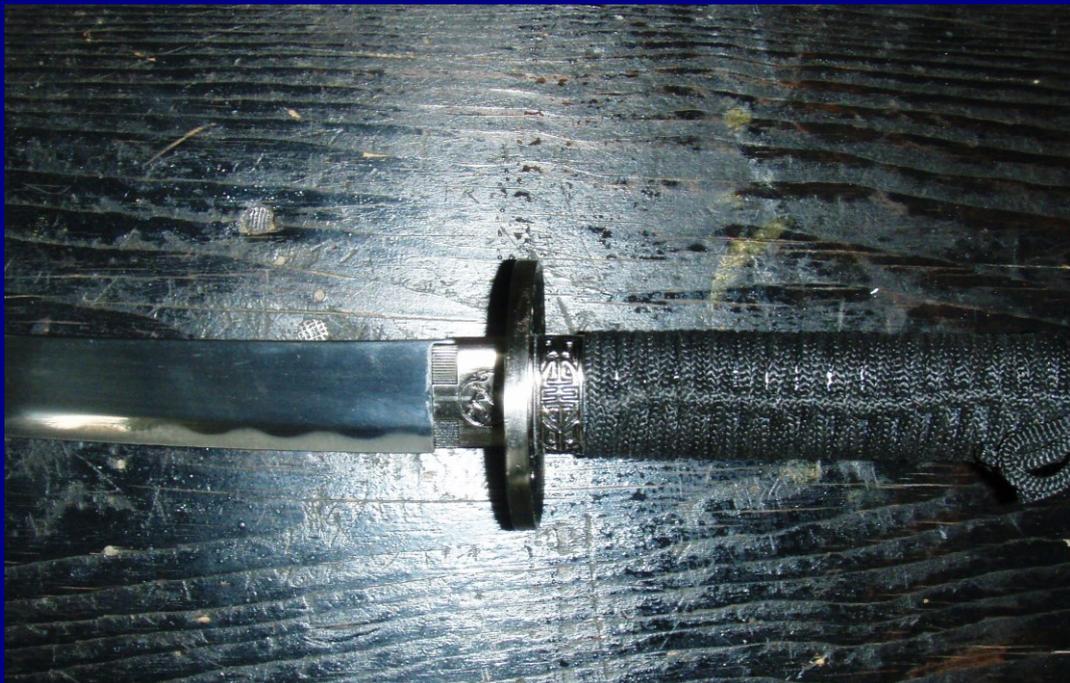


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CONTENTS

Current articles (All rights reserved by authors):

Why Not to Fight.....	4
Weight Training for Martial Artists.....	8
Breathing	11
Modernizing a Traditional System	14
Introducing My Philosophy of Training an Eclectic Art.....	16
Persevering	19
The Science of Blocking	21
Training for Tomorrow	24
NOTES FOR AUTHORS	26

Why Not to Fight

Donald Miskel

I'm a minister and a pastor. I'm not supposed to advocate violence, yet I teach combat. I have on occasion taught the rare self defense class though in all honesty I'm not big on self defense. Self defense only goes so far and when addressing the violence of the serious street predator isn't enough to deal with the level of aggression such people bring to the table. The bottom line is that defense doesn't win fights.

In the neighborhoods I grew up in violence was a serious and ever present reality. Confrontations and all out violence were often the rule rather than the exception. One either learned to deal with it or they were dealt by with it. I chose not to be a victim. I learned to fight and I did it both well and often. It didn't take much to set me off.

My concept of fighting didn't involve black eyes, split lips or bloody noses. Instead it dealt with hospitals, emergency rooms or worse. A double deployment into real combat leached some of if not all of that type of killer attitude out of me. During that time I saw enough blood and devastation to live a lifetime. All these years later I am still dealing with the aftermath of that experience. Still I can have a confrontational nature and I work hard to harness my aggression.

I like to label myself a pacifist but in all honesty that isn't the reality. If I allow my nature full reign I can be extremely aggressive and will resort to violence. I have some pent up hostility that I try to keep bottled up. I've managed to keep from being killed in the streets or locked up in prison all these years and I'd like to keep it that way. Besides violence goes against the image I want to convey so I keep that tiger in its cage.

As a Christian I do try to shy away from violence. I live in a much better place but I am often required to go into some rather violent neighborhoods. My church is in a really rough area and some of the people I deal with even within the congregation I serve are of rather questionable temperaments. On occasion I am called on to deal with some challenging situations and on the rare occasion I am faced with aggression or I am challenged. By challenged I don't mean threatened. I don't deal well with threats. I have a tendency to take any threat seriously and if I feel the threat is really serious I'm subject to deal with it

decisively then and there. When challenged I try to keep a level head and deal with it in a competent but non confrontational manner. I have learned to defuse or deescalate a situation before it becomes a real problem. Violence in the places that I often frequent is generally total and complete. People there tend to react violently and brutally if such situations are allowed to run their course. Should a fight incur it will generally end with someone seriously hurt or worse.

I don't like to fight. I don't care for physical or even verbal altercations. I couldn't always say that. I was violent as a youth and as a young man. Fortunately those days are safely behind me. In affect I spend a lot of my time training for a fight that (God willing) will probably never happen. Though I like to consider myself, if not a complete pacifist, at least a nominal one. I don't like fighting but if backed in a corner I will fight and if I fight I don't fight as a preacher or as a Christian. If I have no alternative I revert back to the viscous animal state that I entertained in the side streets and back allies of Chicago's inner city. That's why I avoid the situations that might degenerate into such a confrontation.

