

# **KENKYO-HA GOJU KARATE KEMPO**

*An Introduction to the Way of Karate*



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KENKYO-HA BUDO RENMEI

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The techniques of karate are dangerous and should be used only in self-defence and only as an absolute last resort. Karate training should be undertaken always under the supervision of an experienced and competent teacher. The practice of karate requires a high degree of physical fitness, and before beginning any programme of strenuous exercise you should consult a physician and satisfy yourself that you are in good health. You practise at your own risk. The authors and publishers do not accept any responsibility for loss, damage or injury arising out of the use of the techniques and training methods described in this book.



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## Preface

We believe that the traditional martial arts values of humility, self-improvement and consideration for others have been undermined in the modern world by politics, selfishness and greed. Our intention in setting up the Kenkyo-ha Budo Renmei is to create a community of like-minded people who want to practise the budo disciplines as ways of self-perfection. Our aspiration is that it will become a federation of associations dedicated to individual arts. Its founding association is the Kenkyo-ha Goju Karate Kempo Kai: 謙虚派剛柔空手拳法会. Kenkyo (謙虚) is “humility”: we believe this to be the cardinal virtue of the martial artist.

We are not interested in, and we will not engage in, politics or competition. We will not seek money or self-advancement. We are not interested in creating a large and powerful organisation or in tournaments and displays, but in bringing together people who want to learn from each other and live according to the spirit of budo: a spirit of humility, sincerity and service. Our motto is a saying of Ueshiba Morihei Osensei: Masa katsu agatsu (正勝吾勝): “True victory is victory over the self.”

This is a non-profit educational work intended for members of the Kenkyo-ha Budo Renmei. It is not a “how to” book. It records only our own thoughts, impressions and advice – both to the beginner and the more experienced – based on many years of practice and experience. We certainly do not wish to impose a “syllabus” or an orthodoxy on anyone, and we have no desire to create conformists. The guiding principle of the book is the development of independence and individuality through *personal interpretation* of the way of karate-do, and everything in it should

be understood in the light of that principle. Some of the things we say will be controversial, but we have tried always to speak with honesty and in the true spirit of karate-do. We hope that what we say will be taken in that spirit.

We have used masculine pronouns throughout, but this is a stylistic expedient to avoid the awkwardness of always having to say "he or she," "him or her," and so on. Almost everything we say applies to males and females equally.

Our thanks are due to Myles Cowie, Nicki Cowie, Val Dyson, Peter Leggett and the late John O'Brien for their help in producing the illustrations and for their suggestions and support. Every effort has been made to trace the copyright owners of other illustrations reproduced here. Where no acknowledgement is given, we believe that the images are in the public domain. If we have inadvertently printed material without proper acknowledgment, we will rectify the situation if the copyright owner contacts us. Posed images of karate techniques inevitably look artificial; but though realism is impossible we have tried to illustrate what we say as clearly as possible.

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**KENKYO-HA GOJU KARATE KEMPO**



# 1: Karate as an Ethical Practice – A Kenkyo-ha Manifesto

## Introduction: A Brief History of Karate

FROM THE EARLIEST times of which we have any knowledge there existed on the Ryukyu islands – the islands of Okinawa – three indigenous methods of fighting or self-defence: tegumi, kobudo and te. Tegumi is a form of grappling or submission wrestling that is still practised as a sport in Okinawa. We know nothing about its origins, but it has been suggested that it was the most ancient of the Okinawan fighting arts.<sup>1</sup> Kobudo is a range of disciplines utilising ordinary domestic and agricultural implements as weapons. It is still practised either as a separate art or in conjunction with empty-hand techniques in some Okinawan karate schools. Its chief weapons are staves of various lengths (particularly the long staff called rokushaku bo), nunchaku (rice-flails), kama (rice sickles) tonfa (rice-grinder handles) and sai (a three-pronged fork that may have been used originally as a short pitchfork). Most pertinent to us is the empty-handed art called te (手) (the word simply means “hand”), a method of self-defence that developed in three somewhat different forms called (after their supposed places of origin) Naha te, Shuri te and Tomari te.<sup>2</sup> These arts, collectively known as Okinawa te (沖縄手), are the direct ancestors of what we now call karate.

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<sup>1</sup> See Nagamine Shoshin (trans. Patrick McCarthy), *Tales of Okinawa's Great Masters* (Tuttle, 2000). pt. 3, ch. 14.

<sup>2</sup> The large coastal city of Naha is now the capital of the Okinawan Prefecture of Japan; Tomari is its seaport; Shuri, the site of the ancient royal castle of the Ryukyu kingdom, was the capital of Okinawa until 1879. These three places were formerly separate but are now part of the same conurbation.

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There is every reason to think that Okinawa te was greatly influenced by the Chinese martial methods generically called quan fa. In the fourteenth century, when the three kingdoms of Okinawa – Chuzan, Hokuzan, and Nanzan – entered into treaty relations with the Chinese Ming dynasty, imperial diplomats and many other Chinese began to come to Okinawa.<sup>3</sup> Some of them taught Chinese martial techniques to the Okinawan people, who integrated them into what they knew and practised already. It is from the eighteenth century onwards that we come across the expression “tou de” or “kara te” (唐手), which (depending on pronunciation) is “T’ang hand” or “Chinese hand.” We know of some Okinawans who made a point of seeking out particular Chinese teachers. Names that come to mind in this connection are Sakugawa Kanga (1733–1815) of Shuri who in the second half of the eighteenth century studied with a Chinese master called Gong Xiangfu;<sup>4</sup> and Higashionna Kanryo (1853–1916), a native of Naha who studied with a number of Chinese teachers in Fuzhou. Higashionna Kanryo’s teacher from 1867 to 1881 was Ryu Ryuko (1852–1930), an exponent of the Whooping Crane quan fa method (called Ming He Quan in Chinese).<sup>5</sup>

Shuri te, Naha te and Tomari te may thus be described as native fighting arts modified, in ways that cannot be exactly specified, by Chinese influences. They are the direct ancestors of the familiar forms of karate now practised all over the world. Shuri te’s most prominent descendants are Shotokan, Wado Ryu and Shorin Ryu; those of Naha te are Goju Ryu and Uechi Ryu; those of Tomari te are Matsubayashi Ryu and Shorinji Ryu. (These lists

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed history see George Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People* (Tuttle, 1958; rev. ed. 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Gong Xiangfu is called Kushanku (公相君) in Japanese; the long karate kata known as Kushanku or Kanku dai is apparently named after him.

<sup>5</sup> Ryu Ryuko is sometimes called Xie Zhongxiang. Higashionna Kanryo, only a year younger than Ryu Ryuko, seems to have been more of a domestic servant than a formal pupil. The legend is that Ryu Ryuko took him as a pupil as a gesture of gratitude after he saved his daughter from drowning.

are not, of course, exhaustive; we mean no discourtesy to the many less well-known schools that we have omitted.)<sup>6</sup>



*Higashionna Kanryo*

The transmission of karate to Japan,<sup>7</sup> and thence to the rest of the world, is due largely to the activities of three Okinawan teachers who in the early decades of the twentieth century set out to popularise the art on mainland Japan and secure its acceptance there: Funakoshi Gichin (1868–1957), Mabuni Kenwa (1889–1952), and Miyagi Chojun (1888–1953). Broadly speaking, it is to these teachers that the organisation and systematisation of Okinawa te

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<sup>6</sup> For a fairly comprehensive survey see Mark Bishop, *Okinawan Karate: Teachers, Styles and Secret Techniques* (Tuttle Publishing, 1999). Also, there are schools – Shito Ryu and Motobu Ryu, for instance – that contain elements from more than one of the original traditions.

<sup>7</sup> This transmission was not entirely uncontroversial. Okinawan purists especially disliked the Japanese re-writing of “karate” so that, without changing the pronunciation, the word now meant “empty hand” (空手) rather than “Chinese hand” (唐手). This change was made at least partly because of the Japanese antipathy to all things Chinese after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–1895.

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into what we recognise as modern karate is due. This is rather a large generalisation, but not a misleading one.



*Funakoshi Gichin*



*Mabuni Kenwa*





*Miyagi Chojun*

In the contemporary world, five traditions or schools of karate have become predominant in terms of the number of practitioners associated with them. We list them here in alphabetical order:

Goju Ryu, founded by Miyagi Chojun, who studied with Higashionna Kanryo from 1902 to 1915. Goju Ryu is a form of karate in which the influence of Fukien White Crane methods, presumably as taught by Higashionna Kanryo, is still apparent. Goju Ryu is distinguished by strong, “heavy” Naha te kata and by its emphasis on fighting at close quarters with many grasping techniques. A slightly different form of Goju, called Goju Kai, was developed after World War II by Miyagi Osensei’s student Yamaguchi Gogen (1909–1989).

Kyokushinkai, founded in 1957 after a long period of development by Oyama Masutatsu (1923–1994). Oyama Osensei was a Korean who migrated to Japan in 1938. He studied Daito Ryu aiki ju jutsu with Kotaro Yoshida (1883–1966), and karate with

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Funakoshi Gichin and Yamaguchi Gogen. Kyokushinkai karate was formulated by Oyama Osensei during long periods of solitary training on Mount Minobu in Yamanashi Prefecture and Mount Kiyosumi in Chiba Prefecture. It is known for its exceptionally hard training methods.



*Oyama Masutatsu*<sup>8</sup>

Shito Ryu (originally called Hanko Ryu) founded by Mabuni Kenwa. This school, distinguished by its large number of kata, is essentially a fusion of Shuri te and Naha te elements; Mabuni Osensei studied with both Higashionna Kanryo and the Shuri te master Itosu Anko (1831–1915).<sup>9</sup>

Shotokan, founded by Funakoshi Gichin and now the most widely practised form of karate in the world. Funakoshi Osensei studied with Asato Anko (1827–1906) and Itosu Anko

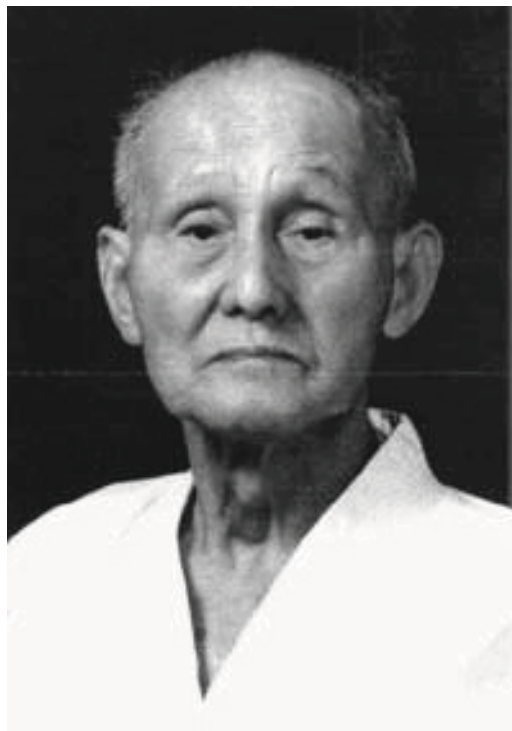
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<sup>8</sup> Photo by courtesy of Australian Kyokushin.

<sup>9</sup> Described by Nagamine Shoshin as “the master of chivalry” (*Tales of Okinawa’s Great Masters*, pp. 45ff). “Shito” (糸東) is made up of the first kanji of the names of Itosu Anko (糸洲安恒) and Higashionna Kanryo (東恩納寛量). The homophone “Shito” (私闘) is “personal struggle”; one suspects that the pun is intentional.

before migrating from Okinawa to Japan in 1922. He is an important contributor to our understanding of karate's formative period because of the amount of written material he produced in his lifetime.

Wado Ryu, founded by Ohtsuka Hironori (1892–1982), a student of Funakoshi Gichin, Mabuni Kenwa and Motobu Choki (1870–1944); his karate was much influenced by his own earlier study of Yoshin Ryu ju jutsu.



*Ohtsuka Hironori*

Mention should be made also of a method of karate less widely practised than those mentioned above but sufficiently established to be fairly well known in the West: Uechi Ryu, developed by Uechi Kanbun (1877–1948), an Okinawan who in early adulthood studied an art called Pangai Noon in the Fukien province of China with a teacher called Zhou Zihe (1874–1926). One's impression from watching it is that, of all karate schools, Uechi Ryu has remained closest to its Chinese roots. The consensus is that the Pangai Noon studied by Uechi Kanbun is now extinct, though in recent years

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some Uechi Ryu karateka have tried to reconstruct it from the kata taught by Uechi Osensei, and have revived the name.



*Uechi Kanbun*

Technical and political differences between the various schools – we shall for the most part try to avoid the word “styles” – need not concern us, though we shall have something to say about them presently. More important from our point of view is the ethical or “spiritual” dimension of practice that became particularly explicit after the spread of karate to Japan. It is to this dimension that we shall devote the rest of this chapter.

### **The Ethics of Karate Do**

People wishing to introduce an unfamiliar method of fighting into the conservative and exclusive culture of mainland Japan saw very clearly the need to forestall the suspicion that karate might be no more than an ignoble peasant science of brawling.<sup>10</sup> The means of

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<sup>10</sup> One of their objectives was to secure the acceptance of karate as a “gendai budo” by the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai (“All Japan Martial

doing so came readily enough to hand. Quite apart from any immediate need to reassure those unfamiliar with the art, the founding teachers of modern karate<sup>11</sup> understood already that unless grounded in a clear and stable ethical discipline a martial art need be no more than the skilled application of violence for possibly unworthy purposes. The native *te* of Okinawa, so much influenced by the Buddhist and Taoist arts of China, was itself not without an implicit code of personal and social responsibility. Also, after its transmission to Japan, the art of karate came directly into contact with the ancient military ideology of loyalty and self-sacrifice called *Bushido*, and with the established practice of Zen Buddhism. For these interconnecting reasons, modern karate was – in principle at least – associated from the start with a clearly articulated moral code. An important part of what we are assuming in this chapter is that this code is an essential aspect of “pure” karate.

The nature of karate as a system of ethics is perhaps most easily conveyed by reproducing some of the well-known maxims of Funakoshi Gichin:

Karate begins and ends with courtesy.

The true purpose of the art of karate is not victory or defeat but the perfection of the practitioner’s character.

In karate there is no first attack.

Karate is a defensive art from beginning to end.

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Virtue Association”), the official martial arts organisation founded in 1895 under the auspices of the Japanese Ministry of Education and sanctioned by the Meiji emperor. “Gendai budo” (現代武道) is “modern martial way” as distinct from the “koryu” (古流) or ancient schools dating from before the first year of the Meiji restoration (1868).

<sup>11</sup> By “modern karate” we mean, roughly, karate during and after the time when it began to be diffused beyond its local Okinawan roots. We recognise, however, that the expression seems to suggest a discontinuity that is not consistent with reality.

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Just as a mirror's polished surface reflects whatever stands before it and a quiet valley carries even small sounds, so must the student of karate-do make his mind empty of selfishness and wickedness in an effort to react appropriately to whatever he might encounter.

True karate-do is this: that in daily life, one's mind and body should be trained and developed in a spirit of humility; and that in critical times, one should be devoted utterly to the cause of justice.

Anyone who wishes to study karate-do must strive always to be inwardly humble and outwardly gentle. However, once he has decided to stand up for the cause of justice, then he must have the courage expressed in the saying, "Even if it must be ten million foes, I go!" Thus, he is like the green bamboo stalk: empty inside, straight, and with knots, that is, unselfish, gentle, and moderate.<sup>12</sup>

First you must know yourself; then you can know others.

Spiritual development is paramount; technical skills are merely means to the end.

Be always mindful, diligent and resourceful in your pursuit of the Way.

Apply the Way of karate to all things; in this lies its beauty.

Abide by the rules of ethics in your daily life, whether in public or private.

This is a small selection from a wide range of possibilities. One could fill a book with similar quotations from the writings of Funakoshi Osensei<sup>13</sup> and other distinguished teachers who emphasise again and again the centrality of personal and public virtues

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<sup>12</sup> The imagery is odd, but the sentiment clear. "Empty" in this sentence is "kara" (空), as in karate (空手).

<sup>13</sup> The above quotations are taken (with a few inconsequential alterations to the translations) from the recently-published modern editions of Funakoshi's writings: *The Twenty Guiding Principles of Karate: The Spiritual Legacy of the Master* (trans. John Teramoto; Kodansha International, 2003); *Karate Do: My Way of Life* (Kodansha International, 1981), and *Karate-Do Kyohan: The Master Text* (trans. Tsutomu Ohshima; Kodansha International, 1991).

to the practice of karate: courtesy, humility, gentleness, justice, self-knowledge, non-aggression. Perhaps the most succinct aphorism of all is one attributed to Nagamine Shoshin (1907–1997), the founder of Matsubayashi Ryu. When someone asked him what makes a good karateka, he replied: “Ki shou, fu shin” (鬼手仏心) – “Demon hand, Buddha heart.”<sup>14</sup> As far as we know, it was Funakoshi Osensei who introduced the practice of speaking of “karate-do” rather than “karate jutsu.” “Do” (道) is “way” or “path,” with the connotation also of “Zen way” or “Buddhist teaching.” Karate, in other words, is more than a “jutsu” (術) – more than a means or a repertoire of techniques. “True” karate is a way of life in which moral and social excellence must be fully and consistently embodied. Mabuni Kenwa called his karate “kunshi no ken” (君子の拳): “the virtuous man’s discipline.” This phrase has become a kind of motto of Shito Ryu, but it might be applied to all schools that practise the martial arts as an ethical discipline or “way.” The outward, material, visible aspects of practice are ultimately only the means by which the practitioner goes beyond them, to free the mind and develop all that is best in the self.

Clearly, then, the karateka should strive to be a person of integrity and nobility of character. So what has gone wrong? Trying to analyse this question and find an answer to it is the most difficult, and the most important, task of this chapter. We know that it is easy to be critical of others, and we realise that much of what we are about to say will be controversial. We say it, however, out of genuine conviction arising from many years of personal experience and observation.

### *Ideal and Reality*

First, then, *has* anything gone wrong? As far as we are concerned the short and clear answer is, Yes. It is in our view obvious that, in

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<sup>14</sup> We have come across this attribution in many places; see, for example, Charles C. Goodin, *Hawaii Pacific Press*, 1 October, 1999.

general and apart from a certain amount of lip-service, the ethical ideals of the old masters have been comprehensively ignored. The longer answer is as follows.

(A) Funakoshi Gichin's senior student Egami Shigeru (1912–1981) remarked in 1976:

The present situation ... is that the majority of followers of karate in overseas countries [i.e. elsewhere than in Japan] pursue karate only for its fighting techniques ... It is extremely doubtful that those enthusiasts have come to a full understanding of karate-do ... Mention should also be made of the negative influence of movies and television on the public image of karate, if not on the art itself. Depicting karate as a mysterious way of fighting capable of causing death or injury with a single blow or kick ... the mass media present a pseudo art far from the real thing.<sup>15</sup>

Egami Sensei is not the only one to make such comments; nor, despite what he implies, is karate as practised in Japan exempt from reproaches of this kind. The heart of the problem, as we see it, is that karate has become a casualty of its own popularity. This popularity – largely, though not entirely, due to the martial arts film industry during the 1960s and 1970s – has led to what one might call the industrialisation or commercialisation of karate: a development inimical to “a full understanding of karate-do.”<sup>16</sup> We shall try to develop this statement in terms of the following four points.

1. Karate has to a large extent become a sport or game. For many of its practitioners, the sole or main object of practice is to enter and win tournaments, and numerous organisations have grown up that have as their principal purpose the organisation of competitive events. The World Karate Federation, established in 1990, has for

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<sup>15</sup> *The Heart of Karate-Do* (Kodansha International, 1976; rev. edn., 2000), pp. 13–14.

<sup>16</sup> We are here speaking only of karate, but it is hardly open to doubt that, with a few notable exceptions, this process of commercialisation has infected the martial arts generally, especially since the “Bruce Lee boom” of the 1970s.



some years been trying – so far without success – to have karate recognised as an Olympic sport, and one suspects that it is only a matter of time before these efforts are rewarded. One consideration here, though a secondary one, is that constant no-contact or semi-contact fighting weakens technique – an issue that we shall mention again in due course. A far more important point is that the desire to win is the desire to feed and inflate the ego: to be the Victor, the Hero of the Hour. “The true purpose of the art of karate is not victory or defeat but the perfection of the practitioner’s character.” There is nothing very perfect about the character of someone who wishes to enlarge himself by triumphing over others in a game that can be played only at the cost of trivialising an art whose founders set such exalted standards for it.

2. Recent decades have seen the growth of large karate classes in which students are fee payers and the teacher a professional or semi-professional service provider. In such classes the traditional relationship of intimacy and example as between teacher and student does not and cannot exist, and there is an exclusive concentration on the students’ merely technical and outward development. Increasingly one comes across references to “the martial arts industry”: a phrase that expresses a largely unchallenged assumption that martial arts teaching is a business like any other, and that karate is a commodity to be bought and sold. Those in the “industry” are in many cases young people (sometimes of considerable technical ability, sometimes not) who do not bother with – who are sometimes positively contemptuous of – the idea of karate as a Zen “way” of discipline and self-improvement. Quite apart from anything else, in the context of Western culture kicking and punching sells; arduous inward personal development on the whole does not.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> On the face of it, one might make this point especially in relation to the numerous kickboxing and freestyle and “sport karate” schools that have in one way and another spun off from traditional karate. For the most part, however, such schools make no claim to have

3. The growth of the martial arts “industry” has given rise to a proliferation of dubious and fraudulent teachers. This is not an easy point to make, because we have no intention of naming names or accusing individuals; but no one who has had much contact with the contemporary martial arts world can doubt that there has been such a proliferation. Exposés and accusations have become depressingly common, and it is not obvious that all such accusations are malicious or politically motivated. There are teachers who make patently absurd claims for themselves: who tell you that they can harness the mysterious “chi/ki” force of the universe and by means of it knock out an opponent without touching him; that they have esoteric knowledge of techniques too deadly to be disclosed – and so on and so forth. There are teachers who have grossly exaggerated their training background, or simply lied about it on the assumption that no one will be bothered to check, or who falsely claim to have served in elite military units<sup>18</sup> or to have had other kinds of special and unusual experience. There are senior martial artists whose claims to have a Japanese lineage, or to have trained for many years in Japan, have turned out to be falsehoods. To be as fair as we can: many (perhaps most) of those who commit this kind of dishonesty may be actuated not so much by material greed as by ego-needs associated with their own insecurities: a desire for recognition and power and celebrity. In a sense, such people are more to be pitied than condemned. Nonetheless, they hardly exemplify “perfection of character,” nor can they have much to contribute to its development in others.

As an adjunct to this point we remark as a matter of common knowledge that students are often ready to let even manifestly fraudulent or ridiculous claims pass unchallenged. It is something of a mystery that this should be so frequently true. Why go on

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signed up to the “spiritual” values of traditional karate. We accept that it would be unjust to reproach them for not living up to standards to which they have never subscribed.

<sup>18</sup> Expect to hear also: “... but on missions so sensitive that my existence would be officially denied.”

handing over your money to someone who is clearly a charlatan? The answer, we suggest, is partly that students are imbued from the first with an unduly deferential and unquestioning attitude to their teachers. This is often represented – not without justification – as a traditional aspect of oriental culture. We suspect also that their denial of the obvious arises from ego-needs of their own: from the wish to believe that they are the disciples of a wise and invincible master who can lead them to some cherished goal. It is natural enough to want to belong to an in-group or a “family.” It is natural also, at least for a certain type of personality, to want to place oneself in the hands of a trusted authority figure. This is precisely the kind of dependent and impressionable personality that makes “cults” possible. The power of wishful thinking, here as in other kinds of relationship, is very great. It is easy to persuade yourself, even in the face of clear evidence to the contrary, that someone really is what you want him to be.

In various ways, then, peer pressure, individual needs and personality traits, or “the emperor’s new clothes” phenomenon, can lead students to pretend – even, less explicably, to believe – that their teacher has knocked them down or controlled them without touching them, or what have you. We have seen this kind of collective delusion many times, and it leads us to a simple conclusion: that every dishonest teacher is sustained in his position by the suggestibility of students who *allow* themselves to be deluded – sometimes to an extent extraordinary to the outsider. It is conceivable also that, in some cases, apparently fraudulent teachers do really come to believe that they can perform near-miraculous feats – because their students so often tell them that they can and shield them from contradiction. If there are limits to the human capacity for self-deception, they are very broad ones.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> There can, of course, be nuances in the relationship of pupil to teacher that are not obvious to the casual observer. The surviving footage of Ueshiba Morihei (1883–1969), the saintly founder of Aikido, often attracts a specific type of criticism: “He hardly touches the students and they fall over! Sometimes he doesn’t touch them at

4. The growth of the martial arts “industry” has given rise to what one might call a devaluation of the currency, or “grade inflation.” Every teacher knows that the first question asked by a newcomer to the dojo is likely to be: “How long will it take me to get a black belt?” The desire to pass gradings is much the same as the desire to win tournaments. It is a desire for ego-fodder. As such, it is a desire that the conscientious teacher ought surely to eradicate, by instruction and example. Then again, if the students are fee payers and the teacher a service provider, the teacher has to give the customers what the customers want to pay for. If he doesn’t, the customers will go elsewhere. The long-term result is a multiplication of grades (the attainment of each of which involves a fee) and a lowering of the standards required to achieve each one (because students who “fail” will, as likely as not, never be seen again). Nowadays one comes across holders of dan grades (some of them children, or not much more than children) who have little or no grasp of the inner or “spiritual” aspects of karate (some of whom, indeed, have no very impressive grasp of its external aspects either). Again, this is a contentious point because we name no names; but we suggest once more that no one who has spent much time in the current martial arts world is likely to doubt it.

(B) As a generalisation, karateka – even very senior ones – have failed miserably to keep their own egos in check and to let their better selves reveal themselves in practice. Every club, every association, every federation is notoriously full of “politics” and

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all and they fall over! They’re not attacking him seriously!” Of course they’re not: he’s over eighty and they love him. This, surely, is understandable; and to our knowledge no one has seriously suggested that Ueshiba Osensei was a fraud or that his students were dupes or stooges. The fact remains, however, that excessive submissiveness or compliance on the part of students can lead both students and “ordinary” teachers to lose their grip on reality. We are convinced that, in some cases, what looks like fakery is in fact the mutual acting out of a fantasy that has become genuinely implanted in the minds of those who participate in it.

infighting and backbiting. New associations are founded by people who have left or been ejected from a previous association in anger, possibly over some quite trivial disagreement. "Styles" continue to remain separate, to perceive other "styles" as threats or rivals and to have no apparent sense of a common purpose. The aspiration of Funakoshi Osensei seems largely to have been forgotten:

There is no place in contemporary karate-do for different schools. Some instructors, I know, claim to have invented new and unusual kata, and so they arrogate to themselves the right to be called founders of "schools." Indeed, I have heard myself and my colleagues referred to as the Shoto-kan school, but I strongly object to this attempt at classification. My belief is that all these "schools" should be amalgamated into one so that karate-do may pursue an orderly and useful progress into man's future.<sup>20</sup>

Also, it has all too often been true that when the head of a school or "style" dies his disciples fall immediately to squabbling among themselves about who is to be his inheritor, with the resultant multiplication of factions and splinter groups whose members seem deathlessly hostile to those of other groups. The appearance of internecine strife and disputes over succession has become boringly predictable. It happened when Miyagi Chojun died in 1953; when Funakoshi Gichin died in 1957; when Shimabuku Tatsuo (the founder of Isshin Ryu) died in 1975; when Ohtsuka Hironori died in 1982; when Uechi Kanei, son of Uechi Kanbun, died in 1991; when Oyama Masutatsu died in 1994. We will not take up space with the sorry and insignificant details of these quarrels; they are easy enough to research if anyone wishes to take the trouble. Suffice it to say that you can almost guarantee it that, when a prominent teacher dies, some kind of civil war will break out among his students.

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<sup>20</sup> *Karate Do: My Way of Life*, p. 38. "Shoto" (松濤) is, literally, "waving pine tree": the word was the pen-name with which Funakoshi signed his calligraphies.

Why is karate at all levels so much disfigured by “politics” (to say nothing of the other martial arts of which the same is true)? One possible conjecture that we mention only briefly is a psychological one. It has to do with a general tendency of the martial arts to attract a particular kind of neurotic individual. What we have in mind is the “authoritarian personality” described in 1950 by Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson and Nevitt Sanford.<sup>21</sup> The authoritarian personality is insecure, ego-driven, inflexible, confrontational, literal-minded, intolerant of criticism, resistant to change. It is a personality that enjoys and thrives on formality, hierarchy, discipline, etiquette, clear rules and instructions – precisely the things that one finds in a traditional karate dojo – and reacts aggressively and irrationally when familiar rigidities are questioned. We may or may not be right in supposing that this kind of personality finds itself drawn to the martial arts, but long experience suggests that we are. On the assumption that we are, it seems to us that (a) these psychological characteristics are of exactly the sort that karate ought to enable the individual to rise above, and that (b) on the whole it has signally failed to do so. Indeed, they are characteristics that all too many teachers display and transmit in turn to their students.

### *Principles of Kenkyo-ha*

Our thesis, in a nutshell, is this. On the one hand, if we look back at the teachers of the past whom we are most accustomed to regard with reverence, we discover an incontestable fact: that their conception of “true” karate incorporated a definite ethical ideal over and above the physical performance of the art and inseparable from it. On the other hand, this ideal has been consistently disregarded by subsequent generations who have done so much to turn karate into a game and the teaching of it into a business. Of course there are distinguished exceptions to this generalisation, but it would be difficult to deny that it is broadly true.

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<sup>21</sup> T.W. Adorno, E. Frenkel-Brunswik, D.J. Levinson and R.N. Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (Harper and Row, 1950).

Perhaps our argument will seem censorious or self-righteous. Live and let live, surely; all things being equal, anyone who wishes to ignore the teachings of the great masters is perfectly at liberty to do so, and who are we to tell others how they should and should not live? In a certain context, as we have conceded already (see note 17, above), this point is not without force. But, whether one likes it or not, those who practise the merely external aspects of traditional karate, or who practise from motives of vanity or self-aggrandisement, are not practising the “true” art according to the definitions of those very masters whom they regard as authoritative. To those who have no experience of karate, or whose perception of it is distorted, it seems wildly paradoxical to say that one who studies a “deadly fighting art” should also cultivate the “unmanly” Buddhist virtues of humility, gentleness, courtesy and forbearance; yet that is precisely what the teachers whom we regard with most veneration do say.

What, then, is the answer? What maxims might anyone beginning to study karate be advised to follow if his karate is to be more than an approximation to the real thing? The following principles briefly express the “philosophy” of Kenkyo-ha Goju Karate Kempo.

*Be mindful of what lies beyond kicking and punching.* Ultimately, karate is more than a syllabus of fighting techniques or an art of self-defence. It is a way of self-mastery or self-perfection. Call it a Buddhist or Zen way of self-perfection if you wish (“Demon hand; Buddha heart”); but names have no particular importance. Whatever you call it, its goal is perfection of character, and your true enemy is your own ego.

*Keep your mind fixed on the here and now, not on an illusory future destination.* Perfection of character is not something waiting for you as a reward at the end of a journey like a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. You can attain it every minute of every day if you give yourself wholly to what you do and live the “way” of

karate with a sincere and dedicated heart. There is no journey, and there is no destination.

*Practise with humility.* Be aware always of your own faults and shortcomings and not inordinately proud of your accomplishments. Do not seek to magnify yourself by defeating or humiliating others. Treat those junior to yourself not as inferiors, but as younger brothers and sisters. Treat those senior to yourself as older brothers and sisters: learn from them and accept their correction and advice without resentment. Remember that we are all on the same path, regardless of “style,” and do not be jealous or mean-spirited in your criticism of others.

*Preserve your own integrity and independence of mind.* Respect your teachers and the great teachers of the past, but do not worship them. Respect is not the same thing as slavish compliance, and you will only harm your teacher if you encourage him to believe that he is beyond criticism. Provided you do so with humility and a genuine desire to learn and grow, do not be afraid to ask questions or challenge the received orthodoxies. There can be no growth without change, and understanding cannot be learnt by rote.

*Rise above yourself.* As you acquire strength and self-confidence, try to use these things for the good of others, showing love and compassion to all sentient beings, and never using them for your own glorification. Do not mock or despise the weakness of others, but help them to overcome it.

*Do not attach undue value to physical strength and prowess.* Wisdom can increase with age, but strength will certainly leave you as time passes.

By way of strengthening your mind, repeat to yourself as often as you feel inclined to, and certainly before you begin each practice session, the following “kun”:<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Customarily the “dojo kun” (道場訓) – “training hall precepts” – are displayed in the dojo and recited before practice begins. We here



I train myself to be humble in heart.

I train myself to show respect and compassion to all sentient beings.

I train myself to ask no more than I can give.

I train myself to learn from my mistakes.

Remember too another precept of Funakoshi Osensei: "It will take your entire life to learn karate, there is no limit." Karate is not only for the young; in every sense, karate is for life.



*Karate is not only for the young*



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intend the term to mean not something imposed or prescribed, but "the rules that one gives to oneself."

## 22 *Kenkyo-ha Goju Karate Kempo*

We shall repeat and amplify some of the things said in this chapter as we go on. We know that sententious advice is a good deal easier to give than it is to take. We know also that no one is perfect and that no one ever will be. But some targets are worth aiming at even if you miss them.

## 2: Junbi Undo – Preparatory Exercises

IT IS ESSENTIAL to spend the first fifteen or twenty minutes of a practice session on a sequence of junbi undo (準備運動): preparatory exercises. The purpose of junbi undo is to work through the whole body, raising the body's core temperature, taking the joints through their full range of motion, and warming and stretching the main muscle groups. A thorough warm-up will reduce the risk of injuries that might arise if strenuous practice were undertaken without preparation.

When doing any kind of exercise you should “listen” to your body and match what you do to what it tells you. Even gentle exercise can lead to soreness or injury unless you work within your limits. In the interests of safety and effectiveness the following general principles should be kept in mind:

- (a) Breathe slowly and deeply always, fully in and fully out. It is important not to hold your breath or restrain your breathing at any time.
- (b) When you stretch, do so gently, smoothly and progressively, without “bouncing.” Use the full range of motion available to you, but do not do anything that feels “wrong” or uncomfortable.
- (c) Avoid hyperextending your joints (i.e. forcing a joint beyond its normal range of motion) and sudden or excessive twisting movements, especially of your neck and lower back.

Before beginning these sets, and between each set, it is advisable to jog around the dojo for a while to keep your body warm and your heart rate slightly elevated.

## Junbi Undo

### (a) *Feet and Ankles*

1. Standing in heiko dachi (see p. 188),<sup>23</sup> slowly and smoothly raise yourself on tiptoe and lower yourself again, ten times. Test your balance by pausing on tiptoe for a few seconds before lowering yourself.



**1**

*Slowly and smoothly raise yourself on tiptoe and lower yourself, pausing on tiptoe each time to test your balance*

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<sup>23</sup> For a glossary of this and the other Japanese terms used in this book see chapter 12.

2. Stand on one leg. Rotate the foot of your raised leg ten times clockwise and ten times anticlockwise, making sure that you use the full range of motion of your ankle. Change your stance and perform the same exercise on the other side. Maintaining your balance while standing on one leg is an important secondary part of this exercise.



**2**

*Rotate each foot clockwise and anticlockwise, using the full range of motion of the ankle. Take care to maintain your balance while standing on one leg*

3. Still standing on one leg, straighten your raised leg and point and raise your toes ten times, feeling a stretch in your Achilles tendon and the muscles of your lower leg. Change your stance and perform the same exercise on the other side. As with the previous exercise, take the opportunity that the one-legged stance gives you of training and confirming your balance.



**3**

*Point and raise the toes of each foot, feeling a stretch in your calf muscles and Achilles tendon. As before, take care to train and confirm your balance*

**(b) Legs**

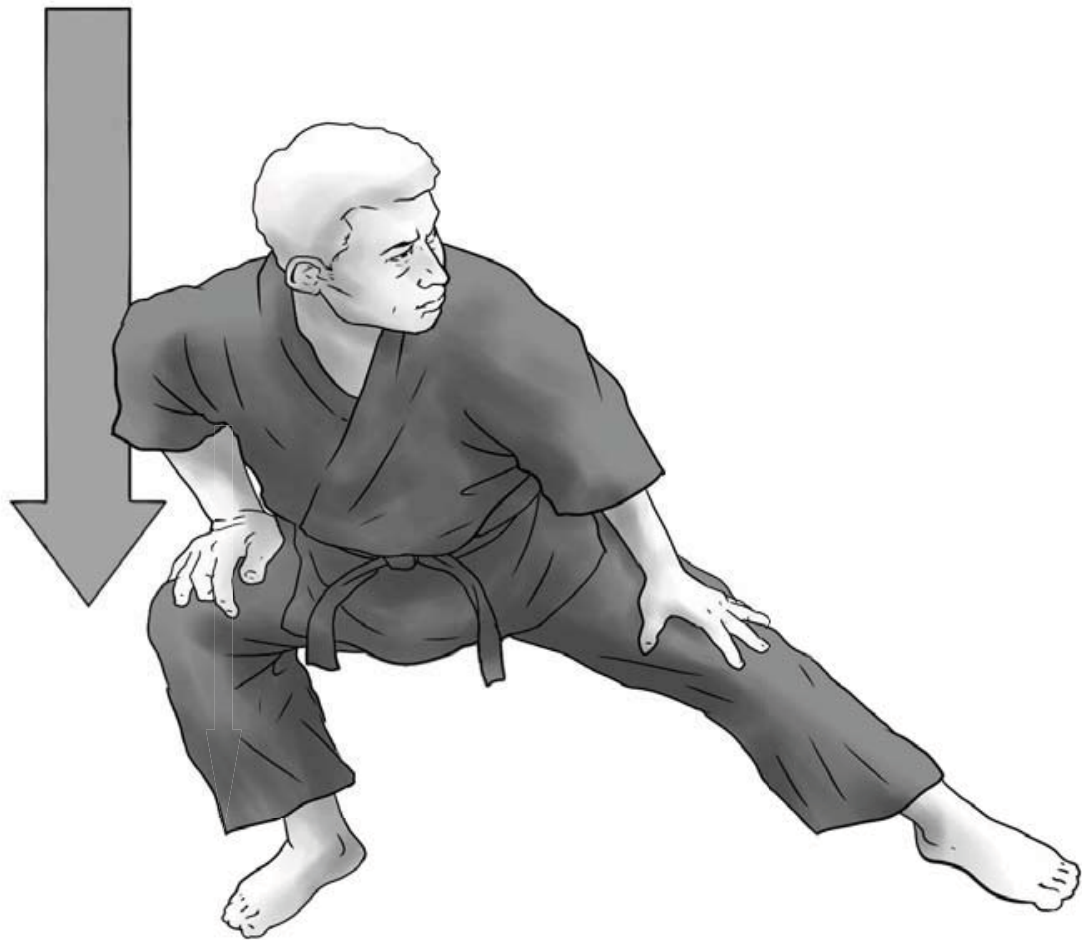
4. Stand in heiko dachi and extend your hands in front of you, palms downwards at waist level. Strike sharply upwards with each knee alternately into the palm of the corresponding hand; do this ten times with each knee. At the same time have the feeling that you are driving your other foot down into the floor.



**4**

*Strike your knee sharply up into the palm of your extended hand, simultaneously "rooting" your other foot firmly to the floor*

5. Beginning from shiko dachi (see p. 205), shift your weight across to your right leg, straightening your left leg. Lower yourself towards the floor until you feel a significant stretch on the inside of your left thigh. Repeat the exercise five times on each side.



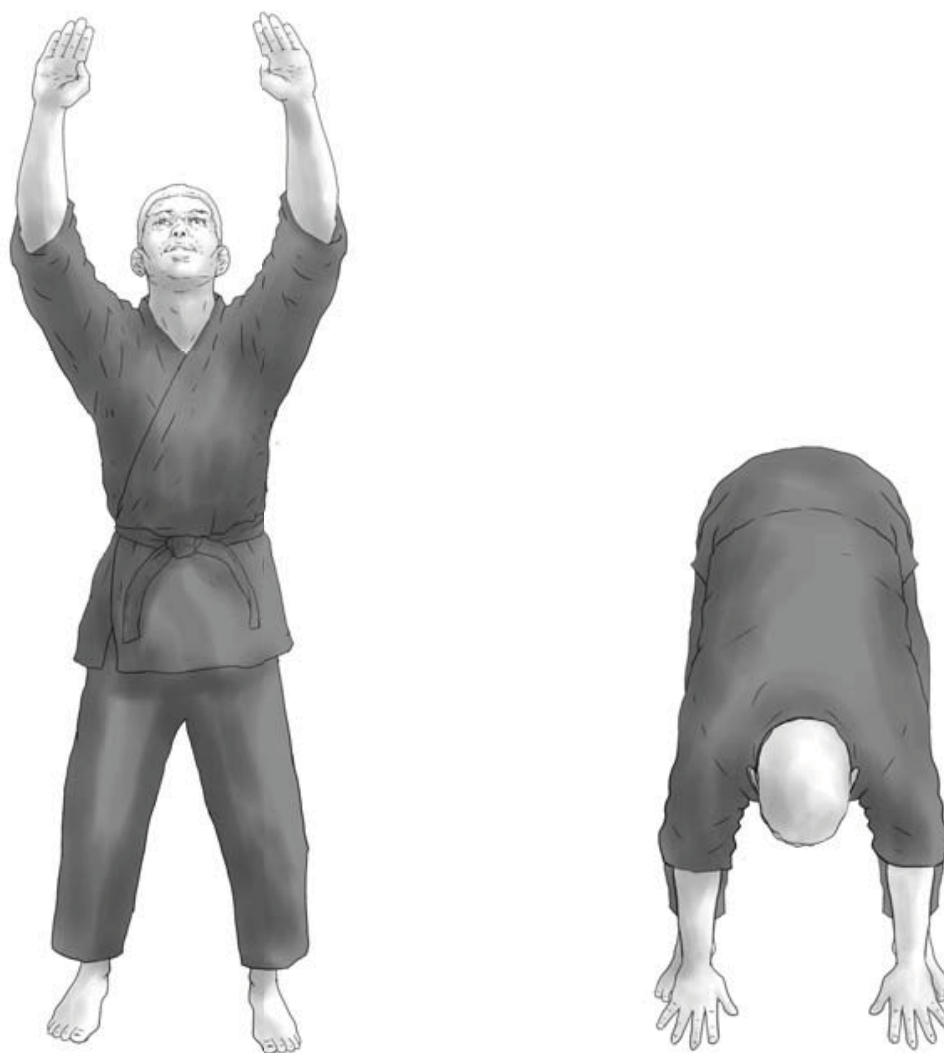
5

*Sit down on one leg, lowering yourself towards the floor until you feel a significant stretch on the inside of the thigh of your straight leg*



6. Stand in heiko dachi and raise your hands above your head as if trying to reach up and touch the ceiling. Lean forward slowly, bending at the waist and touching the ground with your fingertips (or the palms of your hands if you can). Keep your back as straight as possible while you do this: rounding your back will tend to compress your spinal discs. If you cannot reach the floor, go far enough to feel a significant stretch in the hamstrings at the back of your legs.

Do this exercise slowly; you may feel light-headed if you bend and straighten too quickly.



**6**

*Bend forward slowly until you feel a significant stretch in the hamstrings at the back of your legs*

7. Stand in heiko dachi; slowly sit down as low as you can in a 'frog' posture, keeping your feet flat on the floor. Fold your hands in front of you as if praying, and use your elbows gently to push against the insides of your knees and stretch your thighs apart. Repeat this exercise five times.



7

*Sit down in a "frog" posture and use your elbows gently to push your thighs apart*

8. Stand in a left han zenkutsu dachi (see p. 208) and execute ten fuetsu geri/otoshi kakato geri (see pp. 111–112) with your right leg; then change your stance to a right han zenkutsu dachi and execute the same kick ten times with your other leg. (Because this is a more “ballistic” exercise than the ones that have gone before, be sure that your muscles are warm and “ready” enough before you do it. Always remember that cold muscles tear easily.)

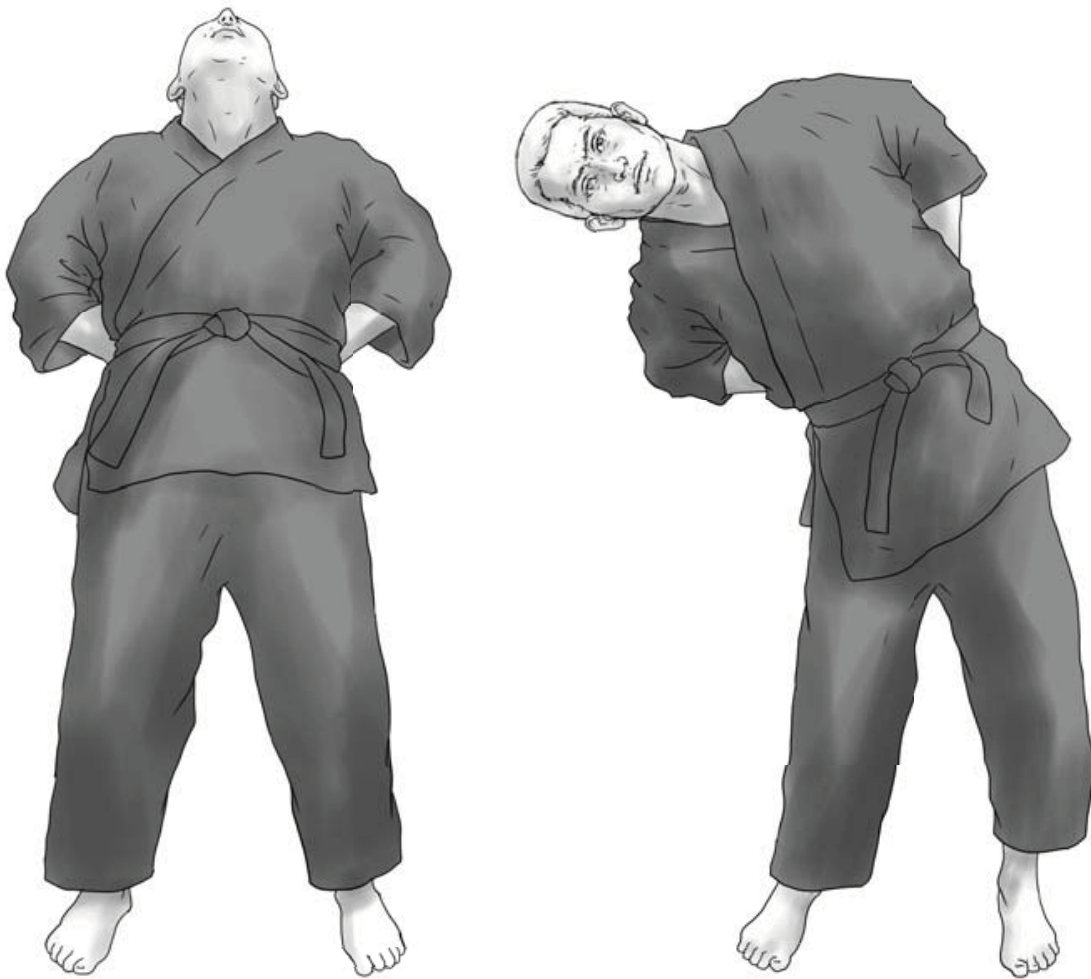


**8**

*Stand in han zenkutsu dachi and execute ten fuetsu geri/otoshi kakato geri with each leg*

**(c) Waist and Abdomen**

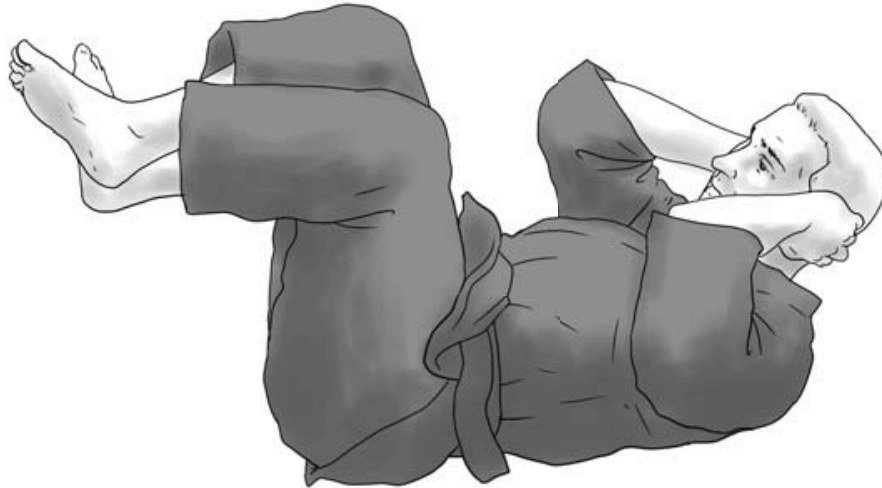
9. Stand in heiko dachi; press your hands against the small of your back over your kidneys and lean backwards against your hands as far as you comfortably can; straighten up; lean as far over to your right as you can; then as far over to your left as you can. Repeat this sequence ten times. This sequence should not be allowed to become a series of sudden, intense twists of the torso.



9

*Press your hands against the small of your back and lean backwards against your hands as far as you can; straighten up; lean over to your right; then to your left*

10. Lie on your back with your knees drawn up, your hands beside your temples and your elbows pointing towards your knees. “Crunch” your abdominal muscles to bring your knees up to touch your elbows. Do this exercise a minimum of ten times.



