

Introduction: *The following article appeared in an edition of Furyu Budo Journal which was published by Wayne Muromoto of Hawaii back in the nineties. Sadly, Furyu is no longer with us and the back issues are becoming collector's items. The bright side is that Wayne Muromoto now puts out a regular blog called the Classic Budoka which is well worth a look.*

A Family Tradition of Zen and Aikido At Osaka's Toyonaka Shosenji Dojo by David Kolb

In a quiet suburban neighbourhood of Toyonaka, within the Osaka City limits, stands the local Soto Zen Buddhist temple. It is a fairly affluent area with well tended houses and gardens that are generally far larger than the norm in urban Japan. There is nothing too much of note, except for the last time I was there in March 1995, when there was the activity of repair work and characteristic blue plastic covers on rooftops that were damaged courtesy of the recent Hanshin Earthquake.

The temple itself is a modern construction with an adjoining house, garden and somewhat surprisingly, an aikido dojo. Consequently on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday evenings the neighbors have become accustomed to a stream of local residents, young and old, who come to practice Aikido under the supervision of the master of the temple. They have also become used to growing numbers of foreigners who sometimes ask for directions to the aikido dojo in halting Japanese.

Like his father before him, Shimamoto Katsuyuki is a priest of the Toyonaka Shosenji temple. As part of a family tradition he will be succeeded by his son Tamayuki, who currently assists his father in his role of local Buddhist priest. Shimamoto sensei also has another special qualification. At the rank of seventh dan, he is one of the Aiki-Kai's most renowned sensei in the Kansai area and head of a growing Aikido association.

The Shosenji Dojo celebrated its 30th anniversary in October 1994 with a demonstration and party held at the local civic center. Special guests were Doshu Ueshiba Kisshomaru, senior teachers from the Tokyo Hombu Dojo, and Shimamoto sensei's mentor in aikido and Zen, Kakuzen Suzuki. Suzuki sensei, besides being one of Japan's most renowned Buddhist scholars, also holds a seventh dan in Aikido.

It was Suzuki who first introduced Shimamoto sensei to aikido when they were at the Komazawa University in Tokyo. At that time Suzuki Sensei was a dormitory teacher with an ambition to start an aikido club. He recruited the young Shimamoto to be one of its founding members. This has resulted in a relationship with aikido and each other that has endured right up until the present day.

The late Osawa Kisaburo was to become Shimamoto sensei's main aikido teacher. His flowing yet effective style was to leave a lasting impression and a legacy that is still in evidence at the Shosenji Dojo. Whilst living in Tokyo, Shimamoto sensei also had the opportunity to study with the founder, Ueshiba O'Sensei, and other prominent teachers at the Hombu Dojo.

In the early 1960's Shimamoto Sensei returned to Osaka to assist his father in the running of the Shosenji Temple that had recently been relocated to the Toyonaka District. His father was the 14th successive master of the temple, which had originally been located in Umeda in the heart of downtown Osaka for some 400 years. Unfortunately, the original Shosenji was destroyed in one of the many air raids that flattened much of the city during the Second World War.

Shortly after his return to Osaka, and with his father's permission, Shimamoto sensei continued his Aikido practice through the establishment of an aikido dojo within the temple grounds. This dojo was to have a direct affiliation with Osawa sensei and Hombu Dojo.

The early years were not to prove to be completely uneventful, with the dojo building having undergone a number of incarnations, usually through the over-enthusiastic efforts of students who managed to crash through the walls and even the floor.

Over the years the dojo has continued to grow and perhaps, more importantly, it has managed to retain members throughout that time. The more prominent of those include Yamazaki Kazenori and Yano Noboru sensei, both sixth dan. They presently also conduct classes at other locations in Osaka. As a result the association now has about 400 active members training at the Shosenji Dojo, community centers and local high schools.

As well as assisting in the operation of the temple, sensei's son, Tamayuki, also has a growing responsibility in the Aikido Dojo. At age 29 and holding the rank of fourth dan, he has built on the strong foundation of training in aikido that he began as a child with a three-year live-in apprenticeship at the Hombu Dojo. Furthering the family tradition is his sister Junko, who holds a second dan.

Aikido as taught and practiced at Shosenji has a special quality that is like the spirit of community and family within the dojo. The hospitality to newcomers and guests is also second to none. (The relatively regular post-training parties especially are not to be missed!) Whilst Shimamoto sensei is at a loss to explain the attraction of his dojo to foreign students, the answer is fairly obvious, in my opinion.

At the Shosenji Dojo there is an all too rare opportunity to train under the tutelage of a genuine master of aikido as well as to share in the cultural life of a Japanese community, something that short term visitors to the large urban centers would normally find difficult to achieve. Besides training at Toyonaka, the Shosenji Aikido Association has regular classes in Osaka at Senri Chuo, Hibiki and Umeda. If you study aikido and are ever in the area my advice is to make a point of experiencing the Shosenji Dojo.

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