



国際大山空手道連盟総本部

World Oyama Karate

Honbu Newsletter

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Back to Basics

By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama



Put Your Spirit Into Each Technique!

The weather across the world has been unpredictable lately. In Alabama, we had a pretty mild summer, but it rained nearly every day. Although summer is still here, I can feel that autumn is just around the corner. When I walk the trails with my dogs in the morning, I can feel the air becoming cool and see the leaves ready to change color. Walking the dogs in the morning is my favorite time of day. It gives me a chance to think about what I need to work on, how to teach my students and instructors, what I'm going to eat for lunch...

We had some big events during the early summer. The June Fighters' Cup in San Francisco was a great success. Sensei Saito, Sensei Yoko and all of their Black Belts did a great job, as did Shihan John Lehner, Sensei Motoi and the students from San Jose dojo. In the middle of June, I conducted a Japan Branch Chief Camp. We trained hard together and on the last day, I showed them the first "rough cut" of the movie, *Take a Chance*. They were very excited. Sensei Naoi told me afterwards, "I wish I was in the movie."

When we made first made plans to film the movie a couple years ago, Sensei Naoi, Sensei Masa and Sensei Saito all did a screen test audition at Honbu Dojo. Sensei Masa and Sensei Saito did their best to give an Oscar-worthy performance. But Sensei Naoi did no preparation at all and just read the lines without any effort to act. In July we had summer camp, which was a reunion for the Imo (Potato) Samurai that went with me to Russia. Sensei Motoi from San Jose also came down. It was a great camp.

2013 is now 2/3 finished. As I look back over the past couple years, I have some thoughts on training that I want to share

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Shihan Dai Takahashi, Shihan John Lehner, Saiko Shihan, Japanese Vice Consulate, Sensei Shuji

without any thought to setting it up or when is the best time to use it. If they fight another beginner, this type of fighting may actually be effective every once in awhile. They may say to themselves, "Yes, I am a Karate man! I can see my Black Belt in the near future!"

But if they fight a more experienced student, simply using their reverse punch

over and over doesn't work. They are easily read by their opponent, who is also able to control the distance, angle and timing of the fight. At that point, the beginner may say, "What's happened to my strong punch? Where's my Black Belt that seemed so close before? I need a telescope to see it now!" Having a strong technique initially gives a student confidence, but when they face someone more experienced, that confidence disappears when they realize their strong technique is really *the only* technique they have. It is at this point that their instructor (perhaps me, Sensei Karl, Sensei Dale or Senpai Bushido (???) will point out to them that while their reverse punch is very strong, they don't have any strategy for how to use it. They should think about Kihon Sono Ichi Kata and how it uses set-up techniques (*Sute Waza*) for finishing techniques (*Kime Waza*).

If students can see the interconnectedness of Kihon, Kata and Kumite training, that's wonderful. But, unfortunately, many students only see Kumite as Kumite, Kata as Kata and Kihon as Kihon. They miss the point that Kata teaches strategies for how to use Kihon techniques with combinations, timing and angle in order to be effective. During Kumite, students can see where their technique lacked power or correct form or

with you in this issue of the newsletter...

TOKUI WAZA

When they first start training, a student's favorite technique (*Tokui Waza*) usually is one done with their dominant hand/foot. Very few people are truly ambidextrous, most of us favor one side or the other for performing daily tasks. We have preferred hand with which to write, eat, throw or catch a ball, etc. Although it may seem so, the human body is not perfectly symmetrical. There are very subtle differences in our left and right sides, such as length and muscular/bone structure, that dictate exactly how we will use our body to perform tasks with optimal efficiency, power, speed and balance.

So, for example, when a right-handed person begins training, their favorite hand technique is most likely going to be right hand reverse punch. From years of favoring their right hand for daily tasks, their bodies are accustomed to using the right side to generate power and speed. Identifying and developing a strong technique(s) gives a student confidence. When they fight, however, they only think of using that single strong technique (right reverse punch). They use it over and over again



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how they need to practice Kata more to develop a better sense of timing.

So, after identifying and develop their favorite technique, a student needs to figure out how to set it up (i.e. left hand ago uchi for right hand seiken). They should try to put together a simple combination of 3 techniques and practice it over and over again. Furthermore, they need to use their combination with different timings.

