



SPIRIT
BY JOANNA YAMAMOTO

A SAMURAI AND THE CHURCHES

The first time I saw Masahiro Oki he was dressed in Japanese kimono and demonstrating kendo in the lobby of a New York University lecture hall. The first time I met him he was in Japanese underwear giving corrective exercise on the carpet of the Boston Zen Yoga Dojo. In New York I was awed by him, in Boston I was charmed. It had come for a private consultation during which he laughed at me, told me I was too fat (no news) and needed a boyfriend (also no news). When he gave me the series of exercises, I started laughing too. The session ended with some acupuncture needles down my spine, which got me crying, not because they hurt, they didn't, but because he had tapped a deep well-spring of my excesses. I liked him for that and thought I really ought to go home and follow his directions, but I didn't. A month later I sent an apology, packed my suitcase, and went to his dojo in Japan where I hoped to encounter discipline. I planned to go for four months, get thin, and cure my eyesight. I returned two years later, much thinner, my eyes still poor, but seeing more clearly.

Masahiro Oki is unique even in Japan. He knows a great deal—martial arts, cultural arts, Oriental medicine, Western medicine, natural foods, philosophy, science, languages, TV shows, and the Emperor of Japan. But unless it be religion, he has no specialty. He teaches how to live the life natural to a human being, which he calls Yoga. Masahiro Oki is himself a kind of artist, he says an actor. Although just slightly taller than average Japanese size, he seems bigger than life. His body is soft, his mind quick, and his character good. When not seen, he can be felt; when seen, he's not seen through, until he's with a child. Then the man reveals transparency. To him, children are not invisible, and his relationship to them is as with little brothers and sisters, not dolls or objects. Probably discounting his elder friends, Buddha, Jesus, and Gandhi, he now most enjoys the company of children.

In years past his students have been in all states of mental and physical health. Lately they are Japanese youths and a few foreigners. They come to

study at his dojo because it's perhaps one of the only places left to experience the kind of mind that created the Orient. When he teaches, Masahiro Oki bears a *shinai* (wooden training sword) with which he cracks legs, heads, backs—whatever needs waking up. He travels in the tradition of the Zen Master: to walk softly, carry a big stick, and shout with a full voice. During his *kyokaho* (strengthening exercise class) he uses the *shinai* and his own power and spontaneous inventiveness to push people beyond their expected limitations. His aim is not to build muscular bodies but to free minds. His interest is not in levels of achievement but in people doing what they think is too difficult. He calls his system Moving Zen.

"Dekimasen" (I cannot) is a forbidden phrase. Oki believes that everyone can do some level of everything.

There's a story of how he took a group to the foot of a mountain where stone steps spiraled high up the gate of a monastery. He said, "Run to the top." Everybody gasped, "Dekimasen". Oki walked away. The students stood around looking at the steps and themselves, feeling ashamed. A few finally hurried after Oki, apologized, and asked him to please come back. He did. Everybody started running up the steps. Some made it running, some running and walking, some didn't make it at all. But everybody climbed the mountain, whether they did or didn't. Oki teaches that change comes by the process, not the completion.

His means of education is through daily life. He is always checking, especially the customs, behavior, and thinking of his student staff. If a shirt is dirty, he asks, "Why do you dress like that?"



Masahiro Oki, once jailed with the Ayatollah's father

If someone makes noise, "Why do you move that way?" If a person misses a meeting, "Why didn't you come?" The fellow might answer, "I was busy cleaning the office." Oki inquires, "Did you want to come?" He thinks, "No, I didn't really want to." His answer was a lie. Selfishness shows up in many guises. If a teacup is used as an ashtray, its life has been taken. If the nature of anything—an electric saw, the air, a plant, or a person—is not respected, it can be killed or kill. Killing is done recklessly, unconsciously with only an attitude, a word, without caring. By insisting upon what is appropriate, Oki helps make us become more deserving of the epithet, "made in the image and likeness of God."

Following is an interview with Masahiro Oki by Sherman Goldman.

EWJ: Many people in America are now worried about energy and fuel. I wonder if you think this is the end of modern civilization?

MO: No, I don't think so, because one of the main characteristics of a human being is the heaven-sent ability to create. So when we face something difficult, another idea is always emerging. But even though we have this ability, nowadays people all over the world are misusing material, not only oil. Yoga teaches that everything in life is God. If we understand that oil is God, we must use oil in a divine way. But people are wasting oil; that's why we are suffering. We must think that oil is God, water is God, life is God.

EWJ: Why do people forget that?

