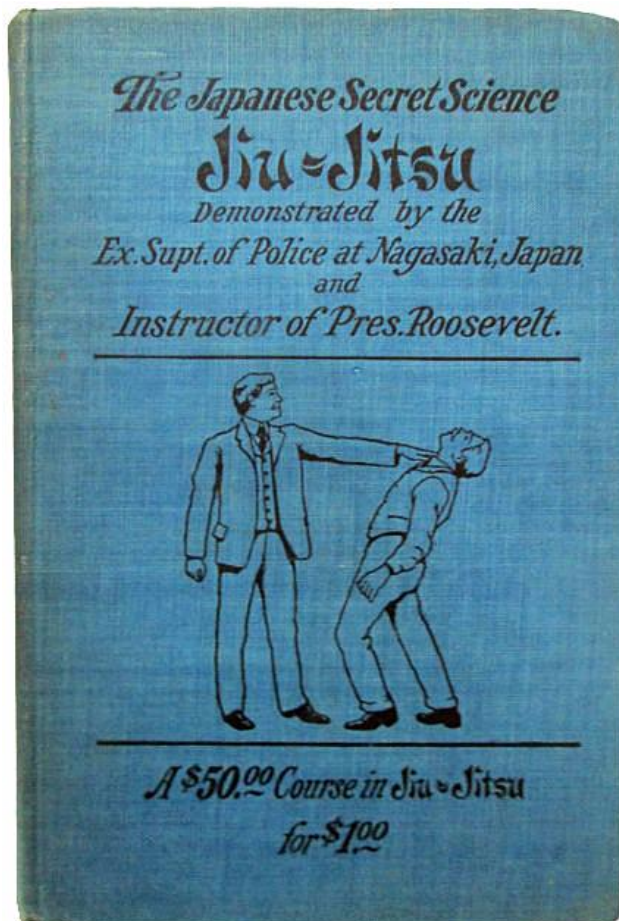


AoM Team | February 3, 2017

Vintage Jiu-Jitsu (Judo) Lessons from Theodore Roosevelt's Personal Instructor



THE WASHINGTON POST: THURSDAY, JUNE 29, 1905.

Prof. Yamashita's Judo Exhibition.

Prof. Yamashita's exhibition of Judo which will be given at the Lafayette Theater on Friday evening, promises to be the most interesting performance of its kind ever seen in Washington. The professor has never appeared publicly in America, though he has given a number of private exhibitions in Washington and New York. He is the foremost exponent of this art in the world, having obtained the seventh degree. Weighing less than 140 pounds and but five feet two inches in height, he is yet able to overcome an antagonist of twice his weight. Mme. Yamashita, who will take part in the performance, is also an adept in the art, and is able to defend herself against any man, however strong. She will illustrate how easy it is for a woman proficient in the art of Judo to take care of herself when attacked. The exhibition will show a complete practical demonstration of Judo. Prof. Yamashita also will perform a number of physical tricks, which have excited much wonder and admiration when performed by persons appearing in vaudeville, and will show how easy it is to do them. A well-known athlete of Washington has accepted the invitation to go on the mat with Mr. Ogo in a wrestling bout. Mr. Saburo Koshiba's illustrated lecture on the Russo-Japanese war will be exceedingly interesting. Mr. Koshiba has just received a large number of lantern slides direct from Japan, made from photographs taken on the field.

Editor's note: Theodore Roosevelt had a keen interest in martial and combative arts, beginning with boxing as a young man, and later as president — after a blow blinded him in the eye — focusing on wrestling and grappling. While in the White House, he first took jiu-jitsu lessons from Professor John J. O'Brien, who had learned the art while working as a police inspector in Nagasaki, Japan. According to a 1902 article in the New York World, Roosevelt "hoped soon to be able to break the arms, legs or neck of any Anarchist or thug who may assail him."

Later, TR was taught jiu-jitsu and judo (while now distinct, he used the terms interchangeably) three times a week, for three years, by Japanese master Yoshiaki (Yoshitsugu) Yamashita. Roosevelt loved practicing jiu-jitsu (his ardor would help popularize it with Americans) as well as good old fashioned wrestling, and he would ask any and all companions and visitors; from diplomats to cabinet members to his wife and sister-in-law to grapple with him.

TR's unflagging enthusiasm and burly frame eventually wore out even Yamashita, who told a journalist that while Teddy "was his best pupil...he was very heavy and impetuous, and it had cost the poor professor many bruising, much worry and infinite pains during Theodore's rushes to avoid laming the President of the United States."

If you want to learn some of the vintage jiu-jitsu moves TR once practiced, below you'll find the book (condensed) his original instructor, J. J. O'Brien, published in 1905. Bully!

10 THE MESSENGER, OWENSBORO, KY., SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 12 1904

WASHINGTON IS LEARNING JUI-JITSU

Washington, D. C., June 11.—Washington is learning jiu-jitsu. In one class are six society women; in another four little girls. In a class for men are several members of the diplomatic corps and Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., and his brother Kermit.

So impressed is the President Roosevelt with the Japanese secret science of self-defense that he has recommended that it be taught at West Point and Annapolis. Arrangements to that end are now being made.

Yamashita, the most learned of the living exponents of jiu-jitsu, or judo, as the modern school is popularly designated in Japan, is now in Washington, and with him for the first time judo as interpreted by an acknowledged master has been permitted to go out of Japan.

Judo until now has belonged to Japan alone, and those who were initiated there took an oath more solemn than a Mason's never to reveal what they had learned. Only those of most exalted moral character have ever been admitted to the higher degrees, whose dangerous secrets are jealously guarded.

Had to Get Emperor's Consent.

