



国際大山空手道連盟総本部

World Oyama Karate

Honbu Newsletter

Issue 39 - January, 2015

HAPPY NEW YEAR ! 47 SAMURAI - 忠臣蔵

By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama



Mission Accomplished

Last Year's Memories Make This Your Year

OSU! Happy New Year! I hope everyone is doing well. We have a great year ahead. Whenever a new year begins, we reflect over the previous year. We think about the successes we had, the mistakes we made, and what we hope to accomplish in the coming year. Like I've said before, we should all say to ourselves, "Today is my day!" and "This year is my year!" To be alive is to have a chance; that's the bottom line. Good health is everything, worth more than billions of dollars. So we gotta Sweat, Sweat, SWEAT!

When I was in junior high and high school, I wasn't very good at academics. I never wanted to study. Whenever I sat in class, I could feel that the outdoors, field grounds, beach were calling me. Waiting for me. I couldn't stand to just sit still and listen to teachers' lectures, so I always got into trouble. But when I came to the United States in 1972, I gained a greater appreciation of Japanese history, culture and friends and family I left behind. Every once in awhile, I'd pick up an old high school textbook and just read it. Sometimes I used it to make myself fall asleep, but other times I was genuinely interested.

Now I'm a citizen of the United States and I feel that America is the greatest country in the world. Whenever I travel to other countries to teach, I'm reminded of just how lucky we are to live here. I was born and raised in Tokyo, though, so Japanese history and culture is still an important part of who I am. When I discovered my newfound interest in Japanese history after arriving in the United States, I shared it from time to time with my students. Especially stories of ancient Samurai. I didn't rely solely on textbooks for my knowledge, but also studied different historians' interpretations and opinions.

I arrived in Alabama at the start of the Karate Boom in the US. Every class was packed and overflowing with students. Christmas time was always problematic for me because so many students would invite me to their houses for Christmas parties and dinners. Sometimes Hanukkah dinners too. At that time I spoke very little English and didn't have any knowledge of Christmas traditions. I couldn't accept an offer from one student and not accept those from other students, so I had to accept all the invitations I received—usually about 6 or 7. It was hard to do with my little stomach.

Shihan Ron would take me around to all the different houses. We were like FedEx, delivering ourselves from house to house, eating and drinking and moving on to the next one. It became torturous to eat so much in a single day. My opinion of modern Christmas time is that the "Joy of the Season" is tied in with ads and merchandising campaigns. "Jingle bells, Jingle bells" sounds the same as "Red hot sale, Red hot sale!", "Ho, Ho, Ho!" is the same as "Buy, Buy, Buy!" The big corporations

drive home the idea that the joy you feel in the holiday season depends on the amount you spend on buying gifts.

During the holiday season, I always think back and compare the traditions and celebrations that take place in Japan with those of the US. Japanese society is very adept at embracing outside customs and views. For example, in Japan it is tradition that the father of a family brings home a "Christmas Cake". This tradition started around the time I was in high school. Only a small percentage of Japanese people are Christians, but almost every family eats Christmas Cake.

After I came to America in the early 70's a new Christmas tradition began to emerge in Japan. I didn't know about it, though, until I asked Shihan Dai Takahashi and Sensei Masa what other Christmas traditions are in Japan. Fast food restaurants (i.e. McDonald's, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken) began popping up in Japan during the 70's. There is an extremely prevalent tradition now of eating Kentucky Fried Chicken for Christmas dinner. The first KFC in Japan opened in Nagoya in 1970 and quickly gained popularity. A couple years later, a group of foreigners were in search of turkey dinner for Christmas. However, turkey isn't popular in Japan and is very hard to find, so they opted for the next best thing—"Christmas Chicken" at KFC. KFC saw this as prime commercial opportunity and launched its first "Kentucky for Christmas!" advertising campaign in 1974. Thanks to plenty of ads featuring Japanese celebrities, the idea quickly caught on. Now, families stand in line for up to 2 hours to order their KFC Christmas Dinners months in advance. I couldn't stop laughing when I first heard about this. What does KFC have to do with Christmas? Or the birth of Jesus? Why is there such a thing as "Christmas Cake"? There is one other unique tradition in Japan that takes place at the end of December—derived from the world of classical music.

