

THE MEANING OF HAVING A MASTER

Fiona Hurlock

In Japanese, the term *sensei* is widely used to address a teacher. But the word *sensei* is much more than simply a synonym for teacher – it is also used to address someone who is a master of their craft. The word *sensei* is made up of two ideograms, *sen*, which I understand to mean ‘ahead’ or ‘to precede’ and *sei*, meaning ‘life’ or ‘born’. Together, these ideograms create a new word that means something like ‘one who is ahead of you in life’. They have literally walked the road before you and amassed a great wealth of skill, experience and knowledge and hence, are worthy of respect.

In Japan, graduates from acupuncture college often look to obtain a place in a teaching clinic so they can learn from a *sensei* in the traditional manner, meaning they learn through the observation and assimilation of their *sensei*’s teachings. If they are accepted as an ‘uchideshi’ disciple, they will begin their real training as an apprentice. This apprenticeship could last from two years to five years or a lifetime.

Ikeda Masakazu sensei has been treating patients for over 50 years – often treating 30 or more patients a day in a multi-bed training clinic located in Imabari, on Shikoku Island. His fervent wish is to pass on the art of traditional Japanese medicine to as many deshi, students, and practitioners as he can. He has expended a great deal of time and energy over the years cultivating practitioners who ‘*can take over the knowledge*’ but unfortunately there are only a few people whom I can call deshi from the bottom of my heart. I try to be firm with my deshi, but as I am old, it now takes a lot more effort from me to accomplish everything.’



‘It is very difficult to find gifted people and it requires hard work on my part. I am lucky if I can find one such individual from 100 practitioners, and if I find two gifted practitioners out of every 100 practitioners, I would definitely call this a success.’

In seminars Ikeda sensei often states that if you want to be like him, then you will have to work as hard as

him. His typical day would see him rise at 6.00am, study until clinic commenced at 9.00am, treat until 7.00pm, then study until 2.00am. He would then lecture around the country on his weekends. Continuous effort must be made to learn this medicine as neither the theoretical nor practical aspects of classical medicine can be mastered overnight.

Ikeda sensei also says: ‘The best way to observe is by imitating what I do as this will allow one’s skills to improve. But when observing in a clinic, you must be flexible and obedient. There are few people who are able to absorb information akin to “*sand sucking water*” whilst observing in my clinic.’

When observing in his clinic note-taking is discouraged. You are a part of the ebb and flow of the clinic and your behavior impacts this flow for better or for worse. Note-taking moves you away from a relaxed and present state of observation into the realm of the mind. As your skills develop, you should be able to sense the changes in the patient as treatment takes place.

If you are lost in your mind, you will miss these changes. ‘When treating patients, we must cut off all unnecessary idle thoughts, synchronise with the patient, have Seishinsei [誠心誠意] (which can be translated as ‘wholeheartedness’) and we must put our life (everything we have) into treating our patients. We must be in a meditative state during this time which can be thought of as treating with our intuition.’

The following story is taken from Nangyoushingi [難経真義/Intendment of the Nan Jing]; Rikuzensha, 2007.



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In the way of Kendo, the terminologies: protect (follow), break and leave [守、破、離] are used. It means that at the first stage, you follow your master until one day you break the rules and eventually leave the style and everything you have learnt from your master, in order to make your own style. This may work for martial arts but this cannot be applied to acupuncture practitioners.

I recently received a letter from one of my students who opened his own clinic. He had written: ‘I realised that I have been automatically mimicking the way sensei treats patients in everyday practice and when I am faced with a difficult situation, sensei’s face comes up in my mind straight away. I treat patients by myself but it feels as if sensei is supporting me, deep inside my mind.’ He was surprised how he would picture my face when he treats, but most practitioners will forget their masters eventually and develop their own treatment style.

If you are a good practitioner, you will continue to picture your master’s face for your entire lifetime or you may hear your master’s voice. Because of this, you will reflect on yourself and continue to progress the development your skills. One student who has been practicing in his own clinic for 20 years still dreams about me scolding him. For my students, a master could be Bhaishajyaguru who has my face or voice, or it could be a senior practitioner of traditional medicine, or it could be a wise old man as stated by Carl Jung. So, the one scolding them in their dream is not me, it is actually their conscience as a practitioner which borrows my form. It is a great thing if we can receive messages from a master from a different dimension and this is a common phenomenon when studying traditional medicine. So, if you want to learn traditional medicine, follow a master and learn obediently from them.

My master is my oldest brother who has already passed away. Even after four years had passed following his death, I still could not believe that he had actually passed away. He used to love joking and tell funny stories to make people laugh, so when he passed away I thought he was pretending to be dead or that it was a joke. One day, my brother appeared in my dream and said: ‘My clinic is gone, so I will treat patients at your clinic.’ I told him: ‘Why don’t you stop treating because you are already dead?’ After this, he went somewhere else but early January this year, he returned to my clinic. I guess he really loves treating people.

In addition to learning directly from his brother (Takio Ikeda sensei who was a torchbearer of the second generation of Japanese practitioners having trained and polished his clinical technique under Inoue Keiri, one of the pioneers of the neoclassical art in the Showa era), Ikeda sensei observed in several clinics and studied under masters such as Kitetu Naito [内藤希哲], Yudo Yakazu [矢数有道], Kazuo Tatuno [龍野一雄] and Seiji Araki [荒木性次]. He was taught the Shang Han Za Bing Lun predominantly from Seiji Araki sensei. Ikeda sensei says: ‘I still remember how these masters were treating patients and of course, I applied the techniques I learnt through observation.’

If you are fortunate enough to find a good teacher, hang on to them. However, Ikeda sensei says finding a good student is even harder!

Masakazu Ikeda graduated from Meiji Oriental Medical Institute in 1968. Since that time, he has devoted himself to the clinical practice of acupuncture, moxibustion and herbal medicine. He has trained many practitioners from countries around the world including Japan, Australia, United States and many European countries. He is also the author of over 27 textbooks in Japanese. His overall approach to healing is grounded in a profound understanding of classic acupuncture and herbal medicine texts. With his years of experience Masakazu Ikeda has developed a state of the art needling technique that is truly inspiring.



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