



David M. Valadez
Senshin Center
Dojocho

A Retransliteration of Osensei's "Kannagara no Jutsu"

by David M. Valadez

"The Art that is in Accordance with God" 1

This evening I would like to give a simple talk in response to some requests made by you, the students. However, please remember, the primary essence of the martial arts is not a thing that one can capture in full intellectually. Thus, daily I pray that every one of you, through your own practice, will someday master true martial arts -- the real martial arts. Let me share with you what I have experienced -- how I understand my art, my practice.²

The art that I practice is the art that is in accordance with Nature -- which is itself grounded within the Way of God, the Way of Heaven, God's will. By the word "accordance," I mean that there are common principles and/or structures between the art that I practice, Nature, and God's will, etc. These principles are the numinous of all that is manifested -- for example: these principles unite the sun and the moon with the entire Universe, etc. Together then, these principles, through that which is manifested, teach us of Nature, of God's will, and of what I consider to be the true martial arts.³

This "Art of Nature," I convey to you here, is manifested by means of the Will of God -- in correspondence with underlying divine principles. That is to say, as the ocean, the mountains, the sunset, the stars, reveal through their very manifestation their relationship to the numen, so too does this art of mine. Through spiritual Awakening, one realizes the form or shape of the ultimate divine presence in the totality of his/her body/mind. In coordination then, one's physical practice becomes an extension of this Awakening, of this spiritual development, of this numinous, of Nature, of God's will. When one's practice occurs outside of these spiritual principles and realization, one's practice cannot help but to be incomplete and one's understanding cannot help but to be superficial. Thus, it is seldom possible to discuss the real martial arts -- the true purpose behind such a real practice. It is impossible to intellectually delineate this correspondence between martial technique and the larger Universe before true insight has been gained.

However, together, we can and we should train toward this end, toward the great manifestation and mind/spirit of God, through a realization of the single underlying principle of all beings and all creation. Through such a practice, human beings can inherit this great tradition, this true martial art that has been passed down generation after generation from the mythical age until now. Thus, we can make it ours, at the level of the complete and/or fulfilled individual. We can "enshrine" it in the totality of our being. To do this, we need only observe the interdependence that exists between what

the Ancients called Heaven and Earth, the Sacred and the Profane, the Omote and the Ura, the visible and the invisible, the Yang and the Yin, the inner and the outer, the surface and the depth, etc. That is to say, we look to find the divine in the mundane; we look to bring sacredness and purposefulness to all that we do; we look to bring into our lives a real sense of the holy, of the spiritual, of depth, of ultimate meaning, etc.

In centering our existence upon such a perspective, our lives overall become a kind of conduit by which the divine principle and purpose become known to us, and through us to others. In this way, as we practice our martial art together, making it a conduit or a mediator of the divine principle and purpose, our art leads to higher states of spiritual maturity.⁴ The martial arts do this as we through our practice come to fulfill the divine principles and purpose -- which themselves make up the true martial art. As you can see then, true martial arts cannot be fully captured by the mundane spoken or written word. Rather, if we have to theorize, understanding must come to us through the wisdom of the ages -- through the teachings of the spiritual masters that have come before us.

For us to tap into this ancient wisdom, we take our initial step by keeping God in our heart/minds. From beginning to end, practitioners of the Way must keep God in their thoughts and their actions -- in this way they will hone their martial skills according to Nature and thus according to the divine principles and purpose. The ultimate reason of the true martial arts is to orient our lives according to these ultimate principles of existence. We do this via a sincere practice -- via the cultivation and application of sincerity.⁵

Through The Way, through our practice, we come to gain the virtue of sincerity. Through the virtue of sincerity, we come to know The Way -- we come to develop our practice. The virtue of sincerity is both the entry to The Way and a product of The Way. Sincerity is what connects the outer form to the inner essence. The cultivation of sincerity is then the purpose or the reason why we train in the martial arts. Through martial arts training, we are trying to gain a distance from the superficiality of our lives, our relationships, our thoughts, our actions, our identity, etc. Through the cultivation of sincerity, through a capacity for sincere action, thought, and word, we can come to clearly observe the holiness that is all around us -- that which is the true essence of everything and every one. Being able to give witness to this holiness, in turn, allows us to have an even greater capacity for sincerity, which, in turn, brings us more clarity regarding this holiness -- this cycle continues ad infinitum. This is what it means to practice the martial arts as a Way. It means we are here to mature our spirit, to realize the ultimate divine principles and purpose. We are here to bring a particular kind of depth to our lives, for this we need the virtue of sincerity.