I don't fight but I know how to fight and likewise I know how to teach others how to fight. As a martial art instructor I literally teach two different systems. I teach a martial art. It can be used aggressively and it can translate into the physicality of combat but that isn't why I teach it. I use it as a tool to shape and develop character and integrity into young (and sometime not so young) human beings. On the other hand I teach a system that translates into raw combat. More often than not I teach that art to police officers, security personnel and people in other high risk professions. I also teach a watered down version of that art for self defense and personal security. I can teach those arts because I understand the hows and whys of violence.

I worked in mental health, in hospital security and in the penal system for a number of years. Those professions often required me to be hands on with what I know and teach. In those professions I've seen a number of coworkers hurt or badly injured. My training has put me in good stead in those professions. Other than the occasional bump or bruise I never accrued an injury during the inevitable confrontations that go with the job. I can also say that I have never hurt a patient or seriously injure an inmate.

Fighting isn't brain surgery but in its purest state it can be an art. There's a grace and beauty in it when it's done scientifically but in the end violence is nasty and ugly. I hear martial artists cavalierly speaking of injuring, maiming or killing someone as if it were a game. Unless you're a sociopath taking someone's life is going to affect you severely. I can tell you that from experience. These days we have a lot of martial arts teachers teaching something that

they've never done as if they have a complete understanding of it. You have people teaching fighting who have never had a fight in their life. I've actually had occasion to disarm knife and gun wielding opponents. Lest you think I'm boasting on my physical prowess let me balance that out. I've been shot twice and I've been both cut and stabbed. As a young man I was beaten within an inch of my life by multiple opponents. I found out firsthand that one person combating fifteen or sixteen people successfully works a h*** of a lot better on the screen than on the streets.

So let me explain why we shouldn't fight. I can only speak for the streets of Chicago but the same probably hold true not only for most of the major cities in our nation but in many small towns and even in rural areas. Let me again use myself as an example. So many of my friends ended up in prison or dying in the streets. Considering that I've been in some very dangerous situations both in the military and in the streets it's probably the grace of God that I didn't meet a similar end than a result of my own rather dubious physical prowess. I would like to keep my record intact. It's kind of late in the day to be gracing the tiers of our prisons (it was bad enough working there) and there's no future in being shot down in the streets. That's why I don't allow myself to be drawn into a physical altercation. Everyone who knows me know that fighting me wouldn't be the best idea they've ever had. Consequently in such a situation they are going to enter into it trying to even the odds. That means I'm going to have to get really critical in order to survive such a situation. Not only that but the way people are today if you beat them in a fair fight they are going to come back strapped to address their loss. I'm not going to walk around looking over my shoulder and waiting for the probable reprisal to successfully defending myself. That means I'm going to feel compelled to end any fight with the other person either being critically injured or killed. In such a scenario there's more than a small chance that I'll have to justify my response before a court of law.

So why is it wise not to fight? A fight will end either of several ways. It could end up with both of you walking away with one or the other as the victor but will that be the end of it? On the other hand one or the other of you will be seriously hurt or killed and the other will very probably have to answer for it. Ask yourself if either of those scenarios is acceptable to you.

As martial artists we have to strive for peace but on the rare occasion peace will evade us. If backed in a corner you have no choice. You'll have no choice but to fight for your life. In that case if you're able to you'll do what you have to. My advice in such a situation is to fight like your very life depends on it. Chances are it may. Don't fight tentatively. Give it everything you have. You can't fight effectively while worrying about what will happen afterwards. As most of us have heard any number of times, "It's better to be tried by twelve than to be carried by six". That's true but hopefully as a trained martial artist you have the mental dexterity to not

let it degenerate to that. You don't want things to degenerate to only those two alternatives. To what ever extent that you can you have to control a situation so that it doesn't come down to that. Fight if you must. Fight for your life. Fight for friends, family or loved ones. Fight for the weak and helpless. Fight for what is right. But if at all possible be men and women of peace.

God bless you, my martial art brethren.

Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel

Weight Training for Martial Artists

Donald Miskel

I expect to get two responses to this subject. One will probably cry, “Perish the thought. Martial arts and weight training are oil and water. They don’t mix.” To which I will say, “Oh contraire, young one. Sit down in a half lotus and prepare to be enlightened.”

On the other hand I have the supplicants who have bemoaned my previously shared wisdom on the subject. “Oh, most wise and wonderful luminary, grand Puba of the fighting disciplines and senior most master of all things martial; You have told us why but you haven’t told us how.”

Well, my young Hoppa Grasses out there; prepare to be duly amazed, informed and consider yourself told. I am going to share with you my own private system of weight training for the martial artist.

Anyone who knows me knows I’m completely sold on weight training. It is one of the core training systems of my personal martial art style. I love chi and I teach some aspects of the internal arts but I love physical strength. I am first and foremost an external stylist. If I hit you you won’t have to delve into the hidden power of my super secret technique. I’ll just fall off and knock the living you know what out of you. No hidden internal technique. Just raw brutal power. Oh, it’ll be graceful and thoroughly scientifically applied but you’ll have no doubt in your mind that you’ve been made the recipient of many hours of bench presses and tricep extensions. If I manage to hit you you’re going to stay hit.

Okay, to my secret style of martial art strength training. Several things you’ll have to take into consideration before you start your lifting regimen. First of all we’re looking for strength and power and not necessarily for bulk. A little muscle looks good on you and to an extent strength requires some size. As a rule big people are generally stronger. While strength is our goal here too much bulk will slow you down and in the end will be counterproductive. Secondly let’s keep in mind that unless you plan to get into power lifting or the ascetic aspects of physique competition lifting for the martial artist is a means to an end. We use it to improve our effectiveness as martial artists. And lastly strength doesn’t replace the need for skill and ability. You can be as strong as a mountain gorilla but if you can’t hit your opponent

or twist him in knots you still won't be able to fight. Skilled combat deals more with finesse than with brute strength.

