

# *The Way of the Grandmaster: Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**Donald Miskel**

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## *A Brief Resume*

My name is Donald Miskel. I was born in McComb Mississippi in October of 1947. My family migrated to Chicago when I was four years old. I was raised in Chicago's inner city. The neighborhoods I grew up in were pretty tough even by Chicago standards but mine was a relatively happy childhood. I learned to fight early. Fighting was survival tool and physical aggression and mental toughness had to be learned early. I managed to learn both better than most. I had good eye hand coordination, speed balance and a well-honed killer instinct that served me well in the streets.

My first concept of any martial system came through my father. My dad was a WW II marine and a military police who had spent much of his enlistment in Hawaii at a prison camp. He was well versed in the marine's version of hand to hand combat and combat judo. He began showing me a few things when I was actually too young to grasp much but it whetted my curiosity about systematic fighting techniques.

When I was ten years old a friend's father came home from an enlistment in the marines and a stint in Okinawa. He had been a military boxing champion and had studied judo and some of the ateme waza and the striking methods that they taught. He wanted to teach his son self-defense and he needed someone of his son's size and age for him to train with. My friend's father was allowed to teach a boxing class at the Chicago Park District field house in Washington Park. His son and I took the boxing classes but he also taught us judo after the other kids had left. In addition to the boxing punches he also taught us empty hand striking and a few rudimentary kicks. Nothing as advanced or well thought out as the traditional karate, kung fu and kempo that I would eventually go on to study.

When I was twelve years old I took what was to be a six week course at the Jujitsu Institute in down town Chicago. The senior instructors were world renowned Mas and Vince

Tamura. What was supposed to be a six week course became a couple of years. We were taught judo and jiu jitsu.

When I was about fourteen I came into contact with Sensei Shojiro Sugiyama and studied Shotokan karate with him. When I was sixteen years old I met Sensei Douglas Dwyer at Van Boskirk's, a local sporting goods store; the only one that sold martial art equipment in the South Side of Chicago. I had a lengthy acquaintance with Mrs. Van Boskirk and she introduced me to Doug. Doug was working the sais in the aisle of the store and I was thoroughly fascinated. I began training with him in Shorei Goju karate. He had recently opened a school on west 63<sup>RD</sup> street on Chicago's South Side. I was the first and only African American student in the school. Chicago is a pretty segregated city and the neighborhoods tend to be ethnic so it was risky for a black kid to be in that area at night.

I continued my training in the military and had an opportunity to study some of the martial arts in their places of origin. Aside from Hawaii, South East Asia and the Philippines I had an opportunity to study briefly in Okinawa, Korea and Japan.

I received my first black belt in Chaun Fa (Chinese kempo) and Chinese Kundau silat under Benji Appalado.

I have studied karate and kempo as well as Tibetan Lama (white crane) kung fu under Master Choi and Northern Shaolin Praying mantis under Master George Hu. I studied Chinese Kempo and savate under Jeffery Dupre. I have studied aikido, aikijitsu, jiu jitsu and chin-na under Sensei Robert Hackett, Sensei Gilbert James, Sensei Grazanski, Master Tony Roberts and Master Freeman Foxx.

I have studied several other systems under various instructors and masters over my fifty seven years in the martial arts. I have had several commercial schools and have taught for the YMCA and the Chicago Park District. I am the Judan Shodai Soke, co-founder and senior Grandmaster of the Black Lotus Martial Art Association and I'm a Patriarch, senior grandmaster and the Head of Family of the IFAA Black Dragon Fighting Society. I am the pastor and senior advisor for Kenpo Karate Family International and a chaplain through the Shinja Martial Art Association. I also serve as a board member of several other martial art organizations.

Aside from being a martial artist I am a licensed and ordained minister and pastor, a certified prison chaplain, and a certified Christian counselor. I retired as a Psych professional. I have served as a psych tech, a psych therapist, an intervention crisis counselor and a life skill counselor.

I have an AA in Microbiology and Chemistry, MAs in Psychology and Divinity, a ThD in Theology and Pastoral Counseling and a PhD in Christian Counseling. I also have honorary doctorates in Martial Science and Martial Art Education.

A complete martial art resume is included with this book.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**With my wife and grandmistress, Denise Miskel.**



# *The Way of the Grandmaster: Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



# *A SCIENTIFIC BREAK DOWN OF THE STRIKE*

Since this is a martial arts article most of you have correctly surmised that this essay isn't about walk outs by disgruntled employees, picket lines, scabs (as they are so often referred to) or strike breakers. What I refer to as a strike is the ability to hit.

Hitting is pretty basic. Since human beings don't have the imposing canines of many of the primates, the ripping and tearing claws of some predators or the deadly horns and antlers of the creatures that they hunt striking or hitting has become the method of preference by humans in unarmed combat. It's arguable if that is the most efficient manner of dealing harm to another human being. There are martial arts schools that take a totally different approach preferring grappling to the striking arts. That's an argument for a different essay.

Aside from biting hitting is the first mode of offense that a child learns. If one child tries to wrest a toy from another it's unlikely that the offended child will respond with a hip throw and a rear naked choke. A response that incorporates grappling is learned rather than instinctual so you will seldom see that in such an instance. In one on one combat grappling has proved an effective response to a striker, success resting with the better or more skilled fighter than the preferred method of combat. I'm not trying to discount the

effectiveness of grappling. The advantage of striking is that it requires less physical contact and allows an attacker the ability to render harm with a minimum of danger to himself. He can hit and get out of the way of the opponent's response. Of course that is an oversimplification but in the best case scenario that is the advantage of striking.

I'm not going to argue the advantage of one form of combat over another. Instead I want to examine the various types of strikes and how they work. I'm not referring to techniques here. I'm not going to argue the advantage of a left hook over an overhand right. Both are more effective in given situations.

Boxing, often called the sweet science, manages to get a lot out of a little. Boxing takes five or six punches, body positioning and footwork and creates one of the more effective fighting system available. Ideally, it doesn't use clawing, biting, eye gouging, kicks, head butting or elbows but a good boxer can give a mediocre martial artist a lesson that he won't soon forget. Boxing isn't considered a martial art by most classical martial artists but I beg to differ with that. It is a very effective martial art and it can often enhance other martial arts by offering more efficient hand techniques and teaching maneuverability. Boxing doesn't have to follow the Marquise of Queensbury rules. All of the forbidden techniques that I mentioned can be included in combat boxing and sometime even finds their way into the ring.

Again, my purpose here isn't to show the effectiveness of one striking system over another. Instead I want to examine the types of strikes available and the reason for their effectiveness. There are several methods of creating damage with a strike. Hence these methods determine the manner of strike. A strike can do damage by several methods. The ones I want to talk about are

shocking, jarring, crushing, compression and stunning. There is some overlap of these types of strikes but I'm not going to examine those grey areas. There are several other minor methods of striking such as gouging or opposing strikes (which attack the bend of a joint) but I'll leave those alone for another time.

Let me identify the strikes I refer to with this terminology. The terms I use are my own and may be referred to by other names but for the sake of clarity I'll use the names that I feel best describe these methods of attack.

I want to examine these strikes beginning with those I think of as the least efficient and therefore the least scientific.

First I'd like to examine the crushing strike. I use that term to describe a strike that crushes, breaks or shatters the skeletal structure. I found myself in an altercation once, after a hard night of partying. I was confronted by a larger aggressor who thought he saw an easy mark. I wasn't in the best fighting condition at the time considering the night's activities and all my scientific training went out the window. What remained were my rudimentary boxing skills and years of strength training. Instead of a beautiful knife hand strike to the carotid sheath or a devastating reverse punch to the solar plexus, I simply hauled off and punched him in the chest. Not extremely scientific but it did the job. A million bench presses, triceps extensions and shoulder raises gave me the brute strength to crush his sternum. Probably the only reason I was able to land such a blow at all was that my opponent was in no better shape than I was. Anyway, that's what I refer to as a crushing blow. It isn't the most effective strike for a fly weight or light weight fighter but a large heavy person can sometime use it effectively. Even so, there are better ways to strike.

Another type of strike I would like to examine is the compression strike. A compression strike uses what I like to refer to as blunt penetration. Kneeling in a person's belly with one knee is a compression attack. A penetration strike is used most often against the soft parts of the torso focusing on the internal organs. Its method of attack is to invade the space that houses the internal organs by compressing the outside tissue and by that method creating destructive pressure against them. What separates one compression strike from some others is degree of force and choice of weapon. The same method of attack concentrated with a smaller weapon creates a totally different kind of strike. Also, this type of strike is typified by speed of delivery. A heavy weapon, such as a knee, doesn't require eye blinding speed to do harm. The literal mass of the weapon makes it formidable.

Another method of attack is the jarring strike. The jarring strike works best against the face, head or other weakly supported targets. It does damage by setting the less supported target in abrupt motion. This type of attack can cause several forms of injury. One effect is hyperextension of the supporting structure. In a less harmful method of attack such a strike can dislocate a joint or injure connective tissue but in a more serious attack it can severely injure vulnerable targets such as the neck or the spine. This type of blow can also create a whipping motion of the head causing the brain to make concussive contact with the skull. These types of concussive blows can cause unconsciousness and in extreme cases even death. If you hit an opponent in the chin and render him unconscious that is the type of blow that lays him flat.

Another type of strike I would like to examine is the stunning blow. My choice of words may not be the best in this instance. By a stunning blow I

don't mean a blow that gives an opponent momentary pause. That isn't what I'm referring to with this term. By a stunning blow I refer to a blow that effects an attacker's nervous system. A stunning blow can attack either the central nervous system or peripheral targets but it attacks the nerves in the body. These types of blows cover a wide number of strikes and punches and range in severity from stunning an attacking limb to shutting down the central nervous system altogether. When striking the ulna nerve in an opponent's elbow you are delivering a stunning blow. By the same token if you attack an opponent's acupressure points with a dim mak attack, possibly killing him, you have also delivered a stunning blow. The difference between these two attacks is in severity and not in the method of attack. A stun gun can render a person helpless, disrupting his central nervous system. The same weapon used against the heart or with greater voltage can actually kill an opponent. Both are stunning attacks but the effects are completely different. Stunning blows are among the more scientific methods of attack. It doesn't have to get as complicated as dim mak to be effective. A knife hand strike to the side of the neck or a hammer fist to the base of the skull isn't especially complex but such attacks to the nervous system can be very effective and even deadly. These types of pressure point strikes make up much of the approach of the more scientific striking systems but they have to be used with caution. Often the severity in damage inflicted is governed by the degree of focus and force used in the attack. It's a matter of degree that can mean the difference between an unconscious opponent and a dead one. No one with good sense wants to be a killer. In learning these types of strikes a person has to learn restraint. He has to be able to gage the amount of force required to accomplish no more damage than the situation calls for.

The simple techniques in the stunning category require a minimum of training and aren't especially difficult to use in a combative situation. The more complex attacks, however, probably works better in the dojo or kwoon than on the streets. Not because they are ineffective but because they are difficult to apply under duress. They require pin point accuracy to be effective and for the average person such accuracy goes out the window when the heart rate goes up and adrenalin is introduced to the blood stream. In such instances the average person is capable of only gross motor movement. The Japanese martial artist tries to negate this reaction by developing what is referred to as mushin. Mushin refers to a state of mind that is like the surface of a calm lake. The surface of a calm lake reflects anything around it. It is like a mirror. Troubled water, on the other hand, refracts light and what you get isn't a clear picture but what the mind perceives as random flashes of light. The reflection from troubled water offers only confusion. The samurai warrior went into battle expecting death. He was as concerned about dying well as he was about living well. By embracing, even looking for, death he (theoretically) lost his fear of death and that minimized the effect it had on his fighting ability. This is a state that the master martial artist has to be able to enter into to make some of the more esoteric techniques work. Few of us are able to reach or maintain such an untroubled calm in the face of adversity. Since most of us have lives and careers outside of the martial arts we can't or won't invest the type of time and effort that reaching such a state requires. Consequently, many of us know the techniques but few of us can implement them in combat.

That leaves us with the last type of strike that I wish to address. I'm referring to the shocking strike. By shocking I don't mean the type of shock associated with electrical shock. Nor do I refer to shock as in sudden alarm or

as reaction to extreme pain or trauma. By shock I mean hydrostatic shock. Karate and several similar fighting systems specialize in these types of strikes. They can be disruptive, debilitating, dangerous and even deadly. A shocking strike depends on several factors that make it effective. It depends on speed, focus, penetration and limited contact. Any well trained martial artist knows the first three principles but many miss the last. Let me take them in order and then let me explain how they work. There are several ways of developing power. We know that speed and mass equals power. You can get more power with less speed if you have more mass. On the other hand you can achieve power with less mass if you have more speed. In my opinion, I put more store in speed than in mass. A person can develop their speed but a person can't always develop mass. When it comes to striking strength also comes into play. It isn't the most important consideration in delivering a powerful strike but let's face it most of us would rather be hit by a light weight than a heavy weight. Not just because of his size but because of the strength and power that his size implies. If you put a heavy weight boxer in the ring with a middle weight fighter the middle weight will look better. He will exhibit more maneuverability and more hand speed. He'll also be prettier but that's a discussion for another time. The middle weight will probably land a dozen punches before the heavy weight can land one good shot. Unfortunately for the middle weight that one shot is subject to be the only one the heavy weight needs to cinch the fight. That's why they have weight classes in boxing. Of course karate style fighters aren't boxers. Not in the strict sense, anyway.

Along with speed these types of strikes depend on penetration. You can punch like a mule but if your penetration is only skin deep your strikes won't be effective. All of the power that a shocking strike creates has to be delivered



effectively to the target and that requires some depth of penetration. That's why a good punch requires follow through.

A good shocking strike also requires focus. A person can have all of the other elements together but if his strikes aren't focused they'll lack the type of power that such a strike requires. In karate this type of power is created by the blow being shot out with a minimum of muscle tension using a loose muscled thrusting or whipping action. At about the point of contact and penetration every supporting muscle and joint in the body is locked and tensed to focus the force of the blow into the target. That brings us to the last part of the equation which, in a sense, is the other part of focus. Once the blow has been focused into the target the body relaxes instantly and contact is broken. This prevents the force from being reflected back into the attacking limb and lessening the impact of the blow. This is often the missing element in the equation. All of these things put together creates a powerful and devastating strike.

Now that we understand the elements of this strike lets consider the physiological effects and the science behind it. The shocking strike has some elements of all of the other strikes especially when it is aimed at vulnerable targets on the opponent's anatomy. It allows a smaller person to do maximum damage to a larger and stronger opponent. It allows him to create maximum power with minimum effort and to put more power into a blow with less physical motion. He doesn't have to deliver a wide looping haymaker to level an opponent. Martial artists scoff at the haymaker but it isn't because it doesn't have power. If it manages to land it will send the best martial artist to the land of nod. The haymaker, by definition, is telegraphed and as slow as a tractor in the Indy 500. It's slow and easy to see, therefore it's easy to stop,

avoid and counter. A karate technician can get as much or more power by using the laws of physics and kinesiology. He substitutes the long wind up of the haymaker by spinning his waist into the punch. The proper method of punching should be in the arsenal of every novice martial artist. I'm not trying to teach a course in punching. If you don't know the basics I doubt that you would be reading this essay.

Now we get to the good part. How does this type of strike work? For an example let's look at the destructive power of a large caliber bullet. A bullet isn't dangerous because of its mass. Even in a large caliber bullet the mass is negligible or would be if it wasn't traveling at such great velocity. The destructive effects of such a projectile isn't because of the hole it creates. I'm not saying that the hole it creates can't kill you. Too often it can. The hole that a forty five army automatic leaves is almost big enough to walk through. That alone is capable of ending a person's life. Let's look at the hole created by a .45. The hole going in isn't much bigger than the bullet itself but the exit wound can be as big as your fist. Why is this? The most devastating effect of a gunshot wound isn't the penetration of the projectile itself but is because of the shock waves that it sends through the surrounding tissue. You must keep in mind that the human body is composed mostly of water. Throw a stone in water and you get a ripple effect. On a larger scale if a huge mass or a fast moving object of sufficient mass hits water it sends out more than just a ripple. The energy of that mass hitting the water is transmitted to the water causing violent waves away from the area of shock. We've seen the effects that this can have in a large body of water. That type of thing is what causes tsunamis or tidal waves. If you watch the news or read the newspapers you have been informed of the destructive effects that these types of phenomenon create. The effects of a bullet striking flesh sets off a similar

destructive wave. The force created by a gunshot destroys surrounding tissue by rupturing cells in the body. It has a tendency to destroy whatever tissue it comes in contact with and any tissue effected by the destructive ripple of spreading force. You see the end result in the size of the exit wound which is many times the size of the projectile itself.

You may ask yourself what this has to do with striking. If a strike is delivered properly it has a similar effect. The end results may not be as dramatic and definitely not as visual but the technique can be just as devastating. There are no degrees of death. A twenty two slug to the brain can kill you as dead as the blast of a thermonuclear device. A coroner or doctor just announces a person dead. There's no percentage of death involved. You need only be 100% dead. Overkill doesn't render you 120 % dead. Believe me, 100% is more than enough. With a well focused and powerful strike you send a hydrostatic shock through the target and the surrounding tissue. It may not have the effect of a large caliber bullet but it only has to be effective enough to do the job. A well focused strike can rupture the internal organs and disrupt bodily functions. It doesn't require a bloody hole or huge exit wound to do the job. These types of strikes are enough to injure and even kill an attacker. You don't need more than that injured is injured. Dead is dead. Over kill is a waste of effort.

This hasn't been a how to essay. If you don't have the tools or the ability to deliver the types of strikes we've discussed you'll need to talk to your instructor. My intention has been to give you a better idea of the types of strikes that comprise the martial arts, not by technique but by methodology and delivery. I hope that understanding the nature of these strikes will translate into better application and technique. If nothing else it

should enable you to impress your friends with your knowledge of the inner workings of the martial arts. Who knows, you might even earn a black belt in conversational karate.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



# *BLACK LOTUS: FORM, FUNCTION AND FOCUS*

The Black Lotus Association is made up of a membership of both masters and students of the arts. Because many of our members are the heads of their own organizations and teach their own martial arts system, I felt that a further explanation of the philosophy of the organization is in order.

First off, the Black Lotus Martial Arts Association (which for the sake of convenience and my lack of keying skills, I'll refer to as the BLMAA) was formed for instructional level students. That is to say, lower level black belts. Back in the dark ages, when I started studying the martial arts, it customarily took years to achieve a black belt. That is, if a student was capable of achieving that level of expertise. It generally took an average of six to eight years to reach the shodan level.

As time passed and more commercial schools came into existence, black belts were handed out in a much shorter time. This wasn't completely unwarranted, in that more efficient teaching methods were implemented. Unfortunately many schools shortened the time factor and changed the curriculum to retain students. Many schools issued contracts with a black belt promised within a prescribed amount of time. The shodan depended more on time factors than on the skill level of the students.

This led to a lowering of the standards and a rush in the time that the curriculums were taught in. Because of this the skill level of the average shodan was less than acceptable.

Students who received their black belts during that time didn't realize that they didn't have the skill level implied by the rank they wore. They were under the impression that they had more skill than they actually had. This caused a number of students to be hurt and humiliated in self defense situations. The BLMAA was developed to address this problem.

It was my intention to bring together a number of instructors from different schools and systems to collaborate in addressing this situation. Thus, with the cooperation and help of several very qualified instructors, many older and of higher rank than myself, an alliance was formed and a curriculum developed, and the BLMAA came into existence. Several systems were taught in the classes, different instructors teaching on different days, but eventually a synthesis developed and an eclectic art began to emerge. This Black Lotus Martial Arts System (BLMAS) is actually several complete systems that can be practiced as individual, complete arts, or in concert with the



other arts offered to form an individually adaptable eclectic fighting system. In this system the art was tailored to the student and he could choose his own path.

This approach to developing and teaching the arts proved successful and the skill level of the BLMAA students improved vastly. In our organization, the sports aspects of the arts weren't emphasized. We left the sport and competition areas to the individual schools and instructors. We concentrated, instead, on the combat and self defense aspects of the martial arts.

Because I was a pastor, at the time, and several of our key members were Christians, the organization gradually took on a Christ centered focus, replacing the Eastern spiritual influences with Christian philosophies and values. As the organization grew, more instructors who were pastors and ministers became ministers. Unfortunately, this didn't sit well with some of the original members and some left our ranks while others became inactive while still retaining their memberships.

Because the organization taught (sometime brutally) efficient combative techniques, a stricter code of moral conduct was demanded of the students to discourage them from going out and putting their new found physical prowess to the test. Our students became very efficient in combat and self defense situations and accountability became a big part of our code of conduct. If a student was involved in a combat or self defense situation and it came to the attention of the organization, an explanation and a justifiable reason was required of the student. This cut down on the number of incidents by the members. Because conflict resolution and de-escalation in confrontational situations were taught and stressed these incidents became rare, even in the mean streets of Chicago.

In the BLMAA each school and instructor is autonomous, though they are expected to adhere to the philosophy and code of conduct of the organization. Initially, the membership consisted only of dan level membership. The instructors generally had their own schools or organizations and their students were considered auxiliary, or second level associates of the BLMAA. They weren't allowed individual membership. It is my intention to amend this rule and open the organization to lower ranked students. This will be discussed and put before our Master and Master's council in the near future.

The BLMAA doesn't hold tournaments and all interactions between the schools, organizations and systems are up to the individual masters and instructors. This may be subject to change in the near future but as of now, this is the rule of thumb. If the individual schools indulge in free sparing, inner school tournaments are allowed though they aren't sanctioned by the organization. The BLMAA and its fighting system is completely combat and self defense focused.

The BLMAS (combat system) has traditionally attracted more law enforcement, security people and students who work in areas where altercations and confrontations are more common. My personal experience has been in hospital security, personal protection and in the mental health field, all of which are areas where confrontations are often common. The dynamics of these occupations have added to our realistic and practical approach to confrontational situations. I have also taught karate, kempo, aikijitsu and jiu jitsu, all of which I am more willing to teach to the general public. Since I don't teach commercially, I am at liberty to choose who I will teach, especially in the BLMA system. Many of our instructors share this same approach, but again, each school and individual organization within the BLMAA



is autonomous and make their own rules in this area, however, where the BLMA combat system is taught, it is suggested that the students be considered carefully.

The BLMAA is designed to allow and interchange of ideas and fighting techniques between schools, systems and instructors. It also allows and encourages an ongoing forum that allows mutual growth through an interchange of ideas.

I am no longer young and will soon be sixty two years old. Age and several surgeries (primarily back surgeries) have caused me to curb my actual, hands, on teaching. I have a few private and semi-private students that I teach my core system to, but my time now involves more research, writing and personal development than actual teaching. Most of my teaching is done through essays, articles and personal interchange with other instructors and students. I am still learning, and garner much from these interchanges with other instructors, masters and students.

It is my desire to bring together the various Christian martial arts schools and organizations so that we can coordinate our efforts. I am also interested in reaching the lost for Christ, using amongst other methods, the martial arts ministry. I feel that this should be our first and major focus in the BLMAA. Turning out good students is important but turning out students who will offer their talents and abilities to kingdom building should be our first priority. As the presiding master and chairman of the BLMAA I feel that this should be the first focus of our organization and of the martial arts ministry.

I have been a martial artist for over fifty years and I still research and train diligently, but first and foremost, I am a Christian and a pastor. My

greatest focus will always be on the souls and spiritual needs of my congregation and students and winning the lost for Christ.

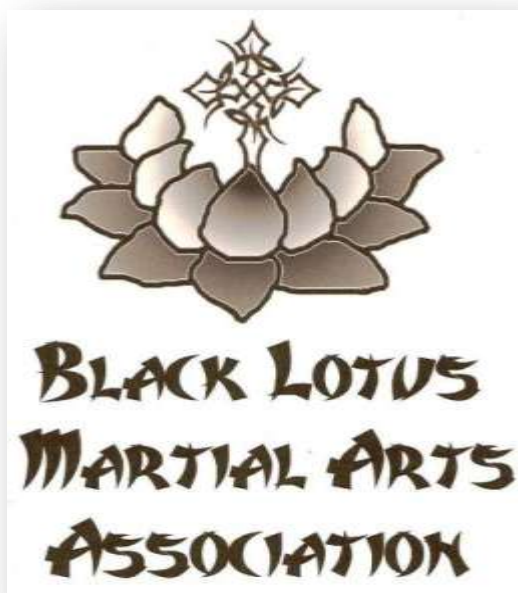
I invite all of the dedicated masters and instructors in the BLMAA to work closer together towards a common goal and to communicate with one another. We need to be in contact to coordinate and focus our efforts. We have a group on the Shinja network and I encourage all of our members to Join the Shinja network, the BLMAA group and the Kenseiryu and Thunderbolt Kenpo groups. I also encourage the membership to check out the Shinja Martial arts organization, the American Martial Arts Union and Master Quoc Tran's organization. These are Christian martial arts organizations and ministries, in their own right. Kenseiryu and Thunderbolt Kenpo are also sister organizations.

I ask the membership to refrain from martial arts politics and to seek unity with other schools, systems and organizations, whether they are classical or eclectic systems. We need a greater level of cooperation and brotherhood in the martial art community. Try not to shun other schools because they don't share our spiritual beliefs. Perhaps by contact with us and through our example, they will be led to the light of Christ.

God bless you, my students, friends and fellow instructors and masters. Let us work together and be with one accord. Train hard and honestly and teach the same way. That way we will achieve and reach our common goals, not only teaching the arts, but winning lost souls for Christ.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# BLACK LOTUS FOUNDATIONS



Since we are adding new members who share a common vision, I would like to elaborate on the foundations and philosophies of the Black Lotus Martial Art Systems and some of its underlying principles. We may not all share the exact same fighting system but we do have to be on the same page as far as direction is concerned. After all, “how can two walk together except they be agreed”? (Amos 3:3)

Black Lotus Martial Art System is an eclectic interpretation of a number of fighting principles and concepts. It takes its primary techniques from karate (Okinawan Kempo), American kenpo, Aikijitsu, and Chinese Chaun Fa and Chin Na. Though we follow an eclectic approach, each of these systems are separate entities and can be studied and ranked separately.

Goju Te Kempo is the foundation of the Black Lotus system. We feel that striking is the most effective way of dealing with combat and self defense situations. The grappling techniques that we use are generally used as restraint or throwing techniques at the end of a waza (fighting combination or sequence). They are not generally used as singular fighting techniques on their own, but supplement the primary striking techniques.

Goju Te Kempo gives us a flexible system that deals with aggression by redirecting the force of an attack and using it against an attacker. We try to avoid using force against force and will preferably use soft circular blocking that redirects the direction of the attack and positions the opponent a disadvantageous position. We use sabaki or positioning footwork, to place our self in the most efficient position to deal with an attack while offering the least access to the opponant's weapons.

The Black Lotus System uses seventy percent hand (striking) techniques to twenty percent kicking and ten percent grappling techniques. Of course, since the system allows individual interpretation by the practitioner, these percentages may vary somewhat.

Our system uses about an equal percentage of open and closed hand attacks, again varying with the individual. We prefer strait line punching to circular, though both are used. Our open hand and arm strikes are generally circular, though again, a few strait line techniques can be and sometimes are used. Our kicks tend to be directed to an area from the solar plexus and rib cage to the feet, ankles and lower legs of the opponent. The system also incorporates leg and foot trips, sweeps and entanglements to destroy the opponant's balance and attack his base. Kicks are not generally used as a primary technique. More often it is used to set an opponent up for a finishing

technique, to divert his attention from a primary technique, as a supplement to a series of hand techniques, or as a finishing technique at the end of a waza.

Along with striking, kicking and grappling techniques, we use a series of bone and joint destruction, ripping and tearing techniques, and techniques designed to break the neck or the spine. These techniques are used for extreme situations and are not first choice techniques. They are designed for killing, maiming or seriously injuring an opponent. We also employ a number of choking, strangling techniques and sleeper holds, as well as a number of restraining holds and locks.

We will use nerve center and pressure point attacks, but our primary aim is to destroy the support system (feet ankles or legs), obscure or destroy the vision, or to compromise the opponent's ability to breath. This gives us a number of easily accessible targets that don't require a lot of technical skill to access.

Aside from these offensive weapons, we employ a number of more exotic weapons, such as the shoulders, hips, butt, the chin, head, and teeth, as the situation may warrant.

Living in the modern world we also teach the use of weapons. Those who desire are taught kobuto, the use of traditional Okinawan and Japanese weapons. All students are taught the use of bladed weapons, striking weapons, firearms and weapons of opportunity. Students are also schooled in weapon defense, multiple opponent defense and scenario defense situational drills.

Our basic self-defense system advocates gross motor movement and simplicity of technique. Though more complex techniques are taught to the advanced students we believe in erring on the side of simplicity.

Our defensive system tends to be deceptively simple. We avoid force to force blocks unless we are using a block as an attack on the opponents offensive limb. When using an attacking block we will try to direct it to the most vulnerable area of the opponent's attacking limb while cutting his line of attack to use his force against him. We prefer parrying or circular defenses to force on force blocks. Our blocks are used along with footwork and body positioning to place the opponent in a position that doesn't allow him an angle of attack, and makes it difficult or impossible for him to defend himself. They serve to unbalance, overextend or uproot him while placing him in a vulnerable position. They allow us to either strike simultaneously with our blocks or strike an indefensible area following the block or parry.

Though we train in a martial discipline, we are a Christian based martial art system, which means we exercise Christian restraint when confronted with a threat. We will fight but only when there is no other alternative. Our philosophy concerning conflict resolution is base on these premises. We will walk away from a fight if possible. We will try to reason our way out of a confrontation, deescalating or diffusing the situation if we possibly can. If forced to fight we will restrain rather than hurt, hurt rather than injure, injure rather than maim or cripple, and maim or cripple rather than kill. We will kill only if it is completely necessary and we are left with no alternative.

Our system incorporates several basic kata to teach flow, body movement and footwork, and to promote balance. More than kata, waza are taught to program basic movements, defensive techniques and incorporate responses into muscle memory. Static repetition of basic techniques are used in the beginning, to teach the student the techniques and to teach the proper

body dynamics, but they are generally used only in the early stages. In the intermediate stages, basics are practiced through the wazas.

Within the Black Lotus Martial Arts Association, there are a number of individuals who teach complete systems. While they may not mimic the Black Lotus Fighting system they embrace the concepts and basic principles in the application, expression and use of their individual systems. Each student must invent himself and find his own way after having perfected the basics. They are given a large pool of knowledge to draw from and within this environment, governed by the core principles, concepts and philosophy builds his own approach that suits his needs and purposes. I don't want those who align themselves with me or train under me to be clones of me. I will give them the building blocks but what they build with it is up to them.

Each master and sensei is autonomous and teaches his own system, but we share common ideals, goals and philosophies. In the end, the Black Lotus Organization doesn't promote a single system, but embraces many styles that seek a common goal; The growth, proper education and implementation of our arts, and the proper approach in the use of our knowledge and ability.

This ends this brief explanation of our approach to the fighting arts. This has been an overview of our philosophy and approach to the martial arts. I hope it has given some insight into our ideas, philosophy and approach to the martial disciplines. These precepts are used as guidelines, not as set laws. As long as the individual member governs himself by responsible Christian rules of conduct and trains honestly and realistically, he has the flexibility that allows individual expression.

Lastly let me say that what we teach isn't a sport. It doesn't lend itself to competition. Until there is a sport that advocates competitive eye gouging, joint destruction, murder and mayhem, there can be no reasonable sports application of our fighting system. What this approach 'will' do is allow each individual to become the best martial artist he can be and if necessary, fight or defend himself and his loved ones.

In conclusion I would like to quote a couple of scriptures that illustrate our Christian philosophy and should serve as a guide in our endeavors.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness... (Matthew 6:33)

"In all thy ways acknowledge Him and he will direct your path." (Proverbs 3:6)

"Follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see God." (Hebrew 12:14)

God bless you my Brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



# *BUILDING ON A PREEXISTING FOUNDATION*

Archeologists often find older cities beneath cities that rose up later. I'm not sure why that is but maybe it is because they use the strength of the foundations of the previous structures to build on. I could be wrong in that assessment but the principle seems pretty sound to me. If it's usable why lay a new foundation?

I have studied several traditional martial arts in my many years of study. Several I've received advanced rank in. For years I taught classical systems of karate, kempo and jiu-jitsu but these days I lean toward a more eclectic approach. I'm the type of person that hates to discard of anything that I can find a use for. If it's useful I'll find a way to use it. That has become my approach to the arts that I teach. I'll use whatever is usable.

In my many years of teaching I've only had a hand full of uchi deshis (close door students). They are the ones that I hope will carry on my system after I'm gone. While developing the system that I now teach the art went through a number of incarnations. What I taught in the eighties bares only a passing resemblance to what I teach now. Each of my private students was taught according to what I was doing at the time. If you brought them together it would be hard to believe that they were trained by the same person. It may even be hard to tell that the individual students I teach studied the same system. There's a good reason for this. I didn't necessarily teach them the same

thing. The basics are the same but the art that I teach is plastic and is molded to the individual student.

Several things determine what I'll teach a student. Age, personal ability and athleticism figures into the equation. I also take into consideration individual body types, strength, flexibility and attitude. I also consider who I'm teaching and what they require from the martial arts. Different people study for different reasons. I'm not interested in teaching for competition but if I were I wouldn't teach a sport based system the same way I do a fighting system. The needs of the student varies and I will teach each according to his individual needs. Another thing that I take into consideration is former training. If a person has a good foundation in whatever art he studied previously I'm not going to raze that foundation and build another. Not if the old foundation is useful.

I've studied several striking arts as well as a number of grappling arts in my career. I've also had opportunity to study fighting arts, self defense and military unarmed combat. With that pool of information I'm not so limited in what I can teach a student. This gives me the knowledge and flexibility necessary to consolidate their former training into what I teach them. I'll expand their knowledge into other areas but if at all possible I prefer to build on their existing foundation.

I believe in a well rounded approach to the martial arts. I think a striker should be able to grapple well enough to enable him to deal with a grappler long enough to implement his game plan. He should also be able to challenge another striker by introducing some grappling into the mix. In so doing he can take a better or equally skilled striker out of his element. Unless you're better in that particular area it isn't a good idea to fight another opponent's fight. You

have to be able to flip the script on him and confront him with a challenge that he can't meet.

I can teach a lot of different techniques but I believe that a personal system shouldn't be too top heavy. For example I know a lot of joint techniques but I don't teach them all. For one reason I feel that some are more effective and easier to apply than others. By the same token some can be used in a wide variety of situations. Those kind of techniques will be the kind that I'll lean toward. For this reason I don't teach aikijitsu or jiu jitsu as separate arts. I teach what I feel blends well with the other grappling and striking techniques that I teach. I feel that every element of the system should compliment all of the other areas. That way different approaches can blend together into a cohesive system.

The method that I teach has a lot of possible combinations so the system has hundreds of techniques and combination of techniques but I only teach the bulk of the system to those that I hope will carry the system on after I'm gone. The rest of my students manage to learn a rather simple system custom made for them and tailored to their own needs. Consequently I believe that I'm teaching a practical system that anyone can learn and excel in. For the same reason it tends to be efficient and effective in its application.

One of my uchi deshi (s) in Tucson studied judo in his youth. His background was pretty comprehensive and his ability was better than acceptable. I accepted him as a student and we spent almost eight years studying together. I taught him a blend of karate, kempo and aikijitsu but because of his judo background I placed more emphasis on aikijitsu and jiu jitsu. He turned out to be a good striker with decent kicks but he excelled in the grappling techniques I concentrated on. He didn't particularly like it. He

moaned and groaned on the evenings that I announced jiu jitsu night. I'm probably not the most gentle teacher in the world and to his credit he kept coming back in spite of the constant whining and complaining. He now has black belts in both the jiu jitsu/aikijitsu and the kempo systems that I teach and he is currently teaching in Tucson. He was recently reacquainted with his judo sensei and they plan to stay in touch. I look forward to seeing what that relationship will develop into. His judo sensei is proud of him as am I. You will find his articles on World Wide Dojo. I like to think that I develop minds as well as bodies. Through his articles as well as his teaching and training he continues to grow and show his grasp of the arts with their underlying principles. Hopefully I played a role in his development in all of those areas but he came to me with a pretty good preexisting foundation. I just built on it.

God bless you my martial art brethren. Study hard and go with God

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

## *BUILDING ON THE BASICS*

Way back in the day when I was a kid (some of my students will think that that was in the beginning of time), my father took me to downtown Chicago. He showed me a construction site where they had dug the deepest hole that I had ever seen. It looked to me like they had dug to the very center of the earth.

I asked my father why they were digging such a big hole. He told me that they were going to build, what was to be, the tallest building in Chicago. No, I'm not talking about the John Hancock Building or the Sears Tower. I may be dating myself, but I'm referring to the Prudential Building.

I wondered why they were digging a hole if they wanted to build a tall building. It didn't make sense to me. Being only a child, I didn't understand the need of a solid foundation in building. Unfortunately, a lot of Western martial artists suffer from the same short sightedness. They want to build tall, without digging deep.

Christ told the parable about the man who built his house on the sand. It stood quite secure until the rains came and the storms raged. Too many of us find ourselves in a similar situation. Our martial art skill is fine as long as we aren't faced with any real opposition. You may ask yourself why this is. It can stem from any of a number of reasons. It can be a lack of native ability, or physical skills in a person. He can lack the reflexes or the needed eye hand coordination needed. Some people are strong and have the musculature that is complimented by slow twitch muscles. They are physically powerful, but they

lack speed. Some people, on the other hand, are long and lean and have the type of speed that results from fast twitch muscles. Some people are uncoordinated and clumsy. Some have poor balance. All of these, and other similar problems, can hinder martial arts skill. Many of these can be overcome with diligent training, but some are just the problems that we have to deal with as we seek success as martial artists.

There are some facts that have to be accepted. If you're short, you can't make yourself tall. If you're naturally thin, you can't make yourself large. Your bone structure, height and general body configuration are governed by genetics. If you're short and heavy boned, Taekwondo may not be your best choice in the martial arts. If you're thin and small boned, you might not want to dedicate your time to grappling and ground fighting. People have overcome these limitations, but I'm a firm believer that you should choose your martial art according to your limitations and body type.

Some of the challenges that we face in becoming competent martial artists are inherent but some are self imposed. If you're uncoordinated, training can remedy some of that problem if you're determined in your goal and stick with your training. We struggle with our limitations and natural lack of ability, and many overcome them with time and determination. We have to be realistic in our training. We have to work with, and sometimes work around, the things we can't change, and we have to change those that we can.

The western mindset has changed the way that the traditional martial arts are taught, or at least here, in the western world. Our feeling of personal freedom, personal expression, and entitlement, changes the traditional relationship between instructor and student. In the birthplace of these arts,

students venerated their instructors. They didn't question their instructors and any doubts or disagreements they may have had they kept to themselves.

Getting back to the analogy I was trying to make at the beginning of this study, if you want to build high, you have to dig deep. The most important part of the building process is laying a good foundation. Without a good foundation, it doesn't matter what building material you use. You can build with the best steel and the finest brick. You can engage the finest artisans and have them take their time in their labors, but the results will still be poor if there is no foundation to your building.

In a neighborhood on the southern outskirts of Chicago, I lived in a building complex that was built on reclaimed land. The land had once been swamp but had been reclaimed with landfill. Some of the buildings began to sink, over time, and their integrity was compromised. Consequently, they had to be torn down. Once the building has been built, it is virtually impossible to build a firm foundation under it. That's why it's important to establish a good foundation prior to building the structure.

In these days of reality training and real life martial arts, this is as important as ever. I put a lot of store in reality training. I teach a reality system myself. These systems are good, if they're built on something. Most of my martial arts training has been devoted to the traditional arts and was based on extensive training in the basics. When it is all said and done, it is the basic techniques that seem to work.

Unfortunately, many people judge a martial art by how visually and ascetically pleasing it is. There is some truth to this concept. Form effects function. When these martial arts are done well, the coordination, balance,

economy of motion and strait forth purpose looks graceful to the eye. Grace as a natural by product of the arts is fine, but grace for the sake of grace is a mistake that robs the arts of their effectiveness. Looking pretty for the sake of looking pretty should never be our goal. We must keep in mind that we are practicing fighting arts and not ballet.

The problem that I have with many of the martial arts that are being taught today, is that they are long on technique and short on basics. The system that I teach came about in the eighties because many of the younger martial arts practitioners were proving ineffective in the streets. It's nice being effective in the dojo but if it doesn't translate to the streets, where its martial ability is needed, it is nothing but a form of exercise, and probably not the best form of that. If it's only exercise that you want, you'd do better with aerobics or strength training. The martial arts were developed for fighting and that's what it should accomplish best.

Personally, I don't view martial arts as a sport. I did some tournament fighting when I was younger, but I quickly came to realize that many of the opponents that I couldn't defeat in kumite, I'd walk over in the streets. Combat, and the reality of the inner city streets, clarified a lot of the misconceptions of combat that I may have had. Personal combat is real. It isn't a game. If you face an attacker with a knife, you are either capable, or you are dead. That isn't the time or place to try to learn martial skills. If you aren't able to give a realistic and effective account of yourself, you very probably won't live to learn from the experience.

I grew up in tough surroundings and rough circumstances. Combat wasn't theoretical. It either worked or it didn't. I saw too many, would be, martial artists, left bleeding and broken in the streets. In those types of



encounters, fancy and complex techniques don't work. In my experience, it wasn't the rear spinning heel kicks or the flying side kicks that got the job done. It was the shuto (knife hand) to the throat, the reverse punch to the solar plexus, the stomp kick to the knee that was effective. The basics are what work. The simpler a technique is the more chance that it will actually work.

I've had the misfortune of having to face attackers with knives, clubs and even guns. I was fortunate to survive these experiences, but you can rest assured that there wasn't a fancy technique to be seen during these encounters. I resorted to the ten thousand block and counters that I had done in the dojo to see me through these experiences. Too often today, fancy techniques are taught to green students. They haven't had the basics burned into their muscle memory, and though they may know the techniques, they can't use them when they are most needed. I don't care what martial art you practice, there is no effective fighting art without basics. Like a house without a foundation, it is destined to fail.

When the system that I teach was founded, it was to address the ineffectiveness of the black belts that the local martial arts were producing. Commercial schools catered to the desires of their students to remain financially solvent. Loss of students meant a loss of income, so many sensei compromised what they taught and how they taught it. Contracts with guarantees of black belts at the culmination of training, became common. When I first got involved in the martial arts, as a youth, I was told that very few students would ever become black belts. I was told that many didn't have the capabilities, regardless of the length or intensity of training. I'm not saying whether I think this is true or not, but I have seen a lot of shodans who wouldn't have been green belts in the systems I was brought up in. In those

days, you expected to take at least six to eight years in earning that coveted first degree black belt, if you could do so at all. Now days, black belts are handed out in a year or two to anyone who stays the course. Again, I'm not criticizing any style, system or instructor, but I have a hard time seeing how a student can learn all that he needs to know, in such a short period of time, to reach black belt level. It's not up to me to determine how different organizations, schools, systems or instructors measure their students, but we should be careful about letting students believe that they are more capable than they are. Such a mistake can cost their lives. Reality doesn't allow for a lot of mistakes.