**10**

*Lie on your back with your knees drawn up;  
“crunch” your abdominal muscles to bring your  
knees up to touch your elbows*

11. Lie flat on your back; support your hips with the palms of your hands; slowly lift your feet off the floor until your legs and body form a right-angle; then slowly lower your feet back down to the floor. Do this a minimum of ten times. Sometimes pause with your heels six inches or so off the floor.



## 11

*Support your hips with the palms of your hands;  
slowly lift your feet off the floor until your legs  
and body form a right-angle; then slowly lower  
your feet back down to the floor*

**(d) Upper Back and Shoulders**

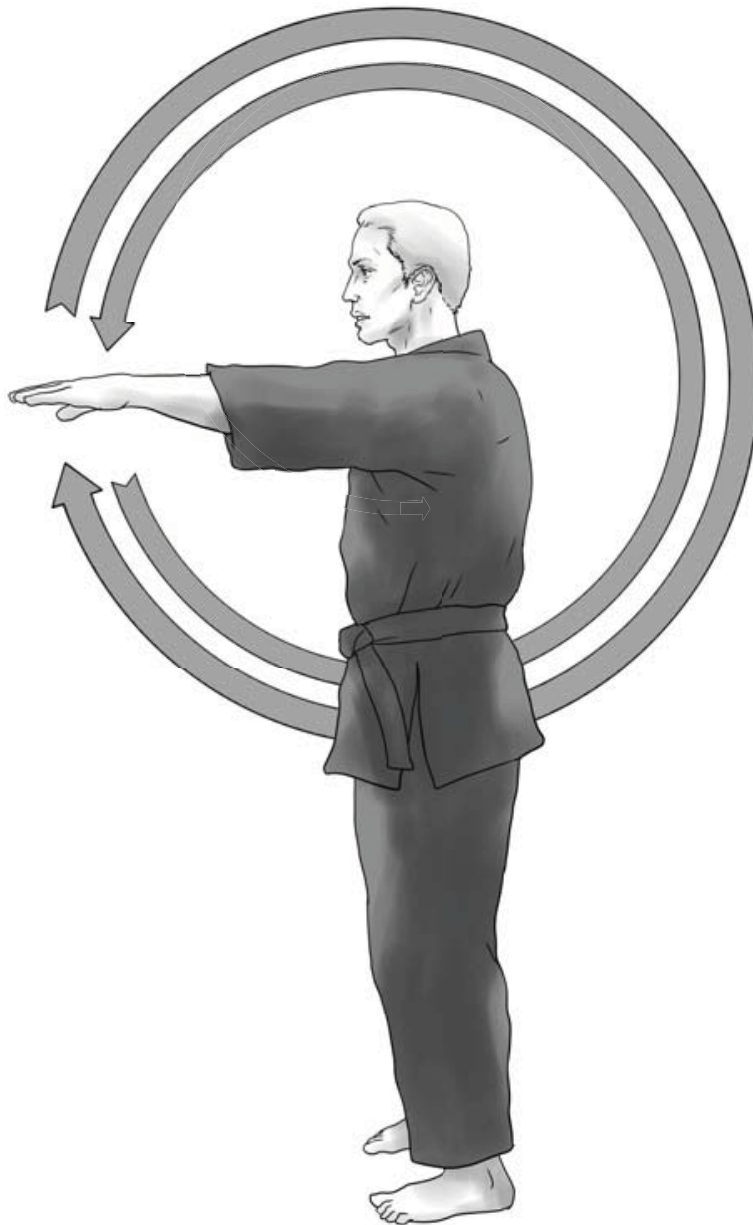
12. Stand in heiko dachi. Shrug your shoulders as high as you can and roll them forwards ten times; then do the same thing ten more times but rolling them backwards.



**12**

*Shrug your shoulders as high as you can and roll them forwards; after ten repetitions repeat the exercise in the reverse direction*

13. Stand in heiko dachi. Rotate your arms from the shoulders, feeling the movement in your shoulder joints. Increase the speed of rotation as you feel yourself attaining your full range of motion. Rotate your arms forward first, then back, at least ten times in each direction.



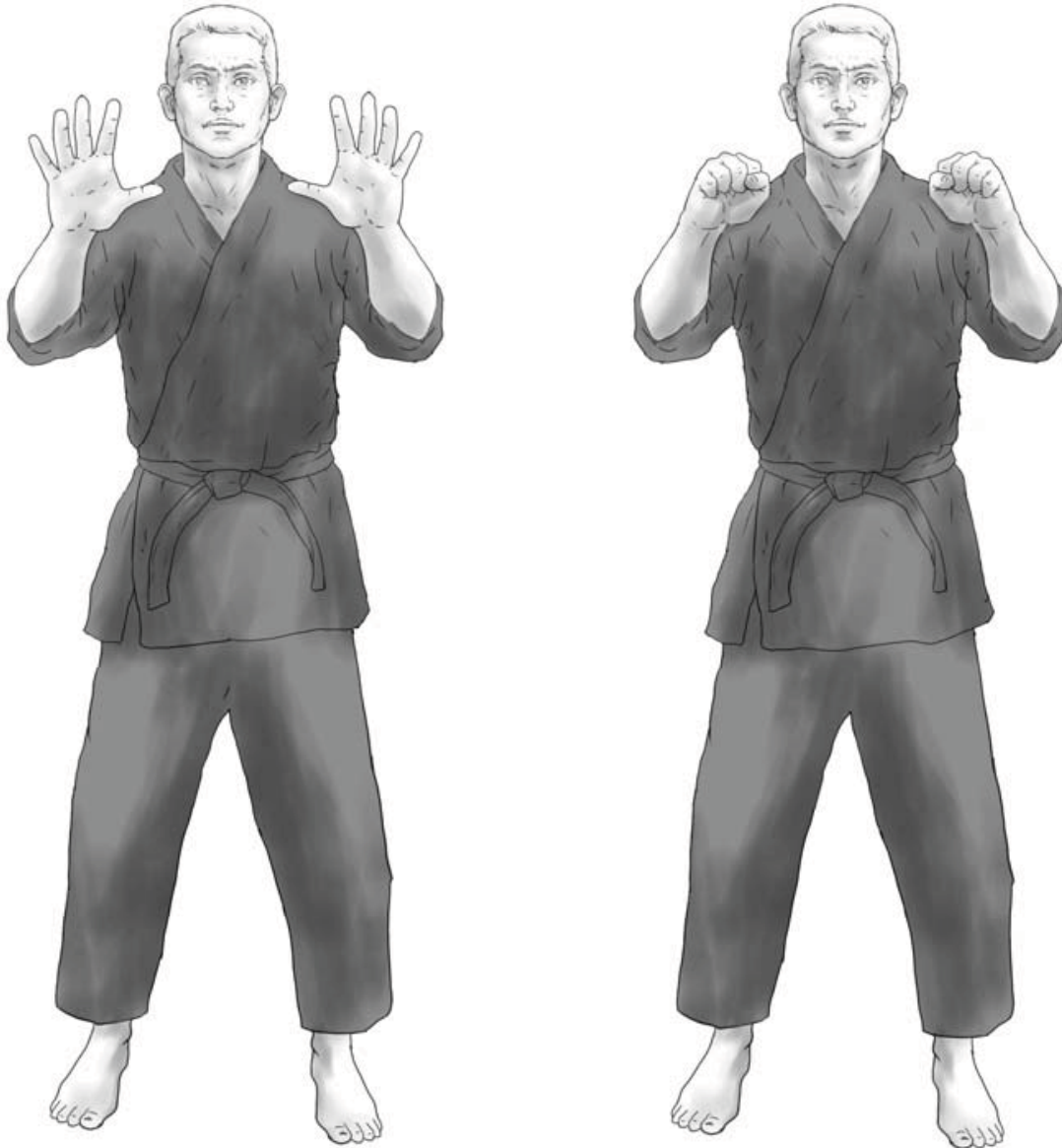
**13**

*Rotate your arms from the shoulders, forward first, then back, at least ten times in each direction, with increasing speed*



**(e) Hands and Arms**

14. Stand in heiko dachi. Extend your arms in front of you; stretch your fingers as wide apart as you can, then roll them up tightly into fists. Feel as if you were grasping and squeezing tennis balls. Repeat the exercise ten times.



**14**

*Stretch your fingers as wide apart as you can, then roll them up tightly into fists as if you were squeezing tennis balls*

15. Still in heiko dachi and with your arms still extended in front of you, rotate your hands five times clockwise and five times anticlockwise. Do this exercise slowly, making sure that you are turning your hands through their full range of motion; you should feel a stretch especially in the tendons of your wrists.



**15**

*Slowly rotate your hands five times clockwise and five times anticlockwise, taking your hands through their full range of motion and stretching the tendons in your wrists*

16. Stand in shiko dachi with your fists drawn back to your ribs; perform at least ten straight punches with each hand, aiming at a point directly opposite your own throat. Punch hard and vigorously, but do not lock your elbows out. Let your shiko dachi be as low as is comfortable, but there is no need to go too low (see p. 205). Breathe deeply and normally.



**16**

*Stand in shiko dachi and perform ten straight punches with each hand, aiming at a point opposite your own throat; be careful not to put excessive stress on your knee and elbow joints*

**(f) Neck**

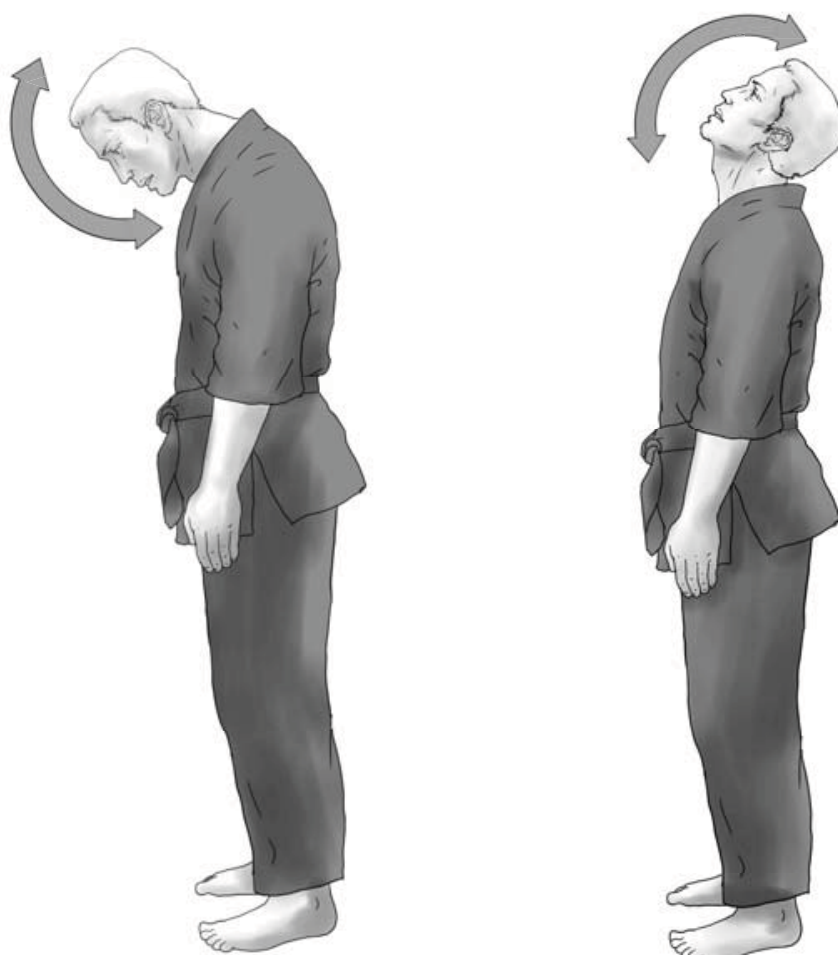
17. Stand in heiko dachi. From a natural resting position looking straight ahead of you, turn your head first to your left then to your right so that, at the end of each movement, you are looking directly over your shoulder. Do not go beyond what feels comfortable. Repeat the exercise at least five times in each direction.



**17**

*From a natural position looking straight ahead of you,  
turn your head at least five times to the left and  
five times to the right. Be careful not to go  
beyond what feels comfortable to you*

18. From the same natural resting position, nod your head as far forward as you can, as if to look at the floor in front of your feet, then as far back as you can, as if to look at the ceiling directly above your head. Then bring your head back to its resting position and repeat the exercise, ten times in all.



**18**

*Nod your head backwards and forwards at least five times, again being careful not to go beyond what feels comfortable*

Be aware of how easy and potentially serious it is to injure the neck. Do exercises 17 and 18 slowly and smoothly, being careful not to twist the neck violently; and do not try to extend the range of motion beyond what feels like its natural and healthy limit. Always treat your head and neck with the utmost respect!

The junbi undo exercises described in these pages should not be taken as a hard and fast prescription. Individual needs will vary according to age and circumstances, and individual preferences will differ. Also, always doing the same set becomes tedious. There are many variants and alternatives, some of them longer and more vigorous than the sequence illustrated here. As long as every part of the body is stretched and warmed by safe and effective means, it does not much matter what preliminary exercises are done.

### **Assisted Stretches**

The body's flexibility can be improved up to a point; people who begin karate are often surprised at how much more supple they become after only a few weeks of training. Nonetheless, "up to a point" is a phrase that needs to be taken seriously. Some people are naturally more flexible than others; some people are very flexible indeed. (This is not an unmixed blessing, incidentally; extreme joint hypermobility – "double jointedness" – in youth can lead to painful problems later on.) In almost all cases a degree of flexibility will be lost with age, but if you try to go beyond your natural limits at any age you may well hurt yourself.<sup>24</sup> Over the years we have seen many injuries arise from the fact that karate 'warm-ups' tend to turn into bendiness contests. By all means push yourself to your limits; but at any given time it is important to know what your limits are, and not to try to go beyond them. Remember always that you are not in competition with anyone else.

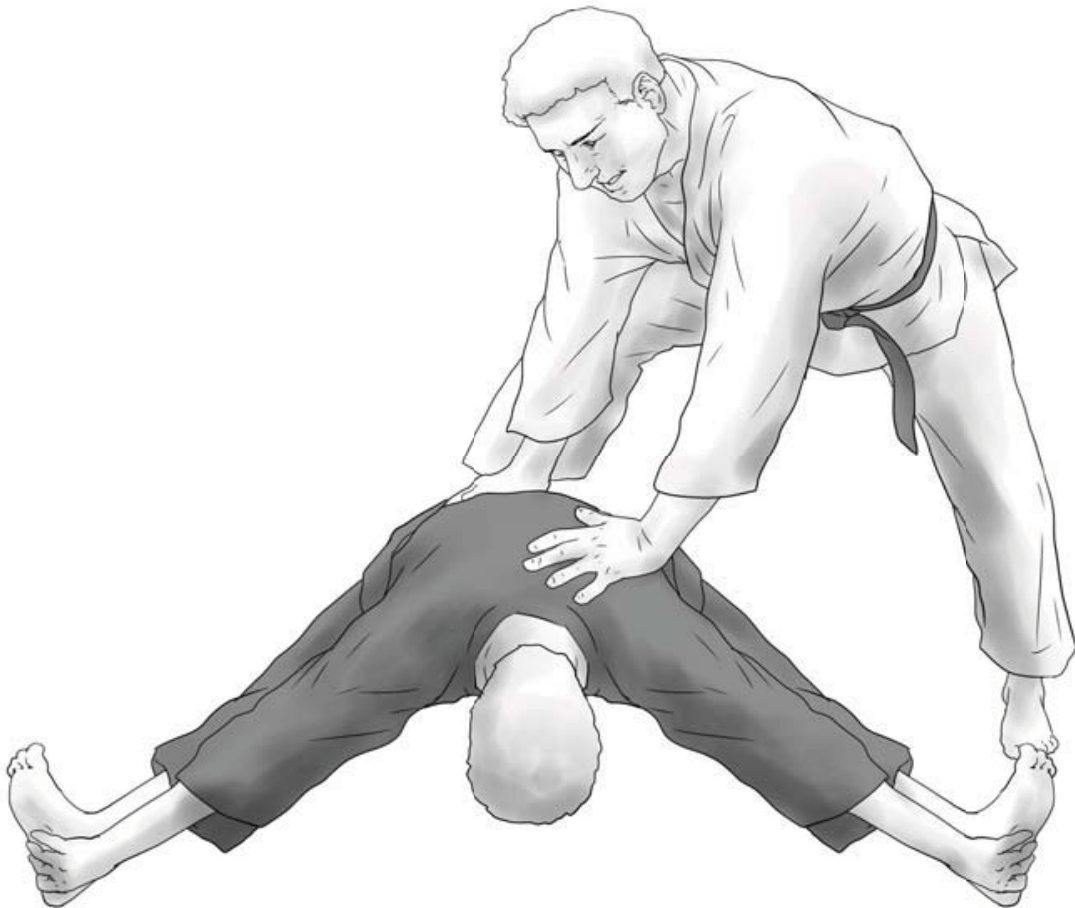
With this qualification, partner-assisted stretches can be very useful. *The following exercises should not be done, however, until after the body has been thoroughly warmed and stretched by a sequence of*

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<sup>24</sup> Some martial arts – tae kwon do is the most prominent example – seem to call for a degree of flexibility beyond what most people (especially older people) can achieve. Contrary to what is often supposed, traditional karate does not call upon its exponents to execute very high or athletic kicks. It is better to choose an art that is within your physical capabilities than to injure and frustrate yourself trying to acquire capabilities that you do not naturally have.

*junbi undo*. It goes without saying that in all assisted stretches it is vital for the participants to be sensitive and responsive to one another.

(a) Partner A sits on the floor with his legs as far apart as they will comfortably go; Partner B exerts continual gentle pressure against his back, as if trying to push his torso down to the floor between his thighs. It will help if Partner A holds onto his ankles or feet and pulls himself down towards the floor during this exercise. Notice that Partner B is pushing both the lower and upper back of Partner A, to avoid bending the spine excessively.



*(a) Partner B gently pushes Partner A down towards the floor; Partner A simultaneously pulls himself down with his hands*

(b) Partner A sits on the floor with his legs as far apart as they will comfortably go; Partner B sits opposite him with his feet placed against the insides of Partner A's ankles. Holding onto Partner B's arms, Partner A gently pulls himself towards Partner B, using the pressure of Partner B's feet against his ankles to stretch his legs further apart.



*(b) Partner A and Partner B co-operate to stretch Partner A's legs*

(c) Partner B squats in front of Partner A; Partner A puts his ankle on Partner B's shoulder; Partner B slowly stands up, progressively stretching Partner A's hamstring muscles. Partner A can steady himself by holding on to Partner B or by using a wall. It is essential to avoid any feeling that the knee is hyperextending.



This exercise can be done with the foot in a front-kick (as illustrated) or side-kick position (see p. 120); in the latter position the emphasis will be on extending the range of the hip joint.



*(c) With Partner A's ankle on his shoulder, Partner B slowly stands up, progressively stretching Partner A's hamstring muscles*

### **3: Training an Effective Posture**

ALL EFFECTIVE MOVEMENT needs to come from a base that is confident and secure, and successful strikes and blocks can be executed only from a strong and stable foundation. For these reasons, one of the most important aspects of karate practice is the cultivation of what we shall call a grounded body condition. In this chapter we shall outline some of the ways in which such a condition can be developed and maintained.

#### **Posture Control**

It is, in fact, probably better to think in terms of re-establishing a natural but neglected body condition than of developing something new. One of the problems that beginning karateka run up against is the need to unlearn much of what they have been taught to regard as correct. Experience suggests that the average human being – at any rate the average occidental human being – acquires at an early stage a set of postural habits that are thoroughly unnatural or artificial. It is perhaps less true now than it was in the past; but young western males still tend to grow up with the idea that the traditional military “attention” stance – body held rigid, chest thrust out, stomach pulled in, shoulders thrown back – is a good, correct, smart posture.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to see why such an idea ever established itself, because this stance and the ways of moving

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<sup>1</sup> Females too, though for different reasons, develop “stomach in, chest out, back straight” body habits fairly early in life. As usual, almost everything that we are saying in this chapter applies equally to male and female karateka. It has been suggested also that the Japanese custom of sitting or kneeling on the floor rather than on chairs accounts for some of the differences between Japanese and European postural habits.

that it encourages are just about as dysfunctional in postural terms as anything could be.

This dysfunctionality is almost self evident. It is certainly easy to demonstrate in the dojo. Stand “at attention” in the prescribed fashion, stiff and tense, and have a practice partner push against your chest. You will immediately feel yourself beginning to topple over backwards – and your partner’s push does not have to be very hard to make this happen. If you did not immediately step back into a stable posture you would go on falling until you hit the floor rigid, rather as a grandfather clock would if you pushed it over. It seems obvious that a stance from which one can be so easily dislodged – that is so stiff and “top-heavy” – is not a strong or an effective basis for anything.

So now experiment with something different. Stand facing your partner in a relaxed natural stance with your feet at shoulder width apart (i.e. in *heiko dachi*) and let him push you in the chest again (the push should be a steady push, not a sudden thrust or strike). The object of the exercise from your point of view is not to step away from the push, but to adapt your stance in such a way as to absorb or cope with its incoming force without being unbalanced by it. You will, in fact, find that you do this more or less by instinct and without thought. One might almost say that your body will do it for you as an act of natural adjustment, in much the way that it will adjust itself to changes of speed or direction when you stand up in a moving train (indeed, standing up in a moving train or bus without holding onto anything is a useful practice). When you feel your partner’s push your posture will modify itself into one that will tend to “earth” the push through the structure of your body into the ground. The sensation of shifting or settling into such a posture is not easy to describe, but most people, if asked, express it in terms of “sinking their weight” and “rooting” themselves to the ground.

This feeling of being “rooted” or “sunk” is what we are calling a “grounded” posture. Because it is a prerequisite of so many

other things it is vital for the karateka to develop it not just as an occasional response but as an habitual or a normal body condition. Learning to stand and move always as if someone were about to bump into you or try to push you over will create a strong foundation from which any technique and any movement can be executed with confidence and efficacy. When you think about it, this “grounded” or settled posture is an entirely natural one. Babies adopt it by instinct – they would never learn to walk otherwise, because they would fall over every time they tried to stand up. Thanks to the triumph of aesthetics over practicality, we lose our natural tendency to “sink” as we grow up. We develop a “gravity-defying” posture because we are taught to think of anything else as slouching. At the beginning of our karate practice we need to re-learn that it is (a) futile to fight gravity and (b) essential to make use of it for our own purposes.

There are several ways of learning and reinforcing this lesson. One of them is the exercise that we have just described: Partner A pushes against Partner B, and Partner B “finds” within himself the body condition that best enables him to neutralise or redirect the force of the push. Partner B learns to sink his weight or lower his centre of gravity: this is what we mean by making use of gravity for our own purposes. This sort of exercise can be done in any number of permutations. Stand in shiko dachi or zenkutsu dachi or sanchin dachi or whatever stance you like – tsuru ashi dachi, even – and let your partner try to push you off your stance in as many different directions as possible (these stances are illustrated in chapter 8). Your part of the practice is to “find” the body condition that in each case makes it as difficult as possible for him to do so. Your role is to neutralise or absorb the force of his push as far as you can by controlling the “groundedness” of your body as you receive it. The more effort your partner has to expend to move you, the more effective your control of your posture is proving to be.

Some teachers of great innate ability – Ueshiba Morihei is a famous case in point – are said to have developed the art of

“sinking” or “rooting” to such a level as to make themselves virtually immovable. It is, of course, a mistake to expect miracles from any exercise, but without aspiring to the legendary stability of Ueshiba Osensei and others everyone can develop a high degree of posture control. You will probably be surprised at how quickly and easily you learn to “ground” yourself. You are not, after all, learning anything new; you are only remembering something that you had forgotten or “grown out of.”



*White Gi stands in zenkutsu dachi, “finding” the body condition that most effectively counteracts the force of Black Gi’s push*

When doing this kind of exercise you will probably notice in yourself a tendency to “cheat”: to counteract your partner’s push by leaning against it rather than by standing in a way that enables its force to be redirected into the ground. The best way to assure yourself that you are not cheating is to have your partner stop pushing suddenly and without warning. If you find yourself toppling in the direction that the push was coming from, you were leaning against it rather than absorbing or redirecting it.

But experience is worth more than words; these things are always a good deal easier to discover through practice than to express in writing. Experiment with these exercises in as many ways as you can devise; make it as hard as you can for your partner to push you off your stance by letting your body discover for itself how to create a firm and stable base. The more often you do it, and the more adventurous you are in exploring it, the easier and more instinctive it will become to stand and move in a way that is “sunk” or “grounded.”

The following exercise will illustrate for you how great a degree of posture control can be achieved by a simple act of will.

1. Partner A stands in a natural stance in front of Partner B. Partner B, standing behind him in *shiko dachi*, puts his hands around his waist and lifts him straight off the floor (i.e. lifts him up by straightening his own legs rather than by levering him off the floor with his pelvis). If both partners are of more or less the same height and weight, this is easy to do.
2. The exercise is repeated, but this time with Partner A consciously sinking his weight – lowering his centre of gravity – towards the floor. Partner A has to “find” in himself the body condition that will make it difficult or impossible for Partner B to lift him. You will see a remarkable difference between the first and second phases of this exercise. You may find that you can make yourself almost unliftable; you will certainly find that you can make yourself seem to have become much heavier than you were the first time.

You have not, of course, actually become heavier or somehow managed to tamper with gravity. If you were to do this exercise standing on a weighing machine, the machine's reading would not change. What has happened is quite simple. You have made yourself *feel* heavier by becoming a "dead" weight: by doing nothing to co-operate with your partner's effort to move you. People who took part in "sit in" demonstrations in the 1960s used to do the same thing while policemen were carrying them away. As before, you need to play with this exercise for yourself to appreciate the possibilities of "grounding" – grounding through relaxation – that it will reveal.



*By becoming a "dead" weight – by seeming to make himself heavier than he is – Black Gi makes it difficult for White Gi to lift him*

The kind of postural control that we have been talking about is often described as “sinking the breath into the abdomen/hara/tanden” or “sinking the chi/ki.” Clearly you cannot really sink your breath “into” your hara – your abdomen or belly – and we shall have something to say on the subject of chi or ki presently. But if you do the exercises outlined above, you will quickly notice that a grounded posture has two main and interdependent components: relaxation and deep breathing. In view of the importance of the relation between breathing and posture you will find it helpful from time to time to concentrate on breathing as an exercise in itself, using the kind of practice that in Chinese is called zhan zhuang (站樁).

The rationale of doing this is again related to the tense, upright “at attention” posture that we described earlier. If you make a definite muscular effort to hold your stomach in or to make it look as flat as possible, one result will be that you will breathe with your intercostal muscles only: the mechanical process of breathing will involve only the muscles that cause your ribs to rise and fall. But if you breathe solely with your rib-cage you will be breathing only into the upper part of your lungs – which is one of the reasons why the “military” posture feels so top-heavy. If you want to use the full capacity of your lungs, you need also to flatten your diaphragm with each in-breath, thereby increasing the volume of your thoracic cavity and hence the space into which your lungs can expand. This is what is meant by “sinking the breath into the abdomen.” But because flattening your diaphragm will push your abdominal organs downwards and outwards, it will have the effect of pushing out or rounding your belly – which is exactly the appearance that most people, male and female, are self-conscious about.

An important function of our zhan zhuang exercise, therefore, is to help you to overcome your aversion, if you have it, to the round-bellied look. “Zhan zhuang” is “standing like a post.” That really is all you have to do, and you can do it anywhere. Stand in heiko dachi and let all tension leave you. Close your eyes if you



like. Let your mind be still and unanxious. Relax your entire body, and especially your shoulders and abdomen. Breathe in and out as slowly and deeply as you can, not only using the muscles that lift your ribs, but now also consciously flattening your diaphragm or pushing it down as you inhale – pleurably ignoring the fact that this is giving you a round belly like the cheerful personification of happiness and generosity called Hotei. You're not fat or slovenly: you're just breathing in the way that nature intends, using the whole capacity of your lungs. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Aim to create for yourself, by combining relaxation and slow, deep breathing, a completely relaxed, sunk, heavy feeling, happy and untroubled by self-consciousness.



*Create for yourself a relaxed, sunk, heavy feeling like  
Hotei, happy and untroubled by self-consciousness*

By all means use imagination or visualisation as part of this exercise. All training is a co-operative interaction between body and mind, and occupying yourself with visualisations will help

you to overcome feelings of bodily self-consciousness. Imagine, then, all tension leaving your body and soaking away into the floor like a dark liquid (don't worry; an imaginary dark liquid won't damage the carpet). Imagine that, regardless of what is physically possible, you really are taking each breath right down into your abdomen. Imagine that, with each out-breath, your body is becoming heavier and more immovable and sinking down towards the floor. Imagine that with each in-breath you are drawing energy from the universe into your body, and that with each out-breath you are adding it to a dense mass of energy that is accumulating behind your navel. Visualise that mass of energy as a bright, heavy, compacted ball to which every breath adds a little more. You can even give this ball of energy a colour, if you like (the Chinese and Japanese seem to like to think of it as red; *tanden* or *dantien* – 丹田 – is “red field”). You can make up whatever visualisations you like, as long as they contribute to the sense that your body is becoming heavily and powerfully rooted to the ground – and as long also as you resist the temptation to take your visualisations too literally (see pp. 60–64).



All this is will be enough to introduce the reader to the idea of a “grounded” posture: a posture or body condition that is in contrast to the high, unstable military posture that we described at the beginning. No amount of verbal description can really convey what such a body condition feels like; but anyone who explores it along the lines that we have suggested will not take long to grasp the possibilities.

There is one supreme karate exercise that combines in itself all the various aspects of body training that we have discussed: the kata called *Sanchin* (三戦). The regular practice of *Sanchin* kata is in our view indispensable to the development of strong karate, because it is so fundamental to the cultivation of effective stance and movement.

## **Sanchin Kata**

The word Sanchin means “three battles.” The idea behind the name is that in practising Sanchin kata one is striving to master body, mind and will; more properly, perhaps, to integrate these three elements of the self into a unified and co-ordinated effort.

Sanchin is an ancient kata that, like so many Okinawan and Japanese kata, had its origins in China. It exists in a number of forms, some of which are very different from the Goju versions that are most usually seen. It was originally performed with the hands open in nukite form (as it still is in the version used by Uechi Ryu karateka; and see pp. 81–82). The practice of performing it with the hands clenched into fists is said to have been introduced by Higashionna Kanryo’s student Kyoda Juhatsu (1887–1968). Many Goju schools practise two forms of Sanchin, called Sanchin sho (三戦小) and Sanchin dai (三戦大) respectively.<sup>2</sup> Sanchin sho (“small Sanchin”) was abridged by Miyagi Chojun from the Sanchin that he learnt from Higashionna Kanryo, and for that reason is also called Miyagi no Sanchin (“Miyagi’s Sanchin”: 宮城の三戦). Sanchin dai (“large Sanchin”, also called Higashionna no Sanchin: 東恩納の三戦) is longer, with two 180° turns. There is no reason why you should not practise both, but the turns required by the longer Sanchin are valuable in themselves as “grounding” exercises. Sanchin, for all its apparent simplicity, is a difficult and strenuous kata to perform properly.

Our understanding of Sanchin kata differs in some respects from traditional or “mainstream” views, and no doubt many people will disagree with what we say. Nonetheless, we offer the following advice in the light of our own experience.

(a) Proper breathing is essential in performing Sanchin kata; but what “proper” breathing is needs to be clearly understood. You will sometimes see the forward thrusting/punching movements of Sanchin performed with what western physiology calls Valsalva

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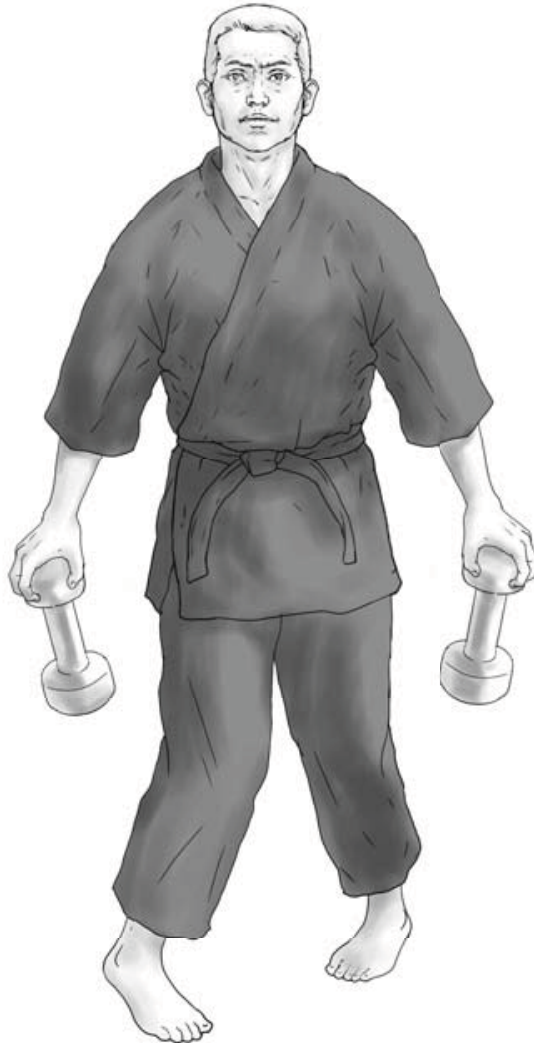
<sup>2</sup> Or Sanchin dai ichi (三戦第一) (Sanchin # one) and Sanchin dai ni (三戦第二) (Sanchin # two).

breathing: the sort of strained breathing (exhaling against a closed glottis) that one might adopt – unwisely but instinctively – when lifting a heavy object. One has heard respected teachers say that this breathing is a way of “forcing ki into the blood”; one has even seen karateka performing Sanchin kata while holding their breath, presumably with the same end in view. This is not only nonsense (part of the family of nonsense that has accrued around the idea of “ki”); it is dangerous nonsense. One of the things that Valsalva breathing will do is spike your vascular, cranial, and pulmonary pressures. This is not a good idea, especially for the older karateka. If you have hypertension, peripheral vascular disease or congenital vascular abnormalities it is potentially a lethal idea. There is a strong anecdotal association between the “traditional” performance of Sanchin kata and hypertensive health problems. It is worth remembering that Shimabuku Tatsuo, the founder of Isshin Ryu, fell down dead in his dojo while practising Sanchin kata.

When performing Sanchin kata, then, breathe slowly and deeply, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Make sure that with every in-breath you fill your lungs as completely as possible, and that with every out-breath you empty them as completely as possible so that the air in your lungs is always fresh. Use the whole of your thoracic capacity by fully engaging your diaphragm or abdomen in the mechanics of breathing. As you exhale, open your mouth and make an audible “haaa” sound; but *do not at any point* hold your breath or restrict your breathing so that you feel yourself to be “straining.” Your breathing should be deep, slow and unrestricted throughout.

(b) Maintain throughout the kata the “grounded” body condition that we have described. Have the feeling that your centre of gravity is established firmly in your hara, and do not at any point allow your posture to become “top-heavy” or unstable. It is useful to visualise (or sometimes actually to have) a weight hanging from your obi, pulling you down towards the floor. When you step forward, slide your feet along the floor without lifting them, so that it would be difficult to put even a piece of paper under

them. Use your imagination to create for yourself the sensation that you would have if you were wading through thick mud or walking with heavy weights around your ankles. You can, of course, use actual ankle-weights from time to time. You will also find it useful occasionally to walk backwards and forwards as though doing Sanchin kata but holding niri game<sup>3</sup> or dumbbells in your hands and letting them pull you down towards the floor.



*Let the weights pull you down so that you feel rooted to the floor. When you step forward, slide your feet along the floor so that it would be difficult to put even a piece of paper under them*

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<sup>3</sup> Nigiri game are heavy ceramic jars filled with sand, traditionally used to strengthen the grip. For this and other Okinawan training equipment see Michael Clarke, *The Art of Hojo Undo: Power Training For Traditional Karate* (YMAA Publication Center, 2009).

(c) The sanchin dachi in which the kata is performed should not be too wide; otherwise the knees will be subjected to excessive stress.<sup>4</sup> The actual width of the stance will vary according to the physique of the individual. As a rule of thumb the lateral distance between your feet should not be greater than the width of your shoulders, but very tall karateka may need to take a wider stance than this in order to achieve a sufficiently grounded feeling. There should be the sense that the feet are trying to screw themselves into the floor or sink into it; this is what is meant when it is said that you should “grip the floor with your feet.” At the end of each step forward the pelvis should be pushed through or tilted to straighten partially the natural inward curve of the lower back. According to “traditional” teaching the turned-in position of the front knee and the bent back knee should bring the thighs close enough together to impede or catch an upward kick to the groin; but, again, individual differences of physique may make this impossible.<sup>5</sup> The important thing is to aim for a “grounded” body condition; all aspects of your stance should be directed to that end.

(d) Sanchin is essentially a “dynamic tension” kata. Each time you pull your hand back towards your ribs, inhale deeply. The movement of your hand and the relation of your body to the floor should feel exactly as it would if you were pulling against a strong resistance (imagine a bungee rope). You have to find the body con-

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<sup>4</sup> Some karate schools use a much wider version of sanchin dachi called han getsu dachi (半月立ち), which is “crescent” or “half-moon” stance. This is found at the beginning of the kata that Shotokan karateka call Hangetsu (Wado ryu practitioners call their version of the same kata Seishan). In our view han getsu dachi is a stance that could do a great deal of harm to the practitioner’s knee ligaments over time.

<sup>5</sup> The kata that have come to us from Okinawa and Japan naturally presuppose what one might (as a large generalisation) call a typical oriental physique. Non-Japanese karateka often find that they have to make adjustments or modifications to stances and kata to accommodate their own physiques – because, for example, they are taller or longer-limbed than the “average” Japanese. One should make such adjustments without hesitation and without any sense of doing something improper or wrong.

dition that enables you to pull your hand in towards you without yourself being pulled forward by the resistance. Try to use your whole body as you would if you were shifting a heavy piece of furniture: your whole body rather than upper body strength alone. As you thrust forward with your punch, exhale fully. You should again feel that your thrust is overcoming a strong resistance, and again you should have the sensation that your whole body is engaged in the effort. Contrary to what is sometimes taught, it is not necessary to maintain a state of muscular tension throughout Sanchin kata; but as you breathe out and punch or thrust forward your whole body should be tensed and your abdominal muscles should contract as if preparing to receive a blow. This tensing of your abdomen as you exhale is what is commonly called “ibuki” breathing; but we stress again that it does not involve holding or the breath or forcing the breath through a closed throat. (The word “ibuki”(息吹) means “exhaling”: there is no great mystery about it.) As you step forward to repeat the withdraw-and-punch sequence on the other side relax your body and take a complete in- and out-breath. Sanchin kata should feel like hard work, but you should *never* feel that it calls upon you to make an effort that is in any way unnatural. We have even heard people congratulate themselves on a “good” Sanchin because, at the end of it, they have a splitting headache. This is *not* a good Sanchin.

The tension and stability of your posture during the forward-thrusting phase of Sanchin kata can be tested by having a partner slap you vigorously on the shoulders, thighs and abdomen while you are performing it. This shime (締め) – “tightening” – exercise looks and sounds more alarming than it is. The slaps administered must be firm enough to test you, but they should not be too hard. Shime is a learning experience, not a punishment or an ordeal.

Despite what is so often taught there is no one unalterably right way of practising Sanchin kata. Remembering that the point is to cultivate a strong and stable body condition, you should play with it until you find the way of doing it that is right for you. The

advice that we give here is only advice – not instruction. Practise diligently, and always with the guidance of a teacher; but find your own way.

### The Question of Ki

We mentioned on p. 52 the idea of “sinking the chi/ki” (“ki” is the Japanese and “chi” or “ch’i” the Chinese pronunciation/transliteration of the word written as 氣). Ki and the use and enhancement of it is a controversial subject, and in this final section we shall make some heretical remarks about it.

Anyone who spends any time in martial arts circles will soon come across the notion of ki, as in such expressions as “developing your ki,” “sinking your ki,” “projecting your ki.” They may have been shown, or have participated in, such commonplace demonstrations as the “unbendable arm” trick (and we use the word “trick” advisedly).<sup>6</sup> Many people display a degree of credulity in relation to ki that is quite extraordinary. It is postulated as a mysterious life force, carried around the body along “meridians,” that can be directed or channelled in such a way as to enable the adept to perform superhuman feats of strength, agility and control. It is a force supposedly different, though in ways that no one can explain, from the known natural forces of gravity, electro-magnetism, etc. We have already mentioned students – and teachers – who appear to believe in all sincerity that chi or ki can be deployed to knock people down or immobilise them without touching them. We hear it said that the great teachers of days gone by owed their prowess to their mastery of ki. It is this same chi or ki that acupuncture is supposed to be able to manipulate and direct for therapeutic purposes.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, this marvellous force is invisible and unmeasur-

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<sup>6</sup> It is a “trick” not in the sense of being an illusion or deception, but because what makes it work is not “ki” but posture and relaxation.

<sup>7</sup> For an impartial evaluation of acupuncture see the papers collected in Edzard Ernst and Adrian White (eds.), *Acupuncture: a Scientific Appraisal* (Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999).



able, the meridians along which it is supposed to travel are invisible, and many martial arts practitioners who claim to be able to perform tremendous feats by means of it are obvious mountebanks, some of whom have been made to look exceedingly foolish.

In view of its inherent unlikelihood and the exploitation of its supposed existence by frauds, it seems that the only intelligent attitude to adopt towards ki is one of healthy scepticism or outright disbelief. On the other hand, it is undeniable that there are frail-looking old gentlemen who seem able to dispose of attackers with effortless ease. But by what means? May there not after all be a core of sense in the notion of ki and its properties? We shall try to deal with this question by making three unsensational points.



*... frail-looking old gentlemen who seem able to dispose of attackers with effortless ease*

(a) The word “ki” or “chi” seems to mean a good deal less than is often supposed. Literally it denotes nothing more esoteric than “breath,” “air,” mind” or “spirit,” and, by an extension readily comprehensible in English, “life.”<sup>8</sup> To grasp this essential simplicity of meaning is to clarify the issue considerably. If by “ki” is meant only what one might equally call aliveness or vitality – the difference between being alive and being dead – then clearly there “is” such a thing. The existence of “aliveness” is hardly in doubt. If you want to say that a dead cat is a cat destitute of ki, your meaning, as far as it goes, will be clear enough.

(b) If this is what – if this is all – ki means, we can talk about enhancing it or developing it or using it without seeming to invoke some quasi-magical invisible force and without having to think of it as a kind of “stuff” that flows around the body. Obviously it is possible to increase the body’s vitality or efficiency – through exercise, healthy diet, proper breathing, and so on. By the same token it is possible to impede or deplete your ki by doing things that are inimical to health: smoking, drinking to excess, neglecting to take exercise, etc. The operative differences between vibrant good health and unhealthy lassitude are hardly difficult to understand.

(c) We shall be happy to apologise to anyone who can prove us wrong, but until evidence to the contrary is forthcoming we contend that there really is no more to it than this. That ki “exists” is not in doubt, but there is no need to make a mystery of it. It is “aliveness” or “vitality” in an ordinary and uncontroversial sense. If you regularly practise one of the Chinese deep breathing and stretching routines called qigong (chi kung) exercises, you will certainly feel warm, energised, vibrant, “full of beans.” But what you are feeling is not the surging of some mystical “life force” understood only by the sages of the East. You are feeling as you

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, John 19:30: “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed his head, and gave up His spirit” – i.e. He died.

do because your muscles are warm and supple and your blood has been fully oxygenated by deep breathing: a fine way to feel, but not something that needs any explanation beyond that provided by ordinary physiology. The case of ki is a little like that of what used to be called phlogiston, the “stuff that makes things burn.” We are now happy enough to call the stuff that makes things burn “oxygen” and to abandon the older theory without a qualm.

Ki, in short, is entirely unproblematical as long as one realises that there really is nothing occult about it and that there is no need to resort to superstition or outmoded science to account for it. People who speak as though the art of ki manipulation were a secret transmission entrusted to the enlightened few do so for all kinds of reasons, some of them no doubt disreputable. Scepticism is often greeted with an indignation that suggests that belief in ki is more a matter of faith than of reason. In the final analysis it needs to be stated clearly that there is no magic about the martial arts, no matter how strongly some people want to believe otherwise. In Chen Man-Ch'ing's phrase, there are no secrets.

What, then, about Ueshiba Morihei and Chen Man-Ch'ing and all the other old gentlemen who can deal with opponents with such marvellous ease? First of all, one has to remember that what these people have been seen to do in demonstrations is to an extent unreal, because demonstrations are precisely that. The point of a demonstration is to show as clearly as possible how a technique works, not to show what can go wrong with it or to display it in the heat and confusion of battle. Also, as we have said already – and without meaning any disrespect – students are unlikely to attack their aged and venerable teacher with full force and intent.

Having said this, it does seem incontrovertible that some teachers have achieved levels of skill that are completely incommensurate with their age and apparent bodily strength. Again, we are inclined to explain this in terms that may seem dis-

appointingly ordinary. No doubt such teachers have high levels of ki – high levels of fitness and vitality maintained by exercise and healthy living. More to the point is that by a combination of long practice – lifelong practice – and natural aptitude, they have achieved a virtually perfect understanding of distance, timing, body-language and biomechanics. Ueshiba Morihei, Chen Man-Ch'ing and other celebrated teachers brought as near to perfection as makes no difference the art of anticipating an attack, neutralising it, and using its force against the attacker. Why does there have to be a more mystical explanation of their expertise than that? Surely the object of practice should not be to pursue the dream or delusion of some magical or supernatural force, but to bring one's natural capabilities to the highest level that they are capable of attaining. This is an important part of the "perfection of character" that it is the purpose of practice to bring about.

## 4: Striking Techniques

THE STRIKING TECHNIQUES of karate are called uchi waza (打ち技). In this chapter we shall describe some of the more usual uchi waza and say something about the development of force and precision in executing them. (It should be remembered, however, that the descriptions given here have something of the nature of dictionary entries. Listing and illustrating techniques conveys absolutely nothing of the fluidity and contingency of practice, any more than listing words conveys anything of the real nature of language.)

### Uchi Waza

The importance of conscientiously training uchi waza cannot be too much emphasised. An old karate maxim is ikken hissatsu (ichi ken hissatsu; 一拳必殺) – “one blow, certain death.” It goes without saying that the notion of killing somebody with one blow (or at all) is not to be taken literally; nor must one ever lose sight of the principle that karate does not strike first. The point, however, is that if you are attacked you will want to defend yourself as quickly and decisively as you can. The worst thing you can do is allow yourself to be drawn into a slugging match with someone stronger than you (and it is prudent always to assume that anyone who attacks you is stronger than you). If attacked, it is vital to seize the advantage as quickly as you can and use it to the full. The ideal is to strike once but to make your one strike so effective that only one is necessary. This principle – strike once and strike hard – should be kept always in mind. To have to strike at all is bad. To have to strike more than once is worse.

“One blow and it’s all over” is, of course, an ideal from which it may be necessary to depart in “real life”. The truth is that even an accurate and well-executed strike may not stop an assailant who is anaesthetised by drink or drugs or fuelled by anger and adrenaline. Anyone with any experience knows this. One should therefore always be *prepared* to retaliate with multiple strikes and/or locks if necessary, and to that extent practising combinations in partner work is an essential part of the development of effective karate. One should certainly not train in such a way as to develop an invariable, robotic “block and strike once” response as a conditioned reflex.<sup>1</sup> Having said this, though, it should be remembered that criminal codes generally specify that only “reasonable force” may be used in self-defence, and magistrates (certainly in the United Kingdom) tend to be conservative in their interpretation of what “reasonable” means.<sup>2</sup> Even someone who has been subjected to an unprovoked assault can find himself in trouble if the court can be persuaded that he used more force to defend himself than was “reasonable.” This is one of several reasons why the principle of one strike only, or at any rate of minimum necessary force, is a good one to adopt. Train every technique, therefore, with a view to using it to maximum effect.

The most elementary striking technique is the straight punch, called *choku tsuki* (直突き). “Choku” – “straight” or “direct” – signifies that the punch moves to the target by the most direct route, travelling in a linear path with the elbow behind the fist, following its path. When this is done as a formal “*kihon*” exercise,<sup>3</sup> the fist begins from a supinated (knuckles downward) position at

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<sup>1</sup> We shall come back to this subject in chapter 9.

<sup>2</sup> The meaning will, of course, depend on the circumstances. What is reasonable against one unarmed attacker will be different from what is reasonable against multiple attackers or someone with a weapon. It is important to remember, though, that – rightly or wrongly – the judiciary seems on the whole not to like self-help or to approve of martial artists. This statement is supported by anecdotal evidence only, but it is as well to err on the safe side.

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 9.

the ribs and twists into a pronated (knuckles upward) position as it moves towards the target, reaching the end of this spiraling motion at the moment of impact. This combination of forward thrust and helical twist should feel as though you were trying to drill or screw your fist into the target. When a straight punch is executed from a front stance, if the front leg and the striking fist are on opposite sides the punch is called *gyaku tsuki* (逆突き) (“opposite side punch”). If the front leg and the striking fist are on the same side the punch is called *seiken uchi* (正拳打ち) (“forefist strike”) or *mae te uchi* (前手打ち) (“front hand strike”). If the front leg and the striking fist are on the same side and the punch is executed in conjunction with a forward step or lunge the punch is called *oi tsuki* (追突き) (“following punch”). A “jab” punch with the front hand is called *kizami tsuki* (刻み突き). There seems, incidentally, to be no strict logic or consistency about the use of the terms “*tsuki*” and “*uchi*.”<sup>4</sup>

The following principles are essential to avoid injury and ensure maximum percussive and penetrative effect:

1. The fist should be rolled up as tightly as possible with the thumb folded well in.
2. Contact with the target should as far as possible be made with the large knuckles of the first two fingers.
3. The wrist must not buckle when contact is made.