Through our training, we are trying to bridge a gap between the mundane world and the spiritual world, one by which we can rediscover our own personal connection to the divine.⁶ In this way, we ourselves, in our identity, in our actions, in our words, in our thoughts, become representative of the divine. Thus, we become a part of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness -- as do our actions, our words, and our thoughts. As a whole then, the true martial arts is a practice of purification -- one that works to purify our body/minds of the ignorance that denies this deep and most real unity.

Understand, unification is about two different things becoming one. You must merge with the form and spirit of beauty, for example. There must be a coming together; so above, so below; so in Heaven, so on Earth; so eternally, so daily; so inside, so outside; so the sacred, so the mundane; so of the soul, so of the body; so of the heart, so of the mind; so of the attack, so of the defense; so of initiating, so of responding; so of object, so of subject; so of form, so of non-form; etc.

Though housed in tradition, the authentic core of Japanese martial arts resides in progressiveness. Thus, the arts must adapt to their times -- continually advancing. As in combat, to advance without hesitation is the safe course; to retreat is to be cut down, to stay still is to be cut down. The martial arts as a whole, and your practice as a part, must then advance according to these unifying principles -- where the accumulated result of our actions is Goodness, Truth, and Beauty.⁷

Again, your martial arts must be in accordance with the rotation of the heavens and the earth. That is to say, your martial arts practice must be in accordance with all things seen and unseen. All things are related to each other. For example, the human body is related to the universe. The human body is a miniature universe, a small version of the cosmos. As such, when the human body acts contrary to the nature of the universe, it acts contrary to its own nature. You must train with this in mind. If you want to train in the martial arts you must unify your spirit with the spirit of the universe in order to act in fulfillment of your nature, as opposed to acting contrary to your nature. Additionally, because the body follows the spirit, because the body and the spirit also exist via this kind of concentric unity, when you train the spirit, you train the body -- making the body one with the universe.

Today, there is a lot of talk about the "Japanese Spirit" and the "Imperial Way." I must say that I do not understand these terms in the same way that others might. For me, it is this unification of the spirit and the body that is the formation of the real "yamato damashii," or the ancient understanding of seeing the great Oneness of things sacred and mundane. The uniting of spirit and body, the perfect fulfillment of our most real selves, is what the martial arts are all about. It is this type of fulfillment, which is not one of power or of material gain, that supports the real strength of any community, any nation, even the world. When we realize this fulfillment through our training, we realize that the Imperial ancestral teachings are correct in noting that we as human beings are descendent from the Divine. Together then, this fulfillment and this realization awaken us to a martial art that is in accordance with both that unification of body and spirit and that is consistent with our Divine nature. Through all of these things, through our training thusly, the virtues of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty will be expressed outwardly from us, spreading out to others, spreading all over the world.

The true Japanese martial arts then can be understood to have the world as its concern. A true practice notes that the spirit and body are united to form what in ancient times was called "yamato damashii." The unification of the body and spirit produces a kind of emanating power, a force that spreads outwardly and proactively produces likeness -- such that Good produces Good, Truth produces Truth, and Beauty produces Beauty. This is what we can see in Omoto-kyo scripture when we read: "All over the world plum blossoms bloom." This means that one person, with a correct practice, can spread the divine purpose to a mass of others, and so on, and so on, and so on.

To be sure, things are not always easy. Sometimes the social collective has its own contrary forces at work -- such as when it is experiencing famine, plague, and war. However, when we as a society face social disaster, such as when we are challenged by famine, plague, and war, we are to be inspired to see that there is a better way of living, of being. In a way, these challenges are here to inspire us to find this better way of being and of living together. The same is true of challenges that we must face at an individual level. They are here to help us reform our hearts, so that we can collectively bring peace and goodness to the world through the virtue of love and the practice of sincerity.