I realize that teaching methods have improved, but some things just take time. It takes time to lay a good foundation. In Okinawa, years ago, a student didn't learn a lot of kata. He might learn a handful, but he would specialize in only one. Each kata comprised an entire fighting strategy, and, according to the old masters, mastering any one, would give a practitioner an effective fighting system. They didn't base their ability on fancy techniques or flamboyant execution back then. They based their fighting arts on basics. They developed a level of competency that is seldom seen in martial artists today. Their secret wasn't in superior knowledge or esoteric techniques, but strong foundations and perfect executions of the basic technique.

Stories are told of, long lost, secret techniques. There are no long lost secrets in the martial arts. If it's hidden it's hidden in plain sight. If you want to be a good, strong, martial artist; if you want your techniques to really work in the streets where they are needed, you need to pay attention to your foundation. If it doesn't work, don't just learn new techniques. That's like building additional stories on an already rickety building. Start from the bottom

up. Go back to your roots; to your beginning. A tree is strong because of its roots. A building is strong because of its foundation. If a martial artist is strong it is because of his basics. Train honestly, my friend. Go back to basics.

God bless you, my Brethren. Go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



## CENTERING

I have often been asked why do I, as a Christian minister, continue my studies of the martial arts. To date, I have put close to fifty years of study into training in something that I hope never to have to use. One of the answers I give most often is, “to stay balanced”.

I’m not huge but at five nine and carrying 225 pounds of pretty hard muscle mass, I’m not a small person either. My size and the confident manner in which I carry myself tends to divert most would be assailants. Considering that I have lived a large part of my life in some really tough neighborhoods and have worked in some high risk professions, that’s saying a lot. Not all to my own credit but some of this I attribute to my martial arts training.

So why do I persist in my training? I can give you several reasons. For one, studying the martial arts and doing the additional training that allows me to continue these pursuits, have kept me in pretty decent physical condition, even into my sixties. Another benefit is that it has helped to minimize the debilitating effects of aging. I’m not twenty years old and I can’t do what I was one able to do, but considering my age, I manage to do more than most. To a large extent, we don’t just get old. What we do is relinquish our youth and give in to old age. We don’t have to do this. If we stay active, and train properly we’re capable of doing much more than we might think. Another reason for continuing to train is it to stay centered.

I don't study the martial arts simply as a means of trying to find some form of enlightenment. This is what the 'do' in the martial arts, such as in judo or aikido, implies. I lean more towards a 'jitsu' approach. 'Jitsu' alludes to a more combative application. I don't continue my studies anticipating a fight or an attack that may never happen, but I do believe in being combat able. Actually, whether we study the martial arts as a 'do' or a 'jitsu', there are a number of benefits that the martial arts offer beyond trying to turn ourselves into the proverbial lethal weapon. Centering is one of these benefits.

Most martial arts address this concept to a greater or lesser degree. In some arts, especially the internal arts, such as Tai Chi, Pau Kua, Hsing I , Aikido and etc., centering is emphasized. In some of the other martial arts, it isn't taught as an individual concept, but in training, it is gradually instilled into a student.

Centering means more than the occidental interpretation of this word might imply. Centering takes several things into consideration. Centering implies balance. It means that a person must always be aware of his center of gravity and, for the most part keep it directly under him to remained balanced. It also requires a lowering of the center of gravity to accomplish rooting, making it difficult to unbalance, upset, or move the person. Balance also requires proper positioning in relationship to an opponent. It can mean being at the right angle to address an attack, or avoiding the direction of the attack. This implies, being at the right place at the right time. This allows a martial artist to redirect and contain a threat without exposing himself to undo physical danger. Balance also requires proper breathing. To remain balanced, a martial artist has to breathe from the diaphragm, expanding the entire area of the lungs. Aside form the fact that this oxidizes and energizes the body, it keeps

the person from floating his body, or raising his center of gravity. This is often caused by breathing in just the upper portion of the lungs or by expanding the chest, raising the center of gravity. We have to keep in mind that since the center of balance is a few inches below the navel, it is more important to concentrate on and possibly extend the belly to lower the center of gravity. Floating interferes with stability and makes the balance weak. With weak balance it is impossible to be efficient in facing the opposition that life's threats bring with them.

Incidentally, balance figures in other areas of our lives. Man is a triune being, and to be balanced, in a holistic manner. means that each aspect of the person is in balance with the other. Training in the martial arts aids in attaining this.

Man is first a spirit. It is in this aspect of a man's being that he is able to have a relationship with God. We are told in the word that, "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Man's being should be centered first in his spirit. The word says, "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit" (Romans 8:5). Being centered in the spirit implies denying the lust of the flesh. Of course, this is accomplished by seeking and growing closer to God through Christ, but it also requires sacrifice and discipline. Studying the martial arts will not necessarily make a person more spiritual, but it will offer some of the discipline necessary to be successful in this aspect of his life. As advised by Solomon, we acknowledge God in all that we do and we allow him to direct our path.

Secondly man is a soulish being. The soul is the intellect or the seat of consciousness. In a sense, the soul is who we are. It is how we see ourselves

and how we perceive the world. In this area of our existence, we have our sense of self awareness. The soul determines the priorities in our lives and the choices we make. It is through the soul that we will decide to live with emphasis in either the carnal or the spiritual realm. It is in the soul that we exercise free will. We will either decide to seek the way of the spirit and draw close to God, to seek the way of the world which is the devil's path, or we will try to be completely self motivated, leaving God out of our lives, which is as self destructive as openly yielding our lives to the devil. Without God there can be no life and without Christ, there can be no salvation. To be centered in our soul is to make God the center of our lives. Again, by giving us better control of our physical selves, it gives us the discipline to deny the desires of the flesh and the influences of a sinful world that's rooted in the flesh. "Thou will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." (Isaiah 26:3)

Lastly is the natural man or the physical aspect of our being. Man's greatest aspiration should be his salvation. We should understand that salvation is a process. The Spirit is saved immediately, as soon as we give our hearts to God through Christ. Jesus is the only source of salvation and the only path through which we can establish a relationship with God. The soul is saved gradually as we learn to yield our lives to God, walking according to his precepts. This is what it means to 'work out our salvation in fear and trembling' as mentioned in Philippians 2:12. The spirit and soul can be saved in this realm but the flesh can only be brought and kept under subjection. That is why we are told in the word that flesh and 'blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven'.

As we become centered through our martial art training, that sense of balance should begin to permeate other areas of our lives. The martial way is a

way of sacrifice, self denial, hard work and discipline. Through this effect, we should seek to bring the rest of our life in balance by being completely centered.

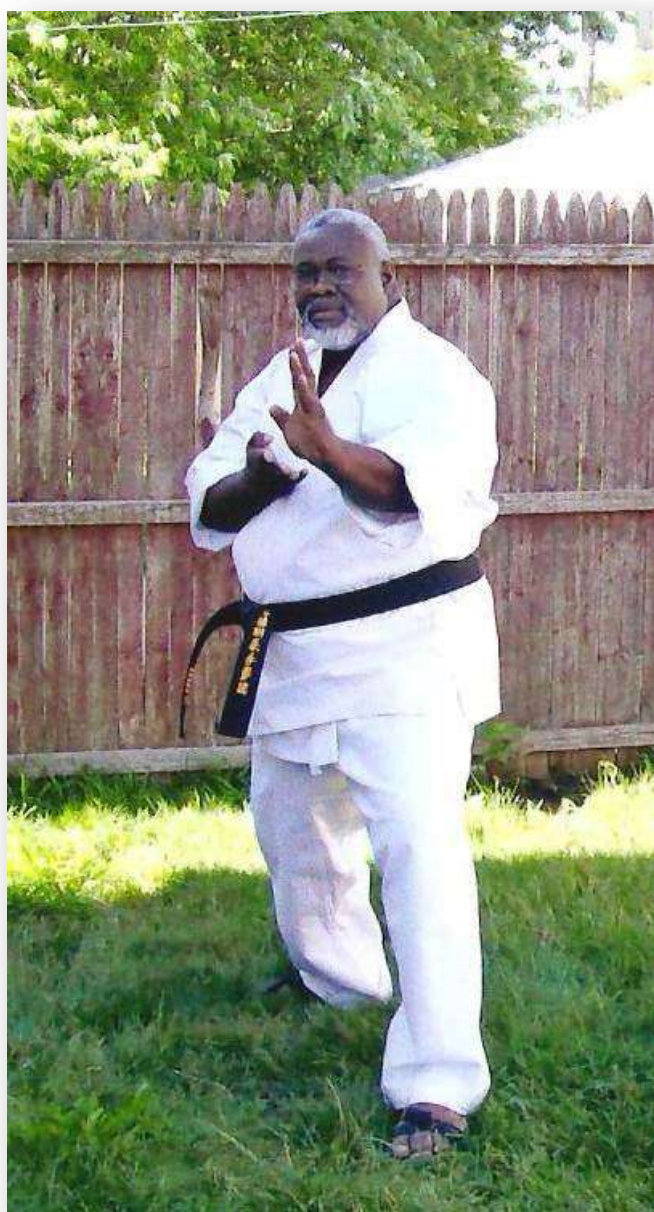
Being centered doesn't mean sitting and contemplating your navel. It doesn't require transcendental meditation and chanting. Many of the practices of traditional Eastern martial arts will mislead us in our Christian lives. That is why, even in the practice of these physical disciplines, we must remain spiritually centered. This will focus us, enable us to attain our martial art goals and keep us in spiritual balance.

Being physically centered can save our lives in a confrontation. It can help us diffuse, deescalate, walk away from, or if necessary, physically deal with a confrontation. Being spiritually centered, on the other hand, can save our souls. We have to be centered enough to deal with every confrontation that life sends our way, whether it is in the natural or spiritual realm. As you pursue your studies, let me remind you; that you may or may not ever face a threat from a physical opponent in your life time, but spiritual warfare is a constant and universal reality. This applies whether you are a Christian or a sinner. In that area, the devil doesn't discriminate. He has a special dislike for Christians but it is his desire to destroy every person he can, man, woman and child; saint and sinner. Being a Christian doesn't exempt you from this fight. The truth is, he has every saint in his crosshairs, but it gives us the tools to deal with his attacks. If there's one thing we learn in our training it's to use the right tool for the job. It isn't a good idea to 'bring a knife to a gun fight'. As martial artists and as Christians, we must know our enemy, be ready for any possible attack and be centered enough to deal with the challenges that life in this world (enemy territory) might send our way.



In closing, let me remind you that being centered means not anticipating anything, but being ready for everything. The enemy doesn't always telegraph his intentions. Be ready for whatever challenges you may have to meet, and as the Boy Scout motto says, "Be Prepared". Train hard, my brethren, stay centered and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



Shihan Al Smith. my senior student. A student for over 30 yrs.

# CHRISTIAN MARTIAL ARTS, RANK AND ADVANCEMENT

Well, my bretheren, here I go again, pontificating. You may not especially care for it but you knew when you began training with me that I am as much pastor as sensei. If you like the training it is one of the other benefits that you get. It's a package deal so sit back and enjoy. If you don't enjoy, endure. There may be a test after this and your next promotion may rest in the balance.

All joking aside (what you thought I was joking?) there is an issue I would like to address. I head a Christian martial arts organization and belong to several others. I sit on the master's council of at least one of them. I also belong to several more secular organizations and sit on the master's council of at least one of those. Being a part of these two types of organizations with their differing philosophies I am often called on to address a disagreement between them and even try to mediate an argument. We want peaceful and amical resolution of these conflicts. We definitely don't want them evolving into actual altercations. Though I doubt that something like that would happen it has happened before. The dojo wars in Chicago in the late sixties and early seventies are an example. I remember those too well.

Everybody doesn't see things the same way. It's the varying views that we share that make life interesting. Unfortunately it can make life a little bit more interesting than we want it to be. An old Indian (meaning from India)

curse and blessing states, "May you live in interesting times". According to how it is meant and how it unfolds it can be either. We want things to be interesting but only within reason.

I was recently put in a position to try to mediate a disagreement between two martial arts organizations. Both organizations and the primary individuals involved are dear to my heart. One organization is a Christian organization and the other a secular organization. I sit on the master's council of both and have advanced rank in both systems of martial arts advocated by these organizations. I am also a chaplain and counsellor for both. The reason behind the argument was a bit complicated but for the sake of this essay I'm going to oversimplify it. The disagreement was over rank and promotion being awarded to a particular person. I don't want to argue the right or wrong of the two arguments or my own personal opinion in the matter. What I do want to discuss is the difference in rank and promotion between a Christian martial arts organization and a secular one. The ranking systems and criteria for rank can be at odds between the two types of organizations. Not saying that one is wrong and the other is right. The ranking system they use may suit the one and not the other.

First off let me say that several of the individuals on both sides of the argument were professing Christians. In spite of that the objectives of the two organizations were very different. The Christian martial arts organization is organized as a ministry first and a martial arts organization second. It's primary purpose was to use martial arts as a ministry. A Christian martial arts ministry is like any other Christian ministry. Its primary purpose is to win souls for Christ. The martial arts systems they teach are tools used to achieve those ends. That isn't to say that those who teach in such a capacity aren't serious martial artists. Many of us are. I've been involved in the martial; arts for almost fifty

five years. The study and teaching of the arts is one of my passions but first and foremost I am a minister and pastor. Fortunately I don't have to choose between the two. I embrace both equally. In my mind they are different sides of the same coin.



In my teaching career I have taught both classical and eclectic martial arts, I have taught in commercial and non-profit dojo(s) and I have taught in Christian and secular schools. In each instance my goal and my primary thrust was different. These days I am only interested in teaching Christian martial arts in a spiritual setting. In a sense, my dojo is my cathedral. I have a steady income and I don't have to teach for a living. I teach primarily out of a church gym or out of my home. Since I don't care for large classes this works well for me. It

also gives me an opportunity to impact the individual lives of my students independently. Considering my objectives that works best for me.

In the secular sector rank is based solely on skill and ability. Either a student is worthy of a particular rank, according to the requirements of the school, or he isn't. There is no middle ground. In the ranking system of the organization that I head and the other two Christian martial arts organization that I am a council member of the criterion for rank and promotion is different. In my organization my expectation for kyu rank and for the lower dan rank is the same as any other organization. It is based primarily on skill, knowledge and ability. The reason for this is that I need the teachers in the system to be adept enough to teach the students that they will be instructed with. They have to have the skill, knowledge and teaching ability that is required of them. After sandan (3rd degree black belt) my criteria for rank parts with the norm. I am more concerned about their ability in ministry than their ability in the technical areas of the arts. That isn't to say that I require no more skill for a godan (5TH degree) than a sandan. At that level I just base rank on ministerial skill as much as knowledge and ability in the arts. It is my belief that rank beyond godan is more administrative than skill based. One reason being that at the age that an individual reaches godan his physical abilities are waning. By the time a person reaches eight degree he's been in the arts for about forty years. He's probably in his mid fifties or early sixties by then. His knowledge may have grown but his body is no longer in step with his mind. At that ratified rank a martial artist is judged more by what he knows and what he has accomplished and contributed to the arts than for raw ability. I can't even begin to do the things I used to do ten years ago. I'm approaching sixty five years old and while I'm in remarkable shape for my age (my opinion) I'm still a senior citizen. There's no need of fooling myself to the contrary. If I'm a master at all, and I don't claim to be, it's

more because of what I know than what I can do. Too many people buy into the Saturday morning kung fu movie concept of shrived up octogenarian kung fu masters beating up on young fighting champions. That's a myth pure and simple. Angelo Dundee was a shrived up boxing master but you didn't see him beating up on Muhammad Ali.

Various schools, instructors and organizations have different criteria for rank and for promotion. A shodan in one school would hardly qualify as a brown belt in another. Each school and organization has its own requirements for rank. Since there is no one board that regulates this it is just how it is. My organization is no different. I want my instructor rank people to be comparable with any other organization's but when it comes to master rank I judge differently. I am looking for the one who can inspire. One who can give good council. One who can impact the spiritual lives he teaches and those who serve under him. First and foremost they are ministers. After that they are martial artists. At higher rank I place the former over the latter. I am more interested in creating good Christians than creating good fighters. Our system doesn't particularly encourage sports karate. Ours is a combative system. That isn't because I'm trying to turn out street fighters or bar room brawlers. It's because I teach the way I was taught. I was taught what was effective in a self defense or combative application. It's what I know. What I understand. A few of my students have fought in tournaments and some have done very well but it isn't our point of interest. Ours can be a brutal system. Because of the potential of abuse of the system I am especially adamant that I teach good Christian ethics to go along with the martial skills I am trying to install into my students. We are accountable for what we teach. Especially to the young. A good moral foundation must be laid with the physical skills that they are learning.

I am not alone in my philosophy in teaching and ranking. The other two christian organizations that I represent hold to something of the same philosophy. We are trying to create good Christian, good citizens and good human beings. The ability to do so, using the martial arts as a means to that end is the quality we look for in our instructors and especially in our master level people. In our hearts and minds that trumps raw martial arts ability and teaching skills every time.

There, see there. This wasn't a sermon after all. You'll notice that unlike most of my articles and essays not a single scripture was quoted. Don't let that fool you however. This was as much a spiritual message as all of those others. I will give this advice to my fellow Christian martial arts instructors. Whatever you do do as unto the Lord. And remember, my brothers, only what you do for Christ will last. God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**The Review Board.**

## COMING OF AGE

I absolutely adore children. Next to women I think that children are one of God's best inventions. Infants, babies, toddlers and children; I love them all. Teenagers on the other hand... But that's a thought for another time.

Every living creature progresses through stages in its life. Adulthood is reached over time. Maturity is a process. It doesn't happen overnight. This rule isn't just limited to human growth but is common in just about everything that progresses into a functional stage. The martial arts are no exception.

I am being inducted into the Museum of Sports Karate this month as a 'History General'. What that implies is that I'm so old that I have been involved in the martial arts since the dark ages. Not actually but I have been involved in the arts long enough to see it grow into what it is now. Sometimes watching what unfolds before me I suspect that we've reached senility and we're entering into our second childhood or maybe we are retarded in our growth and still acting like children when we should be adults. The bible speaks of drinking (mother's) milk when we should have progressed to eating meat. Unfortunately some of us are in a state of arrested development and we're still acting like playground bullies. I've never seen so much pushing and shoving in my life. We'd do better if we'd go on and fight and get it over with. All of the growling, snarling and posturing is bordering on the asinine.



In spite of what I see I still have great hope and faith in the martial arts to become what it is capable of being. We should have left our childhood behind long ago. It's time to grow up.

Regardless of what we may be told there are no big I's or little U's in the martial arts. There is no martial art aristocracy. We are martial artists. The martial arts are about fighting. We aren't exactly dealing with brain surgery here. Never the less, the martial arts can accomplish amazing things if we allow it to grow out of its infancy and come of age.

Actually, all of us aren't guilty of martial art retardation. Some of us are growing or have grown to maturity. Our primary focus is (or should be) self-realization and the growth and inspiration of our students. Bickering and infighting will not accomplish this goal. If anything it will inhibit the arts from reaching their full potential and our students from reaching their goals. If children see nothing but arguing and fighting from their parents it is hard to expect much more from them. We're deceiving ourselves if we act like children and think that our children will grow up to be responsible and sensible adults.

Growth is necessary if we are to survive. Children can't take care of them themselves and they certainly can't raise and take care of other children. Growth inspires growth. Intelligence breeds intelligence. Our children garner their inspiration and get their guidance from us.

I am a member of the Black Dragon Fighting Society. I've been involved in it since its inception. I'm one of the patriarchs of the organization and one of its senior grandmasters. I saw it in its wildest days. Its adolescence was something to behold. We were a wild bunch back then. We were born in controversy and we continued in the same for a number of years. Like all things, however, we

went through a gradual change. We grew out of our childhood into adulthood. As most teens will, we grew out of that wild stage and have become mature and functional adults. Unfortunately our past has worked against us. The rejection of the past that made us much of what we were then still continues till this day. We are still ostracized by many.

In the legal system a minor's juvenile record is closed if not expunged when he reaches adulthood. What he did in his youth becomes a closed issue. In effect, his youth can't be held against him in adulthood. Children grow up. The apostle Paul said, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child but when I became a man I put away childish things. (1ST Corinthians 13:11)" We have, in effect grown up. We have become mature adults.

I have been blessed to see this transition. I have lived to see this historical organization grow out of its infancy, through its adolescence to where it is now. The culmination of this transition was so wonderfully demonstrated this past weekend (Oct. 5-7). We had our reunion seminar conference in Lexington Kentucky. The attendance was great and the air of camaraderie and brotherhood permeated place where it was held. There were individuals from many schools, systems and organizations. Even other countries were represented. With the mixture of styles, races, religions, creeds, colors genders and nationalities there wasn't a hint of dissension or politics. Everyone was about sharing and learning as much as possible in the time allotted. Every seminar was well attended and well received. No-one was criticized or ill spoken of. I have never seen anything like it in my fifty five years in the martial arts. I was proud to say that I am a Dragon. I don't think that anyone went away feeling short changed or disappointed. The whole thing was a great success.

The high point of the convention was the ceremony recognizing the veterans in attendance and honoring our fallen and lost comrades at arms. It was beautifully done. It was recognized by the governor of the state (Kentucky), a senator and mayor. It was wonderful to see and be a part of. As a veteran I truly felt that my contribution was appreciated. Many of us who served in the Viet Nam conflict have long awaited such recognition. For those present, wherever they served, they were reminded that their service meant something to our people and our country.

I love the martial arts. I approach it with acceptance and tolerance of other styles, organizations and systems. We each practice at our own level for our own purposes but the important thing is that we all practice and we are all martial artists. We are a fraternity; a brotherhood. We embrace different ideas and philosophies but we are brothers never the less. It would be wonderful if we acted as such. We are past the point where we should be acting like spoiled children. We should act as an example to the rest of society. After all, as martial artists we are held to a higher standard.

God bless you my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# CONDITIONING FOR THE MARTIAL ARTIST

People involve themselves in the martial arts for any number of reasons. I would like to think that the arts have something for everybody. It offers a means of self defense if taught properly. Many see it as a competitive sport. That isn't what the martial arts were designed for but if taught with competition in mind it is a nice sport. The martial arts offer mental as well as physical benefits. The martial arts teach discipline and builds tenacity and self confidence. There is a group of people who involve themselves in the arts for exercise. According to what art you involve yourself in the martial arts offer moderate to intense exercise. That's good for the casual weekend warrior but the serious martial artist need more. That is if he hopes to excel and mold him into a real warrior and the fierce competitor that the arts promise.

Most who know me know that I'm an advocate of strength training. I pump iron and practice several other modes of intense training. I'm not interested in body building but I am interested in strength and a powerful body. In previous articles I have explored the benefits of weight training and I still swear by them.

I'm no longer a young man. I'm closer to seventy than I am to sixty. Fifty seven years of that time has been dedicated to the martial arts. Along with training in the arts I've been weight training since my early teens. I've listened to the arguments from various instructors and masters about the negative

benefits of weight training for the martial artist. Early in my martial art career I studied judo and jiu-jitsu and I wrestled in school. In those arts I heard less about the detriment of weight training but when I became involved with karate, kempo and kung fu all of that changed. I was an amateur boxer in my youth and later boxed as a semi pro which meant that I was a sparring partner for serious boxing competitors. I never heard those complaints in boxing but as I dedicated myself more to the oriental striking arts I began to hear that litany. Weights and karate (my primary art at the time) don't mix. Fortunately I listened to my own counsel on that matter. I continued to strength train when all of my fellow students listened to our instructors and did only moderate calisthenics. In the end I generally managed to physically dominated them. I hit like the kick of a mule.

Weight training isn't the only means of conditioning for the martial arts. A practitioner can choose any of a number of methods but if he is serious in his art he'll soon realize that he needs more than moderate stretching and a few pushups to mold his body into the fighting machine he might envision himself to be.

A weight training program doesn't have to be a power lifting regiment or body building routine. Ballistic training with relatively light weights increases the strength of the ligaments and tendons while strengthening the fast twitch muscles that compliment speed. Long lean muscle can be the result of the right kind of training. High reps with light weights can accomplish that admirably. Weight training doesn't have to result in excessive size or bulk. A lifting program can be tailored to the need of the person.

In no other martial art, area of physical competition, sport or fighting system does anyone think that their art alone is enough for physical

Conditioning. Expertise demand more. Not that we'll ever reach that level of perfection but if we intend to strive for it we'll have to condition our bodies to complement our training.

Strength is only one consideration in this supplemental training. Aerobics are necessary for endurance. Flexibility is also necessary. Not just the occasional ham string stretch or Chinese split but total body flexibility. A well-conditioned body lends itself better to the demands that intense training and even combat puts on it.

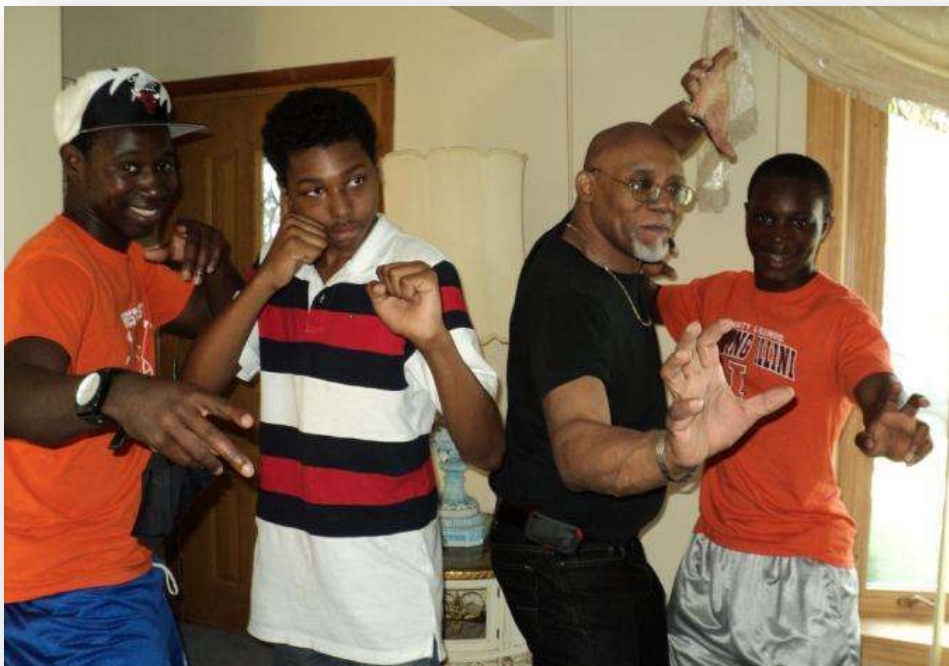
Practicing the basics will condition the body well enough for the casual practitioner. Punching and kicking in the air will increase speed while work on the heavy bag will increase punching and kicking power. That level of training would suffice the average casual student who may compete in the occasional tournament or kata competition but for the serious athlete or hard core martial artist more is required. There is no easy path. Expertise comes at a price. It comes with blood, sweat and tears and with maximum effort. The path to mastery requires more than the twice a week hour long class. A sensei will teach you the techniques but it's up to you to condition your body to perform those techniques. Not in the gym or dojo but where the rubber meets the road. You may be able to punch like Joe Lewis or kick like Bill Wallace but if you're winded after a couple of kicks and punches you'll never be the warrior you want to be. You have to train. It's become a cliché but it is as true as when it was first uttered; "No pain no gain".

Pain isn't pleasant. Most sensible people avoid it but most sensible people don't become warriors. The warriors in our society are the policemen and soldiers who keep our community and our country safe. Also the warriors are those who will make the sacrifices necessary to mold themselves into true

martial artists. That should include you my brethren. The Black Dragon Fighting Society has been famous for creating some gut bucket fighters. While our new image hopefully lends itself more to individual social and familial responsibility we don't want to lose that edge. We practice our own code of bushido. We are gentle warriors. That is to say we're gentle when we can be but the ultimate warriors when we have to be. Being constantly capable and ready for any eventuality means being mentally and physically prepared. That state of readiness comes at a price. It requires personal effort and sacrifice. It requires physical training and physical and mental conditioning.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**Three of my young students; my grandson Isaiah Miskel and Kyle and Kamaron Lyndsey.**

# *DEVELOPING SPEED IN THE MARTIAL ARTS*

There are several concepts in the martial arts that are deceptive and often misinterpreted. Things aren't always what they appear to be or what they look like on the surface. There are no hidden secrets or secret techniques that give a master super human capabilities. If anything is hidden it's hidden in plain sight. We often see but we don't understand what it is we see. "There is nothing wrong with your eyes Hoppa Grass, it's your perception or lack thereof".

Too often people misinterpret power for strength or positioning for footwork. No, my friend, all of the hopping around and dancing in place that we see these days is not karate. Kick boxing has become confused with karate. Karate requires a strong base and a rooted stance to garner the power that is its earmark. That doesn't mean we just stand in one place. We use tai sabaki or body positioning to address an opponent's aggression. We also turn and position the body of our adversary to place him at a disadvantage.

Too often a karateka will try to substitute strength for kime (focus). Proper body physics, alignment and sequence coordination produce more power than raw strength alone. Understanding such simple principles will ultimately mean the difference between success and failure in the arts.



I could spend hours talking about such principles but that would be like trying to reveal the entire foundation of the art in a few paragraphs. Such an undertaking would require much more time and space than I am allotted here. What I would like to talk about is speed.

First of all speed is misleading. What the average person would consider raw speed isn't what it seems. When we think of speed we generally consider forward momentum or acceleration. Like saying a car can go from zero to sixty in six point seven seconds. That's raw speed. The time it takes to get from point A to point B. That type of speed is important but having speed in the martial arts require more than that. It requires more than just hand speed.

What we interpret as speed involves several elements. One is deliberation. In a fight you won't have time to interpret your opponent's intentions, choose a response and act on it. By the time you go through that process you'll be hit and probably on your way to dreamland if not the hospital or the morgue. Self defense depends on muscle memory. You have to develop that in the dojo. You don't have the luxury of learning to fight during the conflict. Muscle memory is developed by repetition. You would have had to do a technique over a thousand times for it to become reflexive. If you have to think about it it isn't going to work. The seiken zuki of karate is a straight line punch that hits with as much or more power than a roundhouse punch or haymaker. Instead of the drawing back of the hand or the long wind up it depends on the twisting of the hips to create both power and speed. The seiken zuki creates tremendous speed and power over a short line of execution. What we perceive as speed requires good eye hand coordination. Knowing how doesn't always translate into the done deal. That's why constant practice is necessary. The difference between the master and the average

student is in the basics not in superior technique. Practicing the basics create the natural ability make speed and every other element in karate possible.

Another consideration in what we perceive as speed is reaction time. Responding to the opponent's action without hesitation. Again this is possible because the response is hard wired into neurological network of the karateka. Thousands of repetitions of a given technique, especially in relation to various stimuli makes this possible. This kind of reaction is said to originate from the spine rather than the brain. It bypasses the recognition/response sequence. And of course there is timing. Without timing reaction time is of no accord. It's possible to be too fast. If a block is too fast it can get there before the attack and still result in the defender getting hit.

Often the missing element in speed of execution is foot work and positioning. This principle is called tai sabaki. With superior footwork and positioning eye blazing speed is no longer necessary. With this concept it is possible to position yourself and your opponent to your advantage. From that advantage point it is often possible to throw one or several shots to an opponent's exposed pressure points with impunity. The result gives the illusion of speed because it allows several unanswered techniques in quick succession with no effective defensive reaction from the opponent.

Another element of speed is the narrowing of the defense/counter attack sequence. Eventually defense and counter will be accomplished in the same motion. An experienced practitioner should be able to go from the two beat block counter sequence, to the half beat counter and eventually the simultaneous defense and counter attack. Slipping, dodging and ducking attacks while attacking the exposed parts of the opponent's body also results in superior speed. Various techniques such as parrying, jamming, locking, trapping

and such like stacks the deck for the karateka and results in more effective defense and counter attacks. In combat the direct, least complicated approach is generally the best approach. Lastly the ability to move the defending or attacking weapon from point A to point B or what we call raw speed can be developed. All of these elements work together to achieve actual and relative speed. Conservation of energy may often mean being no faster than success requires. Overtaxing the body by going beyond the requirements of the situation isn't a good practice. One never knows what other challenges awaits. Spending all of your energy on one opponent can mean disaster if another opponent presents himself. There are many elements that add up to together to create an effective fighter. Speed is just one of them. All of them must be taken into consideration to create the well rounded fighter. It's possible to be fast and yet be ineffective. By the same token it's possible to be strong and have little or no power. Every link in the chain has to be present to offer a chance of success. Any link in the chain can spell a lack of success and even disaster. The art of karate or any other martial art must be practiced in its entirety. To perfect one element to the detriment of another will result in a less than effective system. The study of any martial art requires a balanced effort. It's a package deal. All of these fine points taken together will equal a total art. With the proper study, training and application that total art should translate into an effective art. In the end, the art is no more effective than the practitioner and the practitioner is no more effective than his training.

Train hard my brethren and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# *EMBRACING THE ATTACK OF THE TIGER*

We are in a new era of martial arts. Many practitioners are abandoning the martial arts as a character builder and look at it simply as an offensive or defensive weapon. Actually, this isn't a new view. The martial arts have simply gone full circle and arrived again at the purpose for which they were first created.

Many of the advocates for this approach feel that they are innovators and to some extent they are. However, they aren't inventing anything new. They are simply reexploring the fighting aspects of the martial arts.

Throughout the history of the martial arts in the U.S. there have been mavericks that were solely interested in the combative aspects of the arts. They were criticized and sometimes ostracized because they advocated the more violent side of the martial arts. What these individuals had done was embrace the jitsu of the martial arts. Though they were looked upon with distaste by the martial arts community they were truer representatives of the original intent of these arts than their peers.

There are some good points in the practicality of the combative approach to the arts. Learning to fight takes less time than the obsessive preoccupation with form and grace. Fighting is simple and straightforward. In adapting this realistic approach, however, we need to be careful that we don't go so far in

the other direction that we lose some of the benefits of the classical schools of martial arts. In many of these systems, the techniques aren't suspect. Only the intent and purpose of their implementation is sometime impractical.

The classical arts aren't so different from their combative cousins. After all, a kick is a kick and a punch is a punch. These and similar weapons are common through most martial disciplines. For the most part only strategy and philosophy divide them into different arts.

One problem with the fighting arts is that these arts are often practiced and taught by noncombatants and even pacifists. They have no intent of ever using what they learn in a combative situation so they aren't overly concerned with practical application.. There is nothing wrong with this mindset but we have to be realistic about what we are training in and what we're training for. Aikido, which incorporates some very effective and potentially dangerous techniques, has the tools to enable a fighter to hurt an opponent. However, the mindset that is adapted in its study will not create a good street fighter.

One thing that the classical martial arts offer is the ability to receive a technique. In our combative intent, we become so preoccupied with offense that we totally reject the idea of embracing the attack of an opponent. In aikido, a practitioner is taught to make the attacker's technique their own. They receive and blend with the attack. They even accept ownership of the technique. When you own something you can pretty much do what you want with it. You can put it where you want it. Often in our efforts to be aggressive and take a preemptive approach to combat, we sometimes throw out the baby with the bathwater. Fighting does require some level of aggression but aggression alone will not make a person into an effective fighter. That being the case, considering the level of practicality of these arts, we might as well

buy assault weapons and be done with it. Very seldom will we be as aggressive as the thugs that we will have to face in a real fight. If aggression alone made a fighter, we would be lost before we started. In our training, we do try to increase our level of aggression and even develop a killer instinct, but if we sink to the level of aggression of the street thug, we are no better than they are.

In the long standing philosophy of karate the edict is taught; “in karate there is no first strike”. This might sound counter productive for an art as aggressive as karate but the problem is the lack of understanding of many practitioners and even instructors. Karate is basically a counter punching system. It reacts to an opponent’s attack and uses it to the karateka’s advantage. Modern combative philosophy takes on an almost paranoid preoccupation with reaction time and preemptive strikes. What they fail to realize is that if you initiate the first strike, you are legally considered the aggressor. Of course, that is an over simplification but unless you are threatened by a weapon or accosted by multiple assailants you are legally at fault if you attack a potential opponent.

Action is always faster than reaction. That’s a fact of life that we can’t rewrite but there are ways of dealing with this fact. One reason some martial artists fall victim of their opponent’s fist strike is because of lack of awareness. A person would become a nervous wreck if he walked around in a constant state of preparedness and potential aggression. That type of mindset would translate into a hair trigger disposition that could be dangerous in the hands of a trained martial artist. Instead, a martial artist should be trained to be aware of his surroundings and sensitive to what is happening around him. It is counter productive to go through life expecting and waiting for an attack that may never come. That type of attitude keeps the body and mind in a constant state

of tension. As any martial artist knows, you can move faster when you are relaxed than when you are tense.

Another way of dealing with the preemptive strike is through spatial awareness. By keeping the proper distance between him and a possible threat a martial artist gives himself time to react. He also allows time to evaluate the level and intent of the threat. This should happen on a subconscious level if the martial artist is properly trained. If you have to think about an attack your defense isn't going to work.

Too many martial artists will attend a couple of seminars and think that they are ready to take on the world. It doesn't take long to learn a technique but it takes time to internalize it. This is accomplished by extensive training and repetition of a technique until it becomes second nature. Any technique, in order to be effective, has to be programmed into muscle memory. This can only be done through extensive practice. There is a world of difference between knowing a technique and being able to implement it.

Another element in effective combat and self-defense is what the Japanese call sabaki. This refers to positioning. In order to be effective in a combative situation a fighter has to be able to position himself properly in relation to his opponent and the opponent's attack. Being in the right place at the right time can mean the difference between victory and defeat. Many people have become victims because they were in the wrong place. Avoiding certain areas will help a person avoid being confronted by certain situations. If you insist on strolling through a battle ground, you would do well to expect to have to fight. This same fact lends itself to combat. Positioning is half the battle.

Another element that enables a martial artist to be effective is total intent and commitment. Total commitment is necessary to make a technique strong enough to take down an attacker. This principle is called kime in karate. Kime means focus of effort, energy and intent. A tentative technique will only get you hurt or killed. If you don't intend to hurt or impair an attacker, your best bet (which often is the best tact anyway) is to take to your heels and beat a hasty retreat. As Miyagi said in the 'Karate Kid', "You do karate or you no do karate. No half do karate". If you aren't ready, willing and able to fight in a compromising situation fighting isn't your best option. You might do better to practice track. At least, if nothing else, you can 'get out of Dodge'.

The last principle I would like to explore is the one that this article is intended to address; receiving a technique.

In trying to address aggression we sometimes become obsessed with avoiding or stopping an attack. That's understandable considering the lethal intent of an opponent's attack, but sometime, in our fear of being hit we defeat our own purpose and in the process lose the opportunity to dominate and dispatch the opponent with the least risk of harm to ourselves.

In combat it is a bad idea to go toe to toe, blow for blow with an opponent. Especially since most attackers won't choose a victim that they feel is an even match. More often than not, you'll be facing a bigger or stronger opponent, one that is better armed or multiple opponents. This fact should govern our response to an attack. If we can put the opponent in a position where he is no longer a threat and can at the same time place ourselves in the position to do maximum harm with minimum risk to ourselves, we have the potential to end the conflict without being injured or hurt.



The occidental mind views things differently from the oriental mind. Our way of seeing things often gives us the wrong understanding of what is actually being taught with some techniques in the Asian combative arts. One such misconception is in the art of age uke, or what the westerner would call blocking techniques.

Let me clarify the concept of age uke. When I was studying karate I had the privilege (and what some would consider the bad luck) of being my sensei's uke. When practicing or demonstrating a technique, there is tori who implements the technique, and uke, who receives it. You'll notice that I said receive the technique. In order to learn a technique, there has to be cooperation between tori and uke. This cooperation doesn't involve opposition. Uke doesn't oppose tori's technique. He receives it. This sense of receiving the aggression of an attacker is what is implied by age uke.

In order to really take control of an attack the defender must embrace it. He has to receive the technique and make it his own. In so doing, he can position himself and his opponent where it affords the best advantage. Age uke should redirect the opponent's attack, overbalance him and put him in a position where the defender can implement a response from an indefensible position that offers maximum damage to the attacker with minimum risk to himself. In so doing he will be able to use the attacker's technique against him and use his own strength and aggression to defeat him.

There are instances when a martial artist will have to initiate the first attack. As martial artists, and especially Christian martial artists, we have to be able to discern when that is necessary. It is better to be able to redirect, diffuse or deescalate the violent intent of an aggressor without having to resort to violence. That is the ultimate skill in the martial arts. Unfortunately, sometimes

meeting violence with violence is unavoidable. We have an obligation to preserve our own safety and the safety of our loved ones. Still, we want to act appropriately in a given situation. In facing opposition we should be discerning enough to know what course of action is necessary. Not only is this morally right, it can help a martial artist avoid serious repercussions and legal problems.

Learning the way of harmony, and not opposition, in all circumstances in our lives offers a certain amount of control in what could be a negative situation. Being centered and grounded and having confidence in our ability will circumvent many situations. You won't find yourself giving in to violence to prove yourself. Also, your level of confidence and your sense of awareness will often make a would be assailant seek easier prey.

In ending this one sided discussion, I would like to say that God and his protection is always our first line of defense. The word of God admonishes us that: "As far as you're able, follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see God" (Hebrews 12:14).

Train hard, my martial arts brethren. Go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# *FIFTY-SIXTH YEAR*

## *OBSERVATIONS*

Today is October seventeenth, two thousand and thirteenth. Today I made sixty six years of age. That means I am no longer young. Actually I haven't been young for a long time now. Being a senior citizen means I can get away with saying some things that a younger person couldn't get away with. People have a tendency to chalk up older people's indiscretions to advanced age; Maybe a little senility or dementia. So if I say something offensive blame it on old age.

This month also marks my fifty sixth year in the martial arts. In all that time I should have learned something. Considering how opinionated I am I need to have at least a tiny bit of wisdom. I tend to be a prolific if not an insightful writer. That being said let me comment on yet another observation. If I offend someone in the process please remember I'm an old man. Please also remember that this old man could very possibly knock your hat around backwards.

In my several years of involvement in the martial arts I have seen trends come and go. I have watched the martial arts evolve in America. In the process we've learned more but understand less. We've developed a lot of pretty good practitioners but fewer really effective technicians. More emphasis is placed on the art than the martial aspects of the martial arts. We've grown more esoteric while losing much of the combat effectiveness in our various arts. I am

convinced that the martial arts were developed for self defense and combat. Its development of body, spirit and mind is a happy byproduct but was never the intended purpose of those arts. They were a means of conquest and survival. Remove those aspects and you lose much of the effectiveness of the arts.