During the last few days of December, performances of Beethoven's 9th Symphony are everywhere. Performances take place in every venue and are broadcast repeatedly on TV. One year, 10,000 men and women filled an arena and all sang the chorus. The women wore evening gowns and the men tuxedos. I think every year since then, more and more people have gathered to top the number of singers from the previous year. I can imagine Beethoven rolling around in his grave every December and wondering, "What's going on in Japan?? They sure do love me!"

One other year-end tradition in Japan comes from history and reminds people of what it means to be Japanese. It is a true story from Samurai history that concerns events that took place in 1701. More than 300 years later, people are still crazy

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Saiko Shihan commentating on the Kyokushin 2nd World Championship with Sanada (L)

about this story and love to watch it on TV or in movie theaters. It is called "Chu-Shin-Gura" in Japanese and known in English as *The 47 Samurai*. This story encapsulates the character and values of Japanese society even now. I've wanted to share it with you for a long time now. Before beginning, though, I want to share a funny story with you.

I hope you all haven't forgotten about the movie *Take a Chance* that we have been working on and should be coming out soon. When the producer, Scott Perkins, and I first started planning the filming of the movie, Scott said we needed to find a well-known name to be in the starring role. I thought maybe we could get Sanada to play the role of either Masa or Rikio. Sanada is very well-known in Hollywood now after starring with Tom Cruise in *The Last Samurai* and in the TV show *Lost* and the *X-Men* movies, etc. I first met him very early in his career at the second Kyokushin World Championship. I was a commentator for the tournament on a national TV broadcast. Sonny Chiba and Sanada (who was a junior member of Sonny Chiba's production company) were celebrity guests. Sanada

had been a student of Shihan Goda and was still very close to him, so I suggested Shihan Goda contact Sanada for us. He was able to get in touch with Sanada's agent. His agent said Sanada was very busy and asked what kind of budget *Take a Chance* had. Shihan Goda said a little over a million dollars (maybe that was stretching the truth a little???). "Oh, pretty big," the agent said. "It would be a good opportunity for Sanada," Shihan Goda replied, "it's a great story". The agent then said he was sorry, but Sanada was currently in London shooting a new movie with Keanu Reeves—*The 47 Samurai*. Shihan Goda asked what kind of budget they had and the agent said \$100 million. "Oh... oh... pretty good," Shihan Goda answered quietly, and then was silent.

I saw the movie when it came out. Honestly, I didn't get it. The story was so far off from the original events that it didn't make sense. In Japan, people are always remaking this story with their own takes, but the story is always the same and historically accurate. That is the story I want to share with you now. There are many different opinions and interpretations of

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SANKIN KOUTAI: The Shogun ordered the lords to travel lavishly to

these historical events, but I believe this is the most accurate depiction of what took place.

47 Samurai

Before going into the actual story, I need to give you some background information on the time in Japanese history when these events took place. Until the 12th Century, the Imperial Court was the seat of all power in Japan. From that time on, the Samurai began gaining more and more power and political influence. As different Samurai gained control of different regions, they would battle each other in an effort to expand their territory. By the year 1467, all of Japan was consumed by inter-territorial wars. These wars lasted over a hundred years. By 1600, the territories were consolidated into two groups—East and West. They faced each other a final time at the Battle of Sekigahara. The East, led by Tokugawa, was victorious and in 1603, the 1st Tokugawa Shogun united all of Japan under his control.

Once the Shogun gained power, he went to great lengths to keep it. He closed the borders of Japan and kept it isolated to prevent outside influence (Japan's isolation from the rest of

the world lasted nearly 300 years). One way he kept control of the country was to appoint Daimyo (Lords) to govern every region of Japan. He appointed lords from 3 groups of people—those related to him, those who were not related but had been loyal to him before Sekigahara, and those who became loyal to him after he became Shogun. The lords in the last category were stationed furthest from the capitol, Edo (Tokyo) and those that he trusted most were stationed the closest to him. Since the lords worked for the Shogun, he required each lord to have a house/office in the vicinity of Edo. The lords lived there with their wives and children. (In essence, the lord's family were hostages that the Shogun used to ensure the lords' loyalty). Once a year the lords were allowed to travel back to visit territories. These trips (Sankin Koutai) were very expensive and were a means to deplete the resources of each state so that no single territory could become powerful enough to threaten the sovereignty of the Shogunate.