It is possible also to use a vertical fist, as often seen in Chinese martial arts (the Wing Chun punch is the classic example). This vertical fist is called *tate ken* (縦拳)<sup>5</sup> in karate and hence a punch with it is called *tate ken tsuki* (縦拳突き). *Isshin ryu* karateka use a

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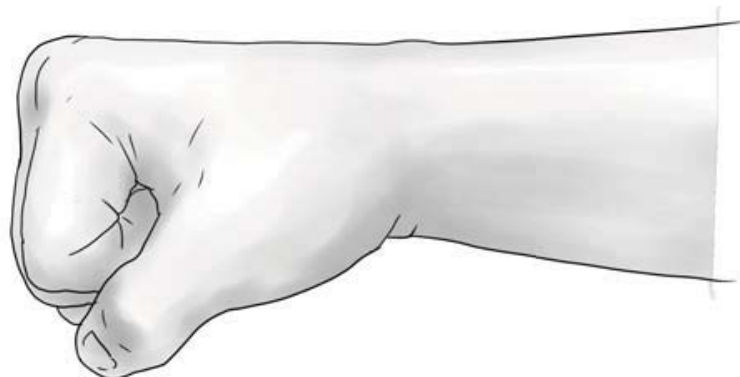
<sup>4</sup> Broadly speaking, *tsuki* (突き) is primarily a thrust or stab rather than a punch; *uchi* (打ち) has more the sense of striking; but the distinction is not exact. Modern Japanese has the word “*panchi*” (パンチ), but this “*gairaigo*” (loan-word) is not used in karate terminology. *Kizami* (刻み) seems to have the sense of “shredding” or “chopping.”

<sup>5</sup> “*Ken*” (拳) in phrases of this kind means “hand,” “fist,” “knuckle.” It should not be confused with the “*ken*” (剣) in “*kendo*” (剣道) or

form of *tate ken* with the thumb held at the top of the fist and pressed down against the second knuckle of the index finger: a configuration thought by Shimabuku Tatsuo to be particularly strong and stable.



*The fist should be rolled up tightly and with the thumb folded well in*

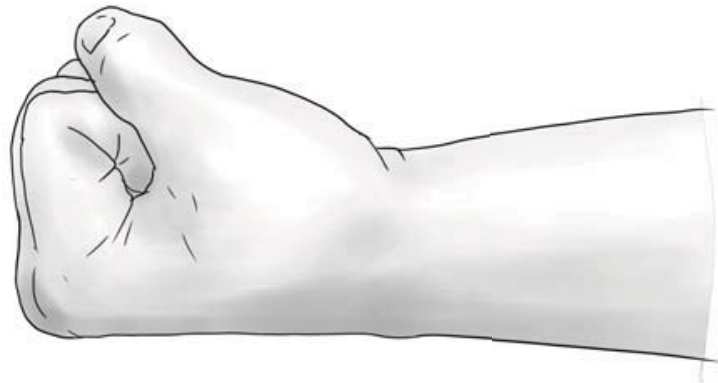


*Contact should be made with the large knuckles of the first two fingers;  
the wrist must not buckle when contact is made*

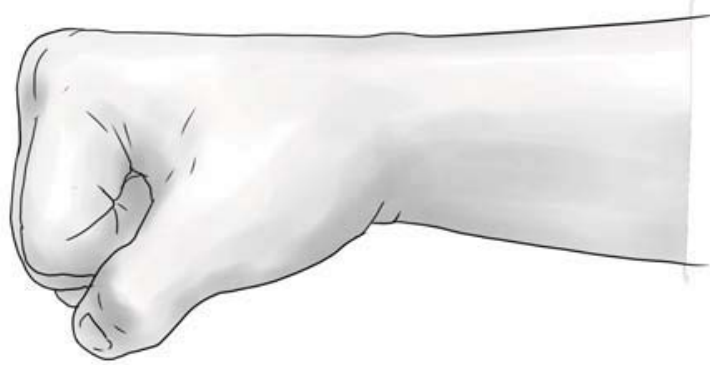
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“*kenjutsu*”(剣術), which is “sword.” Japanese has quite a number of homophones, or near-homophones, of this kind.

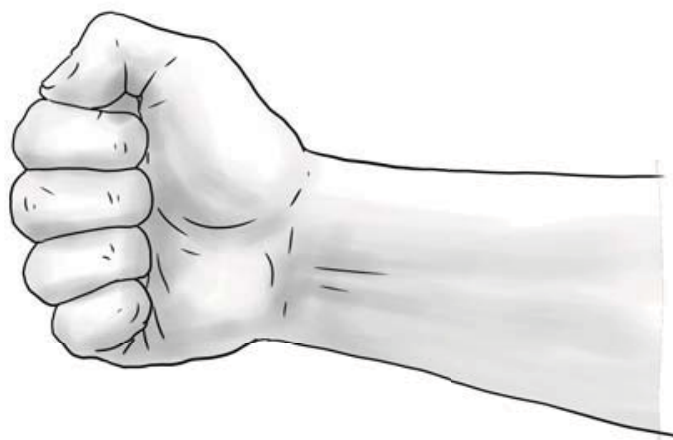




*Supinated position*



*Pronated position*



*The Isshin Ryu tate ken ("vertical fist")*



*If the front leg and the striking fist are on opposite sides when the punch is delivered the punch is called gyaku tsuki (“opposite side punch”). Notice the left hand drawn back in a supinated position*



*If the front leg and the striking fist are on the same side  
the punch is called seiken uchi ("forefist strike") or  
mae te uchi ("front hand strike")*



*If the front leg and striking fist are on the same side and the punch is executed in conjunction with a forward step or lunge the punch is called oi tsuki ("following punch")*

Punching in its various forms is the method of weaponless striking with the hands that seems to come most naturally to humans, but uchi waza can be delivered with a large number of other hand and fist configurations. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but it briefly describes and illustrates the uchi waza that are likely to be encountered most frequently in the dojo. This list is in alphabetical order, and is not meant to imply anything about relative effectiveness.

# 打ち技

*Uchi waza*

***Empi uchi* (猿臂打ち) or *hiji ate* (肘当て) (“elbow strike”)**

This technique is exactly what it says it is: a strike with the elbow. The alternative names effectively mean the same thing: there is no material difference between “empi” and “hiji,” though empi tends to be the word commonly used when talking specifically about strikes. “Ate” is a noun related to “ataru” (当る), “to hit.” If there is a difference between “ate” and “uchi” it is a subtle one; but perhaps “ate” has more of the sense of “smash.”<sup>6</sup> The occurrences

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<sup>6</sup> Confusingly enough, there is a Shotokan kata called Empi (often spelt Enpi); but this “empi” is a different word – 燕飛 – meaning “darting swallow.” The name was coined by Funakoshi Gichin; the original Okinawan form of the kata is called Wansu (腕秀), probably after its Chinese creator.

of empi uchi in the Goju kata Gekisai, Shisochin and Sanseiryu are all of rising or upward strikes: strictly speaking they are “age empi uchi” (上げ猿臂打ち); but empi uchi can be delivered in any plane or direction. Every instance of hiki te (引き手) – pulling the hand back to the ribs – in kihon or kata practice is potentially an empi uchi delivered to the rear (in which case it would be ushiro empi uchi (後ろ猿臂打ち)). In all cases the idea is to hit the target with the olecranon process of the ulna: the hard bone at the tip of the elbow. It is perhaps obvious that this technique is of use only at very close range.



*Empi uchi or hiji ate (“elbow strike”) is a close range strike using the hard bone of the elbow. Illustrated above is a rising elbow strike, coming from below to strike the attacker’s jaw; but empi uchi can be delivered in any plane or direction ...*



*... This is mawashi empi uchi (“turning elbow strike”) ...*



*and this is otoshi empi uchi (“downward elbow strike”)*

***Haishu uchi*** (背手打ち) (“*back hand strike*”)

Haishu uchi is a sort of reverse slap: a blow delivered with the back of the hand, keeping the fingers tight and the thumb folded across the palm. The most obvious target is an attacker’s ear or the side of his head. (Because it is so vulnerable to being grabbed or accidentally caught in the sleeve of a practice partner’s gi, the thumb should never be left sticking out when performing open-handed strikes.)



*Haishu uchi* (“*back hand strike*”) delivered to the side of an attacker’s head. Notice that the thumb is kept well folded in

***Haito uchi*** (背刀打ち) (“*reverse sword hand strike*”)

Haito uchi is a “reverse” shuto uchi (see below) in the sense that it is delivered with the other side – the thumb side – of the hand,



chiefly using the side of the knuckle at the base of the index finger. As with *shuto uchi* the fingers must be pressed tightly together; the thumb should be folded across the palm, out of harm's way. *Haito uchi* can be used to strike at the neck or the side of the head, though it is not a particularly versatile technique. Its direction is against the natural bend of the elbow, and it should not be delivered with the elbow joint fully locked out. Because "hai" (背) can mean both "reverse side" and "ridge" (as of a mountain), this technique is often called "ridge hand strike."

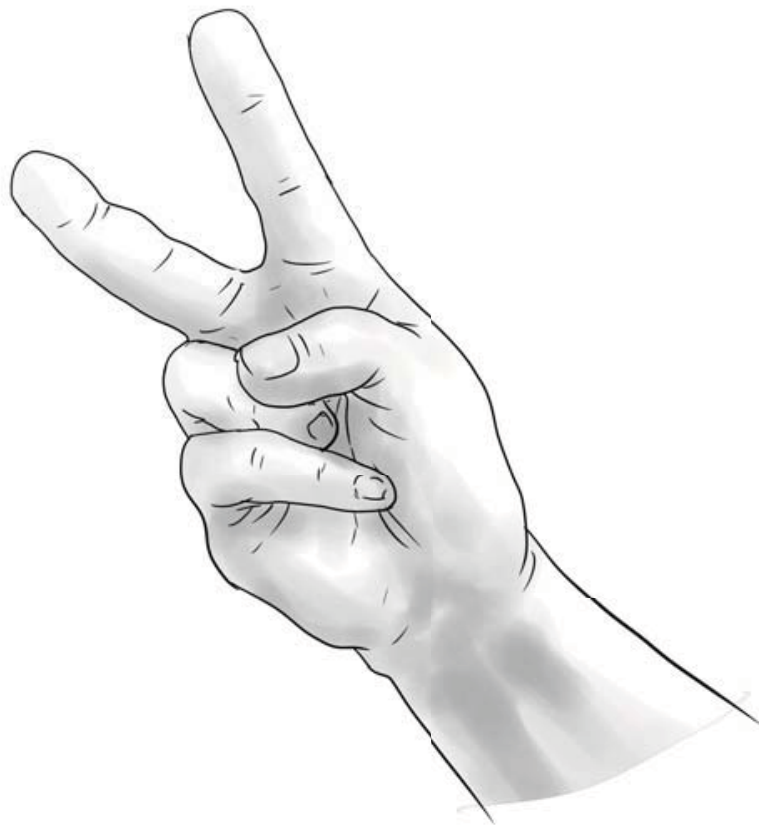


*Haito uchi* ("reverse sword hand strike"), delivered with the inside edge of the hand, striking with the side of the knuckle at the base of the index finger

***Hebi uchi* (蛇打ち) ("snake strike")**

*Hebi uchi* is a thoroughly "Chinese" technique, not often seen in karate (purists may say that it is not a karate technique at all). It exemplifies the Chinese habit of imitating the behaviour of non-

human animals: it is a two-fingered strike mimicking the fangs or forked tongue of a snake. It is not, on the whole, a technique of great utility. For one thing, normally decent human beings will not readily poke their fingers into someone's eyes, and it is difficult to see what other application the technique might have. For another, two unsupported fingers are very vulnerable to being grabbed or injured by unintended impact. The fingers should be kept slightly bent.



*Evidently intended to resemble the fangs or tongue of a snake, hebi uchi exemplifies the Chinese practice of imitating the behaviour and movements of non-human animals*

***Ippon ken uchi (一本拳打ち) ("one knuckle strike")***

This powerful technique concentrates the whole force of a blow into a small area. It is executed by striking the target with the middle knuckle of the index finger while the index finger is

supported by the pressure of the thumb beneath it, pressing against its distal knuckle.



*Ippon ken uchi* (“one knuckle strike”) concentrates the full force of a blow into a small area

***Koken uchi*** (腕拳打ち) (“wrist strike”)

*Koken uchi* is delivered with the back of the wrist. It has most potential as a “rising” strike, perhaps as one escapes from a wrist grab (it is in this form that it occurs in Goju’s Tensho kata). There are several different methods of forming the hand into the distinctive shape required by *koken uchi*; the method chosen is probably no more than a matter of individual preference. This shape occurs also at the end of Goju’s Sanseiryu and Suparunpai kata, and is a recurrent feature of the Chen and Yang styles of taijiquan, as part of the form called “single whip.” *Koken uchi* seems to be a hand form that has come largely unaltered from the Chinese origins of many karate techniques. The “beak” or “claw”

shape is perhaps another instance of animal mimicry. Some people think *koken uchi* a valuable technique; others find it of limited use. It also has potential as a “disguised” grasping technique. It is sometimes recommended as a blocking technique, though it is not a very realistic or useful one.



*Koken uchi* (“wrist strike”) is most obviously a strike rising up from below into an attacker’s jaw

***Nakadaka ken uchi* (中高拳打ち) (“convex fist strike”)**

*Nakadaka* – “middle high” or “convex” – describes the shape of the fist used in this technique, formed with the middle knuckle of the third finger protruding, the finger being supported from below by the thumb pressed against its distal knuckle. The idea of the strike is the same as that of *ippon ken uchi*: to strike with one

knuckle only, thus concentrating the full force of the blow into a small area.



*Nakadaka ken uchi* (“convex fist strike”) resembles *ippon ken uchi* in concentrating the whole force of the strike into a small area; the only difference is the knuckle used

***Nukite tsuki* (貫手突き) (“piercing hand thrust”)**

This technique is delivered with the extended fingers as if you were thrusting a spear or dagger into your attacker. The fingers must be held completely rigid and the thumb folded well in. Uechi Ryu karateka make a speciality of *nukite* and condition their hands so thoroughly that they can break wooden boards with it. For most people, it is a technique that is practicable only against soft targets (especially the throat); certainly it does not lend itself to use against bony surfaces. The tip of the middle finger will make contact with the target first and is vulnerable to

compressive injury even with the lateral support of the other fingers. The fact that nukite tsuki occurs in only two Goju kata (Shisochin and Seisan) perhaps suggests that it is not regarded in Goju schools as being of great practical use.



*Nukite tsuki ("piercing hand thrust") is a penetrating technique delivered with the extended fingers against soft targets. For obvious reasons it is not a particularly safe or versatile technique*

### ***Shita uchi (下打ち) ("underneath strike")***

Shita uchi is a straightforward uppercut: a close-range punch rising from below with the hand supinated, most obviously striking upwards into an attacker's chin; it is in form the same as ura uchi (see below) but with a longer and upwards travel. Like

ura uchi, it is particularly effective if the hand is formed into the “nakadaka” shape.



*Shita uchi (“underneath strike”) rises up from below to strike under an attacker’s chin – preferably using the middle knuckle of the striking hand*

**Shotei uchi (掌底打ち) or teisho uchi (底掌打ち) (“palm heel strike”)**

Shotei is “the bottom of the palm of the hand”: i.e. the resilient surface at the base of the hand when the hand is bent back at the wrist (the alternative names mean the same thing). It is especially effective under the chin or nose, or, in its “upside down” form (as it occurs in Tensho kata), to the bladder or testes. Shotei uchi is often more of a hard push or thrust than a strike. It is a versatile

technique because it can so easily flow from an open-handed block, or itself flow into a grasping or clawing technique.



*Shotei uchi* (“palm heel strike”) is most effective under the chin or nose; in practice it is often more of a hard push or thrust than a strike

***Shuto uchi*** (手刀打ち) (“sword hand strike”)

This is an iconic technique. In the 1950s and 1960s, when karate was first beginning to be known in the West, *shuto uchi* – the “karate chop” – for some reason came to be associated with it particularly. *Shuto uchi* is delivered with the outside edge of the hand, striking with the muscular pad between the base of the little finger and the wrist. It is used most effectively against the neck. The shape of the hand is essentially the same as for *nukite tsuki*.



To avoid injury the fingers must be pressed tightly together and, once again, the thumb kept well folded in. It goes without saying that a “karate chop” to the throat is an extremely dangerous technique.



*Shuto uchi (“sword hand strike”) is delivered with the outside edge of the hand, striking with the muscular pad between the base of the little finger and the wrist*

***Tettsui uchi (鉄槌打ち) (“iron hammer strike”)***

Here the striking surface is the same as in shuto uchi, but with the hand rolled up into a fist and used as if it were a hammer – most obviously striking downwards into the face, as in Goju’s Saifa kata; but there are other applications in Seiunchin and Shisochin kata, and gedan uke can easily turn into tettsui uchi in suitable circumstances (see pp. 165–166, below). The fist should be

clenched tightly in order to tense the muscular pad on the outside of the hand as fully as possible.



*Tettsui uchi* (“iron hammer strike”) is a blow with the little finger side of the clenched fist

***Uraken uchi*** (裏拳打ち) (“back fist strike”)

Ura is “back” or “reverse”: uraken uchi is a “back” fist strike in the sense of being executed with the hand supinated (knuckles facing away from you). The strike is delivered by throwing the “back” of the fist at the target and striking it with the large knuckles of the first two fingers. The nose or eyes or temples are the most obvious targets; but uraken uchi is a more versatile strike than it may seem at first sight. It is also easy to disguise. The fist should be “flung” at the target with a whipping action of the arm

as though the hand were a weight attached to the wrist by a spring. The fist should be held loosely as it travels towards the target and tensed suddenly at the moment of impact. The effectiveness of this very telling blow comes from a combination of the sudden tensing of the fist and the “springy” action of the wrist.



*Uraken uchi (“back fist strike”) derives its effectiveness from the “springy” action of the wrist and the tensing of the fist on impact*

***Ura uchi (裏打ち) (“reverse strike”)***

Ura uchi is a “short-arm” strike delivered most effectively (in view of the shortness of its travel) with the hand in the “naka-daka” form. There are two occurrences of it in Saifa kata, where the idea is to pull the attacker *into* the blow rather than striking out at him with it. The “ura” in ura uchi is the same as in uraken:

ura uchi is a “reverse” strike in the sense that it is delivered with the hand supinated (knuckles facing downward and away from you) – i.e. reversed from the usual position of the hand at the end of a punch.



*Ura uchi (“reverse strike”) is a close range blow with the fist supinated throughout. In Saifa kata the attacker is pulled onto the strike*

### **Tameshiwari**

Karate is indelibly associated in many people’s minds with the breaking of hard objects by striking them with various parts of the body (including the head). The Japanese word for such exploits is tameshiwari (試し割り), “testing by breaking.” As part of a ruthlessly single-minded approach to their discipline, generations of martial artists have prepared themselves for combat by putting

their limbs through gruelling routines of “conditioning” – plunging their hands into pans of sand and gravel, thrusting their fingers into bundles of bamboo, and so on – with a view to desensitising them and toughening the skin and bones. Uechi Ryu karateka condition even their fingertips and big toes to deliver damaging strikes. Tameshiwari is both a part of this conditioning and a way of testing it. It is said also that tameshiwari builds self-confidence and increases the accuracy of strikes. Objects broken include bricks, concrete blocks, roof tiles, baseball bats, wooden boards – even coconuts (coconuts are said to have tensile properties similar to those of the human skull). It is nowadays possible to buy “rebreakable” objects made out of hard plastic that have similar properties to bricks and boards but can be used without the waste and expense of smashing up piles of the real thing.

It has to be said that spectacular displays of breaking are often illusory, or at least a good deal easier than they look. Even with this qualification, however, our view is that tameshiwari is a harmful and dangerous practice. Perhaps this is another heresy; but, as with all the statements made in these pages, we speak in the light of our own – sometimes painful – experience. If tameshiwari is done at all, it certainly should not be done with the elbows, knees, extended fingers or head. Knees, elbows and fingers are easily injured, perhaps irreparably, and the unwisdom of hitting concrete blocks with your head perhaps needs no elaboration. Apart from the immediate risk of injury, tameshiwari is an almost certain way of storing up trouble for yourself later on. Osteoarthritis is a painful and disabling condition that can arise both from wear and tear of the joint and as a result of injury.

Tameshiwari is in any case a largely pointless practice in the modern world. Its rationale, if it has one, dates back to the days when an unarmed Okinawan might have had to defend himself against an attacker wearing wooden armour. To use tameshiwari as part of a training regime for self-defence in the twenty-first century is like preparing for a darts match by trying to throw darts through a wall. They don't have to go through the wall; they

only have to stick in the dartboard. In short, we would strongly discourage anyone from practising tameshiwari or undertaking the gruelling conditioning that is often associated with it. There are healthier and more effective ways of building confidence and developing strong and focussed strikes.



*Osteoarthritis is a painful and disabling condition that can arise both from wear and tear of the joint and as a result of injury<sup>7</sup>*

### **Training Power and Focus**

It is important that, when training your strikes, you should for most of the time make contact with an actual target. “Air” strikes against an imaginary target will (a) tend to harm your joints in the long run, and (b) will not teach you anything about power and focus. This is where the item of traditional “hojo undo” equipment called the makiwara comes in. Its responsible and careful use is virtually indispensable to the development of accurate and powerful uchi waza.

Makiwara (巻藁) is literally “straw roll,” because that is what the original ones, used for cutting practice with swords and as archery targets, were (and still are). The traditional karate maki-

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<sup>7</sup> Photo by courtesy of James Heilman, MD.

wara is mounted on a wooden post some eight feet long,<sup>8</sup> three feet or so of which are sunk into the ground. When this is done nowadays the buried end is usually embedded in rough concrete. This method has obvious drawbacks. It is not always convenient or possible to practise out of doors, and if the post wears out or breaks there will be the chore of digging up a large lump of concrete. Instead of burying it, it is a simple matter to attach a post of the requisite length to the dojo floor by the sort of metal bracket illustrated on page 93, which can easily be bought or fabricated. This is the usual modern form of the makiwara. The post should be of sound, knot-free 4" x 2" (10 cms x 5 cms ) timber. In use it should be flexible enough to "give" when the makiwara is struck, so that the hand and arm are not always jarring against an unyielding surface, but resilient enough to provide the user with "feedback" about the quality and dynamics of the blow. Japanese cedar is the wood traditionally used, but experience shows that oak or ash give exactly the right degree of flexibility. The post (or the unburied part of it, if you are going to have a garden makiwara) should be tapered down to 0.5" (12 mm) at the top. An outdoor makiwara post should be thoroughly treated with a good quality waterproof sealant. The striking pad at the top was in earlier days made of rice-straw rope (strictly speaking it is this pad, rather than the whole apparatus, that is the "makiwara"). Rope is still used, but nowadays a leather-covered pad of dense foam is more usual, and much more durable. The pad should be perhaps 6" from top to bottom and extend across the whole width of the post.<sup>9</sup> It is possible to buy wall-mounted striking pads that are less fuss to install, but the practitioner may find that these lack

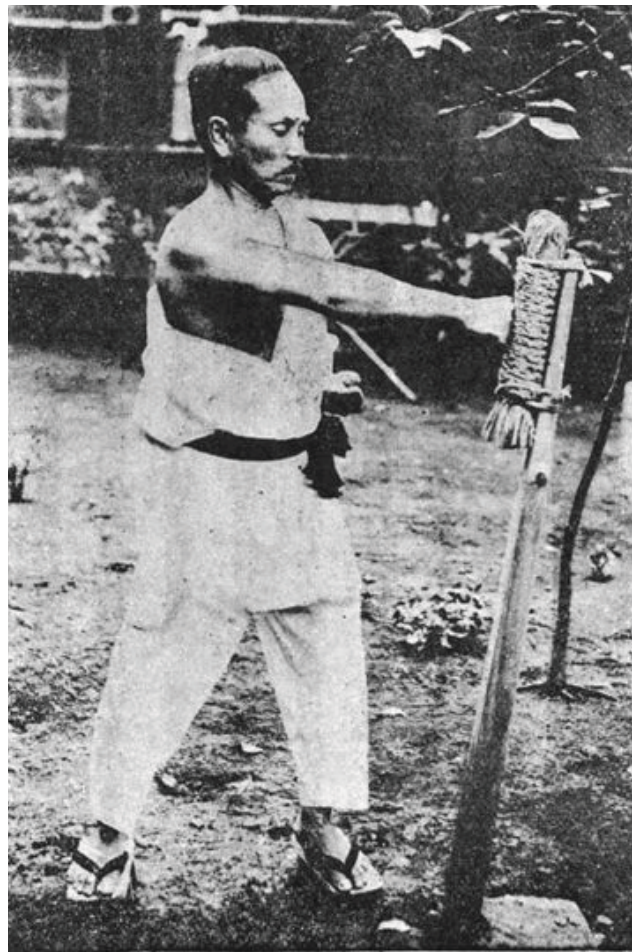
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<sup>8</sup> The exact length of the post will depend on the desired height of the makiwara, which should be roughly at the level of the karateka's chest.

<sup>9</sup> In our experience, makiwara are always rectangular in cross section; though in his 1932 book *Watashi no Karate Jutsu* (trans. Patrick and Yuriko McCarthy; International Ryukyu Karate Research Group, 2002), Motobu Choki describes a "round" makiwara that can be struck from any direction. We have never seen one, but presumably it would consist of straw rope wrapped around a cylindrical post.

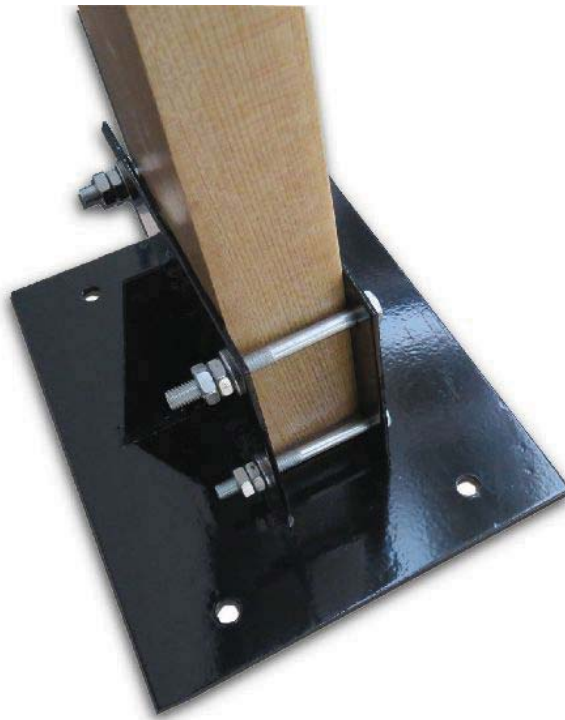
flexibility. Also, if you miss such a pad you will strike the wall to which it is attached.

There is, of course, no reason why the individual should not design training aids to his own specification and make them out of whatever materials come to hand. Doing this is, after all, quite in keeping with the time-honoured Okinawan practice of improvisation. We have seen striking posts made along the lines of the Wing Chun or Choi Li Fut “wooden man,” with various projections added to represent arms and legs; we have seen makiwara made out of old rubber tyres, pieces of carpet, and so forth. There are no limits to human inventiveness.



*The older type of makiwara post was buried in the ground and bound at the top with rice-straw to form a striking surface. The karateka in the picture is Funakoshi Gichin*





*Makiwara posts are nowadays more often bolted to the floor indoors by means of a metal bracket ...*



*... and have a leather-covered foam pad instead of the traditional rice-straw striking area*



*There is no reason why the individual should not design training aids to his own specifications and use whatever materials come to hand*

Practice with the makiwara has two great advantages. Because the striking area is so small, each strike has to be very accurately focussed. (It is, we should add, possible to hurt yourself if you miss the makiwara – especially if the makiwara is installed with a wall close behind it, or fastened to the wall itself. Care is necessary, especially at first.) Also, there is no psychological limit to the force that you can use against the makiwara. It is an inanimate object that you can hit without inhibition as hard and (subject to what we shall say in a moment) as often as you like. You will find that constant use of the makiwara will strengthen your wrists and thicken the skin of your knuckles. Rubbing surgical spirit into your hands or steeping them in salt water will also help to toughen the skin (vodka will do the trick too, but surgical spirit is cheaper). The various “secret” herbal preparations that can be bought for this

purpose do not, in our experience, have much to be said for them; but there is no harm in trying them. You will probably find that the skin of your knuckles will break and bleed initially, and you should not, of course, apply anything toxic (e.g. arnica ointment) or astringent to broken skin.



*Using the makiwara*

The makiwara must be used sensibly and with moderation. Resist the temptation – and the temptation is strong at first – to overdo it. Start modestly, with no more than ten strikes with each hand

daily, and gradually build up to a maximum of 100 strikes with each hand. You are likely to experience diminishing returns if you do more than this, and feats of endurance that lead only to pain and damage have nothing to commend them. Use the makiwara under the supervision of your teacher, and be guided by your teacher's advice. Be especially careful at first not to let your wrist buckle when you punch the makiwara, as it may tend to: this can lead to a painful sprain injury. You will find that your wrists will become much stronger in a comparatively short time. Because of the issues of bone damage that can arise in relation to the still-developing physique of young people, no one under the age of eighteen should use the makiwara at all.

Please take seriously the following points in connection with your makiwara training.

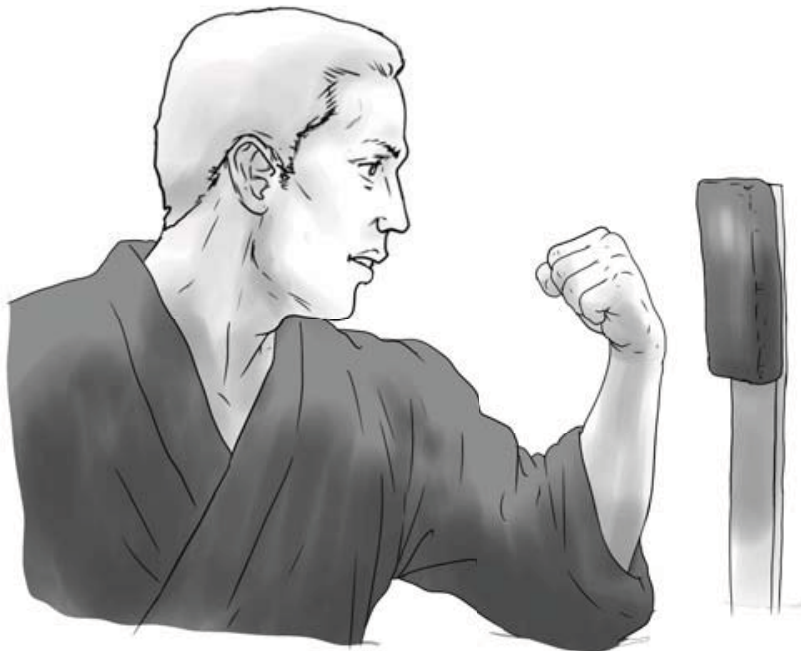
1. There is a Zen saying that you should want the dharma as you would want a bucket of water if your hair were on fire. One can make a similar remark about karate practice. Once you are used to using the makiwara and confident with it, strike as if your life depended on it, with all the speed and force of which you are capable. Strike as if, at that moment, there were nothing in the world but the gestalt *you/strike/target*. You cannot hurt the makiwara, and half-hearted practice is worse than no practice at all.
2. Power will be added to your strikes by giving a loud and explosive shout as you deliver them. This sort of shout is called "kiai" in Japanese (気合): a word that conveys the idea of a concentration or unification of energy/force/spirit. Giving a loud yell – a sort of "war cry" – will liberate or disinhibit you, and the sudden expulsion of breath will help to "root" your posture. In "real life" a sudden and unexpected scream will also startle and distract – will "take the mind" of – an attacker. Make whatever sound you like, as long as the full force of your intention is expressed in it absolutely. Yell as loudly as you can, holding nothing back; let your shout be a "hara" shout, coming from deep

inside you. “Hai!” is a good sound, and – because “hai!” (はい) is “yes!” in Japanese – suitably affirmative. (One has sometimes heard people shout the word “kiai!”; but this is more or less to shout the word “shout,” and sounds a little odd.)

3. When practising your strikes our earlier remarks about a relaxed and “grounded” posture will come home to you forcefully. If you “throw” a punch with your arm and shoulder – in other words, predominantly using your pectoral and anterior deltoid muscles – your punch will be weak and the action of throwing it will destabilise you. If the target were suddenly to disappear or evade you, you would tend to stagger forward, off balance. It is important that your strikes should come always from the kind of sunk, rooted posture that we described in the previous chapter. In conjunction with that posture ...

4. ... teach yourself to strike in such a way that the force of the strike depends not primarily on what your arm is doing, but on the co-ordinated effort of your whole body pushing off the floor. (Sanchin kata will help you to develop this way of striking as a conditioned reflex.) As is so often true, it is not easy to put this into words; but think of the sort of effort that you would exert if you were moving something like a piano. It is this sort of whole-body feeling that seems to be meant when it is said that your strength should come from your “hara.” Hara (腹) is literally “belly” or “abdomen,” but the word has also the well-established connotation of “mind,” “motive” or “intention.” In every sense your strength is coming from deep within you. Do not come up on your toes when you strike, but try to feel that you are pressing your feet into the floor.

5. Everyone has “favourite” or habitual techniques – aiyo (愛用) – that suit his or her physique or personality especially; but it is a mistake to let your repertoire become too limited and hence to find yourself relying on a restricted range of responses. Do not be misled into thinking that the makiwara is only for punching. You can and should train as wide a range of techniques on it as you can.



*Using the makiwara to train shuto uchi and uraken uchi:  
remember that the makiwara can be used for much  
more than punching*



A valuable supplement to the makiwara is a heavy hanging bag. The chief advantage of the bag is that it can be hit from a wide variety of angles and hence used in combination with realistic footwork. Also, because it can swing towards you and “oppose” you, it will give you a kind of instructive experience different from what is obtainable from the makiwara. You can in a certain sense spar with it. In addition, the bag can be used to train kicks much more satisfactorily than the post-mounted makiwara can, though one often sees a lower pad attached to a makiwara post and used for a limited form of kicking practice.



*A heavy hanging bag is a useful supplement  
to the makiwara*

The karateka should for the most part train his strikes to have short-range *penetrating* power. You will find that a heavy bag will help you with this aspect of practice very specifically (though here, as in so much else, there is no substitute for partner work: see p. 221). As with the makiwara, you can hit the bag as hard as you like and without inhibition; but you will probably be able to visualise penetration far more easily with the bag than with the makiwara. Imagine that you are aiming not for the surface of the bag, but for a point several inches inside it; visualise your punch tearing through the fabric, and your hand inside the bag grabbing and pulling out the stuffing (it is hardly necessary to comment on how easily this visualisation can translate into a picture of what you might do to an attacker). The bag will give you a kind of feedback unique to itself. You can see the fabric dent under the focussed force of your strike, and you can see and hear the bag “shudder” on its hangings. If it swings away from you rather than “shuddering,” you are pushing rather than striking/piercing it. The difference between pushing and striking is often surprisingly difficult to feel, but it is important to understand and master it, and the bag will help you greatly in this respect.

As with the makiwara, do not overdo your use of the bag. Make haste slowly, gradually increasing the force of your strikes and the duration of your training. When you feel confident and “at home” with it, train with all your heart; but never forget that every well-trained strike is potentially lethal, and be mindful always of the responsibility that this imposes on you.



## 5: Kicking Techniques

HAVING DEALT WITH a reasonable selection of striking techniques, we come now to the other main parts of karate's counter-attacking arsenal: kicking techniques, usually called *keri waza* (蹴り技),<sup>1</sup> and joint-locking techniques, called *kansetsu waza* (関節技). We shall deal with *keri waza* in this chapter and *kansetsu waza* in the next.

### Keri Waza

Kicking techniques have tended to multiply in modern (post World War II) karate. This has been to a great extent due to the cross-fertilization of karate and tae kwon do, whose practitioners have made spectacular kicking so much a feature of their art.<sup>2</sup> Karate and tae kwon do have tended to become competitors in the "martial arts industry," and one's impression is that some karate teachers have made efforts to ensure that karate should not be outdone by its Korean cousin. Also, "sport" karate and the martial arts film industry have encouraged martial artists of all kinds to

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that "keri" is transliterated as "geri" in compounds with another word (as in "mawashi geri") need not confuse anyone. The word is the same; the different transliteration indicates only a shift in pronunciation. "Allophones" like this are fairly common in Japanese. (Be aware, incidentally, that another "geri" (下痢) is "diarrhoea.")

<sup>2</sup> So much so that some contemporary tae kwon do practitioners seem hardly to bother with hand techniques at all. The influence of tae kwon do has extended well beyond its impact on the "traditional" martial arts. Tae kwon do-style kicking has become a more or less invariable feature of the many kickboxing and multi-style clubs and associations that have emerged in recent decades.

concentrate on audience-pleasing techniques. Looking at the matter from the point of view of practicality, strong and tactically well placed kicks can be extremely powerful weapons, but the subject of kicking needs to be examined in the light of several qualifications. We make three general suggestions.

1. *It is better to train to deliver a few straightforward kicks strongly and effectively than to struggle to perform kicks that are complex, difficult – and weak.* We have no quarrel with spectacular kicking as such, but we say again that karate is for life and for everyone, regardless of age. The jumping and spinning kicks that the film industry has brought to such prominence demand very high levels of speed, athleticism and accuracy. Generally speaking, such kicks can be done well – or at all – only by the young and super-flexible. It may be a pleasure to watch them, but it is not true that anyone and everyone can learn to do them; nor is it obvious that they will in all cases be useful in actual self-defence situations. It is, however, quite possible to develop a range of practical kicks that are within the capability of a well-trained karateka of any age, and it is upon these that we shall concentrate in this chapter. By all means acquire a repertoire of visually impressive kicks if you can and want to; but there is no need to feel that your karate is inadequate if by reason of age and/or physical capacity such things are beyond you. If you watch old footage of the masters in action, you will notice that “original” Okinawan karate did not include as many kicks as one might suppose. Side kicks and “roundhouse” kicks, for example, are relative newcomers, mainly developed by the post-Funakoshi generation. (Funakoshi Gichin’s son Yoshitaka (1906–1945) was responsible for greatly extending the Shotokan kicking repertoire.) Many other kicks have been transplanted into karate from other arts. All this is reflected in the relative paucity of kicking techniques included in the older versions of traditional karate kata.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For example, in the five “Heian” kata of Shotokan, which are younger versions of the “Pinan” kata of Wado Ryu (etc.), it will be noticed that some of the front kicks that feature in the Pinan kata have been

2. In “real life” situations kicks are usually much better used as follow-up or finishing techniques than as techniques of first resort. This maxim may not apply if you have the kind of speed and accuracy that will enable you to exploit an element of surprise; but we think it true as a rule. Humans have the disadvantage of being bipeds. Having one leg in the air is inherently hazardous if you have only two legs to begin with. A kick that is caught or blocked or that fails to land is likely to create a far more perilous situation – a situation harder to recover from – than a failed hand technique. On the whole it is better to kick when your opponent is already at a disadvantage.

3. Much will depend on physique and individual aptitudes and preferences; but, generally speaking, *close range techniques that rely on evasion, deflection, closure and control of distance are in practice a great deal “safer” than kicks*. As we shall emphasise in due course, a vital part of training is the development of enough self-confidence to work at close ranges without fear. There is some reason to think that people who rely heavily on an arsenal of kicks often do so because they lack the confidence to get well inside an opponent’s range. It is worth remembering that the closer you are to an opponent the less able he will be to kick you.

4. *It is not necessary, nor is it particularly desirable, to kick higher than the groin or mid section*. The higher the kick, the more (in most cases) the kicker’s balance will be compromised, and the likelier the kicker will be to have the kick caught and his supporting leg reaped from under him. By all means practise “jodan” kicks – kicks to head level – if you can. Doing so is a valuable way of training balance and accuracy, and long-legged flexible people do not find it particularly difficult anyway. In practice, however, kicking someone in the head – kicking a small, moving, defended

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replaced with side kicks. So too in the Shotokan kata Kanku dai as compared to the older version of the same kata called Kushanku. Of the Goju kata, three (Sanchin, Tensho and Seiunchin) have no kicks at all, and only three kicks occur in the others: mae geri, sokuto/kansetsu geri and mikazuki geri – this last only once.

target – is hard to do and not really a good tactical choice; nor are very high kicks “traditional.” We are, remember, here talking about real-world self-defence, not point-scoring competition fighting or dojo practice with an obliging partner. In the event of a real attack, fancy dancing will not help you. At any rate, it will not help you unless you have an exceptional degree of speed and skill.



*In this old photograph of Motobu Choki, notice how his makiwara is set up for the practice of very low kicks*

The following interrelated principles are vitally important in kicking:

1. *A secure balance.* Even while standing on one leg you must be completely in control of your balance and aware of where your body is going. Failure in this respect is probably the commonest defect in kicking technique that you can see in the dojo: a karateka kicks and then, succumbing to the momentum of the kick, more or less “falls” out of the kick into a stance of sorts. If, immediately after a kick – especially an unsuccessful one – gravity is in control of you rather than the other way around, you are seriously vulnerable to counter-attack. You may find that you have fallen straight onto a punch. You must be prepared always (a) to follow

up your kick immediately, and (b) to retrieve the situation instantly in the event of an unsuccessful kick.

2. *A firmly grounded stance.* Newton's Third Law of Motion always holds: to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. In other words, whatever you hit will always hit you back. Everything that we said in chapter 3 about grounding applies especially to the execution of kicks. When punching or striking a target the "recoil" is nowhere near as noticeable as it is when kicking. It is masked or ameliorated by the fact that you are standing on both feet. The recoil from the impact of a kick is much more noticeable and much more disruptive – because, standing on one leg, you are in a position of biomechanical disadvantage. You must develop a stance that is "grounded" enough to enable you to "earth" the recoil from your kick: to direct it down through your body into the ground so that its force does not throw you off your stance; otherwise you will find that the kick has as much effect on you as it does on the target. Only practice will enable you to "find" such a stance, but doing so is of crucial importance.

3. *Successful recovery.* It must be remembered that when a kick is fully extended to the target the technique is only half over. Retracting your foot quickly and replacing it on the floor under control is equally important – especially if the kick has missed or been deflected. Having your leg or foot caught and held by an attacker – so that you are now standing helplessly on one leg – is from your point of view the worst possible outcome that a kick can have. Train not just the "outward" phase of a kick, but for speedy retraction and recovery.

What these three principles boil down to is this: do not "throw" kicks wildly. Precision and control are vital. Be sure that you are entirely in control of your body throughout *all* the phases of kicking and recovery. As with everything, constant practice and personal experimentation is the answer, but the following recommendations may be found helpful.

1. It is a mistake – a tempting mistake, but a mistake – to place too much faith in upper-body strength. Active people have leg muscles that are already comparatively well conditioned because they are used constantly in walking. Nonetheless, do not neglect the development and maintenance of leg strength and flexibility in your training. Walking, running, climbing stairs are all beneficial. Many teachers recommend standing in shiko dachi for increasing periods. This and similar isometric exercises are beneficial also, as long as you do not feel that they are putting undue strain on your knees. If you have relatively weak legs, your karate as a whole will suffer no matter how strong your upper body is.

2. General fitness conditioning is essential if you are to develop strong and effective kicks. Because large muscle groups are involved in kicking, kicks use a great deal more energy than hand techniques do. You will find that kicking will always tire you more quickly than upper body techniques will.

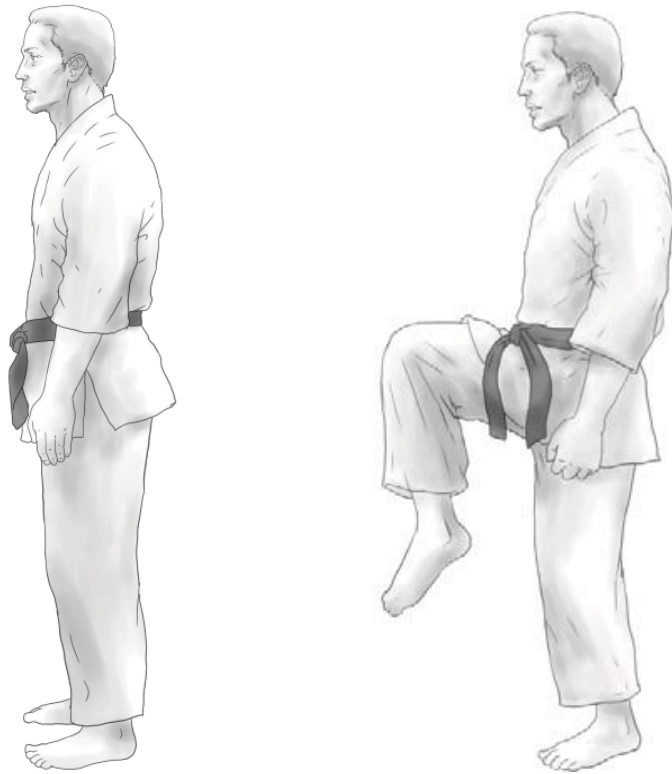
3. Make sure that you can stand confidently and securely on one leg, not just for a second or two but for as long as you choose. Practice this by standing in tsuru ashi dachi. Make sure also that you can shift quickly into a solid one-legged stance even while on the move. The hiza geri/mae geri combinations in Goju's Saifa kata are intended to train precisely this skill at speed; you will also find the Crane kata Paiho valuable in this respect.

4. For some part of your training, practise "slow motion" kicks of the kind that are seen in taijiquan forms (again, Paiho kata will be useful here). Taijiquan exponents practise in slow motion for a very good reason. Kicking is a little like playing the piano: blinding speed will hide defects and perhaps convince you that you are kicking well, but they will still be defects. It is much harder to kick slowly; doing so will develop the form of your kicks and teach you a great deal about your weaknesses. (It is not, of course, necessary to aim for the extraordinary grace of modern Chinese Wu Shu performers.)

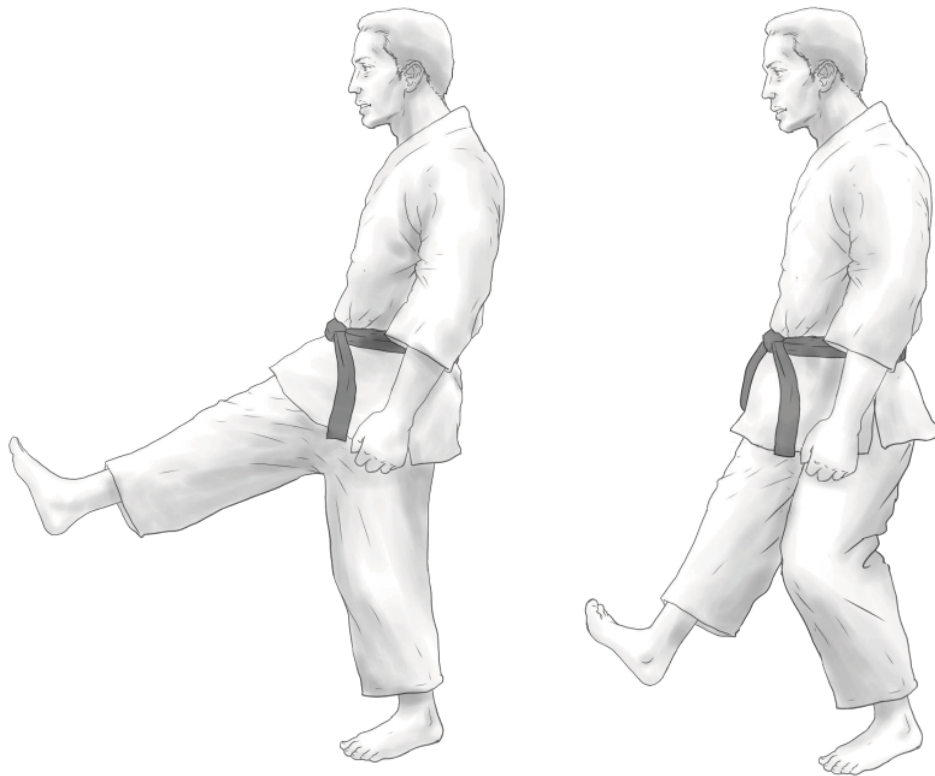
5. Also beneficial is the slow motion walking exercise often used by practitioners of taijiquan. Most people, even when they walk – never mind kicking – effectively fall forward with each step. If their stepping leg were by some magic to disappear (or if it were to be swept from under them), they would go on falling until they reached the floor. The slow-motion walking exercise illustrated on the next two pages is intended to counteract this tendency to fall from step to step, and to teach balance and “groundedness” in movement. From a natural feet-together starting position, walk forward lifting your knee high, as if you were stepping over a low wall. Extend your leg and lower your heel to the floor *very* slowly, “sinking” or “rooting” into your supporting leg and making sure that you remain in control of your posture. Slowly transfer your weight to your lead leg; then *very* slowly lift your rear foot over the wall, take up your starting position again, and repeat the exercise, stepping forward with the other foot.

A similar exercise to this, called kinhin or kyougyou (経行) – literally “sutra journey” – is done in Zen monasteries as a form of walking meditation and as a way of stretching the legs after long periods of seated meditation. We are not for the time being stressing the meditative aspects of it, but they are worth bearing in mind. Focus yourself single-pointedly on each slow and careful inch of each step (and see pp. 252–256 for some discussion of meditation).

When you feel confident that you can do this exercise stepping forwards without losing your stability, try doing the same thing moving backwards. You can also do it stepping sideways, lifting each foot over the same low wall and putting it down deliberately on the other side. You may be surprised at how difficult these exercises are. Dissecting a completely ordinary activity like walking by doing it exaggeratedly and in slow motion will show you that we are far more at the mercy of gravity than we usually suppose. Even when we walk, we are to a great extent trusting to luck. It is essential to eliminate this element of luck from our kicking techniques.