How many of you remember the popularity of point karate in the sixties? No contact was allowed because we were convinced that our techniques were too deadly for contact fighting. In those days we were determined to forge our hands into lethal weapons. We beat our hands on padded boards and thrust our hands in sand, gravel and iron shot. The kung fu stylists beat their hands on iron palm bags and then tried to minimize the damage to their hands with various lotions and potions. Some of us even broke our hands so that they would grow back stronger. I question the wisdom of all of that but we were serious about being deadly.

We conditioned our bodies even as we conditioned our weapons. We trained like real athletes and not like weekend warriors. In those days a black belt meant something.

When I was aspiring for a black belt in the early sixties we were taught a hand full of pressure points. Not the dim mak or kyoshu jitsu that is taught today. We were taught about ten target areas to disable or even kill an opponent. With the knowledge of those easily assessable targets and hand and body conditioning when we hit a person they had a tendency to stay hit. Now we teach over a hundred nerve centers, pressure points and chi meridians that are said to disable an opponent. Being of limited intelligence and burdened with a growing learning disability I am overwhelmed with the intricacy of the arts that have developed around all of this knowledge.

Being the dim witted individual that I am I embrace the 'more is less' philosophy. I have taken the time and made the effort to learn if not perfect several martial arts. With the time I've invested in these arts I have managed to accrue advanced rank in several of them. I found many of them to be a bit top heavy. Many of the techniques they taught were more traditional than practical. I'm sure that they were more than efficient in dealing with the challenges that they were created to address but things have changed radically since those days. We no longer need flying kicks to unseat an opponent on horseback or techniques to address a sword or spear wielding adversary. Consequently some of what we were taught had little or no application according to the challenges of today.

In the systems that I've developed and teach I adhere to that same 'more is less' theory. I teach a combat system that I feel is more applicable to the needs and challenges presented by today's society. I love the traditional systems but I don't claim to teach them as such. Many of my students have been police officers, personal security specialists, prison and mental health workers or worked in other high risk professions. The art that I developed and teach reflects their needs and the challenges presented by the mean city streets that many of us grew up in.

My concept of pressure points and nerve center strikes is based little on chi or acupressure points. I teach a handful of critical targets. They attack vision, breathing, consciousness and foundation. My philosophy is that if a man can't see he can't fight. If he can't breathe he can't fight. If he can't stand he can't fight. And of course if he's unconscious he can't fight. Several of the said targets can be lethal but we try to avoid killing or seriously injuring an opponent. For control we use a number of jiu jitsu and aikijitsu techniques. By

the way, I teach both the striking and grappling systems separately but I blend them into a practical cohesive system that transitions from striking to grappling. We teach a handful of karate/kempo kata to teach basic balance and flow but we teach more with waza and scenario based training. Our Kukeren Gojute Kempo ( Dan Te Ryu) and Jute Ryu Aikijitsu are modified systems that are purely combat oriented.

Many of my peers teach dim mak and kyosho jitsu. I've studied the systems myself. I admire them for what they do and I wouldn't dare question or criticize them or the arts they teach but for those of limited ability and minimal retention the arts that I teach are a perfect and very effective alternative.

Combat isn't rocket science. There's nothing scientific about gouging someone in the eye or kicking them in the knee cap but those kinds of crude techniques can bring a fight to a quick halt. Nothing complex or esoteric about them but it's hard to argue against effectiveness. I look at the challenges of combat as improper fractions. My tendency is to reduce them to their lowest terms. Makes them easier to work with and the problems that they present easier to deal with. There you have it. The Don Miskel approach to combat and self defense. Fighting made easy. Call it old man kung fu. It ain't cute but you can bet your a--, I mean your rear most extremity, that they work.

Thank you for listening to the rambling observations of an old man. Apparently your studies in the martial arts have garnered you with both respect and patience. I appreciate both.

Train hard my brethren and go with God

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

## *FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT*

This year will mark my sixty seventh year in the land of the living with fifty seven of those dedicated to the martial arts. I have been blessed to be able to make this journey. It has been a fantastic experience. As I continue my sojourn in this world my journey in the martial arts continues also.

I've been advised by friend and family alike to sit down and take it easy. They say I've done enough and I'm too old to continue doing what I'm doing. Possibly they're right but for me this is a lifelong journey. With the many challenges that age presents and the effects of the many injuries I've accrued along the way training becomes more of challenge. I practice both internal and external martial arts but I still strength train. I even do a little teaching but my primary contribution to the arts these days has to do with sharing spiritual and philosophical insight and managing the organizations that I head and/or advise. In that vein I have an observation that I would like to share. Blindsided you with that one didn't I? Probably not. Those who know me know that I'm a preacher and given occasion I will preach.

People study the martial arts for many reasons and on many levels. I often comment on that fact but I would like to revisit it with an eye on a particular aspect of that same fact. Any of the Eastern martial arts can be studied as a do or as a jitsu. For instance judo is an art. It is practiced as such with an eye on the ascetic. Jiu Jitsu on the other hand is a fighting system. It isn't a sport and it isn't taught to enlighten a student. It is and was created as a

survival tool. It reached its pinnacle in dark allies and battle fields. In a word it was created to give a combatant the edge in a fight.

Many martial arts made the transition from combat systems to sports or ascetic arts. Consequently many of the more deadly techniques have been excluded and the techniques that were taught for combat have been modified to make them safer to practice with an opponent. For example the karate punch isn't taught in its most lethal form. The seiken zuki (full twist punch with palm facing the floor) or tate zuki (vertical fist) aren't taught in their more lethal form. The original punch was formed with the fist halfway between those two positions with the fist at roughly a forty-five degree angle. A strike that's formed properly accesses the body cavities and nerve nexuses more efficiently. The difference can be devastating and isn't suited for a sport application. In affect the more dangerous techniques were changed to allow those arts to be practiced in friendly competition.

Today many martial artists are sportsmen. They're more interested in competing than fighting. I have no problem with that but to think that that is the original and sole purpose of a martial system is inaccurate. Martial systems weren't created as sports. Nor were they created to advance spiritual growth or moral development in a practitioner. They were created to injure, maim or kill. An eye gouge is a simple and effective combat technique but don't expect competition eye gouging to become the new rave. By the very nature of its devastating effectiveness it is suited only for life and death combat. That's the nature of any real fighting technique.

The problem with the competition based martial arts is that their sport applications are being passed off as combat effectiveness. Please take my word for it, what's effective on the tournament floor doesn't necessarily translate to



the streets or to the battle field. A baseball bat can be a lethal weapon and a hurled baseball can do some real damage but baseball players aren't trained in combat. Baseball is a sport and should be recognized as such. If you think that playing in the little league qualifies you for combat you're headed for a rude awakening. We need to be honest with ourselves and realistic in our expectations. You won't become combat ready by practicing tournament karate.

I respect a tournament champion who is good at his trade. I don't subscribe to that path in my martial training but I admire what he does. I'm pretty sure that I can't compete with Bill Wallace on the tournament floor but he probably hasn't been trained to survive on the mean city streets of Chicago or those like them in other cities. What he studies wouldn't be applicable for hand to hand combat. That very sort of thing is what some martial artists train for. They train for combat effectiveness or for survival in the real world.

I am impressed by those who compete and make a name for themselves. They may do it for self satisfaction, notoriety or for fame and glory but if they do it well they have my respect. However I'm more impressed by those who train and teach quietly giving the tools for others to survive or grow. Whether they teach to enable their students to defend themselves or to train up model citizens and instill good moral values in them they have my support and admiration. The willingness to serve, minister and mentor is in my eyes the highest expression of the martial arts.

It's nice having a large and lucrative commercial school. I certainly can't criticize success in any legal enterprise. However I am more impressed by the sensei who teaches in a community center, in some damp church basement or in a park. The one who passes up monetary success to enable him to reach the

challenged teen, troubled child or at risk adult. Those such individuals are my heroes. They give selflessly of themselves to be a blessing to others.

Whatever your path be true to yourself. You have every right to follow your dream. However don't criticize those who seek a different path. We are all martial artists however we decide to pursue our dream and on whatever level we choose to do so. The tournament champion is no more a martial artist than the sensei who trains and teaches out of his garage. The instructor who owns a successful school is no more a martial artist than the sensei who has a backyard dojo. Some of Bruce Lee's best students were trained in his back yard. Success isn't measured by size.

It is my belief that we should give back. Those of us who have gained the most should be willing to give the most. Keep in mind that the sensei of the historical past were as much father and mentor to his student as fight instructor. I feel that that should be our endeavor.

I have rambled through several issues but let me end this discourse with the spiritual and philosophical truth; "It is more blessed to give than to receive". In the end the greatest fight that you'll fight is with yourself and for your own character. In entering that fight let's fight the good fight.

Train hard my brethren and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# FOUNDATIONS AND ORIGINS

Everything has to start somewhere. Everything that is to stand must have a foundation. Nothing exists in a vacuum. I'm real big on finding the roots of things. How things came to be what they are. Being a writer I'm always looking for the roots of words and the origins of various adages and clichés. How did various phrases and ideas become part of our vernacular? Every 'old saying' has its author. The same holds true for the martial arts that we study today.

Many of the martial art masters that founded the arts that we study today studied with someone. Very few had a spiritual epiphany that morphed into one of the martial arts that have become cornerstones in the martial art world. Master Gichen Funakoshi studied variations of Naha and shuri te. Master Kano and Ueshiba studied various forms of jiu jitsu. If you go back far enough jiu jitsu probably has much of its roots in sua jau and aikijitsu in chin na. Karate and kempo was heavily influenced by the various Chinese kung fu influences that found their way to the Ryu Kyu islands. It may be informative and beneficial to research the origin of whatever art you study.

In my many years in the martial arts I've had the privilege of studying with several instructors in a number of systems. I stayed with several of them long enough to attain menkyo(s) or teaching certificates. A couple I've stayed with long enough to be considered a master in the systems. Not that I claim mastery in anything. After fifty seven years I'm still a student. I guess I'm a slow learner but I keep on plodding along.

All of the systems and arts that I have studied have amalgamated into one eclectic system. I divide the system that I teach into two key components. Either the kempo or aikijitsu systems can stand along and can be taught independent of the other but ideally they are designed to complement each other. I've studied arts that I may have been qualified to teach at some time or another. I don't teach any of them but all of them have found their way into my key art. All of them to a greater extent form the art that I teach.

My primary arts were karate (shorei goju), Okinawa kempo and diato ryu aikijitsu with a smattering of judo, aikido and hakka ryu jiu jitsu thrown in the mix. They are the foundations for everything that I study or teach.

How do you find the roots of a particular system? You can look at the point of emphasis of the art. Is it basically a striking or a grappling art? Does it advocate fighting at a distance or up close? Does it advocate strength or technique? Is it external or internal; hard or soft? Is it circular, linear or a combination of the two? These and similar questions can give you insight into the origins of your art. Let's look at some of these questions and examine a particular art. We'll look at goju karate as an example.

Okinawa goju is considered a softer system than shorei and shorin karate, the two other major styles of karate on Okinawa. Goju has both linear and circular techniques. It is in affect two systems in one. Looking at the sanchin (hour glass) stance of goju karate and its crescent stepping patterns you can see shades of pau qua chang, an internal style of kung fu. The mawashi uke (round house) blocking patterns support this. On the other hand there are the tensho blocking and grabbing techniques that are reminiscent of white crane kung fu. A lot of the high kicks and long hand techniques bear this out. One could also look at the explosive oi zuki (lunge punches) of the systems

along with the gyaku zuki (reverse punch) and see a serious similarity to tsing i. These influences along with the influences of the local Okinawa te systems (Naha te, Shuri te and Tomiki te) make up what we know as goju karate.

Trying to understand the roots of your system may or may not make you a better practitioner but it would definitely give you a deeper insight into the individual arts that made up your system. Examining these systems may give you a better concept of the intregul parts of your art and how they come together to create the art that you study. Taking a closer look at these individual arts may even make you a better martial artist. Plus you can impress your friends and fellow students with your academic knowledge. I might warn you though, to be careful how you go about enlightening your sensei with your superior knowledge. No need of getting a butt whipping if you don't have to. Sensei(s) can be a little testy about those kinds of things.

God bless you my newly enlightened brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# *GOOD OUT OF THE GATE*

## *(TEACHING FROM EXPERIENCE)*

I just got home from teaching my Saturday morning martial art class. Everything hurts. My orthopedic surgeon and my pain management doctor warn me against what I do but you see how much good it does. Anyway, my own personal experience got me to thinking. Hence this article.

There are many elements that constitutes mastery of a martial art or any other endeavor, for that matter. Mastery requires time, effort and experience. There are other elements that are necessary to attain mastery of any art. According to what one is trying to master there are many variables but these three are requirements regardless of your area of expertise. The martial arts are no exception. If anything these elements apply even more to the mastery of a martial art discipline than in most other arts. Mastery, if attainable by a particular individual is going to occupy a major portion of his life.

Martial art mastery doesn't happen by accident. It requires deliberation. One doesn't back into such an achievement. He has to strive with that result as a goal. If you're blessed with the physicality and coordination; If one has a measure of athleticism and the time to dedicate to the study of his particular system he will probably become a black belt. Things aren't what they once were. Back in the day it didn't matter how much you studied or how hard you

trained everyone couldn't and didn't make black belt. The standards and expectations of the sensei and the system has changed over the years. If you're determined and have the time to dedicate to your art you will attain shodan and maybe higher. Everyone will not become a master.

By the time one has dedicated his life to an art and fulfilled the necessary sacrifices to become a martial art master many years have slipped by. His original ability has waned even as his knowledge and wisdom has grown. It's a trade off. Time increases knowledge but it robs one of youth. it will take about forty years or more to reach hachidan (eight degree black belt) and even longer for kudan or judan if those ranks are available for the practitioner. In many systems those rarified ranks are reserved for the master and grandmaster of the system. Except in rare cases, if a practitioner is able to reach ninth or tenth degree, fifty or more years of study have been dedicated to his art. By that time he is no longer burning up the tournament circuit or terrorizing young thugs in the streets. If he is still involved with the art at that age he may do a little teaching but primarily he will walk around (if he can still walk) looking important and wise. Or perhaps he is doing what I am doing now, presenting himself as an authority of all things martial.

Saturday morning kung fu movies (the older generation will know what I mean) have instilled us with a vision of old octogenarian masters flying through the air like eagles and beating up on young fighters. It works on films but in actuality it loses something in translation. Age takes a toll and most of us aren't what we once were. We know more and can do less. In a real world that's what happens.

I have dedicated fifty five years of my life to studying and teaching the arts. I still do both in spite of age, injury and several radical surgeries. If I had

good sense I would sit my old butt down somewhere but as we all know by now that isn't going to happen. Consequently, I do what I can. I teach children and several individuals who work in 'at risk' professions. I teach police and correction officers, security personnel and psych professionals. I have worked in several of those professions and know the risks that these individuals are exposed to and how to address some of them.

I am supposed to do a couple of seminars and demonstrations at a couple of large important gatherings in the coming months. I was a bit worried about being able to perform at a level that will compliment my rank. Several things happened to allay those concerns. I did an interview for a martial art documentary and the ones who did the filming and watched me teach my class (one an experienced martial artist) expressed appreciation for my abilities, form and technique. He even thought I had the physique of a much younger gentleman. While I must admit that god has blessed me with a decent physique considering my age I have to mention that he hadn't seen me with my shirt off.

I had pretty much given up on teaching because of age and injury but my ministry (I'm a minister and pastor) found me back in the dojo. I had pretty much resigned myself to managing the organization that I headed and writing the occasional article. God has a way of ordaining certain things in our lives that take us out of our comfort zone. What a difference a few months make. I find myself having to turn down teaching opportunities now. Never the less I still just teach my children classes and my specialized classes for those aforementioned individuals. I'm not teaching tournament champions and I'm not quite ready to compete in kick boxing or MMA matches but I am still active in the arts and will be in some capacity until they plant me.



As I have said and will continue to say, a master is a master because of what he knows, not because of what he can do. If he is only able to give verbal instruction or is only able to teach in slow motion he is still a master and you would be a fool if you discount his knowledge because of his waning ability. He is a store house of knowledge and ability. Those of us who have opportunity should avail ourselves of the wisdom that they offer.

Speaking of myself again, I want to say that I'm good out of the gate. For five minutes I can be your worst nightmare but if you can outlast me...

My brethren I admonish you to give honor to whom honor is do. Venerate those who have gone where you someday hope to be. Don't worship him but recognize his knowledge, wisdom and his contribution to the arts. Maybe, if you stay the course and continue to train and study you will reach the place that they have. You can only hope.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**Sensei John Wallace, my ushi deshi in Tucson, Arizona.**



**Aikijitsu Throw.**

# KARATE AND THE GRANDMASTER

On occasion I put myself in the line of fire with the stances I take and the articles I write to explain those stances. I'm probably getting ready to do the same thing again. Hopefully no-one will put a hit on me behind this and I won't die mysteriously due to some kyoshu jitsu or dim mak attack. No Hoppa Grass, that's dim mak attack not 'Big Mack' attack.

When I started studying the martial arts there were no Saturday morning kung fu flicks on TV and no kung fu matinees to shape my ideas of the martial arts. In 1957 Chicago there was just judo and jiu jitsu available, both of which were taught quietly in some small dojo or another. No big deal, no politics, no fanfare. No martial art mystique to create over the top sensei, masters and grandmasters. How I long for those simple times.

Karate became my art of choice. I studied several systems of karate, kempo/kenpo, aikijitsu/aikido and later kung fu wherever I could with whomever I could. I was beholden to no-one. For years I taught quietly in Chicago and Tucson. I always had a school or two and taught in colleges, YMCAs, Park District field houses, church gymnasiums and such like. I avoided organizations and shied away from the limelight. I avoided martial art politics like the plague. I even avoided advanced rank. I stayed a nidan and sandan for long periods of time. I never was a forth dan in karate. I was instead given a fifth or godan for time in grade. I didn't like it but I went along with it. Over the

years I climbed the ranks and at the present time I'm considered a master or grandmaster by my peers.

Let me get into the meat of this message. I would like to talk about rank and the American martial arts. In the beginning of my martial art training I studied several classical systems and belonged to the related organizations. These were Eastern arts and followed the Eastern philosophies concerning rank and fealty. We went about everything according to the oriental methodologies. We followed the ranking systems according to their requirements because we were basically oriental systems. We even used Japanese terminology. However that was then; this is now. The martial arts we teach and train in have changed as well as those of us who teach and train in them. The directions of those arts have been shaped by our own individual needs and challenge here in America. Taking those things in consideration change was inevitable. The arts that we teach have become uniquely American. The foundation of those arts may have been Asian but the arts have changed to suit our needs, body types and our temperaments. Consequently our loyalties have changed as have our ranking systems. We have become American masters teaching American arts.

Like many other American masters I hold high rank in several Asian arts. Like some other American teachers I had my own vision and using my extensive training and experience in the various arts I've trained in I created my own system or more properly my own martial concepts. I am ranked in those systems and the organizations that support them. My rank in the Asian arts would probably be recognized by my oriental counterparts but my American arts and my recognition of grandmaster rank by my American peers probably wouldn't. Nor should they.

Rank is extremely relative. What's accepted in some systems or by some organizations may be frowned on by another. I really don't put a whole lot of store in rank. They can mean too many different things. I look more to the knowledge and ability of the individual. I do get a bit concerned about those 10TH degree grandmasters with less than forty five or fifty years in the martial arts but occasionally there is the rare exception to the rule. There are the rare student prodigies that graduate from college at sixteen. Occasionally you get one of those in the martial arts. I can name three off of the top of my head. No name dropping here but the three I'm thinking of are recognized as masters and grandmasters by the martial art community. One in particular received the equivalent of a shodan, 1ST degree, from his instructor and went on to create one of the most innovative systems in existence today.

Who's to determine what is legitimate rank or a legitimate system? Of course I have my own opinion on this subject. If I didn't I wouldn't be writing this article. Personally I don't concern myself with the acceptance or rejection of the system that I teach. My students believe in it and it works for them. That's all of the acceptance I really require. I've taught and occasionally still teach the classical martial arts but I teach my own personal system to only a handful of people. I had the rank of godan or above in several classical systems long before I tried my hand at creating a different concept of those arts. I had over forty years of martial art experience when I started on that journey and then I didn't do it along. It involved the combined efforts of several other sensei and masters.

A number of individuals concern themselves with the advanced rank claimed by some of the proponents of the westernized arts. Let me clear something up. At fifth dan you have the knowledge and ability in and of your

particular art. A godan will require about twenty five years of dedication and training. Saying that a person started training at twenty. At forty five his physical abilities are beginning to wane and it doesn't get better with the passing years. In the end a master is a master because of what he knows not what he can do. What you can do diminishes with age. What you know doesn't.

I am the co-creator and senior grandmaster of the Black Lotus Martial Art Association and its several systems as well as the head of family of the IFAA Black Dragon Fighting Society. This will mark my fifty seventh year involvement in the martial arts. I have trained with some of the best as well as with some of the most controversial. I hold the rank of 10TH dan in two arts and advanced ranking in several others. Still I am nothing more than a godan, fifth degree. Actually none of us are. Rank beyond that is honorary and based on other than physical prowess. If we think otherwise we fool ourselves.

Recently I've been questioned concerning the rank and advancement of several BDFS members. I don't judge the rank of other masters. In the end their claims will speak for themselves. The IFAA BDFS doesn't confer rank. We don't even cross rank. We do accept members who head or represent various organizations or systems and the rank the said entities conferred on them. They remain autonomous and their claims are their own. We don't back up those claims. Their rank and their supposed exploits are their own. By inclusion in our organization we only acknowledge the rank conferred on them by their said organization. We back up no claims of past exploits unless we have personal knowledge of them. Other than that their claims are their own. We don't try to qualify those claims.

Let me state also, I will not base my friendship to anyone, martial artist or otherwise, on the opinions of others. My friends don't have to be your friend

and those relationships don't require your approval. I don't have to, nor will I, explain the reason for or nature of those friendships or associations. That's between the person and myself. I am a minister and pastor as well as a martial artist. Oft times the decisions I make are harbored more in the latter than the former. I don't expect everyone to understand or agree with them. In such instances we can agree to disagree. Otherwise you are welcome to your opinions as long as you keep them to yourself.

With all of that being said I will admonish the up and coming masters and those claiming such rank to exercise honesty and integrity. It isn't my place or anyone else's to police you. You can do that without me. Be honest with yourself and others. Your credibility depends on it.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# *KATA AND OLD SCHOOL KARATE*

Many of the past masters knew and perfected one, two or a handful of kata. Now many practitioners know (or half know) many kata. Actually each kata or set of katas is an entire fighting system. It is possible to perfect only one or two kata in a lifetime. Instead of a hundred kata done a hundred times one kata done ten thousand times. Old school karate taught in the original manner.

In times past kata was karate. All of the techniques and secrets of a system were catalogued and hidden in its forms. Because systems were sometime combined into an eclectic method that became new expanded systems many kata were brought into the resulting system. As an example Shotokan Karate is a combined synthesis of Naha-Te and Shuri-Te. Thusly each brought its unique forms or kata into the final product. Tai Chi teaches only one long (or short) form. Wing chaun teaches only three. Some other systems have twenty, thirty or even more kata. The masters of the systems knew them all because he had to be able to pass them on to his students. Unless one was groomed for the headship of the system he didn't really know all of the forms. He learned the form or forms that he chose to perfect or that were deemed applicable to his own needs. Often this was determined by his teacher taking into consideration his physical attributes, his innate abilities, his temperament and his individual needs.



It takes a lifetime to perfect a kata. That is if one can ever be said to really perfect a kata. It's impossible to perfect twenty or thirty katas in a single lifetime. Many times we want to progress to the more intricate and ascetically pleasing forms but they aren't necessarily the most effective mode of combat for the practitioner. Complexity doesn't necessarily translate into practical application. Often more is less. Bigger isn't always better.

Master Gichen Funakoshi was once asked what was the kata for the beginner. Without hesitation he identified Taikyoka as the form for the beginner. He was then asked what was the kata for the master. After a moment's thought he stated that taikyoka was the form for the master. Often in simplicity lies mastery.

I don't teach many kata. I know a number of kata but I really only practice about three of them. I'll teach the several most basic katas to a student and then give him one to work on throughout his Kempo/Karate career. I teach many waza and fighting forms but in perfecting his kata I feel that a student perfects his own individual fighting style. What I teach these days is more of a fighting system than a martial art. That's because I teach many individuals in high risk professions with specific needs. In spite of that I still teach a hand full of students the martial arts as they have been passed on to me. The synthesis of the several arts I have studied makes up the art that I teach but it incorporates only a handful of katas.

I am often asked are katas important. I ask in turn, what do you want to study? If you want to be a martial artist you will have to learn and practice kata. If you just need a self defense or combat system you can probably do without them but understand, what you're studying isn't a martial art. If you

want to be a martial artist then katas are a must. To a large extent, the kata is the art.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



# KARATE FOR THE MASTERS

It has been a lifelong endeavor for me to truly master the martial arts. I have dedicated nearly 55 years of my life to that end. Still striving. Still seeking. Still studying. I am considered a martial arts masters amongst my peers and a grandmaster in some circles but I have better sense than to become too enamored with my ability. Age, injury and several radical surgeries have taken their toll on this old body but so far my mind is as clear as ever. Which, by the way, isn't saying much but it is what it is.

I HAVE OFTEN ASKED MYSELF WHAT IS MARTIAL ARTS FOR THE MASTER. What describes that rarified level of knowledge and ability? Is it a powerful gyaku zuki (reverse punch) or a blazingly fast yoko kekomi geri (side thrust kick)? How about the signature oi zuki (lunge punch) or the mae geri (front kick). Will mastering these moves make one a master. Good question. I'm still trying to find an answer to it. I remember when I could deliver a mawashi geri (roundhouse kick) that would scorch your gi. Today I can barely throw the same technique waist high due to a couple of back surgeries. Everything fused, nothing bends. Not the best situation for a karate/kempo sensei. Still I strive for mastery and have learned to reinvent myself as a martial artist. But then this isn't about me.

In the early days of my martial arts training I was attracted to the most radical and acrobatic techniques I was capable of doing. Spinning kicks, jump kicks, flying kicks were the order of the day and that was before the popularity

of taekwondo in the Midwest where I resided. Like most youngsters I was attracted to the theatrical. But is this the martial arts of the master?

In order to reach grandmaster level, (eighth dan and above) a good forty or fifty years of training has been dedicated to training, practice and teaching. A lot happens to the body in that amount of time, much of it not good. What you were able to pull off at twenty you'll be hard pressed to duplicate with any authority at sixty. Let's face it, we do get old. Either that or we get dead which isn't conducive to training. Which brings up another peripheral question. Will there be karate in heaven? As a minister and Christian martial artist I concern myself with such questions. Interesting conjecture but let's get back on track. Is a master a master as his ability wanes? Unfortunately knowledge and ability seem to grow in opposite directions as we age. We know more but we can do less. If this isn't you just give it a bit more time. You'll get there.

It has been my conjecture that a master is a master more for what he knows and what he has accomplished than what he is still able to do. Otherwise one will be a master for a while and slide back down the scale to a beginner. For mastership knowledge is key. Being able to transmit what you know into the lives of others. That is the true role of the master.

Real karate, or any other martial arts resides in the kyohan (the basic techniques). It isn't the eye catching, mind boggling esoteric techniques that describe the master. When all is said and done any real martial arts describes its worth on the field of battle. True any martial arts 'do' will accomplish much more than making a person a proficient fighter, which is good since violence is antisocial. But in the long run the martial arts are about fighting. Not about kumite, waza or kata though all three contribute to the ability of the fighter. In its rawest manifestation the martial arts are just that; martial. It's about

combat, fighting and self-defense. If the arts don't work in those areas they don't work at all. It's nice to build character and teach discipline but there are possibly easier and less traumatic way of doing that without the bruises and contusions that accompany the study of any fighting discipline. In the end, if you can't fight, you aren't much of a martial artist. You're merely a paper tiger.

Back to the beginning of this essay. Karate is effective because of its basics. Everything else is superfluous. Basics are what work in a real confrontation. When the blood is inundated with adrenaline and the heart rate peaks eye hand coordination basically disappears. Simplicity becomes the redeeming factor in such a situation. Gross motor skills are what work.

I would like to tell you that all those beautiful and flashy techniques that you perfected for last Saturday's demonstration will work in the streets but I would probably be misleading. Basics work. Simplicity offers a better chance of success. Leave those fancy techniques for the stage. That's where they'll get the applause. Don't allow those flashy techniques to leave you broken and bleeding in the streets. Likewise instill a sense of reality in your students. If you teach karate or any other martial discipline as a sport be honest with your students. What works on the tournament floor doesn't necessarily work in the streets. A master instills reality into his students. He doesn't inundate him with false and maybe dangerous expectations. A real master will take his student to where he needs to be as a martial artist.

Lastly, to cement my argument let me go to one of the great authorities on karate. Master Gichin Funikoshi stated that taikioka is the kata for the beginner. Then he turned around and stated that taikioka is the kata for the beginner. How can this be? Sounds like the classic oxymoron but in this truth lies the key to mastery of the arts. A young martial artist relies on his youth and

physical prowess. That will only take him so far. Especially if he intends to continue practicing his art beyond his youth. As he continues to pursue his art he'll eventually learn that there is a deeper depth and greater knowledge to be had and that resides in the basic foundational techniques of his art. Every sound building rests on a good foundation. Without it it doesn't matter what good material you build with. Your building will be built on and in futility. A structure is no better than the foundation it stands on. In the martial arts mastery resides in the basics.

Be realistic in your studies and training. Teach realistically. You'll be much happier with your accomplishments and in the end your students will appreciate it.

Train hard my brother and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*





**Grandmaster Doug Dwyer II.**

# *LINEAGE AND THE TRADITIONAL MARTIAL ARTS*

I probably do enough writing for ten people. It's not so much that I'm insightful or prolific as that I'm opinionated. I'm a preacher and pastor by vocation. Pontificating is in my nature and preaching and teaching is in my blood. In my past I've been a Psych professional and a counselor. I have the training and the degrees to back up my experience. My passion aside from preaching is the martial arts. I've dedicated fifty five years of my life to training in and teaching the arts.

My career in the arts began in judo and jiu jitsu. From there I went to karate, kung fu and kempo. I have a long background in the classical systems of the martial arts. Since that time I have combined the arts that I've studied along with life experience and personal insight into an eclectic system that is combative in nature. What with working in psych, the penal system and on the fringes of law enforcement; growing up in the toughest areas of one of the roughest major cities of our nation, fighting in its mean streets trying to survive and experiencing war and military combat (some of it hand to hand) I have a pretty good grasp of practical self defense and combat. I'm no tournament champion but I can fight and I had a reputation that proved I did it well.



I try to keep my finger on the pulse of the martial arts community, its trends and direction. Sometimes seeing what I see in the arts and the martial art community baffles and often saddens me. The martial arts, especially in the U.S., have always been rift with politics but it's worse today than it's ever been. Some of us have taken it upon ourselves to criticize and ostracize some of the rest of us. Who have made certain of us the martial art police is a mystery to me but some of us seem to have assumed that position. We feel that we have somehow earned the right to determine who is worthy of acceptance and who isn't; who is real and who is phony and so on. It is my belief that those who believe and have faith in us will follow, validate and support us. Actually, the effectiveness of our arts validates us. What else should a fighting art require?

One of the things that cause these divisions is the rift between the classical and eclectic styles. Then there is the division between the combative and sports aspects of the arts. Part of the reason for this is the almost religious reverence shown to the originators and creators of the arts that we train in. Many of us will fight to maintain the purity of our arts however time and the modern demands of combat show them to be impractical. Please understand me. I'm not criticizing these arts or the ones that follow them. There are many reasons for practicing the martial arts. If the traditional approach fulfills your needs then by all means follow them. There is a richness and beauty inherent in these arts that make them well worth studying. I just have a problem with anyone who teaches an art that was designed to answer the needs of a feudal age hundreds of years past and declare them to be the consummate self defense system for this modern day. If an art has to be tweaked too much just to make it practical I question its ability to fulfill the needs of modern day combat. All of the changes required to make them workable changes the art and at that point it is no longer the art originally created.

There is a lot of controversy concerning eclectic fighting arts. If one would be honest he would realize that most of the arts that we study today are eclectic in nature. Master Funakoshi, the creator of shotokan karate studied both naha-te and shuri-te. He combined these to create what we now consider a classical system. Likewise with Master Oyama's Kyukushanki karate and many others. Most of the Korean systems are a synthesis of Korean and Japanese systems. Likewise the Okinawan systems are comprised of Chinese influences as well as Okinawa's own indigenous arts. There are few pure systems that have not been influenced by or distilled from other arts.

It's good to be loyal to our particular styles and systems of martial arts and to show appreciation and admirations to those who made them what they are but we must keep in mind that these people were only men. Many Eastern countries have taken the recognition of lineage to a level that approaches ancestral worship. Japan, for instance, is a Shintoist country. That is to say that Shinto is their traditional religion. Their faith involves a deep veneration of ancestors. This is true to an extent in most Eastern countries. Those attitudes influence the way the martial arts have traditionally been taught. I believe in giving honor to whom honor is due but no-one on earth has yet to create anything that is perfect. All martial arts have their shortcomings and sometimes their flaws. In the end a martial art is as good as what it accomplishes. No martial art was created by a god and none of them will make us into supermen. In the long run it is the man that makes the art and not the art that makes the man. An art is no better than those who practice it.

I encourage every martial artist to continue studying. If you are satisfied with your art continue in it. However don't tear down someone else because he follows a different approach. We each must find our own way. The way may

be blazed and the path laid out before us but it is up to each of us to walk it or decide on a different path. No one way has every answer.

It isn't anyone's job to validate another just as it isn't his job to defame another. We are at liberty to seek our own path and shouldn't have to suffer the abuse of others because our path doesn't coincide with theirs. It's time to grow up. All of the infighting and backbiting only denigrates the arts. It makes us look like a bunch of grammar school bullies trying to secure our reputations at the expense of others. There are no aristocrats in the arts. We are all fellow martial artists whatever we choose to study or to teach. If a system isn't efficient it will die on its own. It doesn't have to die under the gnashing teeth of a pack of rabid martial artists. If you don't care for or believe in a particular art, its creator or its practitioners just leave it alone. It will either succeed and grow or it will die a natural death.

God bless you my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

## *LIVING LEGACIES*

A real parent is secure in his position and his relationship with his children. He feels no need to compete with them. He doesn't envy them their youth. It is his wish to see his children do better than he did; to be more successful, accomplish more and to be better. Each generation should be a step upward.

When my biological children were young I had formal schools. They were raised in the dojo for all practical purposes. I didn't insist that they make the martial arts central in their lives or that they reach black belt level but I did insist that they would be able to defend themselves in the streets. They had to have a secure grasp of the basics and be proficient at self defense. I insisted on that level of knowledge and ability.

Unfortunately only one of my children stayed with the arts long enough to reach black belt. I am now teaching my grandchildren and the hand full of protégés that follow my vision. They are my children in the arts. I have trained quite a number of students in the various arts that I've taught over the years but only a handful have been allowed into my inner circle. Those are my ushi dashi(s), my close door students. They are the ones that will carry the art after I am gone. I am approaching sixty seven years of age and I'm in my fifty seventh year of involvement in the martial arts. I teach the occasional class or seminar and instruct my private students but I no longer have a school. At this hallowed age I am more involved in ministry than the teaching of the arts. What I do in

the arts involves research and writing, managing the organizations I head, and advising and serving as a council member on a few others. I do more teaching through articles than through hands on instruction. At this late date I live vicariously through the accomplishment and advancement of my children; my personal students in the arts.

A martial artist is measured by his own knowledge and ability but an instructor is measured by the quality of his students. I was never big on tournaments. I fought only what was required to make rank. I was more interested in the application of the arts and how their teaching translated to self defense or combat than with competition. When I was coming up there was no MMA. We fought full contact in the old World Karate Federation and in the early BDFS. There was no safety equipment allowed or available. We trained for combat. I followed a handful of the hardcore instructors and students and fought in some of the illegal pit matches that were held during the day. I was more interested in real world combatives than the esoteric aspects of the martial arts. Even till this day that is still somewhat the case. My focus is on the martial aspects of the martial arts. I don't deny the spiritual or character building aspects of the art but it has never been my primary function. I teach spirituality through mentoring and ministry.

I was pretty combative when I was young. That was common place in the neighborhoods I grew up in. The inner city of any major city is a rough place and Chicago is rougher than most. Even in that environment I was more aggressive and confrontational than most of my peers. I wasn't shy about scrapping. I would and did fight. Over the years I've mellowed out. That had to do with my spiritual awakening but much of it was because of my involvement in the arts.

I had occasion to prove my martial art training both in the streets and in combat while in the military. I know that what I teach is effective in combat. Teaching the type of students that I teach it has to. When it comes down to the wire that is the acid test of any martial art or of a martial artist. Take the martial out of the martial art and you have nothing more than ballet. Nice to look at but ineffective where it matters most. Since I got out of the military I can count the physical altercations I've had on the thumbs of one hand. Actually there were more instances than that but I work hard to avoid any kind of physical altercation. I now measure the effectiveness of my art by my students.

Many of my students work in high risk professions. I have taught more than a few law enforcement officers, prison guards, personal security specialists and mental health techs. The training that they have received has served them well and on occasional has made the difference between safety and serious injury or death. I can't count the heartfelt acknowledgement and appreciation that I have gotten from students who used their training in threatening situations. The thanks that I get from those students give me validation of my efforts. They are my mark of success.

I have turned out a couple of fighting champions in my lengthy career. However there were never enough of those to mark me as a trainer of competition champions. Their success probably had more to do with their own innate ability than my training in that area. I taught them for combat but they were able to translate their training into competition. As proud of them as I am I can't take credit for their success. If on the other hand they deal effectively with a violent confrontation on the streets I will take some credit for that. I trained them and they were trained for that type of thing.

These days I am the Head of Family of the IFAA Black Dragon Fighting Society, the senior Grandmaster of the Black Lotus Martial Art Association and the pastor and senior advisor of Kenpo Karate Family International. I also sit on the board or the masters councils of several other organizations. I am a chaplain through the Shinja Martial Art University, I'm a licensed and ordained minister and pastor and I'm an adjunct professor at a major university in the Chicago area. Obviously my focus has changed. The martial arts are still a major part of my life but I live much of that life vicariously through my students and membership. Their success is my success. They are my living legacy.

I admonish the sensei and masters out there to train their students for reality. I'm not saying that you shouldn't teach some of the competitive aspects of the arts but keep in mind it is a martial art.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# MARTIAL ARTS AS MINISTRY

Over the years I have caught a lot of criticism from fellow ministers and pastors for my lifelong involvement in the martial arts. They claimed that I was practicing murder and mayhem disguised as an art. In trying to address their criticism I managed to refrain from body slamming them into the sidewalk or rear spinning heel kicking them into enlightenment. I've tried to explain the concept of martial arts as ministry. In all honesty, it got past most of them. In the long run they've just had to accept my eccentricities and my passion for the martial arts because of my consistency in ministry. I've never maimed or killed anyone (that they knew of) so they've had to accept that I train in the martial arts for some other unfathomable reason. I haven't allowed my frustration with their lack of understanding to depress me but I've put together too good an argument not to share it with someone with a receptive mind. You fellas are unfortunate enough to be within earshot so you're elected as class and audience. We'll call it a study in 'Martial Arts Apologetics'. To my students who hope to advance in rank; there will be a test.

Fractured humor aside, I feel that this is an important subject. The BLMAA lays claim with several of our sister organizations to being a Christian martial arts association. We are martial artists who come together for mutual support and camaraderie but I hope that some of the members are present because of an interest in sharing the Christian message through the arts.

I have learned as a minister and pastor that many people will never darken the doors of a church. The only time you'll see them near a church is



during weddings and funerals. I've been criticized for actually preaching while conducting funerals. Often what the family wants is a sugar coated biography of their departed loved one concocted for the sake of those who attend the service. Aside from the fact that I would be offering a picture that anyone who knew the person would recognize as false I'd be creating a lie. I became a minister because of a calling on my life. I definitely didn't choose this path as a vocation. My focus is on reaching lost souls for Christ. Solomon said, "In all thy ways acknowledge him (God) and he will direct your path" (Proverbs 3:6). My focus in life is ministry and that includes my study and sharing of the martial arts.

I realize that some instructors and martial arts masters have joined the BLMAA for various reasons. Some joined simply to attain certification and for rank recognition. Some became members for the camaraderie and brotherhood of the arts. Some are here to share ideas and to be taught, but a chosen few are members because they are interested in using the arts as a vehicle for ministry.

I believe that it's no coincidence that so many dedicated martial artists become Christians and even ministers. I feel that there is a thread of spirituality that runs through the arts that can lead to enlightenment and a spiritual awakening. By enlightenment I don't mean reaching nirvana or some such other concept. I mean a recognition of the sacredness of life that can lead to a deeper spiritual awareness. This awareness often fosters a hunger for deeper spiritual meaning. How a sensei handles that hunger in a student can be life changing.

Soldiers and warriors often become acquainted with death. This makes them realize their own mortality. There's a saying that states, "There are no

atheists in a fox hole”. There’s a certain truth in that statement. Dealing with combat very quickly makes a soldier realize the need of God in his life. This phenomenon is often apparent when a person studies a fighting art. When a student realizes how vulnerable the human body is it reminds him of his own mortality. That knowledge often translates into a desire to find a deeper meaning in life. An instructor who has a Christian focus to his art will be able to feed that desire.

Through the years martial arts have gradually transitioned from Bujutsu to Budo. Since our lives don’t depend on turning ourselves into lethal weapons most people study the martial arts for a different reason. Many of us are more interested in the arts as a tool for self defense or combat but most of us will never have to use what we learn in serious combat. In my mind it doesn’t make sense to dedicate your entire life to preparing for a situation that will probably never happen. The average person will never have to fight a knife wielding assailant or take a gun from a person who threatens his life (Which, by the way, is just as well). Many of us would be surprised to find out that what we’ve studied didn’t prepare us to the extent that we thought it had. That, however, is a discussion for another time. Hopefully, we study the arts to make us better persons rather than as an expression of some kind of blood lust. The study of the martial arts should put us on the road to self discovery and ideally to a higher calling and greater understanding of life.

The role of a sensei has changed over the years. Most of us aren’t interested in forging myopic misfits into trained killers. The world certainly doesn’t need any more of those. Instead our aim should be to mold well adjusted and compassionate human being. The ability to body slam some miscreant into the sidewalk or knock his hat around backwards is a handy

byproduct of the process. If a person is interested in being a trained killer he would do better to buy a gun and learn to use it. He'd probably get more of what he needs from the NRA than from a martial arts dojo. I'm not trying to slam the NRA. I happen to be a member myself. I'm simply putting things into perspective.

