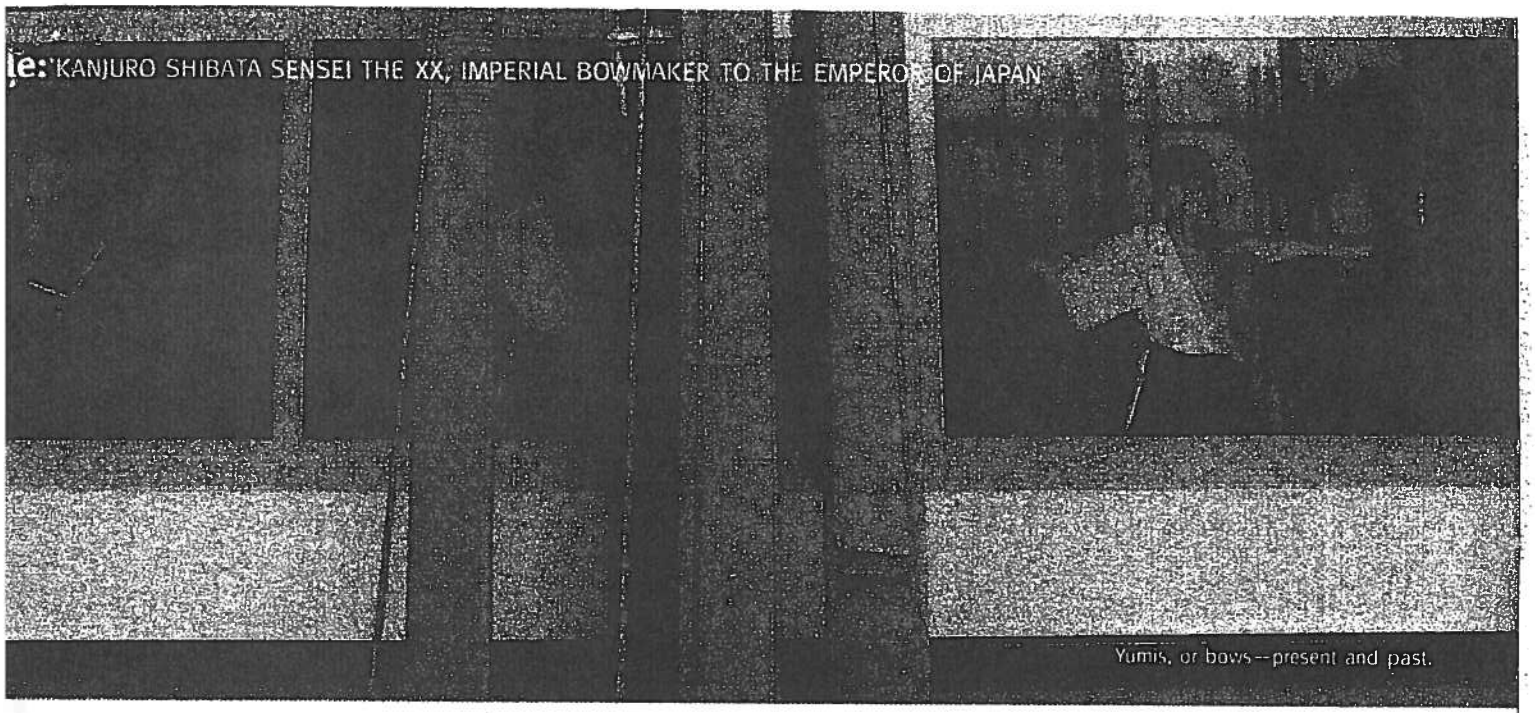


Yumis, or bows--present and past.

On a beautiful May morning, Kanjuro Shibata, Sensei, 20th in a line of Zen archery masters, kneels at the front of his *dojo*, or practice hall, wearing a brown *kimono* and a crisp, skirt-like *hakama*. He is now 87 years old, but could pass for 65. His manner is formal, yet tender, like a grandfather. The regular Sunday morning class is closing, and *Sensei* (a title meaning teacher) bids his students farewell in the abbreviated English they learn along with the *kyudo* form. For years, he has traveled nearly year-round, leading seminars throughout the U.S., Canada and Europe. Tomorrow morning he leaves on another trip.