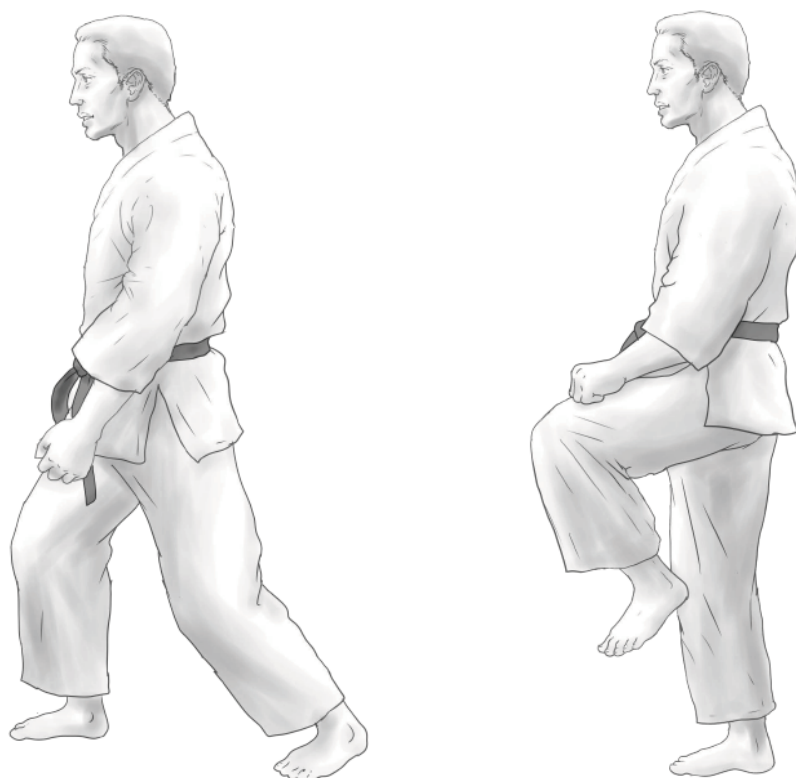


*From a natural feet-together starting position, lift your knee  
as if stepping over a low wall ...*



*... extend your leg and very slowly lower your heel to the floor,  
"rooting" into your supporting leg ...*





*... transfer your weight into your lead leg, lift your rear foot over the wall and repeat the exercise, stepping forward with your other leg*

5. When you practise your kicks, kick *something*. As with uchi waza, you will not develop a sense of power and effectiveness unless your technique actually makes contact with a target, nor will you have any real degree of control over your kicks. Also, and again as with uchi waza, it is a mistake to practise in a way that puts excessive stress on your joints. The knee is a hinge joint: it bends only one way. The momentum of an “air” kick – a kick that does not make contact with anything – will tend to hyperextend it, and knees are all too easily damaged. When practising alone (we shall deal with partner work separately, in chapter 9) it is a good idea to use a heavy bag as your target. The makiwara can be used, and will certainly develop a high degree of accuracy and strength, but a bag will give you a wide range of options for realistic footwork and will enable you to kick from a number of different tactical directions. It is important to remember that, in actual

combat, nothing is static. You will almost certainly have to execute techniques against a moving target, often from a position of disadvantage.



*The makiwara can be used to develop accuracy and strength; bear in mind, though, that it is not necessary to kick this high*

5. Try to be as varied and versatile in your training as you can be. As with uchi waza, it is natural and inevitable that everyone will develop favourite techniques and that some techniques will be more suited to your aptitudes and physique than others, but it is

important not to become unduly reliant on a limited a range of options. Also, train both legs, so that you do not come to depend wholly on a “strong” side.

As before, we list the following techniques in alphabetical order (with two exceptions) without meaning to imply anything about their relative effectiveness. Practice will quickly show that there are many variations on the basic forms described here.

# 蹴 り 技

*Keri waza*

*Fuetsu geri* (斧鉞蹴り) (“axe kick”)

This is one of the kicking techniques that seems to have been imported from tae kwon do. The foot is swung high into the air without flexing the knee and allowed to fall in a chopping motion onto the target, with gravity providing the force of the impact. Because this impact will so obviously stress the knee joint, try not to lock your leg out completely. *Fuetsu geri* is also a good stretching exercise that can be used as part of a warm-up sequence (see p. 31). It is most obviously useful as a way of finishing off an attacker who has already fallen. The foot can be swung vertically up into the air, or it can describe a shallow clockwise or anti-clockwise curve from the floor to the top of its motion. In either case the foot should fall straight down onto the target and strike it with the bone of the heel. As with *ippon ken uchi* and *nakadaka*

ken uchi, the point is to concentrate the force of the blow into a small area. If the rising arc of the foot is anti-clockwise (assuming a kick with the right leg), the kick is uchi fuetsu geri (内斧鉞蹴り) – an “inwards” axe kick; if clockwise, it is soto – “outwards” – fuetsu geri (外斧鉞蹴り). This kick is more usually called otoshi kakato geri, but we prefer to call it fuetsu geri for the reason that will be given presently.



*The foot is swung into the air without bending the knee and allowed to fall in a chopping motion onto the target. To avoid hyperextending the knee at the moment of impact, do not lock your leg out completely*

*Fumikomi geri* (踏み込み蹴り) (“stamp kick”)

Fumu (踏む) is literally “to step on”; as the name suggests, fumi-komi geri, like fuetsu geri, is a technique most obviously used to finish off an attacker who has fallen to the ground. The knee is raised high and the foot driven downwards into the target, striking with the heel. In executing it against a fallen opponent there should be the sense that you are dropping the whole weight of your body down onto him.



*Fumikomi geri* (“stamp kick”): the foot is driven downwards into the target, striking with the heel

***Kin geri (金蹴り) (“groin kick”)***

Kin geri is a snap kick striking with the dorsal surface of the foot. The knee is lifted up with the foot plantarflexed (i.e. the toes pointed downwards) and the foot driven forwards and upwards into the attacker’s groin (kin (金) is an abbreviation of kintama (金玉), “testicles.”) The force of the kick comes both from the forward motion of the hip and the “snapping” extension of the leg from the knee. To avoid risk of injury the toes should be curled under as far as possible when performing it. Assuming a front stance, kin geri can be executed with either leg. It is this type of rising kick to the groin that sanchin dachi is notionally supposed to block (but see p. 58).



*Kin geri (“groin kick”): the foot is driven forwards and upwards into the attacker’s groin, striking with the dorsal surface*

*Mae geri* (前蹴り) (“front kick”)

Mae geri is karate’s most basic and useful kick. It is one of the handful of *keri waza* used before Funakoshi Yoshitaka’s introduction of an extended range of kicking techniques. As the name suggests, it is kick directly to the front of you. The knee is lifted up and the foot shot forward to the target, usually striking with the ball of the foot. From a front stance it can be executed with either the lead leg or the rear leg. Again, the force of the kick comes from the forward motion of the hip and the extension of the leg.



*Mae geri* (“front kick”): the foot is shot forward to the target, usually striking with the ball of the foot

Mae geri can be executed either as high-impact snap kick or as a thrusting kick to push an attacker away from you. A snap front kick is called *mae geri keage* (前蹴り蹴上); a thrusting front kick is *mae geri kekomi* (前蹴り蹴込み). It is possible also to use the sole of the foot or the heel as the striking surface, depending on the

target and the desired effect. Mae geri executed with the lead leg can function as a sort of “jab” to keep an attacker at a distance.

*Mawashi geri* (回し蹴り) (“*turning kick*” or “*roundhouse kick*”)

Older and less supple karateka tend to find “jodan” – high level – mawashi geri difficult because it requires a very mobile hip joint. There are several ways of executing this kick. Most commonly in karate, the leg is lifted up to the side and the hip rotated so that the leg is more or less parallel with the ground (imagine swinging your leg over a bicycle). The foot is then whipped around in a lateral arc, with the idea, in the case of a high-level mawashi geri, of kicking around and past an attacker’s guard. The kick is driven partly by the forward motion of the hip of the kicking leg and partly by the extension of the leg from the knee. It can be done from a front stance with either the lead or the rear leg. Broadly speaking, lead-leg mawashi geri are faster but weaker.



*Jodan mawashi geri (“high-level turning kick”): the foot moves in a lateral arc to kick around an attacker’s guard*



In its “pure” Japanese form, mawashi geri is supposed to use the ball of the foot as the striking surface, with the foot dorsiflexed (i.e. the toes lifted higher than the heel, creating a relatively acute angle between the top of the foot and the bottom of the shin) and the toes pulled well back. This, however, is very difficult to do, and most people strike with the dorsal surface of the foot. Oyama Masutatsu introduced into Kyokushinkai karate a roundhouse kick using the shin: a technique borrowed from Muay Thai (“Thai boxing”), whose exponents use it constantly and to great effect.



*It is not necessary to kick as high as in the previous illustration and the striking surface can be varied according to whatever the circumstances require. Here “chudan” – mid section – mawashi geri is used to strike an attacker’s ribs with the shin ...*



*... and here “gedan” – low-level – mawashi geri is used to strike the attacker’s thigh. This and the shin kick shown in the previous photograph are applications of the “turning” type of kick imported from Thai boxing*

***Mikazuki geri (三日月蹴り) (“three day moon kick”)***

This technique is so called because the leg is swung up in an arc (like the crescent shape of a new moon) to strike the target with the sole of the foot. The idea is that you are knocking aside the hand of an attacker holding a weapon or “smacking” away the arm of someone who has grabbed your wrist. You can easily

practise it by slapping your outstretched hand with the sole of your foot, as in Goju's Suparunpai kata and Shotokan's Heian godan.



*Mikazuki geri ("three day moon kick"): the leg is swung up in an arc to strike the target with the sole of the foot*

***Yoko geri (横蹴り) ("side kick")***

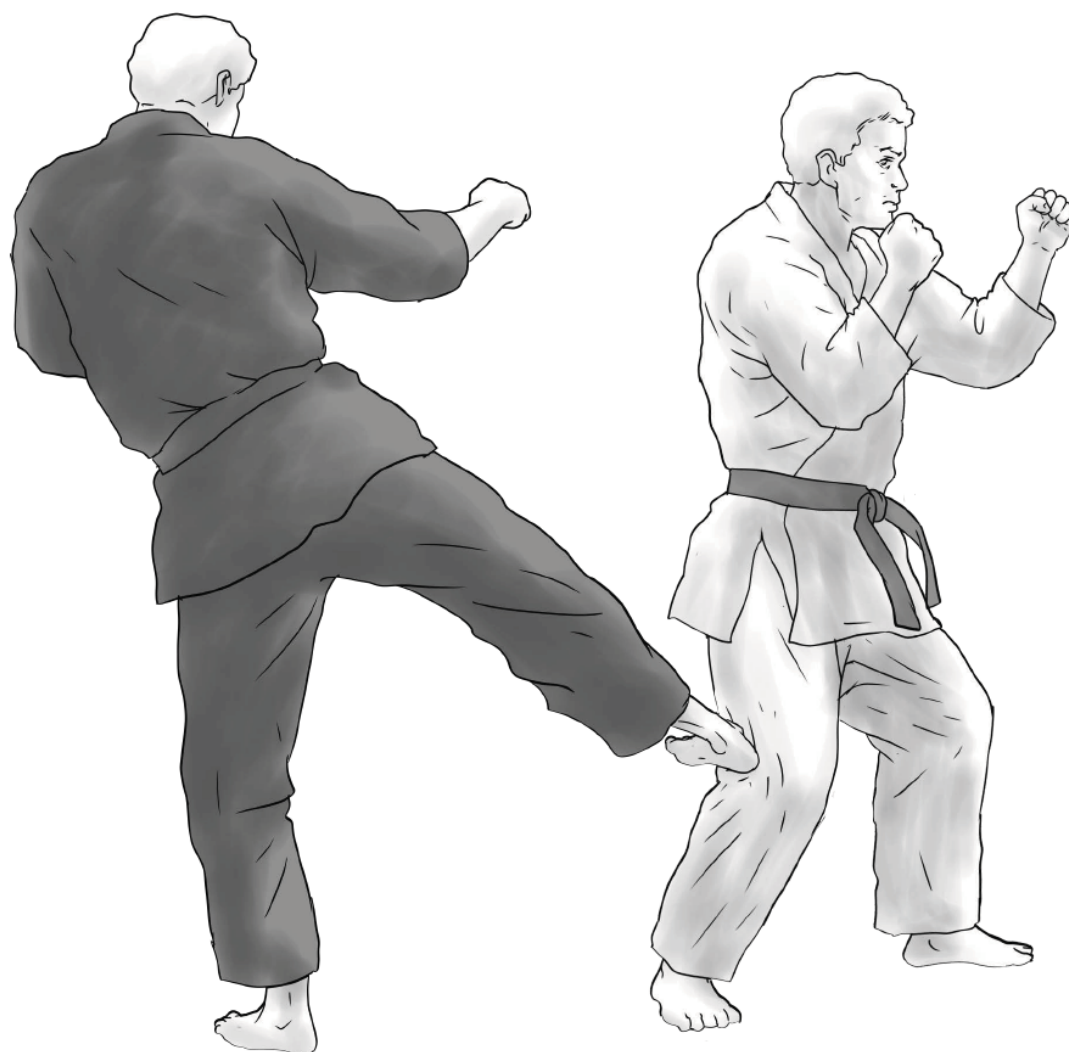
Yoko (横) is "sideways" or "horizontal." Like mawashi geri, the delivery of "jodan" yoko geri calls for a very flexible hip joint; but, like mawashi geri, yoko geri does not have to be particularly high. It is delivered with the edge or sole or heel of the foot, depending

on the target and the intended effect. The knee is lifted and the foot fired out to the side, driven to a large extent by the pivoting of the other foot on the ground. The long axis of the foot should be more or less parallel with the ground. Like mae geri, yoko geri can be either a snap kick (keage) or a thrusting kick (kekomi).



*Yoko geri ("side kick"): the foot is fired out to the side, striking with either the sole, the edge of the foot or the heel. In this example the edge of the foot is used to strike into the opponent's abdomen*

...



*Like mawashi geri, yoko geri does not have to be particularly high; here, a low yoko geri is used to strike the side of an of an attacker's knee (this kick is also a kansetsu geri: see pp. 123–124)*

Two other leg techniques may be mentioned that are not in the strict sense kicks.

*Ashi barai* (足払い) (“leg sweep”). The purpose of this technique is to destroy an attacker's balance or drop him to the ground by sweeping his leg from under him – perhaps if all his weight is on his front foot, or if you have caught a kicking leg and have him at your mercy. Although it is not called a kick, ashi barai may for many practical purposes be thought of as a kind of low level

mawashi geri, striking the attackers calf or ankle with your instep or shin. It can, however, also be a backwards or reverse sweeping or hooking motion, as in the illustration below. It can, indeed, be any reaping motion of the leg that knocks or sweeps away an opponent's support.



*Ashi barai ("leg sweep") is any reaping motion of the leg that sweeps an attacker's leg from under him*

*Hiza geri (膝蹴り) ("knee kick"). This technique is usually called hiza geri, but it is not really a "keri" so much as an "uchi" or an "ate." It is a close-range striking technique executed by the simple expedient of driving your knee up hard into a convenient target. The force of the technique comes mainly from the pushing of the*

foot of your supporting leg against the ground as the upward strike is made; its effect can often be intensified by pulling an opponent onto it.



*Hiza geri (“knee kick”) is more properly a close-range striking technique that involves driving the knee up hard into a convenient target*

Three other common expressions require some clarification.

*Kansetsu geri (関節蹴り) (“joint kick”):* a kick intended to hyper-extend or otherwise damage a joint.

*Kakato geri (踵蹴り) (“heel kick”):* a kick that uses the calcaneus bone – the hard bone of the heel – to strike with.

*Sokuto geri (足刀蹴り) (“foot sword kick”):* a kick with the outside edge of the foot.

These terms are a little ambiguous. They can be used both as the names of specific kicks and also as denoting features that might be exhibited by different types of kick. Thus, for instance, the low kicks in Goju's Sanseiryu kata are yoko geri (because they travel more or less sideways in relation to the kicker), kansetsu geri (because directed against an opponent's knee joint) and sokuto geri (because delivered with the edge of the foot); fuetsu geri is also a kakato geri (because it strikes with the heel), but so is fumikomi geri, and mae geri also can be a kakato geri.



*This kick is a fumikomi geri (because delivered with a stamping action), a kakato geri (because delivered with the heel) and a kansetsu geri (because delivered against the knee joint)<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Because the kicking foot is turned outwards in this example one could perhaps also call this a "soto fumikomi geri."



There are of course many more kicks than we have illustrated here, and an enormous number of possible variations and permutations. You will see from the illustration on p. 123, for instance, how easily hiza geri might be transformed – might flow directly – into a finishing kin geri. Experience and imagination will open your mind to a wide range of tactical possibilities. Moreover, we stress that there is no “correct” way to kick; or, more properly, that the only correct way to kick is the one that works best for the kicker. For this reason we have not described any kick dogmatically in terms of its “proper” form. Our intention has been to show those “bread and butter” kicks that are (a) probably most useful in “real life” situations and (b) most easily acquired regardless of age and flexibility. By constant practice and experimentation with these the karateka will develop his own preferences and methods of execution, and extend his repertoire at his own pace and according to his own temperament and capacities. For the benefit of the relatively inflexible or older karateka we say again that very high kicks are neither “traditional” nor necessary to effective self-defence. Simplicity, speed, accuracy and power are the four corners of effectiveness.

## 6: Locks and Holds

KARATE IS FOR the most part a striking and kicking art. In his *Karate-do Kyohan* Funakoshi Osensei stresses the importance of joint locking techniques as part of it, but karateka have paid comparatively little attention to them.<sup>1</sup> Many such techniques are hidden in the kata – many more than one might suppose – but they are relatively neglected. This is probably due to the fact that “joint techniques” – kansetsu waza – are perceived, not without reason, as having certain drawbacks in comparison with strikes and kicks.

1. They are relatively difficult to use under pressure: difficult to apply, that is, against a determined assailant rather than a compliant partner in the dojo.
2. In “real life” they require a good deal of sustained muscular strength (as distinct from the “explosive” force of a punch or kick). On the face of it they are unlikely to work against an attacker who is significantly stronger than you.
3. They come especially into their own when fighting on the ground; but it is inevitable that in a ground-fighting scenario most of the advantage will be with the stronger and heavier party. A methodological assumption of karate is that it is better to prevent this scenario from arising in the first place, by the development of a strong and stable stance and the timely and effective use of uchi waza and keru waza.

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<sup>1</sup> An exception to this is Ohtsuka Hironori’s Wado Ryu, into which he incorporated elements taken from Shindo Yoshin Ryu ju jutsu. In general, however, karate is a good deal less adventurous in its use of joint attacks than a number of Chinese arts, such as Ying Zhua Quan (“Eagle Claw”), Tang Lang Quan (“Praying Mantis”) or Hung Gar.

4. Assuming that you have restrained an attacker with a lock, you are, as they say, now riding a tiger: what do you do next? Unless you expect help to arrive imminently, there is not much point in merely holding on to an assailant (though this is a point that we shall qualify to a certain extent at the end of this chapter).

Having said all this, it is still advantageous to acquire some understanding of locking and compliance techniques that can be used should the opportunity arise. In this chapter we shall try to illustrate a few applications of the principles upon which they rely. You will find many others for yourself through a careful study of kata and the mechanics of joints. Because ground fighting is a whole separate study, we shall deal only with locks and holds that can be applied from a standing position.<sup>2</sup>

### **Kansetsu Waza**

The objective of kansetsu waza is straightforward: to force a joint against its natural direction by exploiting leverage and rotation. The word gaeshi (返し) that so often occurs in this context is, literally, “reversal”; kansetsu waza involve “reversing” a joint relative to what it will normally or comfortably do. There is no counting the number of ways in which such reversal might be achieved: everything will depend on the circumstances and opportunities that present themselves. We shall here present only a few of the many possibilities, looking at some hypothetical ways

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<sup>2</sup> There is some treatment of groundwork in an excellent book by Iain Abernethy called *Bunkai Jutsu: The Practical Application of Karate Kata* (NETH Publishing, in association with Summersdale Publishers Ltd., 2002). He says, however, that in a real fight, “the more simple, direct and practical methods must be given priority ... In my own club ... the emphasis firmly remains on avoiding going to the ground and regaining our feet as quickly as possible should the worst happen” (p. 186). Abernethy Sensei’s understanding of the kata of Wado Ryu is magisterial. We recommend two other books by him (also produced by NETH Publishing): *Arm Locks for All Styles* and *Karate’s Grappling Methods*.

in which kansetsu waza might be employed with a respectable chance of success. The word “hypothetical” is important. Our purpose is not to prescribe a syllabus of “self-defence techniques,” but to provide the reader with *some very general* indications of what might be feasible and why. Because the number of actual situations that can arise is so large and unpredictable, it is not possible to do more than illustrate some fundamental principles that the student can take as a starting point for his own practice and exploration.

# 關節技

## *Kansetsu Waza*

The illustrations given in this chapter mostly presuppose a right-handed attack, but it is easy enough to see how they can be adapted in the event of a left-handed attack by adopting a “mirror image” of what is shown.

### *Hiji gaeshi* (肘返し) (*elbow locks or “arm bars”*)<sup>3</sup>

Because the elbow is a “gynglymus” – a “hinge” joint that bends in one direction only – it is fairly easy to damage it, or to inflict

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<sup>3</sup> “Hiji” rather than “empi”: empi is a word usually used only in relation to strikes.



*The elbow is a hinge joint that will bend in one direction only ...*



*... and is relatively easily dislocated*

pain on an attacker, by “reversing” it over a fulcrum. Exactly how much damage or pain you want to cause is a question that will depend on the circumstances. What is “reasonable force” is always a matter of judgment and interpretation.

### **Example A**

This example relies on the fact that the human arm will not comfortably rotate inwards, coupled with a forcible hyperextension of the elbow.

Figure 1: Black Gi tries to grab the front of White Gi’s jacket with the evident intention of hitting him with his other hand.

Figure 2: White Gi blocks Black Gi’s attack with *kake uke* (see p. 167). Notice that White Gi’s right hand is open in readiness to grasp Black Gi’s arm but that the block itself is done with the outside of the wrist. It is a mistake to try merely to grab an attacker’s hand or arm, because it is so easy to miss. Notice too that White Gi has shifted out of the line of an attack by Black Gi’s other hand and placed himself on Black Gi’s undefended side. It is always wise to do this if you can.

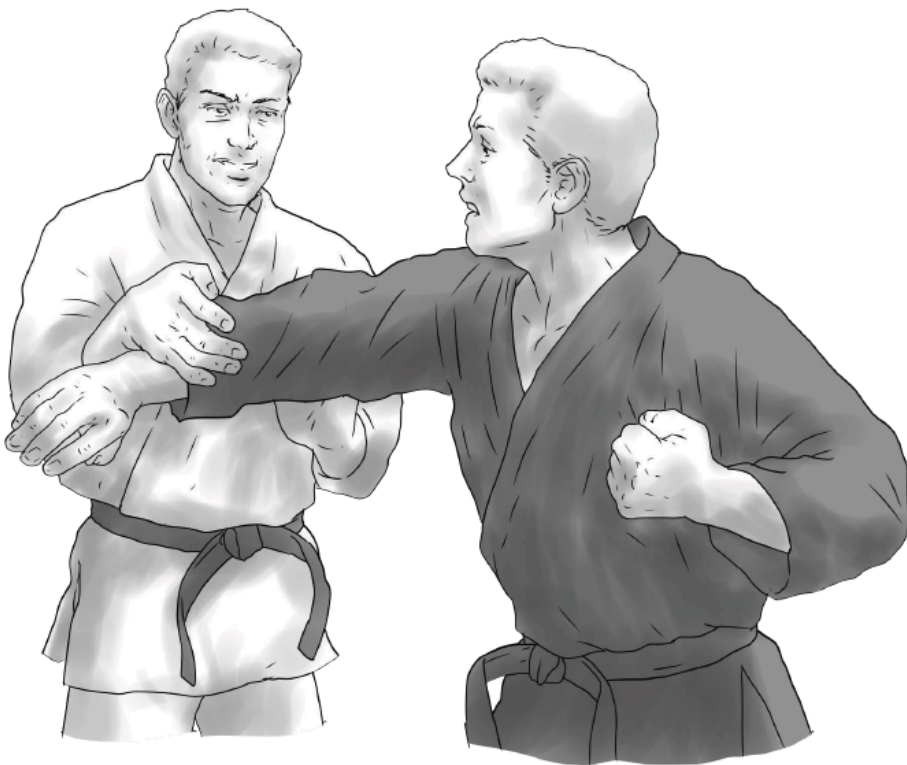
Figure 3: White Gi seizes and controls Black Gi’s arm with his right hand (*hiki uke*: see p. 167) and with his left hand in the *shotei* formation simultaneously pushes Black Gi’s elbow up and over to rotate his arm inwards. In this sort of situation it is relatively easy to turn the momentum of the attacker’s forward movement to your own advantage.

Figure 4: White Gi steps through with his left leg and uses a combination of bodyweight and forward/downward movement to apply pressure against Black Gi’s elbow. His right hand pulls upwards, his left hand pushes downwards. The objective is not merely restraint, but pain and damage.

Figure 5: White Gi takes advantage of Black Gi’s compromised position to strike *tate ken uchi* to his head without going to the floor, though it would in fact be fairly easy to take Black Gi to the floor from this position.



*Figure 1*



*Figure 2*



*Figure 3*



*Figure 4*





*Figure 5*

### **Example B**

Figure 6: Anything that enables the elbow joint to be bent the wrong way can serve as a fulcrum. In this application from Goju's Seipai kata, White Gi has intercepted Black Gi's attack, turned his own body roughly 180° clockwise, wrapped his left arm around Black Gi's right arm, and is now using his left forearm as a fulcrum over which to lever Black Gi's elbow. This application also places Black Gi's jaw in easy range of an empi uchi delivered by White Gi's left elbow.

### **Example C**

Figure 7: In this application from Goju's Gekisai kata, White Gi uses his body as a fulcrum to "bar" black Gi's arm. From this position ashi barai can easily be used to take out Black Gi's right leg.



*Figure 6*



*Figure 7*

***Kote gaeshi (小手返し) (wrist locks)***

Kote (小手) is the kind of gauntlet that kendoka wear; by extension the term denotes the wrist and lower part of the forearm. A sudden forcible palmarflexion of the hand (bending the wrist inwards so that the palm is being folded towards the inner surface of the forearm) can be acutely painful.



*The bones and articulations of the hand and wrist. Notice that the joints at the base of each digit are shallow “condyloid” joints that are relatively easy to damage*

It should be borne in mind, though, that it is far from easy to manipulate the wrist against real resistance because (a) whereas the elbow joint is a hinge that will move only in one direction, the wrist is a much more versatile joint, and (b) the hand/wrist connection in most people is relatively strong because the muscles of the forearm that control the movements of the hand are well conditioned through constant use. Aikidoka and ju jutsuka train

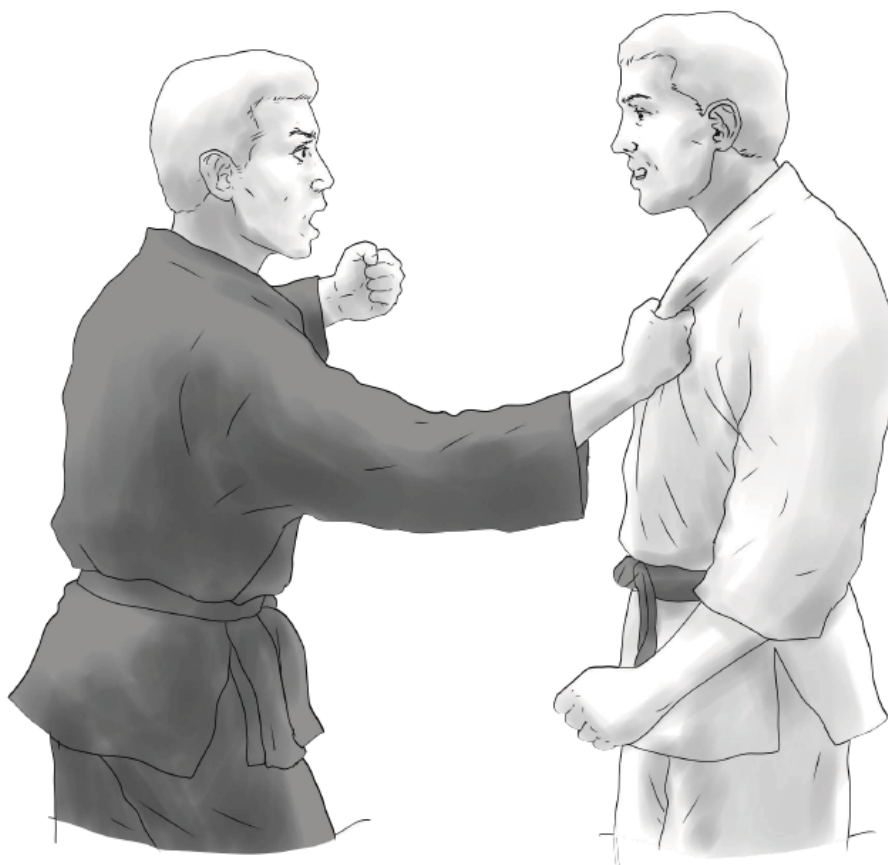
their wrist flexibility specifically, to make themselves comparatively impervious to wrist locks. It is a good idea for karateka to do this as well.

### **Example A**

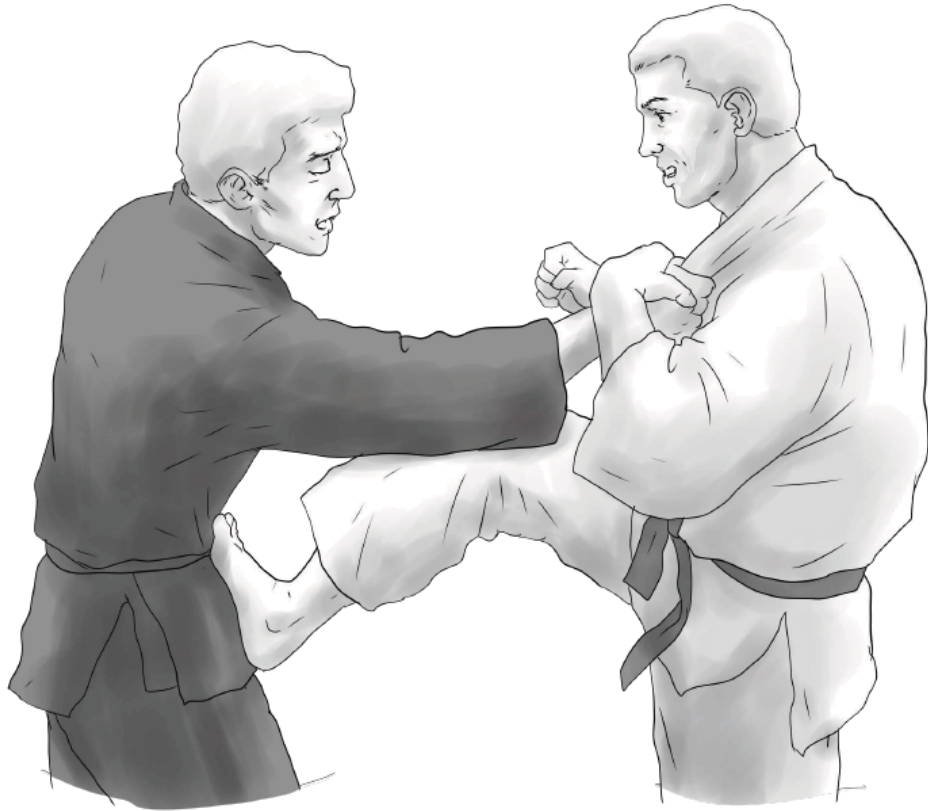
Figure 8: Black Gi grabs the front of White Gi's jacket with his right hand.

Figure 9: White Gi seizes black Gi's hand with his own left hand on top and "takes the mind" with a short-range mae geri to the mid section.

Figure 10: Having distracted Black Gi and loosened his grip, White Gi rotates his arm anticlockwise (it would be clockwise if Black Gi had grabbed with his left hand) so that the palm is upwards, and locks the wrist with a strong forwards and downwards pressure with his thumbs against the back of the hand.



*Figure 8*



*Figure 9*



*Figure 10*

### **Example B**

Figure 11: The force of a wrist lock is much increased by twisting the attacker's hand and forearm outwards relative to his body. This will also bring you in closer to a convenient target for a strike: White Gi here has only to bring his right elbow up to strike empi uchi to Black Gi's jaw. Also, continued downward pressure on the wrist from this position will take an attacker to the floor.



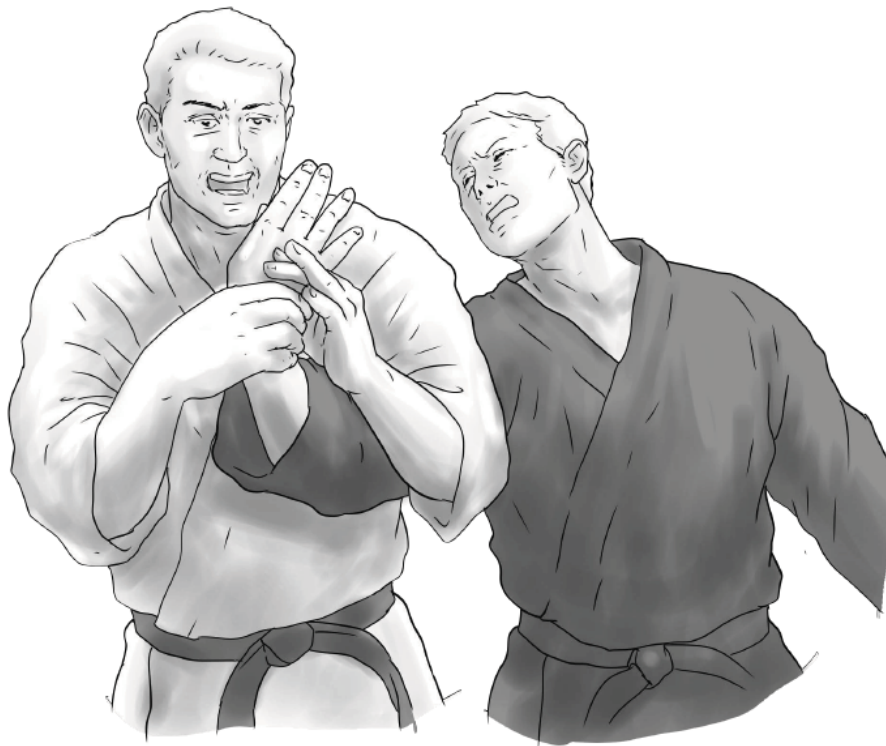
*Figure 11*

### **Example C**

Figure 12: As an alternative to the technique just illustrated, you can grasp the attacker's (right) hand with your own (right) hand on top and rotate his arm clockwise instead of anticlockwise while applying the wrist lock (though this is harder to do because the degree of rotation involved is so much greater). This will expose the whole of his body to a counter-attack.



Figure 13: A wrist lock will be much more effective if by bracing his elbow against some part of your own body you can prevent an attacker from moving away from it.



*Figure 13*

We have illustrated wrist locks as responses to a one-handed grab, but they will work equally well – if they work at all – against an attacker who grabs you with both hands. They are often taught unrealistically in self-defence classes. It must be remembered that speed of response and the “taking of the mind” with some painful or distracting technique are essential. If an attacker has taken a firm grip, unassisted strength will probably not dislodge it, and you do not have time to struggle. Grabbing your clothes will be only the first part of what an attacker has in mind for you. He will be intending either to pull you in towards him or immediately hit you with his other hand, or kick you.

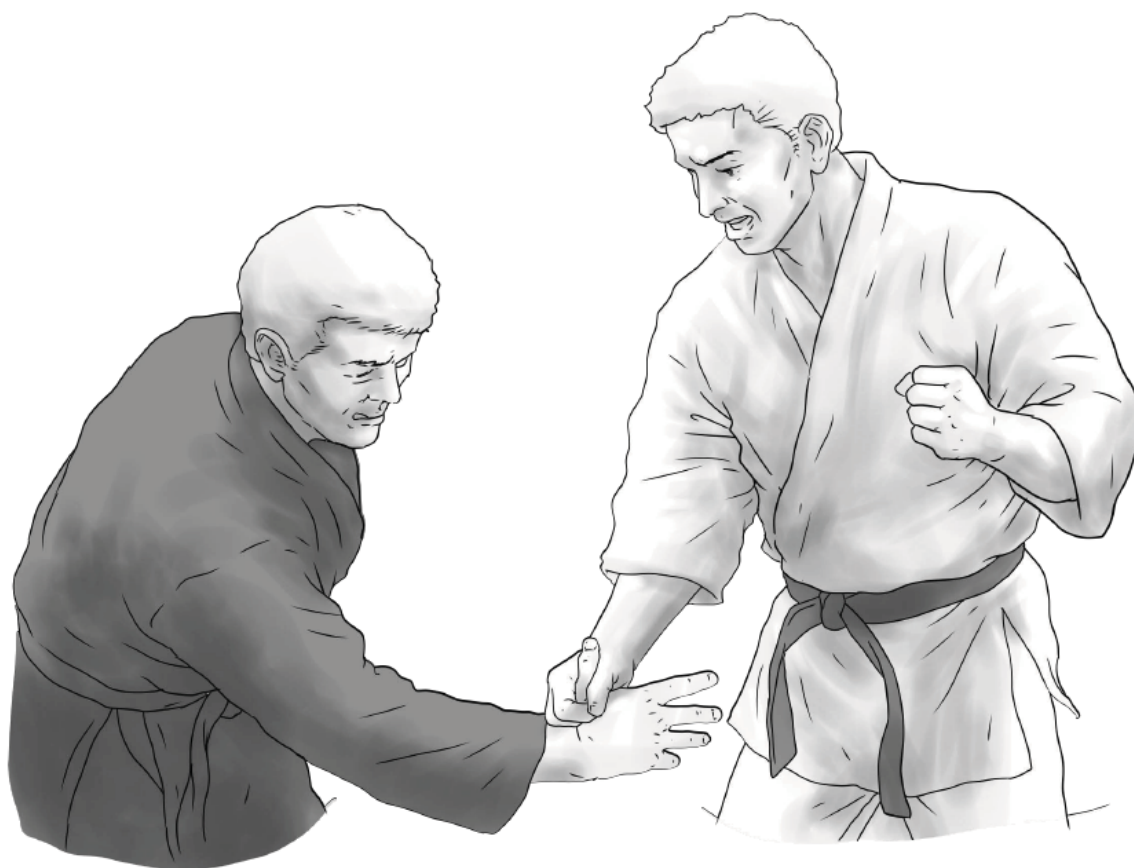
*Yubi gaeshi (指返し) (finger locks)*



*The metacarpophalangeal joints are limited in their range of motion, and the interphalangeal joints are “hinge” joints that will bend only one way and are fairly easy to dislocate*



The size and strength of the hand is very variable as between individuals, but it is relatively easy to cause pain or damage if the opportunity to take control of an attacker's finger or thumb presents itself. By the same token, it is wise always to safeguard your own fingers and thumbs against the possibility of a grab. Even large and strong hands are vulnerable in the right circumstances. The metacarpophalangeal joints (where the digit joins the hand) are limited in their range of motion, and the interphalangeal joints (the knuckle joints between the bones of the fingers and the thumb) are hinge joints that will bend only one way and are fairly easy to dislocate. The metacarpophalangeal joint of the thumb (where the thumb meets the side of the hand) is particularly easy to manipulate with acutely uncomfortable results, or to dislocate (figure 14). It does not take much strength to apply this thumb lock if the chance to do so arises, but it will need to be done suddenly and sharply.



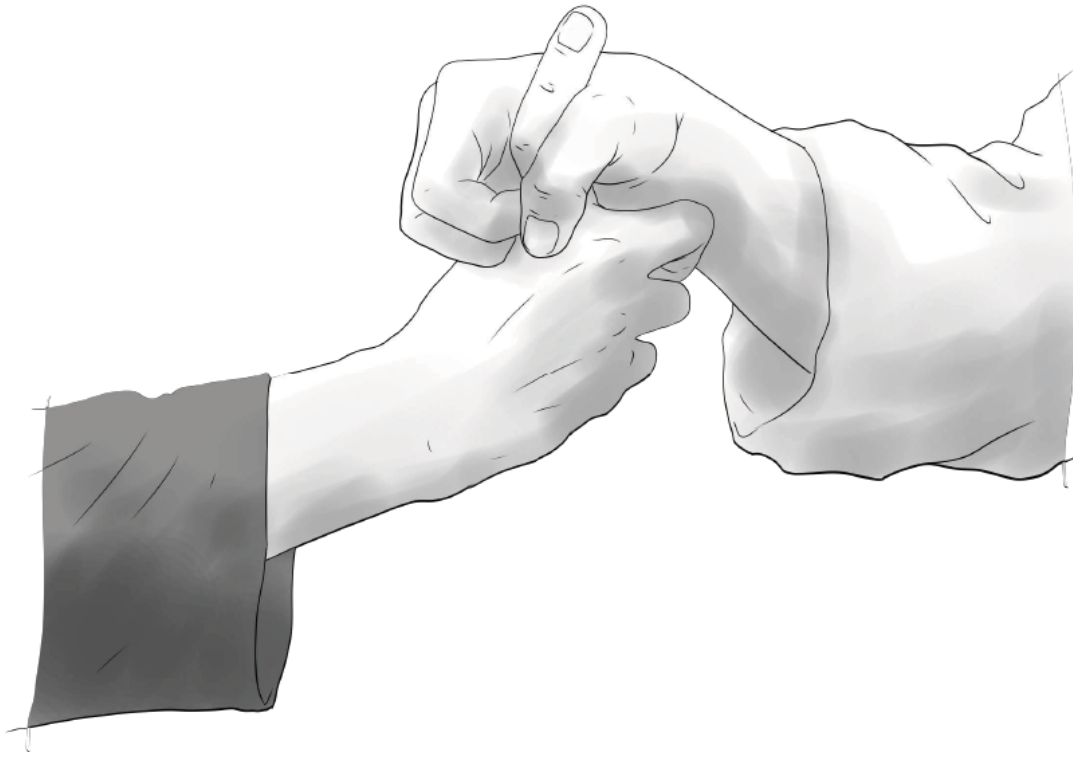
*Figure 14*

It is worth bearing in mind that the fourth finger (the *digitus annularis* or “ring finger”) is usually the weakest of the fingers by quite a long way (you may find it instructive to experiment with your own hand to find out how true this is). This is because it shares a flexor muscle with the middle and little fingers. Most people (apart from pianists, who train themselves to do it) cannot fully extend their fourth finger independently of the others.

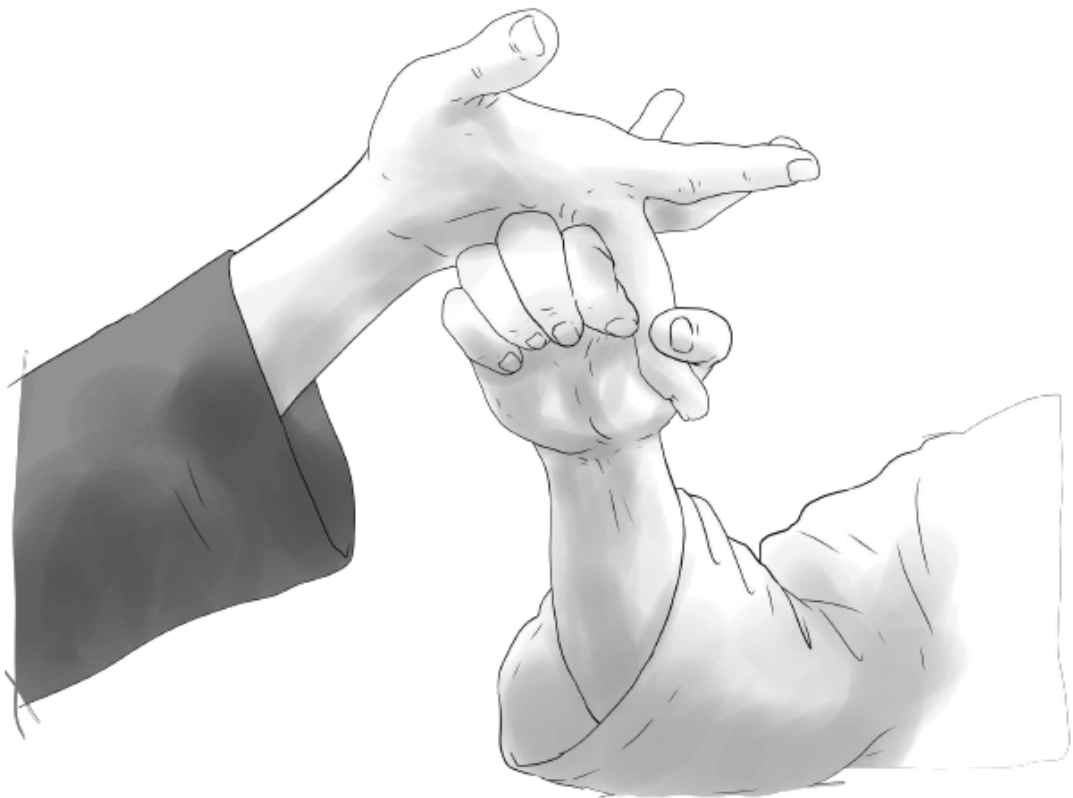
Yubi gaeshi will not work well if you try to grip an attacker’s finger or thumb simply by wrapping your own fingers around it (figure 15). Such a grip will not provide much leverage and is fairly easy to pull out of, especially if the hands are slippery with sweat. Try instead to create a fulcrum and lever combination with your own fingers and thumbs. We illustrate (figures 16–17) only two of the ways in which this can be done.



*Figure 15*



*Figure 16*



*Figure 17*

As with wrist locks, the effectiveness of a finger lock will be increased if you can brace an attacker's elbow against your own body (figure 18).



*Figure 18*

### ***Kata gatame (肩固め) (shoulder holds)***

The word *katame/gatame* is related to *katameru* (固める) – literally, “to freeze” or “to solidify.” As the name suggests, some of the techniques that fall within this category are more suitably viewed as restraints or immobilisations than as “reversals.” The shoulder joint – the glenohumeral joint – is a spheroidal (“ball and socket”) joint. It is the most mobile joint in the human body. As such it is theoretically very vulnerable to dislocation or subluxation (partial dislocation), but in the case of someone who is young, fit and muscular, dislocation would probably require a considerable impact (e.g from a heavy fall). It is relatively difficult to cause pain or damage by locking the shoulder of someone who

is strong and resisting you. It is by no means impossible, however, especially since shoulder holds can in many cases be used also to put pressure on an elbow or on the arm as a whole.

### **Example A**

Figure 19: White Gi blocks and controls Black Gi's right-handed punch with a left-handed kake uke/hiki uke combination ...

Figure 20: ... simultaneously "takes the mind" with a tetsui uchi to the temple (speed and "taking the mind" are vital here, because White Gi is so exposed to an attack by Black Gi's other hand) ...

Figure 21: ... pulls Black Gi forwards ...

Figure 22: ... steps quickly in, passes his left arm under Black Gi's right armpit and up behind his shoulder and ...

Figure 23: ... uses both hands to lock Black Gi's shoulder. Black Gi's head is now well in range of a strike.



*Figure 19*



*Figure 20*



*Figure 21*



*Figure 22*



*Figure 23*

### **Example B**

Figure 24: The scenario here is the same as in the previous example, except that White Gi has passed his blocking hand *over* Black Gi's arm and come up under his armpit. From this position it is easy to deliver a strike to the head or solar plexus.



*Figure 24*

### **Example C**

Figure 25: Having controlled Black Gi's wrist and pushed his elbow upwards (cf. figure 3) ...

Figure 26: ... White Gi rotates Black Gi's arm and traps it in the crook of his own elbow, leaving his other hand free to deliver a concluding strike.





*Figure 25*



*Figure 26*

### Example D

Figure 27: Having stepped outside the line of attack, White Gi raises Black Gi's attacking arm upwards with an age uke ("rising block") ...

Figure 28: ... passes his hand around Black Gi's arm to grasp his own forearm ...

Figure 29: ... and locks Black Gi's shoulder and elbow. Continuing downward pressure from this position will easily take Black Gi to the ground.

This kind of hold, where the leverage is provided by White Gi's grasping his own forearm, is called ude garami (腕搦み), "arm tangle" (the expressions "figure four" lock and "key" lock are also found). There are many variations of it, especially in ju jutsu, where it is almost always used as a ground technique. A "figure four" lock is in practice both a shoulder hold and an elbow lock, because the whole arm is bent the "wrong way."



*Figure 27*



*Figure 28*



*Figure 29*

The example just illustrated presupposes a right-handed attack blocked by a right-arm age uke. A similar effect, though with greater initial risk to White Gi, can be achieved with a left-arm block against a right-handed attack (figure 30) (and, of course, vice versa).



*Figure 30*

### **Example E**

Figure 31: Assuming White Gi to have taken control of Black Gi's right arm ...

Figure 32: ... if White Gi now turns in a clockwise direction (anticlockwise if he has taken control of Black Gi's left arm) and passes the arm over his head ...

Figure 33: ... this will raise Black Gi's arm and immobilise his shoulder in such a way as to bring him off balance backwards. If White Gi continues to exert backward and downward pressure on the arm, Black Gi can easily be taken to the floor.