The samurai arts became obsolete with the advent of fire arms. Swords just didn't stack up well against rifles and pistols. During the boxer rebellion in China many of the greatest kung fu masters and their students were cut down by the guns of the European forces that they opposed. Don't misunderstand, I love the martial arts and I swear by the attributes that they offer the diligent student. I just believe in being realistic. If you're trying to become a ninja or a samurai to mold yourself into an efficient combatant, you've chosen the wrong vocation. If, on the other hand you study the martial arts to attain a greater understanding of self, you're in the right place.

The martial arts offers more than just a hand full of fighting techniques. The United States military man spends only a few days in hand to hand training. That includes the spec op types such as the Green Berets and the Navy Seals. I was trained in those arenas and I was never offered more than a few hours of H2H combat training. With their minimum of training, I would hazard to guess that these soldiers could give the average martial artist the lesson of his life. The trained soldier is able to fight but their training doesn't offer the benefits that the martial arts gives if properly taught. Through an education from martial arts movies and cinema the martial arts student comes expecting more than a lesson in fighting. Caught up in the martial arts mystique he seeks moral and spiritual direction from his sensei. Watching a host of Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee movies his expectations have been set. He is looking not so much for

a 'Cobra Kai' type of instructor (as in the Karate Kid) as a 'Mr. Miyagi' who will teach him a more enlightened way. This expectancy places the martial arts instructor in a unique position. It offers an opportunity to sow spiritual seeds into the hearts and minds of these eager seekers of knowledge.

The martial arts have deeply spiritual roots. Many of them were born in Buddhist and Taoist temples. There is a reason why spirituality was traditionally woven throughout the arts. It offers a balance that must be maintained to keep well trained combatants from becoming psychopaths, murderers and bullies. The samurai had Bushido to balance out their ability to hurt and kill. The warriors of the Silla dynasty in Korea had the Hwarang philosophy. A balance needed to be kept to maintain the humanity of those trained warriors. Balance is all important in the life of every human being but it is especially important in the life of the warrior. Most samurai were devout individuals (which wouldn't prevent them from rendering an enemy a head shorter). Many wrote poetry, practiced calligraphy and became experts in the tea ceremony and flower arrangement. Those artistic expressions became the yin to their yang. It gave them a sense of balance. In the Shorinji Kempo temples the student is taught that it is more important to be able to spare a life than to take a life. For this reason healing arts were taught along with the combative and religious principles.

As sensei, martial arts masters and instructors, we have the perfect opportunity to mold not only the minds but the hearts and souls of our students. We can teach our students to sit in a half lotus or a seiza position and meditate and chant or we can direct them to the well spring of all spirituality. As Cristians we have to shy away from pagan teachings. Instead we can help create in them a life changing rebirth that will offer them more than the ability

to punch and kick. We can introduce them to Christ. Instead of teaching them the art of death we can offer them life and life eternal. The martial arts are a wonderful vehicle for self discovery and physical improvement. It teaches discipline and it will, hopefully, enable a student to defend himself should the need arise. Let us continue to study and to teach but in all that remember, 'Only what you do for Christ will last'.

I hope that you found a grain of wisdom in the ramblings of this old man. As the head of the Black Lotus Martial Arts Association, one of the Patriarchs of the Black Dragon fighting Society and the Grandmaster of the Black Lotus Combat Systems and Kukuren Gojute kempo Ryu Jiu it is my duty to teach and mold both good students and instructors. In so doing I have offered this study. Some of you have read it simply because I have the authority to promote and offer rank (and there WILL be a test). That's reason enough for me but I hope some of you read it because you share with me the desire to use the martial arts as ministry. It is a wonderful calling and I hope it is a call that you will accept. For those of you who would like more training in martial arts ministry Dr. John Enger (of the Shinja Martial Arts Association) offers a course in martial arts chaplaincy that will give you the knowledge and tools that will enable you to be successful in this area. With that let's roll up our sleeves and get to work. 'The harvest is white plenteous but the laborers are few". ( Matthew 9:37)

God bless you my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

## MARTIAL ART SNOBBERY

Our nation was built out of protest of class and cast systems. One class being better than another and such similar ideas. We are a melting pot. We draw our ideas, wisdom, knowledge and philosophies from many different sources and cultures. If we were gem stones we would be multi faceted rather than the smooth faced cabochon. We have as many personalities as we do people and engrafted cultures. That's what makes us unique. That's what makes us strong.

In breeding in any species magnifies whatever weaknesses may be inherit in that species. Recessive traits become magnified and undesirable traits become dominant. In our nation we are constantly exposed to new and fresh ideas. The ability to disagree has contributed to our strength as much as the ability to have common ideas and a common voice. America is a democracy and encourages individuality. Apparently that doesn't apply in politics and martial arts. Since I don't want to start a riot I won't expound on political snobbery. I'll leave that for another time and another forum.

Give something to Americans and they will make it their own. Anything that we inherit will be given our own flavor. We give our knowledge its own unique character and it reflects our own individual character. Each individual can interpret new knowledge according to his own needs and level of understanding. Where flexibility is possible there is no definitive way of doing anything.

Now with that being said let me present my argument. First a disclaimer. I love the martial arts. I have dedicated the major portion of my life and much of my effort to the arts. I nettles me when an individual with twenty years of study who has studied with one system, one master or one organization feels that he is in the lofty position to judge others who have dedicated two or three times more time to the perfection of their various arts. I have a problem with people who believe that if I don't do it the way they do it or believe it the way they see it I'm less than credible. Those of us who have studied several systems or are eclectic in our approach are criticized by martial art traditionalists with half our experience.

Some people believe that unless you were taught by someone of oriental heritage your knowledge is lacking. Another misnomer is that unless you study the art the way it was taught three hundred years ago you aren't a martial artist. I've heard individuals who couldn't stand toe to toe with an amateur boxer tell the boxer that he doesn't study a martial art. Likewise I've heard purists tell mixed martial artists who could clean their clock in their sleep that they aren't martial artists. In all honesty I've been guilty of the latter at one time or another but I'm making an attempt at blatant honesty here and I'm not holding myself exempt.

Martial artists all but venerate Bruce Lee. They see him as some kind of martial art saint. This in spite of the fact that he thumbed his nose at the traditional arts and criticized the traditional martial artist. Bruce Lee borrowed what he needed from wherever it was available. His jeet kune do is based heavily on skill sets that many martial artists would claim are not martial arts. In my way of thinking I find that hypocritical at the least. These same martial artists discredit individuals who did the same thing; people such as John

Keehan (Count Dante) and Bruce Tegner who did the same thing just as well. What these same martial art snobs don't realize is that the arts that they study may not be as pure as they think. Karate is an eclectic art. It borrowed from Chinese Buddhist, Taoist and Muslim kung fu systems and added it to their Okinawa te, an indigenous art to form tode which eventually became karate. I won't even examine the Korean arts. They're more eclectic than some of the Okinawan and Japanese systems.

The truth is there is no pure martial art nor should there be. A martial art master who doesn't use what he knows to work isn't much of a master. A master owes it to his students to keep the art current and usable by the day's standards. How important is it today to be able to defend against a swordsman on horseback or an armored samurai. If this is what you're training for, regardless of how traditional you claim your art to be, you are training for disaster. If you are going to be effective as a martial artist you have to be able to deal with the threats that you are subject to be presented with. Karateka of days past trained against the samurai sword because the samurai was one of their most prevalent threats.

I have spent a number of years studying several traditional martial arts. I hold rank in a number of them with advanced rank in several. With well over fifty years in the arts I don't feel that I need anyone telling me that I don't understand the arts. I judge a martial art by how well it works and how well it deals with modern day aggression. In the end that's what a martial art was originally intended for. When we make a martial art something it was never intended to be we run into problems. We garner many additional benefits from the arts but in the end if they aren't good for self defense or for combat they aren't really martial.



Boxing doesn't teach kata. Neither does catch wrestling. What shorenji kempo calls kata many systems would call waza. Would you say that because they don't have stylized drills to catalogue their systems techniques that they aren't martial arts? Then you might just be a red ne... Opps, sorry. Wrong argument. You might just be a martial art snob. By the way Bruce Lee Had no use for kata so by the measure of most of you who idolize him, he wasn't a martial artist. What kind of sense does that make? Sounds hypocritical to me but then who am I?

Ending this one sided argument I'll say that I do teach several kata in my system and even include some bunkai. But because, after almost fifty six years in the martial arts, I teach a nontraditional eclectic system I'm not a martial artist. Okay but I'll spend another fifty years trying to figure out that argument.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

## MENTAL KUNG FU

Man is a triune being. That is to say that he has three aspects to his being. Man isn't just a physical presence. If we live only according to the demands of the fleshly man we are living only a fraction of our life possibility. Man is a spirit, he has a soul and he lives in a body. Holistic medicine has become popular in recent years. Actually this is nothing new. The Chinese physician has been treating the various aspects of the human condition for longer than we can begin to understand.

I am a minister and of course I am concerned with more than just the physical man. I wouldn't be much of a pastor if I wasn't. But this is an article about martial arts and self defense. You may wonder how these other aspects of the human existence enter into the martial arts. Anyone who has studied the arts for any length of time, especially in the oriental systems, knows that many of the martial arts began in religious temples. Chan (Zen) Buddhism and Taoism birthed a number of martial arts. I'm not advocating that the Christian martial artist enters into these philosophies and spiritual practices but I am pointing out that the arts weren't created in a vacuum. In their creation all aspects of the human being were taken into consideration. In all actuality nothing can be accomplished independent of the soul and spirit. Where you go all of you goes. If your feet go, the rest of your body will follow. We are holistic beings.

There is more to self-defense than a punch, a kick, a lock or a throw or takedown. Real martial art goes beyond its physical expression. If you don't put your heart into a technique, regardless of how much you've trained it won't work. Fighting is more than mere physical contention. Hopefully we are not just

focused on combat in our studies and teaching. There is more to life than that. Violence is antisocial. It should always be a last resort. If we depend on our physicality alone violence will be the sole manifestation of our art. If, on the other hand, we base our martial expression in the other areas of our being we will have control over our circumstances to the extent that we will practice our arts on a higher level. We will learn to fight without fighting.

Many of us have studied some type of animal system, such as tiger crane, praying mantis or white crane kung fu. Yet, however affectively we mimic the fighting prowess of these animals we will be limited by our human limitations. No matter how good you become at black tiger kung fu you can't kung fu a tiger. Please, take my word for it. Don't put it to the test. That would be a lesson you won't live to profit from. Yet, in spite of our human frailty, we have almost caused the extinction of tigers. Human beings are more dangerous than any tiger. What gives us this superiority? It is the human brain. Our ability to think. The brain supersedes the limitations of the human body making us more dangerous than physical ability alone could accomplish.

All the training in the world won't help us if we aren't aware of our surroundings and don't see a dangerous situation before it becomes critical. We will do better in a self defense situation if we react to deal with the impending attack before it occurs. This type of awareness requires more than training the fist into weapons or learning a kick or two. Our minds are, or should be, our first level of defense. The best fight isn't the one you win it's the one you avoid. Fighting without fighting is always preferable to getting hurt or hurting someone else. If we can control the situation we can control the outcome.

My friend, Dr. John Enger of the Shinja Martial Arts University has a black belt in Verbal Karate. This method involves conflict resolution. Dr. Enger was a police officer and often had to use his verbal skill to defuse or deescalate what could become a dangerous situation. No police or security officer wants to fight with another person in the process of doing his job. Likewise, no responsible human being, martial artist or not, should seek a physical confrontation if he can reason his way out of it.

Too often we let our own pride, insecurities or, so called, righteous indignation enter into the equation goading us into a fight that we could otherwise avoid. For any civilized person fighting is always a last resort. Very little is resolved by conflict.

I have always held that if one of my students finds himself in a physical confrontation my instruction hasn't been totally effective. I try to build a level of self-awareness and command of his surroundings in a student that he should see a possible situation before it happens. If confronted he should have the verbal and mental skills to deescalate the situation. Of course, unfortunately, a fight is sometimes unavoidable. I teach my students to be an angel in negotiation but a demon in a fight. Do everything you can to preserve the safety of you and any, would be, assailant but if violence is inevitable go all out in your efforts to protect yourself and loved ones. But first, think. Take control of yourself and you'll have a foundation to enable you to control the situation.

Use your mind as your first resource. Your first line of defense. Observe and always be aware of your surroundings and any possible impending situation. Avoid areas where trouble is likely. Carry yourself with confidence and an air of capability. Predators are looking for a soft target. Don't give them what they are looking for. If confronted be confident but not cocky. Strong but

not pushy. Aggressive but not abusive. Flexible but not a push over. It's a balance that you are looking for. A perfect balance of yin and yang. And lastly, always keep in mind that it is your brain that makes you superior to the average predator. Your brain is your best weapon. Use it. Master that and you will be a true martial art master.

God bless you my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**Sifu Larry McFadden, a long time student, friend and confidant. The president of my Black Lotus Martial Art Association and the Grandmaster of kan balaam kung fu.**

# *NEW BIRTHS AND FRESH PERSPECTIVES*

As most of you know by now I don't buy into the traditional ranking system. In a sense I'm a nontraditional traditionalist. Like many western martial artists I have created my own system. Actually I didn't create anything. The techniques I use have been used since the martial arts were created in antiquity. Mine is just a difference of application and how I deal with certain situations.

That being said I would like to talk about the new systems that are cropping up in the martial art community. We may not like it and we may question the validity of the arts and their creators but like it or not the phenomenon has become a fact of life. It's like a brush fire in a dry climate. It's impossible to stamp them out so we'll have to find a way to live with them.

All systems are not created equal. How well a system is put together and how well it works depend on a lot of things. Of course every fighting system has to be built on some kind of foundation. Mine came out of a lifelong involvement in the traditional martial arts. In a sense, building on a preexisting foundation.

Knowledge of combat should be the foundation of any martial art. How we come by that knowledge is the question. It would either require prior training or a good deal of personal experience. Let's be honest with ourselves.

A street fighter that has grown up fighting has a better sense of real combat and what it requires than the dojo trained weekend warrior. A lot of my fellow martial artists would disagree with this but how many of them have stood toe to toe with a seasoned street brawler? I'm not talking about the drunk in a bar. I'm talking about an individual who lives in an environment of constant violence and is a seasoned fighter.

There are fighting systems that have come out of our nations prisons that are well thought out and really dangerous. They were designed to deal with violent people in a violent environment. I would advise a martial art enthusiast to stand toe to toe with one of these combatants before they talk to me about combat. It might be hard to convince some of them but most traditional martial artist have no real concept of combat. Theory doesn't always translate into reality. You'll never know how practical your training is until it's tried by fire. Not many would care to do that. not many should.

The Black Lotus Martial Arts Association and its subsequent arts came about because of the failure of some young black belts in the streets of Chicago. Too many of them were being trashed in the streets. On occasion the failure dealt with the individual but too often the fault was in what they were trained in and how they were trained. Many of them were battle ready if they faced a foe from the feudal era of Japan or Okinawa. Unfortunately those skills didn't translate to the reality of the streets. The BLMAA began as a collaboration of established martial art masters and instructors who came together to address these failures. That doesn't make the system that came out of that superior to any other but it addressed the problem.

Another consideration is how innovative is the creator of these new arts. How well thought out is the system? Does it address the problems that it's

created to address and how well? In the end the efficiency of the system justifies it. It either works or it doesn't.

Too often we determine the acceptability of the art by the lineage of its creator. We might need to accept the fact that no-one has a monopoly on knowledge. It doesn't matter how it's acquired. If it's correct it doesn't have to be qualified through lineage.

Practicality and efficiency describes an art however it came about. If the creator is good at what he does and can recreate that level of efficiency in others he has a system that should be taken seriously.

Many of us would discard of these new systems piece mill. Instead we should take a closer look at them and see if they are something that should be accepted and perhaps sanctioned by the martial art community. We should realize that they aren't going to just roll over and die. Not if they have a following. I propose that we find a way to evaluate these systems and determine if they are viable. Instead of rejecting them unseen perhaps we should see if they have anything to offer and if so see what we can do to help them reach their full potential. Most of the creators of these systems won't want to be regulated by any oversight committee but they may accept any sincere help in getting their systems recognized and to the level where they will be accepted by the martial art community.

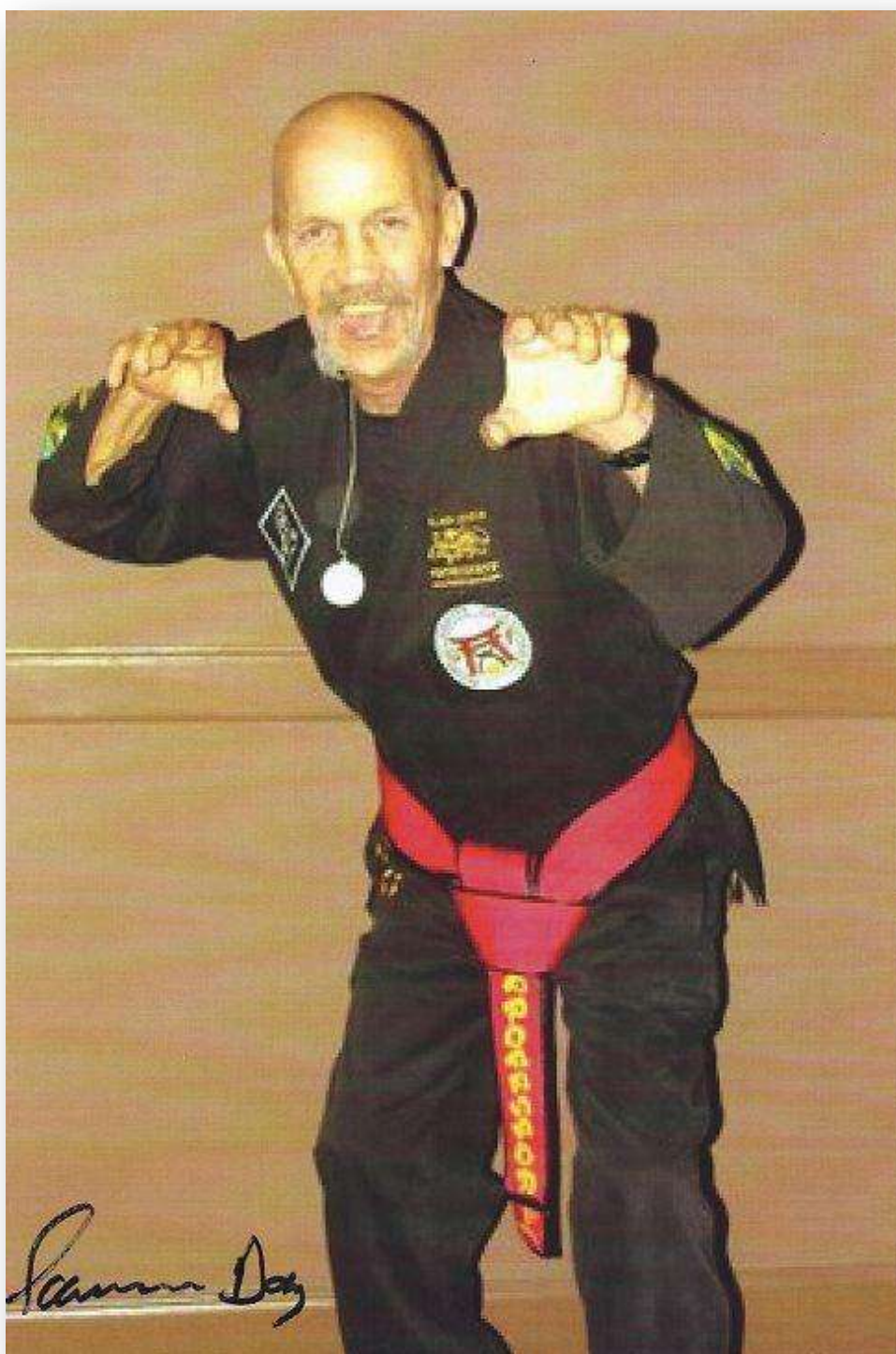
I try to offer such an atmosphere within the BLMAA and to encourage the same in the Black Dragon Fighting Society. There should be a place for these systems and their creators if they have something to offer. Let's not throw out the baby with the bathwater. Some of the most venerated systems came from dubious circumstances. Everything has to start somewhere. Instead



of being elitist and dogmatic in our attitude perhaps we can help see that these systems and the individuals that create them can reach their full potential. They may never be accepted in the traditional sector but that doesn't mean that they have nothing to offer. Old doesn't always mean better. Working together we can keep the martial art new and fresh. We don't want to be stagnant. Let's work and grow together. I believe that we'll all profit from it. More can be accomplished through cooperation than through opposition.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**Dr. Lawrence Day, the former Head of Family and Senior Grandmaster of the IFAA Black Dragon fighting society. Along with Dr. Michael Felcoff mentors and my seniors since the late 1960s. Dr. Day was my predecessor as head of the IFAA BDFS. I inherited the position with his passing.**

## NO HOLDS BARRED

I just finished watching an excellent documentary about mixed martial arts. Like many lifelong martial arts I've watched it grow from its infancy to where it is now and like most of my peers I have mixed feelings about it. It is probably the fastest growing sport in the world today. It is definitely a lucrative business and a serious money maker. Promoters and some fighters have made a fortune in the business. Say what you want about it, it is successful beyond anything most martial artists would have ever expected. Like it or not, for better or worse, it is probably here to stay.

Most traditional martial artists look upon MMA with a jaundiced eye. It doesn't have the esoteric appeal that classical martial arts have boasted over the years. Gone is the spiritual aspect that has been attributed to the traditional martial artist. Gone is the almost ethereal calm of the martial artists of the past. In its place you have a lot of loud in your face competitors more reminiscent of pro wrestlers than the long held image of the martial artist of yore.

My foundation is in the traditional martial arts but I'm not a traditional teacher or practitioner. Like many American martial art instructors I teach an eclectic approach to the arts that are for all practical purposes a mixed martial art. Even so I have a love hate relationship with MMA.

I've never been much of a competitor. I studied the martial arts for a completely different reason. I was attracted to the mystical appeal and spiritual

air that the arts wore back in the day. I grew up in a tough neighborhood in the inner city on Chicago's mean South Side. I was a competent street brawler and was considered tough and brutal in an atmosphere that bred tough fighters. Amongst some nasty brawlers and street fighters I stood out. I didn't really need martial arts for self defense. I could take care of myself.

I started studying judo and jiu jitsu at about the same time that I started boxing. Eventually I changed my focus in the martial arts to karate and kempo. I was a good boxer and enjoyed the sport but it was just that; a sport. I wasn't into sports. I liked karate because it added other practical weapons to my natural arsenal. I was initially attracted to karate because of its potential as a fighting system. I wanted more than the unfocused aggression of the average street brawler. I wanted science rather than raw violence. With my stint in the military during the Viet Nam conflict the nature of real combat impressed itself upon me. Combat was a reality. Violence is a fact of life and I wanted to be the absolute best.

By the time I came out of the military I had been involved in the martial arts for well over a decade. I had studied with several instructors in a number of systems and was beginning to form my own ideas about combat and the martial arts. Tournaments didn't offer the opportunity to put my theories to the test. There were too many rules and sparring was still mostly no contact or controlled contact. I didn't want to spar. I wanted to fight. I found what I was looking for in the underground pit matches that were cropping up during that time. Such fights have always existed. They were popular during the depression but they have never completely died out. They were fought in old barns, warehouses or wherever they could take place away from the watchful eye of the law. They were illegal and money was made mostly by side bets. They were

brutal and bloody but few martial artists were attracted to them and the skill level wasn't that high. However what they lacked in skill they made up for in brutality.

I make no boast about a great fight record. I was effective in the streets where it counted and I did well in those underground matches but they were a far cry from the bloodsport matches that some of my peers fought. They were more like brawls than matches but I made a little money and I learned what I wanted to know. In those matches and on the streets I've sat straddling another fighter's chest and tried to punch his lights out. Never did I dream that something like that would be embraced in a sport setting.

Had MMA been popular when I was young enough to compete I probably still would have avoided the sport. Like I said I'm not a competitor. I've never been shy about fighting. I did a lot of it and I didn't lose fights. Not so much because of my skill level but because I'd do whatever was necessary to win. In my mind the only rule that governs a fight is don't get hurt and don't lose. With all of the skill and knowledge that I've accrued since I started this journey in the late fifties I'm still basically a street brawler. That mindset is hard wired into my DNA at this point. I look on my martial arts like I do a pistol. Don't pull it out unless you're willing to seriously injure or kill someone with it. It isn't a contest with me and it definitely isn't a game. Fighting is about survival or at least it was where I grew up.

I don't train fighters for tournament fighting no more than I train competitors for MMA. As brutal as MMA is it's still a sport. Sports have rules. Fighting doesn't. I teach a combat oriented system. I'm not interested in turning out tournament champions or MMA competitors. For the most part I train individual in high risk professions.

I'll watch the occasional MMA match as I will a boxing match but I'm not particularly enamored with either. They're beautiful for what they are but they aren't real combat. Please understand; I'm not saying that I could stand toe to toe with some MMA champion. Perhaps I never could have. However my system has served me well and kept me safe in a very violent environment. My skill and abilities have seen me through a war and have helped me survive life in some tough neighborhoods. In the long run that's what a martial system is designed to do.

I'm up in age now and in spite of the implications of a hundred Saturday morning kung fu flicks I realize that the old wise eighty year old kung fu master can't go toe to toe with a young fighting champion. As I've said to my competent young students in the past, I can be your worst nightmare for two or three minutes but if you can last beyond that you've got me. Of course, you have to last those few minutes.

I won't criticize MMA or its competitors though I don't care for some of their attitudes. MMA is a fact of life and as much as I would like to see the traditional martial arts at the pinnacle of the martial art movement MMA will have its day. Whether it stands the test of time remains to be seen. I just hope that there will always be a place for the traditional schools of martial arts. Those schools have the ability to shape and change young lives. The traditional arts are more than a punch or a kick. They are treasures that offer more than competition or violence. They offer an opportunity of self discovery and growth that MMA doesn't.

It would be easy to become discouraged having to compete with the popularity of MMA but the traditional arts are treasures hidden in plain sight. Those who teach them realize that and those who pursue them and what they

have to offer will be greatly rewarded. Don't throw in the towel, my brothers. Keep on doing what you are doing. We must see that there is always a place for the traditional martial arts.

Keep the faith, my martial art brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**With G.M. Mark Shuey and Shihan Dana Abbott at the Museum of Sports Karate Gathering.**



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# *PUTTING YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD*

Before I embark on this one sided discussion let me do a disclaimer. I am not trying to send you into communication overload with these articles and messages. Having dedicated well over half a century into the study and teaching at the martial arts two things have occurred that have caused this prolific outpouring. I have been elevated to the rarified position of Grandmaster by my peers and I have suffered the backlash effect of all of my years of training. Consequently I spend more time contemplating various aspects of the martial arts than teaching and training. Please don't get me wrong. Like many of you I am a martial art fanatic and literally breathe martial arts. I still train and to a lesser degree I still teach. I just spend more time pontificating. I probably think too much. Too much time on my hands. I have one more article in the hole so I beg your patience. Please bear with the rambling of an old man and I promise to (try to) put myself on article restriction.

What I would like to discuss today is the effect wing chun and jeet kune do has had on the martial arts and its pros and cons for the Japanese and Okinawa inspired martial artist.

In the two afore mentioned arts a strong hand forward approach is advocated. This is what a right handed practitioner would call a south paw or unorthodox stance. This type of approach advocates defending with the rear

hand and countering or attacking with the forward weapons. This would include kicks as well as strikes. Karate and its associated arts along with European boxing advocate the strong hand back approach. Both have their advantages and disadvantages.

Wing chun and jeet kune do tend to lean toward blitzing attacks. Karate in its purest form is a power system and adapts the one hit one kill philosophy. This isn't as common an approach as in the past. Most karateka these days aren't able to generate the power to affect that one strike capability but that is more because of the way karate is taught and practiced today than it does the capability of the art.

Back in the day a karate fighter was generally unarmed. His only defense was the natural weapons of the human body. He honed these weapons to a lethal state by conditioning the striking surfaces and bone structure and by applying physically sound principles into their methodology. Karate and its resultant power is a marvel of physics. No hocus pocus; no prestidigitation. Just sound physics. With the proper training it's possible to garner the kind of stopping power that old world karate was capable of. One must take into consideration that because they were often confronted by armed and skilled opponents in life and death struggles the karateka's weapons had to be as deadly as the weapons they were confronted with. They seldom had more than one chance to affect a telling blow that incapacitated or destroyed the opposition. Imagine facing a skilled and battle tested samurai warrior in a life or death struggle. You wouldn't want to get in a give and take jousting match. Every move had to count. More often than not you didn't get more than one chance. Hence the one strike one kill philosophy.

Boxing and kick boxing have changed what we know as karate today but karate wasn't always as benign as it is now. It was practiced and executed with total commitment. There were no combinations or in between techniques. Every single technique was designed to maim or kill.

Wing chun and the arts that were derived from it take the blitz Krieg approach. The idea is to overwhelm the opponent's defenses and to overload his central nervous system with a strategic combination of strikes. I may be over simplifying but that is basically the approach taken. The forward hand offers the fastest access to the target. Since a one strike kill isn't attempted the initial strike doesn't have to have the power of karate's gyaku zuki or reverse punch.

The karate practitioner often had to face an opponent who was outfitted with armor and had to have weapons that would breach the barrier that it presented. His hands had to be able to crash through such obstructions. This required conditioned hands and the power that the reverse punch offered.

Wing chung because of its necessity for speed uses high stances. Karate on the other hand is (or was) a counter punching system. A karat fighter would redirect the force of the opponents attack with a devastating and often incapacitating block and position himself into an advantageous position that allowed him access to the opponent's most vulnerable targets while offering the least access to his own. This is called tai sabaki. From that position a finishing technique was implemented, hopefully to the opponent's detriment. Usually only one step was taken in the process. No bouncing on the toes. No stick and move. No shuffling in and out. Just one devastating technique that more often not ended the fight.

Various martial arts developed to address the needs of a particular person or group of people. It addressed the challenges that he or they would be met with. There was nothing esoteric or artistic about fighting. It was as direct and deadly as possible. How cute you looked during the process didn't enter into the equation. The effectiveness of a particular art determined its efficiency. It either worked or it didn't. If it didn't most combatants didn't have opportunity to go back and correct their technique. Not unless it was in their next incarnation. Okay, no theological backlash on that statement. I'm trying to use a bad sense of humor to illustrate a point. In real combat your system and your personal ability either worked or you were sent to meet your maker. In other words you were rendered stone cold dead.

I believe that the martial art that one studies should not only be based on availability and body type (though they weigh in heavily in the equation) but on what the art will be used for. I have nothing against the various arts that are represented by the martial art community. Each is beautiful in its own right. I believe that an art should be chosen and practiced in its pure form. If it isn't broke don't fix it and if it is broke find another art. What I am saying is that by trying to incorporate the principles of another art into your own you often come up with a system that hasn't the effectiveness of either art. One is oil. The other is water. Just because both are effective alone doesn't mean that a compilation of the two will be better. On the other hand if one is lacking mixing them often causes more problems than it solves.

I like wing chun and I admire the thought that has gone into the creation of jeet kune do but I realize that they aren't karate and they don't particularly mix well with karate. I have had opportunity to delve into the study of both wing chun and jeet kune do and I admire both. I just recognize myself as

basically a karate ka and I don't try to mix the oil and water aspects of those arts. I'm not proclaiming one art better than the other though I have full confidence in my karate. It has proved itself in some rather serious situations and I believe in it's effectiveness. In effect I've learned to put my best foot forward and to stay in my lane. Mixed metaphors, yes, but you get my meaning. Train in the art that is best for you and that best serve your purpose. If it works stay with it. If it doesn't work for you you would probably do better finding another art than trying to recreate the wheel by mixing arts that don't complement each other.

Train hard, my brethren and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**With G.M. Borongan and Soke Marshal.**

# *REAL WORLD MARTIAL ARTS*

In my fifty plus years in the martial arts, I have seen many fads and trends come and go. I've watched karate competition transition from point fighting, to full contact karate to kick boxing. I have seen similar changes in the grappling arts as well. The transition from those changes to mixed martial arts and to reality based training was foreseeable considering the developing mindset in the martial arts world.

Originally all martial arts were developed for combat and self defense. Of those arts, karate was considered one of the most direct and effective fighting arts. In those days, the traditional arts were the cutting edge in martial combat. Over the years following those times, the martial arts developed into what we call a 'Do', as in Judo or aikido. They filled a different role in the societies that they developed in and became more of a means to an end than an end in themselves. Training became more of a ritual or even a hobby and was approached as such. Perfection of form and grace became more important than effectiveness in combat. Any self defense value was incidental. That isn't to say that the combative aspects weren't there but a practitioner had to train specifically towards those ends to be truly effective as a combatant.

With the dissolution of the Samurai class in Japan and the inclusion of fire arms in their culture, the martial arts were no longer widely practiced as fighting systems. Violence was frowned on in the new culture and warriors were frowned upon. Thusly, the martial arts became just that; art forms. Any resemblance to real combat began to lessen as the need for such arts

diminished. Training in the art became a 'Do' or a way; that is to say a way of enlightenment, self discovery or discipline. The 'Book of The Five Rings', the definitive work on combat strategy, became a tool for businessmen and corporate board rooms rather than a means of strategic advantage on the battle field..

Many of the classical martial arts, that had their roots in Eastern Religion and philosophy, again embraced those roles and many became thinly veiled religious practices. The masters and sensei who embraced these philosophies consciously or inadvertently became warrior priests (the emphasis on priests rather than warriors). Martial arts became more and more esoteric in their practice as self defense became less of an issue.

Recently MMA has become popular. Personally, I have mixed feelings about these competitions and the people who compete in them. I did something of the same thing when it was illegal and any profits were made by small purses and side bets. These competitions took place in empty warehouses, old barns, basements, lofts and back alleys. Any where space was available and the cops weren't liable to interfere. These competitions were nothing like the ones popularized by movies like 'Blood Sport' and the competitors were less skilled than those of today but they were really 'no-holds- barred. In a sense, they were glorified street fights, not so different from what we see in some of the competitors in MMA today.

Most of the competitors in these modern MMA matches are fairly decent punchers and kickers and some have pretty good punching skills but what they do doesn't translate to real world fighting systems. Against a single opponent who adheres to a set of rules they would be devastating fighting systems but the real world doesn't work that way. I admire Gracie Jujitsu but I question its



practicality in the streets. On the mean streets of any city, going to the ground is suicide. Please trust me on this. I've been in enough street fights and have witnessed enough violent encounters in Chicago's bloody streets to understand the problem with such a scenario. Go to the ground and his buddies (these thugs always seem to have buddies, even if you don't see them) will kick your head in. No future in that.

Too many of the, so called, modern martial arts systems are taught by people who have never had to fight for their lives in the streets or in combat. I don't question their skill or the arts that they teach but some of the assumptions that they are based on are faulty. I don't offer myself as the consummate master but I grew up in an environment where fighting for survival was a daily possibility and happened more often than I care to remember. Also, I've had the misfortune of being involved in military combat. Nothing slaps you into reality like reality.

Let me say at this point that defending yourself in a serious situation, fighting for your life and even fighting to the death, isn't as easy as a person might think. I've had to do all three in my life. Taking a life with a weapon or with your hands, up close and personal, is one of the worse things that any person will have to do. A sane person can't do something like that and come away unscathed. At this late date in my life, I am still treated for PTSD. Not so much because of what I've seen or had to endure but because of what I've had to do.

This essay isn't about me or my experience or exploits. I don't have a lot to be proud of in those areas and they aren't experiences that I would care to share. What I'm trying to say is that only conflict and combat prepares one for real world self defense. If a person should have to deal with such an

unfortunate scenario, he had better either have personal experience in combat or be trained by someone who has. Anything other than that is theoretical and theory doesn't cut it in the streets. A life and death struggle isn't the circumstance in which you want to find out what doesn't work. Learning that way can get you injured or even killed. A few instructors have managed to survive in such situations and have a real world view on survival and combat. Better to learn from their experiences than from the school of hard knocks. Everyone doesn't survive that kind of training. Learn from those who have if given the opportunity.

Personally, I love the traditional martial arts. I am ranked in several of them and have taught them to many students over the years. I just made sure that they realized that what they were learning was an art and not combat. Taught in that environment the techniques they learned didn't make them into deadly fighters. Properly tweaked, however, these same techniques can be made combat effective. The problem isn't the techniques, it's how they're taught.

Complex techniques become difficult if not impossible for the average student in a high stress situation. Fine motor skills tend to go out the window in those situations where they are most needed to make such techniques work. It is possible with long and disciplined training to enter a near meditative state during combat that enables a combatant to operate at peak proficiency in the face of danger and act without fear. That type of ability isn't attainable with the amount of time and effort that the average student is willing to devote to training. Because of that we have to lean towards simple techniques that build on natural reflexive human reactions and build our techniques from those.

There are three principles that the effective combatant must remember. The first is, 'simple works best'. The more complex a technique is the more it is subject to fail. All the flashy techniques must be discarded. The second principle is, 'natural is better'. Teaching the body to do something that is unnatural to accomplish the same thing that a natural movement would accomplish as well or better doesn't make sense. We have to teach our bodies to use those natural, reflexive moves effectively. Lastly, 'basics work'. Save those fancy acrobatic techniques for demonstrations. When in doubt, use the kiss method of combat. No, that doesn't mean to become overly affectionate toward your opponent, though that would probably convince him that you're crazy and put him off his game. What I mean is, 'keep it simple stu, I mean, keep it simple son.'

As we examine our martial art roots, we don't want to throw out the baby with the bath water. Many of the techniques that comprise these arts are tried and true methods, forged in the heat of combat. As instructors and students we have to fit them into the framework of these modern times and our individual needs. We shouldn't lose the connections with our roots or the ones who laid the foundations that we are now building on. We have to hold on to the 'art' within the martial arts without losing the combat reality of the 'martial' aspects of the martial arts. After all we ARE martial artists. We aren't a bunch of hooligans running around trying to find more efficient ways to bash someone's head in. If we are then we're nothing more than trained sociopaths and should be locked up somewhere.

As martial artists we should study as much to improve ourselves as to be efficient fighters. Fighting is antisocial and we shouldn't spend our lives trying to be as violent and vicious as the thugs on the streets. Our greatest opponents

are ourselves. As we strive to perfect our techniques, we also improve our bodies, minds and spirits. That's the true essence of any martial art. That's why no martial art should be practiced without a modicum of spirituality. I'm a Christian minister and this essay is directed primarily to Christian martial artists, so I'm not suggesting that you indulge in Zen meditation or paganistic spiritual practices. What I am saying is that our Christian beliefs should be prevalent even in our martial practices and should season our efforts with spiritual salt. This will keep us rooted and grounded. Practicing combative disciplines without spiritual and moral values invites in all kinds of negative spiritual influences and encourages antisocial thinking. As martial artists, we have to seek the higher path.

I can teach a person to be an effective combatant in a relatively short period of time. It doesn't take a lot of training to learn to knock someone's lights out. The predator in the street isn't well trained but he is as dangerous as any wild animal in the jungle. His single mindedness, focus and violent mind set make him as dangerous as any trained combatant. Our efforts shouldn't be to become or to create a more dangerous predator. Instead we should strive to forge ourselves and our students into better human beings while creating the tool, the skill and the mind set that will enable us to survive long enough to achieve those goals.

When I accept a student I am looking for a disciple who will dedicate himself to this martial and spiritual journey. I'm not trying to create better fighters. I'm trying to create better human beings with the knowledge and ability to protect themselves and their loved ones should the need arise. I am also trying to create students who are equipped to recognize and avoid, or in a worse case scenario, diffuse and deescalate a dangerous situation. If they

should have to fight, I want them to have the tools to defend themselves and protect their loved ones, but in reality, if they find themselves in an actual physical altercation, I have failed in teaching them the greatest ability that the martial arts have to offer. The ability to live peacefully in a violent world and to avoid or circumvent trouble before it starts. We practice to defend ourselves if we must, but more than that, we train so that we don't have to fight. Fighting in a threatening situation is natural. If we have to do so, we should be able to do it well. However, there is a higher path; the way of the true spiritual warrior. The word of God says; "Follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see The Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Ideally, that should always be our goal. That is the highest demonstration of our applied skill; the most advanced execution of our spiritual and martial ability. Anyone can take a life. It requires more refinement to spare a life. A life spared is possibly a soul saved. Therein lies the greatest combative ability against our greatest adversary. That's real world martial arts.

Train hard, my martial arts brethren, and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

## REMINISCING

The old have a tendency to do a lot of that. At sixty six I find myself looking back over my life. There are some things that I am quite proud of but there are a lot of things that I regret. Some of the things that I regret weren't choices. Much of what I did was simply for survival in a harsh environment.

Back in the day there was a detective series called 'The Concrete Jungle'. Usually when we think of a jungle we think in terms of dense rain forest inhabited by a host of beasts and predators that would kill you or devour you alive. That was the environment I grew up in minus the rain forest. Poverty, desperation and hopelessness tend to make for a dangerous environment. The neighborhoods I grew up in were uncompromising and unforgiving. I watched more than one of my friends being cut down by the streets. It is simply by the grace of God that I survived and even thrived with the life I lived. Out of necessity I learned to fight. I'm not talking about play ground scraps or bar room brawls. I'm talking about fighting for survival. More than once I was left a broken bleeding heap in the streets. At least once I was left for dead but as you see I'm still here. Like the old Timex commercial used to say, take a licking and keep on ticking.

I am the survivor of a real war with a couple of tours of duty in some unsavory places but I never took the beating there that I took in my everyday life. I experienced some traumatic experiences during my military career but I managed to get out minus shrapnel or bullet holes. Not so in the streets. I've been shot, stabbed, knocked in the head and ran down since I mustered out of

the service. Out there running with the big dogs as they used to say on the corner.

As a rule I don't brag about my exploits. Not that there is that much to brag about. I was never a tournament champion. I fought in a few point tournaments and a number of intra school semi contact matches. I found them uninteresting. After fighting in the streets I found them unrealistic. There were occasions that I lost to opponents that I would massacre in a real street fight. I did some amateur boxing and I wrestled in school. That's the extent of my experience in sports. I can't claim the experience of men like Frank Dux, Jimmy McMutrie or Irving Soto but I have fought in some nasty pit fights. They were rowdy and brutal affairs fought in barns, old warehouses, and empty fields or on barges. Wherever they could be held without interference from the law. I'm sure that there were some bribes and more than a few palms were greased in the process. They were illegal since they were supported by bets and wagers. I did well in them but I was better trained than the individuals that I fought. That isn't to say that the fighters weren't tough. Most were experienced street fighters, bouncers, enforcers, brawlers and any and everything in between. I did need the money but that wasn't my real purpose for fighting. I wanted to test some of the ideas that I was developing then. Those ideas along with the input of a number of local martial art instructors would form the core of the system that I teach now. I fought off and on for a couple of years and I fared well enough. I took some beatings but I never lost a match.

