



Photo credit: Tempukai

HEAVEN'S WIND

The Nakamura Tempu Story

Stephen Earle

Preface

Nakamura Tempu was an intellectual and spiritual giant of Japan's twentieth century. His inspirational yet practical philosophy influenced thousands, among them industrialists and statesmen influential in Japan's post-War reconstruction, as well as writers, artists, doctors, and ordinary people from all walks of life. The Tempukai, the organization he founded, continues to disseminate his teachings today, and his writings, along with the writings of others expounding his philosophy, continue to reach a wide and diverse readership.

A contemporary of Ueshiba Morihei, Nakamura also had a deep and lasting influence on the aikido community; this because a number prominent aikido *deshi* in the 1950s and 60s split their time between Hombu Dojo and the Tempukai. The most famous of these was Tohei Koichi. Many of the warm-up exercises and "ki practices" that Tohei introduced into Aikido—the "unbendable arm" test, for example—came from the Tempukai, and the term "mind-body unification" used by Tohei to describe his brand of aikido when he split from the Aikikai in 1974 is borrowed directly from Tempu's philosophy.

But Tohei was not the only aikido instructor to be influenced by Tempu. I first learned of Nakamura Tempu from Tada Hiroshi-shihan, under whom I trained for six years in Tokyo during the 1980s. Tada-sensei has incorporated Tempu's breathing exercises and other elements of his teachings into his

ki-no-renma practices with which classes begin in his dojos. Where Tohei now downplays the significance of Tempu's teachings to his aikido, Tada is unequivocal in his acknowledgement of Tempu's legacy.

Another of my mentors, Sasaki Masando-sensei, came the reverse route from the Tempukai to the Aikikai upon Tempu's recommendation that he pursue the path of budo. Sasaki served as something of a personal assistant to Tempu for twenty years, accompanying him on his visits to the Tempukai chapters in northeastern and western Japan.

On my visits to Tokyo since leaving Japan in 1988, and until he retired from teaching last year, I often attended Sasaki-sensei's Saturday morning class at Hombu Dojo, and my first introduction to Tempu's life story came one morning in 1998 over coffee with Sasaki-sensei in a Shinjuku coffee shop following class. I asked if he could tell me something about Nakamura Tempu. Sensei settled back in his chair and proceeded to hold forth for well over an hour while the four or five of us in attendance listened spellbound. Sasaki had heard Tempu himself tell his story so many times that he could repeat large parts of it verbatim, and I came away thinking, this is as close to the horse's mouth as I am ever going to get.

While Sasaki-sensei's account serves as the inspiration for what follows, it is not the only source. A famous female writer named Uno Chiyo wrote a wonderful little book called *Nakamura Tempu Zadan* ("Talks by Nakamura Tempu"), a copy of which a friend, when she learned that we were in the midst of financial crisis, sent to my wife in the early 1990s; we both read it and life turned around for us as a result. Another writer, Ooi Mitsuru, has written a brilliant three-volume account of Nakamura's life that I have relied upon heavily for both color and detail; the three parts of my account roughly correspond with his respective volumes. The Tempukai's monthly publication, *Shirube*, has also been an invaluable resource. And in 2005 the Tempukai published *Zusetsu, Nakamura Tempu*, an illustrated account of Nakamura's life and times filled with photographs, each worth a thousand words.

All this said, I am not, nor have I any intention of presenting myself to be, an authority on Nakamura Tempu or his philosophy. Rather, I would describe myself as an avid student. My association with the Tempukai began in 2004; I have participated in several of their Summer Camps and other seminars and workshops; and I have integrated at least some of the practices taught by the Tempukai into my daily routine. While Tempu wrote prolifically, I have read only a small part of his writings, particularly as I find them to be very hard going. Part of this has to do with my non-native handicap when it comes to the Japanese language, but most of my Japanese associates agree that his writings are not easy to understand. Luckily, the Tempukai has made some of the voice and film recordings of his talks available in CD and DVD format, as these I find provide a more direct means to a sense of the man as well as his philosophy.

Non-fiction purists may take exception to my practice of reconstructing conversations. Admittedly, this is a storyteller's convention. I have intentionally omitted quotation marks to indicate that what is written does not pretend to correspond word for word with what was actually said. On the other hand, where conversations occur, they are based upon Tempu's own accounts or upon Ooi Mitsuru's accounts of those accounts. Likewise, many if not most of Tempu's stories are impossible to authenticate; I, like his other chroniclers, choose to believe that his stories are based in truth and to present them accordingly.

In short then, my purpose here is to put down neither a scholarly nor a definitive work but a readable introduction to the man and his ideas through his life story. Why so little about Nakamura Tempu is available in English is a mystery to me, but perhaps what follows can serve as a first step in filling that void.

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