He offers a goodbye and thank you, then gets up and adds "dasvedanya," a reminder of his years in a Soviet prison camp after World War II. He smiles, and walks out of the dojo's sunlit entrance. The stark, white cinder-block structure is softened by the addition of gardens, wooden walkways, an entry foyer, and a decidedly Japanese-looking outdoor kyudo range, called an *azuchi*. Today, a children's class has practiced in the azuchi.

Besides the main dojo in Boulder, Sensei has subsidiary groups in Vermont, Halifax, Boston, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, New York, Berkeley, Amsterdam, Vienna and Marburg, to name a few. Along the way, Sensei has acquired 100's of students, all of whom he regards as extended "family."

There's a cutting, earthy quality to his teaching style. Although outwardly a Zen master who teaches what he calls "stand-up meditation," much of Sensei's instruction focuses on how to live properly: placing the needs and welfare of others first. The Japanese word for this outlook is *rei*—literally, "correct behavior."

Kanjuro Shibata XX. Sensei was born Yoshimune Shibata to an old samurai family in Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan. Munekazu Shibata, first to carry the Kanjuro Shibata title, lived in the mid-1500's on the island of Tanegashima off Kyushu. He and his forebears served the Shimazu clan as bowmakers and archers, carrying the title *yumishinan*; or bowmaster. In 1574, he moved to Kyoto, where subsequent generations continued to serve the military shogunates and nobility during the Tokugawa era (1600-1868). At some point, the Kanjuro Shibatas received the more honorific title *onyumishi*, meaning "master bowmaker and archer" from the Shogun, a title subsequently passed from generation to generation.

THE POINT IS THAT THROUGH LONG AND GENUINE

According to Sensei, the practice of discipline—kyudo; rei, and *bushi-do*, the way of the warrior and samurai code—was of the utmost importance in his family. Sensei is also quick to point out that this kind of discipline is not a big deal: "When eating," he says, "you wait for everyone to arrive before starting. It's natural." Nevertheless, he finds that Westerners often lack that basic concern, noting that at American meals the operating logic is "help yourself."

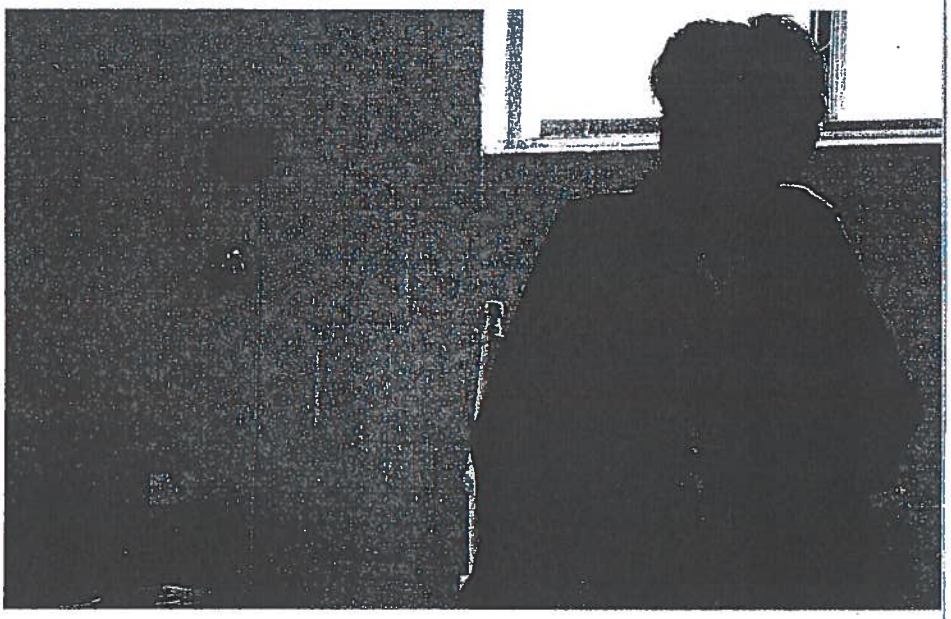
As a result, sitting down to dinner with Sensei often feels like an etiquette lesson: the guest, or Sensei, is always served first, and no one starts until everyone is served and the assembled group has bowed and said *itadakemasu*—I am ready to receive. "To make anything

special of this is absurd," he says. Asked if ignorance of such manners is an impediment to one's path, Sensei hesitates, not wanting to slight Western students, but continues, "Rei is a direct teaching of Zen Buddhism. It's very basic, so yes, it's a problem if Western students don't have that understanding."