Again I won't try to bill myself as some kind of fighting champion. I wasn't fighting the caliber of fighters that the fore mentioned fighters did. I see all of the grief that some of them get by recounting their experience. I don't

need that. I'm pretty sure that they don't either but notoriety brings some pretty harsh backlash.

I am not a fighter. I'll go out of my way to avoid a fight. I'm a minister and for the most part I left that behind with my former life. I was gang related as a youth and participated in more gang fights and all out brawls than I care to think about. I've worked as a bouncer, a collector, an enforcer, a body guard and a personal security specialist. In my career I worked as a psych tech, therapist, a crisis counselor, prison chaplain and as a university hospital policeman. All of those professions offer a number of opportunities for physical confrontation. Fortunately all of that is in my past.

Unfortunately I've had a couple of violent situations in the last few that led to physical altercations. On those occasions I had to defend myself. I can't really call them fights. I dealt with the situations without getting hurt and without seriously hurting my attackers. I'm more proud of that than of any violent victories that I've managed. In a fight there is never really a winner. Violence is bad for everyone involved whether the loser or the victor. There is nothing noble about fighting.

I listen to a lot of martial artists snarling, growling and beating their chests. They brag about all of their physical prowess and expertise. I wonder how many of them have been in a life or death confrontation. Without putting them down I wonder how well would most of them fare in the back allies and concrete jungles of the inner cities of any major city. I've seen some of the real life gangsters, prisoners and back ally brawlers. I was one of them at one time. How many of them have ever been in a real knife fight? How many of them have been shot, cut or stabbed? How many of them have had to take a human life barehanded or with a weapon. I've been there and as they say, "it ain't



nothing nice". No sane individual would want to go there. It isn't like the movies. It's nasty and down and dirty. All I want to do in my old age is live my life in peace. I'm not proud of many of the things I've done but I am the sum total of all of those experiences whether positive or negative. Given the chance to do it all over again I would have walked a different path entirely. I lived a crazy life but that was in my past. Through it all I had the martial arts. To a large extent that's what kept me from going off the deep end. Later I reaffirmed my faith and answered the calling on my life. I became a minister and accrued graduate and post graduate degrees in various religious studies. That is my primary life focus now. I'm a minister and pastor and a licensed and ordained minister. I still train and occasionally I'll do a little teaching. Now days I spend most of my time in the arts focusing on the growth and day to day operations of the martial art organizations that I head or represent. I spend more time dealing with the philosophies of the arts than in actually teaching techniques. I have a few select students that I teach and I'll do the occasional seminar but more of my teaching is accomplished in doing hat I'm doing now, writing and mentoring. I have much to account for in my past but I try to balance out the ill that I've done by the good that I do now. You can't earn or work your way into heaven but I can try to even the scales.

In the end we all teach by precept and example. In my instance God's word and the philosophies and teachings of the martial arts are the precept but I offer myself up as the example. I pray that in my old age I will be a good one.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# RENSHIS, SHIHANS AND HANSHIS (OH MY)

Sounds a little sarcastic doesn't it? As well it should. I've become sickened with all the politics and infighting that seems to plague the martial arts community. Things aren't quite as bad as they were in years past but we still have a long way to go to achieve any real unity in the martial arts world.

I've dedicated the major part of my life to the research, study and teaching of the martial arts. I started my formal training in 1959 but I actually began instruction two years earlier under a brown belt judoka who gave informal instruction at one of the Chicago Park District field house gymnasiums. I was a part of the turbulent era of the martial arts in the early sixties that culminated with the unfortunate death of Jim Konservic at the Green Dragon Black Cobra Hall on the North Side of Chicago. I was a member of the old 'World Karate Federation' and later a member of 'Count Dante's' Black Dragon Fighting Society. It was a wild and turbulent time in Chicago and karate was a rough and bloody affair in those days. Training was brutal and grueling but some of the toughest fighters of that era could be found in those small and dank dojos in Chicago.

I have recently become incensed again by the backstabbing and backbighting that I've become aware of on various blogs, martial arts discussion boards and websites. You'd think that grown folk would get a life and find

something better to do. It seems that the only way some people can build themselves up is by tearing other people down. There's an old saying; "An empty wagon makes the most noise". I'm convinced that many of these critics of everyone and everything fall into that category.

I have my highest rank in eclectic and Americanized Asian martial arts. In reality many of those who think that they are studying a completely traditional art are doing exactly the same thing. Very few Western instructors teach these arts in a completely traditional format. The art, no matter how traditional, is filtered through the mind and personality of the one teaching it. That gives his interpretation of that art a unique flavor independent of the traditions he may have been thought. As a disclaimer let me say that I have instructor rank in several traditional arts. I have trained under a number of Japanese, Okinawan, Chinese and Filipino masters in my martial arts journey. While I enjoyed the sense of oriental culture that they offered I found their instruction no more enlightening than that of their Western counterparts. The best two instructors that I studied under were of Irish and African American extraction.

I am of the belief that if a martial art is to be effective as a combative or self defense tool it has to reflect the demands of the times and the needs of the practitioner. I love iaido. It's a beautiful art and the discipline that it requires does wonders in offering an occasion of self discovery. Still, it has very little relevance to modern self defense needs. I still teach defense against sword attack to my advanced students but I don't expect them to ever face a katana wielding attacker. Of course, in the crazy times we live in there's no guarantee.

I have recently been honored with the rank of 10TH Dan Hanshi through several national and international organizations but I have better sense than to

step into a school in Japan and expect the 9TH Dan master there to fall down on his knees and kowtow to me. That doesn't even happen here, though in my humble opinion... But then, again, that's neither here nor there.

Whatever rank I have been granted is recognized by my peers in the U.S., Europe and Australia. In spite of my fifty plus years in the arts I may or may not be recognized as a master by organizations in some Asian countries. That's probably as it should be because, though many of my techniques are based on what I've garnered from various Asian systems, what I teach is patently American. It addresses the needs and the physical and mental attributes of occidentals.

I teach enough kata to claim some connection to my classical martial arts heritage but what I expect my student to garner from them and how they are approached is uniquely American. I no longer teach the classical systems, not because I don't appreciate them but because they don't suit the needs of the type of student that I teach. Before leaving Chicago most of my students were involved in law enforcement, security, mental health or other such high risk occupations. They wanted to learn how to defend themselves or how to respond in a combative situation. Because of this my training regiment consists primarily of kyohan (basics) waza (short fighting forms), and ippon and nippon kumite (one and two step sparring). I leave jiyu kumite and randori (competition sparring) for the sporting crowd. Nothing wrong with competition. It just isn't my point of emphasis.

I respect every master of every classical martial art that exists. I admire their fidelity and their dedication to their master, their predecessors and their system. I feel the same way toward the original systems that I trained in, their founders, present masters and sensei. I just don't teach what or the way I was

taught The classical systems serve a purpose and fill an important niche. I don't expect them to adhere to my ideas or philosophies, nor do I criticize what they do or how they do it. If it works for them and fulfils their needs it has served its purpose.

I don't seek recognition from systems, organizations or masters outside of my circle of peers. The masters and instructors I associate with share a similar philosophy and follow a common path. I only ask for the same respect from these classical stylists that I show them. I don't require their approval of what I do.

There was a time when I would challenge others who questioned my integrity or my ability. More often than not I left them broken and bleeding but unconvinced. Fortunately I've grown up and I understand that beating the snot out of someone doesn't educate them and it certainly doesn't change their direction. They will continue to do what they do and think what they think even if they do it battered and bruised.

I have read in several blogs where people were slandering the knowledge, integrity, ability and honor of people that they have never met and don't even know. As a minister I am discouraged from using graphic language so it would be difficult for me to adequately articulate my opinions of such individuals. Also, since I have learned that it isn't expedient to give people of that ilk badly needed attitude adjustments I just shake my head and go about my business. You can lead a horse to water but you can't hold his head under until he drowns. And I quote.

I know and associate myself with some rather controversial martial artists. I have seen them being criticized and slandered by people who couldn't

stand in their shadows. They have never seen them fight and they have never crossed swords with them ( which probably explains why they are still capable of running off at the mouth). I have seen some of these individuals fight. Most of them are exactly what they claim to be. They are exemplary fighters and teachers. What more is a martial artist required to be before he is recognized by the status quo?

During the sixties and seventies Chicago and much of the rest of the Midwest was ostracized and basically ignored by the martial arts media and the rest of the martial arts community. This, in spite of the fact that Chicago had some of the toughest fighters in nation. Some things went on that were less than acceptable amongst some of the teachers and practitioners in Chicago but the entire city was black balled for the actions of a few. Unfortunately this type of trend still continues. Politics and martial arts snobbery still abounds. This shouldn't be so.

The martial arts should be a brotherhood. There is too much contention between systems, organizations and styles. People with different philosophies or who train in different ways for different reasons are criticized. No one has a monopoly on the martial arts. A person has the right to train in whatever style or system he wants. Who he trains under or who his style was initiated by does not determine how effective that person or his style is. Being old doesn't make something more effective and just because something has been done the same way for a lot of years doesn't make it practical.

Many systems were designed to address the needs of the time. The techniques that they used reflected this. The hands were abused and heavily conditioned because they were used against people wearing armor. Flying kicks came about to address enemy on horseback. Does that mean that we should

practice these same techniques today? That depends on the individual. Conditioned hands come in real handy for tamashiwari (breaking) demonstrations but they don't necessarily make a person a better fighter. A karateka or taekwondo stylist may be able to leap up and kick the ceiling but that doesn't mean he'll be effective against a knife wielding aggressor. I've known individuals who could break stacks of bricks, fly through the air like a leaping cougar and lift massive amounts of weights but who couldn't fight their way through a handful of kindergarteners.

As I've gotten older I've had younger martial artists want to test their abilities against me. Many of them have never been in combat and they've never had to fight for their lives in brutal city streets. Everything they know about fighting they learned in the dojo. At sixty two years of age and with injuries that have resulted in several debilitating surgeries I'd still wager that I could knock their hats around backward. But that isn't what the martial arts is about and it certainly isn't what I train for. They want to spar with me to see if the art I teach is effective. Considering that much of what I teach is designed to disable, incapacitate and even cripple or kill, I don't think that there is a way to satisfy their requests without someone being seriously hurt. They have yet to come up with a sport that advocates competition eye gouging and such like. Some arts don't lend themselves well to competition. When soldiers are training for combat or police officers are preparing themselves to survive on the streets I don't think that competition is one of their primary concerns. Competition won't prepare them for survival for a life and death situation.

Lastly, I would like to talk about what constitutes a master. By the time a person has stayed with the martial arts long enough to really become a master he is up in age. There are no twenty year old martial arts masters. That isn't to

say that a twenty year old can't be an excellent martial artist. Some are but they aren't masters. Mastery takes time. Contrary to what those old martial arts movies may lead you to believe there are no seventy year old martial arts masters going toe to toe with twenty five year old fighting champions. That only happens in the movies. I'm too old to fight in a tournament, even if I wanted to. That doesn't mean that I can't defend myself. I can't fight a twelve rounder but I can give you pure hell for three or four minutes. Considering what I would feel that I had to do to defend myself against a younger opponent, the fight wouldn't be pretty. If I had my way it wouldn't even be a fight. A fight requires give and take. At my age I'm willing to give but I don't plan on taking much in the way of abuse. That means that, with my limited choices, my response would have to be violent, vicious and deadly. Such a scenario wouldn't be good for anyone involved.

Considering that most masters are getting up in years and can't or won't try to compete with the younger fighter it stands to reason that he is a master because of what he knows not because of what he can do. If you have the fortune to train with and learn from such an individual you're trying to tap into the knowledge that he has. If you came to engage him in ritualistic combat or try him out to see what he knows you came to the wrong place for the wrong reason.

A case in point. When Mohammed Ali came to Angelo Dundee he didn't ask him to spar with him. Dundee was too old to be trying to fight a young contender who was still in his prime. That didn't mean that he didn't have anything to offer Ali. On the contrary, Mohammed Ali was, in affect, sitting at the feet of a master. He came to him to learn what he had to teach him not to test his fighting prowess. Mohammed Ali became the world heavy weight



champion and Angelo Dundee was an aging trainer. So I ask you; who was the student and who was the master? (You should have known that there'd be a test) If you said Ali I'm sitting here risking carpal tunnel syndrome for nothing and you're educationally challenged.

There are teachers, sensei and masters out there in every shape size and variety. They teach some of anything and everything an aspiring martial artists might want to know. Because he doesn't have an oriental cast to his eyes or have a Japanese, Korean or Chinese name doesn't put his claim to the title of Renshi, Shihan, Hanshi, Sensei, Sifu, Guru or Maestro in question. If he teaches what you need well and effectively and he is able to back up his claims what do you care who he is sanctioned by? If a person offers you a million dollars are you going to check his pedigree to see if his fortune consists of 'old money'? If you do you're an idiot. If it spends it spends. By the same token, if his system works it works. He doesn't have to claim lineage to some sage sitting on a mountain top in Tibet to be a viable martial artist, an excellent teacher or a martial arts master. Being a master has less to do with who you claim lineage to than with your own personal knowledge and experience. A master is a master because of what he knows not who he knows. If you want to be able to name drop pursue your journey with someone who offers you that opportunity. On the other hand if you want to learn an effective martial art or fighting system, find the teacher who offers what you need and follow him. In the end a title is just that, a title. The bottom line is does he have what you need and is he willing to offer it to you. If you find that individual, you've found your master. Follow him. Who knows? You might actually learn something.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

## *RISING FROM THE ASHES*

I have some distressing news for the Peter Pan generation. We're aging. Yeah, you heard me right, we're getting old. Some of us, myself included, have gotten there already. Age is a biological reality. Live long enough and you'll find that out. Getting old isn't fun but the alternative isn't pretty. We either get old or we get dead.

Actually the whole nation is aging. When I was a kid the life expectancy for a person in America was sixty two years. Now if you die at that age people will say that you died young. If you have cable TV you're aware that people are obsessed with staying young. You can tummy tuck, face lift, collagen inject and zumba till you drop but in the end age is going to win out. The best you can hope for is to be the best that you can be at whatever age. It is my belief that you don't get old, you relinquish your youth. Our nation has the unfortunate distinction of being the only one that throws away its elderly. We don't value age as do some other cultures but maturity doesn't have to mean your life is null and void.

It is an unhappy truth that athletes while staying in shape stress their bodies and sometime do themselves more harm than good. Taking that into consideration it should change how we train and how we teach. Banging your head into a concrete block to condition it for head butts has proved to be counterproductive. Likewise much of the hand conditioning of the past. If

you're the average adult you may have to actually defend yourself one or two times in a lifetime and hopefully not at all. Understanding that, it may not be wise to beat our hands into clubs. I'm pretty sure that you plan to use your hands for something else other than weapons.

Martial artists are no more exempt from age or injury than anyone else. Though a deteriorating mind ( too many kicks to the head) may thrust us into a second childhood we aren't getting any younger and we have to make the necessary adjustments. That doesn't mean giving up on life and likewise it shouldn't mean giving up on our common passion. We are martial artists and we must 'kung fu'. For us it's like breathing. It's in our blood.

I'm an 'old school' martial artist. I trained in the old way. I banged, battered and abused my body for the sake of battle efficiency. I'm approaching my late sixties now and I've lived to regret it. After almost fifty seven years in the martial arts I am considered a Hanshi and grandmaster but my ability has lessened as my knowledge continues to grow. As much as I hate to admit it I can no longer leap the proverbial tall building at a single bound. To be honest I can barely launch my building bounding butt over a crack in the sidewalk. So what is a sensei to do? We reinvent ourselves to maximize our efforts and to maintain whatever efficiency we can.

Due to injuries because of working in high risk professions I have had two back surgeries (fused from just above the tailbone to just below the shoulder blades) and several to my arms and hand. My orthopedic surgeons told me that my martial arts career was over. So, hearing that what did I do? Did I sit my old butt down like someone with good sense? That's a silly question. I'm a martial artist. Of course I didn't. Instead I found other ways to do the same thing. My undefendable roundhouse kick to the head became by necessity a mui tai type

kick to the calf or thigh. My killer side kick to the throat became a cutting kick to the shins or diagonal stomp to the knee. I revisited my judo, jiu jitsu and aikijitsu training and revived my boxing skills. Since I don't need as much flexibility I've gone back to power lifting. My kicks aren't as theatrical but they are every bit as devastating and I punch like the kick of a mule. Not a bad tradeoff in my estimation but even with all of that age continues its slow attack on my body. Time will come when I won't be able to do much in the way of hard training. Eventually my weight training will be replaced with tai chi and chi gung. I'll continue to study and research the arts but my efforts will become less physical. I have often said that those who can, do and those who no longer can, teach. You don't have to be able to do a roundhouse kick to the head to teach a student how to do them. When even that becomes too difficult I'll continue to share what little wisdom I've accrued in a lifetime of martial art training through lectures and articles. After all, the pen is mightier than the sword, or in my case the keyboard is mightier.

In the end let quote a great martial art luminary (myself); "A master is a master because of what he knows, not because of what he can do". Quoting again from the same impeccable source; "those who no longer can, teach". Youth may have been burned up in the impersonal fire of time but like the mythical phoenix we rise from the ashes. Where are those wise and knowledgeable teachers out there? Come on my brethren; rise. There's a desperate need for those reborn phoenixes in the martial art community. Your knowledge and wisdom is needed more than ever.

God bless you, my martial art family. Train honestly and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# *SELF DEFENSE VS. PERSONAL SECURITY*

For the most part I don't write on demand and I don't take requests. I'm a martial art instructor not your local DJ. That being said let's talk about rules and the exceptions thereof.

I was talking to the senior instructor and President of the Black Lotus Martial Arts Association and one of my senior black belts. He had the audacity to try to coerce me into writing this particular article. I fussed and cussed (actually I don't do much in the way of swearing but it was a close call) but you see I'm sitting at my laptop pecking out the suggested article. I'm good for lecturing. Because I manage the affairs of two martial art organizations and sit on the board(s) of several others I do a great deal of my teaching in that manner. I try to expound on the philosophy, methodology, the inner workings and the underlying principles of the martial arts. Today's lecture was on self defense and personal security. Larry (McFadden) was the benefactor. Sometime I'm too good for my own good. Thus my present labor at the keyboard.

Many people get involved in the martial arts for self protection. Some take a few self defense courses while some go for the total package. In its raw form the martial arts are about fighting. Take the combative applications from the martial arts and you have either a nice exercise program or an interesting hobby. While conditioning and training will give one the physicality and

coordination that makes them more capable in a physical confrontation neither of the two translates into an effective self defense program. If you want to be able to fight you have to train to fight. You don't learn how to fight by doing kata or participating in the occasional karate tournament. In the end you fight the way you train.

This isn't so much a lecture about self defense. Self defense is a worst case scenario. I tell my students that if they find themselves in a self defense situation their training has failed them or they have failed their training. For all intent and purposes self defense should be a back to the wall situation. It should be your absolute last resort.

Considering my background, the places I grew up in and my military experience I'm not shy about fighting. I don't particularly want to fight but if the necessity arises I'm more than willing and able to do so. Where I grew up violence was a fact of life. You didn't fight to prove some point or another. You fought to survive. Breaking my own rule on profanity I could 'fight my ass off'. My background gave me a no-nonsense approach to all things combative.

Larry, the President of my organization, the BLMAA and my nemesis at the moment asked me to expound on the difference between self defense and personal security. It would seem that he'll be teaching and expounding on the subject at the university he retired from and he wants me to do most of the work for him. After much harassment and badgering I finally agreed. The BLMAA and its associate fighting arts share a philosophy on personal protection. I'd like to share some of that.

- A) Avoidance: Stay away from those places that may pose a threat.

B) Awareness: Put away the headphones, the blue tooth and the cell phones. Be aware of your surroundings.

C) Observation: Keep your eyes and ears open. Recognize a possible threat before it becomes a threat.

D) Balance: Appearing balanced communicates a state of awareness. Predators look for a soft target. They prefer an easy or compliant victim.

E) Confidence: Like balance confidence communicates a state of readiness and capability.

F) Defuse: Okay, all of the above failed. You find yourself face to face with an enraged adversary. Reason with him if you can. Try to calm him down.

G) Deescalate: Take the blame if necessary. Try to walk away. Address the problem however you can to avoid a physical altercation.

H) Flee: If you can. Get the hell out of dodge. It isn't cowardly to flee a violent confrontation.

I) Defend: This is a one shot deal. You have to deal with the preemptive strike. Stop his initial attack and then...

J) Attack: Fights aren't won with a good defense. In a heads up confrontation 'the best defense is a good offense'.

K) Fight like your life depends on it. Chances are it does.

Since we got all of that out of the way let's look at the escalating levels of combat.

1. Verbal skill. Try to talk your way out of it before you have to hurt him.
2. Hurt before you injure
3. Injure before you disable
4. Disable before you Maim
5. Maim before you kill

6. Kill if you must
7. Survive at all costs

There it is in a nutshell. Personal protection involves a number of things. You must be aware. Look around you before leaving the house or any building. Constantly access your surroundings and recognize any possible problem. Have your keys in your hand when you leave the car or leave the house to go to your car. Look in the back seat before you get in your car. I can go on with any number of precautions but I'm sure you get the point. If you are security minded chances are you'll be more secure.

Lastly you have to train yourself for that worst possibility. You have to train realistically. Choose your training to suit your needs. A weekend karate class at your local YMCA may not do it. Arm yourself with the weapons that will serve your needs. And remember, in the end, your safety is your responsibility.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



## *STILLNESS IN COMBAT*

Okay, many of you are probably looking at me funny at this point. What the heck is he talking about now? Has he finally lost it?

Not really, my brothers. You probably think that stillness in combat is a recipe for disaster. It's according to what one means by stillness.

Have you ever seen a seasoned martial artist in a tournament? Too often all of those techniques that looked so beautiful during kata and are so sharp and powerful in the dojo degenerate to ineffectual flailing in a tournament. Worse yet have you ever seen that black belt technician freeze up in the face of an attack and get his hat knocked around backwards in a fight? I've seen black belt fighters look like grammar school girls in a playground brawl. Embarrassing to see.

The Black Lotus Martial Art Association came about because a lot of the black belts being turned out in some of the dojo(s) in Chicago were being trounced in the streets. Commercial schools were vying for students and many schools had a contract that promised a student a black belt in a year. I remember when it took from six to eight years to earn a black belt. That is if you were capable of attaining a black belt. Many trained for years and never were able to attain a black belt. I also remember when there was no black belt rewarded to a student under eighteen years old. There were no poon belts or junior black belts. Let me reveal my age here. I remember when there were

only three belts. White, brown and black and there were no degrees in those belts. Okay I realize I'm going back a ways. Animal skin gis and loin cloths.

The collaboration of instructors that eventually became the BLMAA joined together to help those inept, would be, black belts and in the process save the reputation of the art in Chicago. In those days people would sometimes come into karate schools and challenge the students or the instructors. Some were practitioners from other schools or systems and some were hooligans from the neighborhood who for whatever reason took exception to the school. That was karate in the sixties and seventies in the big windy.

Unfortunately, too often, even good karate practitioners were being embarrassed in the streets. They knew the techniques but lost it under the stress of combat. Believe me, fighting isn't the same as sparring.

Many combat oriented systems have done away with the more complex techniques all together. One reason is because they take too much time to perfect but also because most people can't use them in the heat of combat. When adrenalin charges the blood and heart rate goes up eye hand coordination goes out the window. For the most part only gross motor skills are there for the average person under those circumstances. Yet many of those classical techniques were combat effective when these arts were actually combat systems. What happened? Why don't those tried and true techniques work for today's fighter? They seem to work in the dojo.

It isn't the techniques that fall short it's the practitioners of today. Even many of the highest degree black belts are only partially trained in this modern age. In a day when karate and its sister arts are practiced for competition or for

physical exercise or even for spiritual reasons the ingredients that made them most effective have been lost or simply aren't being taught.

In the BLMAA we have given in to the trend of many of the modern combat systems. Most of our techniques are basic and based on natural reactions. We concentrate primarily on techniques that incorporate gross motor movement. With my private students however I teach many of the more advanced and complex techniques. In the more basic combat system our pressure point techniques attack balance, vision and breathing. We leave the more advanced pressure point techniques for the most advanced student and our inside or closed door students.

Those more advanced techniques are sound in theory and given the proper training can be effective. The necessary training involve endless repetition, strategy, what we call tai sabaki or advantageous positioning, footwork, breathing and mushin.

Statagy, footwork, body positioning and repetition are technical aspects of the art but breathing and mushin, which I'll explain in a minute are more esoteric. Too often many karateka will only step backwards or forward in a fight. A few are taught to sidestep but lateral motion is too often completely missing. To a large extent lateral movement makes tai sabaki possible.

Many fighters have no strategy in a fight. They just wade in punching and kicking. Perfecting those technical skills will go a long way toward making a better fighter. Stratagy is learned in the dojo not in the heat of combat.

Constant repetition translates into muscle memory. Without muscle memory it's impossible to be an effective fighter. If you have to think about it it

won't work. In a fight you have time to only act and react. You don't have time for planning.

Okay we've got that out of the way now let's address the real meat of this essay. I'm a Christian minister so I'm a little suspect about the spiritual implications of the zazen and transcendental meditation that sometimes accompany the practice of the Eastern martial art disciplines. This isn't a theological essay so I'll leave that argument for another time and place. Come to my Wednesday evening bible class at my church and I'll address that for you. Still, even without the religious or spiritual implications that Eastern meditation would involve some kind of meditation is necessary if you hope to be able to implement some of the more challenging karate, kempo or kung fu techniques in combat. Meditation not only calms and focuses the spirit it also helps a practitioner learn to control his breathing. Breathing controls heart rate and we've already touched on the effect of erratic breathing and a wild heart rate. What we are trying to do is implement a state of mushin into combat. Okay oh great grand pooba of everything ryu karate. What the heck is mushin? I'm glad you asked, Hoppa Grass.

Picture in your mind a calm lake. I mean really calm. Not a ripple on the water. In such still water you can see your reflection like in a mirror but let there be even the slightest agitation to the surface of the water and all you see are erratic flashes of light. A calm lake reflects. Troubled water refracts. You get plenty of light but no focus of vision or perception. We liken that calm lake to mushin. Mushin is the calm almost detached stillness that the ancient martial artist incorporated into effective combat. In that state he could use the most complex skill effectively.

Let something startle the sh... I mean scare the heck out of you and see how much control you have over your motor skill. You can't even get your key into your car door until you calm down. If you don't have a remote you'll have to stand in the cold until you get yourself together. If the unexpected scare was nothing but the backfire of a passing newspaper truck you're okay but what if that sudden sound was the scream of a deranged assailant? Can we talk about buying the farm? That's where mushin comes in. If you can keep your center and control breathing and heart rate and you've developed your defensive skills into muscle memory you have a good chance of surviving the experience. It is imperative to have a still mind in the face of impending danger. Without it you become a spectator and worse a victim.

If you are going to be effective in the face of combat you have to be able to remain calm enough to fight back. If you're struggling to breath and trying not to soil your undies you're toast. If you want to be able to give a good account of yourself in a confrontation you will have to learn the art of stillness.

Mushin will serve you in every area of your life. You'll be less challenged by life's daily stress. You'll be able to perform better in whatever opposition you are faced with. Finishing that brief. Passing that midterm exam. And yes winning that life and death struggle. You'll be able to control your temper and deal with those pesky unsolicited sales calls that punctuate your evenings. You'll be able to live your life more effectively unaffected by the little irritants that seek to knock you off your square.

Before and after your training and whenever possible during your work day find a time and a technique that allow you that moment of stillness and calm. Control your breathing. Breathe from the belly and not from the top of your lungs. Slow deep breathing promotes calm. If you find yourself in a

threatening situation breathe don't pant. You'll find that if you are able to control your breathing you'll maintain your calm. In many instances the calm demeanor you display in the face of the threat will be enough to make a miscreant think in terms of another target. Assailants want soft targets. They depend on your fear to take away your resolve and give them the advantage. They aren't looking for that calm and confident individual. Predators are looking for easy prey. He is looking for an easy conquest not a hard fight.

In the end whether you have to discourage a would be predator or combat an attacker mushin, that calm in the face of opposition, that stillness in the storm, will serve you to greater affect and help you implement the tools that you have honed in the dojo for just such an occasion.

Fighting is more than defense and offense. It's more than a block, punch and kick. It's an attitude; all of it is a package deal. No one part will work by itself but if all elements are there and you are calm and confident you stand a more than better chance of coming out of the experience the victor. Knowing that should make you breathe easier.

God bless you, my brother. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

## *STRENGTH IN UNITY*

My brethren; this is not a religious dissertation though you'll find some quotes the bible used to illustrate a point or two. I admonish those of my brothers who are not Christian to bear with me and not turn away from the truth that I'm trying to expound. As much as I would like to see the conversion of every one of my brothers and friends to Christianity this isn't an effort to accomplish that.

The psalmist said in Ps. 133:1, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." Unity certainly makes human interaction smoother and less confrontation. But more than that there is power in unity.

When I was in boot camp the various companies indulged in competition in different areas. Coming out first in those competitions awarded a flag to recognize those accomplishments. The flags awarded to each company would be displayed while marching in the graduation ceremony.

For public relations purposes the Chicago Cubs financed the training of one of the companies in boot camp. All of the members of the said company hailed from in and around the Chicago area. Because I had four years of R.O.T.C. I became the first platoon leader of that company.

We had been successful in drill competition and had won the D flag. We had also excelled in academics and had won the I (Intelligence) flag. We coveted but had yet to win the A flag for athletics. We had won the track

competition and only needed to win the strength competition to take the A flag.

Our company was company 444, The Cubs Company. Our sister company, company 442 was offering stiff competition for the acquisition of the A flag. They had won the swim competition and the strength competition would determine the final winner. There was a serious problem challenging our success in strength against our sister company. They had some big robust farm boys in their midst. We had no-one of comparable strength to contest them. They were obviously bigger and stronger. We couldn't out strength them. We needed a strategy to nullify the difference in strength and size. The last competition was a tug of war where strength, size and weight mattered heavily. Our only hope was in teamwork. We figured that if we worked together we could overcome the obstacle represented by their size.

At the offset of the competition we were being overwhelmed by their superior size and strength. They were pulling us dangerously close to the mud pit that separated the two teams. I was at the front of the rope. Weighing all of 190# I was staring into the determined eyes of a 250# corn fed ox of a fellow. He grinned wickedly as I was tottering at the edge of the pit. Our second platoon leader was a big guy and was our anchor. He yelled from the rear to remember our plan. Somehow we regained our focus and began to pull and release in perfect unity. The results were instantaneous. Our competitors were bigger and stronger but they didn't work together. They depended on their obvious advantage to garner victory but in the end our unified effort won the day. We won the coveted A flag against all apparent odds. In the end our unified effort made the difference.



There is power in unity that goes beyond size, strength and numbers. Christ said the “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I will be in the midst thereof. And if any two of you agree touching on anything it shall be done unto them.” God recognizes the power of unity and honors unity and harmony. That type of oneness is close to his nature.

I belong to two international martial art organizations. I am the chairman and Grandmaster of the one (the BLMAA) and a patriarch and ‘Head of Family’ of the other (the IFAA BDFS). The two organizations are sister organizations in that, in a sense, they sprang from the same roots. They serve different purposes and have different visions but they have one thing in common; to propagate and encourage the growth and unity of the martial arts. The BLMAA is a Christian martial art organization and focus on the mentoring of its students. We concentrate as much on moral and spiritual growth as the physical aspects of the martial arts and our rank structure reflects that. The IFAA BDFS is a secular organization and focus on the self defense and combat aspects of the martial arts. We concern ourselves with the moral and spiritual growth of student and teacher but that is secondary to our purpose. As the name implies we are a ‘fighting society’ and martial in our purposes. What both organizations have in common is a desire to see unity within the martial arts and especially in the body of the organizations.

Any organization bands together to propagate some common purpose but all seek the strength of numbers. Hopefully those numbers will work together in the strength, power and, yes, beauty of unity. In a harmonious atmosphere the whole will be greater than the sum of its parts.

In authority I can only speak for myself and the organizations that I represent but in spirit I speak to all of my brethren in the arts. We have

different ideas and we practice various martial disciplines but we also have something in common that should unify us. We are all brothers in the arts. Whether we practice a do (or ascetic art) or a jitsu (or fighting art) we are all martial artists. Strikers or grapplers. Sport or combat oriented. Internal or external stylists. It really doesn't matter. We are involved in the same endeavor, to improve ourselves through the martial arts. In the end our strength is in our common visions. Not where we differ but where we come together. We can agree or we can agree to disagree but if the arts are to grow and strive we must stand and work together. In a forced march soldiers found that they had to stagger their steps while marching across a bridge. If they marched in step they could cause a resonance that could collapse even a strong stone bridge. There is that much power in unity and harmonious effort. We are like a column of soldiers. If we are to march together we are no faster than our slowest man but working together we can achieve our goals. If we arrive at all we will all arrive together or we'll fall short together. We will all win or we will all lose. If we want the martial arts to grow and flourish we have to unify our efforts and strive together. Like that tug of war team we can win against insurmountable odds if we work together.

My brethren, this is a call to unity. Let's find a common ground and agree where we can and agree to disagree where we can't but let's dwell together in unity.

God bless you my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# *STRENGTH TRAINING AND THE MARTIAL ARTS*

I just crawled out of my home gym. I have both a gym and a small dojo in my home. I do most of my training at home. Occasionally one of my students comes to Chicago to train with me. Other than those rare occasions or when the grand mistress trains with me I train alone. I have a bag stand with a hundred pound heavy bag and speed bag but they're out in my outdoor dojo. Too cold in Chicago to abuse them.

I'm an avid weight lifter and strength trainer. At one point in my life I was a body builder. I never competed but at 5'9" I was carrying around 245# of raw muscle. At that time I was a cop at a large hospital complex. A person can look at you and not realize that you're a martial art master but strength and muscle speak for themselves. It kept me from having to wrestle with a lot of irate individuals. They took one look at my size and thought better of it. I have also worked as a psych professional. I have worked for social service agencies, hospital psych units and the penal system, all of them as a psych worker. You can't kick, punch, lock or throw a psych patient. All you have to work with is your wits and your physical prowess. Believe me, strength and size matters.

I began my martial art career in judo and boxing. I started strength training shortly after that. No-one ever questioned my predisposition with weights in the judo or jiu jitsu dojo. Though judo and jiu jitsu depend more on technique than on raw power everyone that studies them know that strength

matters. There's a reason why most combative e sports have weight classes. During the era of point karate there was a lot of sparring with mixed weight classes. That worked because there was little or no actual contact. Let's face it; anyone with good sense would rather be hit by a middle weight than a heavy weight. Put a light weight against a heavyweight in a fight and the light weight will make the heavy weight look slow and clumsy. He'll move around and pepper the bigger man with quick strikes. He may cut him up and bruise him a bit but sooner or later in a real confrontation the big man will make contact. I don't have to explain the outcome.

I'm primarily a kempo and karate stylist. I have advanced rank in jiu jitsu and aikijitsu but I am primarily a striker. I can lock an opponent up and toss him on his rearmost extremities with the best of them but if I get in one good strike the fight is over. Back in the day I loved to kick but extensive back surgeries made too much of that impractical but I'm pretty good with my hands. I love punching and striking.

I did a lot of street fighting when I was younger. Some of it by choice but most of it for survival. Growing up in the inner city of any city in those days you had to be good with your hands. I was better than most. I've always been pretty quick but my advantage was my strength.

When I started studying karate I was constantly told to leave the weights alone. It was the common opinion that you would become muscle bound and wouldn't be able to strike or move well. In extreme cases too much size can be a hindrance but if you know how to train effectively you will only become stronger and more effective with your martial art if you train for strength. I'm not advocating that you become a power lifter or extreme body builder but that you use strength training to enhance your martial art training.

Individuals like Master Ernie Reynolds guided me into the realistic advantage of weight training for the martial artist. I didn't know him personally in those days but he was a mentor by example. He was both a successful body builder and a skilled martial artist. His ability in the martial arts wasn't in spite of his weight training but because of it. I don't miss an opportunity to thank him for the example he offered. I styled myself after him in that regard. I became a better martial artist for it. After fifty six years in the arts I still strength train.

Boxers avoid putting on too much muscle beyond their natural body weight. Pro boxers have to be able to go ten or twelve rounds and all of that mass would fatigue them too soon. As martial artists we don't have to worry about that problem. Any real fight in the streets is going to last for less than five minutes; six or seven at the most. If you can't take an adversary out in that amount of time you need to go back to the drawing board. Karate as it was originally taught is a one hit system counter punching system. If you're trading a hundred punches with an opponent there is something wrong with your system, your ability or skill. Sometimes people choose a martial art that doesn't complement their body type or their temperament. If you're built like a sumo wrestler with short bowed legs taekwondo might not be your best choices in a martial art. You have to be realistic and find an art that compliments your body type.

Many fights are lost in the streets because of a lack of conditioning and stamina. Knowing a technique isn't enough. You have to have the ability and conditioning to pull it off. Just training to kick and punch or even to take down an opponent isn't enough. Conditioning should accompany training. Aerobic training is necessary. Speed training would be nice but strength training will

enhance your ability. Heavy training will increase strength. Light weights lifted in a ballistic manner will increase speed. Heavy weights in multiple sets will increase mass. You choose your method according to your needs but I advise you not to overlook the training advantage offered by weights.

During our conference in Mississippi some of the martial artists that participated saw me in a tee shirt rather than a gi. They remarked on my conditioning, musculature and physical shape. Considering that they ranged in age from their twenties to their early forties and that I am sixty six years old that was good to hear.

Today I did a full strength training workout. Tomorrow I'll do some light spot training. I advocate training for chi and I love the internal martial arts but aside from being able to activate your chi meridians I can probably pick you up and body slam you. Just kidding. I don't want to take it that far. Considering the fact that my back is held together with nuts and bolts I'd probably do myself more harm than I would you. With that being said I will say that if I manage to hit you you'll become a believer. Believe me, my brother, strength counts. I would like to recommend that you consider adding strength training to your regimen. Believe me you won't regret it.

Train Hard my brethren and Go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

## *STRENGTH VERSES POWER*

Before I get into this discussion, let me define several words (and principles) that I will be trying to expound on.

Strength: Physical power. (Muscle derived power)

Power: Might or force. The Capability of doing or accomplishing something.

Energy: The capacity for vigorous activity or to create power.

These definitions were taken from the Webster's Universal College Dictionary and were chosen selectively to illustrate this subject.

In this essay, I am focusing on strength and power as it applies to the martial arts. I will use personal observations and experiences to illustrate the subject. In my earliest teaching career I taught mostly young men. My first school was utilitarian and rustic. At that time, the martial arts weren't especially popular. Very few women were attracted to the study of the arts and few older individuals.

Teaching young men seemed easy at the time. Most of the students were vigorous and athletic. All of them had the strength common to young men and were adrenalin and testosterone driven. They rode the wave of youth and much of what I taught came relatively easy to them. I have come to learn through years of experience that their ease of practice had more to do with my

inexperience and incomplete understanding of the under workings of the arts that I taught than their own natural abilities.

My personal epiphany in the martial arts came when I was asked to teach a woman's self defense class. I found that many of the techniques that the young men did as a matter of course were difficult or impossible for my new female students to accomplish. I had to step back and take a closer look at what I was teaching and how I was teaching it. I had to gain an understanding of the underlying principles of the karate and jujitsu that I was teaching. I came to understand that my male students were able to do what I demanded of them through sheer muscular strength. The female students didn't have the physical power or upper body strength to power through the techniques when they weren't done properly. This discovery became a turning point in my teaching career.

I began studying judo and jiu jitsu, and later karate, from Japanese instructors. Their teaching techniques didn't sit well with my Western sensitivities and after several years of study without any major advancement in rank, I affiliated myself with a fledgling American martial arts association and the system that they taught. The training was hard and brutal and the classes were long and hard. I equated that with better training. Also, rank came faster.

The karate system that I studied was an eclectic blend of shorei and goju karate. Theoretically it blended the hard shuri te (shorei) system with the softer goju system. I say theoretically because the training focused primarily on the harder aspects of karate. We learned to use the sanchin dachi (hour glass stance) and neko ashi dachi (cat stance) stances but most of our fighting was done from the zen kutsu dachi (front leaning stance) or the kiba dachi (horse stance). We learned the mawashi uke (circle block) and the tensho (cranes



wing) blocks, which were soft techniques, but emphasis was on the harder power blocks. Linear techniques were preferred to circular. Parrying, side stepping, evading or retreating was unheard of. All of this added up to a power oriented, strength based system. It was brutal and aggressive but it often fell apart when used against a bigger or stronger opponent with equal and sometimes even lesser skill.

The goju system of karate is based on hard and soft techniques. It embraces the law of the yin and yang. In theory, a hard weapon is generally used against a soft target and a soft weapon against a hard target. For instance, a seiken zuki (fore knuckle punch) wouldn't be used to strike the point of the chin. A palm heel strike would possibly do more damage with less trauma to the hand. Unfortunately the ju (soft techniques) of goju, which require more skill and training, weren't emphasized or weren't taught at all. Rather the go (hard techniques), which are easier to teach and more easily grasped, were generally taught in the United States.

I'm not trying to criticize the art itself or even the people who taught it. I'm just saying that they were teaching only half of the art. There is a reason for this. Most of the teachers in those days were soldiers who had learned their arts during limited stays at duty stations where these skills were available to them. They learned their arts in a relatively limited time and in the short time allowed to their training were taught the external skills of the arts that they studied. On the other side of the coin, many of the old instructors of these arts, seeing the less than acceptable Western attitudes of these students, limited what was taught them. These young instructors came back to the States with a partial understanding of their arts and with a hard core military approach to teaching them.

As time passed and these instructors sought more advanced training and studied the kata, waza, and the application of these techniques the deeper meanings of their arts began to reveal themselves. Unfortunately, many occidentals, being larger in size, still substitute strength for the true power of the martial arts.

I am an advocate of strength training. I have indulged in weight training, power lifting and body building since my mid teens. Today, even in my sixties, I still indulge in weight training, though due to injuries and the resulting surgeries, I am leaning more and more to strength training with less radical resistance systems. Many of my fellow martial artists criticized me for my infatuation with size and strength but I learned not to depend on either to power my martial arts techniques. I still practiced the proper kinesiology and physics in my techniques in spite of strength.

