

EQUALITY

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On the field of death, it matters not your race, religion, or creed. All that counts is how well you played the game of life. Philosophers in America, from the amateur to the Ph.D., have pondered the equality of men. And to support their hypotheses, they have pointed to the Bill of Rights, the Constitution of the United States, and Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address.

As a young man, the problem of equality had troubled me. In the 1930s, some friends of mine were denied service in a San Francisco restaurant because of their race. In no uncertain fashion, they were made painfully aware of the fangs of racial discrimination.

They were angry. They had never received this sort of treatment in Honolulu where they were born. One of them echoed the thoughts of all: "If it was the Elk's club, I could at least understand," he said. "But, to be kicked out of a public restaurant!"

One day after training with the spear, I mentioned equality to my sensei. Yoshida Kotaro. In particular, I mentioned the incident in San Francisco, a city where such attitudes were not supposed to prevail.

"After birth," my sensei said, "there are two points in life where men are equal: The day you enter a dojo, you are the same as everyone else; you start at the bottom. And the day you are on the field of death, when death embraces you, there is no distinction-you are all the same."

"But what about the law?" I replied. "The Bill of Rights, the Constitution?" "The law is only as good as the conscience of men," my teacher continued. "Look at the heart, not the law. It is in the heart, and as a martial artist you should realize that the hearts of men have not kept up with the law."

He then told me the story about Hozoin Gakuzenbo Inye and a young boy. Hozoin Inye, one of the greatest spear masters Japan ever produced, was finally able to beat Yagyu Muneyoshi in a match. Yagyu Muneyoshi had always managed to beat Inye in previous matches, but now the superiority of Inye was above question. Unfortunately, Inye was so impressed with himself that he became insufferably swell-headed.

One day, a young boy about 17 years of age dropped in at the Hozoin temple and said, "I have come here to learn the spear. I have heard that Gakuzenbo Inye, himself, is giving the lessons and, as he is the best, I want to study under him." The boy was accepted.

Inye treated the boy like something less than human and did everything he could to discourage him. The boy did not say a word but kept on asking for a match, Inye complied. In three days, the boy scored a point once in three matches. In 10 days, he held his own with Inye, and in a month, Inye did not want to enter the dojo; he was becoming afraid of the boy.

One day, the boy approached Inye and said, "I do not think too much of you. You are overrated. I do not see how you beat Yagyu Muneyoshi. I want a real match with you, a shinken-shobu. I shall appear in your garden in five days. Be ready to face death." And he left.

By now Inye had all the cockiness knocked out of him. His head had returned to normal size. He could wear his hat. But he was worried. "Why didn't I care for the boy?" he wondered. "I should have treated him better." Troubled, the night before the match Inye went to his garden with spear in hand, stood at the edge of the pond, and gazed at the water. The image of the boy's face stared back at him from the water. Suddenly, a cloud passed overhead, momentarily blacking out the area, and when the cloud had passed by, Inye saw the reflection of his spear in the water with a cross at the point. Excited, he hastily went to the temple blacksmith and ordered what is known today as the kama-yari -the famous Hozoin spear.

The night of the match came and Inye waited in his garden for the young boy. But the boy did not show up. Instead, one of the monks came forward with a note. "The boy left this for you," the monk said.

Inye opened the note. The boy had written, "Treat all men as humans, with decency and respect. We are not equal in ability or creativity, but we are all human beings. It is what is in the heart that counts. Tonight I am sure you understand. This is my lesson to you. When you realized you were facing death, you became aware of the common denominator where all men are equal. In life, equality lies in the hearts of men."