, the culture was so different! It was impossible to be a couch potato then. We didn’t have TV, much less remote control. There were no video games or computers. Very few families even had telephones. I have a cell phone now, but I have trouble with this. Now, how do you listen to messages? I drive Tony and son Zac crazy with all my questions. A lot of times I can’t even find the phone! Recently Tony and I went for coffee. We talked about promotion, my trip soon to Japan, and training at Honbu. When we finished and walked out to the car, I tried to use my remote opener to unlock the car door. I pressed it and pressed it but nothing happened. I was getting very mad. What a useless piece of technology! Then Tony said, “Osu, Saiko Shihan, this is not your car.” I was so embarrassed. Life is difficult.

Well anyway, back to the story... my point is that today people have a very speedy lifestyle. I’m not against



Saiko Shihan’s right Seiken setup for left Furi Uchi against Sensei Masa

## Meaning of Black Belt ... Continue



Saiko Shihan's Jodan Mae Geri

technology. Much of it is good. But, altogether, it is bad for us in many ways. In my opinion, everybody used to have much more patience. People used to wait for results or for an answer. Today, they can't wait one second! If they can't get what they want almost instantly, they move on to something else. That's crazy. I'm a professional Karate instructor. I teach my students. Of course I am also a businessman, and like anyone else, I want to build up my business. But there is one thing that I cannot change. I cannot change the essence of Karate. If I try to change it, then it is no longer Karate. I started observing about 10 years ago that Karate teachers in some styles were operating their schools just like a fast food chain. They started turning out Black Belts so fast it looked like the drive through at Burger King! They say that they just teach the students everything they need to know in a short period of time. This may be possible for a very few students – those that start their training in great physical condition and who are very well coordinated. But the great majority of students are not, and so this is physically impossible.

So, just remember that Karate is about challenging yourself. You cannot learn everything quickly, and you cannot get the World Oyama Black Belt by just skimming the surface of Karate. You must train hard and learn deeper. It takes great physical and mental dedication. Progress does not come quickly or easily. You've got to sweat. Otherwise your Karate will be like a candle light – a little breeze comes up and it is gone.

Now, I want you to think about the “big picture” of Karate training. For overview, there are 3 major categories of training. It is a building process. First of all, you must build your foundation by training in the basic techniques, KIHON GEIKO. Then you must put these techniques together and train with the KIHON organized for effective fighting strategy. This is form exercise called KATA GEIKO. Finally, you must take what you have learned about basic techniques and fighting strategy, and try it out by actually sparring against an opponent. This is called KUMITE GEIKO. For each of these 3 categories of training, you should do movement training, I-DO GEIKO. Train in I-DO GEIKO for KI-



## Meaning of Black Belt ... Continue

HON, I-DO GEIKO for KATA, and I-DO GEIKO for KUMITE. For example, when learning the basic techniques, you should move forward and back executing one single technique with each breath and try to maintain good form while moving. In KATA training, break the KATA down into segments and move through each “piece” over and over again until you can execute it in best form. In KUMITE training, practice your fighting strategy by executing a series of techniques over and over against a receiving partner. Do this until it comes naturally, and you understand how the movements fit your body. By practicing I-DO GEIKO in each of these 3 major categories of training, you will learn more deeply and better understand the point of each type of training. The 3 categories of training are pretty much the same in every style of Karate. They all train in KI-HON, KATA, and KUMITE. But it is through I-DO GEIKO that you can take your World Oyama Karate to a whole new level of skill and understanding.

Traditionally, whenever you get the first-degree Black Belt (Sho Dan), you have reached a certain physical skill level, and you have a fundamental understanding of Karate. You have learned the basic techniques, KATA forms, and strategies of KUMITE. You should now understand the purpose of these 3 training categories and the relationships between them. But this is not the end of your quest. It is only the beginning. It is now that you really begin your personal journey to understand Karate. No, you have not “arrived” when you put on that Black Belt. You have only reached the starting point. A lot of new Sho Dan students misunderstand this. They think that by achieving Black Belt that they have reached their final goal. This is a big mistake. Individu-

als are different, but usually when you reach Black Belt (not in other styles, but in our style), you have a certain understanding about your Karate. You can feel it. You can read it. You can recognize your mistakes, and you can understand why your decisions are right or wrong. Early in your training you cannot feel these things. You cannot see them clearly. But, after you have trained for a long time, you begin to recognize that you are not perfect and why without any looking glass. Before you reach Black Belt, it’s as if you are inside your mother’s body. When you reach Sho Dan, it’s as if you are truly beginning a new life in the world of Karate. This is why a first degree Black Belt is called “Sho” Dan. It means that you are a beginner.