MO: Materialism. People are now educated to think about money. For example, parents say to children, "Please study hard. If you do not, you cannot pass the examinations. If you cannot graduate, you will not get a degree or certificate." That certificate is for money only. Not only in America but all over the world, from childhood people are thinking only money, money, money. Do you think people are being educated to respect, love, help, and have a grateful attitude? Never. Nobody now is getting such an education from childhood.

EWJ: Most young people go to school and get a degree in order to have economic security, but a few say, "No, that's not the true way." What's your view of that difference?

MO: Please think, we are human be-

ings and human animals. Fifty/fifty. Half-material/half-spiritual training is necessary. Without money we cannot live, so we should have ability to make enough money for ourselves. But 50 percent of our energy should be devoted to the spiritual way.

EWJ: I understand you are going to visit Iran; what is your view of the Shah and the Ayatollah?

MO: Khomeini's father and I were in jail together. I never met his son the Ayatollah. But there are two points about the Shah. One, he civilized modern Iran; this point is very good. But two, he forgot about the mind of the Iranians. The upper class people were very well off, but the lower classes got nothing. People want modern civilization, but when they cannot get any benefit from it—what's the use? Only a few people are benefiting from modern civilization. Everybody has the same life for living. We cannot talk about discrimination in life. But most upper class people like the Shah want money, so they are always fighting.

EWJ: The Ayatollah is a very devout believer in Islam. Islam is one religion. He says, "Let's follow the Islamic way." But there are many religions. If everybody goes back to his or her own traditions, that won't make peace, because each religion says its way is best.

MO: Religion is one word, but how people understand religion is very different. Religion means united with God. Buddha never used the name of God. He taught us that we must follow Universal Law; that we call Dharma. The same with Christ. I never saw a real Christian. What is the difference between Christ and the Christian Church? The Church and priests are corrupt. Christ taught us God is inside; he never said God is outside. But Christian priests are maintaining a business mind. They teach that God is outside, Christ is the Savior, and the priests are between the individual and God. So if you want to go to Heaven, please come to Church, listen to my lecture, believe in the Holy Ghost. Still, among religions, Islam and Judaism are very different from the rest. Do you know what is that difference?

EWJ: As a Jew I can say that Judaism is not really a religion in the sense of a belief system. It doesn't matter so much in Judaism what you believe, only what you do; it's a way of life.

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... A SAMURAI

MO: Yes, Judaism and Islam teach the rule of life. They are very similar. Christianity originated from Judaism. Islam is a mixture of Christianity and Judaism; that's why it's very good. Judaism and Islam are teaching how to live, so people cannot combine them with other religions. But it's very easy to combine Christianity and Buddhism with other religions. They are only philosophy, thinking; they are not teaching how to live, how to eat, how to see. Judaism can understand the mind of Islam.

EWJ: All religions, Judaism, Christianity, or whatever, are getting weaker and weaker now.

MO: Of course, because they are not teaching real religion. For example, Judaism originated from the Vedic teachings and Zoroastrianism, which teaches yin/yang philosophy. The messianic idea is from Vedic philosophy. Yoga, meaning the union of Sun and Moon, is also yin/yang philosophy. Many people think yin/yang philosophy originated from China—nonsense. Do you know the meaning of "El"?

EWJ: God.

MO: It means only One. From El came Jehovah and Allah. Jehovah, El, Allah—they're all the same God—One, Oneness. One is authority. One is God. What is El? Universal law, which is natural law. What is God? Natural law, universal law. The name of every religious sect is different, but they are teaching the same thing. Quarrelling between the sects is nonsense. Everybody believes in this El. It's very funny. Why are they quarrelling? It's like this—we are born with the same father and mother, but brothers and sisters quarrel. Why? Father and mother are one, only the number of brothers and sisters is different, that's all.

EWJ: Why do they fight?

MO: Because of their business mind. When we keep a business mind, we must fight. One side must be the winner. The defeated cannot make money.

EWJ: What is the origin of the business mind? Why do some people have that selfish way of thinking?

MO: Selfishness is what I call animal mind. Selfishness and ego have the same meaning. Attachment, too.

EWJ: Modern education openly or subtly teaches people to be selfish. Religious or more traditional education tries to teach people that everything is spirit, but it hasn't succeeded. What can we do if the one is destructive but the other doesn't seem practical?

MO: The most important subject now is education. Until now all over the world people have been incorrectly educated. So-called educated people are misusing knowledge. A doctor wants to make money with science. Mechanically trained people want to make money with technique. A farmer is not an agriculturist anymore because he is growing vegetables for business. Everybody is in business, even schoolteachers. Do you think a schoolteacher wants to teach real education? He wants to get money, that's all. Priests also want to get money. Everybody—money, money, money. There are very few who really understand life.

