A Brief Reflection

by Dan Taylor

Kyoto is nice this time of the year. Not too cold or wet and not too warm or humid. Mostly T-Shirt weather with a light jacket handy. The uniform for those participating in the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai's World Butoku Sai was the official windbreaker over the dogi. We walked as a group in typical Japanese fashion to and from the world renown Butokuden, a building over 1200 years old, boasting a history rich with noted and untold stories of famous and not so famous Samurai as well as 20th century budoka such as Chojun Miyagi, Sensei and founder of Goju-Ryu Karate-Do.

Kyoto is nice this time of the year. Not too cold or wet and not too warm or humid. Mostly T-Shirt weather with a light jacket handy. The uniform for those participating in the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai's World Butoku Sai was the official windbreaker over the dogi. We walked as a group in typical Japanese fashion to and from the world renown Butokuden, a building over 1200 years old, boasting a history rich with noted and untold stories of famous and not so famous Samurai as well as 20th century budoka such as Chojun Miyagi, Sensei and founder of Goju-Ryu Karate-Do.

Our schedules were pretty hectic beginning at 7AM and ending around 10PM every day. However, there was some limited time made available to us for sight-seeing. It had been nearly 30 years since I had last been to Japan. Much had changed since my last visit. In the 70’s, the country was going through a transition of the middle aged to elderly in traditional old-Japan attire and the younger to middle aged in more contemporary western clothing. Now, there was no sign of the old-dress to be found. All were dressed contemporarily as one would expect from any typical western city.

Additionally, one did not have to travel far to see KFC, Pizza Hut, Circle K, 7-11, McDonalds, and much to my extreme delight.....STARBUCKS! I even ran into a house for sale with a “Century 21” sign in front of it. The 24 Hour McDonalds, just a few blocks away, enjoyed a visit from everyone on our team, even those of us who weren’t real fond of fast food. However, Brandon Wainwright (Bakersfield GKK Dojo) was ready to camp out in their lobby after the second day of Japanese food, which he simply could not bring himself to eat. While meals were included in our tour-package, many weren’t ready for the Japanese style Bento Lunches 3 times a day or other traditional Japanese meals most every night, the presentation of which was far more important than the flavor.

I expected many things from this trip such as jet lag, hard training, good training, new friends, frustrations with language, and all such things that an American martial artist might face on such a trip. But, as I sat on the tatami mats that surround the Butokuden training floor, I experienced an unexpected feeling of tremendous awe. Then it hit me. This is the same floor that Chojun Miyagi, one of the greatest if not the greatest Karate-Ka of all time stood on, and demonstrated on resulting in Karate-Do being accepted and established as a Japanese budo. That thought resonated within me as one of the directors of the event told me to get my team ready to enter the Butokuden floor. As we stepped onto the polished hardwood, it was as though we could feel the spirits of hundreds of years of warriors encompass, encourage, and empower us as we too performed for the Hanshi board of the DNBK and Deputy Sosai, the official representative of the Imperial Family.

With over 1100 participants from all over the world, each delegation was given 5-7 minutes on two separate days to demonstrate their respective arts. My team from the Goju-Ryu Karate-Do Kyokai (GKK) demonstrated Saifa kata and bunkai (application) on the first day, and Seiunchin kata and bunkai on the second day. Alone, I also demonstrated Seisan kata and Sepai kata on the first day and Shisochin kata and Kururunfa kata on the second day. We had numerous compliments on our demonstrations and I was quite proud of the team’s performance.

We were privileged to watch demonstrations from countries all across the globe including Europe and middle and far eastern countries. The delegation from the Honbu (headquarters) of the DNBK in Japan was everything one would expect. However, the International Division was equally impressive and included kendo from the U.K. and jujutsu from Russia. I was honored to meet Mr. Ron Kluger, Goju-Ryu Hachi-Dan from Israel. Additionally, at one of our many dinner banquets, I was seated next to Mr. Ken Tallack, Goju-Ryu Hachi-Dan from Canada. Kyoshi Tallack, who speaks fluent Japanese, was a vast knowledge of information about the DNBK. As one watches the performances of those students from their respective countries, there is something notably different from any other martial arts event I’ve ever been to.

There is a demeanor present which is not as prevalent anywhere else. The awareness of martial virtues is dynamically present, but unspoken. It is those virtues and relative protocols that make the DNBK different. Presentation is everything. Proper politeness and courtesy abound. When to bow and how to bow. When to applaud and how to applaud. How to enter and leave a room. A place for everything and everything in its place. Big things and little things. Did you know, for example, that when eating a meal with your instructor, that: 1) You do not order before Sensei, 2) You do not eat before

Sensei, 3)

You do not leave the table before Sensei. Right down to the very last detail, there is a proper protocol for the way all things are done. For the OCD among us, this would be heaven. For those with a more laid-back outlook on things…well, it would definitely not be heaven. I should note that the method of instruction in these things is one of compassion and gentle guidance. One is not chastised for improper behavior; rather, one is politely shown the proper way.

Each of the GKK students who attended this event with me is to be commended. I was very proud of each and every one of them. While the protocols were not new to me, for them it was all a part of a very new experience which they received quite well. They represented the GKK in such a manner worthy to be called budoka. GKK members who attended with me were Robert DaLessio, Brandon Wainwright, Greg Rader, Christian Rader, Chris Duarte, and Ilea Jackson.

There is much more that I could write about the events we experienced on our trip. However, as I think about what was most important, I’m reminded of what Kyoshi Ken Tallack said at dinner one evening. “I may not like your waza (technique)”, he said, “But that is not important”. He then reached over and tapped me on the chest, “It’s what’s in here that is more important ”, he concluded. In a nutshell, Kyoshi Tallack has explained the essence of the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai (Greater Japan Martial Virtue Society). I am extremely humbled and forever grateful to Dr. Tesshin Hamada, Hanshi (International Division Director) for his invitation to participate in this most prestigious event.