

The Warrior

from Guy Sahri ©

Just as the organization of the Martial Arts is in full change, I went to meet of one of the most important personalities of his generation, Roberto Sant'ana. Professor of Physical Education, Senior Lecturer, Specialist in Self-Defense, Instructor Brasileiro Jiu-Jitsu and the 5th Dan JKA Expert, Roberto Sant'ana is a warrior. Companion of a tradition which, these last years, has evil to be made respect, it is with a great direction of realities and without preconceived idea that it incarnates a certain « truth », sometimes disturbing, which challenges us.

Its answers make us reflect deeply on our practice and, perhaps, will make us foresee a different horizon. But beyond the answers, Roberto Sant'ana makes us discover deep and demanding responsibility for the Martial Art. In a friendly way, it delivers a form of Art which requires modesty, courage and passion. Exceptional meeting !

It tells us...

Guy Sahri: Since many years, you travel and discover a cultural heritage of Martial Arts. Which was the influence of these voyages on your personal evolution in the life and Karate ?

Roberto Sant'ana:

With certainty, I then to affirm that my voyages out of Brazil affected great my evolution in Karate. In Brazil, the Masters often lacked humility and thought before very of them. In Europe, in South Africa, in the United States, in Denmark, in the ex-Republics of the USSR, inter alia, the Professors and Experts remained exemplary. They did a very serious work in the Martial Art. Unfortunately, in Brazil, Karate took more than 30 years of delay, on the other countries. Today I perceive a technical regression in Brazilian Karate. I conceive that, lack of financial means, some professors cannot go out and train themselves in Japan or in other Countries, but others have the possibility and do not want. They consider they know quite enough and do not need to be improved. What is really sad, it is that many of personalities confuse technical part with administrative part and want controlling everything. Each thing in its own place, well really!!

In Brazil, Karate stopped and at the present times, has no prospects for future. And, which is worse, it is that we are not helped and that the hierarchy is not respected. During Seminars or Training courses, some people do not know how to place the most graduates in safety « Seiza » salutation. That's general anarchy...

My evolution in Karate is more particularly due to my Seniors of South Africa Japanese Karaté Association - SA JKA, managed by Stan Schmidt who knew, better anyone how, to form an « fortissima » organization inside his country. He always supported his pupils who today are important personalities in the organization. Within the Group, there are 5 or 6 Experts 7th Dan who work all with him, not him only! In Brazil, nobody knows when and how the Brazilian Experts work. That can appear absurd but that resembles more one movie of 50 e can see Sergeant Garcia trying to capture Zorro, than real organization!

« A more humane statute ... »

Guy Sahri: The spectacular dimensions of Japanese Karate often makes it look inaccessible, Gogen Yamaguchi the founder of Goju-Ryu quotes: « the heart of the Martial Arts lies in the unity of an irreproachable technique and a strong spirituality... ». Do you think traditional Karate makes it more accessible ?

Roberto Sant'ana:

(Smiles) Yes... With an exception and some organizations which pretend ignore us, it maybe better finally. In Japan they exist new organizations with the Expert and Instructor Chief of Karatenomichi World Federation - KWF, Mikio Yahara, as well as Japan Karate Shotorenmei - JKS of Masao Kagawa which are doors open to many Westerners. They are structures with a more human statute. I am informed that of excellent Karatecas are very pleased with the welcome they received from these Experts. As a result some organizations swim against the tide! Others, younger people, showed an interesting evolution. But I remind you... that if you are not Japanese, you will never be treated like of them. So you will not be really taken seriously. Unless there is something else, I hope that you understand me!

« World unanimity... »

Guy Sahri: What did the meetings with Stan Schmidt, Chief Instructor JKA South Africa and Helio founder of the Brasileiro Jiu-jitsu, provide you ?

Roberto Sant'ana:

To have met both was extraordinary. When I was in Brazil with Takedo Okuda, I still remember having heard much about Stan Schmidt. Takedo Okuda has always had great respect for Stan Schmidt's Karate. He constantly reminded us that he was authentic « Samurai ». In 1993, to have known personally Stan Schmidt was even more magic than people said to me. Apart from the fact that he was an exceptional practitioner, I never knew a so pleasant and attentive person. In my opinion, today, it would be the person who, in the world, could possibly help to unite the Shotokan style in a single organization. Many people appreciate him. He is unanimously respected in the world. You will never hear speaking ill of him.

Regarding of Master Helio Gracie, I can say that he has a great personality. He speaks of « truths » that many people do not like too much to hear. Without any doubt, he is a legend in Martial Arts. He is a world reference in the field of health with its 94 years. Moreover, he still trains every day. In my opinion, he remains a genius well advanced of one's time.

Guy Sahri: During were the training, which behavior of Stan Schmidt and Hélio Gracie with you ?