I’ve trained in and taught Karate for almost 50 years. In all this time I have observed the progress of many people who were trying to get the Black Belt. I’ve seen how people enjoy the Spring and all things bright and beautiful. And I’ve seen them go through the bad times when it is so very difficult to train. Next time I will tell you in more detail what it means to take this Black Belt journey. I hope that it will give you encouragement and help you to reach Sho Dan, the point of beginning.

*To be continued...*



Saiko Shihan uses left Mawashi Geri against his opponent



# Where Am I Now ??



Saiko Shihan with Branch Chiefs and Senseis in Japan

Time has moved quickly, it seems like just yesterday that the 2005 Ultimate Challenge Tournament in Birmingham, Alabama took place. Before I knew it, it was the end of May and I was on my way to Japan for a training camp with all the Japanese Shihans, Senseis and their assistants. The purpose of this training camp was to insure all the instructors and their assistants understood the relationship between Kihon, Kata and Kumite and how they should be taught to students using Karate Kyoten I-IV.

The training camp was held on June 4th (Saturday) and June 5th (Sunday). The training began early in the morning, and went to 5:00 p.m., and then we had dinner and returned to train from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.. The material in Kyoten I-IV was taught. This is important. In order to build a strong world wide organization, all students should be taught the same way and be held to the same standard. In karate the important thing is every-

one must sweat to learn. In many cases as people advance in rank they stop wearing their dogi and no longer practice with students. Without practicing with students, you lose your “karate eye and sixth sense.” Without your “karate eye and sixth sense,” the ability to recognize your habits and the habits of others is lost.

This training camp reminded me of when we started our organization; it was a fresh start for looking at Kihon, Kata and Kumite and how to train. Kyoten I-IV were discussed in great detail. Each instructor and assistants sweated, took notes and sweated some more. This type of training camp with top instructors is important to build a strong organization.

On this trip I took my son, Zac. He was to be an Uchi Deshi at the Japan Honbu dojo under Shihan Suzuki. After 2 ½ weeks with Shihan Suzuki he is to spend another 2 ½ weeks with Sensei Masa as an Uchi Deshi.



Sensei Saito, Sensei Takahashi, Saiko Shihan, Shihan John, Sensei Shuji and fighters in SF Tournament



## Where Am I Now ? ... Continue

Sensei Masa trained with me for 5 years. When he first started training, he tried to escape every moment and I had to spend 24 hours every day watching him. I hope Sensei Masa takes his revenge on my son, so that he appreciates his life in America and appreciates the culture of Japan.

When I told my son that he was going to be an Uchi Deshi in Japan, he looked at me and said “Why me Dad ? My two sisters didn’t have to be an Uchi Deshi.” I gave him the same answer as I gave him when he wanted to quit karate. My two daughters studied karate and were always finding excuses not to train, so they came to me and asked to quit. I told them you can not quit because I am kicking you out of karate. My son saw this and came to me and said he also wanted to quit karate. I told him no. He then asked me why, and I told him “because you are a boy.” Zac left me shaking his head complaining that it was not fair and America was supposed to be a place of equal rights between men and women. So when Zac asked “why me?” I gave him the same answer, “because you are a boy,” what I didn’t add was that he is soon to be a man and that I wanted him to have this experience to help him grow.

I left my boy with Shihan Suzuki on Thursday June 9th and after a 24 hour flight I arrived in Birmingham, Alabama at 5:00 p.m. the same day, June 9th. I arrived in time for the Thursday night class and got to sweat to help overcome jet lag. On Friday I trained hard with the Black/Brown Belt class and the sweat helped with my jet lag.

Saturday morning I drove to Atlanta to catch a flight to San Francisco, California for the June 13th First West Coast World Oyama Karate Knockdown Tournament. As I was driving I found myself singing the Willie Nelson song “On the Road Again”.

Security at the Atlanta Air-

port is tough, you stand in a long line and get searched, then you stand in another line and get searched again. By the time I reached the gate for the airplane I was exhausted, I felt like I had just fought a 100 man kumite.