The Shoguns also maintained power through the laws they imposed on the country. These laws were modeled after Confucianism, which stressed loyalty to the reigning leaders. In addition, they strictly outlawed violence of any kind. If two

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display their power

people fought, they were both punished, regardless of the reason for the fight.

In 1701, the 5th Shogun ruled the country and Japanese society had changed over the 100 years of peace. The tenets of Confucianism were strictly adhered to as a means to maintain law and order. Confucianism stressed the importance of the public's respect for history and to follow traditional customs. (The root of all ceremonial customs and rules stemmed from the Imperial Court. Throughout history, the Emperors made rules of conduct as a means to exhibit control over the public.) So, naturally, those who had knowledge of Japan's history and traditions and customs gained power. This class of people were known as KO KE (Master of Ceremony). The KO KE were an esteemed part of the Imperial Court up to the 13th century. But as inter-territorial wars broke out, their importance diminished (along with the Emperor's power), while the Samurai's power and influence rose. But, during peacetime, the strength of the Samurai was no longer needed. The Shogun used the Imperial system of rules to control the people. So the roles of customs and ceremonial protocols became increasingly important in daily life. This, combined with the strong influence of Confucianism, gave the KO KE a great deal

of power and high social standing.

The lineage of the Emperor stretched back for centuries. The importance placed on honoring history, tradition and custom meant that the Shogun needed to show respect and deference to the Emperor. He also used his good standing with the Emperor to justify his actions and agenda. The KO KE were very close to the Shogun because their knowledge of ceremony and etiquette allowed the Shogun to keep a good relationship with the Emperor. Every New Year, the Shogun would send a special envoy to present gifts and pay homage to the Emperor and his family and communicate his wish for their good health in the coming year. Later in the year, sometime in March, the Imperial Court would send special messengers to the Shogun to say thank you for the gifts and New Year's greetings (The Emperor was reliant on the Shogun's strength, so also had an interest in keeping a good relationship).

Each year, the Shogun would assign a lord each to take care of the Emperor's two messengers. A lord would tell the Shogun, "I am so humbled to receive this great honor! I will invest all of my time, energy and money to do the best job I possibly can!" But on the inside, I'm sure they would much rather have not been picked since they would have to pay for everything out of pocket and knew very little of the proper ceremonial procedures for hosting a messenger. There were so many rules of etiquette and protocol associated with hosting the Imperial messengers that the lords, who were Samurai, fretted about making a mistake and angering the Shogun and being banished from the kingdom. So they were completely reliant upon the KO KE to teach them the customs and protocols they needed to know.

Kira and Asano

The 47 Samurai story begins with 2 men—Kira and Asano. Kira was a KO KE in Edo. Asano was the lord of the AKO region/state in Japan. In 1701, the Shogun sent Kira to deliver the New Year's greeting to the Emperor. Two Imperial messengers were scheduled to arrive in Edo on March 11th. Asano was assigned to host one of the messengers. Asano and the other lord would need KO KE to teach them what to do as hosts.

As I said before, a vast majority of the lords (who were Samurai) resented the power and influence that the KO KE had. The KO KE considered themselves superior to everyone else because of their authority on matters of custom, protocol and etiquette and their close relationship to the Shogun. Nevertheless, the lords were forced to swallow their resentments and humbly seek out the KO KE's instruction. Being Samurai,

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they had little knowledge of ceremonial customs. Without the KO KE's help, they would surely make many faux pas and anger the Shogun. Kira and Asano already did not think well of each other. Kira was from a territory that produced salt. However, the salt produced in AKO, Asano's region, was much better quality. The AKO region became wealthy from the production of high-quality salt. This made Kira jealous of Asano.

It was common practice for lords to give Kira money and gifts under the table to win his favor and ensure that he taught them well. Asano, however, only gave Kira a small bribe, which made Kira very unhappy. Kira instructed Asano and the other lord at the same time. The other lord had paid a large bribe to Kira, so Kira would always say he did a great job during the sessions. With Asano, however, he was hyper-critical and quick to point out mistakes.