There are two types of muscle in the body. There are what we call fast twitch muscle and slow twitch muscle. Probably this has to do as much with the nerves that activate those muscles than the muscles themselves but the way we train influence how those muscles perform. Heavy weight lifting will build slow twitch muscles. The end result is power and raw strength but that type of training doesn't build speed or flexibility. That type of muscle may serve you well if you plan to lift an opponent over your head and body slam him on the sidewalk. That is if you're able to get a hold of him in the first place. Those pesky little rascals don't particularly have the courtesy to allow you to catch and deposit them broken and bleeding on the afore mentioned surface area. For that you'll need fast twitch muscle. That type of muscle lends itself better to speed and flexibility. If you want raw speed you want to build that type of muscle. Of course while you may be able to catch your opponent your physical prowess probably wouldn't lend itself well to body slams and other strength based techniques.

Actually how you train will depend on what you're training for. A wrestler might be well served with bulk and raw physical strength while the karateka would probably be better served with speed, flexibility and mobility. From this you might decide that the wrestler should lift heavy and depend on building slow twitch muscle while the karate fighter would opt for a regimen that will build fast twitch muscle. There's some merit to both schools of thought but I opt for the middle ground. In the system that I teach I advocate trying to garner the best of both training methods without overdoing either.

In my youth I was involved in bodybuilding. I leaned to natural supplements and avoided steroids but I had garnered some size and a pretty impressive physique. I lifted heavy for strength and size. I got pretty big. At 5'9" I was weighing well into the two hundred and forty pound range. At one point I was weighing in at around 247#. During that time I was still training and teaching the martial arts. I was scary big and probably looked like a shaved gorilla which served me well in my profession. I worked alternately in hospital security and as a psych professional. For a while I worked on a psych ward in the local penal system that dealt with, what they called at the time, the criminally insane. In both instances people might not have recognized or discerned my martial art prowess but there was little doubt about my sheer size.

Aside from the strain that such size had on my heart I had to reexamine the direction that my training was taking me and how it affected me as a martial artist. I could hit and kick like a

mule but with the excessive size I had lost much of my flexibility and I sacrificed a lot of speed. I had slow twitch muscle to spare. I was strong as h*** but it was doubtful if I could actually hit or kick an opponent. I wanted the strength and some of the size but I wanted to be able to use those attributes to some good effect. Taking that into consideration I found the middle ground in my weight training. I have used it with some of my young students and they have developed some serious strength with good speed.

I'm not sure that it is possible to build both fast twitch and slow twitch muscles simultaneously but I have found that by following a mixed lifting regimen it is possible to be both strong and fast. I've experimented with heavy lifting, moderate lifting with high reps and light ballistic lifting that more accurately mimic the techniques that we use in martial arts. In the end I adopted a combination of the three.

My system is broken down into a three day a week cycle with three days left for martial art training, cardio and stretching. Of course at sixty nine years of age I follow a very whittled down aspect of this training but I do ask it of my serious students. Their lifting routines are generally on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays. On Monday they do heavy lifting with multiple sets with low reps. On Wednesdays they'll practice a ballistic lifting routine lifting relatively light weights with several sets and high reps. On Fridays moderate weights are used with relatively high reps and slow precise form. I have found that with this combination my students build muscle and some bulk but their bodies tend to have the lean musculature of a race horse rather than the muscular bulk of a bull. That's what I aim for with the lifting routine that we use. Coupled with regular martial art training I've found the results to be really good. Well, my friends and would be students of the arts I've dispelled any mystery in my super secret lifting regimen. Really no mystery at all and if there was a secret in the first place it was hidden in plain sight. You may find that my system of lifting doesn't suit your purpose or compliment what you do. I'm not trying to make you a clone of me though I could think of worse things you could be. What I will encourage you to do is experiment with strength training and see what routine or combination of routines work for you. While I feel that my routine is superior to most you'll have to decide for yourself. However you decide to accomplish it I encourage you to include strength training in your martial art training. Weight training is a tried and true method of accomplishing that objective.

So there you have it. You asked and I rose to the occasion. I have shared my method of training. However you want to apply it, have at it, Hoppa Grasses. You'll be better martial artists for it.

The Right Wonderful Rev. Dr. Miskel

Breathing

Donald Miskel

Of all of the natural body functions breathing is probably the most fundamental. It isn't something that we do consciously. Breathing has more to do with the spine than the brain. It is governed by the central nervous system but it requires no conscious volition. Chances are if you had to consciously regulate the breathing process you'd keel over from Asphyxiation. We'd probably get preoccupied and forget to breath.

There are several body functions that support life and without it impossible to exist. Basically they are food, water and oxygen. Some of us would probably include sex but that a discussion for another time.

Fact is you can live for weeks without food and days without water but you will survive for only minutes without oxygen. You have to breathe and you have to be consistent with it. You can't opt to breathe sometimes and not breathe others. Breathing is so fundamental that it is common to every living thing on earth. So since we all do it and we do it without conscious effort why is this dissertation necessary? Well for one reason I'm a preacher and as such I have a compulsive need to pontificate. But actually there is a need for such an article. I may not be the best one to write it but I'm going to give it a try.

