

**1997 Tai Kai Interview with  
Soke Dr. Masaaki Hatsumi  
Interview by Josh Sager  
Translation by Ben Jones**

**Black Belt: It's been almost 15 years you started coming to the United States. What changes have you seen in the training since then?**

**Masaaki Hatsumi:** At the time when I first came there was the "ninja boom." And everybody thought that this ninjutsu was something mysterious - something bad. And I have gradually corrected this. Ninjutsu is really a genuine martial art. That's the one reason why I changed the name from ninpo taijutsu to budo taijutsu. They are one in the same. Ninpo taijutsu is a form of budo taijutsu. The place of zero, the zero point.

**BB: How has the art evolved since Takamatsu sensei passed it on to you?**

**MH:** It has not evolved. It's just alive. It's just survived. It's like two things being the same, and they sort of seem to be changing but they are keeping the same form. Isomorphism. Many people talk about evolution, and there was a time when the theory of evolution was all the rage. But what is actually underneath human life has not evolved at all; it has not changed. That's why they have to train, they have to reflect on their own actions, they have to do penance. That's why I say "What is a dojo?" It's not somewhere where you should aim to become strong. It's a place for penance, a place to reflect what you've done. And to live like a true human being. So people shouldn't misunderstand what a dojo is about. They shouldn't have any illusions. A dojo isn't something with a concrete form. Every day is a dojo, wherever you are.

**BB: How do you feel the practitioners of Bujinkan Budo Taijutsu are representing your art?**

**MH:** Jack [Hoban] is a perfect example. Ask Jack. Jack is far better at expressing the art in an American way than I am. You can't express it in Japanese in an American way. Jack will speak from his heart of the art, in American. Because here you have the genuine article who will transmit to you my blessed teachings. So even when I am back in Japan, continue to ask Jack.

**BB: We often hear you say that the martial arts are about love and protecting life, yet the general perception of the martial arts in the public is one of violence. How do you make the differentiation?**

**MH:** It's just the things that any normal, serious person has to do in life. If you study a martial art that's a bit strange, it's wrong. Then you become like a wild beast.

**BB: Can you explain the reason why you hold a Tai Kai every year?**

**MH:** To allow people to know about my martial art a little better. That's why I travel around the world.

**BB: Why did you decide to add the 11<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> dan black belt grades?**

**MH:** It's not something new, in the old days it had been like this. It's just that there weren't any 11<sup>th</sup> dans before.

**BB: In what direction do you see the art going in the future?**

**MH:** It doesn't matter if it doesn't develop further. It doesn't matter if there is only one good person in the art, that's enough. If there is just one fine person then that's the meaning. We don't need many people. Like in America you have President Clinton, just the one president. That's all we need.

**BB: What's the most rewarding aspect of teaching your art?**

**MH:** For example, if people look at nature they think it's beautiful, right? And so, people who've got this genuine nature of humanity, they see something beautiful and then quite directly they say "That's beautiful, I want to protect it." And if you talk about the evolution of the martial arts, that's where the martial arts need to evolve, that kind of attitude.

**BB: Do you see any differences between how ninjutsu is interpreted here in the U.S. as opposed to the rest of the world?**

**MH:** It's the same.

**BB: What would you like the people who come to the Tai Kai to walk away with when it's over?**

**MH:** I would like people to leave behind all the bad sides of themselves, so that their hearts can become lighter and they can leave behind of all the trash from their hearts.

*Just look at the way in which the Bujinkan is flourishing now and you can see how perceptive Black Belt were to give Dr. Hatsumi the Instructor of the Year award back in 1986. Well done!*