From March 11 – 14, 1701, the Imperial messengers visited Edo. They arrived on the 11th and met the Shogun on the 12th. On the 13th, a traditional NO (traditional form of Japanese theatre) ceremony was held and on the 14th, there was a farewell party. During the visit, Kira remarked in front of a group of high-ranking court retainers, while Asano was present, that Asano was making all sorts of mistakes in his hosting of the messengers, that he didn't know what to do and was embarrassing everyone with his ignorance of protocol. Part of the Samurai way of life says that if someone insults or makes you look bad in public, you have a duty to protect your honor by fighting them. If you do not, it means you are a coward and will carry that shame with you forever.

Samurai could only carry their short sword inside the castle because the Shogun didn't allow them to carry the long sword. As Kira was walking with a court official down a narrow pathway (called the "Pine Hall" because of the pine tree artwork that decorates the walls), Asano shouted, "You have insulted my honor!" and attacked Kira with his short sword. He cut a gash in Kira's forehead and another across his back as Kira fled. One of the laws for being inside the Shogun's castle states that anyone who draws their sword within the castle grounds will most likely be put to death. Even so, Asano was so compelled to defend his honor that he couldn't help but draw his sword and attack Kira. None of Kira's injuries were life-threatening and Asano was taken into custody before he could attack further.

The law said that whenever two people fight, BOTH would be punished. This law originated with the 1st Tokugawa Shogun and had been well-established by the time of the 47 Samurai (under the 5th Shogun). However, the Shogun did not find any fault or give any punishment to Kira. For Asano, the Sho-

gun ordered that he commit Seppuku that same night. (Seppuku is a ritual suicide done by driving a small sword into one's stomach and maneuvering it inside to disembowel oneself. This is better known as Hara Kiri, however the word "Seppuku" was reserved for high-ranking people such as Samurai and nobility. A Kai Sha Ku is a skilled swordsman that stands behind the Samurai committing seppuku. At the moment the Samurai plunges his sword into his stomach, the Kai Sha Ku chops the Samurai's head off. In this way, death by seppuku is less agonizing). After hearing his sentence, Asano apologized to the Shogun's messenger and said that the Shogun was very kind to allow him to do Seppuku. Dying that way was considered honorable and a way to atone for a mistake, as opposed to being executed. The timetable of events that set this story in motion are as follows:

March 14th, 11:00 a.m.—Asano attacks Kira. Asano is immediately detained and held in another lord's house. Meanwhile, Kira receives medical attention, which includes having the gash in his forehead stitched up.

March 14th, 3:00 p.m.—Two messengers from the AKO house in Edo travel back to the castle in the AKO region to report that Asano attacked Kira and had been detained. (AKO is 620 km (372 miles) from Edo. There was no highway, and the terrain was very mountainous. On average, it took a messenger in good shape a little over a week to make this trek. But the first 2 messengers were in such a hurry that they made it in 4 days, 9 hours.)

March 14th, 6:00 p.m.—Asano commits seppuku. Meanwhile, his wife shaves her head. Shaving her head was a way of being punished along with her husband. It also prepared her for life as a nun in a monastery. Such was her devotion to Asano that upon his death, she left her life behind and committed herself to the monastery. Asano's younger brother, Daigaku, was put under house arrest.

March 14, Midnight—Two other messengers from the AKO house in Edo depart for AKO.

March 15—The Shogun sends two messengers to AKO to notify them that the entire region and castle were to be seized by the government and everyone must vacate the premises.

March 15—Asano's body is delivered to his house in Edo. It is then taken to be buried at SEN GAKU JI Temple.

March 19, 4:00 p.m.—The first two messengers arrive in AKO to report that Asano had attacked Kira. There were a few retainers in charge of AKO castle. A retainer was like a manager. The lord was in charge (like the owner) and the retainers were

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managers. Among the managers (retainers) there was a senior retainer, a KARO (like a general manager) who was the second in command of the region after the lord. In AKO, this position was held by a Samurai named Oishi. The messengers reported to him.

March 19, 8:00 p.m.—The second set of messengers arrived and reported that Asano had committed Seppuku and that control of AKO and its castle was to be seized by the Shogun's government.

