

## MORE ON MIYAGI

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Whenever I hear of the feats exhibited by some so-called karate experts, Miyagi Chojun comes to my mind. A master of immeasurable skill, Miyagi was regarded as the greatest Okinawan karateka of his time. An extremely quiet man, he was born to nobility in Naha and spent a fortune studying, researching and propagating karate.

Journalist Tokuda Anshu wrote the following account of Miyagi Chojun which I found highly entertaining, revealing and educational: “As a youth, in the year 1928, I became a student of the great karate master Kyan Chotoku. I was then nine years of age and considered it a great honor to train at Kyan’s dojo in Hishagawa.

“One day, to my surprise, I heard that my friend Yamakawa Iwasuke was taking karate from Miyagi Chojun. It was a day I shall always remember. Yamakawa took me to watch him train at Miyagi’s dojo. It was the first time I saw Naha-te. It was so different from Shuri-te. I watched the students practicing sanchin kata. It looked wild and savage to me.

“Then I saw Miyagi Chojun perform. I have not seen since, before, and now a man like him. I held my breath. Miyagi was simply amazing, just amazing. He exuded a vitality as fierce as a lion yet you could see the innate gentleness and control of the man. If there ever was karate in perfection, I saw it then.

“Miyagi Chojun’s training was scientific and severe. For certain periods of time all the young boys would train, at midnight, in the graveyard to develop their minds. No one could advance to the next kata without first perfecting the kata he was on. It was basics, basics, and more basics, with the kata thrown in between.

“Miyagi Chojun got up every morning at five o’clock sharp, practiced some kata several times, and hit the road. He would run about 10 kilometers, come back to the dojo, and do the kata again.

“In 1924, Taisho Ju-san-nen, Kano sensei and his leading disciple, Nagaoka, came to Okinawa and gave a two-hour lecture and demonstration of judo. According to the Asahi Shimbun, it was a fantastic demonstration of human endurance and ability. Miyagi saw the demonstration accompanied by an old man named Matsu. “After the demonstration, Matsu asked Miyagi if any karate expert could equal the endurance exhibited by Kano sensei and Nagaoka. Miyagi simply replied that any martial artist worthy of the name could perform for hours without drawing a heavy breath.

The Asahi Shimbun heard about it and asked Miyagi to perform and uphold karate. He finally agreed, after much pleading, and as the paper put it, ‘Not for show but for the sake of Okinawan karate.’

“Miyagi performed without pretension. Okinawa never saw anything like it. It was the performance of a karate meijin. Miyagi thrust his hand into a hunch of bamboos and pulled out one from the center. He stuck his hand into a slab of meat and tore off chunks. He put white chalk on the bottom of his feet, jumped up, and kicked the ceiling-leaving his foot-prints on the ceiling for all to see. Spectators hit him with long bos (staffs) with no effect. With his fingers he tore off the bark off a tree. And with his big toe he punctured a hole in a kerosene can.

And he did many more feats which had to be seen to be believed. “He performed all afternoon, way past the two-hour mark. After the performance, Miyagi said, ‘Any karate expert who trains properly can do all this, It is simply a matter of paying the price. Karate is a total commitment. I have not done anything that someone else cannot do, or, for that matter, you. There is no half-way measure. Either you do it or you don’t. Nothing is impossible.’”

Miyagi Chogun died in Ishikawa, Okinawa, on October 8, 1953. Yagi Meitoku, who was at his side when he died, is carrying on his work.