Roberto Sant'ana:

With both, I have always been very well received. In 1960, Stan Schmidt and Takedo Okuda both particular in sets the famous house training program for Instructors « Kenshusei » at the headquarters of the Japan Karate Association - JKA in Tokyo. The JKA or « Nihon Karate Kyokai » opened its first dojo on March 22, 1955. It was created in Japan, in May 1949, with, as Master Instructor, Gichin Funakoshi, founder of modern Karate. At the time, the training program of the Instructors promoted uniformity and quality control practioners. Over the years, the Instructors received a diploma and the right to pratice. Takedo Okuda helped Stan Schmidt at the beginning of his career in Japan and always helped since. I think that it was one of the principal reasons for which Stan Schmidt accepted me and always treated me like a son. With Helio Gracie, I did not have such a relationship as intense, but I did seminars and important meetings with him. I got great pleasure of

having worked with the great Master who it was. It was the occasion to see out of his mind the spirit of the « Samurai ».

Guy Sahri: Did the meeting of these two important men allow you to make more choice in the life ?

Roberto Sant'ana:

After having met these two important men, several doors were opened in my professional life. I managed Karate Seminars in Latin America and so in countries such Greece, United States and South Africa. Last year I was pleased to be invited by a Karate Goju-Ryu, interested to see that in approach of practice Karate was different. Initially, I remain the initiator of the Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu in South Africa and Greece.

« It was an enormous responsibility for the day... »

Guy Sahri: Finally doesn't that make you overtaxing your students and sometimes, ask them to well beyond their capabilities ?

Roberto Sant'ana:

After all these years of relations with Stan Schmidt and many of Seniors of South Africa Japanese Karate Association - SA JKA, I learned to have a different approach teaching method. Personally, I do not find that Japanese model remained occidental Karate teaching. Matter of culture, perhaps! In my head Japanese Karate remains for the Japanese, even if it evolved much with Masatoshi Nakayama who spent about much years of his life in contact with Master Gichin Funakoshi. Its remains important to note that, since 1954, Nakayama was alone the head of Japan Karate Association - JKA. At the time was an enormous responsibility. He worked of Karate development by means of competition, as Judo and Kendo did it then. He is the father of Sporting Karate...

At the beginning of the 50's, Master Gichin Funakoshi was often invited to visit the bases of the American army installed throughout Japan. Quite unexpectedly he seems to have been rather impressed by the reception, hospitality and consideration he got from the American army. That had certainly a so profound effect on the Americans that they invited him to visit America. For this historic journey, he took with him Isao, Obata, Toshio, Kamota and Nakayama. The U.S. Strategic Air Command then instituted a training program for Martial Arts and sent its Instructors of Kōdōkan physical conditioning setting to learn Judo, Karate and Aikido in Tokyo. These people who had received limited training in Karate are then returned to the United States to start teaching themselves. At that time, the same situation occurred in Japan; in the middle of the 50's, about 200 supposed Karate styles were created. Unfortunately an impoverishment of the spiritual and philosophical aspect of this Martial Art resulted of that accelerated emigration. In fact, many adapted forms Instructors did not have a sufficient knowledge of Karate to understand all its the depth. Many adapted forms and recalcitrant groups appeared up to South America and Brazil. So Nakayama decided to create a program for instructors of Japan Karate Association - JKA in order to make sure that true « Karate » be taught. In this job we was assisted by very famous Hirokazu Kanazawa, Keinosuke Enoda, Hiroshi Shoji, Okazaki Teruyuki, Hiroshi Shirai, Taji Kase and Hideo Ochi. He knew for a fait that he had to change education system so that everybody can take full advantage of Karate. He win this bet only after the training he gave to the U.S. Strategic Air Command based in Japan. Thereafter he will review the concepts and adapt it to the teaching of Caucasians...

« It may arrive at the same point... »

Guy Sahri: Faced the emergence of an Olympic date, do you think things will get better ?

Roberto Sant'ana:

No, quite the contrary, I don't think so. I think its spirit even risk to die, as it was for Judo. There is no more really technical Judo. Nowadays, only the sport performance takes precedence, and that's a pity!! With the advent of Sport Karate we take come to risk to come to the same point. How many Dojos do they still teach real Traditional Karate? We changed the rules for more safety sporting in view Olympic date. But, in my opinion, if e remove the spirit « Karate », it will cease being. In one battle, the fear of being physically reached brings more responsibility. « Ichigeki Hisatsu », in Japanese, it's a kill shot. It is a concept which cannot exist and will never exist in a Sporting Karate competition.

« A certain spiritual dimension in the world... »

Guy Sahri: For the last years the conflicts are numerous. Is your personal practice open to a spiritual level or more determined before of the rise of violence in the world ?

Roberto Sant'ana:

I practise a Martial Art. I am not attached too much to the sporting aspect of Karate, even if my opinion Karate offers many advantages at this level. I recognize that it helped me in my development as a man and gave me a certain spiritual dimension of the world in which we live, a great confidence, a respect for the values and a regard for myself. Everything I gained until now, my travels, my friends, my family, I mainly owe for the most part to Karate.

