

## **Professor Nakamichi's Dojo**

In a sequel to my fantasy trilogy *The Shangrilla Artifacts*, titled *An Atlantis of One*, one of the characters in the book is the Japanese-American Sensei who narrates sections of *The Shangrilla Artifacts* and currently is acting as a visiting professor at a prestigious college. He explains what his dojo means to him, or more generically what a dojo can mean to us.

In the dojo, senior students help their juniors as a matter of course, and almost everyone is senior to someone else. Students are polite to each other, and rather than feel burdened by formalities, use them to lubricate interchanges. And they train with a purpose. That purpose may differ from person to person, but the means of realizing that purpose is the traditional martial art they study. As Sensei Nakamichi, I am both their guide and their role model. In order to live up to that responsibility, I keep myself in shape, keep investigating the details of my art, and try to make decisions that are both ethical and beneficial to all.

My position gives me a source of respect and of human connection. Certainly college teaching does a similar thing, but I am new to that and, although I may be the consummate expert about the ancient tale I made into a novel [*The Shangrilla Artifacts*], I do not have the same forty years experience that the martial arts has afforded me.

In addition to providing a sense of importance and even affection, the dojo offers a dependable society, a variety of training experiences, a channel for growth, and a sense of contribution. It also offers a side benefit few people recognize: it presents me with analogies. I find that, put into a training situation, one's actions or attitudes can be analogous to actions and attitudes in common life.

Take for example the simple idea of proper posture in performing a karate kata: hips should be tucked, back should be straight, eyes forward, and legs semi-tense. Such posture creates a state of mind, called *zanshin* in Japanese *budo*, in which it is difficult to be lazy or depressed. If one takes the correct posture perfunctorily, it is no longer correct. A little change of plumb line or tension will serve to recapture the desired mental attitude. That attitude, in turn, helps one complete the kata with good posture, a posture that has a functional application in self-defense. In other words,

the art itself uses the mind-body link to subconsciously affect the practitioner.

Of course this fictional character shares part of his genetic code with mine, but he is not exactly me. Neither would he expect anyone reading this to conform exactly to his ideals (or to mine, for that matter). Rather, I would suggest that you step back for a moment and consider what you might have written about the dojo if *you* were to design such a character. What would you say the dojo means to you?