

# Sensei

**In karate-do this title sensei is bestowed on someone that has achieved great skill in the art, and sharing their knowledge in a proper and effective way.**

**'Many martial artists have ambitions of becoming a Sensei!'**

This is a Japanese title that is used to address teachers, professionals and figures of authority such as lawyers, doctors, and politicians, leaders of groups such as in Martial arts, music and other art forms. It is not a title that belongs only to instructors of the martial arts world.

According to eastern teachings and philosophy the title Sensei of martial arts is same in meaning as Guru or Sifu. Whoever has this title bestowed on them have a special role of sharing knowledge that enlightens those in need of such information or training.

In karate-do, this title is bestowed on someone that has achieved great skill in the art and also great ability of sharing this knowledge in a proper and effective way. In Japan, the title goes after the name such as Yamaguchi Sensei or Sakamoto Sensei. A sensei title is not an automatic title for someone that has achieved a certain level of skill. Many traditional schools ordain their teachers into these roles. A title such as this can be removed if teachers break rules and behave in a way that brings bad repute to an organization or show disloyalty to an organization or behaves in a way of disrespect to those above in the chain of command.

In western society, many martial arts schools use this title loosely and some schools even go to the extent of giving this title to people of kyu(class) grade – unheard of in the traditional Japanese system. It's like giving a title of teacher to a primary or high school student. In traditional schools, it is a privileged title of a Sandan. In special circumstances, some leaders will give this title to nidan and shodan grades. What is important in all of this is that these instructors chosen can fulfill their duties as teachers.

## What makes a Sensei?

A sensei has an important role to play and that is to enlighten those in need of knowledge. They have great responsibilities and duties. A sensei must lead by example, show loyalty, humility, kindness, modesty and good manners. All this is important because students follow teachers. My teacher once said, "If one student is bad, only that student is affected, however, if one teacher is bad, hundreds of students are spoilt."

### About the author

Article by Kancho Deena Naidu direct student of the great Gogen Yamaguchi Sensei and graduate of the Japan karate-do college of Tokyo.

## The role of a Teacher

A teacher role is similar in a number of ways as that of a parent. Students are followers and will perform what is being taught or instructed to do. So, a teacher role is crucial in the development of the student, not only in knowledge but also behaviour. Every one remembers good teachers that are good role models, mentors and motivators. Learning is a result gained by interest, need and proper direction.

Many martial artists have ambitions of becoming a Sensei. In my opinion, before taking such a significant role, it is important to firstly consider ones own development in all avenues. I put out a quiz that maybe useful, ask yourself before taking this role:-

- > Am I learned enough to teach the physical aspects of the art?
- > Do I have a sound mind to guide others?
- > Am I of good character or am I intent on improving myself?
- > Do I truly feel that I can teach students so that they can feel safe and confident?
- > Have I the necessary qualifications?
- > Is becoming a Sensei just an ego trip?
- > Am I truly interested in helping people?
- > Am I a loyal and trusting person?

If you have one no I suggest improve before taking on the role. Many do not realise that karatedo requires the development of the physical, mental and spiritual. Spirituality in karate-do has nothing to do with religion. Spirituality refers to the life force within our being called spirit or life. So spirituality is the development of your own life in terms of tolerance, love, compassion, non violence and kindness. To do this we must firstly get rid of any of the six dark angels that often blocks our path or are constantly influencing our minds in a negative way. These are greed, anger, hate, lust, envy and jealousy. The leader of all these is the ego.

Each and every dojo has their own prerequisites of who can teach and who cannot. These thoughts are just my view and it is not a standard that everybody need follow.

## Ethical responsibilities of a Sensei

The importance of values and virtues in the art is something that is not addressed by many teachers, in particular defensive arts such as karate, taekwondo etc. Our responsibilities as teachers, in dealing with people are to promote good values.

Defensive arts for self preservation have been created so that good people protect themselves. Values and virtues were taught by teachers, in the



past and some in the present, so that people remain good and those who have wicked ways change for the better. Every good martial arts school is posed on upholding discipline, teaching students about self control and helping them with their confidence.

Senseis must be properly trained and hand picked to do the job. Teachers must have a strong commitment to bring students lives to a better level. I believe in the quality of life. This life has been given to us once in this body and it deserves the best life can offer by the virtue of being alive and being born human. I believe that with the right training and correct understanding of life, our responsibilities in our roles can bring the best change possible. If most people act out their roles irresponsibly then everything will fall apart. Much thought must be given by teachers, coaches, team players and individuals about making a difference, not only to their own lives but those around them. We need to be thinking 'How can I make a difference to my self and to the lives of others for the better? It is the constant self examining in this positive frame of mind that will help us all move in the right direction. We do not need to do anything more than just following the rules of whatever we do.

Every Sensei or shihan that I talk to says that they want to have a group that are team players and who follow the rules and who have good discipline and character. It is the role of the teacher that can do this. The teacher is the beacon of light that help those who follow to move in the right direction. First the teacher or Instructor has to lead by example. The saying 'Do as I tell you and not as I do' is one of the worse instructions one could give. 'Do as I do' is what has to be said.

Finally, in the world we live in, I believe that we as humans belong to one family. What is special about this life is that we are all made different externally but have the uniqueness of being the same in terms of having a body, a mind and Life. Bodies are different to each other, minds have the freedom to think according to its understanding and choices, and life is an energy component that is from one source. It is only bodies and minds that make us all separate individuals.

We live with each other, guide each other, play with one another and learn from each other, so it our duty to do what is right. This is our responsibility as a human being. The legal aspect is following the laws that govern us. We are obligated by law to do what is right. And finally we do what is ethical because it is part of the human consciousness. If we move away from these things we will be hurting ourselves and others.

A sensei is a true devotee of a system he/she belongs too and must be prepared to practice what they preach and most importantly follow the laws of life that govern us all.

**'We need to be thinking "How can I make a difference to my self and to the lives of the others for the better"!'**