Tempo is everything. There are 3 basic timings--Driving (*Sen*), Counter (*Go*) and Crashing. In Driving Kumite you attack first, which means you need to use quick techniques to initiate the attack along with quick stepwork. In Counter Kumite, you need to figure out how to make your opponent attack, then block and immediately follow with your own attack. Crashing Kumite is a little more difficult than the other two. Here, you attack at the same time as your opponent and follow up with your strong finishing technique.

Having control over timing and setting up your best techniques are essential to winning a fight. When a student first faces someone who is a strong fighter, they panic inside and keep using their favorite technique over and over. Their mind shrinks and they become more and more desperate as their opponent easily reads their movements. Desperate clinging to favorite techniques is a sign of mental weakness in a fight. Most experienced, high-level fighters only use their favorite techniques sparingly. If they fight for 3 minutes, they may use their favorite techniques only 2 or 3 times. They are able to save their best techniques because their understanding of strategy and timing is much better than a beginner's. So, while Tokui Waza are important, they should be saved for the right time and spot. Try to develop at least 3 Tokui Waza for your fighting.

KIHON & CHI/SPIRIT

At the start of their training, students' chi is focused intently during Kihon training. They put all of their effort behind each punch and kick. They do their best to focus mentally and physically on everything the instructor tells them. They sweat

and sweat and train hard until soon they can feel that they are using their total body in harmony with their techniques. A big reason they are able to focus so intensely both mentally and physically is because Karate is still new and fresh to them.

I see lots of Green, Brown and Black Belts who have lost this intensity they once had. They've spent a couple years or more working on the same techniques and becoming comfortable with all of them. Their minds tell them that they already know *Furi Uchi*, *Shita Zuki*, *Seiken*, *Mae Geri*, *Yoko Geri*, *Uchi Mawashi Geri*, etc. They tell themselves, "I know all this now. I got it." But even though their techniques look correct, there is a hollow quality about them.

For example, *Seiken Chudan Zuki* in *Sanchin Dachi*--At first glance, their punch looks good. But, their toes and feet aren't gripped strongly to the floor as they should be, their knees are only slightly bent. Their fist looks tight, but if it were to make contact, it would crumple. Or another example, their *Mae Geri* looks like a *Mae Geri*, but on closer examination, their foot is loose when they kick, they don't use their *chusoku* sharply as they once did. When practicing *Seiken San-Bon Zuki* in *Zenkutsu Dachi*, many students don't use their *Hikite* sharply enough. As a result, when they fight, they never use the total rotation of their body when punching. Because they overlook this point in Kihon training, their Kumite ability remains stuck and limited.

The same is true for their *Kiai*. Whereas it once was explosive and in sync with their techniques, it's now mellowed and seems more musical and soft. They are just making noise, not truly putting their spirit into each technique. In their heads, they feel, "I already know this technique," so it isn't necessary to put their spirit into each one as it was when they started training. This holds true for most students. If I look at their stance, I can instantly tell where their spirit is. That's why at Honbu Dojo, I'm constantly screaming at them to bend their knees and focus on stance so that they can put their spirit back into what they are doing.

There is a proverb in Budo (Martial Arts) that says, "Training isn't done in the mind, but with the total body." Once stu-

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dents reach the level of Green Belt, they often gain a false sense of already knowing each technique. Their minds tell their bodies, "We already got this one, so you can take it easy." But they don't know it at all! In this frame of mind, their training becomes hollow, an empty shell. They fail to recognize that in order to truly know a technique, they must repeat it over and over with intense focus *physically*, not *mentally*. That's the beauty of Karate training. You must spend time exploring each technique deeply, not just a wide variety of techniques only at the surface level.

When a student hasn't spent enough time on Kihon training, it easily shows during Kata. To an untrained eye, their techniques look correct, seem to flow smoothly. But on a closer look, it becomes evident that they aren't really focusing on using the proper part of their body for each technique (i.e. Chusoku for Mae Geri, correct parts of the hand for Shuto, Uraken, Tettsui, etc.). The surest way to make sure that your basic techniques are being done correctly is to make *contact*!