« We convey their culture... »

Guy Sahri: In spite of an enormous problem in infrastructure, training and education within the National Federations and Confederations, Karate is well to South America. Do you believe in the importance of Karate in education and training of its practise ?

Roberto Sant'ana:

In Brazil, Karate has started badly. With the arrival of Japanese immigration after the World War II, some Japanese who level have arrived completely lied about graduation and formation. They regarded them as alive « Gods ». At the time, few people realized. Thanks to God, I was one of them!... (Laughter). We had, in Brazil, a Professor trained in Japan Karate Association - JKA. He was not supported by any Japanese in Brazil. On the contrary, the Japanese « Masters » living in Brazil proclaiming that this teacher had not finished his formation. For me, it was unfounded words. Unfortunately human mind is so even. The Japanese were unable to stand somebody having « success » in their professional sector. That's why they « broke him »!! I believe that within an organization of its own country, Brazil, this professor would have succeeded. But Japanese did not have interest to take him their organization. They did not tolerate foreign Karatéca, as even though we convey their culture!

In this history, those who enormously lost were practitioners from South America and especially the Brazilians...

« A policy of boycotting miserably this kind of meeting... »

Guy Sahri: Recently you have just taken part in a training course with several people of the four principal schools of Brazilian Karate. Did you attain your object ?

Roberto Sant'ana:

Yes. We have reached it, but I am sorry to see that there is not a great passion for other styles only that of Shotokan. There are people, groups, or even a policy miserably boycotting such meetings while in Brazil the Law and the Federal Constitution of 1988 protect practitioners and their organizations. These so-called « Masters » I mentioned previously do not let any of their pupils take part in these events being afraid, probably, they do not come back anymore to their Dojos. Why? Maybe because their pupils would realize were misled?

« The Grand Challenge... »

Guy Sahri: Following the results of the Seminar, do you think of modifying certain aspects of the program ?

Roberto Sant'ana:

We have some plans to improve the Karate in Brazil and Latin America. We are not a political group. We are a group of training and information. The big challenge will be to improve and the technical level and practical of our Karate. Gradually, we hope to achieve this, if we leave us to do it correctly... (Laughter).

« Guarantors of the tradition... »

Guy Sahri: Do you think of going to Europe, to France, to meet companions Experts in Karate ?

Robert Sant'ana:

(Smile)... I am impatient to be there. Of course, I would like much to go to Europe. Especially in France where I recognize that Karate has a great quality and a great personality. I admire the French school and particularly the guarantors of the tradition as Dominique Valéra, since I began my training in 1974. Like many people, he was a reference in my life of Karateca and it would be a pleasure of knowing him personally. I have great respect for the work of Henry Plée, initiator and father of Karate in Europe and in France. Also, of course, Roland Harbersetzer, great writer, specialist in the Martial Arts, Daniel Lautier and Jean-Pierre Fischer whom I had the opportunity to briefly meet in Japan Karate Association - JKA, as well as the Federal Experts such as Jean-Pierre Lavorato, Hiroo Mochizuki, Bernard Bilicki, Yoshinao Nambu, Hiroshi Aosaka, Alain Setrouk, Serge Chouraqui, Hidetoshi Nakahashi, Roland Hernaez, Giovanni Tramontini, Francis Didier, Claude Boucabeille, Bernard Dumoulin, Kazukata Otsuka, Yuichi Sato, Kenji Tokitsu, Eiji Kawanishi, Gérard Gazzini, Kenji Nakata, Naoki Omi, Tsutomu Kamohara, Hiroshi Okubo, Claude Petinella, Yukinobu Shimaburo, Gilbert Gruss, Seisuke Adaniya, Ryozo Tsukada, Thierry Masci, Guy Sauvin and many other references in the World Karate!

« The Styles came from different sources... »

Guy Sahri: Do you believe in the unit as wanted the founder of Gichin Funakoshi Karate, Karate with different Styles for all but practiced by everyone ?

Robert Sant'ana:

No, I don't think so. We know that the styles came from different sources. They must be preserved. During competitions we still have problems due to variations of each school. Out of the competitions

things occur naturally within the various styles of Karate. All respected, but in competition, unfortunately, we see the true face hidden face of some. It is a real war of ego.

« It is a race against time... »

Guy Sahri: How do you look to the future of Karate in the 10 or 15 next years ?

Roberto Sant'ana:

With the advent of professional sporting events and K-1 in the world, I think the Karate loses its essence. It is a race against time. It does not exist in the real Karate professionalism as exist in Football. Some events like the Cup and Open or athletes to earn money but certainly not to survive with lessons which they give in Dojos. Meetings like K-1 are more professional. We now have today Lyoto Machida, nicknamed « The Dragon », son of Yoshizo Machida, 8th Dan and Instructor JKA who comes from a traditional family of Brazilian Shotokan who migrated to the K-1. It is involved with his father while promoting the name of Karate in the world of the Martial arts. He always shows great respect for its opponents.

At the present time I do not believe that Karate has a future that would guarantee him to remain competitive...