

## Remembering Minoru Mochizuki Sensei

The saying, “The teacher is pointing at the moon, and the fool is looking at his finger,” could not have been more appropriate than in the context of Mochizuki Sensei’s teachings.

He used to tell us, “When teaching, say and show only what to do! Someone might not hear what you say but will see what you do, and that’s what he or she will remember.”

This is because we have a tendency to try to justify whatever we are doing, especially when someone corrects us. Western students often talk back or argue with their teachers. It can go from indignation (“But Sensei, I thought that... blahblahblah!”) to self-denigration (“I’m so dumb; I always do that!”) to self-labeling (“I’m a Cartesian,” or “I was diagnosed as having xyz syndrome!”). On the other hand, Japanese students and others trained in the Japanese tradition will respond with a bow and a loud *hai* and appear quite attentive at the moment. But if the acknowledgement is just a cultural habitual form, it merely hides the same lack of understanding, which results in no change.

The consequence is that while our minds are occupied with our own thoughts, with our desire to speak, or with our obsession to behave according to proper etiquette, we do not listen to what the teacher is saying, and we do not observe what he is showing. Consequently, we miss the teaching, and we repeat the same behavior or action over and over again while still vainly expecting a different result.

Therefore, because of all the ever-present distractions in most students’ minds, we should concentrate on what should be done only. Often, we teachers get frustrated at our students, and we shout: “Wrong foot!” “Don’t do this!” “Don’t do that!” And the students get more confused. Instead, we should tell them and show them what to do!

Students often cannot see what their teachers teach them because their emotions get in the way of their learning. At the root of the emotional response is our ego, and when we have not harnessed our ego, we allow our emotions, such as greed and fear, to take over. Emotions act as distorting lenses that prevent us from seeing things as they are and consequently from making proper decisions. Many of us have seen students who traveled thousand of miles to learn with a certain teacher and fail miserably because they did not train themselves to deal with their emotions. It takes time to adjust to the culture, language and food. Add solitude, fatigue, injuries, and the chatter of the mind, and we have a bomb ready to go off at any time. One day, the teacher corrects their technique or their behavior, and the situation completely gets out of control.

When we look at recent martial arts history, we can easily see that many political conflicts originated in a student’s lack of discipline. Because of this lack of discipline, he

or she refused to listen to or be corrected by his teacher. When scolded, the student often reverts back to survival mode, the only way he knows how to function in the “real” world.

Sometimes, he will disappear and abandon his fellow students and responsibilities in the hope that he can forget about everything and start all over again in the antipodes. If he has some seniority and/or students of his own, he may also attempt to apply leverage by victimizing himself in order to get sympathy from confused students (“It was a plot against me by so-and-so; he manipulated Sensei.”). He may also hastily organize an unscheduled exam in order to promote students and get their support. He may hint: “Look, if I am gone, how many other people will follow me? Can you afford to lose so many people?” This kind of desperate behavior reveals the scolded student’s true mind, his inability to develop a true teacher-student relationship.

More important, though, it also reveals the fact that the teacher made the right decision. A good teacher is like a parent. When discipline has to be applied, no matter the cost, in spite of blackmail and convenience, a good parent will stick to his guns. So will a true teacher. The disciplined student still doesn’t know that by victimizing himself, he may get some sympathy and/or temporary support from opportunists who are trying to gain something out of it – such as looser standards, or are looking for an excuse to quit, as well as from those who were emotionally disturbed by the situation, family and friends who have no understanding whatsoever of *budo*. However, soon he will have to live with the consequences of his decision: contempt for himself and eventually contempt from those who sided with him, people who will not listen and become un-teachable, others who will quit or take students to start their own schools, etc.

To Mochizuki Sensei, the true meaning of fairness was to treat everyone according to his or her needs and levels of understanding. He often scolded us, sometimes privately, sometimes in public, and even sometimes in front of our own students. It was a constant reminder that we were there to study and that humiliation was not only an indication of our inflated egos but also a way to learn humility and maintain vigilance.

Yes, it was easy to become emotional. “Sensei isn’t fair!” some would say. It was hard sometimes – pride constantly threatens to overwhelm us – but there was that constant reminder: “You’re here to learn.” Once we made ourselves aware of that basic objective again, then we could concentrate on what we had to do to learn.

