

2019 Gi Yu Kyo Kai Annual Seminar

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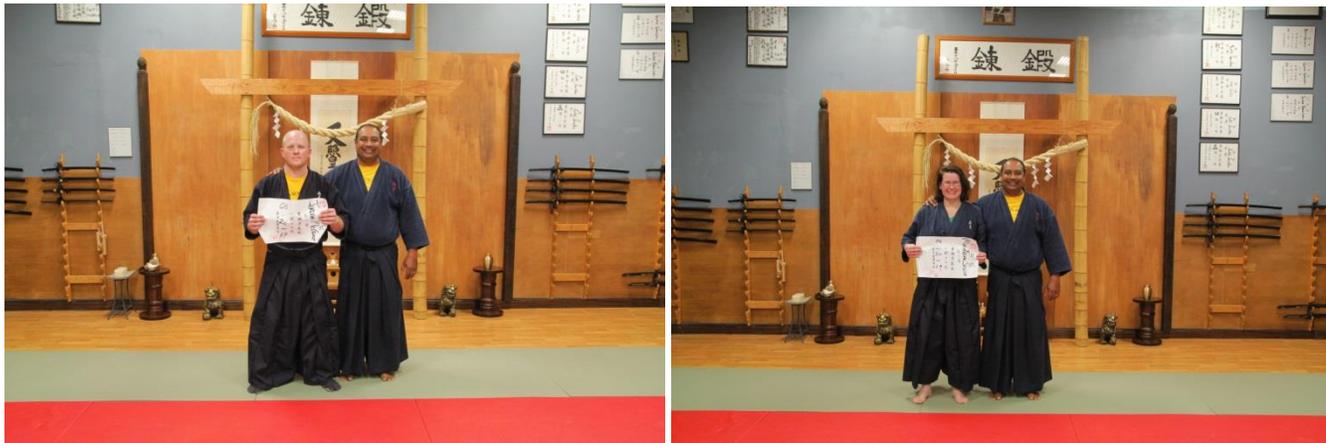
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As time marches on and I get more mature in my pursuit of my budo and hopefully get more seasoned and wise in my older age as a human being, I can't help but think about how quickly time goes by. I think of my 3 daughters, my parents, siblings, friends, students, mentors and my relationships with those I care about in this life. Reflection tells me that those most important to me, have some belief in similar ideals of the human condition as I do. Compassion, Respect, Commitment, Accountability, Honor, Courage, Justice etc. All are characteristics we all share as human beings. I always try to think of what others have done for me in my life and not think about I want them to do for me now. I hope to do my best in exemplifying those endeavors for all those around me, much less myself (since I am sure I fall short often). I find that time is slipping away quicker in my older age as it ever has. In recognition of that, I find a new fire and sense of urgency in my gut to spend more time with those I care about and pursue all the moments I can with them to create the experience for my memories and theirs. Being positive about each and every task and experience in life, changes your mind set to take in all the universe has to offer us. This year's ideological theme was **大同小異** "Daidō Shōi" or "*Similarities outweigh the differences*". Human beings spend so much time discussing and arguing about what is different in all things, rather than what is the same. Conflict. Martial artists are no different. Everyone wants to argue this technique is better than that, this idea is stronger than that etc etc. At the end of the day, take what you can for your growth and then share an opinion based in facts, personal experience and logic for others to make up their own mind. What I know now is that time is moving past me faster than it ever has. Stop wasting time on things that are irrelevant. Take advantage of the moments of learning and interaction with those you respect and care about, to make the most of the time we have. This year's seminar was a time well spent for those who attended, a time that the Titans of Budo congregate to share, learn and make memories that will last a lifetime in budo and friendship.



We started this wonderful event off with our “no-gi” (no uniform-shorts/t-shirt) training. We worked on several ideas: standing, on the ground, throwing, grappling, striking, escaping etc. Though there were differences, the underlying idea was fluidity and ultimately smoothness of technique and efficiency of energy. After this session we went directly in to the DAN (black belt) level testing. We had three folks test for black belts, two for 1st degree black belt (SHO-DAN) and one for 2nd degree black belt (NI-DAN). Unfortunately, the NI-DAN test was not successful, however I think the candidate learned quite a bit about what he will need to do to re-test and ultimately be successful at that exam. The other two folks passed their SHO-DANs with flying colors. Three to four years of hard study and sacrifice to get to a level where they are now part of a very exclusive club, The Gi Yu Kyo Kai DAN coalition! Congrats to Mary Ellen Smith and Jordan McGuire. Well done! I am very proud of you.