A true martial art is aimed at the truth of the universe. It is aimed at a greater scale of observation --

one beyond mere technical detail. It will note that Heaven and Earth, all phenomena, the great universe itself, are the manifestations of God -- both body and mind. To practice a true martial art, one seeks to fulfill this design by making his/her practice part of this body and mind of God. This is how one should understand the kanji character "Bu." "Bu" is God. "Bu" is Purification. "Bu" is Love. Therefore, because such a "Bu" can spread from one person to another, "Bu" is about the rebuilding of a better earthly society -- one in line with God's will, one born of a purification of ourselves, one that spreads Truth, Goodness, and Beauty through the virtue of Love. The body/mind practice of "Bu," is about coming to learn the body/mind of God. Thus, "Bu" is about your life, about your soul. Budo is the mutual enshrinement and coming together of the appearance and workings of God with the godly mind of love for all beings.

When one understands that God is Bu/Bu is God, there is no distinction between the spiritual world and the material world. Thus, our martial arts practice is capable of transforming us according to the ultimate truths of Nature, of Being, of the Universe, etc. When we are able to take these two worlds, the world of spirit and this world that we live in on a daily basis, and make them one, we will have become one with the mind and form of God. This is how "Bu" must be. Thus, a person that wants to practice True Budo should, from the very beginning, seek to cultivate the virtues necessary for knowing God. That is to say, through training, he/she should seek to purify the body/mind of those elements that keep him/her ignorant to God's mind, God's body, and God's will. When one does this, one is practicing the martial arts.

Finally, in closing, let me say that we should not hesitate or move slowly in understanding our practice in this way -- we should not move as slow as the flow of the ages. Rather, we must learn the will of God, then leap forward to take command and actively fashion the ages.⁸

(From a Budo Senyokai publication entitled "Budo" which originally appeared in July of 1933)

FOOTNOTES:

1 The original title of this work is listed as "Kannagara no Jutsu." This is translated at Aikido Journal as, "The Art of Shinto." I have opted to translate this differently because the phrase, "The Art of Shinto," carries with it the following two meanings -- neither of which, in my opinion, is accurately representative of Osensei's message here. The first meaning implies, "Shinto as an art," which suggests that Osensei was talking more about Shinto and less about his martial art. The second meaning implies, "Shinto's art," which suggests that Shinto's art is Osensei's martial art, but this would be like saying, "Baseball is Christianity's sport." It would be an overstating of cultural influence and in the end a gross act of reductionism. Additionally, the word "kannagara," is often translated today as "kami nature" or "the nature of god(s)." It is in this sense that the phrase "kannagara no michi," a phrase also used by Osensei, is often translated as, "in accordance with the will/nature of god(s)." For these reasons, in my opinion, the better translation would assume that Osensei is here talking about "the art of kannagara," but having that not understood as "kannagara's art," instead having it understood as, "The art that is of kannagara." Thus, when you translate "kannagara," the title reads, "The Art that is in Accordance with God." It could have equally have been translated as, "The Art that is in Accordance with the Nature of God," or "The Art that is in accordance with the Will of God."

2 Throughout the text, I have tried to keep the general meaning of Osensei's words. However, to

make his thought more reader-friendly, to move away from the jumbled message of these overly literal translations, I have here and there opted for alternate phrasing and/or even for the moving of phrases from one paragraph to another. For example, I have done this to keep single paragraphs more thematic in their structure. When I have opted to change a phrasing, I have done so by using Osensei's thought as a guide (as it is found in other places in this article and/or from other articles written by him), and/or by using themes common to mystical thought in general and/or to the thought of Omoto kyo theology.

3 This paragraph in the original translation includes the phrase, "Kannagara no Michi," which the translator or editor then opted to reduce to the word "Shinto." In the paragraph of the original translation then, the reader is being presented with the commonly held idea that Aikido is some sort of extension of Shinto and that this in some way has it correlating to Nature in a way stated elsewhere by Kisshomaru. In my opinion, this is a great misunderstanding of Osensei's mystical thinking, thus also of his understanding of the word "shinto," his concept of Nature, and his understanding of his own martial art. Moreover, if one continues in reading the article from this perspective, the totality of the article makes little to no sense -- especially in terms of the advice Osensei wishes to pass on to those that wish to make their art more like his. For this reason, I opted to stick with the usual way that academics translate the phrase, "kannagara no michi" (see footnote 1).