Shibata Sensei holds two people in the highest regard: the Vidyadhara, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, who invited him to teach manners, and kyudo, to his American Buddhist students in 1980; and the 19th Kanjuro Shibata, Muneshige Shibata, his grandfather (Sensei's father, who married into the Shibata family, did not inherit the Kanjuro Shibata title, but acted as his father-in-law's secretary, running the family bow-making business). At the age of eight, Sensei began learning kyudo and bowmaking from his grandfather, who in addition to carrying the title onyumishi, was the official bowmaker to the Imperial family, a commission bestowed on the 18th Kanjuro Shibata by the Meiji Emperor in 1889. As the Imperial bowmaker, he was responsible for making the *Goshinpo Yumi*, a sacred bow used for the purification and consecration of the shrine at Ise, the main shrine of the Shinto religion, every 20 years.

Sensei's relationship with his grandfather was a severe one. There was love between them, but in Sensei's words, his grandfather was "completely harsh," and was not averse to hitting or slapping when necessary. According to Sensei, the many lessons he received from his grandfather, were never verbal—he simply *manifested*, commanding that Sensei "watch with the heart, not the eyes." In this way, Sensei received "all of the jewels of his [grandfather's] heart and mind." At this time he also became familiar with Yamamoto Tsunetomo's *Hagakure*, circa 1716, perhaps the most important piece of samurai literature. Consisting mostly of brief anecdotes and maxims, *Hagakure*, says Sensei, contains the supreme lessons: loyalty to one's teacher, readiness for death and detachment from this life, compassion for others and an anti-intellectual bias that favors "first thought" action over deliberation.

Even though these principles have survived in printed form, Sensei says people's understanding of the samurai way is now watered down. "Now, even in Japan, it's *me first* in everything."



The Imperial Bowmaker to the Emperor of Japan—in his main dojo in Boulder, Colorado.

RACTICE YOUR NATURAL DIGNITY AS A HUMAN BEING COMES OUT.
THIS NATURAL DIGNITY IS ALREADY IN YOU,
BUT IT IS COVERED UP BY A LOT OF OBSTACLES.

He enumerates five important samurai principles: loyalty; behave properly with all, no matter who they are; a life of extravagance is fruitless—therefore do not develop it; develop trust between yourself and fellow warriors; and have courage—otherwise life is fruitless.

Sensei adds that the pride of the *bushi*, or warrior, 450 years ago was *seppuku* (ritual suicide by disembowelment; and proof of one's loyalty, bravery and selflessness). "In the present age," he continues, "there are no samurai living, so it is impractical to cut one's belly open." Asked if he himself weren't a samurai, Sensei insists, "To be reasonable is to have a modest heart when replying to such a question."

At the age of 20, after attending military school and university, Sensei was drafted into the army and sent first to Korea, then Manchuria, where he served in a horse-drawn artillery unit. At the end of the war, his unit was captured by the Russians. In August, 1945, he was sent to a Central Asian prisoner-of-war camp near Samarkand, just north of Afghanistan. The trip across Russia in cattle cars took a month, and conditions at the camp were horrible. The men worked in a coal mine, ate cabbage soup and a small piece of black bread twice a day; the evening meal's soup was fortified with a little camel liver. One in ten survived.

Finally, in the fall of 1948, he was released and returned to Japan. Two years later, he married in a wedding arranged by his grandfather, and the marriage produced two daughters: In 1959, Kanjuro Shibata Muneshige died, and Sensei assumed the title of Kanjuro Shibata XX., Onyumishi, with full responsibility for bow-making, kyudo teaching, and the making of the Goshinpo Yurni (which last took place in 1974). When his daughter Hiromi married her high-school sweetheart Nobuhiro, Sensei asked him to assume the Shibata name and lineage, not an unusual event - the 18th Kanjuro Shibata had also married into the family. Sensei began training Nobuhiro in the arts of kyudo and bowmaking much as his grandfather had' taught him.