The next day, was an early morning, 5 am testing to be exact. We had two folks attempt our 5th degree black belt (GO-DAN) exam. This benchmark is one of the highest levels in our association. It denotes “Menkyo Kaiden” (master level instructor) in all things we study at The Gi Yu Kyo Kai. The exam is very challenging and takes many years of study and apprenticeship to attain. First, the candidate must show they have 85-95% of their notes sufficient on all the lineages we study. They have to write two 2 page essays on martial arts. They have to showcase a series of techniques and then they must pass the “saaki” or intuition test with a sword being swung at the back of their head. Even after passing this exam, to move up the black belt degree ladder, there are more tests waiting all the way to 9th DAN. 10th DAN is given as honorary recognition in our association. Quite impressive what our two candidates did, they both passed! Doug Sunnenberg and Chuck VanDine are two members of a VERY exclusive club of GO-DANs and above black belts. Congrats fellas, I am honored to be among you.



The next session of training was a deep dive in to The Gi Yu Suwari Gata, Chi no Maki. Basic ground movements of neck bridging, side shrimping, escapes, on guard postures, and different dominate grappling positions. It was a hot and sweaty morning. Session next was an introduction to The Jinen Ryu Iaijutsu and the Gi Yu Iaijutsu or drawing of the Japanese sword. Review of etiquette, sheathing the sword, clearing the blood off the blade and basic cutting were practiced in-depth. After a short reprieve we went in to the KYU (non-grade) level testing. Normally I would have had our other Dojo-cho and GO-DAN and up Black Belts administer these exams, however, I decided I would like to be a part of it this time around. We had two folks challenge this year. One for his green belt and one for his purple belt. The green belt exam was from one of our CORDs kids students, he started with us at age 9 or so and he tested as an Adult Green belt at age 16...needless to say, Gavin Wooton passed his exam! The other challenger was Dr. Michael Braginsky, at age 56 attempted and passed his purple belt exam! Written exam, Technical showcase and "Randori" (sparring) with all the black belts, what a test! Awesome job gentlemen!



That evening we had our annual dinner banquet. A great opportunity to interact with each other and each other's families and friends that attended. I had the pleasure to hand out some Thank Yous and Awards as well. I first gave Chris Zapata a special bottle of Sake to thank him for all the hard work and effort he puts in to taking care of our dojo. He showcases his leadership and I wish more of our folks took hold of what he does. Bryan Strait was honored with a nicely framed picture of his fellow students from the dojo, him and his ailing mother. You see, his mother is fighting cancer and she is terminal, so we asked her to come in one night and watch class, watch her son train and know we are proud to have him in our community and to let her heart know that she raised a wonderful human being that The Gi Yu Dojo is blessed to call one of its own. We then moved to presenting the "Student of Year" awards to our KYU student winner and DAN level student winner. These awards are voted on by all the black belts that are all over the globe. The criteria are based on Class Attendance, Technical Skill Advancement, Understanding of Koryu Arts, Selflessness, Character Development, Sincerity, Humbleness, Confidence and Honor. Our KYU level winner was none other than Mary Ellen Smith and our DAN level winner was W.S. Bumgarner. They were awarded a nice plaque along with some very nice hand forged tantos (knives). Congratulations to you both and thank you for leading by example!



The next day we launched directly in to more Gi Yu Suwari Gata. We worked on multiple escapes from the side guard, top mount and bottom position. Another tiring and endurance packed training session. After lunch we reviewed our basic safety, etiquette and basic cuts with our live swords outside by the bamboo grove. Tame Shi Giri (live cutting on bamboo-straw mats) was our next challenge. Everyone seems to continue to get better and better at this exercise. We cut over 100 rolls in those 2 hours.



Sunday was and always is the morning that you realize what we have been waiting for and looking forward to all year, is about to be over. The last and final training session of the seminar was a continuation of The Jinen Ryu Iaijutsu and Gi Yu Iaijutsu. Specifically the “do giri” or abdomen draw and cut. A great way to cap off such an inspiring 3 days.



So, here we are, after what I started with, time is moving by faster and faster as I grow older and older. I hope you feel the “*sense of urgency in all you do, and never the sense of panic*” in all you do in life. I know I do, my relationships with my wife, children, parents, siblings, family, friends and *all of you*, my brothers and sisters on the pursuit of the path of budo. Let’s not waste the time we have to grow and create memories with those we care about. See you next year!