

Masayuki Shimabukuro: EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Jon Sattler

This EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW is an expanded version of a special Q & A featured in the *Black Belt Buyer's Guide 2008*, which hit newsstands November 6, 2007.

When we decided to make the definitive samurai sword DVD, we knew Masayuki Shimabukuro would be up for the challenge. The Black Belt Hall of Fame member began his sword training in 1975 under 20th-generation grandmaster Miura Takeyuki Hidefusa and now holds the title of hanshi, the highest rank in traditional Japanese arts. He now travels the world teaching and certifying instructors in iaijutsu, kenjutsu, jojutsu and other traditional arts.

What is the biggest misconception about the samurai sword?

Most people are surprised to find out that Japanese swordsmanship is not the same as you see in the movies. The chanbara movies show long fight scenes where samurai fight for minutes. In real combat, a sword fight takes seconds. The blink of an eye is all it takes to end a real battle.

Why is traditional weapons training still an essential part of martial arts?

All traditional Japanese martial arts are based on the principles of combat with a weapon.

Everyone's empty-hand combat system is better understood after one has trained in a traditional weapons system—especially swordsmanship. The precision and etiquette required to master an ancient samurai art like that of the sword leads each of us to a better understanding of strategy in combat and our place in a peaceful society.



Masayuki Shimabukuro at the 2006 Hall of Fame dinner in Long Beach, CA, being inducted as the Weapons Instructor of the Year.

(Photo by Robert W. Young)

What was the most significant moment in your own training?

The moment I realized that *setsu-do* (discipline) and *giri* (obligation) were the foundation of living the highest life condition. These two things give [you] the responsibility for—and influence over—your training and your future.

What element of your personal development has been most positively influenced by the martial arts?

I thought **karate** was a tremendous martial art, but I learned dignity from the training I received in **iaido**. My introduction to sword training was definitely the most powerful influence on my development as a person. The **principles of swordsmanship** teach that ideals are more important than money or power.

What drew you to Southern California in the 1970s?

My teacher had a branch *dojo* here in California. My dream was to teach Japanese culture and martial arts to the rest of the world in order to promote better understanding and world peace. California seemed like the perfect opportunity for me to start my mission.



*Masayuki Shimabukuro
(Photo by Rick Hustead)*

What's your biggest challenge as a teacher?

I want to be everyone's friend, but students do not understand the student/teacher relationship. It is difficult for Westerners to separate the kindness of a teacher from the kindness of a friend. Students do not understand their obligations as students and the necessity to carry on the tradition in the proper samurai way.

If there's one thing you'd like readers to take away from your DVD series, Samurai Swordsmanship, what would that be?

If they respect the sword, they will develop the spirit of the samurai. The *katana* has a special power to change people and lead them to understand **bushido**.

What does the future hold for you?

I will continue to help all martial artists by traveling and teaching. I am looking forward to meeting many new people and developing new relationships.

Any closing thoughts?

Culture and history are very important. You cannot [execute] correct swordsmanship without a correct teacher or without a true lineage. If you become like the samurai, you carry the same attitude. Swordsmanship is not like other arts. Other arts were not built around bushido. The sword teaches bushido.