*Figure 31*



*Figure 32*



*Figure 33*

If this rather chancy technique works, it is very effective; but speed and surprise are essential. In making the clockwise turn it is important to stay close to your opponent to “jam” as far as possible any strike with his other hand as you turn.

### **Example F**

Figure 34–35: The scenario here is the same as in the previous example, except that White Gi now turns anticlockwise instead of clockwise.

Figure 36: This will have the effect of rotating Black Gi’s shoulder and turning him into a position from which a “hammer” lock can be applied. This lock will stress the elbow as well as the shoulder. The higher Black Gi’s arm is raised behind his back the more painful it will be.

Figure 37: Because Black Gi’s instinct will be to try to strike around behind him with the elbow of his other arm, it is essential to take immediate additional control of him.



*Figure 34*



*Figure 35*



*Figure 36*



*Figure 37*



### **Example G**

The two holds shown in figures 38 and 39 are in English called “half nelson” and “full nelson” (no one seems to know the origin of these terms). In Japanese we have heard them called funeruson (フルネルソン) and hafuneruson (ハーフネルソン); but these words are “gairaigo.” If there are indigenous Japanese terms for the “nelsons,” we do not know what they are. The nelsons are usually used on the ground, especially by wrestlers and ju jutsuka as “mat holds.” They have some degree of usefulness as restraining holds, but as techniques applied from a standing position they are not particularly difficult to escape from (defences against a full nelson occur in Goju’s Shisochin and Kururunfa kata). If you apply a full nelson it is essential not to interlink your fingers behind the neck of the person whom you are trying to restrain. If you do this and he flings his head back (as in Kururunfa kata), your fingers will be crushed painfully together.



*Figure 38*



*Figure 39*



We have here shown only a few stereotypical situations by way of illustration. Variations on the theme of kansetsu waza are to all intents and purposes innumerable. The student should try to imagine as many scenarios and permutations as possible, exploring:

- (a) the mechanics of joints: how they will bend comfortably and how they will not;
- (b) the various opportunities to control and “reverse” them that can present themselves;
- (c) the many ways in which the impetus of an attack can be turned to an attacker’s disadvantage in techniques of this kind.

Step by step descriptions and posed photographs can, of course, convey nothing of the speed, smoothness and co-ordination with which kansetsu waza must be executed. Speed of response, the element of surprise and “taking the mind” are vital to bringing them off.



Locking and restraining techniques are a central part of “sport” or submission wrestling of one kind and another; but, for self defence purposes, karateka have been inclined to attach much more importance to strikes and kicks, for reasons already mentioned: locks and restraints are difficult to apply against resistance, they call for a relatively high degree of sustained physical strength, and they tend to present you with the “tiger riding” problem.

Having said this, there are arguments against the “tiger riding” objection that deserve to be taken seriously. It may, after all, turn out that nothing beyond – nothing “worse than” – a lock is needed in a particular situation: it is often true that there is no need to do more than restrain or reason with an attacker. In any case, if a lock has been applied at all, its severity can be increased, if and as necessary, even to the point of dislocating or spraining a joint. Also, locks can be used to manoeuvre an attacker into a position in which he is exposed to a strike or kick. A further point is one that we have made already, in chapter 4. Judges and magistrates are generally very restrictive in what they regard as “reasonable force” used in self-defence. They are less likely to look unfavourably on someone who has tried to deal with an attacker by means other than hitting or kicking him. Needless to say, one should in any case never do more damage or inflict more pain than is absolutely necessary, for reasons that have nothing to do with the law.

There are, then, good reasons for not neglecting kansetsu waza. The subject does, however, need to be approached with certain

qualifications. How you will – or can – react to a situation will depend on your personality, aptitudes and physical strength. Realistic acceptance of your weaknesses and genuine confidence in your strengths are factors that can make the difference between success and failure. Some of the following points may not apply to someone of great physical strength and prowess, but they are worth stating as generalisations.

1. Nowhere more than in the case of kansetsu waza is practice with a co-operative partner more likely to mislead you as to the real effectiveness of what you are doing. Kansetsu waza are a great deal more difficult to apply than rehearsing them in the comfort and safety of the dojo might lead you to think.

2. It is almost certain that locks will work only as secondary techniques: that is, only if you have already been able to secure the upper hand.

3. There is probably no point in *intending* to apply a lock; the chance to do so, if it comes at all, will be a matter of luck: a fleeting chance to be seized. Speed and surprise are essential; having seized the advantage, you need to use it without hesitation or delay. Do not give an attacker time to regroup. There is no point in striving to apply a lock against someone who is genuinely struggling to resist you. There is bound to be some more effective option open to you.

4. Locks, assuming them to be feasible at all, may well prove to be useless unless they either hurt or disable an attacker decisively or are followed up straight away by another technique that does. You cannot hold on to someone for ever, and it is no good releasing someone only to have him attack you again. If you use locks, always be prepared to go on to something else, and try always to stay in a position from which you will be able to do so.

In view of the relative neglect of kansetsu waza in karate, anyone who wishes to develop more than a rudimentary proficiency will

do well to cross-train in an art that emphasises them: ju jutsu or aikido or the Chinese art of chin na.<sup>4</sup> In view of the unfortunate possibility of having to fight on the ground as a last resort, we would certainly encourage any karateka to do this.

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<sup>4</sup> See especially Yang Jwing-Ming, *Comprehensive Applications of Shaolin Chin Na* (YMAA Publication Center, 1995); see also the arts mentioned in n. 1, above.

## 7: Defensive Techniques

UKE WAZA (受け技) IS an expression usually, and not quite accurately, translated as “blocking techniques.” Because “block” is so standard a term in English martial arts writing we shall go on using it; but “uke” (受け) really means something more than, and different from, what “blocking” seems to suggest. The verb ukeru (受ける) is “to receive”; hence, in our present context, “uke” implies “receiving an attack with a defensive action.”<sup>1</sup>

The reason for this distinction between “receiving” and “blocking” is simple enough. It is a truth of physics that, in a collision between two opposing forces, the stronger force will always prevail. Your objective in executing an “uke,” therefore, is not to oppose one force with another, but to *receive* an attack intelligently by absorbing or redirecting it and creating for yourself the possibility of control and counter-attack. This involves body shifting and the control of space and distance as well as obstructive movements of the arms and legs.

### Uke Waza

The following are probably the most versatile and frequently used uke waza, in alphabetical order. The Japanese nomenclature varies somewhat from school to school and dojo to dojo, but these differences are unimportant. (The reader should note that, for the sake of clarity, one or two of the techniques illustrated in the following pages are shown at a longer range than would be practicable in reality.)

---

<sup>1</sup> We come across also the terms ukemi (受身) (“breakfalls”: the art of “receiving” a fall safely) and “uke” (受け) used to designate the “receiver” of a technique in partner work. See pp. 214–215.

# 受け技

*Uke Waza*

## *Age uke* (上げ受け)

Ageru (上げる) is “to rise” or “to move upwards.” Age uke is a rising block that deflects an attack upwards and outwards (figure 1). Contact is made with the outside of the forearm; the forearm should roll as the block is executed so that the attack is “thrown” off it like an object making contact with a rotating wheel.

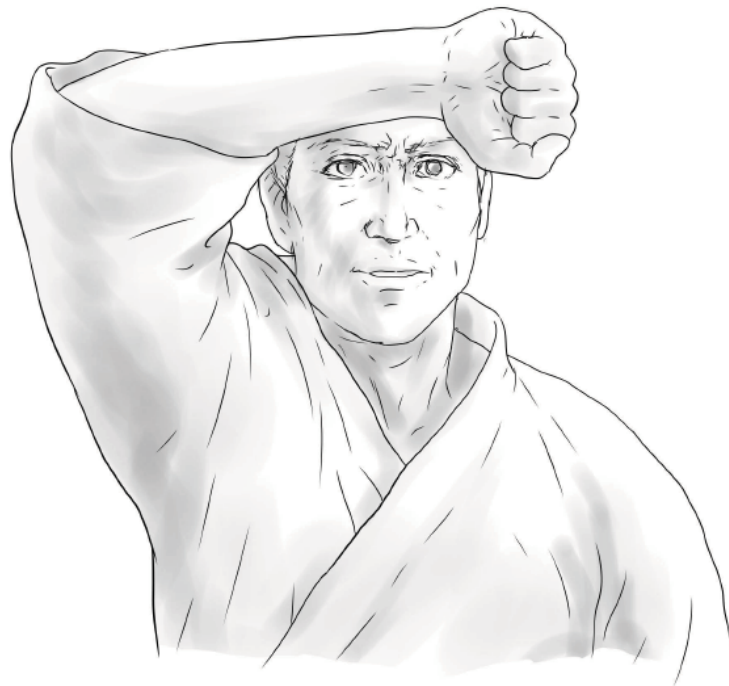


*Figure 1*

The forearm must not be too close to the head and the elbow must not be at too acute an angle; otherwise it is easy for an attack from overhead to reach over it. This block is also called Jodan (上段) uke – “upper level” – block.



*Age uke should not be executed with the forearm too close to the head ...*

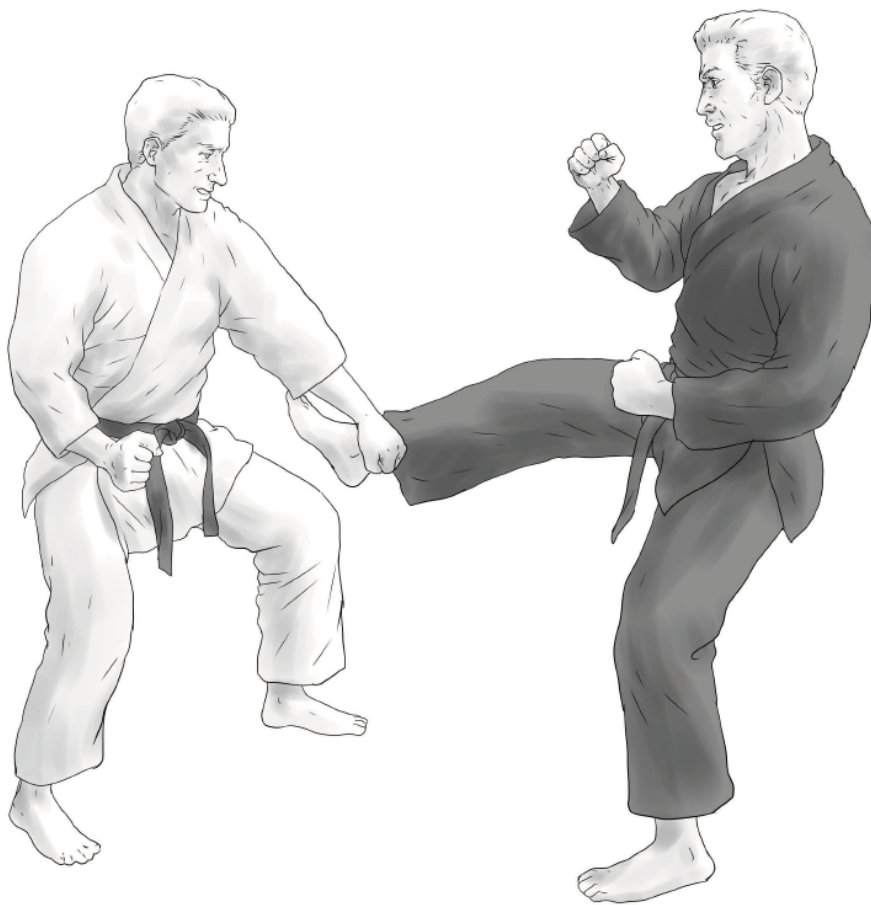


*... or with the elbow at too acute an angle*



***Gedan barai*** (下段払い)

Gedan (下段) is “low level”; barai comes from harau (払う), “to sweep”; gedan barai is thus a low sweeping motion, most obviously used to deflect a kick, where a sweep is less dangerous to the defender than an impact would be (figure 2). Gedan barai occurs near the beginning of Goju’s Gekisai kata and in Seiunchin kata, where the defender steps away from a low kick while using his arm to sweep it to one side and destroy an attacker’s balance.

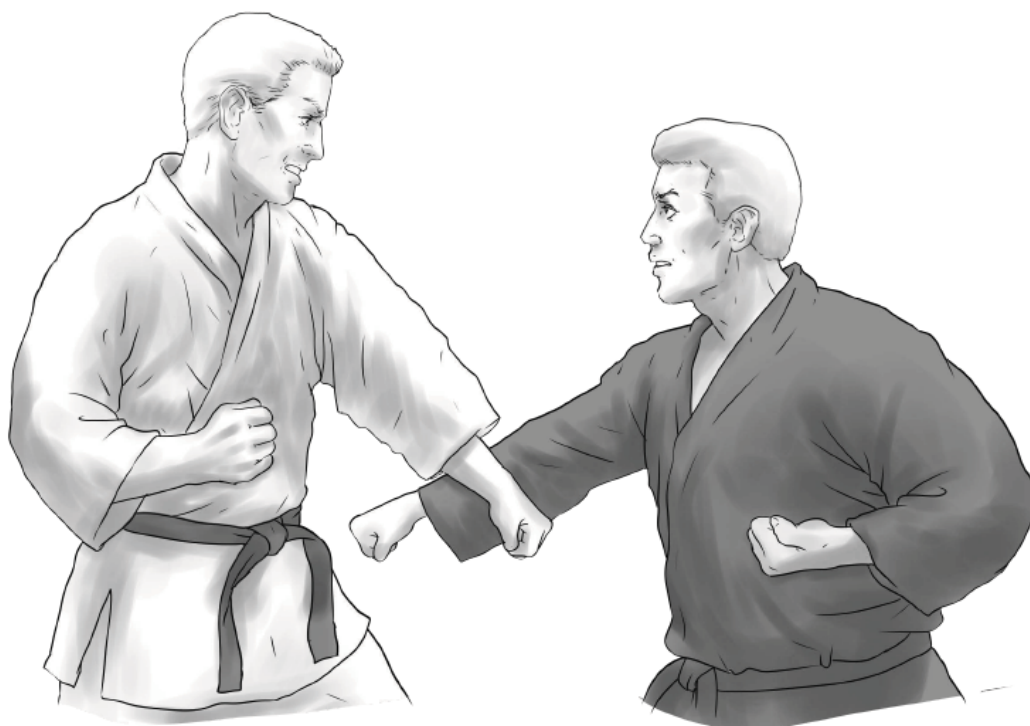


*Figure 2*

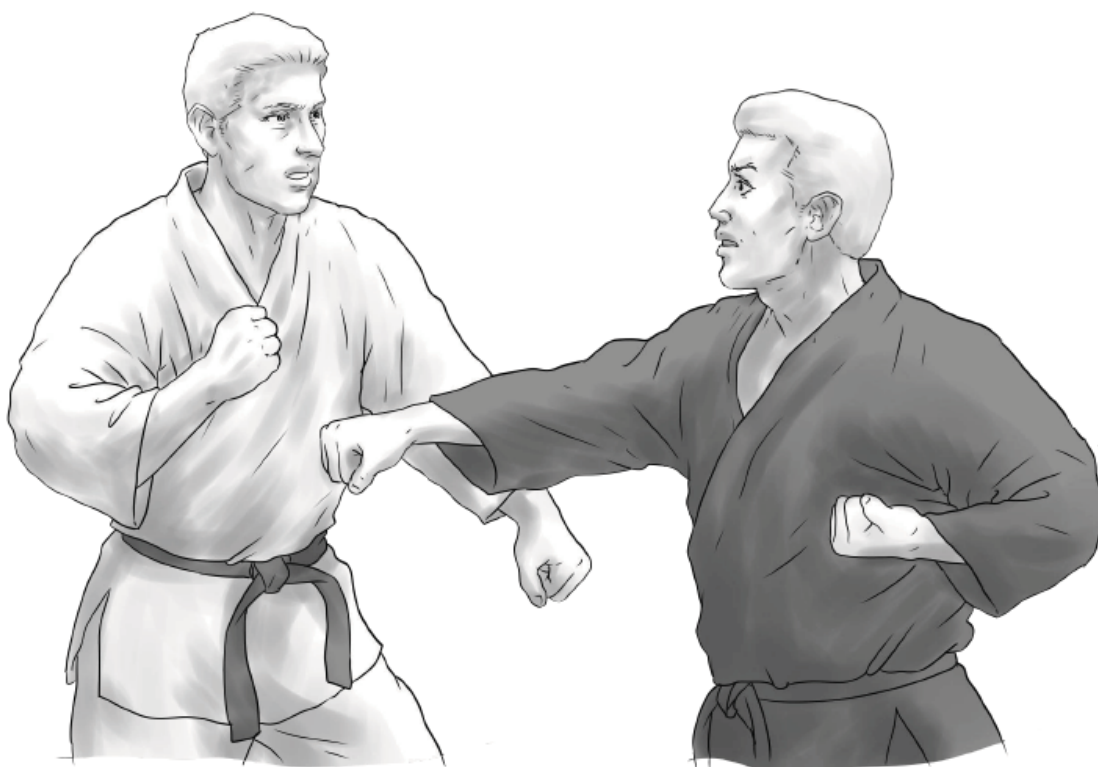
***Gedan uke*** (下段受け)

Gedan uke looks superficially like gedan barai, but the idea of it is not to “sweep” but to deliver an impact with the forearm. Like ude uke (see below), gedan uke and gedan barai can be “soto” (moving outwards and delivered with the outside of the arm)

(figure 3) or “uchi” (moving inwards and delivered with the inside of the arm) (figure 4).



*Figure 3*

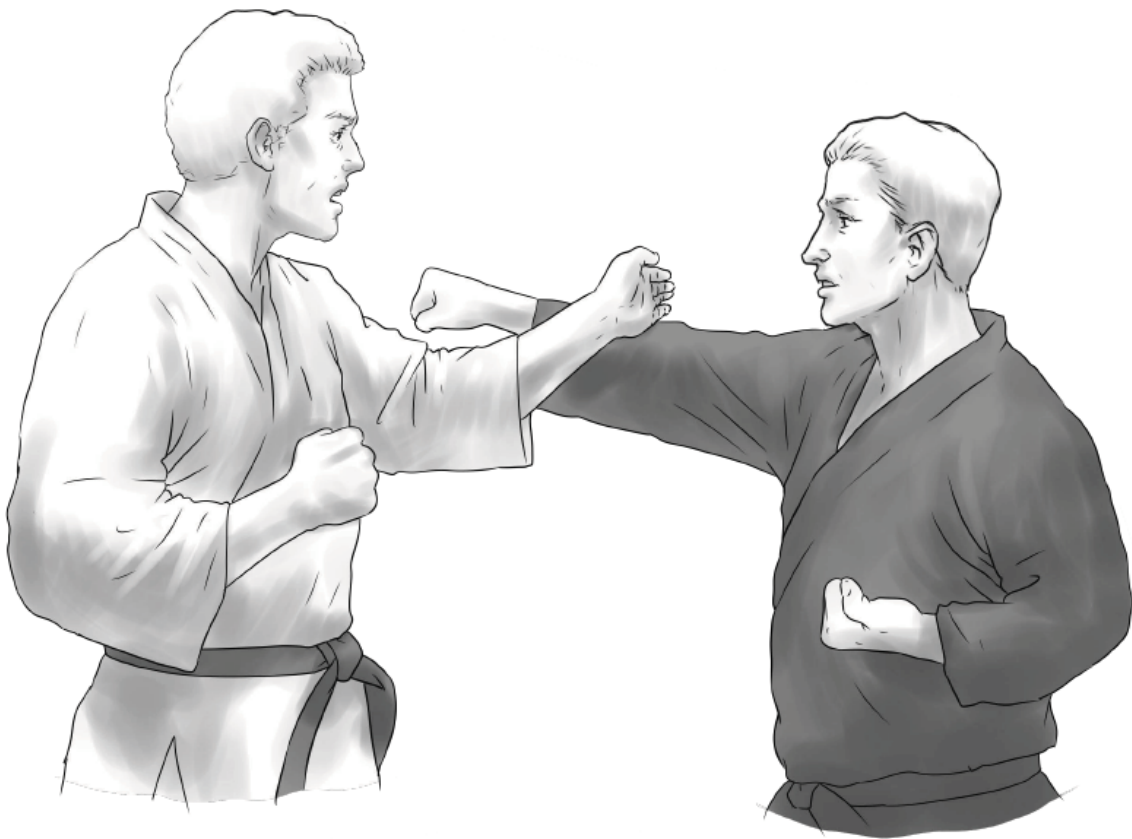


*Figure 4*

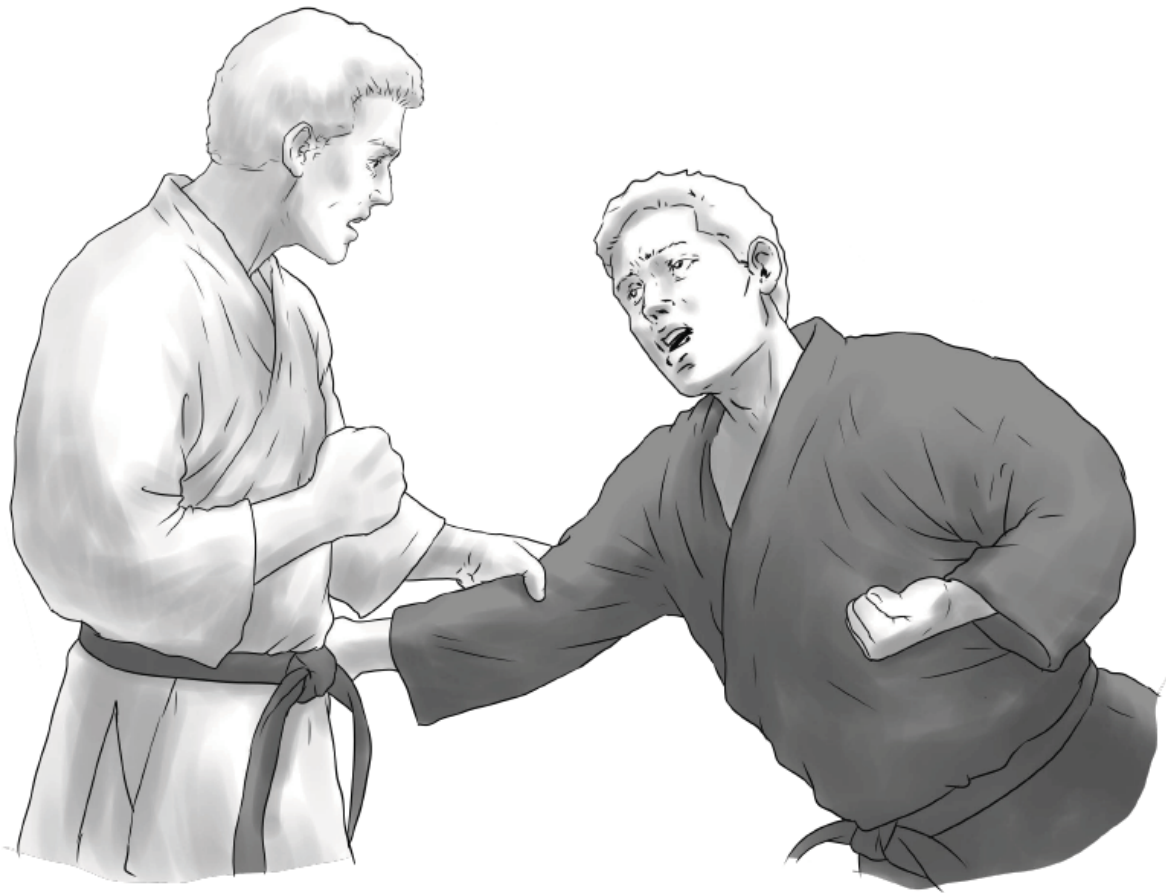
**Hiki uke:** see *Kake uke*, below.

***Kake uke*** (掛け受け)

*Kake uke* is a “hook block”; *kakeru* (掛ける) is “to hang”: the block is made with the outside of the wrist or forearm but with the hand hanging or hooking over the attacker’s arm (figure 5). From this position the hand can easily drop onto the attacker’s arm, seize it and pull him onto a strike (figure 6). This “drop/seize/pull” progression from *kake uke* is called *hiki uke* (引き受け), “pulling block” (*hiku* (引く) is “to pull”: *hiki uke* is a term that shows clearly that “uke” is not really a “block.”). This combination of *kake uke* and *hiki uke* is seen clearly in Goju’s Tensho kata. *Kake uke/hiki uke* is an effective combination if properly applied, but it is important not to let it turn into a risky attempt to “grab” an opponent’s arm. See also pages 130–131, above.



*Figure 5*



*Figure 6*

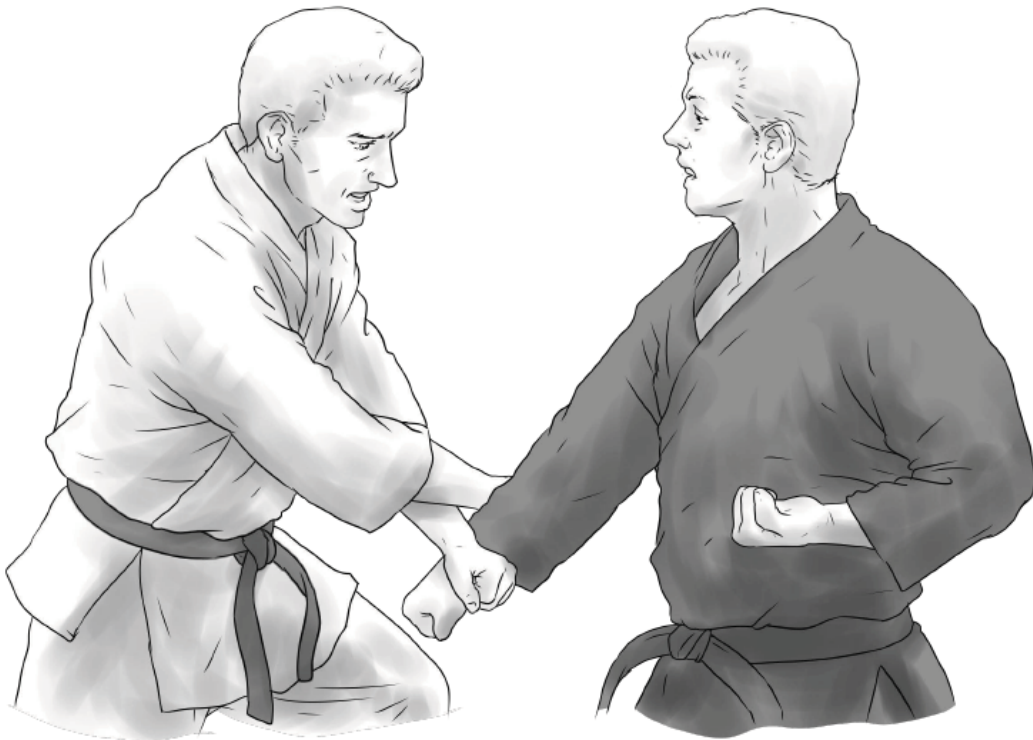
Hiki uke must be a strong, sudden forward and downward pull, exploiting as fully as possible the forward impetus of the attack to which the attacker is already committed.

***Kosa uke* (交差受け)**

Kosa (交差) is “crossing”; this technique is also called juji uke because the hands and wrists form a shape like the Japanese numeral ten, “ju” (十). It can be used to deflect an attack either upwards (as in Goju’s Kururunfa kata or Shotokan’s Heian godan) (figure 7); or downwards (as in Goju’s Sanseiryu kata or Shotokan’s Heian yondan) (figure 8). It seems to come naturally to right-handed people to perform kosa uke with the right wrist on top of the left, but it does not really matter.



*Figure 7*



*Figure 8*

***Shotei uke*** (掌底受け)

*Shotei uke* is a block, usually executed laterally across the defender's body, with the heel of the hand (figure 9). Delivered downwards, against a low blow or a kick or a strike with the knee (as in *Kururunfa kata*) it is called *otoshi shotei uke*. To avoid the risk of injury to the fingers it is important to block only with the palm-heel, or at least with the palmar surface of the hand, and to keep the fingers somewhat bent.



*Figure 9*

***Shuto uke*** (手刀受け)

Like *shuto uchi*, this is a technique delivered with the outside edge – the little finger side – of the hand, most obviously into the crook of an attacker's elbow (figure 10). As with *shuto uchi*, it is important to keep the fingers pressed close together to avoid the

risk of injury. Like kake uke, shuto uke can easily be converted into a “grasp and pull” hiki uke.



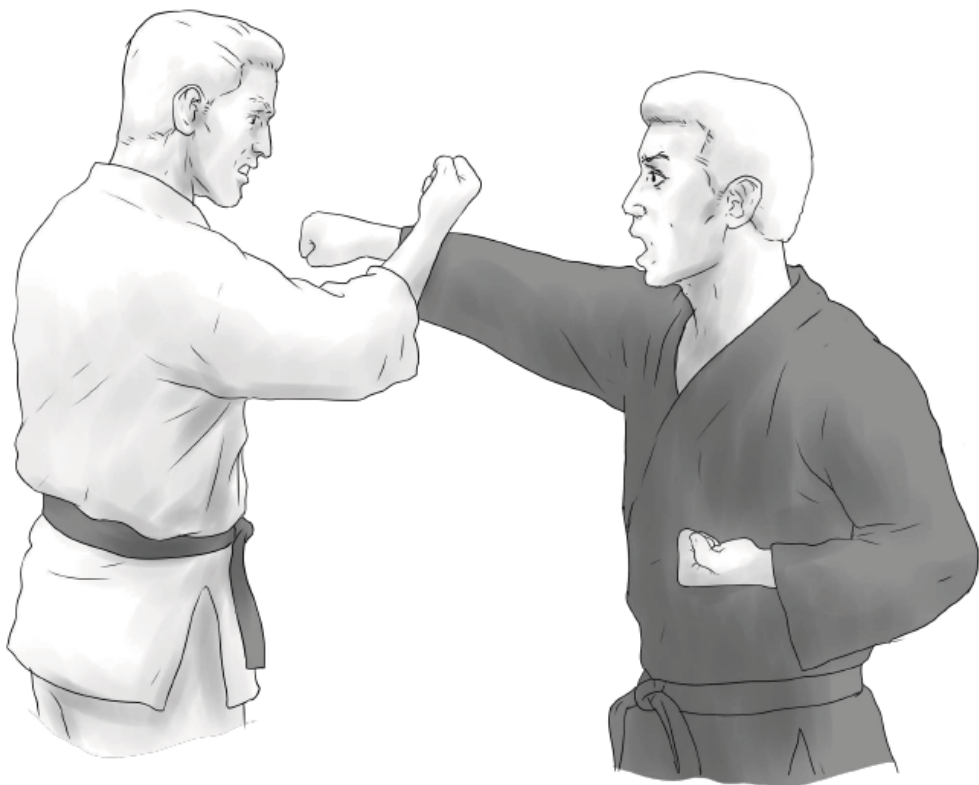
*Figure 10*

***Ude uke* (腕受け)**

Ude (腕) is “arm”; for most practical purposes, “forearm.” The idea is to receive an attack on either the outside or the inside of the forearm (assuming the knuckles to be facing away from you). The former (figure 11) is called soto ude uke (soto (外) is “outside”); the latter (figure 12) is uchi ude uke (uchi (内) is “inside”). Soto ude uke is an “outside” block also in the sense that the defender’s arm moves outwards to the left or right relative to the centreline of his body; uchi ude uke is an “inside” block because the arm moves inwards towards the centreline. These blocks are also called chudan uke (chudan (中段) is “mid-level”).



*Figure 11*



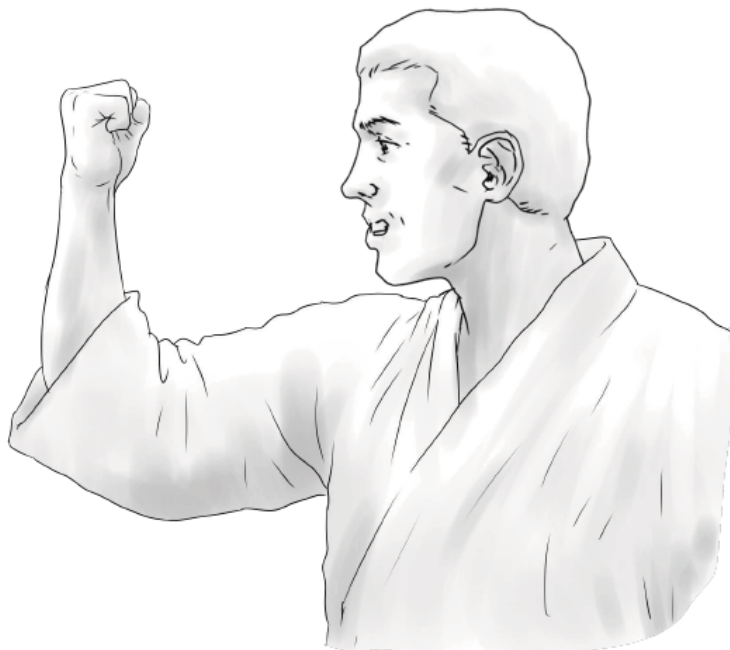
*Figure 12*



Ude uke should always be executed with the forearm at an angle of more than ninety degrees to the upper arm and not, as is often taught, at right-angles to it.



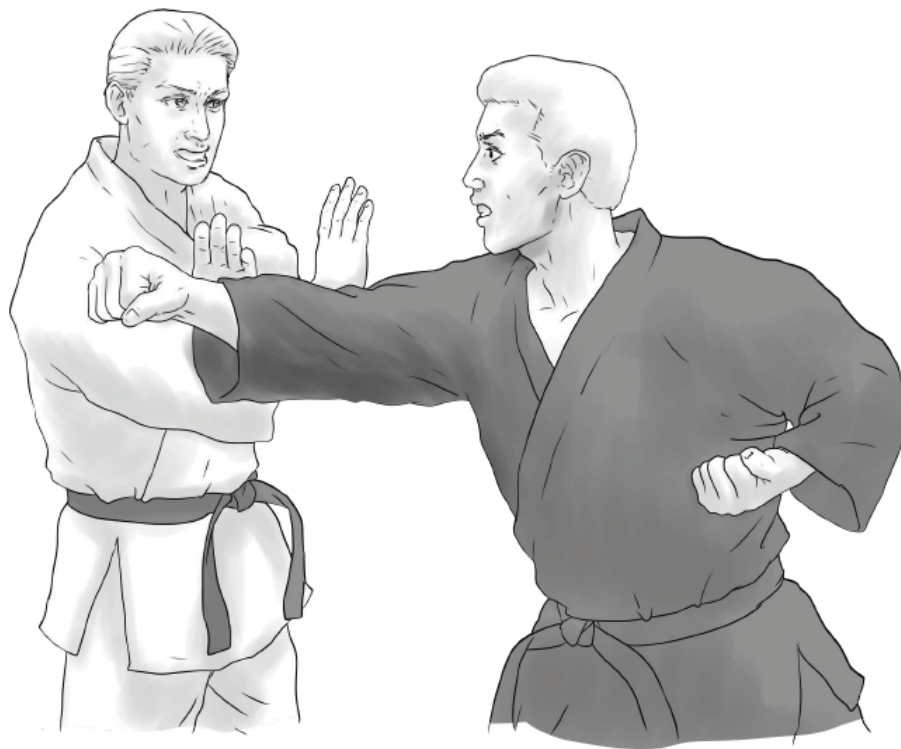
*Ude uke should be executed with the forearm at an angle of more than ninety degrees to the upper arm ...*



*... and not at right-angles to it*

Blocks usually illustrated with the fist closed can also be executed with the hand open (kosa uke is done in both ways in Sanseiryu kata). The advantage of this is that an open-handed block can flow more easily into a grasping or locking technique; the disadvantage is that it exposes the fingers to an increased risk of injury.

It is always wise to execute uke waza with both hands/arms whenever possible, “blocking” with one and using the other to take control and release the blocking hand to strike. Shotei uke and kake uke/hiki uke can easily be combined for this purpose, as in Gekisai dai ni and Shisochin kata. This combination is sometimes called mawashi te (廻し手) or mawashi uke (廻し受け): “turning hands” or “turning block.” In figures 13–15, a left-hand shotei uke is followed immediately by right-hand kake uke/hiki uke, releasing White Gi’s left hand to strike shotei uchi to Black Gi’s head. A variation on the same idea, often called tora guchi (“tiger mouth” or “tiger gate” (虎口), from the two-handed shotei uchi with which it is combined) occurs at the end of Sanchin, Tensho, Gekisai dai ni and Saifa kata.



*Figure 13*



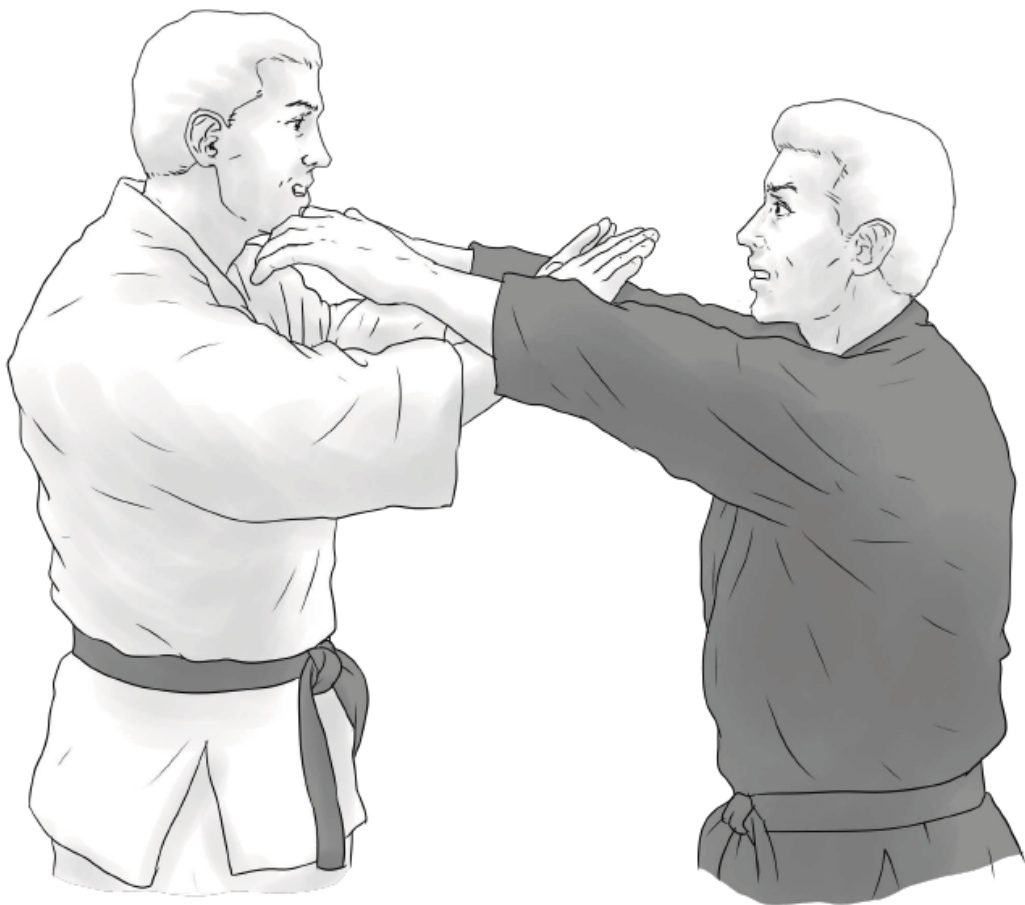
*Figure 14*



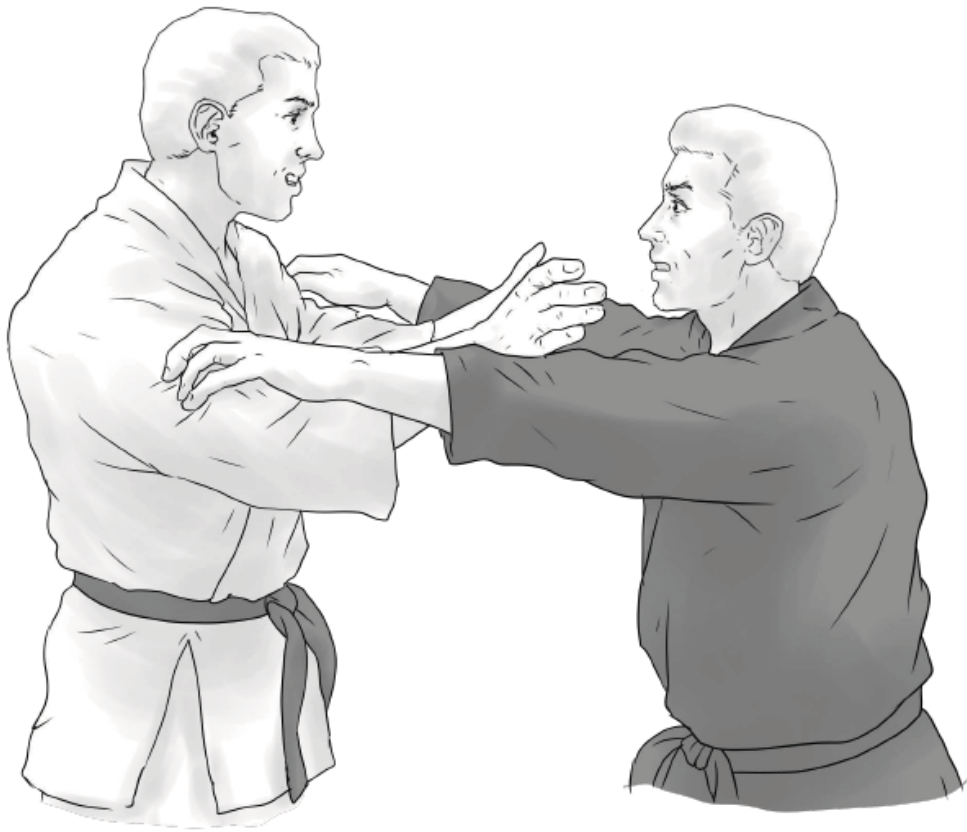
*Figure 15*

Uchi ude uke and kake uke/hiki uke can also be used in the same way, with the ude uke taking the place of the shotei uke in the above illustrations. Because in this case the initial block is done with the forearm rather than the hand, this is a slightly more close-range combination (see figure 25, below).

A two-handed kake uke/hiki uke combination against an attacker's attempted lapel grab is another variation on the theme of two-handed uke waza. The technique here illustrated (figures 16–18) would be called morote kake uke/hiki uke (morote (諸手) is "with both hands"). Notice (figure 16) how easily morote kake uke might in its inception phase be revised into a nukite jab into the attacker's eyes. It is difficult to imagine the circumstances in which it might be necessary or appropriate to do this, but it is a clear possibility. Driving one's arms inside an attacker's like this will also forestall a head-butt.



*Figure 16*

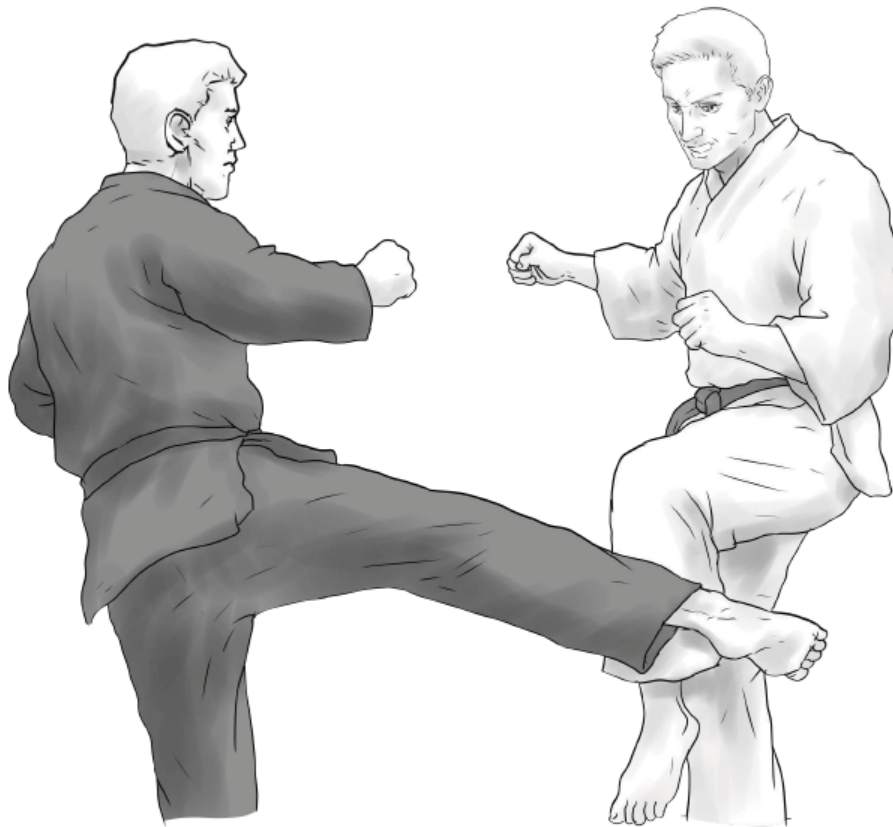


*Figure 17*



*Figure 18*

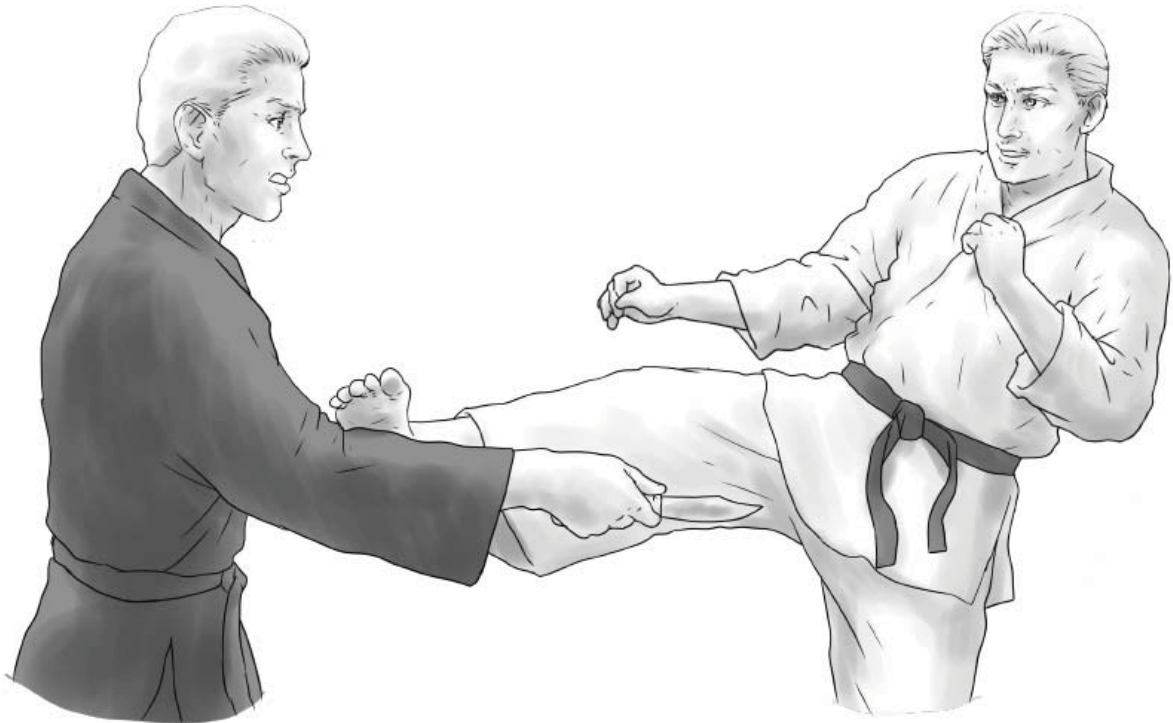
It is theoretically possible to block a low kick, or to defend against an attack with a weapon, with the leg or foot. Techniques of this kind – much used in Thai boxing – are in karate called *ashi uke* (脚受け), “leg/foot blocks.” In figures 19 and 20 a leg block is used against Black Gi’s attempt at a low turning kick, disrupting his balance and setting him up for a counter attack. In figure 21 *mikazuki geri* is used to deflect a knife attack. (We include the latter here because it is so often taught, but in reality it is of little value. It works nicely in the dojo against an opponent who holds his arm out in front of him for you to kick it, but it is hard to imagine any real situation in which it would be sensible to attempt this. If ever you do, kick the arm, not the knife.) A high degree of balance and “grounding” is essential if *ashi uke* are to be used successfully; also, you do not really want to risk being kicked hard on the knee. In the main, they are not a good tactical option. It is better to work at closer ranges and to let blocks with the hands and arms “flow” or develop immediately into counter-attacking or controlling measures (see figures 25–28).



*Figure 19*



*Figure 20*



*Figure 21*

The uke waza shown in this chapter are the ones that the karateka will find it most useful to acquire first, but we have not tried to give a complete list. The illustrations given here are, of course, static and stylised. There is always room in practice for inspired improvisation regardless of “form,” and you will discover through experiment and exploration in partner work many variations on what we have described. We shall have more to say about the mechanics and tactics of defence in chapter 9. For the time being, we note the following principles as being specially important.