Actually there are several kinds of breathing that would apply to our martial disciplines. There is the quick spirit shout (kiah in Japanese) that is common to most hard systems of kempo, karate, kung fu and such like. Actually it's much more than a shout. It tenses the diaphragm, strengthening the core for maximum effort and linking the upper body with the hips and legs. It tends to cause a slight adrenaline surge and forces extra oxygen into the blood. It empties the lungs of excess air to lessen the effect of a strike to the torso and even to the extremities. It helps in kime, the karate usage of ki or chi. Actually ki or intrinsic energy is so linked with breathing as to be indistinguishable. There is no chi or ki without proper breathing. Those enlightened souls amongst us that study chi kung will attest to that.

There are actually several methods for breathing for meditation, maximization of ki and for combat. The internal and external arts approach it differently but for all practical purposes the principles and end results are the same. As an external or hard stylist who has only dabbled in the internal arts I'll approach this exposition from that angle. To avoid confusion I'll use

karate as an example but the same principles will apply to any external martial art. In karate we tend to use *ibuki* breathing. We exhale forcefully with any maximum effort. Actually that method isn't unique to martial arts. A power lifter will growl as he pumps those heavy poundages. Most of us grunt out our effort when we're applying physical effort to any task. Okay, folks, focus. Redirect those dirty minds. As far as it goes this is the proper way to breath in such instances. A *kiah* will not only focus our efforts it will scare the drippings out of an opponent. A loud aggressive scream or shout has a predictable emotional affect. This is breathing for combat. We do some of it naturally and we're taught to put that extra effort into our own efforts but we don't just breathe for combat. We breathe to live.

Karate and whatever other martial disciplines we study should help improve other areas of our lives. Breathing should be no different. If we learn to breathe more effectively in combat, which hopefully occurs seldom or not at all, we should be able to translate that into benefits that will improve our everyday life. Breathing is essential. It stands to reason that if we can improve in it we'll improve our lives also.

Very few westerners know how to breathe properly. Because of our ascetic view of posture we tend to admire a large chest and a top heavy carriage. Many of you gents who appreciate the ladies will agree with that assessment but many ladies who covertly peruse the male physiques around them will share some of the same views. Westerners appreciate a prominent chest. In the military I was taught to stand with my stomach in and my chest out. According to western ideals this looks confident and formidable. I was taught that that was manly. Easterners, especially the Japanese share a different view. In Japan a person will say that a steadfast man has *hara*; that is to say he has belly. Most Japanese men aren't going to be walking around with his chest extended and his belly pulled tightly in. That with good reason. Let me try to explain.

Look at a small child and how they breathe. Not only that, look at their posture. Children generally have their bellies distended. Their little stomachs are rounded. That is natural to a child. Children distend their bellies because they tend to do what I like to call diaphragm breathing. They expand their bellies when they breathe because they extend their diaphragms and breathe deep into their lungs. Not only is that natural it's healthy. They tend to expel most of the stale air in their lungs when they exhale and draw in more clean air when they inhale.

Most westerners practice chest breathing. For this reason all of the poisons aren't expelled from their lungs. They tend to retain carbon dioxide which is fed into the bloodstream with the new oxygen that they breathe in. For obvious reasons that is unhealthy. Greater oxygenation

equals more energy and more strength. We can see that principle in a supercharged automobile engine. More oxygen increases the energy output exponentially. That translates well into combat but more importantly it translates into real life. Proper breathing equals greater energy. More energy equals greater productivity.

Hira refers to more than breathing. It implies balance and centering. The tandem, which is the point approximately three inches below and just behind the naval is the point of human balance physically and according to eastern philosophy spiritually. It is the point where chi or ki flows from. If we are going to be able to create the extreme power in karate techniques all of our effort has to originate from the tandem. All of our power comes from the lower and middle parts of the body. Power in a karate strikes start from the legs, is transmitted through the hips and with focus from the tandem and the sudden expulsion of breath in that characteristic kiah is focused in that instance of kime that makes the karate strike so devastating.

So we see how proper breathing enables the combatant to be more effective but more important than that we see how proper breathing improves our everyday life. So my friends and martial art brethren I urge you to steel yourself, take a deep breath and have at it. But more important than that I urge you to breath.

God bless you, family.

(The Right Wonderful) Rev. Dr. Miskel

Modernizing a Traditional System

Donald Miskel

Because I like being diplomatic in my old age I'm going to try to say what I have to say without causing too much offense. However I'll only take diplomacy so far before I take offense myself. I state my mind and speak what I believe to be the truth but if certain individuals don't like it, oh well. You'll get over it or maybe not. I still stand by the truths that I believe to be the reality and the present state of the martial arts in the twenty first century.

First of all let me say something that will rub some traditionalists the wrong way. We are primarily Americans teaching American arts. The martial arts evolve according to the needs of the people who practice them. If your art hasn't evolved to reflect the reality of the day then your art will have only limited effectiveness in its pure state. Try using rising blocks against the flurry of a skilled western boxer. If you do prepare to have your clock cleaned. Likewise try fighting a kick boxer with the traditional hand at the hip position. You'll notice that MMA fighters and modern kick boxers fight with their hands up. In so doing they are bowing to the reality of modern combat. If you have to teach self defense techniques different from anything that your art implicates then your art isn't combat effective.

I just finished talking to a shotokan master who is considered too young for the rank that he carries. I find that amusing. While I believe in the concept of 'time in grade' I also believe in evaluating on an individual basis. There are several general rules that govern advancement in the martial arts but in rare instances there are exceptions to those rules. Some of the individuals that scream bloody murder at the advancement of an exceptionally skilled and knowledgeable of a relatively young master will swear on a stack of bibles that Bruce Lee was the consummate master and the holy grail of the martial arts. They tend to forget that Bruce Lee was in his thirties when he passed. Likewise John Keehan. Both were talented individuals who left an indelible mark on the martial arts. Even at this late date there is the occasional prodigy.