At 5'9" and around 230 pounds, I'm not a small person but there are people out there a lot bigger and a lot stronger than me. If we depend on physical strength we'll eventually come across someone bigger. If we depend on physical strength alone, we will be helpless before a larger or stronger opponent. By the way, there 'is' a reason why fighters are divided by weight class. Size does matter, especially when faced with an equally skilled opponent. Still, size is not the only determining factor in a physical confrontation. There are more effective ways of generating power than with raw strength.

Strength is determined by physical endowments. Size, musculature, slow twitch muscle tissue, skeletal structure and connective tissue all contribute to physical strength. There are also the less physical side of the coin; the berserker type strength that we find in the psychotic individual. I worked in the field of mental health for a large part of my working life. I've witnessed first hand how

strong a 120 pound woman can be when fueled by psychosis. Adrenalin also plays a large part in the strength equation.

Power, on the other hand is affected by things that can be controlled to a greater or lesser degree. In karate we use the kiai or spirit yell to focus our effort. Aside from giving our efforts an infusion of adrenalin, it tightens the diaphragm and forces oxygen into the blood for maximum effort. We also use kime, which simply means focus. Focus has both physical and mental aspects. The mental part is simply total commitment to a technique. A half serious technique will be ineffective. The physical part of focus in the power equation requires proper body physics, bone and muscle alignment, muscle contraction and relaxation and breath control. Power flows from the heel, through the leg, into the hips, through the torso and is transmitted to the limb and striking surface. Impact is focused several inches into the target and all the joints are locked and the muscles tensed for the moment of impact. The body is relaxed after impact and the weapon instantly withdrawn creating a whip like focus of strength and energy. This results in focused power as opposed to brute strength.

The classic reverse punch in karate is a study in physics. Let's examine it and get an idea how power is generated in karate. In the front leaning stance, seventy percent of the weight is on the front foot. Thirty percent is on the rear foot. If a karate fighter is standing in a natural position when attacked he will step back on one leg to allow him time and room to absorb the power of the attack while blocking or parrying the blow. For illustration purposes, we're going to say that the karateka stepped back with the right foot with the weight evenly distributed on both legs or slightly more weight on the rear (right) foot. He blocks the attack with his right hand or arm putting his body in a half facing

position to the attacker. To counter attack he shifts his weight forward while turning counter clock wise at the waist. And pushing off of his left leg which is locked and planted behind him. As he is full facing the attacker his chambered right hand punches with the turning of the waist turning 180 degrees in a torquing motion while the left hand moves in a counter motion coming to a chambered position. Contact is made with the knuckles of the index and middle fingers focused about three inches into the target. If he has managed to catch the attacker's attacking limb or his clothing, the karateka can augment the damage by pulling him sharply into the counter attack. Upon contact every muscle is tensed as the punch penetrates the target. The striking arms immediately relaxes after the strike is delivered and is drawn back as fast as it was delivered creating a whipping type force. and keeping the energy of the strike from rebounding into his own limb. Now let's look at the physics of this technique.

First of all there is the forward linear momentum of the push off the ground with the planted right foot. Secondly, there is the centrifugal force generated by the snapping turn of the waist and hips. The opposite action reaction principle is used by quickly retracting the left arm to add additional power to the punch. Upon contact the punch focuses into the strike to penetrate the opponent's targeted area. The strike is delivered with the knuckles of the index and middle finger directing more force in a smaller area. The torquing motion of the striking limb adds centrifugal force to the strike. If the opponent can be pulled to the karateka or if the forward momentum of the attack is redirected by the defender's block, the opponent's strength and forward momentum can be used against him. The result is a tremendous amount of power generated with a minimum amount of effort. Lastly everything is brought together with a loud kiai focusing every ounce of effort

into the nerve center or pressure point that received the punch. It isn't difficult to see and understand the physics of this attack. The result can be devastating. The reverse punch is an excellent example of using physics to produce power and power as opposed to strength. Power is generated by using science as opposed to raw strength.

Some years ago I was practicing in the gym prior to the start of my class at one of the YMCAs in Chicago. There were other martial arts classes offered in the YMCA's curriculum. A student from another karate class came in and watched me as I punched and kicked the bag. He eventually approached me and offered to show me the power in his technique. He punched the bag and sent it swinging toward the ceiling. He equated the distance of the swing with the power of the technique. I corrected him and showed him a power punch (gyaku zuki, reverse punch) into the bag. Rather than powering away from the punch the bag bent around the striking surface of the punch and actually jumped or lifted several inches. The young man was puzzled by the bag's reaction to the punch. I explained to him that rather than penetrating the target with his punch he was pushing it away from his power. Karate is a striking art, not a pushing art. An untrained person will hit a man and knock him down. A trained martial artist can hit him and he'll collapse or fall towards the striking hand. That's because the power of the punch was fully absorbed by the target. Little or none of the force was converted into a pushing motion.

It takes time to learn to generate power in your techniques. The process doesn't happen over night. Some of it can be taught but much of it is acquired through constant practice and through personal trial and error. An instructor can show you how to perform a technique but implementing that technique still requires practice. Seeing it is one thing. Doing it consistently is

another. That's why it takes so much time to learn a martial art. Learning karate isn't that difficult. Perfecting it is. It's a long and arduous but rewarding process. It isn't accomplished over night. On the surface karate looks rather simple but as you begin to become an in depth student you'll realize how complex it really is. The difference between an effective technique and one that doesn't work is sometimes small and subtle, but it's these subtle differences that separate the practitioner from the master.

In spite of most of a life time dedicated to the perfection of the arts, I am a long way from being a master teacher or practitioner. I find that no matter how much I know there is still much to learn. With age and injury, I am no longer able to do what I once could. I'm limited in my performance but I am not limited in my studies. My body is somewhat hampered but my mind still functions (though my wife might contest that). More time is available for contemplating the spiritual and the deeper physical aspects of the martial arts. I'm more involved in the administrative ends of the martial arts but my own quest for perfection continues.

Before letting you get back to your practice, let me speak a brief moment on ki or chi. These words, the Japanese and Chinese versions, are used to express the concept of intrinsic energy. In many of the internal martial arts such as Tai Chi Chaun, Pua Kua, Hsing I and aikido, much time and effort is spent in trying to develop this elusive energy and the ability to use it. It has taken on an almost magical and esoteric mystique. I have had an opportunity to study several internal arts. I don't claim to be an expert at any of them but from my own observations I perceive ki or chi as being a result of proper breathing and focus coupled with the proper physics. There is nothing magical about it. That isn't to say that it is easy to acquire or perfect. Demonstrations of

ki can be impressive but internal or soft martial arts don't have a monopoly on this type of energy. We use the same energy when we kiai and use kime. I don't advise becoming preoccupied with studying chi kung or the other methods for perfecting ki. Instead I advise students to continue to perfect the techniques of their own chosen martial art and the intrinsic energy will eventually become apparent in their techniques.

Though the development of power is more important than the development of raw strength I still recommend strength and endurance training to any martial arts student. I've seen too many instances of boxers taking out trained black belts in martial arts contests. If karate is the powerful fighting system that we say it is this shouldn't be. The problem isn't so much with the martial art system as it is in the lack of conditioning of the fighter. Most week end warriors, which is what most karateka qualify as, aren't in the kind of physical condition to contest with a trained and conditioned boxer. Both strength and endurance are required along with those devastating techniques that you've trained so hard to learn. Other wise, you won't have the ability to use them. Having knowledge but an inability to implement it is futile. Considering that we study a combative discipline it doesn't make sense for a martial artist to be unable to defend himself.

Kumite is a way of developing fighting skills. Kumite should be a part of any training curriculum. Some skills can only be honed by contesting against other fighters. Since we don't advocate street fighting, sparring is a good way of practicing your acquired skill. I'm not a big proponent of karate tournaments. I'm more focused on the combative and self defense application of the martial arts. I had occasion recently to watch a recorded karate tournament. I didn't believe what I was seeing. What I was watching resembled

anything but karate. The fighters (can I call them that) bounced around in a poor imitation of a boxer. Because they had no base to fire their techniques from, they had no power. The result looked more like a game of tag than a fighting art. With power, as with everything else, we perform like we practice. You can't and won't develop power while acting like a jumping bean. That isn't what I mean by kumite. If I wanted to liken my fighting approach to something, I would rather resemble a pit bull than a bunny rabbit. If you want to be affective in your art, don't try to reinvent the wheel. Karate is a power system. The stances and techniques were developed to develop the maximum power, effectiveness and efficiency. The power is inherent in the system. You don't have to reinvent it to make it work. If it doesn't work for you it's because of you, not the system. Kumite and waza will help you come to the skill level that is required to implement your skill.

Lastly, I would like to encourage every student and practitioner to continue to practice and strive to perfect his technique. If there is any secret to developing what the Chinese martial arts call Qing or complete power and focus of energy in your technique it is in the basics. Master Funakoshi said that taikiyoka is the kata for the beginner. Then again he turned around said that taikiyoka is the kata for the master. After all the years of working to perfect the complex and intricate techniques of his particular martial art the master eventually comes around full circle and arrives again at the beginning. The gyaku zuki(reverse punch) is one of the first strikes that a young karateka learns. It's part of his kihon or basics. The reverse punch is basic but it is the signature technique of most karate systems. A karate black belt will knock you out with a kick but he'll kill you with a reverse punch. It's the technique of the beginner. It's also the technique of the master. The secret of karate power is in the basics.



In this study, I didn't reveal the secret that some of you may have been looking for. If there 'is' a secret it is that there is no secret. Power comes with time and practice. That's the secret of all skill, effectiveness and power in any martial art. That's the only secret.

That about winds up this study.. Continue to train hard. It's up to each of us to perfect his own ability. This is a journey of self discovery and you are the greatest opponent you will ever face.

Go with God, my brethren.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



## *STUDENTS OF THE HEART*

In my fifty five plus years of studying, researching and teaching the martial arts I have had only a few personal, closed door students. In years past in Japan and Okinawa an uchi deshi was a live-in student. Since it's hard to find a wife who will allow you to move a private student into the home and few dojo(s) have the amenities to second as an apartment for a personal student the term has taken on a different meaning. The ushi deshi is the chosen student(s) that a master chooses to pour the essence of his accumulative knowledge and wisdom into. While my wisdom has often been in doubt my knowledge has seldom been questioned. For many years of my life I ate slept and dreamt martial arts. I was one of the nineteen sixties proponents of the 'karate is my life' philosophy. Fortunately I have grown beyond that phase in my old age. Family, ministry and marriage take a front seat to the martial arts at this late date but the martial arts is still a priority even in my old age. In this phase of my martial art career I spend more time in researching and writing about different aspects of the arts along with trying to manage a couple of martial art organizations rather than actual hands on teaching. Even so I do have a couple of closed door students. I guess old habits are hard to break.

In all honesty training with me is more than a notion. I'm old school enough to make the process difficult and often painful. I don't attract the classical martial art student or the sport orientated individual. Instead I teach the hard core combat oriented practitioner and those in high risk professions. I'll still teach the occasional children's class but that has to do more with

mentoring and ministry than turning out hard core martial artists. For the most part I prefer to train advanced black belt students my core system and self defense to law enforcement and security personnel. I grew up in a harsh environment in one of the nations more dangerous cities and you know how it is with old dogs and new tricks. My primary focus is on practical and realistic combat.

Getting a black belt from me has always been like pulling teeth. I haven't turned out a huge number of black belt students in my career. Most students these days are into instant gratification and would rather take the fast track. I don't give out dan rank in one or two years. If you want high rank from me you have to be in it for the endurance because yours will be a long road.

With all of that being said, the system that I teach appears basic on the surface but is complex in its application and takes years to even begin to perfect. The techniques tend to be direct to the point and often brutal but that's the true nature of combat. Life and death combat isn't a game. It isn't a sport. As fore stated it's just that; life and death. What I teach isn't for the squeamish or faint of heart but what I teach I teach with spiritual content. After all, my brutal system to the contrary, I'm a minister, pastor and Christian. I teach war craft but I don't advocate violence.

I have a number of students, sempai, masters and grandmasters who align themselves after me and swear by what I teach. All of them aren't my private students and most of them didn't get their initial training from me but they are still my students. In my belief the martial arts is like an iceberg. What you see, the techniques and training principles, are but the tip of that iceberg. Most of the iceberg exists out of sight beneath the surface.

In a sense all martial arts are basically the same though all aren't created equal. Martial art systems consist of either striking or grappling or various combinations of the two. There are only so many realistic ways to defend against and attack another human being. The various philosophies of how these techniques are used make up the various martial art systems. In the end any realistically trained martial artist will be similarly outfitted.

When a well-trained martial artist comes under my tutelage I don't try to discard his foundation and rebuild him. He should already be efficient in what he does. I may do a bit of fine tuning to bring him to what I consider an acceptable level but I don't try to recreate the wheel. If they aren't competent martial artists I'll consign their training to one of my students or send them back to their instructor. If I find his level complimentary to his rank I'll on occasion take him on as a student. Some of these individuals live across the nation or even in different countries. The rare or occasional face to face contact that I have with them doesn't qualify me to be their actual instructor even though I sometime guide the direction of their training by offering new ideas and concepts or different directions in their training. These people are my students though my relationship with them has little to do with gyms, dojos, dojangs or kwoons. These are my students of the heart. Aside for the afore mentioned verbal instruction and advice my relationship with them is more philosophical and spiritual. They grow under the guidance that I can offer as an older and supposedly wiser individual.

In the rarified world of the martial art master and grandmaster the difference between the two is often only time in grade and growth in the spiritual arena. If a grandmaster pours knowledge into an established master he will offer more than technique and training. If the said student has reached

master level he has that already. As the 'Head of Family' in the IFAA Black Dragon Fighting Society I don't have a lot to do with giving of rank. That's primarily handled by the masters and grandmasters of the individual systems or by the 'Grandmasters Council' of the organization. In the Black Lotus Martial Arts Association however I do have that authority. Because the BLMAA is primarily a Christian organization I look upon rank differently. Below godan (5TH degree black belt) rank is given like in any other system. Master rank however is awarded differently. I figure by godan a master has the knowledge and ability that he'll carry throughout the remainder of his martial art career. Beyond that I am looking beyond the physical aspects of the arts. Along with time in grade I am looking at moral and spiritual growth. For the average sensei the arts is more about mentoring and creating better human beings than turning out trained killers. That ability and focus is what I strive to instill into my senior students. I've turned out my quota of trained killers. I'm more concerned with training those who will be molders of men and mentors to those who come under their tutelage. These are the students of my heart.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# *THE DEADLIEST MAN ALIVE*

## *(GETTING OVER OURSELVES)*

Personally I think that I'm one of the deadliest men on the planet. My Natural ability, my conditioning, my physical prowess and my superior training puts me in contention for this coveted title. Not!!!

Okay, since I'm not in the running who is the deadliest man in the world? Back in the day it used to be Count Dante, or so he told the world. Of course that self imposed title was a marketing tool. So who fills this slot today? Several names come to mind. Kelly McCann is one. Mark 'The Animal' Young is another. And then there's Danny Inosanto, Larry Tatum, Paul Vunac and several other individuals that I can name. Please don't be offended if your name isn't included. Those named was for illustration purposes.

Who cares about someone's physical prowess? The question only comes to play if you plan to contend with them one on one. That only happens in muggings and barroom brawls. No-one does that any more. Everyone who knows me knows that I'm a martial artist and in a physical confrontation I'll probably knock their hat around backwards or twist off their head. No-one's going to engage me in hand to hand combat which is good because I'm of the same mind set. I don't believe in fighting. I believe in resolving physical confrontations. Fighting involves two people going heads up. That means that both has a chance of winning. I don't do that. I'm going to set the stage so I know I'm going to win. That doesn't involve allowing you a fair chance. This

isn't high school football we're talking here. This is life and death combat. I grew up in the inner city of Chicago. What we used to call the ghetto. Issues are resolved by drive by's, surprise attacks and gang attacks. If someone is stupid enough to stick a gun in my face I'll take it from him and pistol whip him. If I don't shoot him. I don't worry about that. I worry about the sniper or the back stabber. The ones who stack the deck in their favor.

Back in the day I'd destroy anyone who threatened me. I don't deal well with threats. I may be able to deal with it when you launch your future attack or I may not. That depends on what you do and how you do it. I know I can deal with you here and now.

So back to the question. Who is the deadliest man alive? If we want to be honest it's probably the President of the United States. Not because all of the reasons (stupid in my opinion) that my conservative brothers give but because he heads the most powerful nation in the world and he has his finger on the button.

What I'm trying to say is this; we need to get over ourselves. Who's real, who's fake? What systems are authentic which ones are so much B.S. Who's tougher than who (my kung fu is stronger than your kung fu. Humph, my teacher is greater than yours. I'll beat you with two strikes). Let's be realistic here. Most of us aren't ready to deal with a trained soldier. Many of us wouldn't survive two days in a federal or state prison and most of us aren't ready to face a seasoned street fighter. I've worked in prisons and on psych wards that housed the 'criminally insane'. I've seen what the inmates and patients are capable of and believe me my brother, you aren't ready to deal with that. A sane man will hesitate before he'll cut your throat. That's the only advantage that the sociopath needs.



Most of us aren't as dangerous as we think we are. In my lifetime I've known of several really good martial artists that were cut down in the streets. None of them died in a one on one street fight. They were just taken out in the most effective and economical way possible.

We do all of this in fighting and posturing. It is my understanding that the empty wagon makes the most noise. Those that brag, threaten and belittle others do so because of their own insecurities. Who cares if you underwrite my theories or believe in my system? I'm known and supported by my peers; those that believe in me. If you don't fall in that category, oh well. That's your loss, not mine. Just understand this. Unless you've grown up the way that I have; unless you've had to survive in the worse streets of a major city; unless you've had to be involved with real military combat, you aren't ready to deal with me or anyone like me. If I felt threatened by you I'll deal with the situation but you can rest assured that it won't be in one on one combat. I'm not trying to prove who's the better man; I'm resolving a conflict and solving a problem in the most convenient way possible. Does that put me in contention for the aforementioned title? I think not. I'm not dangerous. I'll never attack you or do you harm. Not unless my life and personal safety or the well being of a loved one hangs in the balance. I'm not a sociopath.

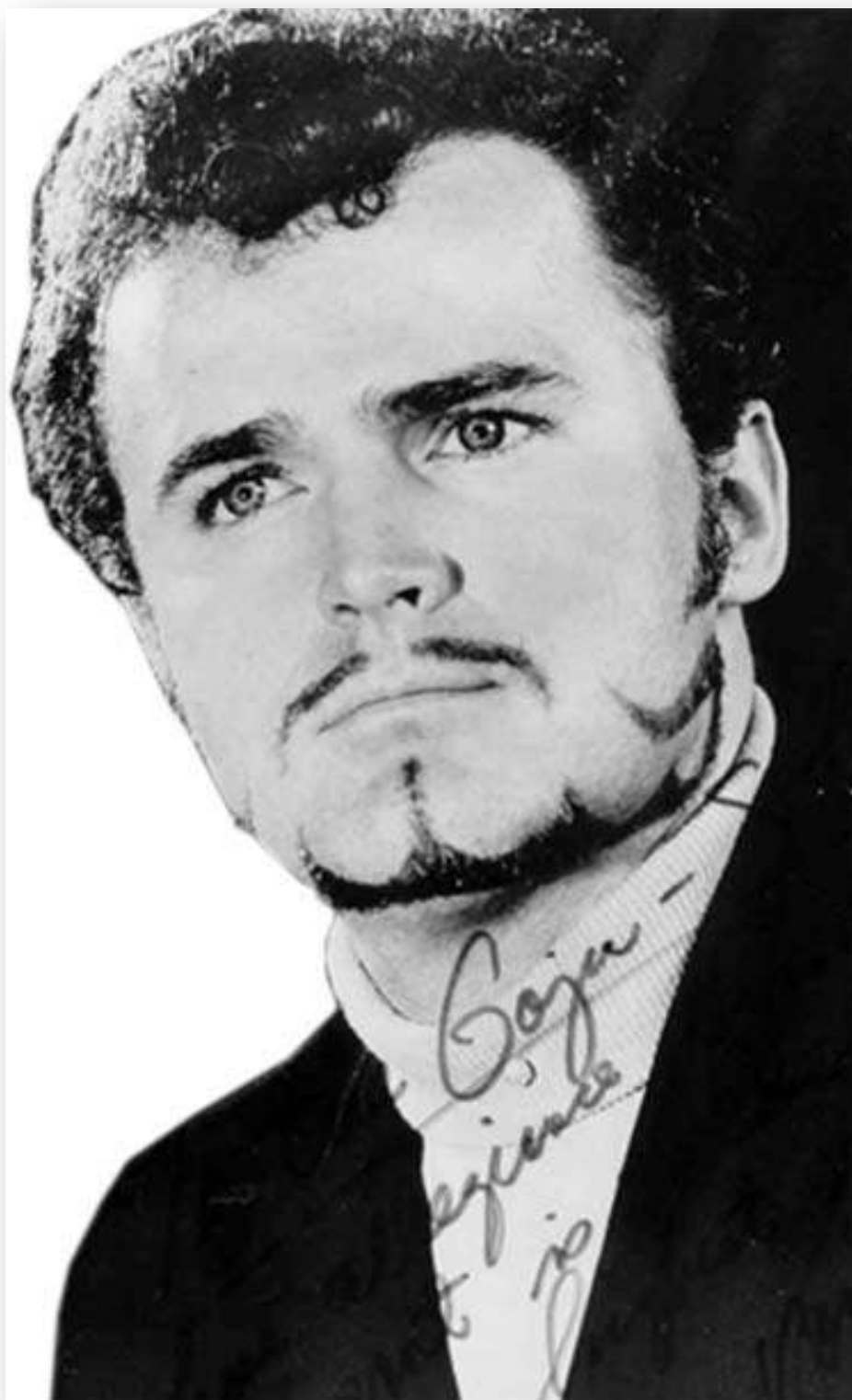
My brothers, instead of trying to destroy each other's reputation and question their credibility we should be trying to support each other. We're family by way of a common interest. We belong to the same fraternity. None of us has a monopoly on physical prowess. None of us has the perfect infallible system. In the end, the man makes the system, the system doesn't make the man. Your system being founded by so-in-so or headed by whoever doesn't make you a better fighter. So in the martial art community who is top dog?

Who's the best fighter? Who's the toughest? Who cares? Hopefully we're too mature to act like a couple of grammar school kids. "My daddy can beat your daddy." Grow up. Ain't none of us more dangerous than any of the rest of us (ghetto speak). All of us are brothers under the skin. let's get over ourselves and be the best martial artists that we can be collectively and individually.

By the way, my daddy can whup yo daddy.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**Count Juan Raphael Dante**

## *THE LITTLE THINGS*

True martial arts are a study in precision. Every stance, every move, every technique have been carefully thought out. Martial arts were developed over years, not in weeks or months. A lot of observation, a lot of thought, a lot of trial and error have gone into the final distillation.

There's a difference between a martial art and a combat or self defense system. A combat or combat system is developed for those with immediate needs or who are in high risk professions. A lot of time isn't available for learning a usable system to address their needs. They are simple and must be easily learned in a short time. A martial art is more concise and much more advanced. It will take years to learn and many more to perfect.

Most martial art subtleties are catalogued and sometimes hidden in their forms or what we call kata in the Okinawan/Japanese systems. The kata were created in such a way that they required careful learning, training and much repetition to acquire the skill and learn the lessons that they teach. They are designed to make a technician train and study. It was the only way to access their deeper meanings. Most of the secrets of the art is hidden in its forms and it requires years of study and training to learn those secrets.

On the surface most kata are relatively simple. The average green belt student can learn the basic moves of most forms but it takes many years of patient training and exploration to extrapolate the deeper lessons they teach. In a traditional or classic art such as karate or kempo the kata is the art.

These days a student will learn many kata but that isn't the way that it was done in years past. A student would learn a kata or a school of kata in the lifetime of his art. Take the pinian or hein kata for instance. The series of five kata is an entire fighting system. The same with the bassai and tekki forms. Each series is a fighting system within itself. A martial artist will perfect only a handful of kata in a lifetime. Many of karate's greatest warriors knew only one or two.

I often quote Master Gichen Funakosi. When asked what is the kata for the beginner he quickly stated taikioka. When asked what was the kata for the master, he thought for a minute and replied, taikioka. Think about it.

When one sees the symbol for karate one sees a fist in the seiken zuki position. The bread and butter techniques of karate are the oi zuki (lunge punch) and the gyaku zuki (the reverse punch). There are many other techniques in karate but those two are the true power techniques in karate. That isn't to say that I would want to be struck with the infamous karate chop or be the recipient of a karate side kick but the karate punch, especially the reverse punch, is probably karate's most devastating technique.

The things that make a technique efficient or that keeps it from working is in the details; the small things. Sometime the way a foot is turned (as in the toeing in of the front foot in zen kutsu dachi) or a slight variation of angle of application can mean the difference between the success or failure of an applied technique.

Distance learning has become popular of late. While studying for my masters and both of my doctorates I took most of my courses on line. I feel that I'm too old to be sitting for hours in a classroom, especially with students who

are young enough to be my grandchildren. Most colleges and universities offer distance learning courses online or however they are done. That same trend is becoming more prevalent in the martial arts. Many schools and organizations offer video training.

I have nothing against martial art DVDs. I have over five hundred myself and I'm working on a series of such myself. They make an excellent reference to the various arts available and insight into their techniques and methodology. I do have mixed feelings about students who make that their only form of training. It's not unlike the students from years past that studied solely from books. There have been the occasional student that fared well from this type of training and that became exceptional practitioners but I believe that they are the exception rather than the rule.

Distance learning is better than none at all. In areas where schools or instructors aren't available they may offer the only alternative. However one must keep in mind that a DVD, tape or book doesn't take the place of a good instructor. They offer good reinforcement to what an instructor is teaching but for the most part they make a poor substitute for hands on training. They offer general information but they don't correct those little things of which we've spoken. An instructor can reposition a hand or correct a stance. He can address the little things that sabotage the effectiveness of an art's techniques.

I won't discourage a student from purchasing DVDs and using them to supplement his training. If the logistics make training in a dojo impractical or impossible, again I say that that kind of training is better than no training at all. Half of anything is better than all of nothing. Still, I admonish those long distance students to seek the input of a good instructor at some juncture in their training, preferably early in their efforts. Bad habits are easy to learn and

are often difficult to unlearn. Effective martial art training requires fine tuning and distant learning make that difficult if not impossible. Keep in mind, like the bible states, "It's the small foxes that destroy the vines". Those small things must be addressed if one if to become a competent martial artist.

Train however you can but avail yourself of the best alternative available. And remember to concentrate on the little things that make up the perfecting of the martial artist and his chosen art.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

## *THE MOMENT OF CONTACT*

Perhaps because I suffered with a learning disability in the formative years of my education, I have an insatiable hunger for knowledge. I had a very difficult time learning to read. I suffered from what is now diagnosed as dyslexia. Learning experts knew what it was in those days but it wasn't diagnosed or treated in inner city schools.

There were no learning programs for what was considered the slow student in those days. They were tucked away in classrooms with the hyperactive kids, those with behavioral problems and the ones with no impulse control, until they were old enough to be quietly ushered out of the educational system. Somehow I was able to stay out of those classes but I was essentially left pretty much on my own in the class room. The turning point in my life was the one teacher who took enough of an interest to encourage me to keep trying. Long story made short; I learned to unscramble the letters and numbers in my head and learned to read and do math. Because of that I became a voracious reader and researcher.

My past experience has taught me several things. One is that no student is hopeless. Another is that some may learn differently but all can learn. Lastly, people learn at different paces and in different ways. Physical and psychological differences makes it impossible for us to do everything the same way. Another lesson learned is that one key person can change the direction of



a student's life. If a teacher has the patience and determination to work with the difficult challenge no student will be a failure.

While working at Chicago State University I met a student who had been in a terrible accident on the night of his prom. His prom date was killed and he was left in a coma and wasn't expected to live. He did recover but he was left with severe physical limitations. He was able to walk but essentially had the complete use of only one leg and one arm. He was a wonderful example of the indomitable human spirit but people thought I was crazy when I accepted him as a student. Most of his was private training and though he sometime became discouraged he never gave up. He was never able to do what some other students could do but in my heart and mind he was one of my best students. With only the use of one arm and limited mobility he still became a credible martial artist. He would never be able to compete in tournaments and he wasn't the original 'Five Fingers of Death' but he was a true martial artist.

The martial arts are many things to many people, and serves various purposes in the lives of its practitioners. There are as many reasons for studying as there are those who study. Whatever the reason for studying, whatever the level of ability of the student and however long he pursues his goals all of his ability comes down to that one micro second of contact. We call this point kime or total focus. It is what the true martial artist strives so hard to perfect.

To those of us who study the martial arts as a means of self defense, we train for that one instance; that one moment when our ability is called into service. We are taught to avoid that confrontation but when it becomes unavoidable success or failure and sometimes life and death boil down to that one critical moment; that one point of contact. Unlike in martial arts movies,

fights don't last for ten or fifteen minutes. What happens occurs in a blitz of quick violence. The average street fighter isn't in the kind of condition to go ten rounds and neither is the average martial artists. That life and death struggle that we all hope to avoid is encapsulated in a brief moment in time.

When violence happens it happens quickly. The average assailant isn't going to give you fair warning and in the heat of the confrontation you won't have time to prepare. When faced with an escalating threat of violence we will try to diffuse or deescalate the situation. Failing that we should try our best to remove ourselves from the threat. When all this fails we can either become proactive or preemptive in our approach or we can prepare to defend and counterattack against the expected attack. Either way in these instances we have opportunity to prepare and time to react. Unfortunately the most dangerous attacks don't happen like that. More often than not the attacker will stack the deck to his advantage and violence will be sudden and unexpected.

The professional fighter understands that fights aren't won in the ring. They are won in the gym. It may culminate on the night of the fight but the win, if the win comes, was many weeks in the making. The real fact is that it was put in motion from the first time the fighter stepped into the gym. It is the same in a real combative or self defense scenario. You will fight the way you train.

As I have fore stated, I am a big reader and researcher. Knowing 'how' has never been enough for me. I want to know 'why'. In teaching we show a student how. Over time he will grasp the 'how' to a greater or lesser degree. I have found that if I teach the student why as well as how he will better be able to internalize the technique in question.

In my reading and research of the martial arts I have come across several publications that have greatly illuminated the 'why' in my inquiring mind. One was 'Dynamic Karate', by Master Masatoshi Nakayama, who was the head of the JKA (Shotokan Karate) organization. It confirmed in a nutshell what I had gradually discovered over several years of study. It gave me a deeper understanding of the inner working of the power in karate. The second book I have just read. It is, "The Physics of Karate Do", by So Shihan Felton Messina. Shihan Messina is an engineer and has a good grasp of Physics. He applies this knowledge to the science of power in the martial arts. He also addresses several of the small mistakes that even some seasoned martial artists make which cause their techniques to be less than effective. As often as not the thing that renders a karate technique ineffectual is as small as the improper positioning of the heel. A small thing but far from inconsequential. It is these small issues that make a technique effective or ineffective. I recommend both of these books highly. The one by Master Nakayama is a large format book and may be out of print but if you can get your hands on a copy it is well worth having. The one by Master Messina is available on Amazon.com for under twenty dollars.

Coming up in the martial arts I was never that big on tournaments. I had to fight in some to attain rank but I realized that some of the same people I lost to in tournaments I would destroy in the streets.

Some years ago while only a sandan (3<sup>RD</sup> black) in karate I taught at and managed a martial arts dojo. We had instructors who taught Judo and Aikido and we had an instructor who primarily taught kata and sparring techniques. He was ranked in the top ten in the nation at the time. My function in the

school was to manage its everyday operation and to teach the self defense courses that several students had sole interest in.

The young man who was our kumite instructor and local champ would often try to convince me to become more active on the tournament circuit. He explained that because I didn't do much fighting that I would lose in a real confrontation. He was convinced that he could easily beat me in a real fight. I took his teasing good naturedly and went about the business of running the school. Growing up in the neighborhoods that I grew up in and having served in combat in the military, I took a different view of what tournaments had become. I was more interested in what was effective in combat than what proved successful in tournaments.

The school was in the shopping district of an upper middle class neighborhood. Violence wasn't much of a problem there. For the most part, it was a pretty quiet neighborhood. The kumite instructor and most of our students were drawn from this neighborhood. Most of the students in the school were more interested in exercise and competition than self defense. Especially the younger ones.

A mile or two from the neighborhood where the school was located was a large federal housing complex, one of the tougher of the 'projects' in the city. The people from there came to that neighborhood to shop and to attend the movie theatre down the street from the school. One night after the other students had left this particular instructor, his girl friend (also a student) and I were still in the school. I had to stay late because we had been collecting the student's dues for the last couple of days and I was doing the books. Usually, I would have been the last person left in the school but the young instructor had been showing his girl friend some new techniques after class.

I had the blinds drawn over the plate glass window in the office when I hear a commotion in the street out front. Looking through the bamboo slats I saw the instructor in a verbal altercation with several young men. I recognized that they were from the projects down the way and I correctly guessed that things were going to get ugly. I made my way out of the office and through the dojo in time to take in what was happening. The confrontation had quickly gone from verbal to physical. I got there in time to see, what I was to learn was the third mawashi ushiro geri (rear spinning heel kick) thrown by the young instructor. I watched as the intended victim leaned away from the attack, grabbed his attacker by the back and top of his karate gi and rabbit punch him to the back of the head. By the time I was able to pull the attacker off he was sitting astride the young instructor rocking his head with looping round house punches. I'm not going to glorify my handling of the situation or the three young men that had confronted the instructor. This illustration isn't about me or my physical prowess. Just know that the situation was dealt with and the young men sent on their way without any serious injury. The young instructor was hurt but his pride had suffered more than anything else.

Talking to him and his lady friend and from the little bit that I had witnessed I was able to piece together what happened. The young instructor had escorted the young lady outside and was waiting with her for her ride to arrive. While they were waiting three young men passed by and one of them said something untoward to the young lady and made derisive remarks to the instructor in his 'karate pajamas'. One thing led to another and the fight ensued. Fortunately only one of the young men fought him while the others egged their friend on. The karateka responded to an attack with a rear spinning heel kick knocking the attacker from his feet. Uninjured he got back up and tried another attack with the same result. The rear spinning heel kick was the

young karate instructor's bread and butter technique and had won him numerous tournaments. He could pretty much land it at will. I personally saw the last kick and quickly saw why it wasn't effective. In tournaments, since any extra distance was an advantage and heavy contact wasn't allowed many of the fighters made adjustments of the striking surfaces of their kicks. With the rear spinning heel kick the flat of the foot was often extended to give a few extra inches of reach and to lessen the impact. The result was a slap with the sole of the foot instead of a focused blow with the heel of the foot. The result spoke for itself.

The assailant and his friends were routed with little more than their feelings hurt and the girl's ride came. The young instructor, chastened and embarrassed refused to discuss the incident. I tried to tell him that things like that happened and since he wasn't badly injured he could use it as a learning experience. He shook his head and without remarking on my encouragement changed cloths, put his equipment in his locker and left. I never saw him again. He didn't come back to school and as far as I know he left the tournament circuit.

That was a rather long story to illustrate a small point. A fight is won or lost according to preexisting experience and training. First of all you specialize in what you train for. If you train for point fighting with little or no contact allowed you'd be foolish to think that it will prepare you to fight in a full contact tournament. Secondly, while forms teach and improve technique they don't teach distance, timing and the broken rhythm that is necessary in a real fight. They also don't prepare you to take punishment. In a real fight punishment and sometimes injury are likely, even with the best technique. If you are fighting a skilled knife fighter and you get cut, you can't afford the

luxury of curling up and allowing what will happen to happen. I guarantee that it would get you seriously injured and probably killed.

In the streets violence isn't theoretical or hypothetical. It is real. If you ever finding yourself having to fight for your life you have only your present skill to see you through. That isn't the place to learn to fight. It's a lesson that you very well might not survive to. The streets aren't the place to learn new techniques or put together new strategies.

Some of us have learned from instructors who have actual fighting experience and street savvy. Believe me, they probably had previous street knowledge. They didn't enter the dojo as virgins to the streets. Hopefully, their careers in the martial arts have mellowed any residual hostility, leaving them with their martial arts skill and a realistic view of what works in the streets. Learning from them and those who have studied the martial arts as a jitsu, or actual fighting system, rather than (or as well as) a 'do' may be better able to teach a student to survive in the streets. It's a lot less traumatic (and less dangerous) to learn these skills from someone else who has been there and is able to pass on this knowledge than to learn it first hand.

There is nothing wrong with studying the martial arts as a form of competition or as a means of physical improvement and exercise. It's fine to study for self discovery and discipline. The martial arts serve all of these functions admirably. While pursuing these treasures that the martial arts offer we still need to train to develop the fighting skills that these same arts were designed to teach. There is no such thing as a non martial martial art. An art though it may be, the martial in the phrase implies an art with combative implications. Without that you aren't studying a martial art. You might as well do tai chi (as opposed to tai chi chaun) which is strictly an exercise.

In the end, any martial art's effectiveness boils down to the moment of contact. Karate originally was a two hit system. You hit the opponent, the opponent hit the ground. It amounts to that moment in time when that instance of contact occurs, but in reality it is more than that. It is the technique and the determined attitude that you have trained to instill into such an instant. It is the skill perfected in hours of training in the dojo. It is the body dynamics that uses the tried and true physics of properly performed technique that's applied in an attack or counter attack. It is the kime or total focus that puts all of our effort into that brief contact. And lastly, it is the coming together of the body and the spirit that culminates into the totally focused commitment in that moment of contact.

A person witnessing the confrontation from the side lines will see only that one devastating technique that levels your opponent. They won't see the hours of training or the years of experience that preceded it. They won't see the tenacity, the determination and the fighting spirit that you have developed through your dedicated training. They won't see the physics, the body dynamics, the focus and the killer instinct (harsh words but necessary in a real fight) that culminated in that one finishing technique. All they'll see is that moment frozen in time and that brief but devastating point of contact. This is martial arts. This is karatedo.

My friend, this reality is what we train to avoid but it is what we prepare for. For that one point of contact.

Train hard my brethren and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



## THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

This is going to be a brief article. I have a sermon to prepare for tomorrow's service at my church and I should be working on that. I also need to be putting together the syllabus for an academic class that I'll be helping teach at one of the local universities here. Those are going to have to wait for a bit. I just have to get this out of my system first.

I had occasion to speak with my Sensei this week, something that I should probably do more often than I do. Douglas (Doug) Dwyer is one of the toughest men alive in my estimation. I have had the good fortune to study with some really great karate instructors in my long martial art career. If I chose to drop names many of you would be suitably impressed but in my opinion Doug is amongst the best of the best.

Doug came up in the 'Deadliest man alive' era of Count Dante (AKA John Keehan). John was one of the driving forces of the USKA and later founded the old World Karate Federation (along with Doug) and the Black Dragon Fighting Society, the later which exists to this day. Doug and John were best friends and studied karate with Charles Grazanski and Robert Trias. Prior to that both had backgrounds in boxing and judo. They were close friends and peers, not instructor and student. Their journey in the martial arts was started together

and they brought shorei goju karate and the USKA to the Midwest which would be its largest area of influence in the U.S.

I began studying with Doug in 1964 after having studied judo/jiu jitsu and shotokan karate. I had a pretty solid foundation in the arts but studying with Doug was light years ahead of anything I had experienced. If my prior studies represented grammar school and middle school then Doug's school would be high school and college.

I have since studied extensively with other instructors and martial art masters including John Keehan but none outstripped Doug. His knowledge, technique and teaching ability was amongst the best I've ever experienced. I am considered a martial art master by my peers and a grandmaster by some others but I am still trying to approximate the skill of my sensei, Doug Dwyer.

I was talking to one of my seniors recently and Doug's name came up. We both concluded that Doug isn't human. I don't believe he ever was. Not doing the things that he could do. I recall watching Doug destroy two roman bricks with a kukete (spear hand strike). I was his uke and often held the bricks while he demonstrated this impossible feat. Doug could break a stack of ten bricks without spacer and reduce them to gravel or he could use kime (focus) and break an individual brick in the stack. I've watched him punch his way through two two by fours like they were dry sticks. I was a pretty decent breaker in my heyday but I have yet to duplicate some of the feats that he did routinely.

I was a street tough kid in a rough neighborhood of an unforgiving city. I studied the martial arts more for survival than for any esoteric reason. I wasn't interested in competing or in demonstrations. They say that necessity is the

mother of invention and where I grew up fighting prowess was a necessity not a nicety. It was about survival and not art. When I sought a martial discipline and an instructor I needed someone and something based in reality. Doug and the art he taught furnished me with the tools I needed to survive. His teaching saw me through the danger of the ghettos of Chicago and the jungles of Southeast Asia. In circumstances that destroyed more than a few young me I not only survived; I thrived.

I'm in pretty decent shape considering several debilitating injuries and illnesses, several pretty radical orthopedic surgeries and the effects of time and age. I still teach and train within the limitations that time has placed on me. I have enough metal in my body to foster panic in airports and I pursue my training through pain and discomfort but I still do the only thing I know how to do. I train. At a time when most of my peers have suffered many health challenges and are challenged by arthritis and injury Doug still trains like a demon. While the rest of us are struggling through our work outs with the appropriate moans and groans Doug is head butting his way through brick buildings. I'm sixty-five years old and Doug is considerably older than me so you go figure. Again, the only conclusion I can come to is that the man isn't human. Whatever planet he migrated from they made men a lot tougher than they do here. Where ever he hailed from he is one of a kind and he's the only man I'll ever call sensei. I don't mind sharing him with the rest of you buzzards as long as you keep in mind he's MY sensei.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

## *THE POWER OF MEDIOCRITY*

I'm sure that anyone reading this will probably think that the title is a misprint or a misuse of the English language. No misprint there and while I'm known to stray into Ebonics on the rare occasion this time I'm on point. In this article I want to talk about the common place or the mediocre. As hard as we may strive to perfect our various arts most of us fall into the area of the mundane. There are a few superstars amongst us but most of us, myself included, fall outside of that rarified category.

All of us who have thought or even studied the martial arts have come across that rare gifted individual who is endowed with bucket loads of natural ability. You know him. The one who never has to study and hardly cracks a book and still keeps a 4.0 GPA. The one who the sensei shows the technique to one time and automatically does it better than the sensei. We won't dwell on our serious dislike of those individuals but we will look at the advantage of being an average or even below average student.

Being average doesn't mean that we can't accomplish great things. It only means that we will have to work our rearmost extremities off to accomplish our objectives. What comes natural to that occasional martial art prodigy will be accomplished for us in the sweat of our brows. Some of us have to work harder to accomplish the same thing but that doesn't mean that those accomplishments are beyond our grasps. We'll just have to strive harder and

reach higher. Okay, with that being said, how does that translate into an advantage?