When Oishi received the messages, he told everyone in AKO castle what had happened and that their lord had been ordered to commit seppuku and they had been ordered to vacate the castle. They were now Ronin (master-less Samurai). They were enraged at the unfairness of the Shogun's decision since Kira received no punishment at all. Upon hearing the news, some of the Samurai said that they should stay and defend the castle against the Shogun's soldiers. Some wanted all of them to commit seppuku in the castle as a protest against the Shogun. Others wanted to immediately travel to Edo and exact revenge on Kira. However, Oishi pointed out that the Shogun government already had spies everywhere and would

be anticipating an act of retaliation. As soon as they learned of a plan to travel to Edo to kill Kira, they would stop them and all of them would die without accomplishing anything. At the same time, Asano's ancestral home in Hiroshima and younger brother both sent messengers urging the Samurai to go along peacefully with the Shogun's decision. Oishi was the highest-ranking Samurai, so it was up to him to decide the course of action. Oishi sent a message to the Shogun pleading with him to allow Daigaku, the younger brother, take over as lord of AKO. That way the Asano lineage could continue and the Samurai would still have a master/employment. Oishi was loyal to Asano, the person, as well as the Asano family and AKO region.

Oishi said they should all commit Seppuku and that anyone who didn't agree with him should leave. He made everyone that stayed sign a solemn pledge of their absolute commitment to him and their course of action. I believe this was Oishi's way of finding out who was truly loyal to Asano and his family. After the pledge was signed, Oishi took it and said they would wait until the time was right to commit seppuku. Meanwhile, he would work on getting Daigaku appointed as lord of AKO, but that would take time. In the meantime, they



The Pine Tree Hallway

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Even 300 years later, in this IT World, this story still strongly impacts people

should prepare to peacefully hand over the castle.

Part of vacating the castle entailed leaving behind all possessions, i.e. armor, artillery, other weapons. Oishi ordered all of the Samurai to clean the castle from corner to corner and to polish all of the weapons and make a detailed inventory. He did this so they would not lose any face. It was a way of demonstrating that Lord Asano's Samurai are honorable and

loyal and completely obey the Shogun.

April 18th and 19th—AKO castle is handed over to the Shogun's government. Before dispersing, Oishi divided the castle's money equally among all the remaining Samurai and said that they would meet again sometime in the near future. All of the Samurai left, but Oishi stayed behind to explain the layout to the government forces and make sure everything was transferred smoothly.

June 4th—Oishi leaves AKO and goes to his second house in Kyoto.

July 5th—Oishi begins spending the majority of his time at leading a loose and carefree life, drinking, partying, and cavorting with Geishas. The majority of scholars say he did this purposely to make the Shogun's spies believe he had forgotten all about avenging Asano. Even some of Oishi's fellow Samurai began to question his judgment and resolution to the cause.

July 18th—The Shogun denies the request to allow Daigaku to become lord of AKO. Daigaku and

his family are banished from Edo and ordered to return to stay at their ancestral family home in Hiroshima. At this point, Oishi knew for certain that they would follow through with plan for revenge.

July 28th—Oishi summons the AKO Samurai to meet with him in Kyoto. Of the original 120 that had previously been com-

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mitted to the cause, only 60 came to the meeting. Among those that had abandoned the cause were three members of Oishi's extended family. He was hurt by this and wanted to find out who was really committed to their plan. He instructed the Samurai closest to him to return everyone's signed pledge to commit seppuku, and follow Oishi resolutely, back to them. He told them to explain when handing it back that Daigaku had been banished and that there was nothing left for them to do. Oishi had to take care of his wife and kids, so needed to look for another job. There was no need for them to go through with revenge, which is why he was returning the pledges.

Oishi also said, "If any of the Samurai are angry about abandoning the plan and insist that they cannot live life as a true Samurai if they don't take action and that lord Asano's spirit can never rest until Kira is dead... if anyone says something like that, tell them the truth—we are going to take revenge soon!" After receiving their returned pledges, a little over 50 Samurai remained. Oishi instructed them to spread out and make their way to Edo. It was essential that they try to blend in so as not to draw attention from either the Shogun or Kira's spies. Some of the Samurai became businessmen or shop managers, clerks, etc.