After a 4 ½ hour flight I arrived in San Francisco and was greeted by Sensei Saito, he had a big smile on his face. Sensei Saito chose a convenient place for me to stay close to the dojo and the tournament site. When I went to my room every thing was great, however, when I opened the bathroom door I was overcome by the smell of cigarette smoke. I told Sensei Saito I needed to sleep that night, but I would speak to the manager in the morning. What I forgot to mention was the hotel was a Days Inn. The next morning I went to the front desk and there were two people there, a middle aged woman and a man that I assumed was the janitor. I explained the problem to the woman, as I was finishing, the man I thought was the janitor jumped up and said that he was the manager and had been for 10 years and he had never had a problem like this. He then stated that this is a five star hotel. I was shocked. I looked around, no lobby, no doorman, no restaurant, no chandelier. I didn’t say anything, but I wondered if the standard for 5 star hotels was different in California. The manager/janitor then went with me to my room, where he smelled the bath-



Kenshiro, Senpai Ichitarou, Zac Oyama, and Saiko Shihan

## Where Am I Now ? ... Continue



Shihan Suzuki, Director of Japan Honbu Dojo, and Saiko Shihan

room. He first said he didn't smell anything, then he thought the smell was cleaning material and then he said a famous doctor from India stayed in this room and the smell was incense. All the time he kept saying that the hotel is 5 star rated and all the time I kept thinking 'Only one more night'.

After leaving the hotel manager/janitor I went with Sensei Saito to the tournament. The tournament was great! It was well organized and the crowd filled the hall. In addition to Sensei Saito and his wife Sensei Yoko (The Boss), were Shihan John Lehner, Sensei Motoi Fukinshi, Sensei Takahashi (Atlanta), Sensei Yamauchi (San Diego), and Sensei Harada (Hokaido, Japan).

There were fighters from many different styles. Sensei Saito's student Thomas was the light weight champion. Sensei Saito could not stop smiling. The tournament was a great success and next year it will be bigger and

better.

There is a two-hour time difference between San Francisco and Birmingham. After the tournament and after I had finished dinner, I got to my room at 10:00 p.m. San Francisco time and mid-night Birmingham time. I had to get up at 5:45 the next morning to catch a flight back to Birmingham.

To make a long story short, I got up at 5:45 a.m., caught my flight, flew to Atlanta and was driving from Atlanta to Birmingham singing 'On the Road Again'.

**Where am I now??**

**I am going into hiding!!!**

# The Road to Japan

by Shihan Dai Perry Burnett

## Surviving Japan Part 4

After the first three months in Japan, things started to fall into place. My language skills were improving everyday. My body was getting stronger due to the hard training each morning and working with students every night. The big picture of my experience was beginning to take shape. It was a mental and physical transformation all at once. The food was great. I loved it all, and compared to home, I was eating some crazy stuff. As I shopped daily for the meals we cooked at the

dojo, I interacted with the people in the neighborhood. This took me deeper into the Japanese culture. Connect the dots and I was living a Japanese life only three months after leaving Alabama. In my day to day life there was almost nothing left of my western background. A crash course and I was in. The big obstacles were behind me; I had my rhythm and compass. Now I had to hold on tight for the ride.

As I mentioned in the second newsletter, one of my jobs was to introduce Saiko Shihan's teaching method to Shihan Goda and the black belts at both dojos. The training in Japan was all about tournament fighting. The classes were one and one half hours long with lots of punch and low kick practice followed by lots of fighting. Beginners trained with and in the same manner as seasoned black belts. There were no special classes for advanced students. This was not good for the advanced belts but it was good for the white belts that had the guts to stick it out because they got strong fast. The first time I fought with an adult white belt I was shocked at how tough he was. He let me know that he was not there to play so I had to turn things up a



Shihan Dai Perry Kumite in Japan Tournament

level or two so I could get him off of me. When we finished fighting I was thinking – what an eye opener.

Saiko Shihan had written some class plans in Japanese. The classes were separated for beginners and advanced students and I was to present these to Shihan Goda. As I mentioned in an earlier newsletter, Saiko Shihan teaches future trainers to pick a theme for each class and build on it; design classes according to the level and needs of the students at that time. Shihan Goda looked over the class plans and passed them on to his black belts. For about a week they all just read them and passed them back and forth. When they looked over the class plans together they would point to certain sections talk a lot and sometimes look at me like I was crazy. This went on for the first week or so of my trip and it made me nervous. Once in a while I would think, "Its ok, let's just do it your way." But, I knew I had Saiko Shihan to answer to so I was in somewhat of a bind. Soon thereafter Shihan Goda had a translator come to the dojo. He told me that he liked the class plans and wanted my help implementing the new system. It was an honor to have someone as highly ranked as Shihan



## The Road to Japan ... Continue

Goda asking me to help him implement a training plan. So we changed the class schedule and made two - one hour classes. One for beginners and one for advanced. I ended up teaching most of the classes. We had two dojos and we alternated between them having an afternoon session at one dojo and a night session at the other. That was four hours of classes every day with a forty-five minute train ride both ways. With our morning Uchi Deshi training and a lot of other duties I had my hands full. It was a good thing I was young because that schedule would kill me now. This went on for a good while and everyone adapted pretty well. We worked this plan for a couple of months and then the classes started drifting back to one class of an hour and a half. But basically Saiko Shihan's training method stuck. We divided the class into groups and used the same new basic system to train. I felt this part of my journey was a success and was proud to tell Saiko Shihan the results.