A lot of the traditionalists criticize those of us who have opted for eclectic systems. The same individuals probably study eclectic systems themselves. Just because the original arts were blended to for the present art so many years ago doesn't negate the fact that they are blended and therefore eclectic arts. By the same token some of the founders of the arts that we swear by today were low level black belts when they created their arts. Take for example

Ed Parker. His art became what it was not because of his original rank but because he was innovative and a forward thinker. Few argued against the 10TH degree that he was awarded by his students and his organization.

I have more years in the arts than most. I've been involved in the martial arts for fifty nine years, longer than that if I take into consideration my father's input in the WW II U.S. Marine combat judo that he tried to teach me way before I could grasp what he tried to show me. He was a marine M.P. stationed in Hawaii during most of the war and was well versed in military hand to hand combat. Most of my background and my rank in the arts were in classical or traditional systems. I accrued advanced rank in a couple of them, reached instructor level in a few others and studied the rest. I teach what I teach because I don't teach any one of those arts separately. They blend together into one art that I teach according to the needs of those I teach.

On the rare occasion I am criticized by one traditionalist or another. No problem there. I can care less what they think and even less what they say. At sixty nine years old (this year) I am still active in training and teaching. I don't teach on a commercial basis but I have a small select group of students. I also teach the occasional advanced practitioner. Many of the 'would be' masters at my age are sitting on the side lines criticizing those who still teach and train. Please understand that age doesn't always translate into wisdom and time doesn't always fashion a master. I believe in honoring my seniors and I applaud those who have paved the way and even more those that are still active. I offer my admiration for your longevity and your tenacity. It takes something to still be active into our winter years. I only ask that you do what you do and let other martial artists do what they do. If they are sound in their martial arts and their system works for them and their students the success of their creations speak for themselves.

God bless you, my brethren and my martial art family.

Rev. Dr. Donald (Papa D) Miskel, MA, PhD, ThD. Judan Shodai Soke, BLMAA
Patriarch and Head of Family, IFAA BDFS

Introducing My Philosophy of Training an Eclectic Art

Donald Miskel

How's that for a title? Sitting recuperating from two recent surgeries leaves me with too much time on my hands. Can't train. Can't pump iron. What's a super supreme grandmaster of the martial art's going to do. By the way, that's a rhetorical question. Anyone who knows me and my proclivity for put every fleeting thought into print already knows the answer. I write. Actually I pontificate. I preach the martial arts. My concept of non physical instruction.

I've been involved in the martial arts for just shy of sixty years. A long time to do any one thing but in my mind time well spent. In my years of teaching and training I have found that the reason a person studies the martial art will determine what they study. That same reason for teaching will shape the art that is taught and the way it's put together.

My introduction in the arts came years before my actual training at the hands of my dad, a marine MP who had been stationed in Hawaii during WW II. He trained in and taught hand to hand combat or what was called combat judo back in the day. I was way to young to grasp what he tried to teach me but he created an interest in me that has lasted into this latter portion of my life and will probably follow me into the hereafter. When I'm buried They will probably have to bury me face down so I don't kick open my coffin.

My formal introduction to the arts was in judo and Kano jiu jitsu, the only arts available in Chicago at the time. Later I studied shotokan karate with the first JKA instructor to teach in the Midwest. When I was around fifteen I met the gentleman that I consider my sensei and father in the martial arts, Douglas Dwyer. Through him I met John Keehan (Count Dante). Through the Count I was introduced to cross training in the arts. John taught shore goju karate flavored with a peppering of whatever other martial art had caught his interest. John Keehan was not only a devastatingly savage martial artist he was a gut bucket, back alley street fighter. Imagine me, a gang related urchin from the inner city of Chicago's most dangerous ghettos being schooled in street fighting by an upper crust Irish American instructor. You go figure. Anyway, he was probably one of the most accomplished fighters I ever trained with.

John was way ahead of his time. To my knowledge he was one of the first instructors to teach an eclectic art. His was a hybrid mix of some of any and everything. It was from him that I was introduced to cross training or what we call MMA today.

When I went into the military I studied whatever was available wherever I happened to be stationed. I had an opportunity to study some of the arts in the place of their inception. Later, in Chicago, I studied whatever was readily available. In so doing I accrued advanced rank in several martial disciplines and a working understanding of any number of other ones. In my long career in the arts I've accrued dan rank in a number of arts, teaching certificated in several others and reached masters level in a handful. As time passed I amalgamated all I learned into the system that I cofounded. I was the youngest black belt instructor in a loosely knit organization that consisted of masters and instructors in several arts. Most have passed away, retired or faded into the sunset (as they used to say). Considering that I'm almost seventy years old and was the youngest instructor in the club you'll understand why I'm the only active teacher of the group that's still teaching.

The club wasn't really an organization in the beginning and it had no name. Because of my past involvement in the old World Karate Federation and the Black Dragon Fighting Society I had a fondness for martial art organization. It was my idea to create an organization and to give it a name (The Black Lotus Martial Art Association). We taught no one art but we had instructors in several Japanese, Okinawan and Chinese martial systems. My aikido, aikijitsu and Okinawa kempo instructor became members and along with the other arts I studied with the many instructors who passed through our ranks I was able to further my instructor with them. Those arts, the karate I taught and bauqwa/hsing i. Formed the major foundation of the arts we taught. Eventually the lines between the various systems began to blur and an eclectic system began to take shape. That and the several arts I've studied since then comprise the art that I teach.