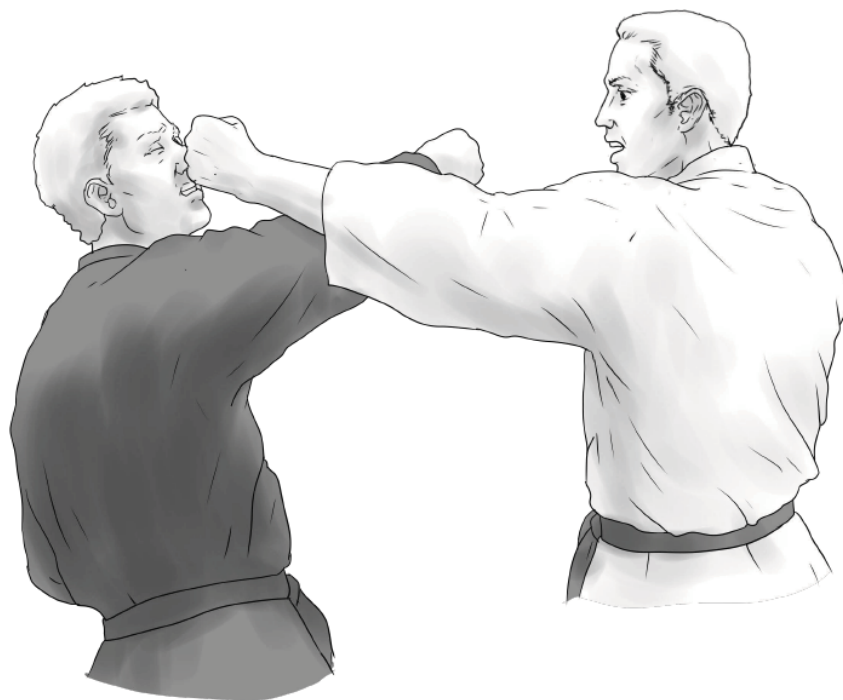
1. Always try to evade, deflect, absorb and neutralise an attack. It is almost never a good idea to try to stop an attack by mere force. We cannot emphasise enough the importance of assuming that an attacker is stronger than you. Karate is ultimately a matter of reliance on skill and tactics rather than physical strength.
2. If at all possible, put yourself *outside* the line of a possible second attack and establish a position of control on the attacker’s undefended side (figure 22; and see chapter 6, figures 2 & 27).



*Figure 22*



3. Whenever you can, block and strike with the same hand or arm – i.e. let the block flow or “bounce” into a strike (figure 23, as a continuation of figure 22). Alternatively, block and strike simultaneously, or as nearly simultaneously as you can (figure 24).



*Figure 23*



*Figure 24*

4. If you cannot get outside the line of attack, get *inside* your attacker's range as quickly as you can, putting yourself in a position from which you can take the initiative away from him and launch a counter-attack quickly and at close range (figures 25–28; note the sequence of uchi ude uke and kake uke in figure 25). In these illustrations, having intercepted, Black Gi's attack (figure 25), White Gi retains control of Black Gi's arm while immediately converting his uchi ude uke into an empi uchi to Black Gi's jaw (figure 26). Notice how White Gi's body is now "jamming" a possible attack by Black Gi's left hand. White Gi's empi uchi immediately becomes an uraken uchi to the temple (figure 27); which in turn becomes a hair-grab and pull onto a hiza geri (figure 28). The exact details of a defensive and counter-attacking sequence obviously cannot be prescribed or decided in advance; but, whatever the sequence, it must be executed quickly, decisively and without a pause.



*Figure 25*



*Figure 26*



*Figure 27*



*Figure 28*

5. If you have to retreat, retreat *tactically*: i.e. be ready to close in and take control of the situation as soon as you can read an attacker's intentions. Remember that there is a great difference between retreat and flight.

## 8: The Stances of Karate

WE SHALL IN this chapter deal with the most usual of the many stances of karate and try to explain something of their role in karate training. You will come across them all sooner or later in kata practice, but you can also isolate them and practise moving between them without direct reference to the kata. You will also come across two Japanese words that are usually translated into English as “stance”: tachi (“dachi” when used in compound terms) and kamae. Tachi (立ち) is related to tatsu (立つ), “to stand up”; kamae (構え) to kamaeru (構える), “to set up” or “to make ready.” Broadly speaking, tachi or dachi refers to the position of the feet and legs rather than the upper body. Kamae refers to (a) the posture of the body as a whole, and (b) the readiness or alertness that the posture exhibits. A good “kamae” consists not only in the overall shape of the body but in the focus and determination that the body-shape expresses. For all practical purposes kamae can be regarded as a “fighting” or an “on guard” stance.

立 構  
ち え

*Tachi*

*Kamae*



*Chudan kamae: “kamae” refers to (a) the posture of the body as a whole, and (b) the readiness or alertness that the posture exhibits*

Stances are of two kinds: formal or ceremonial (as seen, for example, at the beginning and end of each kata) and functional. We shall describe the main formal stances first. It should be borne in mind that their use and significance differ as between different schools and dojo, so that what is said here may not correspond exactly to what the reader has experienced elsewhere.

## **Formal Stances**

### *Hachiji dachi* (八字立ち) (“figure eight stance”)

This natural or “at ease” stance is so called because the feet form a shape on the floor like the Japanese numeral eight: 八.



*Hachiji dachi* (“figure eight stance”). The feet form a shape on the floor like the numeral eight (八).

*Heiko dachi* (並行立ち) (“*side by side stance*”)

This is a stance similar to *hachiji dachi*, but with the feet more or less parallel rather than with the toes pointing outwards. The lateral distance between your feet should be roughly the same as the width of your shoulders.



*Heiko dachi* (“*side by side stance*”): the feet are parallel and approximately shoulder-width apart



*Heisoku dachi* (閉足立ち) (“closed feet stance”)

This is an upright stance with the feet together; the inside edges of the feet are touching, or nearly so. Some schools use *heisoku dachi* as their “bowing stance,” though *musubi dachi* (see below) is more often used for this purpose.



*Heisoku dachi* (“closed feet stance”): the feet are together with their inside edges touching, or nearly so

*Musubi dachi* (結び立ち) (“*knot-shaped stance*”)

This is the more usual “bowing stance.” It is like *heisoku dachi* except that the toes point outwards. The shape that the feet make on the floor is more or less like the two ends of your *obi* emerging from the knot; hence the name.



*Musubi dachi* (“*knot-shaped stance*”): the heels are together and the toes point outwards, forming a V-shape between the feet

*Yoi dachi (善い立ち) ("ready stance")*

This is a stance taken immediately before beginning a kata. It is the same as musubi dachi but with the hands held at groin level with the left hand on top of the right. It should be noted that many schools use a variant of hachiji dachi or heiko dachi rather than this as their "ready" stance.



*Yoi dachi ("ready stance") is the same as musubi dachi but  
with the hands held at groin level with the left hand  
on top of the right*

Every kata should begin with a short formal “introduction” that is not itself part of the kata. The point of this introduction is to calm and focus the mind and show mindfulness of and respect for what you are about to do. These little ceremonies vary from school to school; the following sequence is offered only as a suggestion.

1. Begin in a relaxed heiko dachi. You may find it useful to press your hands lightly against your abdomen just below the knot of your obi, focussing your mind on the fact that the effective energy of the kata must come from your “hara.”



**1**

*Begin in a relaxed heiko dachi; press your hands lightly  
against your lower abdomen*

2. Step inwards with your right foot towards your left so that you are now standing in musubi dachi. Do this slowly and with a focussed awareness of balance and posture: be aware of a slow and definite transference of your weight from leg to leg as you move your feet from heiko dachi to musubi dachi.



**2**

*Step inwards with your right foot into musubi dachi,  
being mindful of how your weight is shifting  
itself as you move your feet together*

3. Bow (we shall deal more fully with bowing and the importance of formality in chapter 11).



**3**

*Bow*

4. Lift your hands and briefly hold them out in front of you at waist level with the palms upwards. The symbolic meaning of this gesture is threefold:

(i) It is a “giving” gesture of peaceful intent.

(ii) It is an “asking” or a “receiving” gesture, acknowledging the benefit that you are about to receive from the kata.

(iii) It is an empty-handed gesture, signifying that you have no weapons: no hostile intent.



**4**

*Lift your hands and briefly hold them out in front of you  
at waist level with the palms upwards in a  
“weaponless” gesture*

5. Raise your hands to heart level, placing the palm of the left hand against the back of the right hand as you do so: “my heart is peaceful ...”



5

*“My heart is peaceful ...”*

6. Letting the palm of your left hand slide over the back of your right, lower your hands to the level of your groin, so that you are now in what we have called yoi dachi: “... but I am ready to protect myself.”





**6**

*“... but I am ready to protect myself”*

This formal “introduction” should be done as one smooth and continuous sequence. It should be performed always with mindfulness and never allowed to become casual or automatic. Westerners who are not accustomed to such things are sometimes impatient of these formalities; but, for reasons that we shall amplify later, they do have a rationale of their own, and should not be neglected.

## Functional Stances

### *Fudo dachi* (不動立ち) (“solid stance”)

*Fudo dachi* can mean different things according to the usage of the particular school. We here use it to denote a low, “heavy” stance with the weight distributed equally between the legs; it is sometimes described as a kind of cross between *zenkutsu dachi* and *shiko dachi* (for both of which see below). *Fudo* is, literally, “non-moving.” The essence of *fudo dachi* is that it should inculcate a strong sense of immovability, purpose and “groundedness.”



*Fudo dachi* (“solid stance”) should give you a strong sense of immovability, purpose and “groundedness”

*Han getsu dachi* (半月) (“half moon stance”)

Han getsu dachi is so called because of the crescent or half moon shape that the lead foot makes on the floor as it steps forward. Han getsu dachi is a wider version of sanchin dachi (see below). We have mentioned it before (see p. 58, note 4), and we say again that, in our view, it puts an unhealthy stress on the knees by requiring them to buckle inwards. For this reason, we do not recommend it as a functional stance.



*Han getsu dachi* (“half moon stance”) is a wider version of sanchin dachi that in our view puts an unhealthy degree of stress on the knees

***Kiba dachi*** (騎馬立ち) (“horse-riding stance”)

Kiba is “equestrianism”: kiba dachi should feel as if you were sitting astride a horse. It differs from shiko dachi (see below) in that, in kiba dachi, the feet are parallel with each other. This parallel stance tends, however, to subject the knees to a considerable lateral stress. For this reason, as with han getsu dachi, we are not inclined to recommend it as a functional stance.



*Kiba dachi* (“horse-riding stance”) should feel like sitting astride a horse; note that the feet are parallel with each other

***Kokutsu dachi*** (後屈立ち) (“backwards yielding stance”)

Kokutsu dachi is more or less the same as fudo dachi but with the weight transferred predominantly onto the rear leg, as if one had shifted one’s stance backwards away from an attack; a shorter and higher version of it is called han kokutsu dachi (半後屈立ち), “half kokutsu dachi.” See also neko ashi dachi, below.



*Kokutsu dachi ("backwards yielding stance")*



*Han ("half") kokutsu dachi is a shorter and higher version of kokutsu dachi*

*Kosa dachi* (交差立ち) (“*crossing stance*”)

Like *kiba dachi* and *shiko dachi*, this cross-legged stance is often used as a leg conditioning exercise; but it is much more versatile – as an evasion, or a stance from which to deliver a surprise kick, or as a means of moving past an attacker and closing in on him from the side – than it may at first sight seem.



*Kosa dachi* (“*crossing stance*”) can be used as an evasion, or as a stance from which to deliver a kick, or as a means of moving past an attacker and closing in on him from the side

*Neko ashi dachi (猫足立ち) ("cat leg stance")*

Neko ashi dachi may be regarded as a continuation of, or a progression, from han kokutsu dachi. The whole of the weight is now transferred onto the rear leg, with the front foot resting lightly on the ground, hardly touching it and poised to kick.



*Neko ashi dachi ("cat leg stance"): the whole weight is on the rear leg, with the front foot resting lightly on the ground, poised to kick*

*Sanchin dachi* (立 ち) (“*three battles stance*”)

We have already discussed this stance in chapter 3. The rear foot and knee point forwards; the front foot is turned in slightly, and – at least in principle – the thighs are brought close enough together to intercept a kin geri attack to the groin. *Sanchin dachi* is sometimes called “hourglass” stance, apparently because of the shape made by the feet, knees and hips when standing in it.

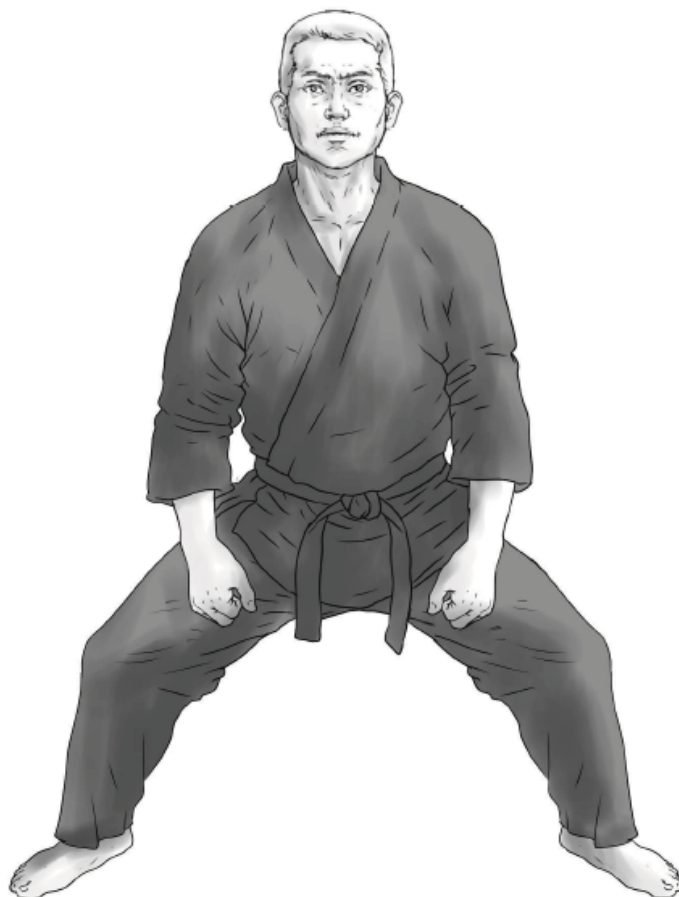


*Sanchin dachi* (“*three battles stance*”); the rear foot and knee point forwards; the front foot is turned in slightly and the thighs are closed as far as possible



*Shiko dachi* (四股立ち) (“*sumo stance*”)

This stance, so much favoured by Goju practitioners, derives its name from the “shiko” foot-stamping ceremony that precedes a sumo wrestling match. It is exactly the same as kiba dachi except that, in shiko dachi, the feet are turned outwards.



*Shiko dachi* (“*sumo stance*”) is exactly the same as *kiba dachi* except that, in *shiko dachi*, the feet are turned outwards

Shiko dachi and kiba dachi are often held for long periods as an isometric leg conditioning exercise. It is a point of honour with some karateka to make their shiko dachi and kiba dachi as low as possible; but a very low shiko dachi held for too long will tend to stress the knees (though it is less hazardous in this respect than kiba dachi is). It is an essential structural feature of shiko dachi that the practitioner must sit *down*. It is important not to lean forwards or allow your buttocks to stick out. If you find yourself doing these things, you need to take a higher stance.

*Tsuru ashi dachi* (鶴足立ち) (“*crane leg stance*”), also called *sagi ashi dachi* (鷺足立ち) (“*heron leg stance*”)

This stance involves standing on one leg like a large wading bird; it is a posture particularly useful for training leg strength and the kind of stability needed to kick quickly or withdraw one’s leg from an attack on it. The supporting leg must be “rooted” firmly to the floor. Both legs should be trained equally.



*Tsuru ashi dachi* (“*crane leg stance*”) or *sagi ashi dachi* (“*heron leg stance*”) is particularly useful for training balance and leg strength

***Zenkutsu dachi*** (前屈立ち) (“*front bending stance*”)

The name of this stance indicates not that the karateka should lean or bend forward, but that the front leg should be bent and the rear leg kept straight (though the rear knee should not be locked out). As with kokutsu dachi, a shorter and higher zenkutsu dachi is called han zenkutsu dachi (半前屈立ち), “half front bending stance.” In zenkutsu dachi, the shin of the front leg should be approximately at right-angles to the floor so that the toes are just visible inside the knee if the karateka looks down. If the toes are invisible, the knee is too far forward; if more of the foot than the toes are visible, the knee is too far back; if the toes are visible on the outside of the knee, the knee is buckling inwards. The lateral distance between the feet should be more or less shoulder-width.



*Zenkutsu dachi* (“*front bending stance*”): the front leg should be bent with the shin more or less at right-angles to the floor; the rear leg should be straight, though the knee should not be locked out



*Han zenkutsu dachi: a shorter and higher version  
of zenkutsu dachi*

Any stance such that one leg is in front of the other can, of course, be taken with either leg forward, and one should certainly always train both sides of the body as far as possible: the temptation to favour your strong or “handed” side should be resisted. A stance with the right leg forward is called *migi* (右); a stance with the left leg forward is called *hidari* (左). Thus, of the two photographs immediately above, the first is of *migi zenkutsu dachi*, the second is of *hidari han zenkutsu dachi*.



At least as far as the functional stances of karate are concerned, the whole idea of being in a “stance” may strike the reader as odd. Devoting time to learning formal or “classical” stances may seem

futile. Who, after all, would ever try to make use of such stances in combat? Very seldom in practice, or in any kind of self-defence situation, is anyone likely to be standing still, let alone standing in a deep zenkutsu or shiko dachi. Exploring, understanding and using the functional stances will, however, bring you benefits of several kinds.

1. Considering them as static postures, remaining in “stances” for increasing periods of time is a good exercise for stretching and strengthening the legs and training posture and balance. This is most obviously true of kosa dachi, shiko dachi and tsuru ashi dachi, but it is in some degree true of all the functional stances. Also, we have mentioned already (chapter 3) the importance of using stances in partner-work to test and develop “groundedness.”

2. Considering them as dynamic postures, learning to flow easily from one stance to another without faltering or hesitation (without what taijquan practitioners call “double weighting”) is an excellent way of training balance, grounding and co-ordination. This is true whether one practises stance-changing in the kata or as an additional exercise separate from the kata. The reader will see how easy it is to link various stances together in a sequence that can be practised as a kind of kata in itself; for example: zenkutsu dachi → kokutsu dachi → han kokutsu dachi → neko ashi dachi → tsuru ashi dachi. Moving from one stance to another as quickly and fluently as possible – which is, of course, precisely what one would be called upon to do in a real fight – is a valuable exercise for karateka of all levels of experience.

3. Considering them as “fighting” postures, learning how to execute strikes and kicks and blocks from a variety of stances will teach you a great deal about the production and use of power from different, and sometimes awkward or disadvantageous, positions. Try, for instance, kicking quickly and strongly with the front leg from zenkutsu dachi.

Do not, in other words, allow the idea of “stances” to become associated in your mind with something rigid and stationary. Do

not be put off either by the fact that some stances seem to involve exaggerated postures that would be unrealistic in a fight. Use them and the skill of shifting between them as a means of developing strength, continuity, versatility and flexibility of movement. If you can do something that feels awkward and exaggerated, you will find it all the easier to do a practical version of the same thing when necessary. Remember Funkoshi Osensei's advice in the seventeenth of his *Twenty Guiding Principles of Karate*: "Beginners must master low stance and posture; natural body positions are for the advanced." What this seems to mean is that "stances" considered as separate or isolated entities within karate have an educational value precisely insofar as they develop spontaneous and "natural" body positions in the more experienced practitioner.

## 9: Kihon, Kata and Kumite

IT IS CUSTOMARY to say that karate has three components: kihon (基本), kata (型) and kumite (組手). Kihon, it is said, are the vocabulary, kata the grammar and kumite the speech of karate. We shall consider each of these in turn, though the reality is a little more complex than this typology suggests.

### Kihon

Kihon are the “foundations” of karate: the strikes, defences and kicks that are its building blocks, and it is important for the beginner to learn how to perform them according to their traditional or classical form (though different schools will have their own ideas about what that form is). This is something that the beginner may find frustrating and incomprehensible. Who, after all, is likely to execute a formally correct oi tsuki in the hurly-burly of an actual fight? Why should there be such disparity between techniques as taught and techniques as used? The short answer is a reiteration of what we said at the end of the previous chapter: that practising what appear to be unrealistic or exaggerated techniques – oi tsuki in a low zenkutsu dachi stance, say – will teach you a good deal about the fundamentals of posture, balance, coordination, focus and the effective application of force. This acquisition of form and skill through exaggeration, as one might put it, seems to be part of what Funakoshi Osensei had in mind in the sentence quoted at the end of the last chapter: “Beginners must master low stance and posture; natural body positions are for the advanced.” In actual practice, there is an unspecifiable number of variations on each technique, and no real application of a technique is likely to exhibit formal exactness. Nonetheless,

there can be no variations on a theme unless the theme itself has been properly grasped and understood.

The conscientious practice of kihon is therefore an integral part of the development of effective karate, though it will be as well to say something about what is worthwhile kihon practice and what is not.



*Kihon*

As to what is not, we deprecate strongly the amount of time given in some dojo (a) to the practice of performing kihon while marching up and down to a count, and (b) to the excessive practice of what we have called “air” techniques: techniques that do not make contact with anything. The former – marching up and down to an “ichi – ni – san” count – seems to be something that came especially into vogue with the “Japanification” of karate, and particularly after World War II. Perhaps it has something to do with a “militaristic” habit of mind. Karate training has come to look like a “drilling” exercise of the kind that one sees on an army parade ground. Also – and perhaps more than anything, with the development of the martial arts “industry” – regimented drill with an instructor calling the cadence is an easy, and perhaps the only, way of teaching basics to a large class. Our objection to this is not that it is boring. Up to a point, learning not to be bored – perfecting oneself through constant repetition and overcoming feelings of ennui and tedium – is part and parcel of character building: of developing the diligence and single-mindedness that should distinguish the martial artist. In a large group, however,



individuals can receive only a minimum of personal attention from the teacher, and in practice the blind are often led by the blind. What is worse, practising kihon *merely* as a formal “drill” exercise quickly imprints on the mind a mechanical, robotic habit of response and movement. This is the very last thing that one wants if one is to respond effectively to a fluid and unpredictable situation and against a moving target. Moreover, however essential repetition may be – and we do not deny that it is essential – collective training in obedience and mimicry can only produce an artificial uniformity that takes no account of individual needs and differences. The idea that there should *be* no individual differences – that the individual should be somehow subsumed into the whole – is one of the more regrettable features of “Japanification.” Everyone has heard the Japanese saying 出る釘は打たれる (*deru kui wa utareru*): “The nail that sticks up is hammered down.”

We have already mentioned the drawbacks of “air” techniques, but these drawbacks are so serious that it will do no harm to mention them again. First – and to state the obvious – the whole point of a punch or kick is (a) that it should hit something, and (b) that it should do so to good effect. Punching and kicking the air may teach you something about classical form, but it will teach you little or nothing about force or focus, or about how to cope with – how to “earth” – the recoil of a punch or kick. Second, the momentum of a vigorous punch that does not hit a target will tend to stretch or open the elbow joint; a kick that does not hit a target will subject the knee to a sudden force against its natural direction. If these things are done too often or for too long, pain and possible long-term damage will result.

These observations lead us to three conclusions that we think essential to the proper development and practice of kihon:

1. Our contention is that *karate cannot be taught successfully to large classes*. One-to-one or small group practice, where each student can be encouraged by the teacher to develop according to his own strengths and at his own pace, are far preferable to the marching

masses that one so often sees. This intimate and personal kind of practice is, after all, the traditional Okinawan way. It is perfectly possible to learn kihon according to their classical form without the kind of meaningless and impersonal regimentation that one has so often seen. A one-size-fits-all approach that requires students to trudge up and down the floor exercising no more imagination than a dog might use in learning to fetch a stick is unlikely to build a solid technical foundation adapted to each student's personality, physique and aptitudes. If small group practice is not commercially viable, so much the worse for commerce as far as we are concerned.

2. Powerful techniques can be developed only through actually hitting and kicking a target. It is pointless to develop techniques that are elegant but weak, and the only way to acquire strong punches and kicks is to test them against some resistant object. *Work with the makiwara, bag and pads should be seen not as something additional to kihon practice, but as an essential and inseparable part of it.*

3. As soon as the student has learnt how to "do" a technique – has acquired the "classical" form of it – he should move at once to its creative and realistic application in partner work. Again, *partner work should be seen not as something additional to kihon practice, but as an inseparable and essential part of it.* It is so essential a part of practice that we must deal with various aspects of it at some length.

### ***Kihon and Partner Work***

Remembering that we are for the time being talking about partner work only in relation to the polishing and application of basic techniques the following points should be borne especially in mind.

1. One partner should usually take the role of uke, the other that of tori. Uke, as we saw earlier, is "receiver"; tori (取り) is "active partner." In partner work, uke is the partner who attacks (and hence "receives" tori's defensive response), tori is the partner who "acts" to defend himself. In the case of beginners or near beginners, two people of the same skill level will learn relatively little

from each other. In such cases a more satisfactory learning outcome will be achieved if uke is more experienced than tori. More experienced karateka can, of course, exchange roles and take it in turns to be uke and tori respectively.

2. All practice must be adjusted to the abilities and experience of the student; but, subject to this, *partner work should be as hard and as realistic as possible*. Uke should put tori under as much pressure as he is capable of coping with, increasing the pressure as tori's confidence and skill increase. The transition from kihon as a formal exercise to kihon as actually applied must be made as quickly and seamlessly as the student's understanding will allow, and the conditions of an actual confrontation should be simulated as closely as possible. Whatever the merits – and we do not deny them – of acquiring a classically perfect oi tsuki, no one will ever attack you with one in the proverbial dark alley. Similarly, there is no point in acquiring formally perfect uke waza – “blocks” – only to use them in ways that have no relation to reality. Obviously one cannot ordinarily use full-power techniques in partner work; but, as far as possible, attacks must be realistic attacks, calling for realistic defences. “Pressure testing” is essential; feeble or stylised attacks and weak defences are worse than useless. Pressure testing cannot begin too soon. Bad habits, once learnt, will only have to be unlearnt, and it is better not to acquire them in the first place.

3. Partner work must enable the student to develop the confidence to work at close ranges: to get inside uke's attacking range, shut down his attacks and develop a counter-attack – all with speed and continuity. You can enter frontally into an attack to intercept or smother it, or you can divert an attack from a tactical position outside the line of a possible follow-up attack; but in either case you have to get close to your opponent. Mere retreat – retreat that is not tactical and controlled – is never an option. If you retreat, you are sending a signal of weakness. An attacker who sees that he has you on the run will follow you, and you cannot retreat for ever. If you are afraid to come within range of his hands, you will only give him opportunities to kick you.

4. Partner work must eliminate from the student's mind, or prevent from forming in it, a tendency that excessively "robotic" kihon practice tends to inculcate: the tendency to be governed subconsciously by a "count": *ichi* – attack; *ni* – block; *san* – punch. One might call this "mechanical sequentialism" – a cumbersome expression, but one that describes the kind of conditioned reflex that becomes imprinted on the mind of a student whose practice consists too much of "drill." Real attack and defence is never an orderly matter of one – two – three. You cannot wait for an attack, block it and respond to it as three separate events, as though a voice were counting in your head. Effective self-defence requires the development from the first of two areas of skill that need to be practised until they become second nature.

(a) "Reading" a situation and anticipating an attack. Some attacks are sudden and unpredictable, but confrontational situations often exhibit a pattern of escalation that is readable through body language and verbal aggression. Reading a situation and anticipating what may be about to happen will buy you time and give you an advantage that you cannot afford to lack. It is possible, with a little imagination and histrionic ability, to create at least a semblance of such situations in partner work. Doing this is one of the aspects of realistic practice and "pressure testing." On the one hand, on both legal and moral grounds one needs to be cautious about "pre-emptive" strikes ("there is no first attack in karate").<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, we certainly do not recommend the mechanical sequentialism so often seen in the dojo: attack – block – strike, as three separate events, *ichi*, *ni*, *san*. Getting into this robotic habit is a serious mistake. Reaction is always at a disadvantage relative to action, because action always has a head start. The important skill to

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<sup>1</sup> This is always a difficult issue, because it all depends on what you mean by "first attack." Pre-empting – striking the first blow against someone who is obviously about to assault you – is arguably not a "first attack." Nonetheless, it is necessary always to remember the legal aspect of things.

acquire is that of responding to an attack at the very first sign of danger rather than trying to deal with it *when it has happened*. This kind of anticipation is called *sen no sen* (先の先). It is a matter of getting inside the silent tick-tock of the inner metronome: of breaking the subconscious one–two–three sequence that can so readily become programmed into the student.

(b) Blocking and striking simultaneously (see chapter 7, figure 24) rather than in a mechanical block-and-strike dyad; or, if this is not possible, flowing smoothly from block to strike, and in either case passing without hesitation from a first strike to as many further strikes as may be necessary to bring the confrontation to an end (see chapter 7, figures 25–28). We mentioned in chapter 4 the principle of “*ikken hissatsu*”: one blow, certain death. *Of course* you should not kill someone, with one blow or many. What the “*ikken hissatsu*” principle amounts to in practice is “Use as few strikes as you can.” Morality aside, the law will punish you if you employ a degree of force disproportionate to the danger you are in. You have a right of self-defence; you do not have a right to beat an attacker to a pulp. But what you certainly must not do is fall into the common dojo habit of “block–pause–strike–end of drill.” *Successful self-defence requires the ability to do as much as is necessary in a continuous and unbroken sequence*. It is vital always to maintain what is called *zanshin* (残心), an alert readiness to follow through. *Zanshin* is, literally, “remaining mind.” A confrontation is not over until you are safe, and you must not “switch off” until it is over.

5. On the one hand, enhanced reaction speed is essential to reducing the advantage that action has over reaction, and reaction speed can be improved markedly by “pressure testing.” On the other hand, always defending yourself against attacks that you know are coming will not improve it. As the student grows in confidence and skill, *uke*’s attacks should become more varied and spontaneous or “untelegraphed.” Except at the most elementary level, attacks in partner work should not be allowed to become predictable and obvious.

6. Sensitivity to what is happening inside one's personal space is essential to self protection. With this in mind many martial arts use a partnered exercise variously called "pushing hands" or "sticking hands"<sup>2</sup> This can be done in a number of ways, and there is no reason to commend one rather than another. On the contrary, you should experiment with it in as many ways as you can. It can be done with one hand or both (figures 1–4). It can be done standing still at first; then, as facility grows, the partners can move around the floor, each trying to gain ground on the other. It should be begun slowly and softly, increasing in speed and power as confidence increases. At its most advanced, pushing hands is fast and vigorous, training quick responses to the unexpected. One partner pushes the other, the other uses stance and body movement to absorb and redirect the push, each moving to and fro, alternately pushing and yielding in infinitely variable patterns. Each tries to sense weaknesses in the posture of the other with a view to exploiting them to push him off balance or flow into a technique (figure 5). The partners' hands or arms must always be in contact. There should be a sensation of what is called *mochimi* (餅み). This word is, literally, "like a sticky rice cake": one's hands should feel like something glutinous and heavy sticking to one's partner – because it is so crucial to self-defence to stay in contact and maintain control. Partners can experiment endlessly with this sort of exercise, and make it more and more challenging and realistic.

Pushing hands is an excellent way of exploring the dynamic relationship between hard and soft – yin and yang, *go* and *ju* (see chapter 10). Even at its most vigorous, it should always be done calmly and with mindfulness of posture and groundedness. Inevitably it is – or in its more advanced forms it will and should become – a competitive exercise; but in the heat of the moment it should not be allowed to deteriorate into a shoving contest.

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<sup>2</sup> This kind of exercise is called *tui shou* in *taijiquan*, *chi sau* in *Wing Chun*, *kakie* (掛手) in *Goju Ryu*. In all its variants, the purpose is the same: to train short-range sensitivity and reaction speed.



*Figure 1*



*Figure 2*



*Figure 3*



*Figure 4*





*Figure 5*

7. In addition to training on the makiwara and hanging bag, partners should work with hand held-training equipment: strike pads and hook-and-jab pads (“focus mitts”). One advantage of such equipment is that it enables full force to be used in partner work without fear of injury. Another is that the partners can give each other verbal feedback, and can provide one another with a moving target. Again, the level of challenge can be adjusted according to skill and experience.

8. By no means all situations are readable, even by the astute and experienced martial artist, and tactical retreat may be necessary in

the event of an unexpected attack. Also, we have mentioned the importance of evasion and deflection in “receiving” an attack, and of getting outside an aggressor’s line of attack and taking control of his undefended side. These things require a skill called tai sabaki (体捌き), which is literally “body judgment,” though “judicious body movement” is closer to the intended sense. The expression is sometimes translated as “evasion,” but it means rather more than that. Tai sabaki is body movement that avoids an attack while simultaneously placing the defender in a position from which he can develop a counter-attack. The object of the exercise is not merely to evade. Successful evasion must be followed by immediate counter-measures: defence must flow always into counter-attack, and partner work must stress this vital continuity and the co-ordination that it requires. Practising tai sabaki will also provide many opportunities to explore the fruitful principle of using the forward momentum of an aggressor’s attack against him.

Thus in figure 6, White Gi has avoided Black Gi’s attempted grab by deflecting it with a hidari shotei uke while moving obliquely into neko ashi dachi on Black Gi’s undefended side (this oblique shift into neko ashi dachi is found at the end of Gekisai dai ni kata). He then takes immediate control of Black Gi’s right arm with a migi hiki uke, pulling him into a shotei uchi to the side of the jaw and simultaneously striking his right knee with a migi kansetsu/kakato geri (figure 7). Tai sabaki is never going to be as easy to do in reality as it looks and feels in the safe environment of the dojo. “Body judgment” is exactly that: it requires high levels of anticipation, confidence, speed of reaction and fluency of movement. Examples of tai sabaki occur frequently in the kata, but partners practising together will be able to explore and test many ways of using it against a range of attacks.

9. As part of the realism and pressure testing of partner work, close attention should be given to the development of economy of movement. Kihon taught as formal exercises – kihon as taught to the beginner – in almost all cases involve movements that are too

large to be practicable. Picture a “classical” gedan uke or gedan barai, beginning somewhere in the region of the ear and ending somewhere near the top of the thigh. In reality, you will not have time for this. So too with tai sabaki: the beginner is likely to make evasive movements so large as to be virtually indistinguishable from flight, whereas the whole point is to stay close enough to an



*Figure 6*



*Figure 7*

attacker to remain in control of the situation. Similar remarks apply to punches and strikes. Short range, sudden, penetrating strikes will be (a) more damaging, and (b) less easy to read than strikes that cover a long and visible distance before they reach their target. What in Chinese is called fajin – the explosive

discharge of energy over a very short distance – can be trained with the aid of pads and focus mitts. It is not easy to do; it involves the engagement of the whole body in one explosive “sneeze” moment; but with the help and feedback of a more experienced practice partner it can and should be learnt at the earliest possible stage. All movement takes time; large movements take more time than small ones. Partner work should develop the skill of extracting the maximum effect from the minimum of movement in the shortest time.



We have emphasised realism and “pressure testing” in partner work partly because these things are of such crucial importance, and partly because they are so often absent from the dojo. The participants must for the time being forget that they are friends, but even experienced karateka may not find it easy to be convincingly aggressive towards a practice partner. You will notice that people employ defence mechanisms against the uncomfortable feeling that they are practising brutal techniques on someone they know: chatting, “sending up” what they are doing, play-fighting – sending signals that they do not really mean it. Over and over again one sees techniques that have no earthly hope of working against a real aggressor *seem* to work in the dojo because uke is excessively compliant. This is a criticism often levelled at aikido, but it holds equally against much of what is done in karate practice. Over and over again one sees potentially viable techniques executed weakly because the cooperativeness of uke makes anything else unnecessary. Nothing that you do in the dojo can really simulate the stress and confusion of a real fight; but it is absolutely vital to come as close to the real thing as you can. Partner work that is no more than an amiable game can only give you a false impression of the effectiveness of what you are doing; and self-defence training that produces only a delusion of effectiveness is worse than no training at all. Also, practice partners should be constructively

critical of one another and should give and receive constructive feedback in a good and positive spirit.

## **Kata**

Almost all traditional Japanese and Chinese martial arts make use of kata or forms: choreographed sequences of movement that are the “grammar” of the art in that they assemble the vocabulary – the basic techniques – into intelligible and co-ordinated patterns. Some forms (especially in the Chinese arts) are very long and complex; others are short and elementary. Even the longest karate kata (Shotokan’s Kanku dai; Goju’s Suparunpai) are relatively short in comparison to (say) the long forms of taijiquan, and are taught in ascending order of difficulty according to the student’s level of proficiency. Many kata (though not all) are traceable back to Chinese originals, though karate kata are on the whole much simpler than Chinese forms.

There are probably more than a hundred Okinawan/Japanese kata currently in use. Some that were once practised seem to have vanished altogether or have metamorphosed into something different from their original forms. Some (e.g. Seisan, also called Hangetsu) exist in several versions that have little more than a name in common, and all exhibit some degree of difference from school to school according to how they have been developed and interpreted (compare, for example, the five Pinan kata of Wado Ryu and the corresponding Heian kata of Shotokan). Different ryu teach different kata, and different numbers of kata. Uechi Ryu in its original form had only three (Sanchin, Seisan and Sanseiryu; modern Uechi Ryu has about eight); Shotokan has twenty-six or so; Goju Ryu twelve or so; Wado Ryu fifteen or so. Shito Ryu has the largest number of all, in excess of fifty; though it seems unlikely that any exponent of that school knows and practises them all.<sup>3</sup> Many kata are practised across several schools; others

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<sup>3</sup> The numbers given here are imprecise partly because some teachers also use a number of elementary beginners’ kata, and partly because some “style” organisations have added or subtracted kata from their

are found only in one (e.g. Uechi Ryu's Kanchin, Kanshiwa and Kanshu). In comparatively recent times, some schools have developed what one might call more "dramatic" forms of the kata for use in competition.

Experience suggests that kata practice is unpopular with many (though by no means all) younger martial artists. This is partly because it seems to have little practical value, and partly because young men tend to be so keen on sparring that they want to do nothing else.<sup>4</sup> Most of the eclectic "kickboxing" styles that have grown up since the 1970s do not bother with kata practice at all, and many traditional karateka regard it only as a chore that has to be done to pass gradings. Our view is that kata practice *properly understood* is the heart and soul of karate; but we stress the words "properly understood." Our understanding of sound kata practice includes some thoroughly heretical ideas, as we shall make clear later in this chapter.



*Kata*

Fully analysed, the kata of karate probably encode nearly every defensive and offensive movement that it is possible for the normal human body to make. The point of kata practice is not to learn these movements as such (they are, after all, studied as kihon), but to acquire the ability (a) to move, defensively and offensively, in ways that call for high levels of co-ordination, and (b) to do so without hesitating even for a moment. Often one

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syllabuses. By and large, numbers have tended to increase rather than diminish.

<sup>4</sup> This is, of course, a grotesque generalisation; but any karate teacher will probably recognise the tendency.

comes across the Japanese word *mushin* (無心), which is literally “no mind.” *Mushin* originated as a Buddhist term, denoting (among other things) freedom from distracting thought in meditation. In a martial arts context, *mushin* is a condition of mind such that the individual is unimpeded by anything that might obstruct action. In plain terms, if you are attacked you must be completely free from any need to wonder what to do – because in the time that it takes you to do the wondering, even if it is only a second or two, all will be lost.

*Kata* practice is a means of developing this ability to react instantly and without thought or decision. It is necessary to practise a *kata* over and over again until all conscious engagement of the mind – all thought or hesitation about what the next move ought to be – is absent. One might say that, once you have made a *kata* fully your own, the *kata* will simply “happen.” You will be moving in intricate ways, but entirely without deliberation. There are all kinds of analogues in everyday life. Walking up and down stairs, driving a car, riding a bicycle: these are activities that call for high levels of co-ordination, yet we no longer have to think about them. We do them with “no mind” because long and repeated practice has established in us the necessary patterns of movement as conditioned reflexes. This is exactly what *kata* practice must do. In a sense, we learn *kata* only to forget them, just as we once learnt to walk but now no longer have to remember how to do it.

What about the reproach that *kata* seem to have little practical value? The chief answer to this is that the meaning of a *kata* is represented in its visible movements only in a disguised and approximate way. The real or full meaning is concealed – often deeply concealed – within the appearance of the movements. Once one has learnt the outward form, its inner meanings must be discovered or excavated by careful and detailed study. But why should this be so? Golfers or tennis players or boxers are not required as part of their training to unravel the secrets of a series of elaborate mimes; why should *karateka* be? At least three



answers, each of which has a degree of validity, can be given to this question.

1. Historically, the martial arts have been distinguished by a degree of secrecy. From time to time (e.g. after the Japanese invasion of Okinawa in 1608 and in Japan after World War II) their practice has been officially prohibited and has become an underground activity. The Chinese arts that are in so many ways the ancestors of karate were often regarded as the property or heritage of a “family” (more strictly, of a clan). Encrypting their techniques in forms taught exclusively to family members was a way of keeping their secrets away from prying eyes. The esoteric nature of the kata as currently practised no doubt has part of its origin, however remote and tenuous now, in this tradition of secrecy.

2. Much more important from a contemporary point of view is the element of educational psychology involved. Students will remember and understand something far better if they have had to hunt it out for themselves than they would if it were served up to them on a spoon. They are also likely to engage with it more enthusiastically than they would with uncreative and tedious rote learning. Traditional instruction involved very little verbal explanation; students were expected to go away and find out for themselves, by trial and error. The point of the hidden aspects of kata is not that there are “secrets” to be withheld from the uninitiated but that personal research and discovery are in so many ways better than instruction.

3. The diligence needed to understand or “decode” the kata will test the individual’s motivation and contribute to his training in patience and humility.

Repeating the kata until they become second nature is vital, but in view of their hidden meanings it cannot be the whole story. Also vital, and inseparable from repeated practice, are what are called *bunkai* (分解), “analysis” or “dismantling,” and “*oyo*” (応用), “practical application.” (These words are sometimes used inter-

changeably, which is harmless enough but not strictly correct.) Someone – we forget who – has remarked that kata practice without bunkai/oyo is only Okinawan folk dancing in uncomfortable clothes. This is an aphorism that the student should take very much to heart. It is essential to search endlessly within the kata for *okuden waza* (奥伝技), “concealed techniques.” Minute analysis will reveal that no movement in a kata is redundant or ornamental. Everything has some offensive or defensive significance; but the significance is not always obvious – sometimes it is far from obvious – and it is up to the student to find out what it is.

We do not at all approve of the common practice of teaching a standard syllabus or list of bunkai/oyo. This practice is undesirable for two reasons. First, nothing in “real life” is standard, and teaching prescribed attack-and-defence patterns can – to say the least of it – serve no good purpose. Second, the idea of “prescribed” bunkai/oyo is subversive of the whole educational point of the exercise: that students should use *their own creativity and imagination* to discover what is latent in the kata. Far preferable is painstaking practice, exploration and discussion with a partner, with a view to wringing every drop of meaning out of every movement in every conceivable situation. On the one hand, if you are presented with a list of applications, sooner or later you will tick the last item on the list and complacency will set in: you will suppose that you have mastered the kata. On the other hand, there are no measurable limits to what the free and unrestricted imagination can discover.

Practising bunkai/oyo with a partner is a much more advanced and complicated affair than practising kihon, but it should be governed by the same considerations. It must aim at ever-increasing degrees of realism, and it must involve pressure testing according to the student’s level of experience. Here, as in the case of kihon, it is worse than useless to practise with less than full commitment and to fool one another with excessive compliance or half-hearted and unrealistic techniques. At its most developed level – a level that will not, of course, be reached immediately – bunkai/oyo

differs from free sparring only in that it emphasises close adherence to form and the quick and decisive finish. Partner work of the most advanced kind can and should include defences against multiple attackers and armed attackers; but do not be afraid to make haste slowly. It is very hard to achieve any degree of realism with weapons, and easy to fool yourself. Self-defence against knives and guns is an advanced and difficult practice. It is not possible to give safe and meaningful advice about it in a book and with still photographs, and we shall not try to do so.<sup>5</sup>

It is, incidentally, a mistake – a common mistake, but a mistake for all that – to suppose that each kata is a continuous “narrative” of an imaginary fight. This misconception is something that confuses and disillusiones students, because it is patently not true that the techniques of a kata all follow from one another in an uninterrupted logical succession. Generally speaking, each kata contains a number of different attack and defence “modules,” sometimes very unexpected and subtle ones, and the object of bunkai/oyo is to isolate and explore these modules or vignettes as fully as possible, rather than to try to understand the entire kata as a single flowing episode of combat. Analysis is precisely a process of breaking down a kata and investigating the parts of it.

Some people collect kata in the way that mountaineers collect summits, on the principle that more is better. More is not necessarily better, however, and kata are not trophies to be accumulated. Motobu Choki is reported as saying that a single kata – Naihanchi – will provide you with everything you need.<sup>6</sup> One

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<sup>5</sup> Apart from a word of caution that is perhaps unnecessary to anyone with common sense. *It is extremely unwise to use real weapons in training unless you are very experienced and confident, and perhaps not even then.* Rubber or wooden knives can be bought for practice purposes.

<sup>6</sup> Motobu Choki's Naihanchi kata seems to have combined in one continuous form the three kata now called Naihanchi (or Tekki) shodan, nidan and sandan. The Shorin Ryu teacher Yabu Kentsu (1866–1937) is also said to have called Naihanchi “the beginning and end of karate.” Yabu, incidentally, is said to have been the first to introduce the “military style” karate training that later became so common.

wonders if this is quite true, but it certainly is true that in the early days of karate fewer kata were taught than is the case now. It is far better to understand a few kata thoroughly than to be able to perform many superficially. It is depth of understanding, not the number of kata that you can “do,” that makes the difference between kata and energetic folk dance.

In these pages we have referred chiefly to Goju kata, simply because they are the ones with which we are most familiar; but – with one exception – there is no reason to think that the kata of one “style” are inherently preferable to those of another. The exception, in our view, is the Goju version of Sanchin kata, because of the indispensable body-skills that it teaches. Subject to this, it is a plain fact that not all kata are suitable to all physiques and temperaments. The heavy, grounded “Naha te” kata of Goju Ryu and Goju Kai may be better adapted to some people than the lighter and faster “Shuri te” kata of Wado Ryu or Shotokan (and, of course, vice versa); though it is true also that practising kata from both traditions has many advantages.<sup>7</sup> One should never hesitate to explore the kata of other “styles” and take from them whatever is useful.

But now for a kenkyo-ha heresy. It is a heresy based on a great deal of experience and thought, and we make no apology for it.

### **The Kenkyo-ha Kata Heresy**

One would think sometimes that the kata of one’s “style” were the Ten Commandments. The same doctrinal statements are heard everywhere: that the kata must always be performed in exactly the same way, with precisely the same variations in speed; that this way is correct, and all others incorrect; that there must always be a “kiai” yell at this point and that point but nowhere else; that

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<sup>7</sup> Some “styles” – notably Shito Ryu and Kyokushinkai – actually require and encourage this. On the distinction between Naha te and Shuri te see Nagamine Shoshin, *The Essence of Okinawan Karate-Do* (Tuttle, 1976), pp. 21–23.

we must hand on what the Master taught without changing one jot or tittle of it – and so on and so forth. It seems to us that this dogmatism has several roots.

1. We referred earlier to the saying about the nail that must be knocked in if it sticks out. Experience suggests that, on the whole, the Japanese have (or have had until very recently) a deep cultural aversion to non-conformists – to the different and unusual – and a corresponding love of uniformity and authority. The idea of transmitting an unaltered heritage almost as if it were a religious dogma is one that seems strongly established in the “oriental mind” (to use an unsatisfactory expression). Any change or challenge to that heritage tends to be regarded as a kind of blasphemy, or at least as a gesture of disrespect towards the past. Karate as practised all over the world has taken over – has, if anything, exaggerated – this cultural tendency. When you think about it, it is quite extraordinary that this should be so. If you said to the average westerner *qua* citizen, “You must never question authority” you would probably receive a succinct answer; yet the same westerner *qua* karateka is prepared to regard docility and compliance not just as necessary evils but as positive virtues.

2. The transformation of karate into a competitive sport has, among other evils, heightened this latent tendency towards conformity. There have to be shitei (指定) (“prescribed”) kata associated with each “style” – kata that must be performed always in the same way because, without a fixed standard, judges would not be able to assess the different performances of the competitors.

3. “There is only one right way: my way” is an aspect of the egotism and power games by which karate is so grossly and universally disfigured. We shall have something to say presently about teachers who insist on imposing a rigid uniformity on their students.

Let us say without further preamble that if kata practice is to have any deep and long-term value – if it is to be more than an irksome requirement of the grading syllabus – *it must be a practice adapted to your own temperament and aptitudes*. There cannot be a one-size-fits-all karate. You are an individual, and your life task is to make the best of what you are, not to transform yourself into something else according to someone else's recipe. You should never let anyone try to re-programme you or make you feel ashamed of the ways in which you differ from others. Your physique and character will not be the same as those of your teacher or fellow students; what will work for them may well not work for you, and vice versa. These are incontrovertible facts that no karate student or teacher should ignore. If you were (say) learning to play tennis, you would certainly begin by imitating your teacher; you would copy his strokes; you would follow his advice to the letter – but you would not then spend the rest of your life doing exactly what he showed you and never deviating from it. You would learn the basics and become proficient in them – and then you would develop your own game. It would still be tennis – but it would be *your* tennis. And so it should be with karate.

We are not, of course, suggesting that the absolute beginner should go his own wilful way and ignore all guidance. Of course you should begin by imitating your teacher, and a good teacher will always make sure that you understand the point of what he is asking you to do. Of course you should take your teacher's advice and respect his experience. But you must also strive to find and internalise a karate that is your own. If you do not do this, you will have learnt karate in the way that a parrot learns speech. Your teacher – if he is worth having as a teacher – will try to understand your temperament and abilities and help you to discover the karate that is right for you rather than requiring you to mimic the karate that is right for him. In saying this we are taking it for granted that tuition will be on a one-to-one basis, or in very small groups, because – whether anyone likes it or not – we are convinced that there simply is no other way of studying

karate properly. How could anyone suppose that something so intricate and personal could be taught to a class of fifty people, or that the mass production of clones can be of any value? These reflections suggest to us the following recommendations with respect to kata practice.

