

Kounji/JP, Shotokan Ohshima Dojo Tokyo -historical mile stones

In the summer of 2002 Shotokan Spain celebrated its 20th anniversary in Malaga.

In these kinds of celebration events Ohshima Sensei used one day for Yodan and Godan tests, for the candidates from all over the world.

In the line of Judges Ono Sempai and me were seating next to each other. Just before the Dan test was started, I told Ono Sempai that I would like to open Dojo in Tokyo and I'm asking his advice and support.

Ono San was very surprised, he was a businessman, and I was Israeli Parliament Member and he wondered how I'm intending to fulfill this not realistic idea.

I explained that I'm not intending to continue with Politics [not my life style], and that from next year I'll continue my business life, so will visit Japan for 10-14 days every month, so if we open a dojo I can teach 3-4 times every month and Ono San can do the same.

Ono San was thinking for a while and then said: "It's possible, we can nominate one student, advanced black belts from Waseda Karate club to be responsible for the Dojo and he can complete the other days that we will not be able to teach.

And that moment I didn't have the slightest idea that I'm going to serve, 14 months later, as the Israeli Ambassador in Japan.

2 months later I was offered by the Israeli foreign Minister Mr.Silvan Shalom and the prime Minister Ariel Sharon to serve as an Ambassador in one of the important countries in the world, and I agreed only if it will be Japan.

On 1st of January 2004 my wife Tzvia and me arrived in Tokyo.

During the first week I met many Japanese friends and asked them to support me in this important mission, to bring our 2 nations and people close to each other as much as possible, in every aspect of our lives.

Among my many requests I asked them to find a place where I can open a Karate Dojo.

Doi Kenichi San, a good friend and a business partner approached the Monk of Kounji Temple in Roppongi, Takayama Sensei, and he agreed to rent us the temple for every Sunday from 15:00-18:00/19:00 for a symbolic price of 5,000 yen per each Sunday we will use the Temple.

I consulted with Ono Sempai, and he promised to help and teach himself whenever I will not be able to teach. Also, we thought that it would be appropriate to have a formal opening

ceremony, with guests and demonstrations. The date of opening was decided: April 4th, 2004.

After we decided about the date, I called Sensei Ohshima to inform him about the opening and told him that we will call the dojo:” Shotokan Ohshima Dojo Kounji”.

Sensei Ohshima immediately objected and said: “You can’t call it Ohshima Dojo”.

My answer was simple: “Sensei, there are so many schools of Shotokan in Japan, they split again and again, so I must identify the Dojo as a student of Ohshima Sensei”.

Ohshima Sensei accepted the logic, but added: “If you use my name, I must attend the opening”.

“Of course “, I answered and smiled [Sensei couldn’t see my smiling face], and said to myself: “Mission accomplished”.

Ono Sempai arranged all the list of the Karate Guests, ask Hamaoka San to arrange a demonstration. And the Embassy sent the Formal invitation.

The security people from Japan and Israel told us that since they don’t know all the guests they must create a security check system before the people enter to the courtyard of the Temple. At the beginning, as a new Ambassador, I was worried that people will be offended, but the opposite happened; the people respected the formal and responsible attitude of the security of the Japanese and Israeli professional and respectful approach.

After Ohshima Sensei gave his speech, Hamaoka San demonstrated Jion Kata. And lead kids practice and Ono Sempai and I demonstrated Jiyu Ippon Kumite.

I wasn’t familiar with all the guests. There were many senior Karateka from Waseda and Keio universities and probably other universities. Japan’s foreign ministry guests [that were very surprised by the idea that an Israeli Ambassador is opening a Karate Dojo in Japan], the embassy people and few Japanese personal friends as well.

During the first year Ono Sempai really helped in teaching when I wasn’t in Tokyo, but in the second year he became very busy and was also busy on Sundays, since he was asked to be the main teacher of the Karate club in Waseda and Hamaoka San became the teacher while I wasn’t available.

From the beginning we had 2 groups: kids from 15:00-16:00 and adults from 16:30-18:00.

We were practicing on the carpet of the temple, and I was worried that we will destroy it, so I used Embassy connection, and we bought mattresses from China, paying from my salary

from the ministry. Also paid this way in order to show to all the ministry workers in Japan and Israel that I'm not getting profit, but the opposite, I subsidize the expenses of the Dojo.

Those mattresses were horrible, all the time moving, we had to stick them by tapes.

One Sunday, when I arrived late to the dojo [around 17:00], coming directly from a Gashuku of Iai-Do in Kashima. I asked Hamaoka San brothers [Yoichiro and Satoshi] to wait for me, in order that I'll prepare them for Sandan and Shodan tests in America. I was surprised to see 3 Karateka waiting for me to join the practice; 2 Israelis Sandan and Rokudan and their Japanese teacher _____ Hachi-Dan.

Few months before I invited the Israeli Sandan to join our practice and he came without notice together with Israeli Teacher [karate friend of me from Israel], and their Japanese teacher. Who was before in JKA and even faced Ono Sempai in the Universities tournaments finales, long time ago [Ono San won of course], but later he split from JKA and created his own Federation.

Of course, I suggested them to join, and explained that the practice will focus on Shodan and Sandan material for test.

The Hachidan didn't join the practice and sat in Seiza for more than one hour watching the practice very seriously.

After the practice he asked me if the Torite, which we practiced is Eli Cohen style, since he never saw it before.