Basically I teach the Black Lotus Combative System. It is comprised of Dante Ryu Shorei karate, Kukren Gojute kempo, Jutoryu aikijitsu and Yin Chi Tao Chaun Fa (Chinese kempo/kung fu). Each art stands on its own and each has a master instructor who heads the system. As the head of the organization I'm considered to be the highest ranking instructor of each art but truth be known I don't teach any of them. At least not independently. To me it is one cohesive art.

That's what I teach but who I teach has shaped the art that I teach. For the most part my students have been law enforcement officers, jail and prison personal, mental health professionals and individuals involved in similarly high risk professions. The system that

I've taught throughout the latter part of my teaching career has changed and categorized the content of my art and its methodology. Lately much of that has changed. In my senior years I have neither the energy nor the desire to teach in a professional capacity. More of my time in these later years has been dedicated to researching the technical aspects of the arts and their spiritual, moral and philosophical aspects. That and putting pen to paper or rather finger to keyboard as I do now. As most of you probably know I'm a minister and pastor and a retired Psych professional.. That has greatly shaped that aspect of my teaching.

My focus in my old age is managing and passing on my dubious wisdom to the members of the two organizations I head and the several others I represent. I continue to weave new knowledge into my system and expand its pool of technique and application. All of that while trying to reduce all of the said knowledge to its lowest terms.

As I've gotten older I've grown cantankerous and I'm jealous of my time. I'm more inclined to spend these latter years with close friends and family. My teaching has been relegated to a couple of students, one a nephew and the other a grandson, to whom I plan to pass my art on to. I will teach the occasional self defense class and will share what little I can with the members of the Black Dragon and Black Lotus organizations that grace my home from time to time. Those who come to me to train are generally advanced students and I don't so much as teach them as fine tune what they already know. If they are strikers I will generally try to offer grappling techniques that I feel will compliment their techniques and visa versa with the grappling students. In a sense I teach them to eclecticism their arts.

I don't and never have taught for sport or competition though I've had a few students who took modified forms of what they were taught and forged successful careers in MMA and kumite. All while striving to teach a reality based semi traditional system.

If you're interested in learning more about my philosophy and approach to the arts I urge you to buy, borrow or steal a copy of my book, "The Way of the Grandmaster", available through Dojo Press. Yeah I know, a shameful plug but I hope you'll chalk it up to age and a bit of senility. By the way, I'd rather that you buy the book rather than borrow or steal it. If nothing else you'll discover how the rather convoluted mind of a (supposed) grandmaster works. I guarantee you, it won't hurt you. It might even help you. Better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick. Thank you for enduring the ruminating of an old man. Your interest and patience is duly appreciated.

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

Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel, ThD, PhD, Mdiv,

Persevering

Donald Miskel

I have been gifted with or cursed with an inquisitive, detail oriented mind. I've been accused of thinking too much. I'm almost fanatical about education. I don't feel that I truly understand something if I don't understand how it works. I have to take things apart, reduce them to their own terms to be satisfied with my insight into its real inner workings. I did that a lot as a kid. The problem was that I wasn't as good in putting things back together as I was at dismantling them. That got me in a lot of trouble as a kid.

I've been accused of being nosy rather than inquisitive. What I have is an insatiable hunger for knowledge. If you know me you know that I'm well educated. I'm not that smart. Actually far from it but I'm tenacious when it comes to knowledge. I've come to realize that the more I learn the more I realize that I don't know.

I read more than anyone that I know. Not so much because I'm intellectual but because as a youth I had learning disabilities that made learning difficult. The schools that I attended didn't know what to do with me. My perception was different. They had no idea how to go about educating me. In the end I had to learn how to teach myself. Learning to read was really difficult and math was a major challenge but I learned different ways to teach myself what I was required to know. In my primary grades my grade average was abysmal. My teachers declared me hopeless. I was held back a grade and I felt that I was stupid. It could have ended there but I was blessed with tenacity and was too stubborn to give up. Somehow, in spite of dyslexia (diagnosed in my teens) and ADD I managed to teach myself what my teachers couldn't. Once I did learn to read I became a voracious reader. I read everything from dictionaries to soup can labels. My grade point average went through the roof. I became adept at taking tests and I blew I.Q. tests through the roof. I excelled in whatever I put my mind to. Not that I had any more intellect than anyone else. Like I said I developed a knack for taking tests.

Being a creature of extremes I became almost obsessive compulsive in my need to learn. I kept a 4.0 GPA or greater (with extra studies). Almost overnight I went from being the kid with the learning deficit to the smartest person in the class. Only I knew that that was the perception of others. I was never as dumb as people thought I was and have never been as smart as some others think me to be. All of that was the perception of others.

Today I still work harder to accomplish what others might find easy. It doesn't make my life easy but because it requires so much effort on my part I cherish what I do accomplish. I was told by my teachers that I should strive to be a janitor or a garbage collector. Instead I became a quality control chemist and a Psych therapist at various times in my life. I have managed to earn two doctorates and several master degrees. Learning still isn't easy but perseverance makes up for a lack of natural talent. That lets me know that the only limitations in our lives are the limitations we put on ourselves.

As a martial artist I was never the sharpest knife in the block but what I lacked in native ability I made up for with longevity. I'm still not the greatest martial artist in the world but I've managed to outlast many with greater talent. Being around so many talented masters and grandmasters I often feel eclipsed by their talents. Not that it bothers me. We are judged by the company we keep and I keep the company of some really talented people. Not boasting on my meager accomplished or belittling myself in any way. I know what I know and no-one can take the things from me that I've managed to accomplish.

