

The Speech of Sensei Paolo Taigō Spongia
at the New Tora Kan Dōjō site Great Opening in its 25th year of life.
Rome June 19 2011

This is a moment of great joy and satisfaction I'd like to share with all of you, students and friends of the Tora Kan Dōjō.

With the students grown up in the dojo, as well as with those who have become recently part of this wonderful family, and finally with those who somehow have been close to our school for these long years.

As many of you already know, this is the 25th anniversary of the Tora Kan Dōjō. In these long 25 years I've never thought about a relocation of the school and I considered offensive by some new members, often children's parents, asking me (anyway naively and without any malice) the reason why I wouldn't look for a larger place.

Actually, we didn't and we don't need yet a larger location in terms of square metres; the dōjō is perfectly sewn on us as a tailored suit: it's the "size" of our life and it's not built up just of bricks and concrete, nor of square metres.

This idea can't be easily understood from those who are not living the life of the dōjō.

Last year anyway, we had been offered the chance to move in this place which seemed to be the perfect solution because of its peculiarities and its short distance from the old site.

For the first time in 25 years I felt it was the right moment to take this step and that we were called to a crucial change.

The journey - our practice is just called Dō, The Way - is based on proceeding on a endless path, giving us the chance to admire new horizons and in this case our horizon has just changed.

There is the right time for everything, as Budō practice has thought us, and the true wisdom lies in being able to listen to the call of life that flows and in not being afraid of changement or, as someone said:

"We don't need to choose at all. Our destiny chooses for us and it's wise, on our side, to be worthy of its choice, whatever it is."

When I was deciding if moving or not, I realized that some crucial decisions and occurrences of my life just happened in "the year of the Tiger", according to the Chines Zodiac in which each sign reappears every 12 years.

In the year and hour of the Tiger I was born. In the year of the Tiger I "discovered" the Karate-do and my adventure began. In the year of the Tiger 1986 I founded the Tora Kan Dōjō and chose this noble animal, so precious for our style, to represent it. In the year of the Tiger 1998 I went to Okinawa for the first time and sustained my first graduation in Japan in front of my Sensei Higaonna and of two students of the founder of our style; in the same year I asked for the secular ordination into the Zen Sōtō, receiving a few years later the monastic one. Finally in the year of the Tiger 2010 my journey along the Way of Zen met a turning point and exactly in the year 2010 we've been offered the opportunity of moving our site... how to resist the call of destiny?

Some students showed an understandable sorrow in leaving the historic home at the 49th number of this street. And this is natural, after having grown up in this place. Some were eight years old at the beginning, now they are 33 years old...

Now I'd like to support those who are feeling this kind of discomfort, saying that we will continue to bring with us, in this new location, all the things the old dojo left us in these 25 years. Nothing will be lost.

This new Dōjō has been dreamt and built exactly on the experience gained in these 25 years on the experiences, needs and ideas that the historical site inspired us.

I don't feel like I'm giving up nothing, I felt this place rising and growing up into the reality we are here to inaugurate today and I don't feel sad but grateful and happy.

I take this opportunity to thank Mr and Mrs Sartorelli who graciously hosted us during these long years; I wish them a good luck.

I'd like also to point up that in every important moment of my life I've been supported by the presence of my friends.

It happened (for the first time) in 1987, when I founded the Tora Kan Dōjō. I was 24 years old and I could never deal with such a commitment without the help and support of my student and friend Vittorio who, renouncing to take vacations in August, stayed with me on the 49th of Selva Candida street to build the walls of what would become the main Italian school of Okinawan Goju-Ryu Karate-Do.

At that time, it was enough to put on some walls, some showers, a couple of mirrors and a rubber floor to start...

Today the work has been bolder and I wouldn't even have thought of making this step and starting with this new adventure, without my guardian angel: my dear friend Angelo De Sanctis, who patiently and professionally, conducted the construction of the new site. Most of the beauty and quality of the new Dōjō, that you will soon admire, is due to his cleverness and generosity.

I met Angelo a few months after the establishment of the first site of Tora Kan Dōjō and last Friday, removing the "tatami" I saw on the old floor the signs of his loving presence, even then. I saw the basis he had built for the old ring and I don't think it is a case that our friendship has the age of the Dōjō.

The strength of our friendship has been put to the test during this last year of projects and construction. I really hope Angelo will forgive me for the stress I caused him, as a result of some unusual requests of mine, that he punctually fulfilled.

Beyond this irreplaceable guardian Angel, many friends and students, as well as my family itself, helped me a lot, and gave me the strength to deal with this adventure that otherwise would have been for me overwhelming and unthinkable.

It's an illusion to think of being self-sufficient or a self made man; our success cannot come only from our strength or diligence, though great.

Not a day passes in which, once awake, I bow with deep gratitude to my teachers, my family and ancestors, and to my friends. My daily practice is based on this deep feeling of gratitude.

I would finally point up something else.

We wanted to build a beautiful Dōjō.

We could have saved a lot of money, using less refined materials or less daring solutions, but along the way, I felt that my debt of gratitude to the Way of Karate-Do and Zen which feeds my life and yours, should be expressed by building a dojo, both functional and beautiful.

Even in this, Angelo's advice, expertise and generosity, have significantly contributed.

Every resource has been invested, and even more: but I'm happy of having done this.

I'm glad I managed to put everything at stake, giving back what I received and offering this precious place of education, formation and friendship to the generations to follow.

Furthermore I'd like to thank, from the bottom of my heart, all who offered their own contribution to construction of the new Honbu Dōjō.

All students who in the last phase offered their time and effort.

The unfailing and precious friend Marco Conti with his extraordinary generosity and all those students who have offered money used to purchase the wooden floor of the great hall of the dōjō.

This adventure has begun in a difficult moment for Italy: many people have lost their job followed by a worsening of their economic conditions. Despite this, many have given up anything in order to contribute to the work. And this fact, in this moment, is priceless and moves me a lot.

The names of all those who contributed to the construction of the dojo and are now parts of its history, have been written below the axes of the parquet, facing the shindan, as if they were united in an eternal Rei (bowing to the altar).

These offers, besides their very precious economic support, show that the dōjō is really the spiritual home of all of us.

A place where many of us grew up, have forged, where friendship and love are born, where hopes, fears, problems and joys were shared.

This place, beyond its beauty, is and will be the place of the soul; this place has no boundaries and we will carry it with us at anytime. I hope the dōjō can continue to be a reference for future generations beyond our little lives and aspirations.

I consider this as a moment of rebirth, of deep purification that will take us together in harmony, to renew our enthusiasm and practice.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart and invite you to enjoy this moment with me. The dōjō is yours and I hope it will always be fed by your presence and your love.

Thank you,

Paolo Taigō Spongia