I was very surprised to hear that and explained that it is a basic practice in Shotokan Ohshima school and that is why it is part of the Sandan test.

He noted that the tatami was all the time moving and told me that just recently he changed the tatami in his own dojo and has the old tatami in a very good shape, if I need.

Few days later we met at the Embassy, and he brought 4 samples of his old tatami to show me the quality. I told him it looks very good and asked how much I shall pay him. He answered that I already paid by teaching him something very important in the Karate and Budo world.

Since then, our old Tatami became punching bags [folded], and we used the new tatami until we moved to JP dojo.

The Temple was destroyed around 2007, in order to build a large building, and we moved with the temple to its temporary location on the 6th floor of a building, not far from the old temple.

Every few weeks Takayama sensei had more staff to put into the large room that we used as our Dojo so the dojo shrank from practice to practice. We had to look for another location.

Nevertheless, we practice in this location long enough, and even had the visit of Ohshima Sensei, that observed the practice and gave guidance to our dojo members.

We had also few episodes in the dojo with some “strange” guests from Israel, Palestinians, Israelis and Japanese PKS [Peace Kids Soccer], Koreans [taekwondo] and Japanese, that came to practice with us, sometimes just from curiosity or real interest and sometimes just to check if we are real karateka.

Let me mention only one episode with a famous Kyokushin Champion, he told me that he also practiced Shotokan with an Italian friend. He had some nick name, something like “kick Kill”, maybe because he used his very strong Gedan Mawashigeri [to the thigh level].

I asked Hamaoka San to practice with him, but finally I practiced personally with him, in order to respect him as a champion and as a guest in our Dojo.

After returning to Sendai, he wrote to me that we are practicing real way of Karate and that he learned a lot. After some time, when I visited Sendai, I joined his dojo and lead practice to his young adults’ group. I think they enjoyed.

Next to the Embassy of Israel [one minute walk], next Kojimachi station, a good friend of mine, Takayama Kaicho, had a security company JP [Japan Protection] and a building with a beautiful Dojo in the second floor.

Takayama Kaicho was introduced to me, while I was Ambassador, by Kase Hideaki Sensei, a writer, philosopher and Ideological leader in Japan, that loved Israel and helped me a lot in my mission as Ambassador. He passed away in 2023.

I asked Kase Sensei to ask Takayama Kaicho if we can rent the dojo for Sunday practices between 16:00-18:00.

Takayama Kaicho said that he will be happy to help us and decided to take the same rent payment as Kounji.

During the first years it was very complicated. Mako Tezuka San, our first secretary of the dojo had to arrange for each dojo member a card with a picture, as if we were workers at JP company. Name of guests had to be provided in advanced and Mako San was very strict and kept very good relations with the employees of JP and Takayama Kaicho. When Mako San became little bit sick Kito Makoto San, that was already the treasurer of the Dojo, agreed to take full responsibility and became treasurer and Secretary of our Dojo.

luckily JP management finally trusted us enough, letting us to enter without any document and invite guest with our approval.

During the years, the friendship with Takayama Kaicho became stronger. And when we asked him, he could arranged 4 very Special Sumo tickets [Sunakaburi] for Ohshima Sensei and his friends in September 2016. After Sadogatake Beya told us it's very difficult, so I called Kito San from America and asked him to ask Takayama Kaicho to help.

The year passed very fast and the Kids of the first years in the Dojo became young adults and the few new kids had to join the adult group, so finally, without promotion, 15:00-16:00 became a free time practice and adults' practice became a little bit longer [16:00- 18:00], according to Yamada San request.

Nihonbashi dojo that was created by Jim Sagawa Sempai and continued to be led by Hamaoka San was closed and Takayama Kaicho agreed that they can use the Dojo and practice on the same day as original, Monday from 19:00-21:00.

Nevertheless, Kyu tests, end and new year events and Gashuku we always did together. For me it was the same Dojo, but somehow the karateka of Nihonbashi Dojo liked to keep their name and identity, so I respected their wish.

Dojo members succeeded to cross over the Corona virus period, practicing mainly at home using Zoom guidance, mainly by Yamada San that became Godan,

After the corona time Yamada San became busy at work and as a young father, and Yamabobe San took the lead and opened also a Saturday morning beginners practice. So, the Dojo today has 3 following days for practice.

Hope that the members and leaders of the Dojo will finally make some serious promotion activities and bring many new happy members.

But, Much more exciting will be to see our "old" members of the dojo, the Adults, the "Kids" and their families, like: Hamaoka+brother, Mako, Itanami+Son&daughter, Maika+mother, Rosenthal+son&daughter, Shimizu's daughter, Ogino+son, Kito's daughter, Samuel Thomas+mother, Alex, and also some Waseda karate Bu members that used to visit and help in the dojo like Akiyoshi San and others that I forgot [getting old]. It will be a great reunion. Of course I didn't mention the members that practice these dsys in our dojo or in CXosmus center or Waseda Karate bu. Only the one that we didnt see for long time.

I don't think that the young and adults' members from Israeli Embassy will be available, but It will be very nice to send them invitation wherever they are in the world [they were all foreign ministry workers and maybe still are].

Our Dojo always gave the warm feeling of family members. Nevertheless, we always kept strong and serious practice that effects, positively, our daily life.

Hope that the Dojo will always keep the strong and Harmonious spirit among and between each of the members, so we can meet again in this and the next anniversary, happy, healthy with a strong mentality and Harmony.

With love, respect and friendship.

Eli Eliyahu Cohen