1. Once you have acquired the basic “shape” of a kata, do not be content merely to replicate what someone else has shown you. This is certainly the easiest thing to do, but it is only a treadmill exercise that will never take you off the same spot. Instead of hollowing out a comfort zone and lying down in it, try to create an interpretation of the kata that is personal to you: again, not wilfully and in disregard of the advice of more experienced people, but with suitable guidance and help. Transform the kata into *your* kata. Subject to such guidance, *use your own imagination* to develop an awareness of the circumstances in which the techniques hidden in it might be used, and an understanding of how they might work.

2. Nothing should distract you from the essence and realism of action. Use your skill and imagination to visualise and isolate applications that are simple, direct and effective. In practice there is seldom any point in trying to do something elaborate and clever; an assailant will not stand there and let you perform gymnastics. Also, do not be misled into supposing that every application will work for everyone. You should not, of course, lightly change or discard anything. The people who composed the kata were not fools, and one should assume that whatever is in them was put there for a good reason, even if that reason is not immediately clear. Nonetheless, if mature reflection and conscientious practice convince you that something will not work for you, do not go on practising it as a matter of duty, as if it were a religious ritual. Remember: no one actually practises a kata exactly as he was taught it, or exactly as the Masters taught it, even if he thinks he does. Extant footage of Funakoshi San, Ohtsuka San, Shimabuku San and others will show you soon enough that kata as practised today is in reality very different

from what they did then. Change and development are not deviations from some sacred truth. There is no need to be afraid of change.

3. Do not suppose that a kata must always be done in the same way, at the same speed and with the same invariable changes of pace within it. Experiment with different speeds, sometimes slow, sometimes fast, and with different combinations of hard and soft. Break yourself of the bad habit (or, better still, do not develop the habit in the first place) of moving from technique to technique in a series of jerks or spasms, and cultivate the good habit of flowing from technique to technique. Be guided by your own feelings and instincts, and try to approach what the kata is teaching you from as many perspectives as you can visualise. There is something of a tendency in modern karate to think that kata should always be done at high speed and with maximum power; but mere speed – speed that blurs technique and takes away the precision of the kata – is not of itself a virtue, and you have other ways of training power. Practise in ways that feel right for you and that contribute to your own understanding, rather than in ways that someone else has told you are right. Do not hesitate to do something today that is different from what you did yesterday. If you approach your kata in this open-minded way, you will never be bored, nor will you have the enervating feeling that you are being called upon to do something that seems pointless.

4. When you have achieved a suitable level of experience and confidence, try the experiment of composing your own kata, incorporating into them the elements that you have found to be most effective for you. You cannot, of course, do this before you have acquired a certain depth of understanding, and you should always draw on the experience and advice of others. No doubt your own efforts will look clumsy at first; but there is absolutely no reason why you should not make them. On the contrary, doing so is a first-rate educational experience: an outstandingly effective way of developing a personal and intimate understanding of karate and making it your own.



All this will shock the purist who supposes that there must be no deviation from what the Masters taught. Remember, though, that the Masters themselves were *innovators*. They were not slavish imitators. Higashionna San, Miyagi San, Funakoshi San, Shimabuku San and the rest learnt from others *and transformed what they learnt into something new*. Nor, incidentally, is it true that kata are in all cases of great antiquity. Edmund Kealoha Parker and Peter Urban, for example, composed their own sets of forms in the 1950s and 1960s. Whether one likes these forms or not, they were the creations of people who were not afraid to innovate. No doubt one could find many grounds for criticising them, but their novelty would not one. The traditional kata of karate are not the Law and the Prophets, never to be questioned or altered. It is the nature of the living world to change. Fossils and stones are the only things of which this is not true. Change for the better will survive and prosper, change that is not for the better will not; but change itself should not be feared.

### **Kumite**

Kumite (組手) is “meeting of hands,” but the usual (and on the whole unexceptionable) English translation is “sparring.” It is, we remember, said to be the “language” of karate: the use in actual conversation, as it were, of the vocabulary of kihon and the grammar of kata.

組  
手

*Kumite*

One usually comes across kumite of two kinds in the contemporary dojo: yakusoku kumite (約束本手), which consists of prearranged attack-and-defence drills often distinguished by numbers (e.g. gohon kumite (五組本手): “five step sparring”); and jiyu kumite (自由本手), which is “free” or spontaneous sparring such that, within certain limits, anything goes. Jiyu kumite is sometimes fearsomely realistic, especially in Kyokushinkai dojo, where full contact sparring is practised with only blows to the head, neck and groin forbidden (though kicks to the head are allowed). More often than not – increasingly, in a world that has become so terrified of injury and litigation – it involves light contact or no contact at all. Where more than light contact is used, the participants often wear pads on their hands and feet and light body protectors. This kind of “padded” sparring is called bogu – “armoured” or “protected” – kumite (武具本手).

Yakusoku kumite resembles in some ways the kind of partner work that we have described, except that it is completely formal, programmed and predictable, with no element of genuine surprise or pressure (yakusoku is “conventional” or “arranged”). One might in passing observe that prearranged sparring isn’t really sparring, but this quibble arises only from a slight failure of the English word “sparring” to capture exactly what the Japanese word kumite means. More to the point, yakusoku kumite is open to an objection that we have already mentioned. It is a robotic or “drill” exercise. Constant repetition of it will programme into tori a prescribed sequence of responses to a prescribed sequence of (completely unrealistic) attacks – but there are no prescribed attacks and defences in the real world, and real-world attacks will be nothing like the ones encountered in yakusoku kumite. It and similar exercises have their uses as confidence-builders for the novice or inexperienced, but it is very desirable to progress from them at an early stage to something more realistic and spontaneous.

Contrary to what is often supposed, jiyu kumite is not an ancient or traditional part of karate training. It was not practised,

or at any rate not widely practised, in Okinawa before World War II. Funakoshi Osensei, steadfastly opposed to any kind of contest in karate, positively forbade it; Egami Shigeru even tells of karateka who were thrown out of the dojo for trying to introduce it.<sup>8</sup> Ohtsuka Hironori and Yamaguchi Gogen were among the earliest teachers to introduce it to any great extent, in the 1930s, and the burgeoning postwar interest in “sport” karate has placed it firmly at centre stage. There are arguments in favour of jiyu kumite and arguments against it. We shall try to give a fair summary of both sides.

The following are the arguments that one usually hears in its favour:

1. It trains reflexes, speed and agility by requiring the participants to react quickly and effectively in a situation that is stressful and unpredictable. It will teach you a great deal about how an attacker might behave and how to cope with a moving target.
2. It tests the courage and determination of the karateka by mirroring the reality of actual combat. By confronting you with non-prearranged attacks it will subject you to more effective pressure testing than any other part of practice can. Jiyu kumite will take you out of your comfort zone: it will teach you how to control your fear of confrontation and of being hit.
3. It will introduce you to the experience of actually being hit. For most people, being hit in the face is a serious psychological shock. A street encounter with a real attacker is not a good moment to experience this shock for the first time.
4. It requires and encourages high levels of aerobic and anaerobic fitness.

On the other hand:

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<sup>8</sup> *The Heart of Karate Do*, pp. 111; 113; see also Higaonna Morio *Traditional Karate Do* vol. 4: *Applications of the Kata* (Japan Publications, 1991), p. 136.

1. Competitive sparring – especially when practised as a preparation for competition fighting – feeds the ego by encouraging the desire for personal victory. As we suggested in chapter 1, this is not consistent with the ethical purpose of karate as a “way.” No part of karate should be a game that anyone can win or lose; nor should karate encourage anyone to take pleasure in the defeat of others.
2. If jiyu kumite mirrors reality, it mirrors exactly the kind of reality that the karateka should train to avoid: the protracted fight. Exchanging kicks and punches with an opponent for minutes on end is not consistent with the ideal (however modified by moral and legal necessity) of *ikken hissatsu*. The central aim of practice should be the quick and decisive defeat of an attacker – not victory in a boxing match.
3. It does not in any case mirror reality very closely, because it is governed by rules that forbid techniques – eye gouges or blows to the groin or head or neck – that might be necessary in an actual fight.<sup>9</sup>
4. No contact or semi-contact sparring where a “flick” can be enough to win encourages the fatal habit of “pulling” one’s techniques. This habit can to some extent be counteracted by *makiwara* training and bag and pad work; but why acquire bad habits in the first place?
5. It is all too often true that when jiyu kumite begins, all thought of form and discipline ends and the encounter becomes something not far away from a brawl. Disciplined and advanced – unscripted and realistic – *kata bunkai/oyo* is far superior as a means of training form, technique and the quick and decisive finish.

As is so often true, both sides of the argument have a degree of validity, and it is not possible to come down decisively on one side or the other. Perhaps the most that can be said from a more or less neutral position is this:

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<sup>9</sup> Though this is hardly a sensible objection to jiyu kumite as such. In what part of karate training is one allowed to do such things?

1. If you practise jiyu kumite, take from it the positives but be aware of the negatives and avoid them. Make sure that it neither takes anything away from the strength of your technique nor adds anything to that of your ego.
2. Do not fall so heavily in love with the fun and adrenaline rush of jiyu kumite that you practise it excessively and to the detriment of other aspects of practice.

To our mind, the most telling argument against jiyu kumite is the close association that it has come to have with “sport” karate. Not having spent the past few decades asleep, we know that there are now many people to whom the idea of karate as being anything *other* than a sport is unintelligible. Nonetheless, the postwar reinvention of karate as a competition sport is something that we think entirely regrettable, for reasons that will by now be obvious. In the final analysis, it all depends on what you want your karate to be: a Zen way of self-perfection and a powerful means of self-defence, or a game that you play for points and trophies. Everyone has to make his own choice.

### **The Teacher: an Excursus**

In attaching so much importance to personal interpretation and discovery, we do not want to give the impression that we are recommending complete self-instruction and a headstrong disregard of your teacher. Of course not. If you have a good and experienced teacher, listen to his advice and take it to heart; be content to develop at the pace that he thinks right for you, even if you are chafing to do more. Acknowledging the wisdom and experience of your teacher and being ready to learn from it with a patient and open mind is part of kenkyo, humility. But so much depends on what kind of teacher you have.

What is a good teacher? A good teacher is one who wants his students to surpass him. A good teacher is one who will encourage you to develop in your own way, helping you to build confidence and skill and self-awareness at an appropriate pace.

But the martial arts “industry” has produced a great many bad teachers, and this is a theme that we think it worthwhile to develop a little.

What is a bad teacher? In making the distinction between good and bad we are thinking not so much of technical competence as of the mentality or attitude that the teacher brings to the dojo. The least bad kind is one for whom teaching is primarily a way of making money. The worst kind is one for whom teaching is a way of ministering to the needs of his own ego. This sort of teacher is a neurotic personality type that is well documented now, and fairly easy to spot if you have a clear head. He wants your money, sure enough; but what is infinitely worse, he wants your soul. He wants disciples or worshippers rather than students. He wants to see in you dependence and submission, not confidence and self-reliance. He is a skilled manipulator and emotional blackmailer who knows how to play on your weaknesses. Inherently lacking self-worth, he craves importance: he wants to be the Master. Remember: anyone who wants to be worshipped is not even his own master, let alone yours. A true master is a master of his art, not of his students. Only slaves have masters.

There are some clear danger signs – though, as we pointed out in chapter 1, they are signs that are all too easily disregarded through wishful thinking and misplaced deference. Here are some of them.

1. Beware of the teacher who wants to be slavishly obeyed: who will never let you do anything apart from exactly what he has shown you: who does not want you to think for yourself or question his infallibility. Obviously, beginners need to learn by imitation, and it is right that they should. But what next? If there is no next – if all you are ever allowed to do is reproduce the transmitted orthodoxy down to the last inch – that is because your teacher wants only to produce copies of himself (or, as it may be, copies of his own teacher, to whom his own soul is in thrall). If you have a teacher who will expel you from the dojo if you

deviate from the True Way, depart with gladness and make a suitable gesture as you leave.

2. Clearly you cannot learn everything at once, and a responsible teacher will teach you only what you are ready to learn. This is true of all education, after all, and a point that is easy to explain and understand. You should be humble and self-aware enough to accept your teacher's judgment about the pace at which you learn. Karate is not a quick fix. The plain truth, however unpalatable, is that real and comprehensive expertise can only be built over years. But beware of the teacher who tantalises you with secrets – who lets fall dark hints about the deep and wonderful mysteries that only he can reveal and that will be disclosed only when you prove yourself worthy. Sensible educational progression apart, there is no need to make mysteries. There are no secrets.

3. Beware of the teacher who will not let you cross-train: who insists on total commitment to his person and "style" and regards any wish to look outside as a kind of treachery. There is no getting away from it that karateka have a good deal to learn from other arts: ju jutsu, aikido, chin na, Thai boxing and others. We remarked earlier, for instance, that traditional karate is relatively impoverished in respect of ground fighting and kansetsu waza. It is a mistake to try to spread yourself too thin, and there is no reason to suspect the motives of a teacher who points this out to you. But, subject to this, what possible reason can there be for not allowing you to learn from others?

(To be as fair as we can, the idea of "styles" – of separate organisations and methods perceived as rivals and displaying varying degrees of hostility towards each other – is still very much a part of the martial arts world, and certainly of the "industry." This fragmentation is something that Funakoshi Osensei himself deplored (see page 17); but a fierce and exclusive loyalty to a "style" and its founder is something that can exist in the minds of teachers who are certainly not crooks. We, however, have always printed the word "style" in inverted

commas. We have done so because we think that the idea of compartmentalised “styles” with inviolable frontiers is one that can only narrow the mind and restrict the development of the martial artist. Karate should be one; there is no such thing as doctrinal orthodoxy, and particular differences of method have no special importance. Ultimately, indeed, all martial arts should be one, united by a common purpose that goes beyond the physical activity of practice.)

4. Beware of the teacher who claims extraordinary powers but will not demonstrate them (because they are too “dangerous” or “advanced”) or who will demonstrate them only with the assistance of submissive “true believers.” Cicero says somewhere that there is nothing in the world so ridiculous that you won’t find somebody somewhere who believes it. Apart from religion, nowhere is this more true than in the martial arts. It never ceases to astonish us that even intelligent and educated people will swallow the most amazing nonsense if they think it part of the Wisdom of the East. Please be assured that your teacher cannot levitate, or knock people down without touching them, or read minds, or become invisible. He can’t, because no one can.

5. Beware of the teacher who claims a lineage or training history (or elite military experience) of which he will not or cannot supply proof. Spurious and embroidered curricula vitae abound. It is perfectly reasonable to ask a teacher to provide proof of his rank and antecedents, as long as one does it courteously. A teacher who is what he claims to be will be pleased and proud to answer you. Anyone who responds to a polite request with bluster or evasion is probably not what he claims to be; it is as simple as that. (Incidentally, a teacher who claims to have studied for many years in Japan but who knows only a few words or stock phrases of Japanese is unlikely to be telling the truth.)

6. No one is without failings; there are few saints in the world. But beware of the teacher whose personal behaviour makes you



uncomfortable. We do not, of course, presume to say anything about what is or is not acceptable behaviour. Suffice it to say that you are entitled to expect your teacher have high personal standards as well as high technical ones.

7. Beware of the teacher who manipulates his students by means of a grading system. Kyu and dan grades perhaps have their uses as very rough ways of measuring a learning process; but the whole business of grading has assumed a ridiculous importance in people's minds and the "black belt" is coveted to a degree out of all proportion to its value.<sup>10</sup> Teachers of a certain kind notoriously use gradings as a way of keeping the money flowing in. Worse still, they use them in the sort of way that one might use a carrot to control a donkey: to enforce compliance and conformity by exploiting the power to give or withhold them. We have no particular quarrel with grading as such. By all means accept a grade, and be justly proud of what you have achieved; but grading should not be a way of rewarding obedience and punishing independence. Be careful, therefore, not to allow anyone to use coloured belts as a way of playing mind-games with you. It is all too easy to let this happen. Gradings have no importance unless they contribute something genuine to your understanding of your own growth. You do not need to win approval by conforming to someone else's definition of what or who you should be.

A large part of what makes it so easy for disreputable teachers to fool and manipulate students is a culture of excessive deference. "You must obey your teacher without question" is a convenient doctrine for teachers who do not want their credentials to be too

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<sup>10</sup> It is worth remembering that the use of coloured belts to differentiate grades or ranks is not an ancient martial arts tradition. It was introduced in the late nineteenth century by Kano Jigoro (1860–1938), the founder of Judo, and adopted by Funakoshi Osensei in the 1920s. Also, the black belt is not a sign of mastery. It is not the end of your journey, but the beginning. This is subject to which we shall return in the next chapter.

closely inspected. The teacher/student relationship in the dojo is still conditioned by practices and beliefs that have been exported around the world from Japan. The elaborate courtesies of the dojo can easily become rituals of abasement (and there is a certain kind of student who rather enjoys this; possibly it is a mild form of masochism). Also, and perhaps most influentially of all, the famous Samurai ideology of Bushido required self-negation, unquestioning fidelity to one's lord and obedience even unto death. This code of chivalry has to some extent lingered on into the modern world, even among practitioners of gendai – "modern" – budo arts. Many karateka seem fascinated by a mental picture of feudal Japan and the fanatical loyalty of the Samurai, even though karate was never a Samurai art.

But we do not live in feudal Japan, nor are we under any necessity that might make blind loyalty a virtue. There is everything to be said for the reasonable and dignified observance of traditional dojo etiquette (see chapter 11); but it is foolish to relinquish beliefs that you would not dream of questioning in the outside world as soon as you bow into the dojo: that no one is infallible; that no one is above criticism; that no one is entitled to require unconditional obedience of you or take away your freedom to think and speak as you please. We think it right, therefore, to give the student a clear piece of advice. Honour your teacher; honour the teachers of the past; honour and respect tradition; show courtesy and consideration to your teachers and fellow students – but never be afraid to ask questions or challenge received ideas. If your teacher feels threatened or insulted by honest, polite and sincere enquiry, you need a new teacher.



Individuality and personal development have been unifying themes of this chapter. Be an individual, develop your individuality, do not let anyone undermine it or rob you of it: perfect *yourself* through the way of karate. There are in this world karate geniuses – Kanazawa Hirokazu is surely one – whose technical

proficiency goes beyond anything that ordinary people are likely to attain. If you are such a genius, you are very fortunate. If you are not, you can still practise with all your heart, with belief in yourself and without envy of others. Know your limitations and overcome them as far as you can; know your strengths and develop them as far as you can. This is what it is to make your karate your own, and a karate that is not your own will never sit comfortably with you.

## 10: The Mind/Body Gestalt

BY WAY OF setting the scene for this chapter, we shall mention two related distinctions that have implications for the martial artist. The first is a commonplace of martial arts writing; the second exercises a pervasive influence on the ways in which we perceive ourselves and the nature of our actions.

1. The distinction between “hard” or “external” and “soft” or “internal” martial arts. This distinction (by no means uncontroversial even among those who accept it) makes its appearance in Chinese sources in the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> It is nowadays most usually associated with the distinguished scholar and Chinese martial artist Sun Lutang (1860–1933), founder of the eclectic Sun method of taijiquan.<sup>2</sup> The internal arts, called *neijia* in Chinese, are said to rely centrally on the mind to co-ordinate the body, and to make use of *chi/ki* as distinct from physical or “external” strength. These arts include taijiquan, xingyiquan and baguazhang and, among the Japanese arts, aikido. The external arts (*waijia* in Chinese) such as Shaolin quan are held to be such that mind and internal energy are secondary to physical or external force. According to this classification, karate is an external art.

2. The distinction between mind and body. “Mind/body dualism” – the idea that mind and body are ontologically separate entities – has been a talking-point of western philosophy since the seven-

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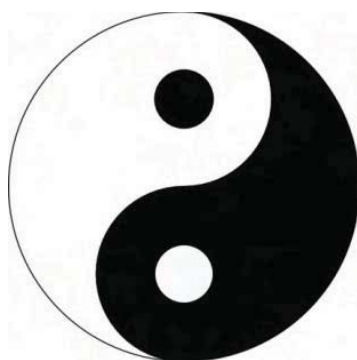
<sup>1</sup> M. Shahar, “Ming-Period Evidence of Shaolin Martial Practice,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (Harvard-Yenching Institute) 61 (2) December 2001: pp. 359–413.

<sup>2</sup> See *Classical Taijiquan* (ed. and trans. Joseph Crandall) vol. 1: *Taijiquan Xue (A Study of Taiji Boxing) by Sun Lutang* (Smiling Tiger Martial Arts, 2000).

teenth century,<sup>3</sup> but the philosophical doctrine only expresses a characteristic that all human beings seem to have: the tendency to think of themselves as (in Gilbert Ryle's phrase) "ghosts in the machine"<sup>4</sup> – as minds that live inside bodies and, so to speak, operate the mechanism. Perhaps this is a tendency associated with the quasi-religious idea of a "soul." My self has two components, body and soul, and my body is not the "real" me. The mind/body distinction is associated also with the persistent idea that mental activity is somehow superior to physical. Sometimes, indeed, we think of mind and body as being opposed to one another: of mind as something that has to overcome bodily impulses, or that can be overcome by them.

We shall not dwell on the philosophical niceties of mind/body dualism, nor shall we add anything to what we have said about chi/ki. We shall suggest only that the distinctions between internal and external arts and between mind and body are of doubtful validity. It is much better not to think in terms of "hard" and "soft" martial arts with methodologies that are fundamentally different from one another. It is better also not to conceive of mind as occupying a sort of compartment of its own, or of the mental and physical "realms" as being different modes of experience.

Something of what we mean by all this is conveyed in the familiar diagram called taijitu:



*Taijitu*

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<sup>3</sup> Largely thanks to the work of the French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes (1596–1650).

<sup>4</sup> See Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (1949; new edn, University of Chicago Press, 2002).

This diagram is also known as the yin/yang symbol. Putting it at its simplest, the taijitu expresses the proposition that reality consists not of categorially distinct opposites, but of the interdependence of opposites. You cannot have dark without light, high without low, male without female, front without back, soft without hard – and so on and so forth. Opposites – black and white, “yin” and “yang” – have an inseparable relation to each other, and each contains some part of the other. This concept has a number of recondite meanings in Daoist cosmology and metaphysics, but these are matters into which we need not digress. We shall use the idea of the inseparability of opposites only to illustrate two points that are central to our discussion.

1. It is a fallacy to suppose that mind and body are distinct and that the mind drives or controls the body as if the body were a horse and the mind a rider. Because the body is not an automaton, its operation depends upon the direction of mind; because mind has no material form, it depends upon a properly functioning body to act in the world according to its purposes. But this is a relationship of *interdependence*. The workings of mind are not distinct from the actions of body; mind and body are the completion of each other. This is true in general, and it is true of karate. Effective karate requires that the mind/body nexus be completely integrated and seamless. Mind and body must flow into one another in an uninterrupted swirl, like cream and coffee in the same cup. If even a second’s hesitation or reflection is necessary as a preliminary to action then what you have is fatal hesitation. No martial art is simply a matter of mind or body: all arts require the dynamic interplay of each with the other.

2. Prescinding entirely from the question of chi/ki, there is no such thing as a martial art that is hard but not soft, internal but not external. In functional terms, and regardless of appearances, all arts are both. Receiving and deflecting and evading an attack requires suppleness or softness – yin or ju (柔). Striking and kicking requires hardness and “external” force: yang or go (剛).

The vital thing is to know how and when to call upon each and how to use each. Hard and soft must flow into each another like the black and white of the taijitu. This truism is reflected in the name coined by Miyagi Osensei: Goju Ryu – “Hard/Soft School.”<sup>5</sup>

We shall try in this chapter to bring out some of the practical implications of these preliminaries.

### **Fear and Relaxation**

Animals, including human animals, exhibit one of three reactions when threatened or alarmed: flight, fight or freeze. It is with the last of these that we are concerned.

The tendency to freeze or tense when frightened is the “rabbit in the headlights” phenomenon. On the basis of common human experience we speak of someone being “paralysed with fear” or “frozen with terror.” But you cannot defend yourself if you are frozen with terror; you cannot deflect, absorb or evade an attack if you cannot move. You cannot even run away. Nor is it enough to be able to overcome an initial “freeze” response and move from it into a condition of softness or relaxation – because moving from a state of tension to a state of relaxation takes time, and time is something that you cannot afford to waste. The martial artist must learn to exist in a state of relaxation that is constant or normal: not a state in which the “freeze” reaction can be quickly overcome, but one in which it does not occur at all. He must develop relaxation as a permanent condition of existence that does not desert him at moments of stress. This is very difficult to do, because it requires us to override something that seems instinctive. Why an instinct that has such negative survival value should have persisted is something of a mystery.

But consider the “freeze” reaction in terms of the kind of symbolism provided by the taijitu. Is the paralysis of fear a mental phenomenon or a physical one? Does the body freeze because the

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<sup>5</sup> Miyagi Osensei derived this name from a passage in the ancient martial arts text called *Bubishi*; see Patrick McCarthy (ed. and trans.), *Bubishi: The Classic Manual of Combat* (Charles E. Tuttle, 2008).

mind is in a state of panic, or is the mind in a state of panic because the body is frozen? Anyone who thinks about it for a while will, we suggest, realise that these are the wrong questions to be asking. The “freeze” reaction cannot be analysed in terms of a mind/body dichotomy, because mind and body do not operate separately in the ways that such a dichotomy presupposes.

It is important not to be misled by some of the connotations of the word “relaxation”: connotations of inattention, inertia, sleepiness, sluggishness. What we mean by it is a state of confident poise or alertness such that one can react instantly to any situation without “freezing,” letting softness and hardness – “ju” and “go,” defence and attack – flow into one another without thought or pause. A familiar illustration of this interplay of soft and hard is the pine tree in the wind. The pine tree is strong, but it is also supple. When the wind blows it accommodates itself to the force of the wind instantaneously, without thought or deliberation.

Clearly, however, developing this condition of relaxed versatility is not a matter of training the mind; nor is it a matter of training the body; nor is it even a matter of training both – because, strictly speaking, there is no “both”: there is no duality. It is a matter of training what we can call the mind/body gestalt. To do this effectively is to achieve what we earlier called *mushin*: a state of being such that the mind/body gestalt reacts without so much as a second’s hesitation to whatever situation confronts it – hard or soft, attacking or yielding, resisting or giving way, as the flow of circumstance requires.

In the following pages we shall recommend some exercises and methods that have been found valuable in cultivating the kind of mind/body integration that we have described.

### *Meditation*

There are two main school or sects of Zen meditation in Japan: Soto (曹洞) and Rinzai (臨濟). The differences between them are mostly methodological, but this is not something that we need spend time on. What the two schools have in common is the



practice of meditation as a way of developing awareness of the true nature of the self: of the mind/body gestalt and its place in the world. In meditation, body and mind are no longer separate: they come together as one reality.

In Japan, seated meditation or zazen (座禪) is usually practised in the posture called seiza (正座). This involves sitting on the floor in the way illustrated below, with the back straight but not tense and the shoulders relaxed. You can sit on your heels, or you may find it more comfortable to sit on a small plump cushion of the kind called zafu (坐蒲) in Japanese. The hands are folded in the lap, usually with the fingers of the left hand resting on those of the right<sup>6</sup> and the tips of the thumbs touching. The eyes are kept open (otherwise you may fall asleep) and should look at the ground about two or three feet in front of you. Breathe slowly and deeply, in through your nose and out through your mouth.



*Zazen*

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<sup>6</sup> Left-handed people find it more natural to rest the fingers of the right hand on those of the left. It really does not matter.

Because Japanese people sit on the floor in seiza from an early age, they do not find it uncomfortable, but westerners – especially older people – may find it hard to get used to. Remember that meditation is not supposed to be an ordeal or a pain-resisting exercise. If you cannot get used to seiza – if your legs always go numb or your knees hurt – you can sit on the floor or a cushion in a simple legs-crossed position, or you can meditate sitting on a chair (not too comfortable a chair, though, because, again, you may find yourself falling asleep). Another common posture for seated meditation is the lotus seat, as illustrated below; but if you find seiza hard on the knees you will probably find the lotus seat impossible. If you can sit comfortably in seiza or the lotus seat, well and good, but there is no need to fret about such things.



*The lotus seat*

It is not a good idea to sit in any fixed position for very long periods even if you experience no great discomfort. Prolonged immobility combined with dehydration can have serious consequences, such as deep-vein thromboses. Sensible meditation does not put the normally healthy person at serious risk of such things, but it is as well to mention them. The method of walking meditation called *kinhin* is also valuable. It involves nothing more complicated than walking around the dojo (or wherever you happen to be meditating), taking each step slowly and deliberately – though without the exaggerated steps shown on pp. 108–109 – while maintaining the same state of tranquillity and detachment as you have in seated meditation. The Chinese *zhan zhuang* exercise is the simplest alternative of all. Just stand in *heiko dachi* and breathe deeply, feeling your body relaxing and sinking with each out-breath. (There are several methods of *zhan zhuang*, but the basic one described on pp. 52–54 is enough for our purposes.)

The purpose of meditation is to withdraw the self from engagement with distracting things and to integrate body and mind into a calm and relaxed unity. (Consciously and deliberately relaxing your shoulders will almost certainly show you that you are more tense than you thought you were.)<sup>7</sup> However exotic and unfamiliar it may seem at first, meditation is a completely straightforward practice. There is no need to look for Mysterious Eastern Wisdom in it, because there is none. Contrary to what is sometimes thought, it is not necessary to meditate “on” anything. Advice often given to the beginner is that you should not think about anything; but this, of course, is hopeless: you will immediately start thinking about not thinking about anything. More

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<sup>7</sup> Unconsciously tensing the neck and shoulders is one of the most typical signs of stress, and a primary cause of tension headaches. You can easily test this for yourself. Pause at some point during the day and see if your shoulders are “up.” If they are, relax them as completely as you can and take a few calming breaths. Then try the same thing again in an hour. In all probability your shoulders will have come “up” again without your realising it. This seems to be especially true of people who work at desks.

helpful advice is: let thoughts arise and pass away naturally, like bubbles rising up through lemonade. Do not worry about the fact that they are arising or try to suppress them. Be aware of them, but take no interest in them: do not attach yourself to them. If at first you find it difficult not to be distracted by passing thoughts, focus your attention on something specific but neutral: the sensation of breath passing in through your nostrils and out through your mouth, or the rising and falling of your chest as you breathe, or the imaginary ball of energy in your hara (see p. 54).

Meditation is not something that comes easily to people accustomed to living in a busy world; some people even feel guilty or self-indulgent about taking time to do it. Nor, as with so many things, is it possible to give hard and fast directions, because within certain parameters everyone will develop his or her own way of meditating. Just as there is no need to look for hidden mysteries, so too there is no need to look for rules and regulations. The outcome is the important thing, not the process. The more you do it, the easier you will find it to enter a meditative state, and the more completely will the calm mind/body condition that you discover enter into all aspects of your life. Try to set aside fifteen minutes each day for meditation. Separate yourself from all extraneous concerns, and enjoy the stillness of being alone with yourself.

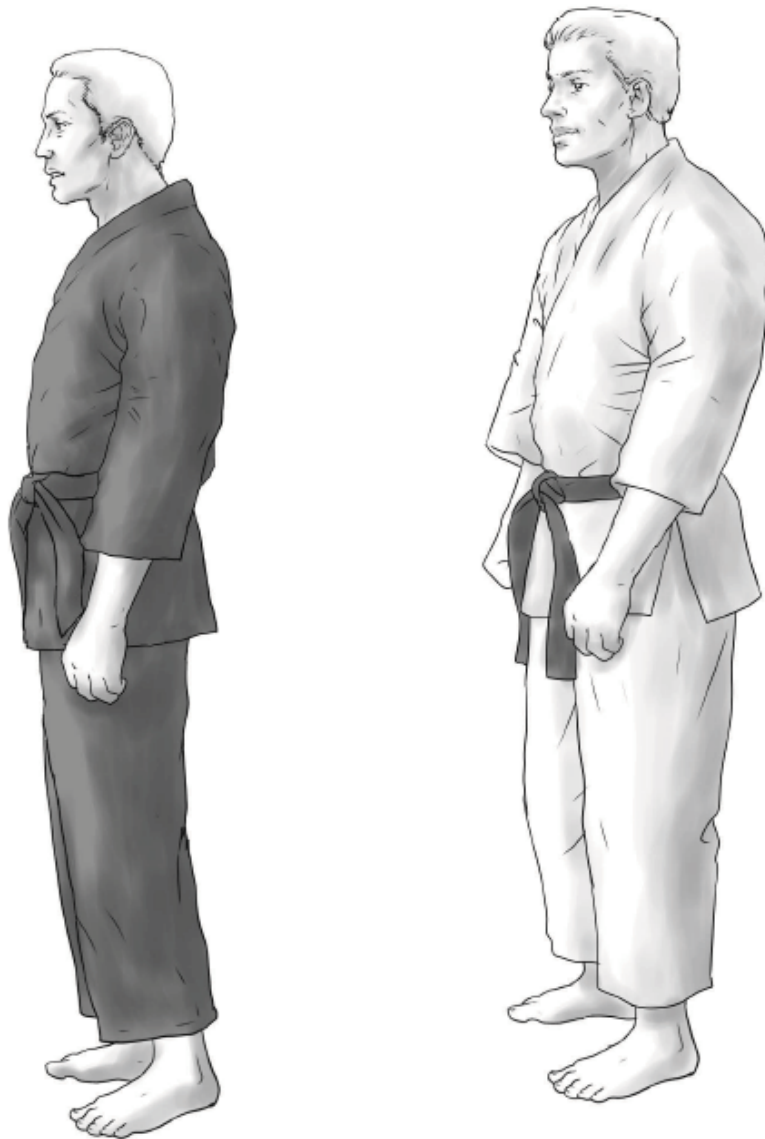
### *Trust Exercises*

Because tension is so frequent a concomitant of stress, exercises that enable you to stay relaxed in a stressful situation are especially beneficial. The pushing hands exercise that we have described already (see pp. 218–221) is a good example of this, especially when it has attained speed and vigour. If you do not remain relaxed, you simply cannot do the exercise; but, at the same time, you know that you are pushing hands with someone who is trying to unbalance you or to take some other kind of tactical advantage. Also, you can add degrees of stress by means other than increasing speed and vigour. Try staring into one another's eyes as you push hands: excessive eye contact is dis-

turbing at the best of times; or try pushing hands blindfolded or with your eyes closed.

Here are three simple “trust” exercises that will enable you to explore for yourself the relation between stress, tension and relaxation. The idea in each case is not primarily that you should trust your partner but that you should learn to trust yourself to “let go”: to override fear under conditions of stress.

1. Partner A stands in front of Partner B and topples rigidly over backwards like a tree, making no effort to save himself – and implicitly trusting Partner B not to let him fall.



*Partner A stands in front of Partner B ...*



*... and topples over backwards, trusting Partner B to catch him*

2. Partner A lies on his back, with Partner B kneeling behind him and holding his head in his cupped hands. For Partner A, the object of the exercise is to relax his whole body, including his neck, making no muscular effort to support his head. He knows that if Partner B lets go of his head it will bang on the ground – but he must still remain perfectly relaxed, trusting Partner B not to let this happen. (We have, incidentally, seen people fall asleep during this exercise. If you can do that, you have certainly mastered the art of relaxation.)



*Partner A lies on his back, with Partner B kneeling behind him and holding his head in his hands. Partner A must relax completely, trusting Partner B not to let his head bang on the ground*

3. Partner B leads Partner A around the dojo while Partner A keeps his eyes closed or – better still – wears a thick blindfold. Partner A's task is to remain completely relaxed, entirely trusting Partner B not to let him bump into anything.

The advantage of these exercises is that they create perceptible levels of stress but with no possibility of real catastrophe. You will probably find the self-relinquishment that they require difficult at first, especially if you practise them with someone whom you do not know well; but overcoming the difficulty is the whole point. Trust exercises will make you acquainted with your worst enemy. No doubt the reader will be able to devise other ways of creating stress and learning to cope with it. Kata practice blindfolded or in

the dark is an example of something that can be done along the same lines.

### **Relaxation and the Control of Space**

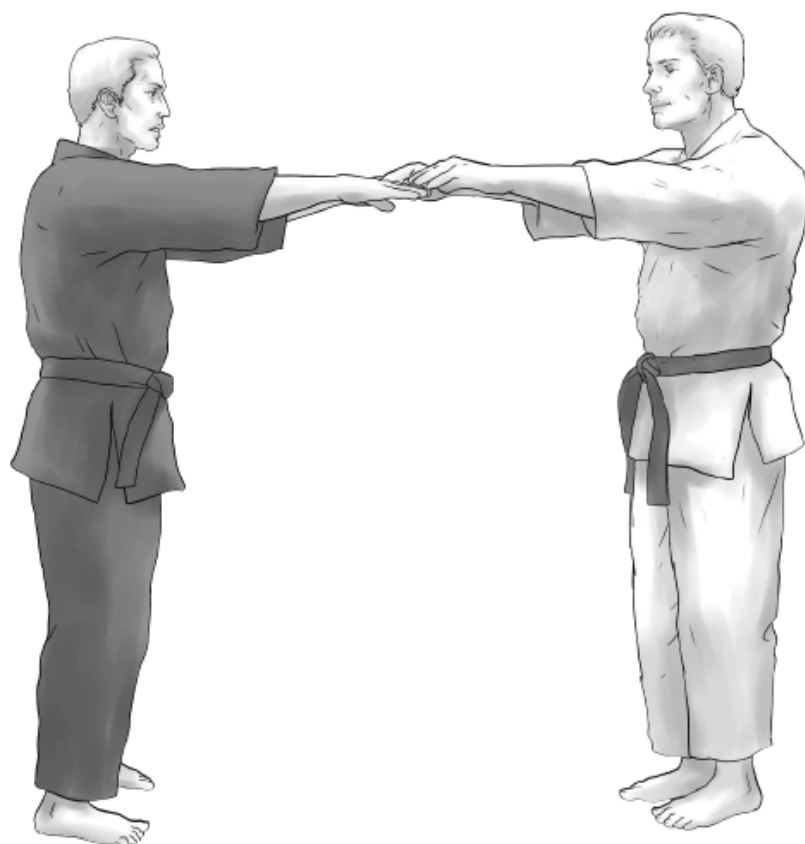
Everyone is familiar with the idea of personal space; everyone has his own private bubble: the area around him, defined by an invisible boundary, within which he feels safe and comfortable. The boundary is not a rigid one. Different people have different conceptions about how far their personal space extends, and these conceptions naturally vary according to (for example) whether they are with friends or strangers. There are also cultural differences that can lead to awkwardness: people from some cultures seem to need a smaller or larger private bubble than others do. But a bubble of some kind seems to be a universal psychological need. No one likes to have his or her personal space entered by a stranger or against his will. Even in circumstances that are not particularly threatening it feels uncomfortable – anyone who has ever stood in a crowded lift or on a packed underground train will know this. In less benign circumstances – confronted by an aggressive or angry or violent individual – it is a good deal more than uncomfortable, and a typical feature of aggressive behaviour is that an aggressor will try to intimidate you by invading your personal space. Considered under this aspect, an assault is nothing more than a violent entry into your private bubble; self-defence is the gesture that you make to reclaim it.

Clearly, the management of personal space is integral to both psychological wellbeing and personal safety. Equally clearly, maintaining or reclaiming it as an aspect of self-defence requires that we be able to control distances by moving with decision, speed and fluency under conditions that are urgent and frightening. But, as we have seen, one of the characteristic untrained reactions to fear is to freeze. It is essential, therefore, to learn not only how to relax under stress, but also how to relax and move under stress.



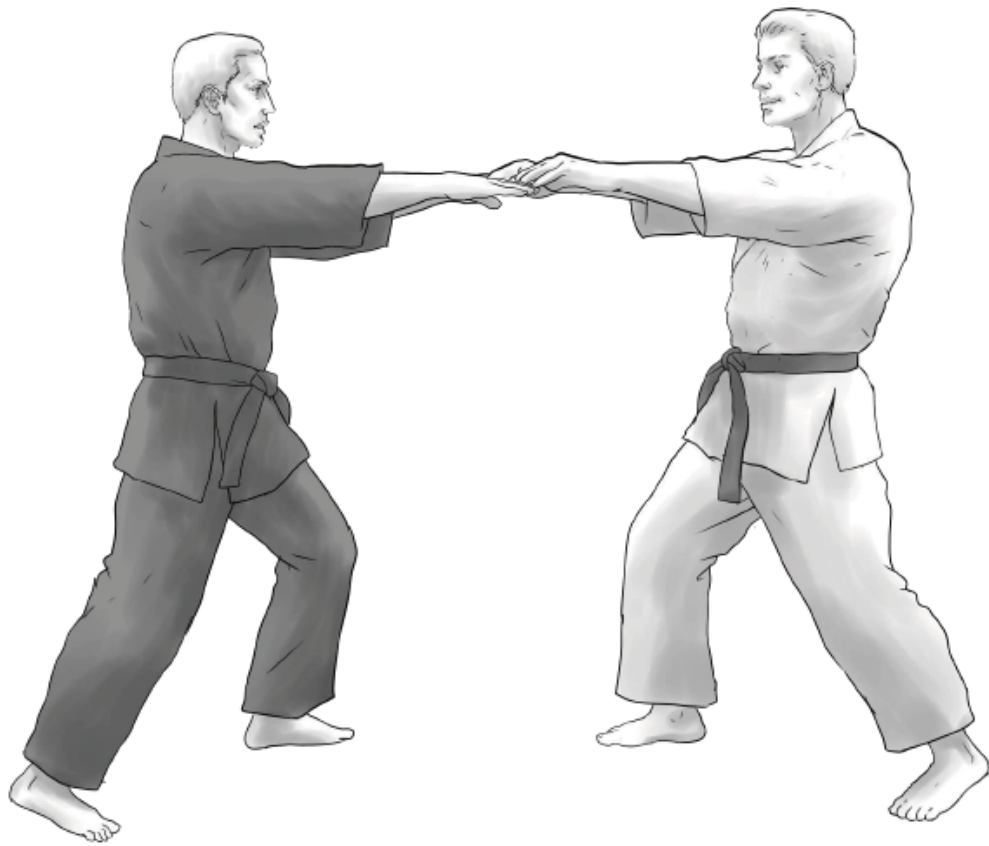
Once again, the pushing hands exercise in its more advanced and dynamic aspects is a good way of training the mind/body gestalt to react to stress or threat with fluid and unpremeditated movement. The following suggestions will also be found useful. As in the previous section, this is not a complete list; you should certainly feel free to devise methods of your own.

1. This exercise was developed by Harada Mitsusuke of Karate-do Shotokai and regarded by him as having great value as a method of teaching effective distance control. Indeed, in the fairly recent past Shotokai karateka in the United Kingdom seemed to spend most of their time practising it. In its simplest form, two people stand facing each other with their arms outstretched in front of them, just touching one another's fingertips. This is an absolutely safe personal space (though larger than most people require) because, at this distance, neither partner can reach the other, even with a kick.



*This is an absolutely safe personal space because, at this distance, neither partner can reach the other, even with a kick*

The object of the exercise is for each partner to defend his personal space against the other's increasingly resolute attempts to enter it. The partners move across the floor, one walking backwards and the other forwards. When they reach the wall, they change direction and come back the other way, maintaining contact with their fingertips at all times. For each partner, the objective is (a) to get close enough to the other to touch his body and (b) to prevent the other from doing the same thing to him. Each partner must try to keep the other at a distance neither greater nor smaller than the length of their outstretched arms.



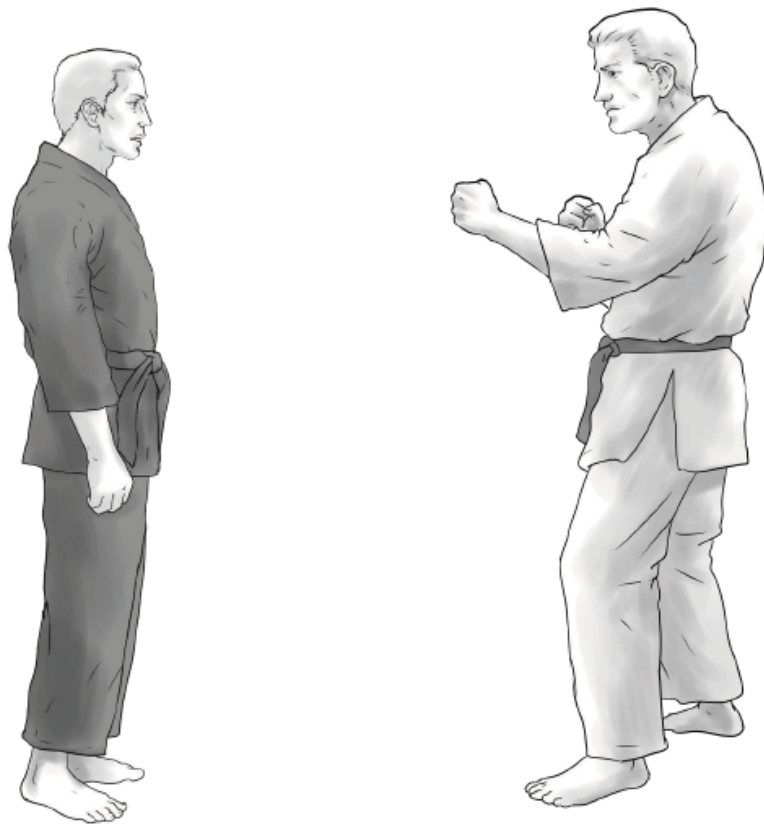
*Moving backwards and forwards, each partner must try to keep the other at a distance neither greater nor smaller than the length of their outstretched arms*

This exercise should be done slowly and uncompetitively at first, but with increasing speed and determination and with sudden and unexpected changes of direction as the participants try to take one

another by surprise. At its most advanced it is done at a brisk run. As with pushing hands, you cannot do this exercise unless you are relaxed and can move readily, but speed and the determination of your partner to enter your bubble will put you under a degree of stress that you will have to overcome. As with the “trust” exercises, there is stress, but no one will die if it goes wrong.

This exercise can, of course, be done out of doors if your dojo is not big enough. You should be careful about practising it at speed in bare feet on a wooden floor. The sudden and rapid changes of direction that it requires will generate a lot of friction, and you will develop painful blisters if you are not careful.

2. This exercise can be regarded as a kind of preliminary to the practice of tai sabaki as described on pages 221–222. One partner attacks the other; the role of the other is to evade the attack by stepping away from it or around it.



*White Gi is about to attack Black Gi; Black Gi's role ...*



*... is to evade the attack by stepping away from it or around it*

The point here is to train not self-defence as such, but calm immediacy of movement under stress. The partner receiving the attack makes no block or counter-attack. His only objective is to move out of danger. The above illustrations show the exercise at beginner's level. The amount of stress, and hence the degree of calmness and relaxation required, can be heightened by reducing the distance and increasing the speed, power and unpredictability of the attacks. Eventually the exercise can become a kind of fast and furious chasing game. An important part of it is to make the evasive movements as small as possible: to let every miss be a narrow one. As we have said before, evasion is not flight, but tactical retreat, and it is vital to develop the confidence to work at close ranges.

The exercises so far described are meant to develop the mind/body gestalt in relation to what one might call the "ju" side of Goju, or the black or "yin" aspect of the taijitu: softness, fluency of

movement and evasion. It is time now to look at the “go” or “yang” side.

### **Disinhibition and Reaction**

There is an enormous difference between striking and kicking in the dojo and striking and kicking in earnest. The latter is far harder to do than many sincere and dedicated karateka realise; certainly it is harder to do than “sport” karateka realise. We have said something about the disabling effect of fear. We come now to something that, for many people, is much more pervasive and harder to deal with – partly because the problem that it presents is one of which they are often unaware.

All ordinary adults – by which we mean sane people who are not violent criminals – have passed more or less successfully through prolonged and complex processes of upbringing and socialisation. We have been taught to conform, at any rate for most of the time, to the norms that others around us acknowledge. We have been taught to suppress, if not always to rise above, our worst selves. On the whole, we behave according to the values of our culture not only because we fear the consequences of not doing so, but because we have had instilled in us a sense of right and wrong. Most people carry around with them a well developed set of inhibitions or taboos. In the civilised world it is wrong to hurt people, wrong to grab for oneself, wrong to be brutally selfish, right to consider others and defer to them – and so forth. Perhaps these principles are sometimes more honoured in the breach than in the observance, but in the main they are principles to which ordinary people in ordinary circumstances subscribe.

But consider the implications of this in extreme or extraordinary circumstances: in the event of a violent attack on your person or on a loved one. Over and above the freeze reaction that we have considered, another obstacle now presents itself: the learnt behaviour of the socialised human being. It is against all your training to let yourself go: to explode into violence, to fight, to hurt or injure someone – to revert to the behaviour of the

savage. Indeed, did we not in chapter 1 say some very fine and high-minded things about the sort of person that the karateka should be – gentle, controlled, forbearing, peaceable? Here, then, the mind/body gestalt is presented with a dilemma – and another possibility of fatal indecision.

If you sit at home and consider the abstract possibility of an attack, or if you rehearse violent scenarios in the dojo, you may think that you do not suffer from such inhibitions. Possibly you are right. But experience suggests that most people are a good deal more inhibited than they think they are. We have often seen students who, asked to give a “kiai” yell – to scream with all their heart and all their might – find themselves unable to do it. They are unable to do it because they can’t “let themselves go” – which is only another way of saying that they can’t override the training in self-restraint that the ordinary civilised human being has undergone. Also, the sort of play-fighting that one so often sees in the dojo does nothing to dispel the inhibitions that we are talking about. You know that no one is going to hurt you, and that you are not going to hurt anyone. It isn’t real.