October 7th—Oishi departs Kyoto.

November 5th—Oishi arrives in Edo. The AKO Samurai have a secret meeting with him. Oishi divides everyone into 4 groups to try to monitor Kira's movements and learn his daily schedule. They only had one shot at revenge. If they attacked at the wrong place or time, they would all be caught and executed. Furthermore, they would fail in their duty as Samurai and be shamed. They had a very hard time tracking Kira's movements.

One of the AKO Samurai had an affinity for poetry and traditional Japanese Tea Ceremony. He had assimilated into Edo by becoming the student of a Tea Ceremony master who was an associate of Kira. One day, the Samurai told the master that he was returning soon to his home in Kyoto and asked if the master would give him a final lesson. The master said that December 14th would not be a good day because he was attending a tea ceremony at Kira's house. The Samurai immediately told Oishi that Kira would be at his (Kira's) house on December 14th.

The Samurai met again. There were now 47 of them. December 14th was the day they would attack. They had a limited budget, but Oishi told them to all wear chain mail under their clothes and he would purchase everyone's best weapon. They



Chief Lieutenant (KARO) OISHI

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December 14th Attack. This demonstration o

also wore the same clothing and had whistles.

December 14th—It snowed all day. At midnight, the Samurai met up and prepared for the attack. They split into 2 groups. One group, led by Oishi's son (who was only 15 years old) would cover the rear and the other, led by Oishi, would be at the front. At 4:00 a.m. they went to Kira's house. The group in the back shouted, "FIRE, FIRE, FIRE!" All of the people in Kira's house, including his Samurai, were panicked. The group from the rear scaled the walls and started attacking. Oishi's group busted in the front door and began attacking. Some of Kira's bodyguards were still asleep in their quarters, so the AKO Samurai barricaded their doors to keep them in. Beforehand, Oishi had instructed everyone to attack in groups of 3. He also said that if they cut down someone, they didn't need to stop to finish him off; just keep going and try to find Kira as fast as possible.

Kira had some very formidable and notorious Samurai, including the master swordsman Shimizu, as bodyguards. But they were no match for the 47. The AKO Samurai quickly fought their way to Kira's room. Upon entering, however, Kira was nowhere to be seen. They all began to panic. One Samurai went to Kira's bed and put his hand on the mattress. "It was still warm!" he shouted, "Kira is somewhere inside!" They opened a storage closet. Two Samurai came out and were

quickly defeated. Oishi's men then found an old man crouched in the corner. The old man told them he wasn't Kira, he just worked at the house. They dragged the man to the light and saw the large scar on his forehead... it was Kira.

All 47 Samurai had survived their attack (16 of Kira's men were killed, 21 – 25 severely wounded, and 12 ran away). There is some debate, but most scholars agree that after the attack, Oishi sent one to depart for Asano's ancestral home to tell Daigaku that they had been successful. They chopped off Kira's head and the other 46 went to Sen Gaku Ji Temple. They placed Kira's head on Asano's grave and waited for Shogun's soldiers to arrest them. Oishi told the Samurai that they would not fight anymore. They had fulfilled their duty as Samurai. While they waited for Shogun's forces, the monks at the temple brought them rice soup and hot tea.

The Shogun ordered the lords of 4 different houses to send their armies to apprehend the AKO Samurai and detain them inside their houses. The lords couldn't say it publicly, but most felt that the AKO Samurai had done a great thing. Most all of citizens felt the AKO Samurai were heroes. They had shown true Samurai Spirit. The Samurai during peacetime had become soft and forgotten what it was to be Samurai, but the 46 Samurai showed true loyalty and devotion and should not be punished for their actions. The Shogun didn't expect this. He

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of Samurai duty was the end of a long journey

asked various scholars and monks what they thought, and most agreed with the idea that the 46 Samurai had done the right thing. However, the Shogun's Chief Retainer said that they had broken the Shogun's laws. They had made waves and committed violence. They should be made to commit seppuku.