Because of the challenges in my life I tend to look at rank in the martial art a little differently than many of my peers. I tend to put more weight in knowledge and integrity than in skill and natural ability. I admire it in others but I don't become too enamored with those with natural ability. I admire those who struggle and persevere more than the one who glides easily through life.

All of us don't have sterling intellects or breath taking ability but if we are determined we can still accomplish great things. I put myself up as an example. Believe me if I can do it anyone can do it. I'm still burdened with a learning disability but I have found a way to do what I need to do. Have faith in yourself and more importantly have faith in the God that created you. "God don't make no mess."

Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel.

The Science of Blocking

Donald Miskel

I started boxing about the same time that I began my studies of the martial arts. I was ten years old at the time. One of my friend's father was a career marine. His father had finished the last couple of years of his enlistment in Okinawa. He had been a contender in his weight class on the Marine's boxing team. He had also accrued a brown belt in judo and Kano jiu-jitsu. He was over the park district's boxing team at a nearby park field-house. Aside from teaching his son how to box he wanted to teach him judo. He needed someone his son's size and age for him to train with. That marked the rather dubious beginning of my martial art career. Actually my formal training in the arts began a couple of years later. I became a marginal student of the gentle arts but I took to the sweet science like a fish to water. Excuse my language, especially as a minister but I could box my little ass off. Later I continued my amateur boxing career and did pretty well. Who knows where it may have gone had I not discovered karate. I was fortunate enough to study with one of if not the first karate instructors in Chicago. I was thoroughly and irrevocably hooked.

I had been involved with the martial arts for a while when kickboxing came on the scene. Having studied with John Keehan, the infamous Count Dante I had cut my teeth with full contact fighting but kickboxing was a different animal altogether. I grew up in some of the toughest areas in the inner city of Chicago. I fought often, did it well and got off on it. I'd rather fight than eat a good meal. Coming from that background I loved the controlled mayhem of kickboxing. Of course it wasn't anything like street fighting. It had rules and I wasn't good with rules but I admired those who fought in those early gutbucket fights. I considered competing myself but the type of back alley karate that I had been taught was too violent and didn't lend itself well to the rules of controlled contests. I wanted to fight. I was into eye gouging, fish hooking and kicking to the groin. I learned to actually fight. I got disqualified from almost every contest I competed in. Had competition eye gouging become popular I was ready but as it was I still loved watching the sport.

At about the same time that kickboxing became popular full contact karate came on the scene. Though both used striking and kicking they were quite different in application. Kickboxing at that time resembled boxing with a few kicks to give it a little flavor. I quickly noticed the difference between the two. Defensively kickboxing involved a lot of bobbing and weaving, ducking, dodging and slipping as in conventional boxing. Blocking was done by

taking punches on the gloves. On the other hand full contact karate used more of the traditional strikes, punches kicks and the subject at hand, traditional karate blocks. Which brings us to the object of this lesson; the science behind blocking.

On the surface the methodology of boxings evasive approach might seem more practical, and yes, more scientific but I think that a closer look might reveal something different. The blocks of karate may look awkward to the eye of a trained boxer but they are well thought out. Generally the idea of a block is to keep the defender from getting hit. When it comes to fighting and combat I believe more in self offense than in self defense. That is to say that the object is to deter, hurt, injure or destroy an opponent. Fighting isn't a sport. It isn't a game. At it's worse it's a matter of survival and may be an issue of life and death. Defeating the opponent is the first line of business in a fight but defeating the opponent an getting gravely injured in the process isn't a real win. In order to defeat the opponent it is necessary to be as functional as possible. A severe injury would make that hard or impossible. Avoiding injury is necessary in order to defeat or subdue the opposition. The blocks in karate does that and more.

A well timed and accurately placed karate block can do more than just stop an attack. It can injure or destroy the offending limb. A karate block can be as much attack as defense. If you've ever been on the receiving end of such a block you know what I mean. A well executed block angles and cuts into bone and muscle. I've seen bones badly bruised and even shattered from a well focused karate block. The block is applied in such a way that the force of the offending blow causes the bone to try to wrap around the blocking limb. We all know that bone doesn't wrap around anything and retain its integrity. Some of you have seen the stunt that some karate and kung fu stylists like to perform where a long square board is broken over their body or a rigid limb. You'll notice that the strike isn't accomplished with the end portion of the board but more toward the middle. The weight and momentum of the board doesn't focus the major part of the force on the karateka's body or limb. Instead the weight and momentum of the board will make it bend, hopeful past its point of flexibility. The body or limb of the recipient acts as a fulcrum for the board to break itself over. A karate block can accomplish much of the same effect on an attacking limb.

A block does more than just stop an attack. It can redirect it. A block can move an opposing limb opening the way to a counterattack. It can be difficult to hit a halfway competent opponent who has his guards are up and in place. Blocks are designed to move the attacking limb, preferably to a position where it is difficult to defend against the counterstrike of the defending party. A karate block can easily clear the way for a successful and devastating attack.

Blocks can also press or oppress a limb. This lends itself well to trapping. A block can place the opponents limb in an disadvantageous position allowing the defender the advantage of manipulating the opponent's arm or leg. This can lead to both traps and locks for jujitsu and aikijitsu stylists. Also when in contact with any limb it's possible to gage the intent and aggressive move of the opponent before he can fully implement an attack.