Sensei was increasingly disturbed by changes in Japanese society - a turn toward materialism that was rapidly changing kyudo from a meditative art into a sport. Rather than practicing kyudo as a way of "cleaning the mind," many students, especially those he taught at a local university, were intent on hitting the target. To this day, Sensei constantly exhorts his students to practice "mind kyudo, not sports kyudo," and to give up hope and fear regarding hitting the target. The emphasis on winning prevalent in Japan led him to accept an invitation by Trungpa Rinpoche in 1980 to teach in the West.

It was an unusual step for someone of Sensei's stature, and an unpopular one in Japan. Trungpa Rinpoche had been looking for genuine teachers of Japanese contemplative arts, and heard of Sensei through Kobun Chino Roshi, a Zen master living in the U.S.

Mike Smith, a longtime Kyudo student & teacher—as well as owner of the landmark Trident Booksellers & Café—performs a ceremony at the Boulder dojo.

(at the behest of Sukuzi Roshi, author of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* and also a friend of Trungpa's). The fresh outlook and non-competitiveness Sensei found in many of Trungpa's students inspired him to return year after year for extended teaching stays. In 1985, Sensei moved to the U.S. permanently.

Now, after more than 20 years of teaching, the quality of Sensei's instruction has deepened as his students' understanding has matured. Moving emphasis away from *shake*, or form, he increasingly points out how students can mix mind with meditation, which he calls *shashin*. "It might be possible to enter kyudo through technique alone, but this is not what I believe," he says. "If you shoot the arrow *mu* -shin-no heart - that is correct heart.' This is Zen."

Sensei is often asked what "mu" is. "That's like asking `what is air? '" he says, "Mu is something scholars try to explain with words. It must be experienced through meditation." At instructor trainings, Sensei will offer a detailed critique of each participant's practice. Most are older students, and the comments, which range from politely revealing to devastating, go far beyond the usual corrections to form. During classes, Sensei often criticizes proficient archers for thinking too much and praises beginners who release the arrow with little expectation.

The result of practicing *shake* and *shashin* thoroughly, says Sensei, is *shahin*—dignity. "At the end, you are actually manifesting supreme dignity." Kobun Chino Roshi, a Zen master and close friend of Sensei, once said: "As Shibata Sensei has stated, you do not *achieve* shahin. What is polished out naturally unfolds as characteristics of the archer's own life itself. These characteristics are seen not only during shooting but in a person's appearance and how one's life is manifested from day-to-day."

The larger question of how Sensei's lineage will continue is only beginning to come into focus. Nobuhiro Shibata, who for many years has made all of the Shibata family bows, will carry the Kanjuro Shibata, *onyumishi* and imperial bowmaker lineages in the next generation, but has expressed little desire to be a kyudo master. Whether Sensei's teachings will live on in the West remains to be seen: "It's up to each individual to see if they can do that. They do understand [kyudo] intellectually, but whether they understand it in their hearts remains to be seen."

As Kobun Chino Roshi said: "Sensei opens up to you, and there's no stinginess in teaching you. His whole mind and body—his presence—is like an arrow arriving from ancient times."

"Hope is not the point. The point is that through long and genuine practice, your natural dignity as a human being comes out."

The above, by Scott Spanbauer, is updated and adapted from the original, published in Shambhala Sun magazine in 1992.

INTERVIEW 08.1991

In August 1991, *kyudo* master Kanjuro Shibata Sensei conducted an intensive at Gampo Abbey, in Cape Breton. During the course of that program, Scott Amsden and Marcia Shibata interviewed Sensei about his experience teaching kyudo to Western students.

SCOTT AMSDEN: Sensei, in the West the approach to archery is more sports-style, either hunting or competition. In both of these, the idea is to hit the target; to either get something or win some kind of prize. Could you say something about how the approach in kyudo is different?