February 4, 1703—The Shogun's messengers arrive at the 4 lords' houses where the 46 Samurai are being held. They announce that Lord Asano had committed a crime by attacking Kira. The Shogun hadn't found Kira guilty, and the 46 Samurai defied these orders by taking revenge and must be punished. Oishi replied, "We accept any decision made by the Shogun. We understand. We also feel that the Shogun is very generous in allowing us to commit seppuku. We are very happy. Thank you very much."

After their death, all 46 were buried in graves surrounding that of Asano and his wife. In the time immediately after these events, the story of the 47 Samurai was told over and over in books and Kabuki plays. Because they had gone against the Shogun, the plays and books couldn't use their real names when telling their story. But this story has survived more than 300 years. Also, on November 5, 1868, the Meiji Emperor sent an Imperial plaque to the graves of the Samurai in Sen Gaku Ji. He praised the loyalty the Samurai showed to their lord and

said their actions were very noble and admirable. This act by the Emperor renewed the Japanese people's spirit and sense of themselves. Even now, every year this story is presented all over Japan in December.

There are many other aspects and anecdotes to the story that we don't have space to recount here. For example, the personal journey of each of the Samurai; the decisions and inner struggles that each made so that of the 200 that started out on the path of revenge, the number was reduced along the way to 120, then 60, then 50, then just 47. Samurai are humans after all. They had to decide whether to sacrifice the lives of their families in order to fulfill their duties and honor as Samurai. The core of the Samurai belief system is to not fear death. Without the fear of death, one is able to focus solely on living a life of honor and principle. Another important aspect of this story is that Oishi's oldest son, who was only 15, was among the 47 who attacked Kira's house and later committed seppuku. It's hard for us to imagine in this modern age allowing a 15 year old to take part of this and so freely give up his life.

I've wanted to share this story with you for a long time. I read so many different books and opinions to get to the truth of the story, so Sensei Karl and I did our best to pass it on to you.

OSU!

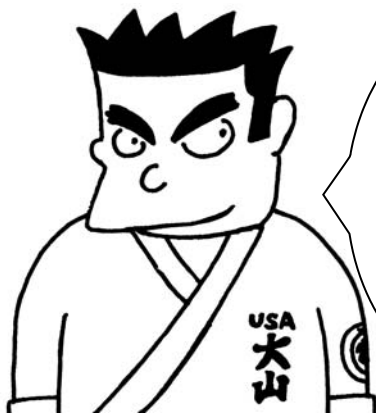


World Oyama Karate 2015 Honbu Schedule



Jan. 5.....Mon.....	Honbu Dojo Training Starts
Feb. 21.....Sat.	Regular Promotion10:30 a.m.
Mar. 21/22.....	Japan Clinic / Black Belt Promotion (JAPAN)
Mar. 28.....Sat.	Advanced (Brown/Black Belt) Promotion...10:30 a.m.
Apr. 11.....Sat.	Regular Promotion.....10:30 a.m.
Apr. 25.....Sat.	American Cup Tournament (Birmingham, AL)
May 2.....Sat.	Regular Promotion10:30 a.m.
May 31.....Sun.	Fighter's Cup Tournament (San Francisco, CA)
June 13/14.....	Japan Branch Chief Camp
July.....16-19.....	Summer Camp (Gulf Shores, AL)
Aug. 22.....Sat.	Regular Promotion.....10:30 a.m.
Sept. 12.....Sat.	Advanced (Brown/Black Belt) Promotion...10:30 a.m.
Oct. 10.....Sat.	Regular Promotion.....10:30 a.m.
Oct. 19.....Mon.....	Japan Cup Tournament
Nov. 15...Sun.	Ultimate Challenge Tournament (Birmingham, AL)
Dec. 12.....Sat.	Regular Promotion.....10:30 a.m.
Dec. 28.....Mon.	Year End Dojo Clean-Up.....6:00 p.m.

****Some dates are preliminary, and are subject to change. We will give advance notice for date changes.*



Have You
Been
Watching
"MARRY
ME" on NBC
?

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Editor-in-Chief: Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama
Editors: Sensei Karl Julian
Graphic Artist: Sensei Masa Takahashi
Technical Assistant: Senpai Tony Ching

World Oyama Karate Honbu Dojo
1804 29th Avenue South, Homewood, AL 35209
Phone: (205) 879-4841 Fax: (205) 879-4849
www.worldoyama.com

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