As for fighting in Japan, I had no idea what to expect. Since I am not tall and I was not as heavy as I am now, I had no size advantage. In fact, I was about the average size of most Japanese fighters. Saiko Shihan had warned me that my size put me in a tough position because there would be so many people in my range. The tournament fighters put most of their effort into strength and stamina training with strong emphasis on punches and low kicks. Until I went to Japan, most of my training was more about technique. Since I taught most of the classes in the dojo in Japan, I had some control over who I would fight. I quickly developed the strategy to start with white belts and work my way up the ranks to black belts. This worked well for me because it gave me the chance to study how they moved while I trained hard to get into better condition fast. It turned out that on the dojo level, I could handle myself pretty well even with the black belts. It was not as easy as it may sound because they gave me a very hard time. I got banged up a lot and I couldn't control every fight. Some of the time the other guy would dominate me. As time went by I got better and stronger and eventually found that dojo fighting was not intimidating.

Tournament fighting was an entirely different matter. My first tournament was kind of a small one by Japan standards but it was still bigger than the tournaments I had seen or competed in. It was a lot of the different dojos fighting against each other and though it was open to the public there weren't many spectators; it was

more for the fighters.

The fights were arranged in advance and I drew a brown belt that I had never seen before. I was not that concerned and thought it was going to be fun. When we got to the gym, I learned that he had a lot of tournament experience. He was a little taller than me and had much bigger muscles. The first time he hit me I knew I had stepped into a different world. I gave it all I had and just barely got a draw. He won in overtime. Even though I lost I was not completely disappointed because I felt I gave him a good fight. Shihan Goda said it was not bad for my first try. That first tournament was on April 20, 1985. I had been in Japan for two months. My second tournament was June 9th. It was the All Japan-Weight Division Tournament held in Osaka. The other Uchi Deshi (my roommates) and I trained very hard and I was getting good results. That tournament was a big deal in Japan twenty years ago and still is today. Since it was only my second tournament in Japan, with over one hundred people in my weight division I wanted to make it a good experience. I thought if I could win a couple of fights I would be doing well. It turned out to be a disaster. I've had asthma all my life but as an adult its only a problem once in a while. The day of the tournament I woke up at the hotel and could not breathe. All morning I tried all of my medicine and nothing worked. It was too late to back out of fighting in the tournament. I could breathe well enough for it not to be an emergency but not good enough to fight; but, I fought anyway. All I can remember about it was trying not to get knocked out and trying to suck in air. Of course I lost in the first round and it was humiliating. It was a real low point for awhile but even that kind of experience is the way of life in karate. When something like that happens you just have to take it. If you are serious about karate you just push through it. I still had more than half of my time left in Japan. So, there was no choice but to go back to Tokyo; back to the dojo, back to work and take whatever Shihan Goda had to say. He was not happy because the other Uchi Deshi lost his first fight too. We said "Osu!" a lot.

My third and last tournament was in September and things went better for me. But, you will have to find out what happened in the next newsletter.

*To be continued....*

# Champion's Road 空手物語 “Karate Monogatari”

by 拳気 一  
ken ki hajime

## Chapter 12

*Continue ...*

“How long have you been training?” Shihan asked Mike.

“A little over five years,” he replied with a smile that showed a little bit of embarrassment, but also a little bit of cockiness.

“Five years?” said Shihan. “You keep leaving and coming back, though. How much actual training have you had? About three years?”

“No sir,” he said. “I think about four.”

A lot of the black belts and other advanced students broke out into laughter when he said “four years.” Shi-

han smiled and looked around at everyone in the room, and began to laugh himself. Then, he looked back at Mike, skeptically, and said “Are you sure?” which triggered a new round of laughter.

I thought to myself “Why do you keep quitting and coming back? If I train for four years, solid, I know that I can beat you.”