I designed the makiwara boards and Kai Bo's that we use at Honbu dojo so that students can train with contact not only

with their bodies, but with weapons as well. When you strike a makiwara, the force you use bounces back to you. If you punch with a loose fist, or with the wrong knuckles, you will immediately feel it in your hand, wrist and arm. I've always told my students and written in my **KYOTEN** books that without contact, basic technique training is not complete. Kicking and punching the air is only part of Kihon training. In order to fully understand a technique, you must make contact (either with arm guards, chest guards, makiwara, another person, etc.)

Because students at the Green Belt level and above have been training for awhile, they gain a sense of how to manage themselves over the period of an hour-long class (or 45 minutes or hour and a half). Subconsciously, they know when they can relax, not put their total focus and energy into training. As instructors, it's our job to never give students an inch, to keep pushing them so they don't fall into this stagnant state. Resisting the temptation to ease up in training is one of the reasons Karate is about each individual challenging him/herself. Just like the expression, "You can bring a horse to water, but you can't make him drink," an instructor can push a student,

but ultimately the onus is on the student to improve and make it to the next level of their training.

Remember that when you are tired and breathing heavy, that's when real training starts. But if you don't push yourself, you will never improve. The beauty of Ki-



Sweat! Sweat! Sweat! In Japan

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Riley and Ruby — My iPhone Instructors

One of the reasons students fail advanced promotions is because of bad habits. As far as they are concerned, they are doing everything correctly. They are blind to their own mistakes until I point them out. I can see the story of their training through their habits. Over time, they've been sloppy during training, their head has gotten too big. They haven't been dedicated enough, and so bad habits have sprung up like weeds all throughout their basic techniques. Sloppy techniques in turn lead to sloppy Katas and ineffective Kumite. That's why basic techniques are so important.

Big Head = Bad Habit

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they gain a new sense of how basic techniques are important.

But at the intermediate level (Orange/Green Belt), they become used to training. Gradually, they begin to not focus as intently on correct basic technique. Their fist isn't so tight or Hikite as sharp when punching. Their roundhouse kick isn't done at such a sharp angle. Gradually, over time, training in this way allows bad habits to creep in. The bad habit seed is planted and as they continue practicing with sloppy form, the seed grows and grows and the roots of the bad habit get sucked into their bodies. Once the bad habit has taken root, it's hard to get rid of.

Whenever a good fighter hits a wall or slump in their training, I tell them to go back to basic techniques. Try to practice slowly and correctly with focus on good form. Reconstruct your understanding of the technique and reinvigorate your training. If you ever want to get a World Oyama Karate Black Belt, you need to know this point. Of course, each individual is a little different, but having an understanding of why basic techniques are important is essential. Even I spend time practicing



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Sweat! Sweat! Sweat! In Summer Camp

and focusing on my basic techniques to make sure bad habits don't creep in.

As you read this newsletter, if you think I am talking about you, it's because I AM! Even though I am in Alabama, I can feel what my students are doing and thinking all over the world! Think back over the past couple months of your training. How focused and dedicated have you been? If you can identify with my illustration of slacking off in class, then I challenge you today start improving on that point. It won't happen overnight, but set a goal for yourself, that you will start focusing intently for at least 20 minutes of each class. Or for 45 minutes, or an hour, or whatever you feel you can manage. If you do that, you will feel different at the end of class. Your heart will grow to the size of Mt. Everest... But it's all up to you!

Karate is Culture

Karate is culture and culture changes with society over time. The core of culture remains intact, but the surface is susceptible to societal whims. For example, in the 1500's Japan was

still a collection of warring territories. Battle was a constant, so the swords used by the Samurai were heavy and thick for optimal use in battle. In the 1600's Tokugawa united Japan and there was peace. The swords during this period began to become thinner and sharper and the Samurai had more time to focus on honing technique rather than just fighting in battles. Also, in 1543, the Portuguese introduced the rifle to Japan, which had a profound effect on society and the way battles were fought.

