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ISSUE 1, 2015 ISSN 1293-9181

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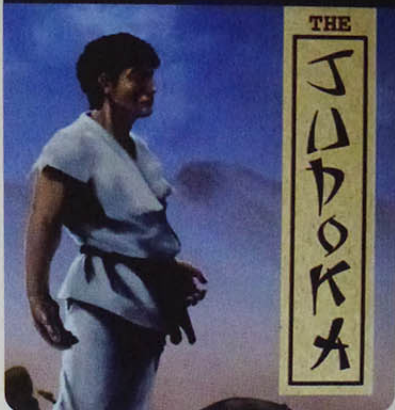
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The Judoka'

by W. D. Norwood Junior

Paperback, 238 pages; published by Masterworks International Publishing, Cork; price €12.95

REVIEW BY MORAG CAMPBELL

THE JUDOKA' IS an unusual book, part fiction, part philosophy, part a treatise on martial technique with the addition of thought provoking ideas on Judo as a 'poetic way' and even as an act of love. This last one is a hard concept to grasp; yet Norwood maintains that love of an adversary is essential to good Judo.

By learning to love one's opponent, Norwood says, one can pay close and sympathetic attention to him and only one who contests for love of the game, rather than on winning, who can get his ego out of the way, can be a successful Judo man he claims. Here's where philosophy comes up against the hard edge of the mind — a challenge for any martial artist.

Philosophy of peace

It soon becomes evident that Judo infused every aspect of Norwood's life and was the lodestone by which he lived. The Judoka tells the tale of a young man who embodies Judo, not merely as a martial art, but as 'a way' in the Eastern tradition of that phrase. He lives 'the Way of Judo' and his life embodies a philosophy of peace grown out of the precepts of this classic martial art.

The book is interesting in that it can be read as a fictional story of a young man who lives a simple life devoid of modern conveniences and close to nature but also as a clear pronouncement of the timeless philosophical values that can benefit all our lives and lead to a life lived more harmoniously and in balance.

That said a large portion of the book involves fighting. Despite the philosophical bent there is nothing wishy-washy about the story line. Violence is, and always has been, a fact of life and the Judoka struggles to meet his opponents, not in the same red mist of anger that he is confronted with, but with understanding, good technique and detachment and not mere brute force.

He accepts the fear present in such situations, recognising that it is fear that readies the body for sudden movement and focuses attention on the likely strengths of his opponent. Norwood spent time in Japan and the traditions he encountered there obviously impacted him greatly. A chance encounter years later with an American police sergeant John Daring who taught Judo in his spare time, introduced Norwood to the Japanese fighting art and his subsequent knowledge and experience of Judo are evident in the writing.

The Judoka is enriched by an introduction written by Norwood's son who was obviously hugely influenced by his father's take on life and his love and respect for his father is evident. It is obvious that here is a man who walked his talk. The publication also includes a short essay by Norwood on writing as a martial art.

As a martial artist and Tai Chi Chuan exponent myself, and a one time student of Judo, I found the book both entertaining and thought provoking. When so many martial arts are practiced today merely as sport or a fighting art it is enlightening to come across a book that addressed the underlying, and often forgotten, philosophical and spiritual aspect that underpin mere physical prowess.

● 'The Judoka' by W. D. Norwood Junior is available from www.amazon.co.uk or direct from the publisher's website at: www.thejudoka.com. This reprint is by Masterworks International Publishing, a small, independent publishing house specialising in books on philosophy, psychology, health and martial arts.

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