I'm glad you ask. Your query gives me excuse and opportunity to pontificate. There is an advantage to be had in the ordinary. Those of us who were klutzes tripping over our own feet and have against all odds become martial art teachers and masters illustrate the point that I'm trying to make. With patience, persistence, determination and old fashioned stubbornness the extraordinary can be accomplished by the ordinary; the ordinary being most of us. Most of us aren't Bruce Lees, Count Dantes' or Frank Dux'. Those low life lilly livered miscreants didn't have to work their tushes off to become martial art masters. That was relegated to us ordinary individuals. But even with the challenges that most of us face in the process of attaining knowledge and ability some of us have managed just that.

As much as I would like to be one of those individuals endowed with superior reaction time, extreme eye hand coordination, extraordinary reflexes, superhuman strength and eye blazing speed I fall into the area of the ordinary. I was just a barely average student. Here I am, fifty seven years into my martial art career and still trying to get the hang of the intricacies that make the mundane magnificent. I haven't gotten there yet but I'm still striving. I'm too stubborn and too dumb to take no for an answer even when no makes more sense. I am, like so many of us, like the bumble bee that is too stupid to know that physics precludes their ability to fly. Fortunately bumble bees don't understand physics.

I grew up in a deprived part of the city of Chicago. Just a few miles away was the Hyde Park neighborhood where the University of Chicago makes its home. When I was a kid Hyde Park meant money. The junior high school that I

attended was located in Hyde Park. Consequently I came in contact with more privileged children. They had the things I wish I had. The things that I dreamt about were just handed to them. I had to work for everything I had. I have a learning disability so school was a challenge to me. I had to study twice as hard to accomplish what some other students took for granted. I learned how to study because nothing came natural to me. On second thought, that isn't true. Some things did come natural to me. Unfortunately those weren't the type of things that would make me successful in life. In the end I attended one of the highest rated schools in Chicago and I managed to earn several graduate and a couple of post grad degrees. Learning to face my challenges in life propelled me further in life than the natural abilities that some of my friends were gifted with. Even a plodder will reach the finish line if he keeps on toiling toward his goal. I'm living proof. Not having much taught me to appreciate the little that I did have. I learned not to take anything for granted. I found out that nothing would be handed to me on the proverbial silver platter. My disadvantage became my greatest asset.

In my teaching career I've come across the occasional gifted student. They didn't have to work as hard as the other students. What was a struggle to the rest of the class came easy for them. They got it right the first time so they disdained the constant repetition. That was for the ordinary student. Guess what happened to those students. They could perform any given technique on demand but somehow their knowledge and natural ability didn't translate to the streets. Knowledge isn't always ability and ability doesn't always translate into muscle memory. Knowledge is cerebral but combat is governed by the primitive brain. You can't reason your way through a fight. It's a known fact that if you have to think about it it won't work for you. It may reside in your intellectual brain but combat isn't intellectual. It breaks down to basic training

and muscle memory. The techniques that you repeated ten thousand times; so many times that you could do them in your sleep, are the ones that will see you through in a pinch.

To the one who did the technique ten times to your ten thousand the techniques that may save his life will elude him when it's most needed. Many times in teaching we feel that we need to require more of the mediocre student than of the one with natural ability. In all actuality the opposite holds true. We have to keep in mind that it is our job to enable every student to become proficient where their abilities really matter.

We can't be lured into complacency with that class superstar. We have to demand the same of him as of the other students. He too needs the consistent training and constant repetition to translate his knowledge into a usable self defense tool. In its pure state a martial art isn't a sport. It isn't for competition. It isn't designed to impress your friends and neighbors. It's about self defense and combat. You may or may not be proficient in those other areas but if it fails you as a fighting system it has failed you completely. Your beautiful form and flashy techniques won't impress an attacker. The command of your art as a mode of combat will. Losing a match or a kata competition won't cost you your life. Losing a fight just might.

In conclusion I would like to say that it is seldom that the natural student will stay with you long enough to be really proficient. People tend to get bored with things that don't offer a challenge or that come too easy. Likewise we don't appreciate something that we don't have to sacrifice or work for. The harder earned a thing is the more it's valued. More often than not the plain ordinary student will stay and go the course. So we see that there is an advantage in mediocrity. We will often be faced with the challenge of the

mediocre student but we can work with that. That same student with those same challenges was probably you a number of years ago. In the end persistence will mean more than natural ability. That same fact holds true for the natural student.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**G.M. Peter Lee, a long time friend and associate. The founder of Kenseiryu International and Thunder Bolt Kenpo and the V.P. of my Black Lotus Martial Art Association.**



## *THE REINVENTION OF SELF*

In this journey there are many roads that we walk at different junctures of our lives. If nothing else, we learn that in this life, nothing stays the same.

Our study of the martial arts should be a journey of self discovery and personal improvement. Martial science and warfare is nothing new to us. We are involved in spiritual warfare everyday of our lives. We may never have to fight for our lives against a flesh and blood opponent, but we train to prepare ourselves for that possible eventuality. As Christian martial artists, our purpose should not be to learn to fight for the sake of fighting, but to enable us to face our real enemies, ourselves and the adversary. My spiritual brethren out there know who I refer to as the adversary. I refer to Satan, the enemy of God and man. We will discuss that area of spiritual warfare at another time. What I want to talk about now is facing the challenge of self.

Our walk with God and our Christian careers should be our primary purpose, but to us dedicated martial artists, our training is an additional way of life. It teaches us many lessons about ourselves and those that we interact with daily. We learn patience, persistence, determination, tenacity, balance, control and self-discipline amongst many other lessons, through studying the martial arts. Our confidence in our own abilities tends to center us and give us a sense of calm. Since we aren't as threatened by the world around us, we can go through life without constantly looking over our shoulders. Fear compromises

our ability to go about our lives with equanimity. Our faith in God's protection and our knowledge of our martial arts abilities gives us a sense of protection and well being.

The lessons that we learn through our training should permeate every area of our natural life. We don't feel that we have anything to prove if confronted, and we can walk away from a threatening person without feeling reduced or minimized by refusing to be drawn into a fight. Knowing how frail the human body is and how easy it is to hurt, seriously injure or kill another human being gives us a deep respect for human life. We understand that it is easy to take a life, but it may not always be easy to spare a life if threatened. We can take a life, but we can't create a life. For this reason, we honor and cherish every living thing.

I grew up in harsh surroundings. The need to survive and my feeling of vulnerability made me violent and quick to fight. I would try to hurt anyone that I considered a threat before they could hurt me. I became an affective and accomplished street fighter at a young age. I was vicious as well as violent and in a fight, I went right for the eyes, groin or kneecaps. Because I feared reprisal, I fought to maim and seriously injure, if not to kill. I became accomplished with a knife or a strait edged razor before I was twelve. When I started studying the martial arts it wasn't to learn to fight. I already did that better than most of the other boys I came in contact with. When I began to train in the arts, I did figure that it would make me a better street fighter, but the more I trained, the less I wanted to fight. With that realization, I started on a road of self discovery that continues to this day.

Studying the martial arts makes you see things differently. If you truly immerse yourself in the arts, you will go through life as you do the colored belt

ranks in the arts. Every lesson will enable you to grow and move up through the belts of life's learning experience. The world becomes the dojo and every experience adds to your training.

I have learned through the martial arts that, as I advance in rank, I am constantly recreating myself. I find that life is the same way. It is a constant learning experience that catalyzes constant growth and advancement. Life serves up many changes and challenges, some of them painful and even traumatic. I remember the trauma of being thrown to the mat for the first time or the pain of a broken digit from an improper technique. All served as street signs that directed me to the next level in my training.

In training, I have seen an often recurring situation that plagues a lot of the Kyu (colored belt) ranked students. In trying to reach that coveted Shodan (1ST Dan) they overlook the lessons of their own rank. To them the black belt is the be all, end all. They are so infatuated with the idea of attaining black belt level that they don't concentrate on the rank that they have. They glitz over the techniques of that rank, skimming along the surface of each rank instead of becoming immersed in it. They don't realize that they are building a flimsy foundation for their black belt and do just enough to make it to the next rank. When and if ever they do reach black belt, they will not be good ones. They'll find out that rank in the dan ranks don't come as easily as in the Kyu ranks. They will never make it beyond Shodan, and the Nidan ( 2nd Dan) will always be just out of their reach. If they are in a strict martial art school, they will learn that the difference between Shodan and Nidan is as great as the difference between the white belt and the black belt. They were never a good yellow belt, or green belt or brown belt. The kyu ranks weren't important to them.

Consequently, they will never be effective black belts unless they go back and relearn their kyohan (basics) over again.

Life is much like that. It is a journey of many avenues. Life leads us to many unexpected places, but regardless how inconsequential each experience seems, we will be required to learn from it before we can really move on and advance. Many lessons in life, we will do over and over again until we get them right. There are some lessons in life that you can't get around.

I have recently had an experience that redefined many areas of my life. It definitely redefined my outlook and my approach to the martial arts. I received a severe back injury, not in training but on my job. I worked in mental health and my occupation put me in contact with many psych patients. I have worked the gamut, from the mentally challenged to the criminally insane. I often found myself having to contend with combative patients many of whom were psychotic. The reputed strength of a combative, psychotic person isn't just a cliché. You only have to deal with one of them, hands on, to see how difficult it can be. They will try to hurt or injure you, but you aren't allowed to hurt them. It is necessary that they be handled humanely because of their illness. You can't take their aggression personally and you can't answer violence with violence.

I wasn't hurt by contending with a combative patient, however. I was hurt by catching a large male patient (approximately 300#) that had passed out. He risked serious injury because of the way he fell. I wasn't working with the patient' but I saw him begin to fall out of the corner of my eye. I had to clear the distance that separated us to catch him. When I caught him, I caught him off center and off balance. He wasn't hurt, but my back was badly injured. The accident resulted in several subsequent surgeries. Two of the surgeries

were to fuse the vertebrae in my lower and middle back. I have very little flexibility in my spine because of this. Another result of the two back surgery resulted in some impairment of my right hand. Part of that hand is weak and completely numb.

I was left in a depressed state because of the limitations that these injuries imposed on me. It affected almost every part of my life. I'm still walking with a cane, and I had to relearn how to do some vary simple tasks. Because of the injuries, I can no longer work in my profession. My mental health career was my second profession in sixty years, and I am left unable to work at either of them. On top of that, my martial art career came to a screeching halt. I felt that that was enough to be depressed about.

I have suffered from clinical depression for much of my life. Along with depression I've suffered from PTSD from my career in the military during the Viet Nam conflict. In faith, I had stopped taking the medication that the doctors prescribed to me, some time ago. Because of past experiences with addiction, I'm shy about taking medication. God delivered me from addiction, but I realize that there are things that I have to do to walk in that deliverance. When I was recuperating from the different surgeries, I was prescribed several extremely addictive pain killers. I took them for a few days after getting home but stopped taking them against medical advice. I felt that it was better to deal with the pain than to flirt with a new addiction. Working psych, I have dealt with any number of patients who became addicted under a doctor's care. So, now here I was again, threatened with severe depression. I have learned in my Christian walk that there is no coincidence or happenstance in God's universe, especially in the lives of his people. The Christians inopportunity is God's opportunity. These situations teach us to "stand still and see that he is God".

Romans 8:28 tells us that “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose”. In doing the work that God has put before me and furthering my education, I have been able to deal with the onslaught of depression without the debilitating affects of psychotropic medication. What many would consider a bad situation, God managed to use to redefine my life. I went back to school and managed to earn two graduate degrees. I have begun to build a new ministry and I have begun to work as an evangelist until God gives me new direction in my ministry.

I was told that I would have to give up the martial arts. Also, I was told that I could no longer indulge in strength training. I have been an avid weight lifter since my early teens and losing these two activities would prove a major loss. I went along with the doctors for over a year, and watched my physical conditioning dwindle by the day. I finally came to the conclusion that enough was enough. I have begun to train again, both in the martial arts and with weights. I obviously can't do what I used to do, but I've set out on a road of rediscovery. I have in effect begun to reinvent myself. I have had to learn how to do things differently. A few years ago, I could do flying kicks. High kicks were no problems. I thrived on them. Now I can just barely kick waist high. As a blind man learns to compensate with his loss of sight with his other senses, I learned to use weapons and techniques that I had never chose to perfect before. I walk with a cane, not the kind with a hook but a stright cane with a knob on the end. What a martial artist might call a hanbo. Needless to say, I have become quite proficient with it as a martial arts weapon. I have begun to put more emphasis on the Aikijitsu and Jiu jitsu techniques that I have learned over the years. I have begun to use more kenpo and kung fu techniques instead of the hard karate punches that challenged my new physical limitations. As in the other

areas of my life I have had to innovate. In all it has been a new journey of self discovery.

In my martial arts, I might not be able to compete in the master's tournament and jiyu kumite (free style sparring) might be a thing of the past, but that okay. I had begun to teach and train more for self defense than for sport, anyway. Not that I was ever that big on competing. I've always considered myself the eternal student but through this experience I have regained the thrill of learning a new art, except now, life is my teacher. While once, I was thrilled with the objective of reaching my destination, now I am thrilled with the journey. In many areas of my life, I am being blessed to redefine myself. There are few thrills greater than the thrill of renewing and reinventing yourself. We don't have to wait until a trauma or some tragedy requires us to make changes in our lives. We can choose to change and go in a new direction. After all, that's what we did when we accepted Christ into our lives.

I'm just assuming that anyone who reads this is already a Christian, since this is directed to Christian martial artists. If you haven't made that commitment in your life, I invite you to make a change. Give your life to the savior. I guarantee you'll never find a better opportunity to reinvent yourself.

God bless you, my martial arts brethren. Train hard, and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

## *TRAINING IN THE NOJO*

No, my friends, that wasn't a typo. It isn't a misspelling, though as many of you know I'm notorious for those, despite years of advanced education. If they gave belt levels in spelling I would never get past yellow belt. Thank God for spell check. Along with my questionable spelling ability, I can't type. Not properly. I'm probably the fastest two finger typist in the Continental United States. I used to blame it on my wide hands and thick fingers. That and the narrow computer keyboards. I did fine on manual typewriters. But, as I am often want to do, I digress (old folk are pronged to ramble). Training in the nojo.

Have you ever had one of those experiences that make you aware of your age? Several years ago, I happened to be in one of those mega department stores. I was living in Waukegan, Illinois at the time. The store was in the town of Zion, Illinois, one town over. I ran into a young man in his mid to early twenties. He asked me if I remembered him. Obviously, he was young. Any experienced person knows that you don't ask that kind of question of anyone over fifty, and I was well over fifty at the time. I didn't even pretend that I knew him. He smiled and refreshed my memory.

It turned out that he knew me from one of the neighborhoods where I had spent a good portion of my adult life. It turned out that I had taught his father when he was a teen. I had a school at the time and I taught at the YMCA a couple of days a week. As a way of mentoring some of the kids in the neighborhood I taught a karate class in the park on Saturday mornings. His



father had been one of my students in those open air classes. When he had grown to adulthood and had children he brought them to one of my schools for me to train. This young man had been my student for a year or two. I've taught more children than I can count over the years. Most I taught without charge. I remembered some of them but I had forgotten him. He asked me if I had a school in the area. At the time I was working and teaching classes at Chicago State University fifty miles from Waukegan. I had him bring his daughters to my house and I taught them basic self defense in my back yard. I actually managed to teach three generations of that family, all of them at under eighteen. That's when I realized I was getting old.

In my many years of teaching the martial arts, I have taught some of everywhere. I taught for the YMCA, in community centers, church gyms, Chicago Park District field houses, a couple of colleges and universities and in formal dojo. Of the places I have taught and trained in, my favorite place was in the nojo. No, that isn't a proper word. It's a play on words that implies training outside of the dojo. I've taught as many or more students in parks, back yards, garages and in whatever space was large enough to throw a kick or perform a throw in than in gyms and dojo . On any number of occasions my wife has threatened my life for teaching impromptu classes in the dining room or having her living room smell like a men's locker room.

I have owned a number of schools and at one time I owned several. I've also taught at schools owned by other sensei. All that was nice but the best classes I ever taught and my own best training were conducted in the nojo.

I grew up in the inner city; Chicago's tough South Side. That's a politically correct way of saying I grew up in the ghetto. Even after my father was able to move us out of those rough neighborhoods, I frequented the back alleys and

side streets of the city. I was a street tough kid. I didn't need martial arts for self defense. I was one of the problems that made martial arts necessary. I was one of the toughest kids in a rough neighborhood. Actually, my father, an ex marine, put me in a martial arts school to curb my aggression. I was prone to fight for very little reason. I was gang related real early. Most of the guys in the hood were.

When I started taking karate, none of the other students wanted to train with me. I was accustomed to fighting. As far as I was concerned karate was fighting and that's how I approached it. Because of the reluctance of the other students to train with me I became my sensei's uke. An excellent position for hands on tutoring but a painful way to learn a martial art. Despite being a good fighter, I wasn't necessarily a good karateka. I drove my sensei to distraction with my back alley approach to the arts. In order to move up in rank with the other students, I had to come to the school early and I was often there when my sensei locked the doors. I also had to spend a lot of time practicing at home. That meant in the park, the alley behind the apartment building or in the basement if the janitor left it unlocked. I got an old army duffel bag and filled it with old cloths. That was my heavy bag. I wrapped a two by four with hemp rope and surgical tape and made a makiwara. I bought, borrowed or stole every martial art book I could get my hands on. Most were old army manuals, since the martial arts weren't popular at that time and there weren't many books available. Later, when eight millimeter films were available, I got hold of an old projector and acquired whatever martial arts training film I could find. I continue that trend till this day. I own an extensive martial arts library and my collection of martial arts DVDs numbers way into the hundreds.

I found out that I worked out better alone or with whatever poor unsuspecting kid I could finagle into working out with me. I taught the little I knew to other kids in the neighborhood to have people to work out with outside the dojo. Like me, these students were ghetto snipes and shared the same do or die attitude to anything combative. I practiced kata in the dojo but because hard contact wasn't allowed, I practiced my sparring in whatever available space me and my raged band of students were using for an impromptu gym. I wasn't anywhere near instructor level but the students I taught were good at our violent style of sparring that we indulged in. We literally beat the crap out of each other. Without the restraint taught in the dojo these guys became the terror of the neighborhood.

I fought in a few tournaments but I didn't care for them. They weren't realistic enough for my liking and more often than not, I would get disqualified. Everyone could box in my neighborhood, even the girls. I boxed CYO and for the Chicago Park District for a couple of years. I was a good boxer, but boxing matches, like tournaments, had too many rules. I continued my own training methods and me and the guys I worked out with formed a renegade type of street kumite system that we called 'Back Alley Ryu'. By this time, I was training with the infamous Count Dante (John Keehan). He was considered by the conservative martial arts community to be the bane of the martial arts world. I had found my niche. The training in the schools of his organization was grueling and brutal. I loved it but it still wasn't the same as training in the streets. I learned what I know of focus, form and function in the dojo but I learned to fight in the streets; in the nojo.

When I was in the service I had an opportunity to see some of the full contact fights in Thailand, Taiwan and in the Philippines. I tried my hand at a

few of them and got my can trashed. I earned my black belt in Kuntao and kempo when I was in the service. Neither was popular in the States when I got out of the service, and while the organization I belonged to grudgingly recognized my rank they never really accepted it. Besides I was growing in a different direction. I trained in other arts and went back to earn black belts in the jiu jitsu that I had studied in the early days of my martial arts career. During that time I fought in a few of the illegal pit fights that were cropping up in various places. Money was made from small purses and from side bets. The fights were brutal but the fighters weren't well trained and while more realistic they weren't very challenging. I pursued more my training in the backyard and garage dojo some of the returning GI's were opening.

All of that was a long time ago. I've trained in quite a few martial art systems in my years in the arts. Some I've received advanced rank in. I've moved away from Chicago and have been in Tucson for the past five years. In that time I have returned to my first love. Training in the nojo. The weather here is conducive to outdoor training if you can deal with the heat. I have a large backyard with a concrete patio. I've been conducting my classes outside in the years since I've been here. It gets hot but it's a wonderful way to train. I'm purchasing a new house and I'm converting a huge garage into a martial arts dojo. It's large enough to hold all of my training and weight lifting equipment with room enough to train ten or fifteen students. This will be my new dojo.

In my years of teaching I have turned out some good students. Some were trained in the dojo and gyms that I taught in, but in my opinion, the best of them came up in my backyard schools. Many classical martial artists have criticized me for my love of informal training but some of the greatest masters

in history trained that way. The beautifully equipped gyms and dojo that we take for granted are a modern creation. Originally karate and jujitsu was taught in whatever space was available. The dojo was wherever the sensei happened to be teaching. Master Mas Oyama trained in the woods and in the mountains of Japan. It was there that Kyokushinkai Karate was born. In the Philippines Kali, Arnis and Escrima were generally taught in backyards or open fields. Pentjak Silat and Kuntao were basically taught out in the open. In this modern age, we have built beautiful and sometimes luxurious dojo, dojangs and kwoons but maybe we've lost something in the process. Teaching combative arts in luxurious surroundings may just take something out of the arts that we teach. I wonder if in those beautiful schools with their showers and sauna and nice locker rooms we haven't lost the true essence of the combative arts. When I was in boot camp the surroundings were anything but luxurious. Luxury wasn't conducive to our training.

I'm not suggesting that we close the doors of our schools and start teaching classes in the woods but maybe we should take a different approach to the arts. When I began in the arts the work outs were almost sadistic. Our sensei(s) and teachers did things to us that would get them sued today. Bloody noses, black eyes and split lips were expected and broken fingers and toes weren't unusual. We beat on makiwara pads until our hands bled and our sensei were anything but gentle. I'm accused of being a tough teacher and many students wouldn't put up with my type of training. I wouldn't go back to the training methods from back in the day but I do believe that martial training should be just that; martial and combative in flavor.

Looking back, I still believe that I've become the martial artist that I am because of the way I trained. I wouldn't want my students to grow up in the

type of neighborhoods that I did and I certainly wouldn't want them to test their martial arts skill in hand to hand combat in some jungle or another. Many of us did though, and while I must admit that that's a dangerous way to come by realistic fighting skill it'll certainly slap you into reality. To many martial artists, their fighting skill is theoretical. They believe that what they've learned will work in a pinch. To those who have been there there is no theory involved. Those who have had to face a knife wielding assailant or wrestle a fire arm from a determined attacker probably know what works and what doesn't. The very fact that they are still in the land of the living says something about their martial abilities.

I am neither the consummate instructor or martial artist but I do know how to fight. I've been both shot and stabbed so my efforts weren't always successful but I managed to live through those experiences and learn from them. I'm not trying to present myself as super sensei. I have the rank but there are better practitioners and probably better instructors. What I am saying is this; you fight the way you train. If you don't train hard you won't fight hard. Fighting has to be based on skill and conditioning but it also has to be based on experience and know how. If not your own, then from the person you train with. You can't learn jungle warfare in a country club. By the same token you won't learn alley fighting in a nice disciplined karate class. Learning to fight requires blood sweat and tears. Well, blood and sweat, anyway. Hopefully they will help you avoid the tears. At least in a real conflict. Cry in the class so that someone won't end up crying over you in a funeral chapel.

Okay, I'm through pontificating. I'm climbing down from my soap box. Let me say this before I finish this rambling attempt at an essay. If you want to become capable as a martial artist, you have to challenge yourself beyond the

comfort of the dojo. You have to train in different terrain. You have to take yourself out of your comfort zone. You'll find that some of your most beneficial training will happen when you're alone, away from your usual surroundings. Keep in mind that an attack won't happen when expected or in a convenient place. If you expect the absolute worse case scenario you won't be disappointed. You may have to defend yourself in a rocky alley, in a confined space or on ice or snow. Don't confine yourself to the comfort of the gym. You can pretty much rest assured that you won't be attacked there. Wherever you are when attacked is the nojo. Not a good experience but if you survive it you'll learn from it. In all truth, the only way to really learn to fight is to fight. Should you find your training thrust into one of those nojo situations leave the rules in the gym and please, no bowing before the conflict. There are no rules in the nojo. That type of thing may not be what you want to supplement your training but should you find yourself in such a situation just consider it a (life and death) part of your training. This is where the hours of grueling training is put to the test. This is real life kumite in the nojo.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and train honestly. You never know when your training will go from the dojo to the nojo.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# *TRANSPARENCY IN THE MARTIAL ARTS*

Recently something was brought to my attention that concerns me. The claims of several very recognizable martial artists are being put to question. Apparently several have been something less than forthcoming in their history. Actually such oversights, exaggerations and downright dishonesty aren't that unusual in the martial art world. Several controversial individuals are being questioned and a few actually dragged over the coals because of claims they have made or because of questionable qualifications. In some instances that is a shame in that some of those in question are very credible and on a few occasions are excellent martial artists. The credibility I speak of isn't in the level of technical skill that these individuals have displayed. They are good technicians but their backgrounds are a little shaky.

Transparency in the martial arts is the ideal but translucency and sometime opaqueness is more common. By the way this isn't limited just to those who are on the outskirts of the martial arts. Many who are pretty much accepted in most martial art circles and are well thought of by the martial art community couldn't stand to be put under a microscope.

Let's be honest with ourselves. Most people have a tendency to exaggerate and embellish a little bit when presenting themselves. Some of the greats in martial art history came with some less than sterling creds. If I cared to traumatize some of the more naïve members of the community I could state



the questionable credentials of a several founders of what are now considered traditional arts. It would serve no purpose to name names or examine these instances in as much as the arts that they founded have proven to be quite efficient.

I'm not a cynic but I have a tendency to take everything with a grain of salt. There are many individuals today that wear the titles of masters or grandmasters myself included. I have enough sense to realize that I can't go into the dojo of some master in Okinawa or Japan and expect them to kowtow when I announce my rank. The rank I wear is recognized by my peers and the several organizations I am affiliated with. Very few of the masters in these new arts would be recognized outside of the confines of the U.S.

There are a number of unique American martial arts that have cropped up over the last several decades. Though these arts may claim oriental roots most are strictly American arts that address American needs. All aren't created equal but some are quite creditable. They serve the purposes of those who create and those that practice them. They require little else to recommend them. They don't need some dark mysterious past or esoteric roots to be viable. They only need to be viable.

Unfortunately many of the creators and practitioners of these arts feel that they have to exaggerate their backgrounds and their accomplishments to validate themselves or the arts that they teach or study. I tend to evaluate a martial artist according to his ability not his background or history. As long as his skill level is what it should be and his art is sound I don't worry too much about where he acquired his knowledge. Too often you have to wade through a mile of B.S. to get an inch of truth. I find that path too dark to tread when it's too easy to just evaluate the person according to his ability.

Transparency is always the best case scenario but I've come to expect much of the translucency that describes the average martial artist. I take fantastic claims in stride and look past them to see the person instead. A lot of egotism is tied into the claims of so many martial artists. Many have put their whole lives into their arts, some to the exclusion of all else. Many have all of their eggs in that one basket. The martial arts is the one accomplishment that they can claim. Because of that many present themselves as bigger than life. Even so, some with shaky pasts have grown into really fantastic martial artists, all outlandish claims to the contrary.

I haven't won any major tournaments. I'm not nor have I ever been that turned on by competition. I learned martial arts for survival. The only claim I can make is that I've been involved in the martial arts for most of my life. Most of my fighting has been in the streets or in the military. I'm probably not the best martial artist in the world but I'm fairly knowledgeable and I can hold my own in a nasty situation. I've survived the ghettos and inner city streets of Chicago and have lived through actual combat but I'm Bruce Lee. I don't claim to be nor should I have to. My survival is what describes the effectiveness of what I teach. I've trained with some really good people and I've done more than my share of self training. I don't feel that I've mastered anything. After well over half a century I'm still a student. Still I stand on what I know and what I have learned. I pass that on to those who believe in what I do. I need no other claims. I'm above board and I'm good at what I do. If anything, that's my claim to fame. I don't feel I have to be anything more than that. Nor should you.

My brothers let's just be ourselves. No apologies made nor undue explanations given. In the true martial arts you only need to prove yourself to two people; yourself and the opponent that you may have to face. You don't

have to be more than what you are. You don't have to be a secret student of Ed Parker, William Chow or Bruce Lee. You just have to be good at what you're doing. Be transparent and let your knowledge and your ability speak for you. In the end your skill will speak for itself. To the best of our ability let's be as transparent as possible. In the end that will always serve you best.

Train hard my brethren and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**At the 2012 IFAA BDFS Conf.**

# UNARMED AGAINST A BLADE

People study the martial arts for any number of reasons. The type of art you study probably reflects that reason. If you are sports oriented, you probably aren't studying aikido or krav maga. While all martial arts serve a purpose all aren't created equal. Some lend themselves better to self defense than others. Some are better for self discovery while others are better for competition. My emphasis in my study is combat, self defense and personal security. I had my martial arts foundations developed in a very combative system, more by coincidence than personal intent. That influence and the fact that I grew up in a violence ridden part of a very rough city shaped my philosophy concerning the martial arts. Having become a Christian and a pastor further shaped my thoughts involving self defense and personal protection

I grew up fighting and I was good at it. In the neighborhood I grew up in violence was a fact of life. No one questioned it. Every person dealt with it as best they could. I was gang related for a good portion of my life. Back in the day guns weren't the weapon of choice on the streets. They weren't as easy to come by for kids back then. We were more prone to make zip guns than to have a manufactured fire arm. Knives and other concealable weapons were preferred to guns. They were more readily available and they were more easily concealed.

Being black in the inner city of Chicago meant you could be stopped and searched at any time. More often than not knives were confiscated. You might get your butt whipped for carrying one but it usually wouldn't land you in jail. Consequently everyone on the streets carried some type of bladed weapon. There were exceptions. Some guys carried brass knuckles, a sap (blackjack) or some other such weapon but knives were more common.

In my neighborhood you had to be able to do two things. You had to be able to throw hands (box) and you had to be able to use a knife. Lacking in either skill got you hurt or killed in the streets.

I began studying the martial arts formally at age twelve. I also boxed for the Chicago Park District. When I started jiu jitsu and later karate classes I went in knocking more advanced students on their rear ends. I was street tough and I knew how to fight. The only reason I was there was because my father enrolled me to curb my aggression level. The one thing I wanted to garner from those classes was to be able to disarm a person with a knife.

I like to keep current with the trends in the martial arts. I like some of the reality fighting arts. I'm somewhat more dubious about Brazilian Jujitsu and especially MMA. By the way, MMA is nothing new. I did that when it was illegal and we fought for small purses and side bets. Of course the competition wasn't as good but those really were no holds barred. The only rule was you couldn't use a weapon. Other than that there were no rules. You fought until someone was incapacitated or rendered unconscious. There was no tapping out. You fought until one of the fighters couldn't continue. As I think back on it I see how foolish that type of thing was. At the time I was young and thought I was invincible and I needed the money. The fights were brutal, bloody free for all. Unfortunately, much of the MMA I've seen is too similar. Too often it seems to

be brutality simply for the sake of brutality. By the way, that kind of thing would get you killed on the streets.

More often than not the average assailant will either be armed or he'll have friends for backup. If you think that you're going to stand toe to toe and trade blows with a street thug you'll very probably be sorely disappointed. Thugs don't fight fair. If they didn't think they had a distinct advantage chances are they wouldn't be confronting you.

In a lot of the disclaimers accompanying reality training a student is warned that his chances aren't good against a person with a knife. If the person is trained or skilled with his weapon that's probably true. I have yet to find the trained martial artist that can take a weapon from me. So what does that mean? We obviously can't curl up and die in the face of a knife attack. The best defense against a knife is foot techniques. Use those size twelves to get out of Dodge. Fighting should always be our last resort anyway. You fight only if you're left with no choice. That's especially true if your opponent is armed. Don't fool yourself. An armed person is always more dangerous than an unarmed person even if that unarmed person is trained. Still, if you have no choice and there's no way to make a quick exit your only alternative is to defend yourself. It isn't the best case scenario but when it's all you're left with you have to deal with the issue.

This isn't a set of techniques against a knife wielding attacker. Hopefully, if you're reading this you have some training to cover such a situation. Technique alone won't help you win in such a situation. Whatever skill you have has to be coupled with courage and a willingness to do whatever it is you have to do. Unless you are a police officer or work in some such similar vocation forget knife disarms. Disarms are designed to deal with a lethal

situation with as little harm to the assailant as possible. Life and death combat doesn't include compassion for your opponent. When faced with an armed assailant your purpose has to be to destroy or totally disable your opponent. Anything less than that is going to get you seriously hurt or killed.

I have taught self defense and anti rape classes over the years. In many of those classes I have had women walk out because the techniques were too brutal. Combat isn't ballet. Combat is brutal by nature. If you aren't ready to try to kill or seriously injure an armed assailant you've lose before the fight starts. Believe me, if he is trying to attack you with a knife, your safety and well being is not one of his primary concerns. His intent is to hurt, seriously injure or kill you. Anything less than total commitment on your part will help him in his efforts.

Is it possible to face an armed assailant and come away unscathed? Unlikely if he knows what he's doing but it is possible to defend yourself and discourage or even defeat such an attacker. Forget the odds against you. You aren't playing the odds. You're trying to survive. If you've trained realistically for something like this, you already have the tools. You have to be willing to use them brutally and viciously. You can't win a fight by being defensive. You have to defend yourself but at some point you're going to have to go on the attack. You'll have to find a way to initiate an attack or counterattack your opponent's attack. You can't keep evading and blocking his attacks forever. If you don't do something to discourage him or hurt him he'll keep trying until he finally connects. You have to fight back.

You're more dangerous with a weapon. Use whatever is available. Don't fight him empty handed if you don't have to. Use the element of surprise.

Throw something at him. Spit in his face. Startle him with a loud unexpected noise.

If you're forced to fight empty handed fight smart. Forget about pressure points. Most of them are too small to access on an armed and moving assailant. In that type of fight there are three areas of attack. If he can't see he can't fight. Attack his eyes. Compromise his vision. If he can't breathe he can't fight. Compromise his ability to breathe. If given the opportunity, attack the throat or the solar plexus. If he can't stand he can't fight. Attack his foundation. That includes his insteps, toes, ankles, knees and shins. Often these areas can be accessed with minimum risk to you. If you can get access to a joint or a limb go for bone breaks or joint destructions rather than attempting a disarm. His personal safety ceases to be your concern when he threatened you with a weapon. Until he is incapacitated or subdued err on the side of maximum damage.

Lastly, expect to be injured. If by some miracle you aren't, well and good but don't go in expecting to walk away unscathed. If you are cut or stabbed your life depends on your willingness to keep fighting. He isn't going to stop because you're hurt. You have to fight back if you hope to survive such an encounter.

In an encounter of this kind your survival depends on your willingness to not only defend yourself but to hurt, injure or kill your assailant. I'm both a Christian and a minister. I don't advocate unnecessary violence but you have a right to defend and preserve your life. It's your duty to protect you family and loved ones. There's no guarantee that you'll win such a conflict even if you fight with all of your skill and courage but I guarantee you that you won't live if you aren't willing to fight back. If you're willing to take a punch in the nose and turn



the other cheek that's your choice. You may take a beating but you have a good chance of surviving that type of attack but when that same opponent is armed, turning the other cheek isn't a viable option. If you choose such a course your death won't be just murder. It'll be suicide.

I've had the fortune or misfortune of being involved in several knife fights. I've also had occasion to face several such opponents unarmed. I've been both cut and stabbed and still managed to take down or get away from the assailant. On the other hand I have actually managed to defeat an armed opponent without being injured. Whether those instances were because of my high level of skill or my opponent's ineptitude is open to argument but I'm still here to tell the story. I have no illusions about my martial abilities. Surviving such an encounter has as much to do with God's grace and mercy as with my skill or my opponent's lack thereof. I would never willingly find myself in such a situation if given any choice. My solution for this is to go armed. Because of several surgeries I carry a cane (and I'm not afraid to use it) but I'd probably carry one even if I didn't need it.

I would advise you to train realistically to develop usable skills. I'd further advise you to develop your killer instinct and develop a level of fighting aggression. Forget about fancy or complex techniques. They probably won't work when you need them most. Keep your techniques strait forth and simple. If you have to defend yourself be willing to take it as far as you have to. Against an armed assailant you have to be willing to take it all the way if you have to. You aren't fighting for a medal or a trophy. You're fighting for your life. You have to fight like your very life depends on it. Forget about fighting fair. There's no such thing as a fair fight. If you're going to fight then fight. Don't half fight or kinda fight. Give it everything you've got with conviction and lethal intent.

There are no runner ups in a knife encounter. If you win, the prize is your life. If you lose... Well let me put it this way; I hope you're right with God.

In conclusion let me say this. The best fight is the one you can avoid. Next to that the second best is the one you win. Not managing either of those the third best fight is the one you survive. In the end that's what it's all about. If you don't survive the encounter you can't take it back to the drawing board. All I can say is if you must die in such a situation sell your life dearly. Death is always a possibility. The ancient samurai went into every battle expecting to die. If death proved to be inevitable he sought to die well.

Train hard and train realistically, my brethren. Go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**With G.M. Clinton Jacobs.**

With G.M. Clinton Jacobs

## *WEEDING OUT THE WEEDS*

Oh really? One man's weed is another man's cuisine. Take the lowly dandelion. Weed? Flower? Pest or foodstuff? Dandelions are used for food in some cultures. Dandelion greens are nourishing and rich in vitamin C. Wine is made of the flowers and textiles can be woven from the strands of the stalks. So taking that into consideration is a dandelion a weed? Is it worthless? You may not want it to take over your lawn but the lowly weed that is so despised has more value than you may realize. Just because you don't see it as acceptable doesn't mean that it has no value.

Wonder where I'm going with this? If you know me you probably have a pretty good idea. Hopefully this is the last time I'll have to do such an article. Not that I expect to change the minds of those whose minds are already made up but I hope that those amongst the ranks of the organizations I am a member and representative of will hear my argument.

The martial arts are too political. There is an imperialistic attitude that some of its factions hold. That same attitude divides the martial art community into factions of inclusion and exclusion. Too many individuals seem to feel that they are martial art aristocracy. Others feel that they are the guardians of the fold. They have and should have a voice amongst their constituency but their voice isn't universal. They may speak for some but they don't speak for

everyone. They don't nor should they have the final word in who is accepted and who is rejected.

There are too many levels of training and skill to put under one umbrella. I agree that there are those who exaggerate their backgrounds and accomplishments and even create a persona or alter ego to promote themselves. These individuals don't let their level of knowledge and expertise speak for them. Instead they fabricate a fantasy to fill in the blanks. This shouldn't be but to a greater or lesser degree this is too prevalent in the martial arts. Everyone wants to be bigger than life. The danger of this is that some individuals can get so entangled in the web they weave that they become lost in their own self created fantasies. In so doing some really good martial artists damage their own credibility. Actually some of the better known and accepted individuals in the arts wouldn't fare well if their experience was examined under a microscope. That being said how do we weed out the real martial artists from the fakes? Easier said than done.

In my estimation there are a lot of false claims but those who make them aren't particularly fake martial artists. Those who train in an art at whatever level they train at are to varying or lesser degrees martial artists. They may not be very good martial artists but they are martial artists nevertheless. It isn't their backgrounds that disqualify them but their level of skill.

In my organization I tend to look past all of the claims that a martial artist makes and look to his knowledge, skill and ability. If he claims to be an instructor or master I look more at his knowledge and the quality of what he teaches than his credentials. Credentials are cheap. They can be created on a computer, printed up by a printer or bought online. Even if an individual is recognized by some organization or another I still look to his skill set. That

describes a martial artist more accurately than his rank or inclusion in the ranks of some organization or another.

Knowledge can come from many places and be acquired in many different ways. Some people can train with some of the best teachers and still be inept. Others can learn from books or videos and be devastatingly effective in what they do. Lineage doesn't always translate into perfection.

In times past when a martial artist's skill could very well mean life or death their knowledge was jealously guarded. Teachers were very secretive of their knowledge sometimes even amongst their own students. That's why any training manuals were kept out of the hands of possible opposing factions and training was done away from the curious eye of any errant spectator.

I know of one judo sensei who acquired his initial black belt rank after training from a book on the martial art that he studied. No school was available in his area so the book he studied from was his only resource. With the knowledge acquired from the pages of that manual he tested for his black belt and became a legend and AAU champion. How many of us would call him a charlatan by today's standards? If you judge his rank according to how he acquired his knowledge and who he trained under he might be suspect but if you look at his skill you might have to reassess your opinion.

I tend to look at this argument from several positions. I see it as a martial artist, as a minister and as a psychologist. As a martial artist and the head of a couple of international organizations and a representative of several others I consider background but I weigh skill heavier in the balance. As a minister I call for honesty and transparency in the area of self promotion but I'm realistic about my expectations. As a psychologist or rather as a therapist I

look at the psychological implications of these many self created persona that are created for the public and the martial art community. Exclusion and none acceptance can create an exaggerated need to be accepted. Too often those who crave recognition and acceptance from the community they want to be a part of will go to extreme measures to garner acceptance.

Unfortunately this creates a problem in the martial arts. There are inept individuals creating ineffective systems and teaching them to an unsuspecting public. But again by the same token there are traditionally trained individuals that are as inept as their untrained counterparts. In the end if we are going to assess an instructor we should look at his knowledge and skill and look at the ability of his students. That will tell the story and offer an accurate assessment of the person in question.

All martial arts and all martial artists are not created equal. There are classical systems that aren't worth much as real combat systems but may offer other benefits. On the other hand there are some nontraditional systems that are extremely effective in combat. Either may fulfill the needs of an individual according to his personal needs and his reason for studying. If it serves the need of the practitioner and is efficient in what it is designed to do who am I to criticize it?

Please understand I'm not justifying dishonesty, exaggeration or false claims. That kind of thing is too common in the arts. What I am suggesting is that we reassess the way that we judge those individuals that exist on the fringes of the martial art community. Sometimes they are where they are not because of a lack of knowledge or ability but because of how they acquired their knowledge.

In conclusion I suggest that a teacher or a technician should be judged by his ability if he is judged at all. Likewise a system should be judged by its effectiveness. I believe that none traditional systems should be labeled as such as should eclectic approaches to the arts. Being nontraditional shouldn't disqualify a system or disqualify a proficient instructor or practitioner. To the nontraditional martial artist I encourage you to be realistic about who you are and be honest about how you came by your knowledge. Let your ability speak for itself. If you are sound in your martial skill you don't have to apologize for not traveling the traditional road. There is a place for you in the martial arts. You don't have to be anything other than what you are. Let your ability speak for you.

God bless you my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# *WHITE BELT KARATE FOR THE BLACK BELT FIGHTER*

There has always been a marked difference between karate do and karate jitsu. Actually at one time there was no karate do. There was only karate or as it was called in its earlier incarnation, tode. First and foremost karate was a tool. It was a fighting system; a tool for survival in an often hostile world. The idea of karate for competition or self improvement had yet to become popular or even be conceived of. Its techniques were designed to disable and even maim or kill. For this reason its techniques were simple and direct. All of the rather esoteric techniques that we see these days were nonexistent. If it didn't work in combat it wasn't practiced or taught.