At this point, I want to give you a little overview of Budo (Martial Arts) culture in the United States. At the end of World War II, Americans became enamored with Judo. They saw how a small guy could throw down someone twice his size. It was fascinating and mysterious. There was a boom of Judo schools in the U.S. in the 60's. After awhile, interest in Judo began to wane and become replaced with Karate. People saw *Karateka* breaking wooden boards and concrete. They saw a hand that was stronger than wood and cement and said, "Wow! I want to learn *that!*" Suddenly, Karate dojos sprang up everywhere. Even Judo instructors brought out pine boards and broke them and declared, "Yes, I am a *Karate*

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man!"

A little while later, the TV series, *Kung Fu* began to air suddenly everyone wanted to learn Kung Fu. That was followed with a fascination with Ninjas. Ninja costumes became the #1 Halloween costume of choice. There were Little Ninjas, Sexy Ninjas, Chubby Ninjas, Elderly Ninjas... This was soon followed with the Summer Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, and suddenly everyone wanted to learn Tae Kwon Do. Tae Kwon Do schools in the U.S. used to advertise themselves as "Karate" when Karate was

popular, but now they changed back to "Tae Kwon Do" to stay current with public opinion.

As a whole, people are finicky. Very few stay dedicated to the same pursuit for long periods of time. Most just want to move on to the next great thing. In today's 21st Century IT Revolution Age, suddenly everyone has a smart phone. They take them everywhere, constantly texting, checking emails, the internet. Communication has become instantaneous and so everyone wants results NOW! Constant communication and information bombardment makes time go by faster and faster. Days quickly turn into weeks, then months, and suddenly a whole year has gone by with hardly any notice.

Since humans began measuring time over 6,000 years ago, time has remained a constant. One minute is still 60 seconds and one hour is still 60 minutes. But people's lifestyle has changed and we perceive time as passing ever faster. We expect things to happen instantly with minimal effort or waiting. Hard physical training "isn't cool" to young people anymore. About 90% of the constant conversations and information we

share on smart phones is unimportant and of little consequence. It's gossip or discussing where we want to eat lunch and what we ate for breakfast. Nevertheless, it commands our focus and attention. There is so much frivolous information surrounding us, that we never take the time to truly examine ourselves deeply; our identity and thoughts are wrapped up in social media. In the future I strongly believe that Karate training will become more and more important for people to regain balance in their information-heavy lives.

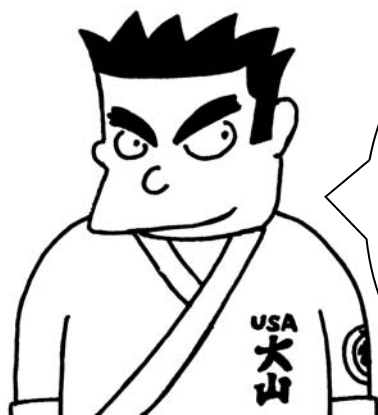
I consider myself lucky that I don't really understand how to use my iPhone. Actually, to be honest, this summer, I took my 2 young grandkids to the Botanical Gardens. We saw a turtle on the pond and they were so excited. "Grandpa, take a picture!" Ruby, the 4 year old said. I started to sweat. I had no idea how to use the camera on my iPhone. I took it out of my pocket and tried to figure out what to do. "You OK, grandpa?" she asked, "Let me see..." My 4 year old granddaughter took the picture like she was born knowing how to use the iPhone. I was sweating.

Even if I can't operate the camera on my phone, at least it doesn't control me. I see so many people everywhere walking around, totally engrossed in their phones. They sometimes bump into each other or wander into traffic or fall into fountains at the mall. I'm glad to not be one of them. Sometimes I can't remember my own phone number or where I put my phone. If I'm at the dojo, I shout, "Sensei Karl! You see my phone?" Usually Sensei Karl is able to find it, but sometimes not.

The point is that I don't feel in a constant rush. My time passes by calmly. I recommend to my students that they try to turn off the cell phone sometimes and read a book or sweat. You're not going to miss out on anything. You won't die.

I worry that soon, I will have to teach students how to battle the Monster Cell Phone, how to fight this kind of opponent. If you are reading this newsletter, I want you to tell your friends that the cell phone germ will eat them alive, but we have the cure at World Oyama Karate! Sweat is the best medicine!

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I Can't
Wait to
See 'Take
A Chance'.

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