So it may seem at a glance that the evasive moves of the boxer or the kick boxer is more practical and more scientific but when a karate block is used properly it opens up avenues of opportunity that evasion alone doesn't accomplish. There are several methods of blocking that a karateka can implement effectively to gain advantage in a confrontation. We already touched on the effect of the cutting block. It uses the outside or inside bone of the forearm and wrist to cut in at an angle into the bone and soft tissue of the attacker. To be completely successful with this type of block some conditioning of the arms and wrists may be necessary. Another type of block is a yielding block. Rather than trying to stop an attack this type of block redirects the attacking limb. It is often accomplished with a rolling of the arm to reap the forward momentum of the attack and sending it off in a disadvantageous direction. A parry can do somewhat the same thing, misdirecting the direction of a punch. In there system that I teach rather than stepping back from an oncoming attack we prefer to step in and at a forty five degree angle to the opponent's attack. This allows a simultaneous parry or a rolling/reaping block from outside the opponent's attack. The same menouver can be used with a pressing block to force the limb to the opponents body, a trap or a double change hand block that would allow the defender to procure the hand or arm of the attacker.

Blocks can also be used as attacks. A rising block can end up being a forearm block to the neck, throat, chin or nose. Likewise what appears to be a downward block can be a a hammer fist strike to the bladder or groin. The possibilities are limited only by the imagination and the skill of the practitioner. Lastly blocks can be used to attack the pressure points, chi meridians and the acupressure points of the limbs and body. Striking certain pressure points on the limbs or the body of the opponent can disable the limb, effect the internal organs or open up other chi meridians for attack. If the technician has the knowhow and the skill the scientific applications of the block is almost limitless. Not trying to take anything away from boxing. I love the sweet science. Boxing was one of my first loves but while we're floating like a butterfly and trying our best to sting like a bee; while we're bobbing and weaving and looking pretty let's not forget the effectiveness of the lowly karate block.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and stay strong.

Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel

Training for Tomorrow

Donald Miskel

A truth that all young people know; old people don't know anything. A truth that all old folk know; we've forgotten more than most young folk know. Wisdom comes with age and is a byproduct of experience. Of course, every old person isn't wise. The old adage says that there's no fool like an old fool. Still, as we grow older we have experienced more of life and we have accrued some small bit of knowledge on the way. We learn from experience. Both the good and bad decisions that we make in life serve to tutor us. Unfortunately some bad experience have long lived consequences and if they don't get you immediately will come back and bite you in the butt.

The title of this desertion may be a little misleading. I could have as easily named it, "Training With Tomorrow in Mind". The decisions that we make today will most likely revisit us in the future. This is no more apparent than in martial art training. Training improperly has unhappy consequences later. As we mold our bodies according to our martial art visions we may want to think of what these practices will mean in later years.

Going into my fifty ninth year of training and teaching I'm a synthesis of traditional and modern martial artist. I love the continuity and consistency of traditional training and values, however I don't embrace some of the old methodology simply because it's old. Sometimes the things that we have been taught are not only old they are antiquated. In our wisdom we have to discern the difference.

In feudal times in Okinawa and Japan practitioners of karate and kempo forged their bodies into weapons. This practice especially applied to the conditioning of the body's various striking weapons. Iron palm and makiwari training did some rather radical things to the hands. They had to be able to strike hard enough to compromise an enemy who was better armed and probably wearing some type of armor. Consequently extreme conditioning of the body was deemed necessary. In the those days it wasn't as much of a problem as it would be today. People live longer today and have ample time for the rather dubious long term consequences to present themselves. Since it's impossible to undo some of the damage that we do to our bodies it might benefit us to examine the wisdom of our training methods.

When I was a young student I styled my training and my practices after the rather radical approach of my sensei. Tamashiwara was an intricate part of our training. My sensei was one of the heaviest breakers of his day. Wood, bricks, concrete and stone disintegrated under his monstrous strikes. He actually broke multiple bricks with nukite (s) (spear hand strikes). The results were visually appealing but I shiver when I think of the long term consequences of his breaking practices. Being young and impressionable I began beating my hands into truncheons. I didn't go as far as my teacher did but my hands were fairly well conditioned. I had calluses that made the average people cringe. As my mother would say, 'it looked like I had been petting alligators'. When I got married my wife announced that there was no way that I was touching her with those hands. Pumice stones and various oils and lotions eventually removed the unsightly callouses but the internal damage to bones, joints and ligaments was already done. I reap the benefits of those practices even today. As the years pass I become more aware of the err of my ways. I have arthritis in most of the joints of my hands and feet. My knees, shoulders, elbow joints and hips serve to remind me daily. I can just bump my hands against a table and almost go into shock. Mind you I can still shatter a man's jaw with a single punch with little ill effects to myself but how often do I need to shatter someone's jaw?

Abuse of our bodies isn't just limited to our striking weapons. Many of the other practices that are considered traditional training can take a toll on the body. How we do what we do is governed by what has been handed down to us over the years but we need to examine not only the effectiveness of our practices not only by their effectiveness in combat but by the effect that our training has on our body. Just because a technique is traditional doesn't mean it's the best way to do what it proposes to do. Look at more than the devastation that it visits on your opponent and discern the effects that it has on your anatomy. Teachers do research in physiology and kinesiology and determine how it will effect your students health and well being in the future. We owe it to our students and to ourselves to not only train and teach effectively but to train and teach right. In future articles we will examine some of the traditional training methods, their effectiveness and their impact on our own bodies. Until then I admonish you to not only train hard but train smart.

God bless you, my brethren,

Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel, ThD, PhD, MDiv.

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