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ABOUT UCHIDESHI 内弟子 (LIVE-IN DISCIPLE)

In the Karate world, for a true practitioner of Karatedō (empty-handed Way), there is a term known as Uchideshi, which literally means: “live-in disciple” at or in a dōjō or karate school; *uchi* means ‘inside’ and *deshi* means ‘disciple’; and its origins pertain to one who wishes to become a Shihan’s/Sensei’s (Master/Teacher) apprentice. Traditionally, one, usually from Japan, writes a letter to a Shihan/Sensei of a style to express one’s desire to become a practitioner. One also has to buttress one’s reasons for one’s aspirations or endeavor into the Martial Arts or Karatedō.

A Shihan/Sensei, upon receiving the letter would then read it and, if interested write back to the hopeful and set up an interview or have discourse at length via the phone. The Shihan/Sensei interviews the hopeful to ascertain the true reasoning of one desiring this type of life-long commitment.

Typically, “Uchideshi-ship” is generally 4-5 years, but at the beginning, it was 8-10 years. But nowadays, that is too long for most, especially for one who is not rooted in the Japanese culture. Henceforth, a 4-5 year stint or agreement is acceptable or mandated, in which one pays anywhere from \$2,000 to \$5,000 per year, upfront, and signs a contract with the accepting Shihan or Sensei. This is a non-refundable agreement, which is stated within the contract. However, an amendment can be made, in which the contractee (signee) and said Shihan/Sensei can negotiate a different monetary agreement, depending upon the situation.

Subsequently if one is accepted as an Uchideshi, one has agreed to the responsibility of training in all classes, and to the overall cleanliness and maintenance of the dōjō, as well as cooking for their Shihan/Sensei (and if there are multiple Uchideshis, then they rotate the cooking responsibilities), answering phones and providing customer service, including membership information to potential students (i.e., learning the business aspect of it as well), plus, assist in all organizational events, such as promotion tests, demonstrations, and special clinics. Furthermore, Uchideshi have to teach (once they become a black belt), and usually have to fight in knockdown tournaments, which test their spirit and demonstrates their commitment to Karatedō. However, at first, they typically fight in semi-knockdown tournament first, before fighting full-knockdown.

If one is not partaking in all of the above mentioned aspects, then one is NOT an Uchideshi. Suffice it to say, truly being an Uchideshi is about one’s commitment to oneself and one’s Master/Sensei. As an Uchideshi one trains, takes care of the dōjō, and competes or fights (kumite), representing one’s Master/Sensei and the style. All of the aforesaid is imperative and missing any of the components is undermining the term Uchideshi and insulting all of those that came before one, regardless of it being another style or era. That is irrelevant. Uchideshi is Uchideshi, period. And if you do not adhere to the above mentioned protocols, then to reiterate, one is insulting the spirits of all those that came before one and is thus, pretending to be an Uchideshi, which is therefore, dishonorable and therefore, NOT Karatedō or being a Karateka, to say the least.

Additionally, one also has to partake in conditioning (the physicality) of the body or body-parts, such as the hands, feet, and shins. One uses Makiwara (padded post or sandbag to strike) training, which is not used by a typical student, since this is harder and more focused type of training as well as painful, not to mention time consuming. One's fist (seiken), palm (sho), knife edge of hand (shuto), heel (kakato), ball of foot (chusoku), knife edge of foot (sokuto), and shin (sune) are the body-parts that one conditions during their tenure as an Uchideshi.

Other aspects are Buddhism as well; i.e., one learns Zazen (meditation) in the form of Mokushō (to meditate) and Nembutsu (to chant) the Daimoku (oral recitation). This is to underscore the importance and essentially spirit of Karatedō and is why so many Rōnins (feudal Samurais) practiced Buddhism as well as sought counsel from Monks, one famous one is Takuan Sōhō of the Edo period who counseled Miyamoto Musashi, Yagyū Munenori, and Yamamoto Tsunemoto. Furthermore, one engrosses oneself intellectually as well; e.g., one reads literature on or about Buddhism, its origins, its venerable masters, and its tenets, such as Shikantaza ("just sit") and Fukuan Zazengi (one's commitment to meditation or Zazen/Shikantaza) as prescribed by venerable Dōgen Zenji of the Sōtō Sect and Mahāyāna Buddhism, which means literally: "Great Vehicle"; so, that one can apply their teachings, adages or maxims into one's life, and thus, transcend oneself.

Suffice it to say, Buddhism is a huge aspect of being an Uchideshi. One has to learn the philosophy and immerse oneself into it to be a true Karateka (practitioner) of the Martial Arts. Virtually all true Shihans/Senseis either are practicing Buddhists, as Sosai Mas Oyama (founder of Kyokushinkai Kan Karate) as well as his protegee Shigeru Oyama of World Oyama Karate and Kaichō Nakamura of Seido Karate, in which they have numerous decades of practicing Zazen (Buddhist meditation) and Nembutsu (chanting) to coalesce one's mind, body, and spirit as well as engaging in Japanese Calligraphy or Shodō. This allows one to experience (dharma) Kenshō or Samādhi (awakening or enlightenment) via one's dedicated practice.