The main steps that had to be taken before Yamashita could be induced to come, involving an audience with the emperor, whose consent had to be obtained for the exportation of a secret so valuable to Japan, much correspondence and the assistance of the most influential men in the empire, including Prof. Shibata, a Yale graduate, make in themselves a long story. Last October, however, Yamashita, accompanied by his wife and one disciple, Kamaguchi, arrived in Seattle, Wash., the home of Samuel Hill, accompanying him a month later to this city, where they have been ever since. They came here as the guests of Mr. Hill, who it was understood would assume toward them the role of protector.

Judo appeals peculiarly to women as a science which teaches the resistance of muscular force by evading it, and which is the triumph of subtlety over strength.

"A woman of however slight physique" said Mr. Hill, "with a knowledge of judo would be absolutely safe anywhere in the world. It should be taught to every woman in the south. With one light touch she could completely paralyze a large man, and with another throw him a distance of several feet."

Japanese Art of Self-Defense Being Adopted by President and Sons. Social Leaders and Army Men Interested in Oriental Science.

Mme. Yamashita, who is assisting her husband in the instruction of the women and children's classes, is several inches below the average height of the American woman. She, however, does some things which seem like feats of stupendous strength to the uninitiated.

"No," she said to the marveling spectator at the end of a performance during which she had balanced a man on either arm and tossed still another man across the stage as easily as if he had been cork. "It is not so difficult as it looks. One needs to know how. That's all."

Considered Few Worthy of the Secrets

When it is explained that to those who have attained a status such as Yamashita's, in addition to their knowledge of the many ways in which with one lightning-like touch an assailant's neck may be broken, his brain paralyzed, his spine twisted, his limbs unlimbed, tradition accords the privilege of employing any of these drastic measures should he see fit, it will be understood why so few are esteemed worthy to be trusted with such knowledge and power. Those of a hypnotist are less dangerous.

The woman who are now trying to learn how are very much in earnest. They take a daily lesson, for which they are on hand promptly a little after 9 o'clock every morning. The professor does not want any in his class who are not sufficiently interested to be regular and punctual. They are society women who go late to bed every night of their lives and have a fresh list of engagements and duties awaiting them every day. Several have not missed one lesson all winter long. One who entertains oftener perhaps than any woman in Washington has missed only one lesson—and then she was out of town for the day.

It is particularly the art of self-defense which these women are learning, and they have progressed so far that they can without difficulty or strain lift and throw a body weighing 200 pounds. An assailant rushing toward them they would throw by a light touch on the knee, wrist or cheek, using the force of his own impetus against him.

Mrs. Lee, who is a sister of Mrs. Elgins, and a daughter of ex-Senator Davis, of West Virginia, is an expert horsewoman and one of the cleverest women in Washington society. The class for women as originally formed by her included her sister-in-law, Mrs. Davis, Mrs. Herbert Wadsworth, Mrs. William Holand Wilmer, wife of the physician; Miss Ames, sister of Representative Ames, of Massachusetts, and Miss Katherine Elkins. Miss Elkins, who is the only daughter and youngest child of Senator Stephen B. Elkins, rides horseback, plays golf and excels in all outdoor sports.

Pupils Must Keep Their Tempers

One point which Yamashita insists upon with all his pupils is absolute good temper. He reserves the right, in fact, to refuse further instruction to any one showing lack of self-control in this particular, and he occasionally introduces exercises calculated to test the disposition of his pupils.

"You will understand that it is brain work," said one of the intellectual lights of the class, "when I tell you that we are studying the exercises that go with each lesson in Japanese as well as in English."

Secrecy is another point insisted upon, each student subscribing to certain conditions and pledging himself not to impart to others that which a study of the science reveals to him.

A fourth, and to the public, most interesting class in judo is that which has been holding its sessions at the white house, with President Roosevelt as star pupil.

Mr. Roosevelt's first introduction to jiu-jitsu was unfortunate. A shipwrecked sailor who had picked up the rudiments of it in Japan and who

brought up later on the New York police force, undertook to instruct Mr. Roosevelt, and dislocated his shoulder in the course of an afternoon's demonstration.

When Mr. Takashita, naval attaché of the Japanese legation, took the two little gentlemen-exponents of the art now in Washington to call on the president, Mr. Roosevelt found himself confronted with a proposition of a very different order. After witnessing an exhibition of their high-bred skill, arrangements were made for regular instruction and the president with his intimate friend, Gifford Pinchot, set about acquiring agility and pliancy. Yamashita and Kamaguchi were commanded to impart all the skill that might possibly be attained in a short course. When the president's sons, Theodore, Jr., and Kermit, came home from Groton for the Easter holidays they also were admitted to the class.

Russian Army Trained in Judo

In Japan the first principles of the science are taught to soldiers, sailors and policemen. All officers of the army and navy are proficient in it. When they come into close contact with the Russian forces the armies of Japan will no doubt give some vital demonstrations of a science to which 200 forms of attack are known.

Hand in hand with judo goes kyuatsu, embracing twenty-eight methods of resuscitating judo's victims and which is generally speaking a somewhat vigorous massage. It is claimed that experts of kyuatsu can revive a hanged man, provided his neck is not broken.

Jiu-jitsu, or judo, has its psychic side. Superficially it signifies the science of self-defense without weapons. It is far more. It implies the dominance of the spiritual over the animal in man. It inculcates sobriety, obedience, absolute self-control, the downing of all emotion and passion at a nod from the will. Its spirit permeates the whole morale of the army of Japan today, whose perfect discipline and all which that implies have already astonished the world.

In Japan from eight to ten years are usually spent in the complete course, so that boys beginning at ten years of age when the body is supple and pliant finish at eighteen or thereabouts. Adults taking up the study rarely attain any marked degree of skill in a science where so much depends upon precision and an almost incredible rapidity in execution.