I was awakened from my thoughts by the movement on the mat that let me know it was time for the kumite, free fight, to begin. I was extremely nervous. Shihan matched me up with a student I hadn't met before, probably from another dojo.

“This is not a street fight,” he said. “You need to show correct form. If your opponent accidentally touches your face, don't lose control and hit his face. We can tell an accident from ‘on purpose.’ If you do it on purpose, today you will die!” He smiled after he said this, to let us know he was joking about the “dying” part, but I could tell he was serious about controlling ourselves. I felt like he must have read my mind, though, as I re-



Saiko Shihan's jump knee kick against Sensei Masa

## Champion's Road "Karate Monogatari" 空手物語 ... Continue

membered my thoughts last night about what I'd do if I had to fight Mike.

Before my partner and I started our fight, some of the other students came into the center of the mat. A couple of old men were paired up with one another to fight. It was kind of endearing to see them working so hard on the mat. They tried to kick the face area, I could tell, but could only reach each other's waists with their feet.

After this, several pair of women fought. I could see a great deal of spirit in their technique and their effort. I could tell that some of them would be very powerful fighters after more training. Some of them could almost certainly challenge me.

Next, some of the other men fought. Some fought as if their lives depended on it, as if there was no tomorrow. These men started off with a series of intense punches and frantic kicks but, after about thirty seconds or so, they were out of breath and panting. At several points, Sensei Riki pointed his finger at one angry-looking fighter to say "You better control yourself!"

I became nervous as I watched the intensity of these fights. I looked over at Mike, who seemed perfectly calm as he talked to a black belt that was standing beside him.

Finally, I heard Shihan call my name. "Zach!" he said sternly, and it hit me like a punch. My partner and I turned to face each other, and suddenly he seemed much more intimidating than when I first saw him. He looked like a football player, with a stocky build.

Sensei Ken ran over to us and handed each of us a pair of pads for our heads and our fists. As he put on my headgear, Sensei Ken whispered to me "One, two, kick. One, two, kick." This advice made me feel a little calmer and more confident. A black belt stood beside us to referee the fight.

There was a thick air of nervousness in the room. This was far different than the free fight practice in class. Now that a promotion was on the line, everyone was more worried, more tense. I looked into my opponent's eyes, and it seemed like they were burning.

My heart was beating so loudly that I thought even he could probably hear it. I could hear the loud "Boom,

boom." Both of my legs felt suddenly powerless. But still I could look my opponent in his eyes. I heard Shihan's voice, somehow distant and far from us, saying "Hajime!" which means "Begin!" I didn't think about anything, but I somehow stepped forward and delivered a left punch. I thought he must have been expecting my right hand, because his timing was off and I hit him in the chest. Then I did a right reverse punch, but he held his arms in front of him together and blocked. My body leaned forward into the punch.

I tried to kick his headgear, but only reached a roundhouse kick to his shoulder area. I think my balance had been thrown off by my reverse punch. We sort of leaned into and grabbed one another by the shoulders. And as we did, the black belt adjudicating said "Ya Mei!" which means "Stop!" He moved us to the center and we stood there in fighting positions, staring at each other.

There were so many people in the dojo that day watching the promotion, but I couldn't see anyone. They were all completely gone, and only him and me stood there, breathing heavily and facing one another. I could hear his breathing and see his chest moving in and out. The sounds were so clear. The black belt said "Continue!"

He kicked a right foot roundhouse kick to my chest area, and I raised my left arm to block. The blow against my arm was like a thick shock, and I felt like it must have broken my bone. The blow just made me angrier, so I took a breath and delivered a right foot roundhouse kick to the height of his shoulder, and he absorbed the blow but was knocked backward. After the kick, I stepped in for a right-hand punch, and contacted his chest. He pushed me with his shoulder. I grabbed the shoulder and tried to swing him around, but he was too strong, and the black belt said "Stop! Stop! Don't grab!"

We fought for less than a minute, but I felt like I had been fighting for hours and hours. I was soaked in sweat. I couldn't catch my air. Suddenly, Sensei Ken came up to me to adjust my headgear, and whispered "Mae Geri." I couldn't figure out what he was trying to say. I looked at him confused, but as I caught his sharp eyes, I woke up from my daze. He looked at me and whispered, "Front snap." As I got ready to fight, I thought "Front snap, front snap" in my head.

*To be continued.....*





国際大山空手道連盟総本部



# World Oyama Karate Organization

Presents ...

## 2005 Summer Camp

Orange Beach/Gulf Shores, Alabama

July 21st - July 24th, 2005



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