And via Zazen and Kōans (written documents that "unlock" one's discriminatory thinking or abstract reality), one learns to not be consumed in delusional (abstract thoughts) and learns to let go instead of holding onto them (i.e., ruminating) during Shikantaza. Thus, the usage of both allows one to "see" True Reality and not the abstract one that most live in and refer to as "real"; because it is not. The object of meditation (Zazen) is to free one's mind, i.e., to see one's Original Face or True Nature and this can only be achieved via Zazen and Kōans (the reading of and understanding). This manifests one to become balanced and/or find the Middle Way or the Two Truths.

Moreover, as a Buddhist, one can become a Bodhisattva, which is one who vows to save all sentient beings, which means to help others break the chains of abstract reality and to understand Universality or Interconnectedness, e.g., non-duality; i.e., that there is no subject-object perspective, which is discriminatory abstract thought. Hence, the Bodhisattva (awakening being: a person who lives being guided by the vow to help all beings awaken) demonstrates their Four Vows, which are: (1) *"Beings are numberless, I vow to free them;* (2) *Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them;* (3) *Dharma gates are boundless, I vow to enter them;* (4) *Buddha's Way is unsurpassable, I vow to*

realize it. And the Four Dharma Seals are: Everything contains suffering; everything is impermanent; everything lacks independent existence, and nirvana is tranquility.

The aforesaid is paramount for one in Karatedō; i.e., one has to become one with these Vows and Seals and truly demonstrate them by knowing (manifesting) them and not trying to do them; when one does that, then one is still delusional and therefore lost in abstract reality. *“It is the very mind itself, that leads the mind astray; of the mind, do not be mindless,”* Takuan Sōhō (1573–1645: Buddhist Monk). That is why Zazen and Nembutsu and the readings of Kōans is essential; one cannot attain any enlightenment without the above mentioned practices. They will lead to “Opening the Hand of Thought,” Kōshō Uchiyama (1912-1998: Buddhist Monk) and “Dropping off Body and Mind,” Dōgen Zenji (1200-1253: Buddhist Monk).

Accordingly, with the above implemented in one’s Uchideshi-ship, one will attain a high understanding not just in Karatedō, but also in life, which is why Karatedō is called that; i.e., the Empty-handed Way, which reinforces one’s path or road that one is on, like a journey. And by practicing in this manner, one will remove one’s Ego, which is essentially what Karatedō is supposed to manifest, i.e., one’s Ego becomes irrelevant and moot. And in its place is one who sees others as a reflection of oneself and thus, one helps and gives love and compassion outwardly instead of harboring it for erosional gain or fulfilling materialistic desires.

This why taking care of the dōjō is imperative, it allows one to remove one’s Ego and promote humility and humbleness in its place. So, everything that one does, encounters, and engages in is to promote humility and venerable perspectives towards oneself that is transcend onto others. Additionally, as one is partaking in these virtues and Way or Dō, one is promoted on a faster level than regular Gakuseis (students) or Dehsis (disciples) due to the all-day training, which includes the already mentioned regular classes as well as conditions and private lessons or instructing by said Master or Sensei.

Subsequently, after 4-5 years (at least) the apprenticeship can be over unless the Uchideshi wishes to continue for a few more years. Nevertheless, at the completion of one’s Uchideshi-ship, one usually opens a dōjō oneself and carries on what they have learned and thus, instills it within their Gakuseis. This creates a legacy and pays homage to one’s Shihan/Sensei.

DICTION IN JAPANESE KANJI

Buddhism 仏教

Daimoku 題目

Dōjō 道場

Fukan Zazengi 普勸坐禅儀

Karatedō 空手道

Karateka 空手家

Kenshō 見性

Kōan 公案

Kumite 組手

Makiwara 卷藁

Mokusō 黙想

Nembutsu 念仏

Samadhi समाधि

Seiyaku(Oath/Vow) 誓約

Sensei 先生

Shihan 師範

Shikantaza 只管打坐

Sōtō Sect 曹洞宗

Uchdeshi 内弟子

Zazen坐禅

Dōgen Zenji 道元禪師, also Dōgen Kigen 道元希玄, or Eihei Dōgen 永平道元 - Sōtō School of Zen

Takuan Sōhō 沢庵 宗彭 - Rinzai School of Zen Buddhism

Uchiyama Kōshō 内山 興正 Sōtō priest, the former abbot of Antaiji near Kyōto Japan and disciple of

Kōdō Sawaki 沢木 興道 (1880-1965) a monk at Eihei-ji, one of the two main temples of Sōtō Zen