



# **Martial Life In The Time of Covid: The Road Ahead**

**2.16.2021**

Hoping all of you are well in this roiling, restless world.

As you can imagine, the impact of the lockdown to lessen the spread of the Corona virus has had significant effect on martial arts worldwide. Similar to the financial crisis of 2008, we are going to see a large number of schools permanently shuttered. Particularly hard hit have been those dojo stressing, contact; Judo, Jujitsu, Aikido, MMA schools and clubs. Oddly, the Traditional schools got a small boost, with their kata work, which lends itself a bit more favorable to virtual instruction.

By the end of March, 2020 all Wind School group classes had been suspended. Although Drew University gave it a go with virtual training toward the end of the Spring Semester 2020, the University decided to cancel all Physical

Education programs for the Fall 2020 school year and extend this policy into the Spring 2021 semester as well.

## VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION

I've made it a point ask all the frontline teachers I've encountered since the lockdowns prompted a switch to virtual instruction how that's been working for them. The nearly unanimous response has been 'dismal.' Burnout is particularly high amongst Elementary school teachers dealing with cooped up, anxious and/or fearful children and their parents. Most martial art teachers were blindsided by Covid. They were unprepared to offer either online, limited live, or hybrid classes. Many are still scrambling to save their businesses.

Martial art teachers often enter the profession to pursue life's more physical realms, myself included. Virtual karate instruction is not particularly appealing and it is very limiting; no *kumite*, no *bunkai*, no hands-on of any kind. However, to survive, one must make do for the interim. We will see many more schools fail if the lockdowns continue much longer.

## HEALTH

I don't know of anyone in the core group that's gotten sick from Covid, except one black belt, Bob the Bear. His ninety-four year old mother tested positive first. Her symptoms; tired for a week then, back to work. Bob got it next. Same symptoms, then back to work.

My personal health remains strong, and on that note I'd like to see the mainstream news cover more stories about those of us who have robust immune systems to counter-balance all those irrational fears of imminent death, disability or the dangerousness of being around people from this virus. I understand the survival rate is 99.96%. Average age of death 78-80 years old, and mostly people with pre-existing conditions.

Did you now that the Chinese considered 2020 a *Disaster Year*? The Chinese have noted the changing weather patterns in 60 year cycles. Every 37<sup>th</sup> year is marked by a strange illness that's hard to dodge. See below.

## Wu Youxing's 吳有性 *Wenyi lun* 瘟疫論 TREATMENT ON EPIDEMIC PESTILENCE

"Epidemic pathogens are a type of abnormal qi (yiqi 異氣, also called liqi 戾氣) that periodically exists between Heaven and Earth in certain places on earth. It enters via the mouth and the nose, and effects everyone equally—no matter whether you open your doors wide or lock yourself in. It reaches close to the Stomach, half-inside and half-outside, and submerges itself in the so-called moyuan 膜原 (Membrane Source) first mentioned in the Neijing's "Treatise on Malaria"... It nests there like a hibernating animal, and cannot be reached by regular herbal medicines. Once it explodes outward from there, the pathogenic toxicity invades the fu organs on the inside and the channel systems on the outside."

We are social creatures who derive meaning and vitality from one another. When we don't have these interactions, other unhealthy symptomologies emerge, like loneliness, depression and anxiety.

IN MEMORIUM  
SCOTT MARGO



One of the tragedies of this past year was the surprise passing of Scott Margo, age 59. Despite his personal struggles behind the scenes, Scott was a three-decade long student and assistant teacher. Sadly, Scott was estranged from his siblings who decided on cremation without notifying any of his friends and fellow martial artists. From what I was told, the police found him dead at home in his bed. There was no autopsy—a shame all round.



## THE GREAT SCATTERING

Sensei Tom Maloney thought it wise to head back to Arizona prior to Thanksgiving only to find his home state one of the top three places in the U.S. with increasing Covid cases. Sensei Brian Vivas found himself with no karate classes at all and is anxious for classes to resume.

Most of the adult students have been taking classes either virtually, in private, or in small semi-private groupings. Some prefer to train outdoors with me in the fresh air to keep on the safer side of exposure. I've had a pretty fair variety of teaching locations in my life. A first for me has been conducting sessions outdoors in freezing weather.

Many of you have commented about the hope of resuming group classes. At present, that would require masks, social distancing, limited class numbers, no lockers or showers, and the aforementioned limitations to what we could actually do. I'm hoping that if, and when, we go back, many of those restrictions will have been lifted.

There are intrepid students who continue to train with me without limitation, with the understanding that if anyone feels sick, we don't meet. So far this system has worked without incident for the last ten months.



PJ says hello. He was back from Maritime school over the holidays. He's also found time to keep up his Forms at school. Eric tells me he does about twenty kata a day. Roberto challenged himself to see how many Seiuchin katas he could do in an hour. I think he got up to eighty-four. Amanda is back at Brown Univ. finishing her Masters. She does virtual classes with me, chi kung class with Master Wu, and trains virtually with her Shotokan karate club. *Inspiring!* Brian trains with Joe Murphy and Jay Austin, who by the way, was awarded his 5<sup>th</sup> dan. Tim, Tom, Steve, Bob the Bear, Adrienne, Carlo, Dan in Connecticut, Wendy, Andre, Steve, and Bob Tighe are all training regularly.



Congratulations to Jay Austin (on rgt)  
who received his Godan rank on 5.18.2020



Congratulations go to Bob Tighe and Carlo Bracco. Both men received their  
Nikyu, 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree Brown Belt ranking on February 4, 2021.

## IT'S YOUR ART

A few of you have said that you are forgetting your Forms, or that finding time to train has been curtailed by other priorities. Keep the faith. Regardless of the pandemic around you, stay positive, find time to ground yourself in the physical world, for the airwaves of the Internet are not going to grant you physical vitality. Consider doing some virtual classes with me if live ones are not in your mindset. Pair up with others at your level to reduce the cost of private training. You don't want to let a year go by without practice or your art will slip away by degrees and it will be hard to reclaim it.

## MY ART

Personally, there's been little break in my own study and practice. Last year I had the good fortune to work with the Sensei Dein Shapiro, an Isshinryu Godan with thirty-five years experience, along with some of his senior karate group in Whitehouse Station, NJ. I was able to spend quality time introducing them to *Internal* Isshinryu. Masters Magazine also published my article on *Kiko* in September. More articles to come.

I've been rather quiet on the video and blogging front as I've focused a lot of my energy since last March to finish a long term project, a young adult Martial art mystery novel that I started years ago. Since kids would often ask me to tell them stories during class, I threatened to write one big zany mystery story and include them as characters. With a little luck this project should be done by the beginning of Spring. After that, I intend to start my next book on *Kiko: Internal Karate-Do*. This subject has been a strong focus of mine for nearly thirty years now.

Time is precious and we need to make the most of it. Feel free to reach out with questions or just to stay in touch. At the very least, I can recommend books and movies to keep you passively training. With the world spinning at a dizzying pace it's even more important to find grounding. I agree we will come out of this differently than when we went into it. Old ways are yielding to new ways. The trick will be to emerge stable, hopeful and thriving.

**Keep your chin up and pelvis tucked!**





Blessings to all!  
**Shifu Hayashi**