For our students who witnessed those moments, it was also a learning opportunity. The fact was that the more (Mochizuki) Kancho Sensei had trust in a person, the more direct he was in dealing with him/her. He himself received his own share of scolding from his teachers, Kano and Ueshiba Sensei. He often used that in his teachings as examples that it had been part of his *shugyo*. And he always spoke about his teachers with respect. That in itself was a teaching.

By constantly reminding ourselves that we are studying to learn, we can better control the chatter of the mind and concentrate on what we have to do to learn. From the basic

principle of “concentrating on what to do” originated the five-step method to develop the proper mental attitude for budo students:

1. Acknowledge the fact.
2. Accept our error.
3. Refrain from arguing and justifying.
4. Correct the error immediately.
5. Confirm mentally the whole process.

There is a short interval of time between the instant someone corrects us and our response to it. That is when we often make irreversible decisions, such as arguing or going to war. We can also use that same moment to accept and rectify. If we practice controlling the chatter of the mind, if we regularly reflect on our motivation to study budo, if we have determined through our observation and experience that our teacher has our best interest at heart and that it supersedes his own convenience, if it's clear in our minds that we are there to study, then at that moment, we can maintain our awareness that the correction is an opportunity to learn. We must remember that our teacher is another struggling human being – though more advanced on the path – and that we should not expect perfection from him. If he gets mad at us, we should concentrate on the reason we disappointed our teacher, not the way our teacher expressed his disappointment at us.

And what if my teacher was wrong? It is not a matter of who is right or wrong. Mochizuki Sensei taught us that we should examine and experience the teachings beforehand, regardless of how great we believe our teacher is. The fact that it triggered all that process of thinking and experiencing forms the depth of the teaching. The resulting discoveries may be completely different than the literal meaning of the original lesson. We can find a doorway to growth if we just look closely at the learning opportunity offered to us with a clear mind that is undistracted by our emotions, guided by our trust in our teacher.

For just as our children will tend to treat us according to the way we treated our parents, so will our students treat us the way we treated our teachers. After all, students reflect their teachers: one gets to know a tree by its fruits. So we should start with ourselves. Daily life provides us with many opportunities to train ourselves to use that gap between the correction and our response. Impatient spouses, family members, friends, coworkers, drivers who honk and/or give us the finger at the slightest mistake, etc. – they all are trying to tell us something, to get our attention. We should use that to improve our awareness and our behavior. We start with small matters; then we gradually build up to handle more challenging matters.

If we know that our emotions easily kick in and prevent us from thinking clearly and making good decisions, if we know that it always results into words and actions whose consequences we will regret later, then we should practice a method, such as the following, to apply during that gap:

1. Stop the mouth and body.

2. Perform *shinkokyu* (deep breathing) three times.
3. Apply the five-step method above.

With regular practice, this process will become a reflex. We will stop immediately, one breath will be enough, and everything else will follow.

Mochizuki Sensei often insisted on the importance of developing concentration and awareness early in life. He called that “cultivating *ki*.” It’s the beginning of all study. For that reason, Sensei taught all his classes – beginners, advanced students, and children alike. He observed and got to know every student’s character. During *keiko*, his eyes were constantly scanning all over the place. He often interrupted the whole class to correct a technique and have us do it over and over again until we could make it work. Often the result was different from what he had shown, but that’s what he expected. There was that constant pressure to maintain concentration and awareness in spite of fear, fatigue, heat, and cold.

After classes ended, the *kayoi deshi* (commuting students) would go home and relax. However, the *uchi deshi* would still be under observation while doing their daily chores. For those of us who would continue and complete our study by teaching, that was a unique learning and training opportunity, particularly for those who were to teach in a foreign country where we would be entirely on our own. It trained us to function in solution mode before getting there. That made all the help and support we would receive from our students and other people so much more valuable.

Mochizuki Sensei’s teachings had many dimensions. Even though he was adapting his pedagogy to his students’ needs and levels of understanding, it wasn’t always clear what he meant. The purpose was to make them think beyond the literal meaning of the words and to see their emotions as signals of the obstacles to be overcome. In some cases, the meaning would appear years later. However, one thing was evident to those who had the privilege to live close to him and observe his daily life: “Sensei is here for his students, and we are here to learn.” In times of doubt, that’s what helped clear up the confusion.

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