In the late sixties Black Belt Magazine did an article on a trend that had become popular amongst young martial artists in Japan. Its techniques were similar to what some young people would call 'tricking' today. Its techniques were acrobatic and it required its practitioners to indulge in the most difficult and impractical techniques possible. Obviously it had no value as a combat system. It would impress the heck out of an opponent before he knocked your hat around backwards but it posed little threat to an assailant. Contrary to the once popular Saturday morning kung fu flicks summersaults, cart wheels and such were never meant for combat.

In combat simplicity is the key. Basics work. A good example of this combat reality is shotokan karate. Shotokan is a lean system based heavily on



basics. Three kicks, two punches and a hand full of strikes make up the major offensive arsenal of the system. Its bread and butter techniques consist of a gyaku zuki (reverse punch) and a mae geri (front kick). Despite the lack of complex and fancy techniques shotokan is the most popular and arguably one of the most practical systems practiced today. It's easy to learn but takes a lifetime to perfect.

Karate as its practiced today is inefficient as a fighting system. Perhaps we should get back to karate's combative roots. Seeing the art as what it was intended for will help to keep us honest. I have nothing against competition as long as it doesn't change the practical aspects of the art. When competition begins to shape the art you are no longer practicing a fighting system.

Let's break it down to basics. Techniques should be direct and to the point. Stances should be rooted. Use the closest weapon to the target. Hands for high targets. Kicks for low targets. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. The occasional mawashi geri (roundhouse kick) is okay but for the most part karate is a straight line system.

Bobbing and weaving and ducking and dodging are boxing techniques. Karate blocks not only injure and even occasionally destroy the offending limb it also allows a skilled practitioner to open his opponent's defense and position him for an attack. Tai sabaki (body positioning) serve the same purpose as boxing's bobbing and weaving. Bobbing and weaving tends to compromise the integrity of the karateka's stance. Karate for combat requires slightly higher stances than the groin dragging stances of some systems. Stances should be high enough to allow mobility and low enough to give a foundation for strong techniques.

Basically karate is a counter punching system. There is no first attack in true karate. Allowing your opponent to commit himself gives you an opportunity to take advantage of your opponent's body positioning. That approach is the essence of karate. Aerial techniques (flying kicks) were designed to deal with an opponent on horseback, not to kick a standing opponent. Rear kicks were designed to deal with an opponent attacking from the rear. No real fighter will intentionally turn his back on an opponent. In my way of thinking that puts rear spinning or turning techniques in question.

Hopping up and down isn't karate. No serious combatant will choose to fight on the ground. Ground techniques should be designed to allow you to get back to your feet as quickly as possible. A fighter is at a disadvantage on the ground. If we are going to practice real karate we have to be honest with ourselves. We have to be realistic and practical. Karate techniques shouldn't be changed or discarded to accommodate competition. Neither should they be changed to allow children to change. The practitioner should change to accommodate the system; the system shouldn't change to accommodate the student.

Again, basics are the rule of thumb. A front kick, a reverse punch, a knife hand strike, a rising block. Err on the side of simplicity. Sounds like white belt karate doesn't it? Don't let the simplicity fool you. In the end, less is more. Basics work. White belt karate perfected to black belt level is karate at its efficient best. Let's get back to real karate. Leave the esoteric stuff for the kids who practice tricking. They don't claim to be fighters.

Train hard my martial art brethren and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# *WILD WILD WEST (MARTIAL ARTS IN A GUN ORIENTED SOCIETY)*

What a time we live in. It's frightening and it's frustrating. It's frightening because you don't know what life threatening challenges you might face from one day to the next. It's frustrating because as individuals we can only do so much to deal with these challenges.

I live in Chicago. Actually I live in the burbs a little south of Chicago. Unfortunately the city influence doesn't recognize town lines. Much of my life and business is centered in the city. Many of the areas I find myself in are dangerous and have a history of violence. The young people in the city are calling Chicago Chiraq. Many of the students I have taught live in the city and are challenged with the threats that the city offers. It is my endeavor to give those students a sense of confidence and the tools to survive in the neighborhoods that they have to live in.

The combat some of us saw during the Viet Nam conflict wasn't as frightening. In the end you can come home from a war. Not so anymore. War is at our back door and the enemy is us. I made it out of the military and the danger of war in South East Asia. I came out with minimal damage. I've suffered more damage in and around the streets of Chicago than in any war I

was a part of. I've been shot in a racially motivated assault. I've been wounded several times and by various methods since I was released from the military. That in spite of my physical prowess. I'm an excellent pistol shot. I'm adept with most small arms and explosives. I'm considered a martial art master specializing in self defense, unarmed combat and personal security. I grew up in some of the toughest areas of a tough city and I was a terror as a street fighter. With all of that I don't feel especially safe or secure in the city that I call home.

When I was a kid being tough gave you some security in the neighborhood. If you could give good account of yourself and weren't a bully or unnecessarily combative you were respected and lived pretty much free from threat. That no longer is true. We've digressed to the code of the west. The gun is the primary tool of conflict resolution.

Many factions cry out for the right to bear arms. We aren't just talking about a handgun, rifle or shotgun for home or personal security. We're talking about fully automatic and assault weapons. Our solution for our nation's problems seem to be greater fire power. Many of us are actually arming ourselves in fear of a class, economic or race war. Others are arming themselves because of their fear, distrust and disapproval of their own government. We're afraid of terrorism from outside factions when we're as much in danger of domestic terrorism. How do we deal with this? Where do we draw the line?

Poverty, inequality and greed have always been a contributing factor to violence, especially in overcrowded urban areas. In the past those challenges were limited to certain areas and to certain social economic groups. That is no longer the case. Poverty has become an equal opportunity situation and violence is becoming as prevalent in the formally more affluent area as in some

of the nation's ghettos. Unexpected violence has threatened and on occasion destroyed our, schools, homes and work places. No-one and no place seem to be safe. The causes and motivation are difference but in all reality when facing an imminent threat the cause isn't an immediate concern.

There was a time when martial ability translated into a deterrent to physical violence. If you were a half way decent martial artist you were more than able to deal with the average day to day threats of the communities we lived in. Not so anymore. The most innocuous conflict or argument can result in extreme violence today. A perceived slight, an unintentional glance, road rage and any of a number of other minor altercations can become life threatening. Since these situations are more subject to be dealt with by a weapons assault than fisticuffs why should we continue to study the martial arts? On the surface it would seem to be a waste of time and effort. It seems that we are practicing hand to hand combat in a weapon oriented society.

As any dedicated martial artist knows the martial arts offer a lot more than just physical prowess. Realistic martial art training does put one in a better stead in the event of a threat that is up close and personal. Muggers, rapists, barroom brawlers and suchlike don't generally shoot at a victim from across the street. Their endeavors require them to be in your face. It's in those areas where martial art training is most effective. That's in the event of an actual threat or attack. Unfortunately aggressors often attack from a safe distance. In such an instance no amount of physical prowess or training in close quarter combat will do you any good. So what do the martial arts offer in such a case?

Actually if the situation has evolved to that extent even a trained martial artist is in serious trouble. In such an eventuality fleeing or evasion is the best

approach. In a realistic martial art it would be a good idea to understand the threat and limitations of the weapons that we may face. Learning to flee or evade such a situation effectively requires as much skill as physical combat. Those skills should be a part of any realistic martial art training.

Some of us who live in urban and even a more rural area have been challenged with roaches, centipedes and other such pests. Most of you will agree that it isn't always easy to send those little monsters to their next incarnation. Swatting or squashing them can be a challenge. They often exhibit an uncanny ability to evade our efforts. They have complex evasion patterns hardwired into their DNA. Evasion is their primary form of survival against wholesale smushing.

Fleeing a threat isn't cowardly. We should know when to flee and when to stand and fight. We should pick our battles and then stack the deck to maximize our chances of success and survival. Reason and not pride should determine our line of action. Misplaced pride can be fatal. You have better have a game plan. Strategy is as important as execution. By the way, those types of decisions shouldn't be considered when confronted with an eminent threat. Learning how to react to a threat require forethought and preplanning. It doesn't happen in the moment. Think and plan for such a situation before it happens. Like combat, if you have to think about it it won't work. These things need to be preplanned. You can't plan for every eventuality but you can learn how to react to various provocations.

Realistic martial art training should give you options and realistic levels of action. Fighting should never be a martial artist's only option. Fighting should be the last option. It should be a worse case scenario but when called on to fight we should go into total fight mode. You either fight or you don't fight. You

can't half fight. Combat requires total commitment. Being defensive in a deadly situation can and probably will get you hurt or killed.

With that being said, the confidence and sense of awareness that martial art training offers should give the martial artist the ability to avoid most threatening situations. A martial artist should have enough confidence and presence of mind to remove himself from a threat should he find himself unable to avoid it. When avoidance isn't possible walking away or fleeing the threat should be the next choice. If fleeing isn't possible practical conflict resolution, de-escalation and reason should come to sway. All of which has to be accomplished without a show of fear or weakness. Fear and weakness encourages the predator. Always deal from strength even when begging for peace. Training and enhanced ability will give a martial artist that sense of strength and confidence. Actually that sense of confidence will discourage many predators. Predators aren't looking for a difficult fight. They look for a soft target.

Let's face it, we can't catch bullets in our teeth or catch a samurai sword between our sweaty palms. What we can do is learn to avoid the people, places and things that expose us to danger. We can carry ourselves with the sense of confidence, balance and awareness that mark us as hard targets. We can have a plan and be prepared for the eventuality of personal threat or violence. We can learn conflict resolution and de-escalation in a potentially violent situation. And, of course, if all else fails we can fight like an enraged tiger. To a large extent a martial artist trains for the pure joy of training. It's an excellent form of physical exercise and a means of self discovery. It isn't the 'be all, end all' solution for every possible problem but it helps to equip us to deal with life on

life's own turns. And if push comes to shove and all else fails it gives us the tools to survive a heads up confrontation. Even in the 'wild wild west'.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*



**At the KKFA conference.**



# ZEN AND MAKIWARİ

## TRAINING

No, my Christian brothers, you'll find little Zen included here but it's a pretty nifty title, don't you think? It's no secret. I'm a big proponent of 'back in the day'. Things are changing so fast that today's innovations are obsolete the day after tomorrow. I'm amused by the commercials that have children telling slightly younger children how hard they had it back in the day. Pretty funny stuff but not so far from the truth. Not so much that these kids 'earned their bread in the sweat of their brow' but things are changing that fast.

As a kid I was burdened with listening to how hard my father had it as opposed to the easy road I got to trod. I'm still trying to figure how my father had to trudge to school barefooted in the snow (in Mississippi yet) uphill both ways. Okay, my Christian brothers. I have to repent behind that one. That may have been a slight exaggeration but I believe you get my drift.

Well, let me tell you 'youngons'. You don't know how good you have it. Back in the day karate classes easily ran for four hours or more. I usually worked my students until they could no longer function. That indicated when class ended. In the old World Karate federation under Doug Dwyer (my sensei) and John Keehan (aka Count Dante) we had a saying. 'Class wasn't over until there was blood on the floor'. Sounds crazy but too often that was the case. We literally trained until we dropped.

I look at how martial arts classes are taught today and how they were taught when I was a young kyu ranked student. Many of the instructors had honed their skills in the military. Marines and airmen did tours of duty in Okinawa and army and navy personnel did the same in Japan. When they came back to the States to teach they brought their military attitudes and methods with them. Actually it went back further than that. During World War II martial arts was taught for combat. That militaristic attitude influenced both the Eastern and Western arts. Martial arts classes took on the characteristics of boot camp. Today martial arts have become commercial and like any other business it caters to its customers. Consequently the needs and sensitivities of the customer too often determine the content and methodology of the classes taught. Work them too hard and you lose students.

Modern teaching methods have made the teaching of the arts more efficient and less painful but I wonder what has been lost with this trade off. The martial arts are, after all, about combat and if they aren't taught with the necessary intensity one has to wonder how realistic the end results are. Soldiers aren't pampered in basic training because they won't be pampered on the battle field. Hardship is part of war. You will receive no polite consideration on the field of battle. In the end how you train will determine how you fight.

I realize that the 'do' concept of the martial arts means that it isn't all about combat and physical confrontation. We're trying to build better human beings, not trained killers but in the end a martial art that isn't affective in combat isn't a martial art. It takes on more of the characteristics of American football, combative in nature but not in intent. Following too much of that approach will have us (like children) playing at combat.

When I was training we spent a lot of time in conditioning the weapons. We worked on the makiwari for hours, often until our hands were bleeding. We conditioned the hands and feet until they calloused and the bones thickened. Karateka sported large knuckles and calloused knife hands. Some of us even went so far as to shove our hands into buckets of sand, gravel and iron filings. That's crazy but we were fanatical about conditioning our hands. The toughening of the weapons was originally practiced because combatants often wore some kind of body armor and the hands had to be like stone to be effective against them. Also, because their opponents were often armed, a one hit kill had to be developed. When facing a trained samurai with a katana one hit was probably all an unarmed combatant got. It was an all or nothing proposition.

Please, don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating beating the hands into those types of weapons. That was thin. This is now. Many of us suffer arthritis today because of those practices but if we insist on hitting with the fist some conditioning is necessary. Believe me, for the most part, the head is harder than the hand. Hit someone on the tip of the chin to achieve that picture perfect knock out and you'll do your hand more damage than you will your opponent. I've been knocked unconscious and I've broken my hand. I got over the former quicker than the latter. Aside from a little brain damage (according to family and friends) I was little the worse for wear from the knock out but I still feel the effects of the numerous breaks to my hand. If we are going to use the fist as a primary weapon some conditioning will be necessary, otherwise we'll be developing techniques that we can't really use. There's a reason why boxers wrap their hands and wear gloves.

We have become more innovative in our teaching methods. We're actually able to accomplish more in (slightly) less time. We have shied away from many of the more brutal and less affective teaching methods but we don't want to 'throw the baby out with the bath water' as they used to say. Some of the training methods from 'back in the day' had merit and were tried and true. There is no easy way to learn a combative art. It's going to stress the human body and it's going to hurt. The adage, 'no pain no gain', definitely applies in the martial arts. This essay hasn't been only about hand conditioning though I use it to illustrate a point. Everything new isn't superior and everything old isn't obsolete. Some of the old methods are still around because they achieve a purpose. As we teach and train we should evaluate the methods and tools that we use to increase the ability of our students and ourselves. We have to develop a balance of effectiveness and safety. Learning to defend yourself and ruining your health in the process is counterproductive but learning techniques that your body can't accomplish safely is a waste of time. We have to be realistic and effective in our approach to combat. Everything doesn't have to be done the way it's always been done just for tradition's sake. Effectiveness in combat should always be the martial artist's first concern. There are other ways of doing things. A palm heel to the chin is as effective as an uppercut (if not more so) and offers less chance to injury to the hand for instance.

I believe that as instructors we have to understand, our arts, combat and what we teach well enough to balance the old with the new; tradition with modernism. Though we embrace much of their philosophy or like to think we do, we aren't samurai. Our needs and objectives are different. If we want to train in a traditional samurai art I can see no harm in it. It can be a great character builder while giving one a good physical and mental presence that it's

difficult to garner through modern sports. Still, in my opinion a combative art has to serve the needs of the people who practice it.

I was there' back in the day' but my predecessors were there 'way back in the day, walking to school barefoot in the snow. Both ways. I'm still trying to learn what they know.

Train hard and train realistically, my brethren and go with God.

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*





*Train hard and train realistically, my brethren  
and go with God.*

*Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel*

# RESUME

## Dr. Donald Miskel

### EXPERIENCE:

1957-1958

Studied Judo at Washington Park Fieldhouse, Chicago Park Dist.  
Boxed CYO and at Chicago Park District

10/59 -6/62

Studied Judo/Jui Jitsu under Master Mas Tamura. Achieved 2<sup>nd</sup> degree brown belt in Kano Jiu Jitsu.

Studied Shotokan Karate under Master Shojiro Sugiyama.

8/62 – 2/66 & 9/72 – 5/73

Studied Shorei Goju Karate under Sensei Douglas Dwyer.

Attained 1<sup>st</sup> Degree black Belt (WKF)

Wrestled on High school wrestling team

6/68 – 10/70

Studied Chinese Kenpo Karate (Chaun Fa), V-Jitsu and Kuntao under Mr. Benjamin Appalado.  
Attained 2<sup>nd</sup> degree black belt.

1/74 – 7/76

Studied Dante Ryu BDFS (system) and Shorei Goju Karate under Master John Keehan

Promoted to 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree black belt.

2/74 – 6/76

Studied Hakka Ryu Jui Jitsu and Daita Ryu Aiki Jitsu under Master Charles Gruzanski.

Attained 2<sup>nd</sup> degree black belt.

4/76 – 6/77

Studied Northern Shaolin Tai Praying Mantis Kung Fu under Master George Hu.

2/77 – 6/78

Studied Aikido under Sensei Robert Hackett and Sensei Gilbert James

Studied Aiki Jiu Jitsu and Hakka Ryu Jiu Jitsu under Sensei Freeman Fox Attained 4<sup>th</sup> degree black belt

11/77 – 10/78

Studied Tibetan Lama Kung Fu (White Crane) and Lo Han Pua Fa Kung Fu under Master James Choi.

2/78 – 4/82

Studied Shorei Goju Karate under Sensei Douglas Hayle.

Promoted to 5<sup>th</sup> Degree black belt.

Promoted to 5<sup>TH</sup> Degree Black Belt, Aiki jiu jitsu

1/85 – 7/87

Studied Modified Pua Kua and Hsing i Kung Fu at Kenwood Martial Arts Association. (Hu's Kuo So)

Studied Tai Mantis Kung Fu under Master George Hu (Hu's Kuo So)

Promoted to 6<sup>TH</sup> Degree Black Belt, Aiki Jiu Jitsu

Co-founded Jute Ryu Aikijitsu

2/92

Co-founded 'Black Lotus Martial Arts Association' in Chicago, Illinois.

1993 – 2004

Studied and taught martial arts at Black Lotus Martial Arts studios in Chicago, Illinois.

Promoted to 6<sup>TH</sup> Degree Black Belt, Aiki Jiu Jitsu

2004

Promoted to 7<sup>th</sup> Degree black belt in (Dante Ryu) Gojute kempo and Black Lotus Martial Arts Systems

2006

Promoted to 8<sup>th</sup> Degree black belt in Dante Ryu Gojute kempo

Awarded 8<sup>TH</sup> Degree black belt in Black Lotus Martial Arts System

Promoted to 7<sup>TH</sup> Degree black belt in Shorei Goju Karate

2007

Recognized as Senior Professor of the Arts by University of American Kenpo

Awarded 4<sup>th</sup> Dan in Cougar Claw Street Defense System

Awarded 3<sup>RD</sup> Degree black sash in Kan Balam Kung Fu

Awarded 3<sup>RD</sup> Degree black sash in Golden Tiger Kung Fu

2008

Awarded 3<sup>RD</sup> Dan in Shinja Martial Arts System

Cross ranked as 8<sup>TH</sup> Dan by in American Kenpo, Valadez Kenpo Association

Recognized as founder and Soke of BLMAS by VKA World Founder's Assoc.

Recognized as Founder of Jute Ryu Combat Aikijitsu

Promoted to Master level in VKA knife fighting system

Promoted to master level in VKA stick fighting System

Promoted to Instructor level in cane fighting by VKA

Granted Diploma, Honorary Doctorates in Martial Science by Masters College of Martial Arts

Recognized as Hachidan Shodai Soke of BLMAS By Shinja Grand Master and Soke Council

Inducted into International Martial Arts Hall of Fame (Master of the year)

Inducted into VKA M.A. Hall of Fame (Soke of the year)



## 2009

Rec. as Hachidan Shodai Soke, First Generation Grandmaster, BLMAS by American Martial Arts Union

Promoted to 3<sup>RD</sup> Degree black belt in Shinja Krav Jitsu

Awarded Kudan (9<sup>TH</sup> Dan) in Gojute Kempo by Kenseiryu International , Thunderbolt Kenpo & BLMAA

Promoted to Kudan (9<sup>TH</sup> Dan) in Black Lotus Martial Arts Systems by BLMAA

Recognized as Kudan Shodai Soke, Hall of Founders (Soke Kan)

Awarded 10<sup>TH</sup> Degree GM, Street Rapid Defense System (cross rank)

Awarded 7<sup>TH</sup> Dan, Tinh Vo Dao, Viet Nam Combat MA System

Awarded 9<sup>TH</sup> Degree, Lu Tran Kung Fu (Cross Rank)

Awarded 5<sup>TH</sup> Dan, Tatakai Jikoboeki Do kempo (SW USA Master, Inst. Rep.) (cross rank)

Gojute kempo, 9<sup>TH</sup> Dan Rec. by World Council of Black Belts

Inducted into Combat Warrior MAA Hall of Fame (warrior of the year)

Inducted into Intl.Tinh Vo Dao Fed. Hall of Fame (G.M. of the year)

Inducted into Christ Mission MA Alliance H all of Fame (G.M. Instructor of the year)

Inducted into Intl. Lu Tran kung Fu Assoc. Hall of Fame

Inducted into Combat Warrior Magazine Hall of Fame

## 2010

Promoted to judan, 10<sup>TH</sup> Degree, Kukeren Gojute Kempo (Dan Te Ryu)

Promoted to judan (10<sup>TH</sup> Degree) BLMAA combat system

Promoted to kudan Shinja Buke Ryu Kenpo

Recognized as 7<sup>TH</sup> Dan, Honto Ryu Kempo

## 2011

Recognised as Professor in Kempo and Jiu Jitsu

Promoted to hachidan, 8<sup>TH</sup> Degree BDFS combat (shorei) karate

## 2012

Recognized as Traditional Historian and journalist for 'World Wide Dojo' (publications)

Inducted into Museum of Sports Karate as a History General

Promoted to senior instructor of Northern Shaolin Tai Mantis Kung Fu (10<sup>TH</sup> level)

Recognized as 'Head of Family' of IFAA Black Dragon Fighting Society

## 2013

Installed as Pastor and religious councilor of KKFI

Promoted to hachidan, 8<sup>TH</sup> degree, Diato Ryu Aikijitsu (bujutsu)

Recognised as judan, 10<sup>TH</sup> degree Soke of (BLMAA) jute ryu combat aiki jiu jitsu

Recognized as Menkyo Kaidan by the Goshinkan International Humbo

Inducted into Master's Council, International Combat Aikijitsu Federation

## **MEMBERSHIPS:**

**Interim Professor, Benedictine University**

**International Combat Aikijitsu Federation**

**Kenpo Karate Family International**

**Museum of Sports Karate**

**World Council of Black Belts**

**Genesis Martial Arts Association**  
**Combat Warrior MA Association**  
**Intl. Tinh Vo Dao Federation**  
**Intl. Tranjitsu federation**  
**Christian Mission MA Alliance**  
**Intl. Lu Tran Kung Fu Assoc.**  
**IFAA Patriarch**  
**Original member IFAA Black Dragon Fighting Society**  
**Black Dragon Fighting Society International**  
American M.A. Union  
Intl. M.A. Council of America  
Valadez Kempo Association  
Thunderbolt Kenpo Association  
Kenseiryu International  
Shinja Martial Arts Association  
Mugei-Mumei no Jitsu Association  
International Martial Arts Union  
Black Lotus Martial Arts Association  
World Karate Federation (Alumni)  
Black Dragon Fighting Society (Alumni)

**FORMAL EDUCATION:**

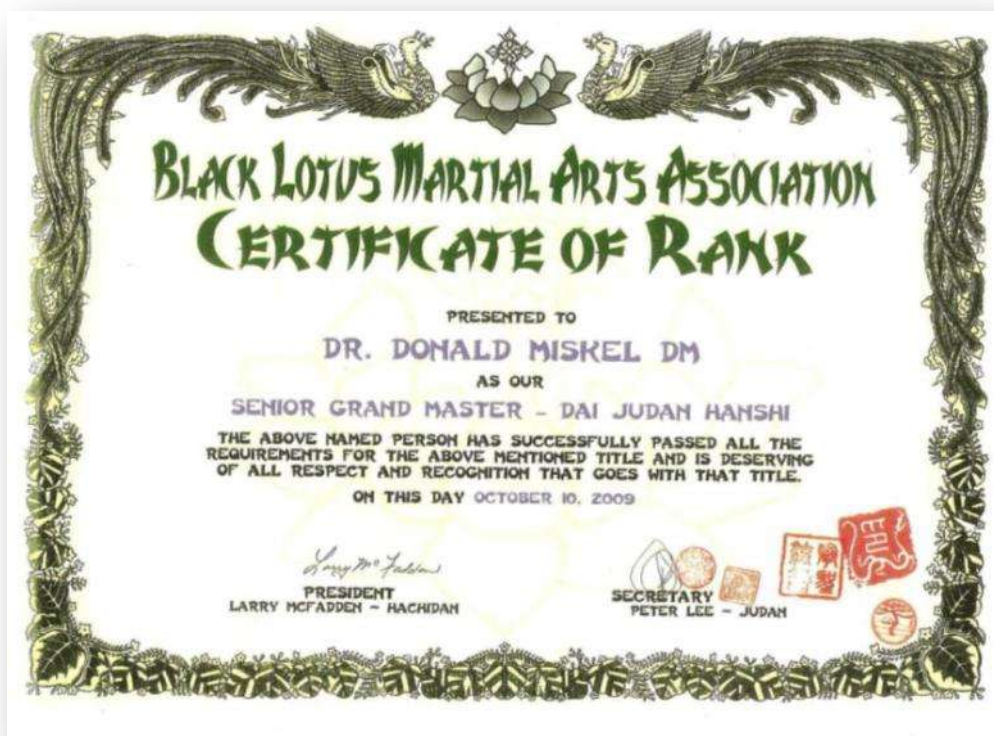
Associates Degree Microbiology, Chemistry  
Bachelor Degree – Psychology  
Master’s Degree – Divinity  
Doctorates Degree-Theology  
Doctorates Degree-Christian Counseling

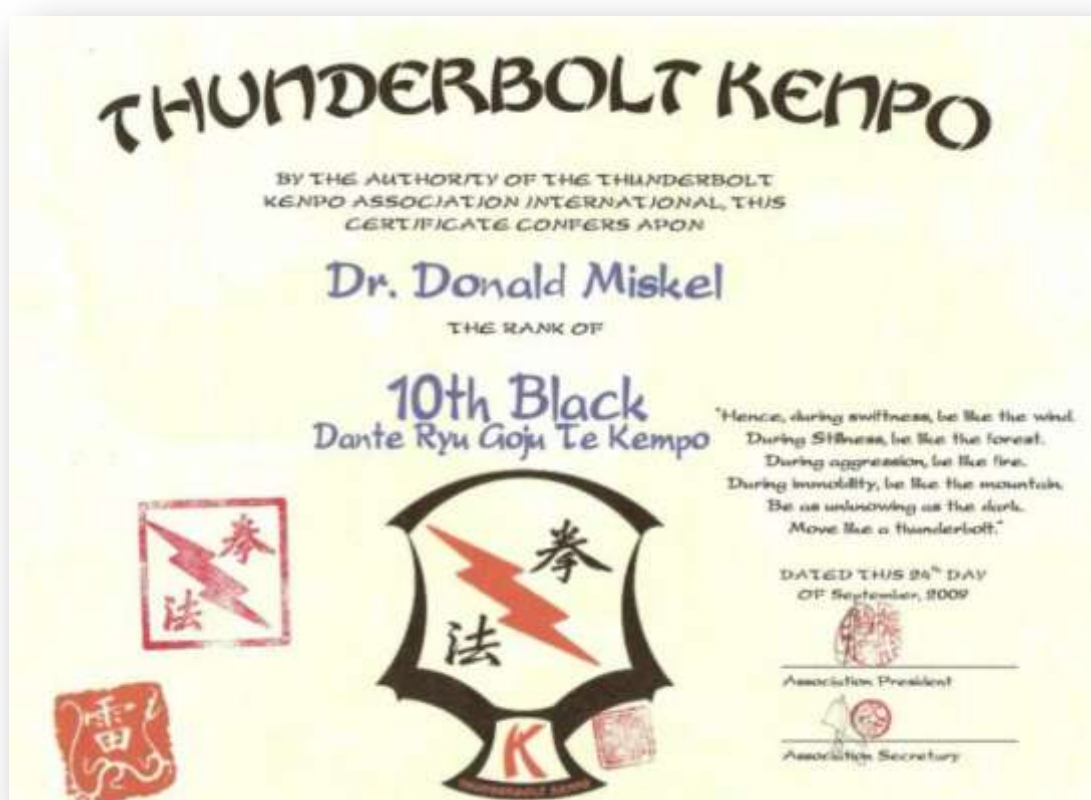
Senior Professor of Martial Arts  
Professor of Martial Arts Education  
Doctorate of Martial Science

Licensed and ordained minister, Pastor  
Certified Christian Counselor  
Certified Grief and Crisis Counselor  
Certified Chaplin

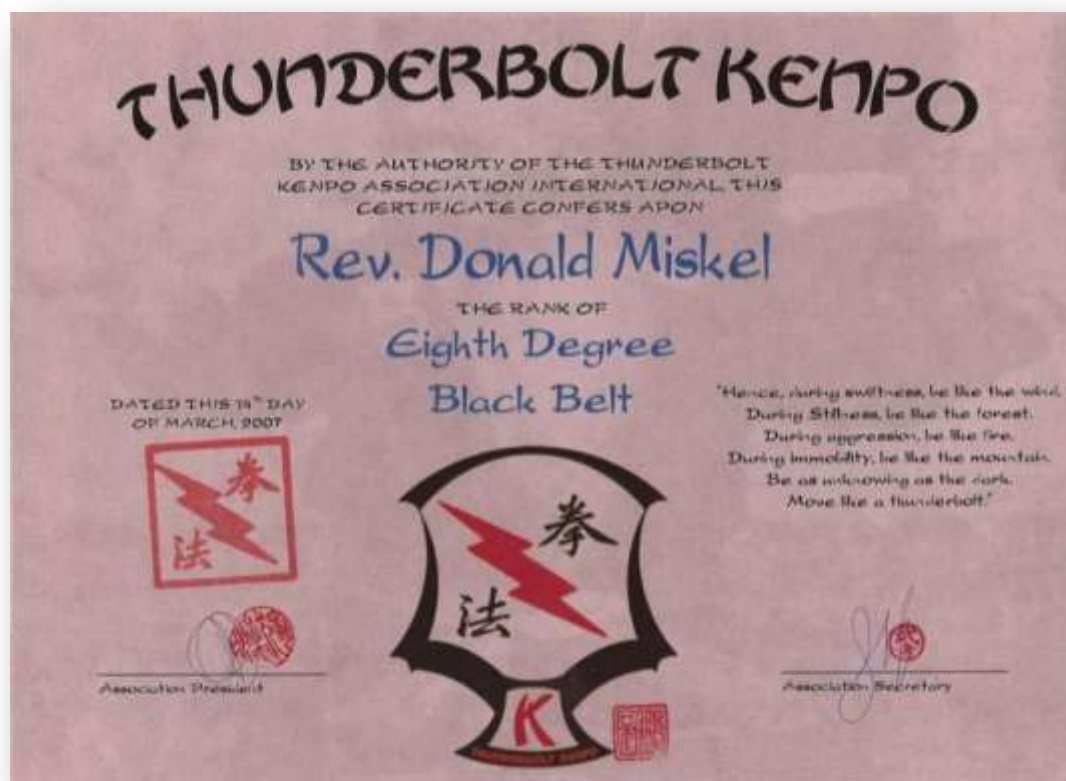
*References available upon request.*

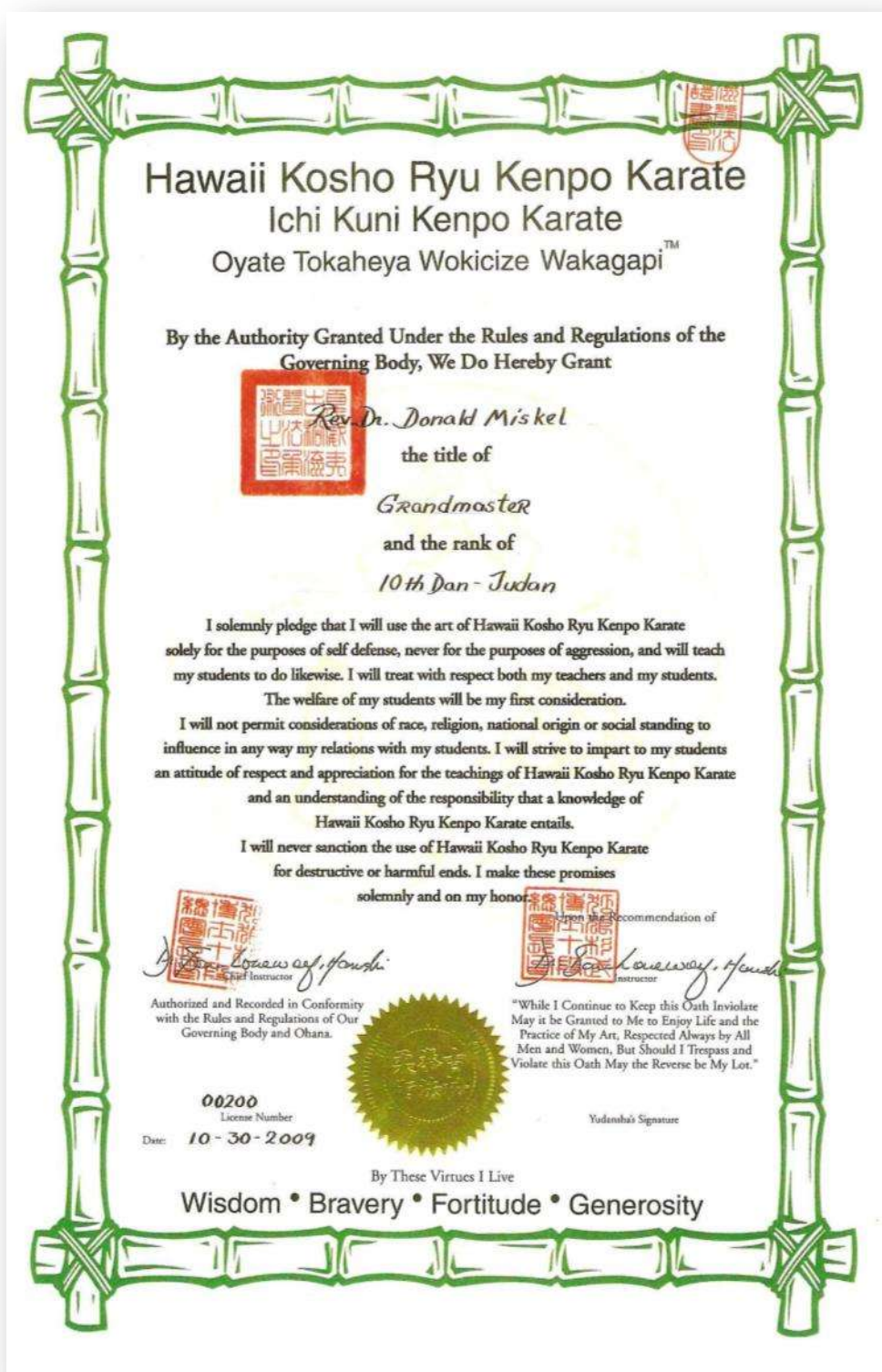
# Credentials



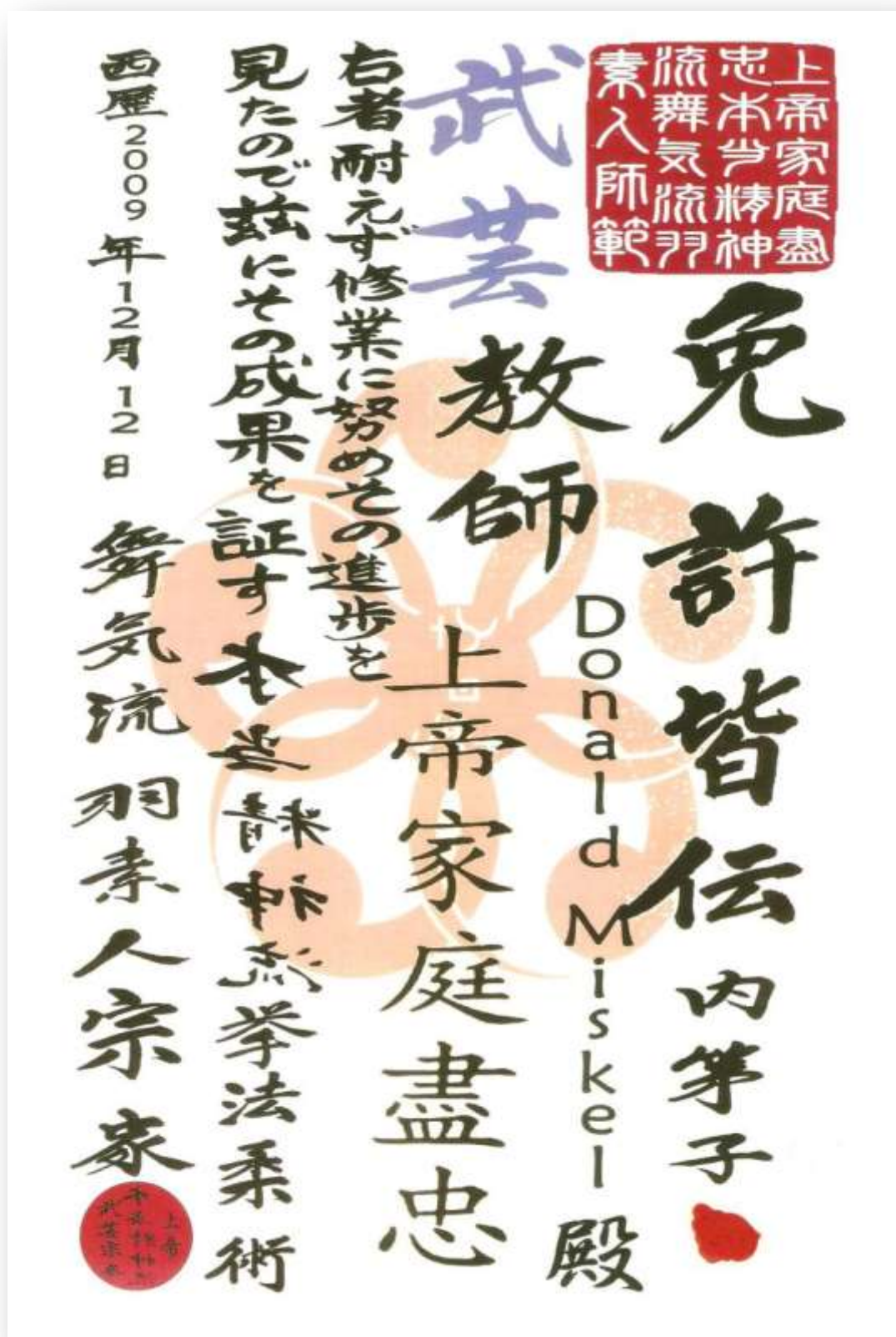


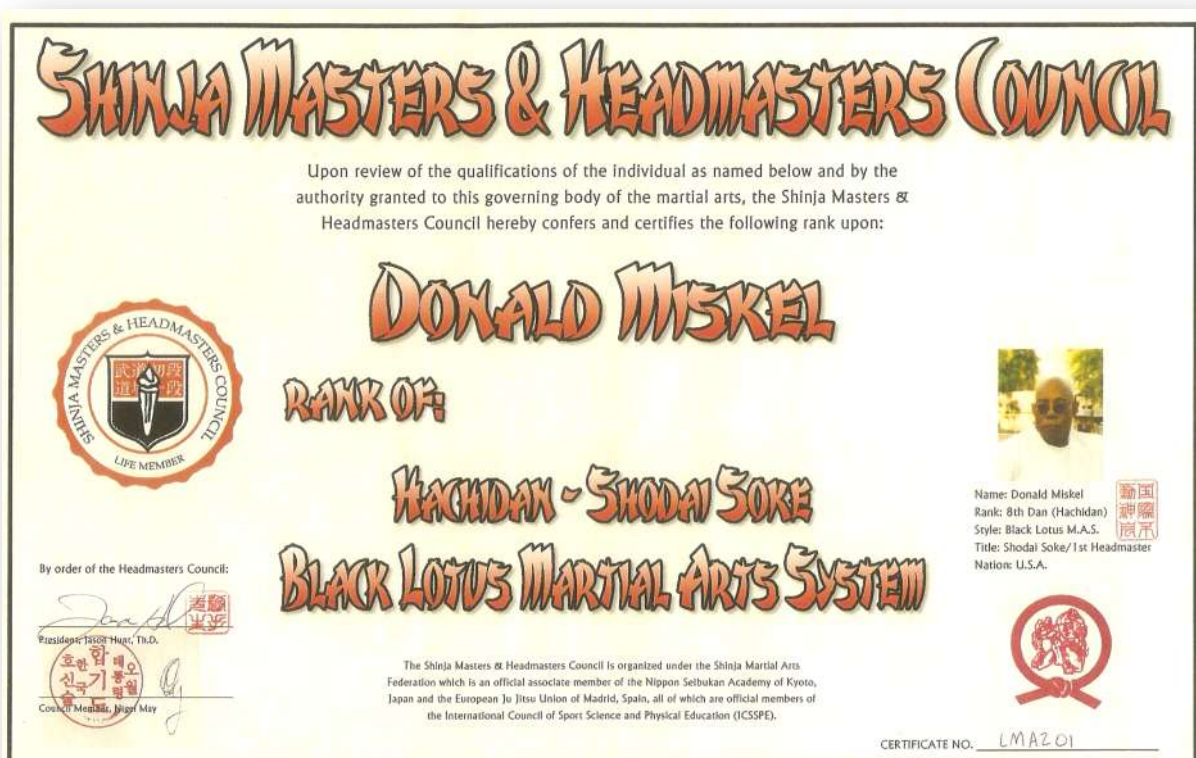














## NOTES FOR AUTHORS

The International Combat Martial Arts Unions Association (ICMAUA, [www.icmaua.com](http://www.icmaua.com)) publishes the book series “**The Way of the Grandmaster**”: authors’ (the Masters and Grandmasters) works on all aspects of Grandmasters and Masters Martial Arts research, history, trainings, journey, teaching, education, and philosophy, personal life, and real self-defense cases.

All submitted works need to be written in English and sent by e-mail to the Editor: [info@icmaua.com](mailto:info@icmaua.com).

**Format requirements: MS Word, Font: Times New Roman, 12, Line spacing: single (1). Photos and tables are accepted.**

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# International Combat Martial Arts Unions Association

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