BEST KARATE

Jitte, Hangetsu, Empi

M. Nakayama
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Dedicated
to my teacher
GICHIN FUNAKOSHI
The past decade has seen a great increase in the popularity of karate-dō throughout the world. Among those who have been attracted to it are college students and teachers, artists, businessmen and civil servants. It has come to be practiced by policemen and members of Japan’s Self-defense Forces. In a number of universities, it has become a compulsory subject, and that number is increasing yearly.

Along with the increase in popularity, there have been certain unfortunate and regrettable interpretations and performances. For one thing, karate has been confused with the so-called Chinese-style boxing, and its relationship with the original Okinawan Te has not been sufficiently understood. There are also people who have regarded it as a mere show, in which two men attack each other savagely, or the contestants battle each other as though it were a form of boxing in which the feet are used, or a man shows off by breaking bricks or other hard objects with his head, hand or foot.

If karate is practiced solely as a fighting technique, this is cause for regret. The fundamental techniques have been developed and perfected through long years of study and practice, but to make any effective use of these techniques, the spiritual aspect of this art of self-defense must be recognized and must play the predominant role. It is gratifying to me to see that there are those who understand this, who know that karate-dō is a purely Oriental martial art, and who train with the proper attitude.

To be capable of inflicting devastating damage on an opponent with one blow of the fist or a single kick has indeed been the objective of this ancient Okinawan martial art. But even the practitioners of old placed stronger emphasis on the spiritual side of the art than on the techniques. Training means training of body and spirit, and, above all else, one should treat his opponent courteously and with the proper etiquette. It is not enough to fight with all one’s power, the real objective in karate-dō is to do so for the sake of justice.

Gichin Funakoshi, a great master of karate-dō, pointed out repeatedly that the first purpose in pursuing this art is the nurturing of a sublime spirit, a spirit of humility. Simultaneously, power sufficient to destroy a ferocious wild animal with a single
blow should be developed. Becoming a true follower of karate-dō is possible only when one attains perfection in these two aspects, the one spiritual, the other physical.

Karate as an art of self-defense and karate as a means of improving and maintaining health has long existed. During the past twenty years, a new activity has been explored and is coming to the fore. This is *sports karate*.

In sports karate, contests are held for the purpose of determining the ability of the participants. This needs emphasizing, for here again there is cause for regret. There is a tendency to place too much emphasis on winning contests, and those who do so neglect the practice of fundamental techniques, opting instead to attempt ji-yū kumite at the earliest opportunity.

Emphasis on winning contests cannot help but alter the fundamental techniques a person uses and the practice he engages in. Not only that, it will result in a person’s being incapable of executing a strong and effective technique, which, after all, is the unique characteristic of karate-dō. The man who begins ji-yū kumite prematurely—without having practiced fundamentals sufficiently—will soon be overtaken by the man who has trained in the basic techniques long and diligently. It is, quite simply, a matter of haste makes waste. There is no alternative to learning and practicing basic techniques and movements step by step, stage by stage.

If karate competitions are to be held, they must be conducted under suitable conditions and in the proper spirit. The desire to win a contest is counterproductive, since it leads to a lack of seriousness in learning the fundamentals. Moreover, aiming for a savage display of strength and power in a contest is totally undesirable. When this happens, courtesy toward the opponent is forgotten, and this is of prime importance in any expression of karate. I believe this matter deserves a great deal of reflection and self-examination by both instructors and students.

To explain the many and complex movements of the body, it has been my desire to present a fully illustrated book with an up-to-date text, based on the experience in this art that I have acquired over a period of forty-six years. This hope is being realized by the publication of the *Best Karate* series, in which earlier writings of mine have been totally revised with the help and encouragement of my readers. This new series explains in detail what karate-dō is in language made as simple as possible, and I sincerely hope that it will be of help to followers of karate-dō. I hope also that karateka in many countries will be able to understand each other better through this series of books.
Deciding who is the winner and who is the loser is not the ultimate objective. Karate-dō is a martial art for the development of character through training, so that the karateka can surmount any obstacle, tangible or intangible.

