

Lessons from Goro Saimura Sensei From “Modern Kendo Hundred Proverbs”

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Saimura Sensei, who was known as the "Master Swordsman (Ken Sei)", sadly passed away in 1969 (Showa 44), but he is an unforgettable kendo teacher and role model /exemplar for my entire life. In 1923 (Taisho 12), I was commissioned as an officer in the Metropolitan Police Department, became an assistant in kendo at the Metropolitan Police Department and in 1926 and spent 32 years under his tutelage and learned many valuable lessons.

One of the most memorable moments during that time was when I became a teacher in 1931 (Showa 6) and one day, 20 years later, I had received Keiko with the Sensei for about seven minutes.

Sensei, probably by means of correcting my short distance maai Keiko, in the first half of the Keiko, he struck me when I raised my mind to attack, then after disengaged twice from the maai, he again struck me when I raised my mind to make further offensive move trying to enter into the maai, and was dragged around similarly like this repeatedly for 3-4 minutes which I couldn't enter into the striking maai distance at all, and in the latter half of the Keiko, when I felt a little tired, Sensei boldly changed to the offensive mode and showed me altogether more than a dozen of model/exemplar techniques of striking MEN, KOTE, TSUKI from the “Issoku- Itou no maai” (maai with one step one sword), teaching me in detail how important the maai distance is, and unfortunately I couldn't hit even one strike back.

Even now, 23 years later, I can't forget how impressed I was by the essence/cardinal principle of the unity of mind, technique and body (心技体一致). When I thanked him after the practice, he persuaded to me, "This is the real kendo, the silent education. Your left foot is side-stepping and your posture is not stable, which is why your maai is close and if you keep practicing like this, you will suddenly start declining sharply after the age of 60. Kendo is at its peak when you are in your 60s, and the limit is around 80. It is not too late for you to go back to the initial mind and redo the “Kiri-kaeshi” and “Uchikomi” .

Also, when I asked him if he had already mastered the MEN-technique, which is his strongest point, since he was a student, he told me remembering that time as follows;

"When I was a student at the Martial Arts Teacher Training School, I was a clumsy student, and was hated by my teachers. After graduation, I became an assistant professor at a Martial Arts College, and during a warrior training trip to the Tohoku region with my friend, I visited Madoka Tomiyama Sensei in Sendai and asked him to train myself. At that time, I wore a geta (Japanese wooden footwear), and due to the long journey, the bottom teeth of the geta was badly worn with an angle.

Seeing this, Tomiyama Sensei said, "The geta is reduced more on the outside like this. With this kind of reduction, I guess the footwork of yours, which is important, may not be sufficient. This means that you are not even qualified yet to be trained by me. Please come back if the bottom of the geta will be worn flat horizontally.

He simply got rid of me like that. I took that as a valuable lesson came deeply into my heart, and since then I have been training my footwork exclusively."

Sensei also said the following;

“At the age of 30, I moved to Tokyo and first studied the foot, waist, and palm movements of Iaido under Hakudo Nakayama Sensei, and then applied them to kendo, especially focusing on the MEN technique from the Chu-dan posture. The most important thing when performing a MEN-technique from the Chu-dan posture is, from the hitting maai distance, upon the opportunity, kick off your left foot, and step on your right foot, and at the same time, sharply rub in with lowering your left heel slightly down without remaining your leg and hip behind.

Then, at the moment the technique is to be executed, extend both hands forward and, using the action of the palms, strike hard rubbing in from the forehead.

In kendo, many people look splendid from the front, but only very few look splendid from the back. This is because of neglecting the stabilization of left leg and hip.

For those who study Kendo, the most important thing is to train the legs and the hips” .

Saimura-sensei was well known for his excellent posture and attitude in the dojo, but I strongly felt that the essence of his magnificent gait in everyday life and the excellent strikes which can rarely be seen were due to the fact that he had used the lessons of Tomiyama Sensei and Nakayama Sensei for his legs and hips throughout from the beginning to the end.

Per my teacher`s lessons, I continued to pay attention to my side-stepping foot and finally it became facing to the forward direction and was able to have nimbler in my footwork.

Although I have passed my 60th birthday and have little time left in my life, I would like to enjoy real kendo with my legs and hips, which I have trained for many years through Iaido.

I dedicate this poem memorizing Saimura Sensei the day he was present.

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