EWJ: That's my question. Why so few?

MO: It depends upon the parents. From my parents I received good influences since babyhood. They took me to temples and churches and told me stories about saints. They never said, "This is religion." Many neighborhood children and animals came to our house to eat and sleep. Most people have a dog or cat as a pet, but at my house, my father and mother were keeping pigs, chickens, rabbits, dogs, and it was my job to go to the bath with a pig—today a pig, the next day a cat. Also, my father gave me a small garden when I was three years old, and everyday I went there to take care of the flowers and vegetables. Such an education makes warmth. For me a dog is not a dog. I feel a dog is my brother or sister, because from babyhood we were playing, eating, and sleeping together.

Also I got education from my parent's attitude, from the atmosphere, not with words. My mother especially demonstrated an attitude before eating food, going to bed, cleaning the room. She never taught me with her mouth. My father also had a gentle attitude. Many people want to educate by speaking words. Do you think you can be successful by speaking words!

My father and mother had many friends, like Georges Ohsawa. I had contact with them. I received influence from many so-called high class people, high not in rank, but in mind. That was not my effort; my father and mother gave me such chances. So I tell my students, "You must make contact with spiritually high people; if you mix with only spiritually low people, you cannot escape." We need two kinds of experience—upper class and lower class, with and without money, selfish and selfless, egoist and egoless, material and spiritual. We need two.

As a child, I was in eight different schools in five years. When I was in grammar school my father told me to go to China. We were living in Korea then. He just said, "Go". After Korea my father transferred me to a Japanese school located in Kyushu. There was a very big garden there with a large statue of the Buddhist reformer Nichiren. My father ordered me, whenever I had time, to go there and watch Nichiren. I didn't want to watch him, but my father gave me a room across from the statue. I was living alone. Every day I went there. I didn't know who that statue was. Many people of the Nichiren Buddhist sect came to chant "Namyo ho rengo kyo." So I asked, "What is 'Namyo ho rengo kyo'?" What is he? What does this mean? I couldn't understand so well, but it was a good influence.

EWJ: The practical education you described is just the opposite of the way most people are educated nowadays.

MO: Yes, and there is overprotection now from everything. I created a kindergarten in Japan to give small children a chance for natural life. But in the beginning the government was against it, because I wanted the children to participate naked—for example, in winter jump into the water—and I made a rule that nobody could come by car, they must come on foot. But many people couldn't understand, not just average people but even the teachers—they thought I was cruel. But now it's hard to get into that school, there are so many applicants.

EWJ: When asked if these crises will be the end of modern civilization, you said, "No, because people can always create with heaven-sent ability." But

nowadays most people are so spoiled—they actually cannot live without air-conditioning, central heating, so many really unnecessary things. How will they survive?

MO: That is why yoga is becoming popular now. It is emphasizing natural life. We shall take away air-conditioning and all the rest. Yoga is promoting natural life. We need two—wild life and civilized life. We must create two kinds of systems—modern and traditional. That we call yin/yang philosophy.

EWJ: Some young people think they should go back to nature and completely forget about modern civilization, forget about technology.

MO: If we escape to only natural life, that promotes animal nature. We are human beings, not animals. So, we need two. If people want to escape from modern life to animal life, they will find it in uninhabited regions of the world. Let them go.

We need two—attached mind and unattached mind. We are human and cannot escape from attached mind. Detached mind is God—do you think a human being can be God? Do you think Jesus was God? Human being! Buddha was God? Only their minds were very pure, that's all.

EWJ: In the beginning you said people use oil and forget that oil and everything else is God. So we should use oil...

MO: In a nice way, useful way.

EWJ: What does that mean?

MO: Using it in the perfect way, because oil also has a life. Oil should be glad for the way it is being used. That is religion. Water is the same; it has a life. If we misuse it, do you think water is glad? That is real religion—let us worship everything: you are God, I am God, oil is God, dog is God, water is God, fire is God. That's yin and yang.

Next month EWJ will present some of Masahiro Oki's yoga exercises for health. This spring there will be an opportunity to study with him at the Sixth International Yoga Teachers' Convention and First World Zen Yoga Congress in Kyoto, Japan. For detailed information on that special event as well as residential training in the Zen Yoga Dojo, Mishima, Japan, please write to: Zen Yoga Arts, Box 49, Allston, MA 02134.

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