Karate-dō is an empty-handed art of self-defense in which the arms and legs are systematically trained and an enemy attacking by surprise can be controlled by a demonstration of strength like that of using actual weapons.

Karate-dō is exercise through which the karateka masters all body movements, such as bending, jumping and balancing, by learning to move limbs and body backward and forward, left and right, up and down, freely and uniformly.

The techniques of karate-dō are well controlled according to the karateka's will power and are directed at the target accurately and spontaneously.

The essence of karate techniques is kime. The meaning of kime is an explosive attack to the target using the appropriate technique and maximum power in the shortest time possible. (Long ago, there was the expression ikken hissatsu, meaning "to kill with one blow," but to assume from this that killing is the objective is dangerous and incorrect. It should be remembered that the karateka of old were able to practice kime daily and in dead seriousness by using the makiwara.)

Kime may be accomplished by striking, punching or kicking, but also by blocking. A technique lacking kime can never be regarded as true karate, no matter how great the resemblance to karate. A contest is no exception; however, it is against the rules to make contact because of the danger involved.

Sun-dome means to arrest a technique just before contact with the target (one sun, about three centimeters). But not carrying a technique through to kime is not true karate, so the question is how to reconcile the contradiction between kime and sun-dome. The answer is this: establish the target slightly in front of the opponent's vital point. It can then be hit in a controlled way with maximum power, without making contact.

Training transforms various parts of the body into weapons to be used freely and effectively. The quality necessary to accomplish this is self-control. To become a victor, one must first overcome his own self.
The kata of karate-dō are logical arrangements of blocking, punching, striking and kicking techniques in certain set sequences. About fifty kata, or "formal exercises," are practiced at the present time, some having been passed down from generation to generation, others having been developed fairly recently.

Kata can be divided into two broad categories. In one group are those appropriate for physical development, the strengthening of bone and muscle. Though seemingly simple, they require composure for their performance and exhibit strength and dignity when correctly performed. In the other group are kata suitable for the development of fast reflexes and the ability to move quickly. The lightning-like movements in these kata are suggestive of the rapid flight of the swallow. All kata require and foster rhythm and coordination.

Training in kata is spiritual as well as physical. In his performance of the kata, the karateka should exhibit boldness and confidence, but also humility, gentleness and a sense of decorum, thus integrating mind and body in a singular discipline. As Gichin Funakoshi often reminded his students, "The spirit of karate-dō is lost without courtesy."

One expression of this courtesy is the bow made at the beginning and at the end of each kata. The stance is the musubi-dachi (informal attention stance), with the arms relaxed, the hands lightly touching the thighs and the eyes focused straight ahead.

From the bow at the start of the kata, one moves into the kamae of the first movement of the kata. This is a relaxed position, so tenseness, particularly in the shoulders and knees, should be eliminated and breathing should be relaxed. The center of power and concentration is the tanden, the center of gravity. In this position, the karateka should be prepared for any eventuality and full of fighting spirit.

Being relaxed but alert also characterizes the bow at the end of the kata and is called zanshin. In karate-dō, as in other martial arts, bringing the kata to a perfect finish is of the greatest importance.

Each kata begins with a blocking technique and consists of a specific number of movements to be performed in a particular order. There is some variation in the complexity of the movements and the time required to complete them, but each
movement has its own meaning and function and nothing is superfluous. Performance is along the embusen (performance line), the shape of which is decided for each kata.

While performing a kata, the karateka should imagine himself to be surrounded by opponents and be prepared to execute defensive and offensive techniques in any direction.

