

“10 Years, My reflections of my past, my present, my future”

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The annual seminar is always a good time but I think this year held more significance for me than in year's past. Ten years is a long time and while I was sitting at the annual dinner I thought about all the people I have seen come and go through the doors of the Gi Yu Dojo and the many changes and challenges that have occurred in the past 10 years. I have some experience in other groups and training organizations and I understand that, despite the best of intentions, these groups tend to be short-lived. So, sitting at the dinner, I understood very well how special and precious what we have is and how proud I am to be a part of it. I can say emphatically and without hesitation that what is offered at the Gi Yu Dojo is unique and unmatched. The scope of the Gi Yu Dojo curriculum is vast and each part of the annual seminar offered a unique focus and lesson to learn.

Although not officially part of the annual seminar, the No-gi grappling (no uniform or gi) class held on the Thursday night before the start of the seminar is always eye-opening and instructional. A lot of our Koryu utilizes the gi in some way and the lack of the gi during the Thursday training presents a great opportunity to focus on movements and ideas that may not be specifically addressed in our Koryu, but blend seamlessly with it. Seeing techniques without the advantage of the uniform really breaks down the techniques to their essence and shows the movements in their purest form.

I have spent many years studying the schools individually. Watching Sensei teach them together was a unique opportunity to see the similarities and sharp differences in the Ryu-ha. Sensei did an amazing job teaching so many schools, conveying their finer subtleties and the kake hiki of each technique and each school. As students, we should not take for granted what Sensei did for us at this seminar. Most teachers would not even attempt the challenge of covering so much material in such a short time to showcase the great variety of movements and weapons that make up our curriculum. I hope everyone who attended could at least partially glimpse the depth and breadth of the schools we study.

Tameshi Giri is always something I look forward to each seminar. It's not something I regularly practice but I find it is so important for any student of Koryu to learn. It is usually a frustrating and humbling experience. More than else anything we practice I think it requires the most focus and concentration. It is by far the most mentally challenging skill to master. The physical skills needed for Tameshi Giri are taught in our regular taijutsu classes but getting those skills to come together all at once, blocking out all the noise and staring gaze of the other students and your teacher, and executing a clean cut is a unique challenge. I don't believe there is an exercise that showcases a student's taijutsu skill better than channeling their movement through an inanimate object to perfectly cut through a roll of tatami. The sword is extremely sharp but it is still just a tool. If the users' mental and physical focus isn't in coordination then the only way they will get through the tatami is luck.

This year the Atlanta group presented a special gift to Sensei at the annual dinner. After a lot of searching, we found a wood block print of a famous Samurai named Masakado. In fact, he is considered by many historians to be the first Samurai. Although this man lived over a thousand years ago, he still touches the lives and culture of modern Japan to this very day. In many ways, Sensei is our first Samurai. Much like Masakado, if Sensei had not been the man he is and taken the steps he has taken to master, learn and promote the koryu for the betterment of himself, his family and his community, he would not have had the immense personal impact on the people around him that he does today. It is doubtful any of us would have found true koryu and that part of each of us that yearned for something more than could be had from the strip center karate school would have continued unsatisfied. It is a small token, but hopefully it conveys our appreciation and understanding of what Sensei has done for us. So, for everything he has done for our little group in Atlanta, for everything he is doing and will do in the future, it was a great joy to present Sensei with our gift.

I wish we could all keep that feeling that we have at the annual seminar at every class, but I know that is unrealistic. We have grown, not just in number, but in the quality of students and instructors. "Quality" is the key word in that last sentence. McDonald's serves millions of people a year. McDonald's is quick and cheap and easy and accessible to almost everyone. We are not McDonald's. Everyone's efforts are necessary and required for the future growth of the Gi Yu Dojo. It's not easy but like my dad has told me, "If it was easy everybody would do it and then it wouldn't mean anything." That energy and enthusiasm we had at the seminar is contagious. If we can harness even some of that feeling in our everyday classes the future of the Gi Yu Dojo is bright. I sincerely hope to see all of you at the 20th Anniversary Gi Yu Seminar.