KANJURO SHIBATA, SENSEI: When I first met Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, he told me that his grandfather had been a yumi-maker, a bowmaker, in Tibet. Just like my grandfather had been a yumi-maker in Japan. We were talking about how in Tibet, as everywhere else in the world, the main purpose of using a bow and arrow had been for sports-style competition or for killing animals for food. In either case, the person shooting the bow hopes for victory. Their shooting is based on hope. Rinpoche told me that his grandfather had taught him that from a Buddhist point of view, there should not be any hope involved with archery: that one's shooting should not be founded on the idea of [hitting] the target, winning victory or fame.

Now at that time I didn't know Trungpa Rinpoche very well; I didn't yet realize the depth of his understanding. So when I heard him say this about no hope and kyudo, I was amazed—this was *exactly* what my own grandfather had

taught me as a transmission concerning the profundity of kyudo as a practice of moving meditation. So our two grandfathers had told both of their grandsons at different times and in different cultures about this way of using a bow and arrow with no gain involved.

So this is how kyudo differs from the common approach to archery. In kyudo, there is no hope. The point is that through long and genuine practice your natural dignity as a human being comes out. This natural dignity is already in you, but it is covered up by a lot of obstacles. When they are cleared away, your natural dignity as a human being is allowed to shine forth.

Sensei, in the East it seems like the teacher-student relationship is more important than in the West.

The foundation of the two societies, East and West, is different. This leads to the main differences between a teacher-student relationship. Historically, in the East, all teachers were highly revered and students related to the teacher in a humble way so as to give the teacher a seat from which to teach. There's a proverb, "Three feet behind don't step in the shadow." The student behaves with so much humility that he or she would not even step into the teacher's shadow. In this style of teacher-student relationship, even if the teacher makes a mistake in teaching, the student would not call attention to it in the teacher's presence. Perhaps he would *never* call attention to it.

In the West, because of the foundation of democratic thinking, students feel that they are on equal ground with the teacher, so the atmosphere of teaching or the seat from which the teacher teaches is already undermined by the students sitting on the same seat. So between East and West the atmosphere around the situation of teaching and learning from the very onset is different; one is more open, the other doesn't seem as open, actually.

Another important difference is that in the West, people tend to cut off their relationship with the past. They throw off the knowledge from their family lineage. People are constantly reinventing the wheel; they seem to learn all of what they have to learn about life by themselves, if they learn it at all.

In the East, there's an unbroken line of wisdom and learning that's passed down through the family from generation to generation. This style of passing wisdom down through generations is the result of the Buddhist foundations of Eastern society. This is a Buddhist way of approaching things. One doesn't throw out everything all the time, but one reveres what's happened in the past.

Kyudo was born out of the samurai tradition. I think in the West people often misunderstand the true sense of what being samurai was all about. Could you say something about genuine samurai spirit?

There's a line that people walk on called the *present moment.* Behind you is the past and in front of you on that line is the future, which is death. But you don't walk in the past and you don't walk in the future, you walk in the present. When you walk on this line in the present, you go over the obstacles that you encounter smoothly; you aren't stopped by them. And you develop the ability to walk this line smoothly and with clarity through the practice which has preceded you in the past. So if the step that you just took in the past was taken with clarity it will enable you to walk this line at the present smoothly, and then walk the line of the present into death smoothly as well. Without fear.

So, you see, for the mind of the samurai, this walking to death was not a fearful event. It was just a continuation of what one already had been doing. For example, if circumstances were such that it became appropriate to offer one's body, which was how seppuku was regarded, this act was not a fearful thing but just a continuation of one's walk on that line of the present.

Many Buddhist teachings also came into the code of the samurai. The idea of putting others before oneself comes from the Buddhist teachings, or the idea of giving your teacher an honorable place from which to preside in relationship to you as a student.

Have you altered your way of teaching for Western students?

It's difficult to teach Western mind. It would be easy to give up on these people. After 10 years their concentration is still on hitting the target! It's taking an extremely long time to get the point across. What's happened is that my own practice has become learning patience and not losing my temper quickly.

Did you ever feel like just moving back to Japan?

Oh, yes, even now it flashes into my mind that I want to go back to Japan. But I don't. I continue with my practice of patience and putting one foot in front of the other, slowly and deliberately. This is Chinese style. Chinese tend to do everything very slowly and very mindfully—while the Japanese, in cultural form, do everything quickly and precisely. So in this case my approach with Western students has become Chinese style.

For more: ryukokyudojo.org