4 This section of the original translation includes the word, "saniwa." The translator or editor there opts to understand this word via a more "classical" Shinto understanding -- translating it as, "a holy and pure garden where the gods descend to commune with the people of this world." While not at all incorrect, such a translation neglects how central another related meaning of the word must have been to Osensei -- that of "saniwa" as "mediator." For example, something that Osensei must have fully understood, Onisaburo was a saniwa to Nao (these two individuals were the co-founders of Omoto-kyo). That is to say, Onisaburo would interpret and/or give meaning to the automatic writings or "ofudesaki" of Nao (which were completely unintelligible until they were mediated by Onisaburo). Onisaburo was a go-between -- he stood between the unintelligible irruption of the sacred that was present in Nao's writing and our own mundane intellectual-based understanding.

5 Here the original translation mentions "Mizu no Mitarna." This is obviously a scanning malfunction since the deity or spirit in question is actually called "Mizu no Mitama." Of interesting note, this is the deity said to have possessed Onisaburo and to thus have been the true author of his spiritual teachings. For Osensei, as for Omoto-kyo theology, because of a unique combination of monotheism, polytheism and pantheism being present, there are many deities, but they are manifestations of the Creator Deity (the same Creator Deity of the Judeo-Christian Bible). All deities converge back into the Creator. Different deities manifest themselves depending upon their specific purpose or mission. For this reason, it is best to speak of "God," but to keep in mind what specific purpose or mission is relative to the discussion -- in my opinion.

6 This section of the original translation includes two extremely problematic terms, "Yamato damashii" and "Kodo." The translator or editor has translated these terms respectively as, "Japanese Spirit" and "Imperial Way." As such, these translations put the thinking of Osensei right in the middle of some of the more controversial aspects of 20th century Japanese fascist thought. In my opinion, these are extremely poor translations of the way that Osensei used these terms. One has to understand that these terms, as phrases, were loaded with cultural capital circa 1935 -- the time that this lecture was given. To speak in any kind of "enlightened" sense, one almost HAD to use these terms and/or to have some sense of their meaning. This does not mean however that everyone had

the same meaning. In fact, many battles were fought, won, and lost, over what these words would mean or should mean. The original translator has simply gone with the winning side's understanding of these terms -- a side that did not gain clear dominance until some years later. Osensei's understanding of these terms seems to be from what eventually became the losing side in this cultural war of defining terms. For Osensei, "Yamato Damashii," in all likelihood (meaning I would need more evidence to be 100% sure but that I am now about 90% sure -- knowing full-well that he did not mean what the fascists meant), meant, "Human beings are divine in nature and origin, that they are descendents from the divine -- a reference to the body and the spirit becoming one." He seems to have arrived at this meaning via the unique way that folks like Onisaburo understood sacred texts like the Kojiki. Through the same means, he seems to have understood "Kodo" as, "The time when the sacred and the mundane, the religious/spiritual and the political, etc., were one and the same." Interestingly, Osensei seems to have known that his understanding of these terms was different from the understandings being produced by the then-powerful political institutions of that time.

7 This tripartition of truth, beauty, and goodness is seen in Omoto-kyo theology. In short, the idea (one common to many movements at that time) was that through unification with God on a massive scale, through mystical union, human beings could transform this world into a type of Pure Land -- a land of truth, beauty, and goodness. The goal was to have this be a kind of mass movement -- one that would spread outwardly from key centers and key individuals. This, obviously, was a fitting goal with WWI still fresh in the memories of the time and with WWII just looming around the corner. When one reads Osensei's phrase, "A Way to Reconcile the World," one should keep this all well in mind -- in my opinion.

8 I think there are some interesting things to note when reading this lecture. First, Osensei never mentions the words, Aikido, or Daito-Ryu, or any other nomenclature commonly used to capture a particular martial lineage, slant, or style. He only refers to the martial arts in general, and to real, authentic, genuine martial arts in specific (his own). Second, when explaining the essence of his own art, when advising those that seem interested in making their art like his, Osensei does not offer the common advice of more suburi, or more suwari waza, or more weapons work, or more Kokyu development, etc. he only says, Make God the center of your practice and your art will be like mine (i.e. an authentic/genuine/real martial art).