Mastery of kata is a prerequisite for advancement through kyū and dan as follows:

- 8th kyū: Heian 1
- 7th kyū: Heian 2
- 6th kyū: Heian 3
- 5th kyū: Heian 4
- 4th kyū: Heian 5
- 3rd kyū: Tekki 1
- 2nd kyū: Kata other than Heian or Tekki
- 1st kyū: Other than the above
- 1st dan: Other than the above
- 2nd dan and above: Free kata

Free kata may be chosen from Bassai, Kankū, Jitte, Hangetsu, Empi, Gankaku, Jion, Tekki, Nijūshihō, Gojūshihō, Unsu, Sōchin, Meikyō, Chinte, Wankan and

**Important Points**

Since the effects of practice are cumulative, practice every day, even if only for a few minutes. When performing a kata, keep calm and never rush through the movements. This means always being aware of the correct timing of each movement. If a particular kata proves difficult, give it more attention, and always keep in mind the relationship between kata practice and kumite (see Vols. 3 and 4).

Specific points in performance are:

1. **Correct order.** The number and sequence of movements is predetermined. All must be performed.
2. **Beginning and end.** The kata must begin and end at the same spot on the embusen. This requires practice.
3. **Meaning of each movement.** Each movement, defensive or offensive must be clearly understood and fully expressed. This is also true of the kata as a whole, each of which has its own characteristics.
4. **Awareness of the target.** The karateka must know what the target is and when to execute a technique.
5. **Rhythm and timing.** Rhythm must be appropriate to the particular kata and the body must be flexible, never overstrained. Remember the three factors of the correct use of power, swiftness or slowness in executing techniques, and the stretching and contraction of muscles.
6. **Proper breathing.** Breathing should change with changing situations, but basically inhale when blocking, exhale
when a finishing technique is executed, and inhale and exhale
when executing successive techniques.

Related to breathing is the *kiai*, which occurs in the middle
or at the end of the kata, at the moment of maximum tension.
By exhaling very sharply and tensing the abdomen, extra power
can be given to the muscles.

*Rhythm*

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**JITTE**

```
1  2  3•4  5  6•7  8•9•10  11  12  13  14•15  16  17a  17b
18a•b 19  20  21  22•23  24Δ
```

**HANGETSU**

```
1•2  3•4  5•6  7  8  9  10•11  12  13  14  15  16  17•18•19
20•21•22  23•24•25  26  27  28•29•30•31  32  33  34•35•36•37  38
39  40  41Δ
```

**EMPI**

```
1  2  3  4  5  6•7•8  9  10•11•12  13  14  15  16  17  18  19  20
21  22  23  24  25  26  27  28  29  30  31  32  33  34  35•36  37Δ
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- continuous, fast
- strong, continuous, fast
- strong
- increasingly strong
- powerfully
- slow, powerfully
- pause
- *kiai*
Flex elbows, lightly cover right fist with left hand and bring hands in front of chin (20 cm.) for kamae.
1. Migi zenkutsu-dachi
Migi teishō gedan osae-uke
Hidari teishō chūdan oshi-age-uke

Lower level pressing block with right palm-heel / Middle level pressing-rising block with left palm-heel. Do 1 and 2 slowly.

2. Hidari zenkutsu-dachi
Hidari shō chūdan osae-uke

Middle level pressing block with left hand  Turn head to right, bring left forearm parallel to chest. Keep elbow in place.
Middle level hooking block to right side with right hand-wrist
Left fist at left side  Yori-ashi, half step to right.
Middle level side strike to right with right palm-heel | Left fist at left side
Left leg is pivot. Bend right elbow slightly.
BEST KARATE SERIES

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The three kata in this volume are on the Japan Karate Association recommended list and are notable for the sticklike use of the arms—Jitte, the circular movements of hands and feet coordinated with breathing—Hangetsu, and easy, agile movements, combined into continuous techniques—Empi.

Masatoshi Nakayama carries on the tradition of his teacher, Gichin Funakoshi, the Father of Modern Karate. Long professor and director of physical education at Takushoku University, his alma mater (1937), he was chief instructor of the Japan Karate Association from 1955 until his death in 1987. A ninth degree black belt and a familiar face at tournaments, he was among the first to send instructors overseas and to encourage the development of karate as a sport along scientific lines.

"An understandable text and clear, well-posed photographs."

.Library Journal


ISBN4-7700-0904-6  c2375  ¥2000E  (in Japan)