Masaya Sato
1932-2010

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佐藤方哉
1932-2010

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MABA/ABA/ABAI was and is full of dream chasers, people who dedicate much of their lives to the pursuit of lofty but elusive goals. Dream chasers are heroes. But now ABAI has one less dream chaser, with the death of Sato Sensei on August 23, 2010. Masaya was 77 years old and still hard at work in pursuit of an understanding of humankind through behavior analysis and in pursuit of the international dissemination of behavior analysis.

It all started years ago when a plane from Boston’s Ralph Gerbrands was flying over Tokyo, and two boxes fell out of the cargo bay to drift down through the clouds. The gods must be crazy. One box, the pigeon Skinner box, fell into the outstretched hands of young Masaya Sato standing in the perception-research lab of Professor Takashi Ogawa at Keio University. The other, a rat Skinner box, fell into the hands of Yagi at the University of Tokyo. But the gods were not crazy; they knew that few things are more reinforcing than tossing a pigeon in a Skinner box, connecting a Gerbrands cumulative recorder to it, and sitting back to listen to and see those key pecks accumulate (and oh yes, timing each of the intervals of the VI schedule with a stop watch while reading the list of intervals in his notebook; and oh yes #2 young Masaya only had a traditional event recorder at that time--maybe not quite as idyllic as I’d like to think). None-the-less, the young Masaya was hooked and, of course, did his dissertation on stimulus control with that pigeon in one of those magic boxes. Thus, under Ogawa’s tutelage, began a major component of the experimental analysis of behavior in Japan.

And Masaya continued to explore one of the great features of the Skinner box, its function as a microscope for examining both simple and complex behavioral processes, when he studied delayed matching-to-sample and also problem-solving in pigeons.

And Masaya began to explore another great feature of the Skinner box, its role as a model for experimental research in the human-operant lab, where he studied self-control and the type A behavior pattern as well...
as in a more generalized lab setting where he studied observational learning (modeling) in young children.

And Masaya began to explore still another great feature of the Skinner box, its role as the foundation for theoretical extrapolation, when he studied instinctive behavior, motivation and emotion, language and cognition, conflict, awareness, self-management of diabetes, asthma, the mand in haiku poetry, and Buddhism. Thus Masaya's breadth of interest illustrates one of the great features of behavior analysis--it provides us a coherent intellectual, social, and spiritual worldview.

Over the years, Masaya read several talks at ABA wherein he presented a behavior analysis of Buddhism. And I'd observed him frequently giving alms at Buddhist and Shinto temples. So I asked this scientist/theoretician if he was a Buddhist; he paused for a minute, as he always did and then said, "I don't know."

The younger Masaya caught the Skinner box, and it caught him. And in 1979, the older Masaya was one of the first members of ABA, attending every annual conference thereafter. But he didn't attend alone; instead, he was always with a coterie of Japanese behavior analysts, both experienced researcher-teachers and fledgling grad students, always encouraging and supporting Japan's participation in behavior analysis. In 1984 at ABA in Nashville, a beautiful young woman, Naoko Sugiyama, was in the grad-student section of that coterie. And two years later, there appeared a photo of Masaya and Naoko, elegant in their traditional kimonos--married.

In 1998, Masaya was the first and, so far, the only ABA/SABA president not from the States. In that role, he made major contributions in helping ABA/SABA bring behavior analysis to the entire world and not just leave it confined to the land of Skinner. He established ABAI's biannual international conference, always to be held outside the States. He got a permanent position for an international representative added to the ABAI Council. And he created a SABA fund for international grants. He was also co-chair of ABA's International Committee. And Masaya was one of the founders of Japanese ABA, its president from 1985 to 1990 and executive director from 1983 to 1984, and 1991 to 2006.

And like Skinner, Keller, Bijou, and so many others before him, a still older Sato-san was required to retire from Keio at the young age of 65, as is still the custom in Japan but fortunately no longer required in the States. And like Skinner, Keller, Bijou, and so many other of our dream chasers, retirement did not stop Masaya's pursuit of the dream; instead, he taught full-time at Teikyo University and then at the correspondence school Seisa University, where he was president from 2009 to 2010.

And like many other behavior analysts, Masaya was also heavily involved in the arts. He came from ten generations of physicians/writers/poets. His father was the famous author/poet Haruo Sato. So Masaya set some of his father's words to music that he, himself, composed. He has four CDs of his own work available at http://www.amazon.co.jp under his pen name Masao Kinoshita (another CD will be released posthumously). Much of his music is of the 1940's Edit Piaf sultry style; and really good; but he also has a CD of songs he composed for children, Spring Day. In addition, Masaya wrote his own poetry and published under yet another pen name, Kanketsu Shishu. Isn't that cool.

The beautiful young grad student in the kimono has gone on to become a major figure in behavior analysis, working with and independently of Masaya, training students, sending them to the States for more training, facilitating their attending ABA, expanding behavior analysis and pioneering OBM in Japan and throughout the world (she wrote Introduction to Behavior Analysis, which has sold 44,000 copies). Naoko initiated J-ABA's paying the considerable expense of two Japanese students attending ABA in the States every year since 2002, an impressively effective use of donor funds, as it doesn't merely reduce the costs of students attending ABAI but, instead, allows students to attend who otherwise might
not be able to. And she's implemented a program where Japanese authors at the ABAI Expo donate their books to Japanese students who started studying behavior analysis in the States with no knowledge of behavior analysis in Japan. Furthermore, Naoko and Masaya have independently been generous donators to SABA's international fund and SABA's student fund.

And she served as the liaison from J-ABA on the 2001 ABA delegation to China. Also she formed the Asian Association for Behavior Analysis. In her own way, Naoko continues the chase of the dream that Masaya started.

And yes, I weep as I write.