Choosing not to defend yourself, on the Socratic principle that it is better to suffer evil than do it, is a moral choice that it is open to anyone to make: provided that it *is* a choice rather than a case of pusillanimous dithering. By all means turn the other cheek if that is what seems right to you. But if you do choose to defend yourself, we say again – and it cannot be said too often – that:

1. You must act instantaneously. The smallest hesitation, whether it arises from fear or scruples or a combination of both, will almost certainly mean your downfall.
2. You must act with total commitment. Half-hearted self-defence is no defence at all. It is, indeed, worse than no defence at all, because responses that lack conviction will only increase the level of arousal and make the situation worse.

What it boils down to, in the context of this section, is this: that you must find ways not only of overcoming the “freeze” reaction

to fear, but also of temporarily switching off the inhibitions that are characteristic of decent human beings. Notice the word “temporarily.” No one is suggesting that you should revert to savagery. Self-defence can and should be seen as a regrettable necessity in an extreme and abnormal predicament. Whatever is necessary to secure your safety can and should be done without anger or hatred. Nonetheless, if you are going to do it at all, the mind/body gestalt must be able to react instantly and reflexively to whatever situation has arisen. You may find this a good deal harder to do than you think you will. Here – repeating to some extent what we have said in chapter 4 – are some suggestions.

1. Quite apart from its unnerving effect on an attacker, few things are as disinhibiting as a totally committed and unselfconscious “kiai.” There is no point in emitting the kind of half-hearted and reticent yelp that one so often hears at “prescribed” points in a kata. It is vital to overcome the quasi-instinct to hold back. When you strike the makiwara or the bag, forget yourself – let yourself go. Scream with all the spirit and conviction that you have; yell as if you were trying to burst the dojo walls. Sasaki Sensei of Hida-shiki Kyouken-jutsu is said to be able to make temple bells ring with the force of his kiai. Imagine yourself doing that. Of course you will feel uncomfortable at first. Overcoming the “wrong” feeling that accompanies letting yourself go – switching off the inhibition – is precisely the point.

2. In the same way, when you train on the makiwara or bag, train as if everything you love depended on it. Routine or merely dutiful training – training as a wearisome chore – is useless. Train as if each blow and each kick were the last act of your life. Every time you hit the makiwara or the bag, do so with the intention of breaking it or splitting it. The whole mind/body gestalt must be single-pointedly committed to the strike at the instant you make it. Each one should be a tremendous instant of explosive self-forgetfulness, like a sneeze or an orgasm. Let every strike be made with your whole being, with no part of you standing apart as a spectator. Strike without thought or emotion, with nothing

attached to your strike – no past, no future, no result, no fear of failure: just the eternal moment.

In this connection note that it is important to avoid rhythm in your makiwara training. A session of thump-thump-thump, with the blows coming like the ticking of a clock, will detract from the force and intentionality of each strike. Let each be new, unique and self-contained, not just one of a series.

3. When using the makiwara, have someone give you a random and unpredictable signal to strike (“now!” or a click of the fingers or something of the kind). When you strike, aim to reduce the time between the sound of the signal and the sound of the strike to its smallest possible minimum. The two sounds can never be completely simultaneous, but try to get as close to simultaneity as is humanly possible. Apart from anything else, this exercise will train you in the art of delivering short-range “untelegraphed” strikes, because the further a strike has to travel between inception and destination the greater the time-lag between the two sounds will be. Make sure, however, that reducing the distance does not reduce the power of your strikes. Cultivate “fajin”: a sudden explosion of completely uninhibited force.



Neither karate nor any other art is purely external, nor should the body be thought of as a mechanism that the mind leads or drives. Mind and body must be merged into one indivisible and spontaneous whole. There must be no space between thought and act: no mind – mushin. To the extent that mind and body are not integrated, there will be deliberation, hesitation, tension, indecision, and these things will hold you back and drain the effectiveness away from your karate. This unselfconscious and utter concentration of the self on the immediate present is hard to describe and even harder to achieve; this is why Zen teachers so often speak of a moment of satori (悟り) – realisation: a flash of sudden awareness that is non-verbal, inexpressible and intuitive. Train until you find it.



## 11: The Dojo

TO THE OUTSIDER, the observance of Japanese formality in an occidental dojo perhaps looks a little absurd, in much the way that, to some people, role-players who dress up in period costume and re-enact ancient battles do. Is it not a mere pose to go through elaborate rituals that belong to a culture so alien to your own? If the ritual is carried to excess or performed without understanding, the answer is probably Yes. Some European dojo are, in fact, a good deal more formal than Japanese ones are. A different and weightier point is one that we have mentioned already: that rituals of bowing and deference can be social mechanisms for instilling a mentality of compliance and reinforcing relationships of subordination and superordination. Within sensible limits, however, dojo etiquette – reishiki (礼式) – has a rationale that should not be overlooked, for two reasons.

1. The Okinawan and Japanese martial arts have a long tradition extending back through many centuries. The gendai or modern budo arts are relative newcomers, distinct from the koryu, the “old schools,” but they share the same cultural identity, and observing customary etiquette is a way of celebrating and remaining in touch with that identity. Considered at this level dojo etiquette is comparable to such things as academic dress and judges’ wigs and mayoral chains. It is a way of fostering a sense of continuity with the past that some people may think pompous or unnecessary, but which is at worst harmless. It cannot be a bad thing to be reminded of the achievements of the teachers of the past and to try to understand the culture in which their arts were formed.

2. Considered at a different level, dojo etiquette is more than an external observance or a quaint form of remembrance. It is one of

the things that expresses the difference between the martial arts and mere violence. Properly and thoughtfully performed, the formalities of the dojo provide karateka with constant reminders that they have embarked on a way of life in which courtesy, mindfulness, respect for others and self-restraint are of the essence. A parallel of sorts can be drawn with the Japanese chanoyu (茶の湯), the “tea ceremony.” Why make such a fuss over tea? Because doing so is a form of self-cultivation: a symbolic enactment of the virtues of courtesy by which the self is brought into harmony with the world.

The degree of formality observed varies from dojo to dojo. Too much, we suggest, can swamp the mind and become a distraction or worse; too little, and karate is on the way to becoming just another contact sport. If you are setting up a dojo, how much or how little formality you wish to have in it is a matter of choice. We shall here give a description of some practices that might be adopted without any risk of overdoing it. Bear in mind, though, that you will often come across ceremonial far more elaborate than what is described here. When visiting another dojo, one should always defer to the customs that are observed there.

## **Bowing**

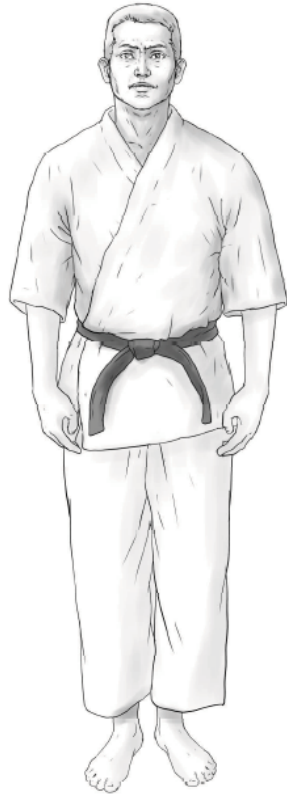
### *Seiza rei* (正座礼) (“*seated bow*”)

Seiza rei or zarei (座礼) is a low bow from a sitting/kneeling position used to mark the beginning and end of a practice session. On the instruction “ki o tsukete” (気をつけて) (it sounds like “kiotsketay”), which is, roughly, “attention please,” the students form a line facing the right-hand wall of the dojo with the teacher facing towards them. The students line up in rank order, ranging from the most senior on the teacher’s right-hand side to the most junior on his left. On the instruction “seiza,” all sit down in seiza. On the instruction “mokuso” (黙想) (“silent thought”) all close their eyes and sit in silence for perhaps half a minute, emptying their minds of distracting thoughts. On the instruction “seiza rei,”

all bow in the way illustrated below. This is not – or should not be – a way of reinforcing the dojo hierarchy. Teachers and students are bowing *to each other*, and, in doing so, all are showing respect for one another and for their art. In some dojo there are three separate opening and closing bows – to the front of the dojo (shomen ni rei; 正面に礼) to the teacher (sensei ni rei; 先生に礼) and to each other (otagai ni rei; 御互に礼). We suggest, however, that one act of formal respect, properly executed, is enough to begin and end a practice. The words of instruction are given either by the senior student present or by the teacher himself. As long as they are audible, there is absolutely no need for them to be barked out like the commands of a drill sergeant.

Every part of this opening and closing ceremony should be done slowly and with focus, never sloppily or casually. The following is the usual way of sitting in seiza and performing a seated bow:

1. Stand in musubi dachi or heisoku dachi.
2. Step to the rear with your left foot.
3. Kneel down on your left knee, placing your knee laterally opposite the heel of your right foot.
4. Kneel down on your right knee, with a comfortable distance between your knees.
5. Sit on your heels, placing your hands palm downwards on the tops of your thighs; relax and keep your back straight.
6. After a brief “mokusō,” place your left hand on the floor in front of you, followed immediately by your right. Bring the tips of your index fingers and thumbs together to form a triangular shape between your hands.
7. Lean forward and lower your forehead toward your hands.
8. After two or three seconds return to position 5, lifting your right hand off the floor first.
9. Stand up, raising your right knee first
10. Return to musubi dachi or heisoku dachi.



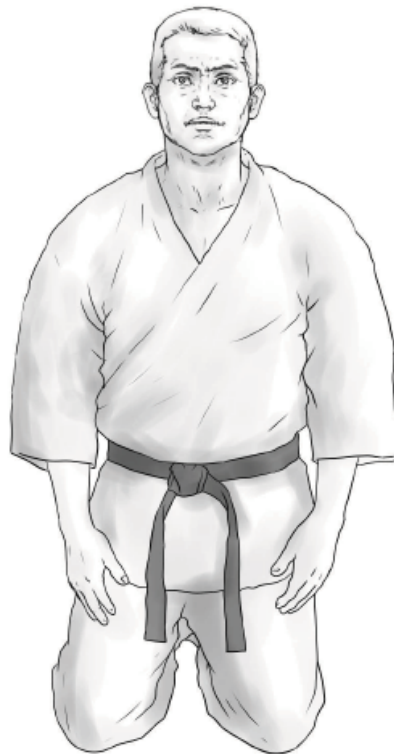
*Seiza rei: stand in musubi dachi or heisoku dachi*



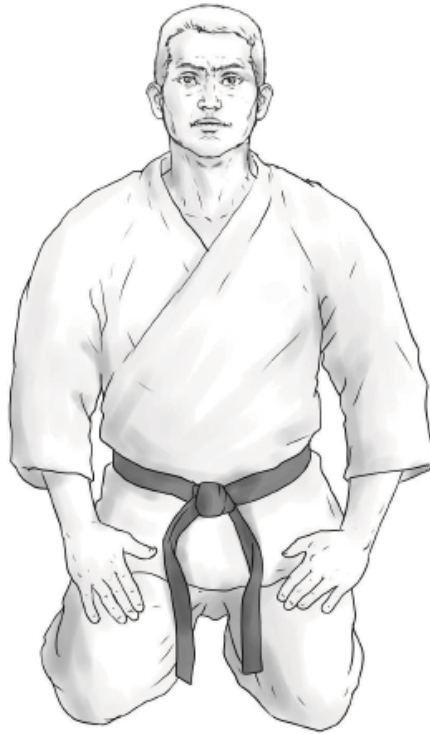
*Step to the rear with your left foot*



*Kneel down on your left knee, placing your knee laterally  
opposite the heel of your right foot*



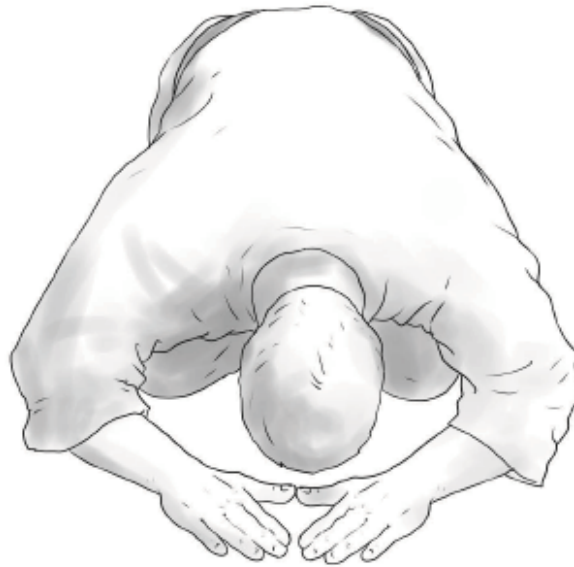
*Kneel down on your right knee, with a comfortable  
distance between your knees*



*Sit on your heels, with your hands palm downwards on the tops of your thighs; relax and keep your back straight*



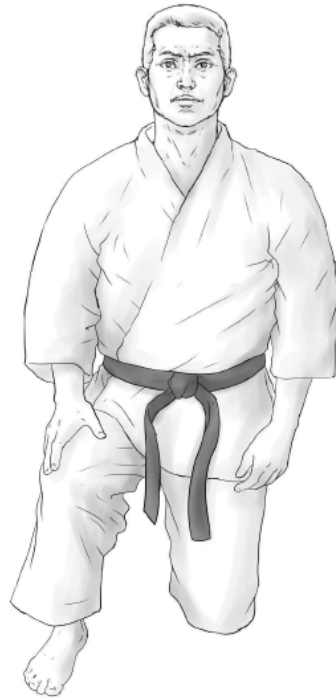
*After a brief "mokusō," place your left hand on the floor followed by your right, forming a triangular shape*



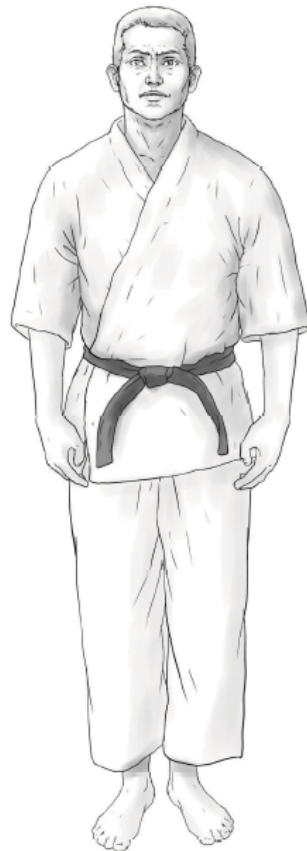
*Lower your forehead down towards your hands*



*Return to your upright position after two or three seconds,  
lifting your right hand off the floor first*



*Stand up, raising your right knee first*



*Return to your original stance*



***Ritsu Rei (立礼) (“standing bow”)***

Social bowing is very much a part of everyday Japanese life, and many subtle shades of meaning – thanks, respect, greeting, apology – are conveyed by how you bow in various circumstances and to different people. It is still possible to give unintentional offence by getting it wrong, though modern Japanese are in general less punctilious about such things than their elders were. For our purposes, it is enough to say that the deeper the bow, the greater the respect, and that respect is shown also by lowering the eyes.

Ritsu rei (also called tachi rei, 立ち礼) is a less profound courtesy than seiza rei. It is a bow from a standing position that may be used in four ways:

1. As you enter or leave the dojo, stand in the doorway in musubi dachi with your hands resting against the outside of your thighs and incline your body forwards about thirty degrees, holding the bow for two or three seconds. You should lower your eyes as you bow, because you are displaying humility before (a) the art and its traditions, and (b) the dojo, the “way-place,” in which the art is practised. Some people say “yoroshiku onegai itashimasu” (よろしくお願いいたします) – a conventional way of announcing oneself; “please receive me kindly” – as they bow.
2. Before speaking to the teacher, bow as above, again lowering your eyes – this time in deference to the teacher’s experience (though many western teachers do not feel comfortable with this extra degree of deference). One often hears people say “onegaishimasu” before speaking to the teacher or asking a question. Onegaishimasu (御願いします) is a polite or humble form of “please”; literally it is “I respectfully request.” Having had one’s question answered, it is polite to say “domo arigato gozaimasu” (どうもありがとうございます), which is a formal “thank you” (some people also say this as they bow out of the dojo). Merely saying “arigato” (ありがと) or “domo” (どうも), as one might in ordinary conversation, is too casual for the dojo.

3. At the beginning and end of a kata, bow as above, this time with the intention of expressing respect for what you are about to do and for what you have done (and see pp. 192–197).

4. Before and after practising with a partner, bow to each other as above, but somewhat less deeply and without lowering your eyes. This is not, as is so often taught, because “you mustn’t take your eyes off an opponent.” It is because you are showing respect to one another as equals. Do not, however, stare straight into your partner’s face, especially if he is Japanese. Most people in the West have been brought up to look people in the eye, and to suppose that avoidance of eye contact is a sign of shiftiness or insincerity. It is as well to remember that the Japanese consider constant eye contact rude or aggressive.



*A polite or deferential bow: begin from musubi dachi ...*



*... bow from the waist, and lower your eyes as you bow.  
When bowing to a practice partner the bow should  
be slightly less deep than this, and you should not  
lower your eyes*

Now and then it might be necessary to apologise for some mistake or inadvertence. (The Japanese tend to apologise a lot, often for things that do not obviously call for an apology.) This should be done with a lowish “deferential” bow, accompanied by “sumimasen” (済みません) or “gomen nasai” (ごめんなさい), both of which are apologies, though “gomen nasai” is rather informal. “Moushiwake arimasen” (申し訳ありません) is more formal – a more serious apology – than “sumimasen.”

It is not a good idea to make a fetish of bowing, nor should there ever be any sense of grovelling as distinct from politeness and proper deference. If you are going to bow, however, do it properly. In Japan, not bowing at all, or giving only a cursory nod, is often a way of signalling your superiority over someone and putting him in his place. Even when bowing to an equal, your bow should be deliberate, formal and held for two or three seconds.

### *Some General Courtesies*

As well as bowing, general attention to politeness will contribute a good deal to an atmosphere of respect and consideration in the dojo. We mention, in no particular order, a few things that are common or customary.

The teacher is traditionally addressed as Sensei (先生) rather than by his name. The literal meaning of the word is “born before” – i.e. “elder” – but it is the usual form of address for a teacher regardless of whether or not the teacher is older than you. Some people in the West do not insist on, or even like, being called Sensei; others do. It would be ridiculous for anyone to expect his students to call him Sensei outside the dojo, but we have come across teachers who do this. It is more or less understood that no one under the rank of sandan is “Sensei.”

The usual and proper way of referring to a teacher is as Surname Sensei, not Sensei Surname (in just the same way that Japanese surnames or family names come before “given” names). Senior students who are not the teacher are often referred to as [Surname] Sempai (先輩) – “older companion” – in the dojo.

The Japanese are very reticent about names and familiarity; less so than was once the case, perhaps, but still to a greater degree than most Westerners are used to. If you have or meet a

Japanese teacher, it is impolite to call him by his “given” name even after you have got to know him. Japanese given names are used only among family and close friends, or by older people speaking to younger. Surname San is the correct form of address, or, more formally, Surname Sama. As a general rule, it is rude to call or refer to someone by his family name without the “San” suffix.

Traditionally, such titles of honour as Hanshi (範士), Shihan (師範), Kyoshi (教士), etc. are not used as forms of address, though this tradition is nowadays not always observed.<sup>1</sup>

Generally speaking, it is considered impolite to turn your back on the teacher or to walk between teacher and students.

An alert and respectful body language should be maintained in the dojo. One should walk quickly and smartly, never ambling or slouching; one should not sit down (except in seiza at the proper times) or lean against the wall or stand other than with your hands at your sides. Instructions should be carried out promptly and wholeheartedly. Sloppy body language is, after all, often an unspoken gesture of indifference or contempt. If you do not feel able to treat the dojo and its members with respect, you should not be there.

When the teacher speaks to you or tells you to do something, show that you have heard and understood by bowing and

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<sup>1</sup> The titles – shogo (称号) – Renshi, Kyoshi and Hanshi were devised by the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai as ways of honouring senior martial artists. They are official Japanese titles with the Emperor of Japan as the *fons honorum*; contrary to what is sometimes supposed, they do not belong automatically to anyone who holds a dan grade above a certain level. Strictly speaking, shogo can be conferred only by the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai, but they have come increasingly into use – especially among the disreputable – as more or less self-conferred titles. We would be very suspicious of anyone who insisted on an obviously self-inflicted Japanese honorific, or on any of the various English equivalents that have appeared during the past few decades: Grand Master, Great Grand Master, and so forth.

saying “hai, Sensei” (はい先生) – “yes, Teacher.” The word “osu” (押忍) – pronounced “oss!” – is often shouted in the dojo in response to an instruction or as a general expression of acknowledgement or resolve (Kyokushinkai karateka use this word a great deal). “Osu” in this context is a contraction of “oshi shinobu,” which means something like, “in spite of everything, persevere.” (The same word, but as a contraction of “ohayo gozaimasu” (お早うございます) – “good morning” – is an informal greeting (“hi!”) between male friends.)

Practice should be conducted without unnecessary conversation; it is disrespectful to everyone in the dojo to chatter. Doing so has safety implications also.

When handing something – even a small object – to somebody, the Japanese custom is to use both hands; similarly, the receiver uses both hands to take it. Using only one hand is regarded as expressing a lack of regard for what is being given or received. Giving and receiving should be accompanied by a bow. How low the bow should be will depend on whom you are handing the object to or receiving it from.

If you hand an edged weapon to someone, the edge should be turned towards you and the hilt should be on your left hand side (so that the receiver can take it with his right hand). Again, the transaction should be accompanied by a suitable bow on both sides.

Except in special circumstances, shoes and everyday clothes should not be worn in the dojo.

Your gi should be kept clean and in good repair. If you normally wear a black gi, it is a good idea to have a white one that you can use if visiting a dojo where a white gi is worn.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The karate gi is not, as it happens, a particularly traditional garment; there are many old photographs of Okinawan karateka training in shorts, loincloths, and so on. Our own preference is for a black gi, simply on grounds of practicality (the white gi in our

With the exception of bottles of water, food and drink should not be brought into the dojo, nor should one chew gum or suck sweets. Perhaps it is needless to say that one should not smoke.

When entering and leaving the dojo, walk around the edge of the dojo rather than across the floor.

If you are proposing to open a dojo, you will be well advised to give some thought to how seriously you want to take dojo etiquette. Most modern westerners have been brought up to have a healthy disrespect for authority and fuss, but respectful behaviour in the dojo has a humanising effect that deserves to be recognised. We do not recommend the interminable bowing and scraping that one sometimes sees, but we should be sorry to see etiquette entirely neglected, even if you teach one-to-one or in small groups. The principles of common politeness that stand to reason everywhere are important, but they are not quite enough. The training of the mind in discipline and respect is as central to effective practice and self-improvement as the training of the body is, and casualness, once introduced, has a way of spreading. The most important thing is that the rules of the dojo, whatever they are, should be accepted by everyone willingly and with understanding, and not shouldered reluctantly as tiresome or incomprehensible burdens.

### **Safety**

In the nature of the case, karate is an activity in which injuries occur. Anyone who practises – certainly with any degree of realism – has to be prepared to accept a certain amount of risk and

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illustrations is used mainly for the sake of contrast); but many people feel strongly that white (as symbolising purity, clearness of spirit and preparedness for death) is a more appropriate colour. As always, one should respect the preferences of one's host in such things. Colours other than white or black, and jackets with multiple badges sewn onto them, are universally frowned on in traditional karate circles.

take a few knocks. There is no way of creating a training environment that is one hundred per cent safe, but attention to a few common-sense principles will minimise the danger of accident and injury.

Everyone should accept that he is responsible not only for his own safety but for that of everyone in the dojo. Look out for one another; treat your fellow karateka as if they were your brothers and sisters. Stay alert: do not become so wrapped up in what you are doing that you no longer notice what is going on around you. The cultivation of all-round awareness is an aspect of training that will serve you as much outside the dojo as in it.

Attention should be given from the first to ukemi, the art of falling safely. Everyone, for example, has an instinct to stick out an arm to "save" himself from falling. Doing this is a short road to injury, and the instinct is one that you should train out of yourself without delay.

Partner work, makiwara training and kumite must always be closely supervised by someone of suitable experience and authority; this is one of the many arguments against large classes.

Students and instructors must be covered by proper insurance.

There should always be someone in the dojo with a knowledge of first aid; there should also be a first aid kit adequate for the treatment of minor injuries, and access to a telephone in the event of something more serious.

Live blades should not be used in training, even by the very experienced. If you disregard this advice, you should understand clearly that you do so at your own risk. It is hardly necessary to add that real firearms must never be brought into the dojo. Even with dummy or wooden weapons, great care



must be exercised, and the inexperienced should not train with weapons at all.

Alcohol must not be consumed before or during training. Even small quantities of alcohol alter mood and affect reactions.

Water can be brought into the dojo to avoid dehydration during vigorous practice in hot weather, but it should be in plastic rather than glass bottles.

Karate gi are often sold with arms and legs that are too long, mainly because heavy cotton fabric will shrink a good deal during the first hot wash. It is surprisingly easy to trip over your own trouser legs, especially since gi trousers – especially ones with the traditional non-elasticated waist – have a tendency to work down slightly during practice. It is also possible for someone's thumb to be caught in a long sleeve (one of the authors once dislocated his left thumb in exactly this way). Sleeves should be shortened (rather than rolled up) to mid forearm length, and trousers shortened to a point well above the ankle.

Practice should be conducted well away from windows and radiators.

Jewellery, apart from sleeper studs, should not be worn in the dojo; rings that cannot be removed should be well covered with tape.

How much protective gear to wear during kumite is a matter of judgment and will depend on how much contact is used. It is certainly prudent to use groin protectors and gum-shields and for women to wear chest protectors.

Spectacles should not be worn in the dojo. If you cannot do without them or wear contact lenses, it is easy to have a pair of squash goggles made up to your prescription.

There should be no unnecessary talking during practice. Apart from the fact that it is rude to do so, engaging in private conversations will distract your attention from what you are doing, and others' from what they are doing. Practising with less than full attention both decreases the value of your practice and increases the risk of an accident.

## Grading

If you are senior or experienced enough to be thinking of opening your own dojo, perhaps you will wish to be or remain a member of an organisation with a prescribed "syllabus." In that case, you will have no choice other than to accept the organisation's grading regulations. On the other hand, perhaps you are intending to operate an independent dojo and grade your students according to your own standards. For people in the latter category, we have a few comments and suggestions to make.

Grading, in our experience, has become the bane of the karate world. Nothing – nothing – causes more backbiting and quarrelling in the dojo than the question of who deserves what grade and why. Higaonna Morio – whose own tenth dan has been thoroughly bickered about by people old enough to know better – says:

I agree that for students [belts] are a way of measuring progress, but at a high price. They cause discontent, squabbles, and lead to excessive pride in self which is the opposite of what martial arts training should develop in a student. Everyone has different standards, so inevitably there are differences between the level of students from different dojo even when they have the same grade, and then the politics start. I believe that there should be black belts and white belts only, and that the focus should be on training, not on accumulating rank.<sup>3</sup>

This is a view that we entirely share. Grading is like a bottle of whisky. There is no harm in it. The harm comes from what people

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<sup>3</sup> Interview in *Dragon Times*, Issue 10.

do with it. As we have said before, grading has assumed a ridiculous degree of importance in people's minds, and karate practice tends to be seen as a journey towards the coveted "black belt." The truth, of course, is that karate practice is not a journey towards anything. If you are not practising for the sake of self-perfection in the here and now, you are not practising at all. That seems to be a hard truth to swallow, but you have to swallow it if you are to escape the delusion of ego. Learning not to need constant ego-reinforcement – in the form of coloured belts or anything else – is part of the "perfection of character" that is the goal of karate. If, as a teacher, you intend to retain the practice of grading as "a way of measuring progress," at least do everything you can to convey the message that grading is not ultimately important, and that it must never be the point or focus of practice.

In our view, there is no need to have more than six kyu grades. A proliferation of kyu grades with precious little difference between each one tends, to put it bluntly, to be no more than an excuse for charging grading fees and a way of keeping the customers hungry. Maintain high standards; no one should pass to a higher grade unless he is clearly ready to do so, and grading must never be used as a way of rewarding favourites or punishing dissenters. Let there be a significant difference between each grade, and a significant lapse of time between each one. Perhaps you agree that "there should be black belts and white belts only." If, on the other hand, you want to continue with the use of coloured obi or "belts" – and we repeat that there is nothing traditional about this – you can, of course, choose whatever colours you like. By way of example, Harada Mitsusuke's Karate Do Shotokai uses a six kyu grade system with the following colours:

Sixth kyu – rokkyu (六級) – red belt

Fifth kyu – gokyu (五級) – yellow belt

Fourth kyu – yonkyu (四級) – orange belt

Third kyu – sankyu (三級) – green belt

Second kyu – nikyu (二級) – blue belt

First kyu – ikkyu (一級) – brown belt

How long will it take to get a black belt? This is one of those “piece of string” questions. It simply is not possible to answer it sensibly except by pointing out that it isn’t the right question to be asking. Traditionally one should award dan grades only up to two levels below one’s own (i.e. fifth dans can award no grade higher than third dan), though how and when this “tradition” began we do not know. Certainly no teacher should promote himself to a higher dan grade. One should remember too that one’s dan grade is only an expression of the opinion of whoever awarded it: it is not an absolute badge of mastery. The question of whether or not you are a master has nothing to do with the colour of the belt you wear.

A rather ludicrous illustration of the mystique that surrounded the “black belt” when the martial arts began to migrate to the West can be found in Ian Fleming’s novel *Goldfinger* (1959). After Oddjob, his Korean enforcer, has kicked a piece out of a marble mantelpiece to intimidate James Bond, the villain Goldfinger says:

Have you ever heard of karate? No? Well that man is one of the three in the world who have achieved the Black Belt in karate. Karate is a branch of judo, but it is to judo what a Spandau [machine gun] is to a catapult.

This, of course, is ignorant nonsense, as is the whole idea of the “karate expert” as a kind of compunctionless killing machine; but a lot of what people believe about the martial arts seems to involve a sizeable element of ignorant nonsense. Returning now to reality: the first “black belt” – the first dan (shodan; 初段) – should be awarded in recognition of the fact that the student has achieved a solid grasp of the fundamentals and is now ready to proceed to more advanced and self-directed work. Shodan is “lowest degree.” Contrary to what is so often thought, its attainment does not indicate that its holder has become an expert with

no more to learn. On the contrary, it means that the student is now in a position to understand how little he knows and to set about building further knowledge on a firm foundation.

In our view, grades should be awarded, if at all, as expressions of the teacher's continuous assessment of the student as a rounded individual, *not* after a formal examination based on a syllabus. We say this because experience suggests that a fixed syllabus encourages students to train only with a view to passing the next test: to think of their karate as a matter of ticking off techniques on a list. It may be objected that continuous assessment makes everything depend on the subjective impression of the teacher; but why – if the teacher is the sort of person worth having as a teacher – is this an objection?

In a perfect world, perhaps there would be no such thing as grading. In the imperfect world in which we find ourselves, grading should at any rate be regarded only a rule of thumb upon which nothing important depends. Grading syllabuses, we are told, exist to maintain standards. If they do, they have not answered to their purpose very well. More to the point, what exactly does this mean? We have said already that there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all karate – no such thing as a standard to which everyone must or can conform. Karate practice should be about the development of the individual *as* an individual, and all individuals develop in their own ways, according to their own temperaments, and at their own pace. The conscientious fostering of personal development is what the teacher should be concerned with, not the endless moulding of replicas. Grading syllabuses exist to reward conformity, and it is not clear to us that rewarding conformity is a good thing to do.



We conclude the main part of our text with the words of Nagamine Shoshin at the end of his book *The Essence of Okinawan Karate-Do*:

Amidst the noise and rapid changes of modern society, one can find in karate-do a peace of mind that will never be shaken. Through karate training one acquires stoicism and self-control which will prepare him fully to meet life's many responsibilities. Karate training takes devotees along the path of self-development. Every movement, every step in karate training requires one to make a total commitment of self. Complete and unswerving focus and power in karate practice help one to understand himself because he is required to fuse his entire being through physical motion. Because the self, in all its aspects and complexities, must be totally committed in karate training, the ability to commit the self will also carry over into all aspects of life. Karate training helps to end a dualistic way of life in which a person is separated by lack of commitment from the world around him. From this comes peace of mind.

The fusing of mind and body in karate is indescribably beautiful and spiritual. The flow of the mind, when totally absorbed during kata practice, brings a person into total contact with the essence and core of his being. One is both humbled and uplifted by this knowledge of self.

If in these pages we have sometimes seemed dogmatic, that is only because we have spoken with sincere conviction and on the strength of much thought and experience. We say again that it is not our wish to dictate an orthodoxy to anyone or to preach to anyone about how they ought to live. If you want your karate to be a game or a sport or a social activity that you "do" twice a week, that is up to you. But we know that karate can be much more than this. We know that the humble and diligent study of karate as a way of self-perfection can transform and enrich the whole of life. The door is always open.

## 12: A Glossary of Japanese Terms

Some knowledge of Japanese terminology is indispensable to the traditional karateka. It is worth remembering that Japanese nouns have no plural form (like “sheep” in English): the plural of kata is kata, not katas; the plural of dojo is dojo, not dojos. Pronunciation is not always obvious from the written form of a word in Romaji (i.e. the Latin alphabet). It is a good idea to hear Japanese spoken by a native if you can.

### *General Terms*

- Age (上げ):** Rising; moving upwards.
- Aikido (合気道):** The throwing and locking art founded by Ueshiba Morihei (1883–1969); technically, aikido can be regarded as a reformulation and development of Daito Ryu aiki jutsu, the art most deeply studied by Ueshiba Osensei. Aikido has been much – and on the whole unjustly – criticised in recent years for its unrealistic and impractical character.
- Ate (当):** A strike; hit; blow.
- Budo (武道):** “Martial ways”: a generic term for the Japanese martial arts.
- Bunkai (分解):** Analysis or dissection of karate kata with a view to discovering oyo (qv).
- Bushi (武士):** “Gentleman warrior”: the “complete” martial artist.
- Bushido (武士道):** “Warrior path” or “warrior way”: the ideology of service and self-sacrifice associated with the Samurai (qv) of Japan.

- Chudan (中段):** Mid section; the area of the body roughly between the waist and the top of the chest.
- Dai (大):** Large; greater.
- Dai (第):** "Number" in an ordinal sense, i.e. dai ichi = number 1; dai ni = number 2. Dai should not be confused with kazu, which is "number" in a nominal sense: i.e. 1 is a "kazu," but "kazu ichi" does not mean "number one" of a series.
- Dan (段):** Level or rank or degree; in karate and other arts, the ranks into which yudansha (qv) are divided, usually ranging from shodan ("lowest degree") to judan ("tenth degree"). Holders of (often self-awarded) tenth dans have multiplied in recent years. Traditionally, a school or "style" had only one judan: its founder or its founder's successor. Dan grades (and all grades) indicate only the relative standing of their holders within a particular school or organisation; there is nothing absolute or objective about them.
- Deshi (弟子):** Student; pupil; an "uchi deshi" is an "inside student" who lives with, or who is in constant attendance on, the teacher.
- Do (道):** Way or path, with the connotation, in such expressions as "karate-do" or "kendo," of an ethical way of self-perfection; cf. Jutsu.
- Dojo (道場):** The "way-place" in which an art is practised. A dojo is not necessarily a building or in a building; a garden or park can be a dojo. In all cases, the dojo should be treated with respect by those who use it.
- Gedan (下段):** Lower level; the area of the body roughly from the waist downwards.



- Gendai (現代):** Modern; recent. The “gendai budo” are those martial arts (including karate) that became established (i.e. that were recognised by the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai) after the Meiji restoration of 1868.
- Gi (着):** Training clothes or uniform; also called dogi (道着). Karate gi are either white (more usually) or black.
- Go (剛):** Hard, tough, masculine, “external”; for practical purposes, the equivalent of the Chinese “yang.”
- Goju Kai (剛柔会):** The version of Goju Ryu (qv) established by Yamaguchi Gogen (1909–1989). Most of the differences between Goju Kai and Goju Ryu are rather minor.
- Goju Ryu (剛柔流):** The “hard/soft” school of karate founded by Miyagi Chojun (1888–1953), largely under the influence of Chinese White Crane methods.
- Gyaku (逆):** Opposite; reverse.
- Hai (はい):** Yes.
- Hai (背):** Back; reverse; ridge (as of a mountain).
- Hajime (初め):** (Instruction to) begin; start; commence.
- Han (半):** Half; semi-.
- Hanshi (範士):** Master teacher, as recognised by the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai.
- Hara (腹):** Abdomen; belly.
- Harai (払い):** Sweeping: the word becomes “barai” in compounds.
- Hidari (左):** Left hand side.
- Hojo undo (補助運動):** Supplementary training using traditional equipment.

- Ie (いえ):** No.
- Ikken Hissatsu (一拳必殺):** “One blow, certain death.”
- Isshin Ryu (一心流):** The “one heart” school of karate and kobudo founded by Shimabuku Tatsuo (1908–1975). Much troubled by political divisions after the death of its founder, Isshin Ryu is comparatively little practised in Europe, though it is well established in the USA.
- Jiyu kumite (自由組手):** Free or unchoreographed sparring, as distinct from yakusoku kumite (qv).
- Jodan (上段):** Upper or high level; the area of the body from the neck upwards.
- Ju (柔):** Soft, gentle, supple, yielding; for practical purposes, the equivalent of the Chinese “yin.”
- Ju jutsu (柔術):** A “koryu” art employing throwing and joint locking techniques as well as strikes and kicks. Some schools also use weapons.
- Junbi undo (準備運動):** Preliminary exercises to stretch and warm the body before practice.
- Jutsu (術):** Method or technique; “jutsu” as distinct from “do” is a neutral term having no reference to the morality or ethics of what is being practised.
- Kai (会):** Association; society.
- Karate (空手):** “Empty hand.” Before its migration to Japan, karate was called “Chinese hand” or “T’ang hand”(唐手). The change of name probably reflects both a desire to appro-

priate karate as a Japanese art, and Japanese hostility towards China after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–1895. The new name was formally adopted by a meeting of senior karate teachers in 1936, though it had been in informal use for some time.

- Karateka (空手家):** A practitioner of karate; in the same way, ju jutsuka are practitioners of ju jutsu, kendo doka of kendo, and so on.
- Kata (型):** Choreographed forms or patterns intended to train the practitioner in co-ordinated movement and to create conditioned reflexes through constant repetition. See also Bunkai and Oyo.
- Kenkyo (謙虚):** Humility; modesty; self-effacement.
- Ki (型):** Breath; spirit; life; vitality: often, though dubiously, represented as a “life force” flowing around the body along invisible channels called meridians and capable of being manipulated for martial and therapeutic purposes. Ki in Japanese is the same as the Chinese “chi” or “ch’i” and seems to be an idea imported from China.
- Kiai (気合):** A loud, uninhibited, energy-releasing shout.
- Kihon (基本):** Fundamental techniques; basics.
- Ki o tsukete (気をつけて):** “Attention, please.”
- Kinhin (経行):** Slow walking meditation, practised in Zen monasteries to stretch the legs after long periods of seated meditation, and for the sake of variety.
- Kobudo (古武道):** “Old martial art”: a term most often used to denote a martial art of Okinawan origin involving the use of traditional domestic and

- agricultural implements as weapons. Kobudo is practised as part of the curriculum in some Okinawan karate schools (a fact that seems to ignore the twentieth-century re-naming of karate as an “empty handed” art).
- Koryu (古流):** “Old schools”: the Japanese martial arts that were established before the Meiji restoration of 1868.
- Kumite (組手):** “Meeting of hands,” usually translated into English as “sparring.”
- Kyokushinkai (極真会):** An eclectic school of karate founded by Oyama Masutatsu (1923–1994), noted for its extremely hard training methods, including full contact sparring without protection.
- Kyoshi (教士):** Literally, “gentleman teacher”: an expert teacher as recognised by the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai.
- Kyu (級):** The grades or ranks held by more junior students, i.e. before attaining the lowest dan or “black belt” grade. There are usually between six and ten kyu grades in karate schools and associations, accompanied in some cases by half-grades or junior grades. Kyu grades are commonly designated by obi (帯) of different colours.
- Mae (前):** Front; forwards; to the front.
- Makiwara (巻藁):** In karate, a pad – traditionally of straw rope, but now more usually of leather covered foam – on which to practise strikes and, to some extent, kicks. Makiwara were originally rolls of straw used for archery and sword cutting practice.

**Matsubayashi Ryu**

- (松林流):** A school of karate and kobudo founded by Nagamine Shoshin (1907–1997).
- Matte (待つて):** (Instruction to) wait; pause.
- Mawashi (廻し):** Turning.
- Mawatte (回って):** (Instruction to) turn around.
- Mochimi (餅み):** Literally, “like a sticky rice cake”; the word is used to describe the feeling of heavy adhesion that should be cultivated in grasping and controlling an opponent.
- Mokuso (黙想):** Silent thought or reflection.
- Morote (双手):** With both hands.
- Migi (右):** Right hand side.
- Motobu Ryu (本部流):** A school of karate founded by Motobu Choki (1870–1944).
- Mudansha (無段者):** The contingent of students in a school or association holding kyu grades.
- Mushin (無心):** “No mind.” In a martial arts context, the phrase denotes a condition of mind/body such that the practitioner can act without conscious engagement of the mind: i.e. by conditioned reflex rather than after choice or deliberation. “Mushin” expresses the desideratum of unhesitating response to an attack.
- Naha te (那覇手):** One of the three Okinawan empty-hand arts that are the precursors of modern karate; the others are Shuri te and Tomari te.
- Nihon (日本):** Japan; literally “sunrise.” “Nippon” is exactly the same word but pronounced differently. “Nihon” is the more usual and less formal pronunciation.

- Obi (帯):** Belt or sash. Now that karate jackets have tapes at the sides, obi have lost their former function of keeping the jacket closed. Coloured obi as a way of distinguishing ranks or grades were introduced by Kano Jigoro (1860–1938), the founder of Judo.
- Okuden waza (奥伝技):** Hidden techniques (in a kata).
- Oi (追):** Chasing; pursuing; following.
- Osensei (翁先生):** Cf. Sensei. The “o” is a prefix meaning (more or less) “venerable” (the word can also be written as 大先生). “Osensei” is a title usually reserved for the founders of schools.
- Osu (押忍):** Heard in the dojo, “osu” is probably a contraction of “oshi shinobu,” which means (roughly) “persevere no matter what.” In this sense, it is used (especially by Kyokushinkai karateka) as a kind of general-purpose affirmative. As an informal greeting, it is a contraction of “ohayo gozaimasu,” “good morning.”
- Otoshi (落とし):** Falling, descending, dropping.
- Oyo (応用):** The practical application of techniques within a kata, discovered through bunkai (qv).
- Reishiki (礼式):** Etiquette; formal behaviour.
- Renmei (連盟):** Federation; league; alliance.
- Rinzai (臨濟):** One of the two main schools of Zen in Japan; the other is Soto.
- Ryu (流):** School; method.
- Sama (様):** A polite suffix used after the name of someone to whom one wants to show special respect; a more deferential equivalent of San (qv).

- Samurai (侍):** The warrior nobility of pre-industrial Japan, associated with the chivalric code of Bushido. The Samurai class was abolished as part of the Meiji reforms of the nineteenth century, but the Bushido code continues to exert a strong influence on both ancient and modern martial arts.
- San (さん):** A polite suffix used after a Japanese family or given name; very roughly the equivalent of “Mr,” “Monsieur,” “Signor,” etc., but used even among people who know each other quite well.
- Seiza (正座):** A kneeling/sitting posture.
- Sempai (先輩):** A senior member of the dojo who is not the teacher.
- Sen no sen (先の先):** Alert and timely anticipation of an attack.
- Sensei (先生):** The title usually given to the teacher in the dojo; there is an unwritten understanding that no one under the rank of sandan – third dan – is addressed as Sensei, but this convention is not always observed.
- Shihan (師範):** A distinguished senior teacher recognised as exemplary by his peers (though the title is often self-awarded).
- Shito Ryu (糸東流):** A school of karate founded by Mabuni Kenwa (1889–1952), noted for its large number of kata.
- Sho (小):** Small; lower; least.
- Shotokan (松濤館):** A school of karate founded by Funakoshi Gichin (1868–1957); probably the

- most widely practised “style” of karate in the world.
- Shuri te (首里手):** See Naha te.
- Soto (外):** Outside; outwards; moving outwards.
- Soto (曹洞):** See Rinzai.
- Tai sabaki (体捌き):** Tactical evasion through body-shifting.
- Tameshiwari (試し割り):** The practice of testing strength, focus and determination in karate by breaking hard objects with the hands, feet and other parts of the body.
- Tate (縦):** Vertical; upright.
- Tomari te (泊手):** See Naha te.
- Tori (取り):** Active partner: the partner who responds to an attack.
- Uchi (内):** Inside; inwards, moving inwards.
- Uchi (打):** A strike or blow.
- Uechi Ryu (上地流):** A school of karate founded by Uechi Kanbun (1877–1948). Uechi Ryu has a number of kata found in no other school, and seems to have adhered more closely than other schools to the Chinese roots of karate.
- Uke (受け):** The partner delivering an attack, who thus “receives” the defensive response to it.
- Ura (裏):** Rear; back; behind.
- Ushiro (後):** Backwards; to the rear.
- Wado Ryu (和道流):** A school of karate founded by Ohtsuka Hironori (1892–1982), incorporating elements adapted from Yoshin Ryu ju jutsu.
- Waza (技):** Techniques.



**Yakusoku kumite**

- (約束組手): Prearranged (choreographed) attack and defence drills.
- Yame (止め): (Instruction to) stop.
- Yoi (用意): Preparation.
- Yoko (横): Sideways; to the side; horizontal.
- Yudansha (有段者): The contingent of students in a school or association who hold dan grades.
- Zanshin (残心): "Remaining mind": continuing alertness.
- Zazen (座禅): Seated meditation; meditation in seiza.
- Zen (禅): A form of Buddhist practice emphasising seated meditation and the direct experience of enlightenment without scripture or ritual.

*Parts of the Body*

- Ago (顎): Chin; jaw.
- Ashi (脚): Leg.
- Atama (頭): Head; hair.
- Chuusoku (中足): The ball of the foot.
- Empi (猿臂): Elbow.
- Hana (鼻): Nose.
- Hiji (肘): Elbow (a more usual word in ordinary speech than empi).
- Hiza (膝): Knee.
- Kakato (踵): Heel.
- Kansetsu (関節): Joint.
- Kata (肩): Shoulder.
- Ken (拳): Fist; knuckle.
- Koshi (腰): Lower back; waist; hips.

<b>Kote (小手):</b>	Wrist; forearm (and see Tekubi, below).
<b>Kubi (首):</b>	Neck; head.
<b>Me (目):</b>	Eye; eyeball.
<b>Mizuochi (みずおち):</b>	Midriff; solar plexus.
<b>Mune (胸):</b>	Chest.
<b>Nodo (咽):</b>	Throat.
<b>Shinkei (神経):</b>	Nerve.
<b>Soku (足):</b>	Foot.
<b>Sokuhai (足背):</b>	Instep; the upper surface of the foot.
<b>Sokute (足底):</b>	Sole of the foot.
<b>Sokuto (足刀):</b>	Edge of the foot; literally "foot sword."
<b>Sune (脛):</b>	Shin; lower leg.
<b>Te (手):</b>	Hand.
<b>Tekubi (手首):</b>	Wrist
<b>Ude (腕):</b>	Arm; forearm.
<b>Yubi (指):</b>	Finger; toe.

### *Etiquette and Courtesies*

#### **Do itashi mashite**

(どういたしまして): Conventional reply to thanks; "You're welcome"; "don't mention it."

#### **Domo arigato**

##### **gozaimasu**

(どうもありが

とうございます):

A polite, formal "thank you."

#### **Gomen nasai**

(ご免なさい):

"I apologise"; "I'm sorry."

**Kudasai (下さい):**

"Please" (making a request).

#### **Moushiwake arimasen**

(申し訳ありません):

"I apologise" (a more formal or solemn apology than "sumimasen" (qv) or "gomen nasai").

**Onegaishimasu**

(御願いします):

A formal/respectful form of “please,” often used as a preliminary to asking the teacher a question.

**Otagai ni rei**

(御互いに礼):

A bow to one another before practice.

**Rei (礼):**

Bow; courtesy.

**Ritsu rei (立礼):**

Standing bow.

**Seiza rei (正座に礼):**

Seated bow (and see Zarei, below).

**Sensei ni rei (先生に礼):**

A bow to the teacher before practice.

**Shomen ni rei**

(正面に礼):

A bow before practice to the front of the dojo (often towards a shrine or a picture of the founder).

**Sumimasen**

(済みません):

“Excuse me”; “I’m sorry.”

**Tachi rei (立ち礼):**

An alternative name for ritsu rei.

**Yoroshiku onegai**

**itashimasu**

(よろしくお

いいたします):

“Please receive me kindly”: a conventional way of introducing oneself on entering the dojo.

**Zarei (座礼):**

Seated bow.

## *Counting*

**Ichi (一):** One.

**Ni (二):** Two.

**San (三):** Three.

**Shi (四):** Four.

**Go (五):** Five.

<b>Roku (六):</b>	Six.
<b>Shichi (七):</b>	Seven.
<b>Hachi (八):</b>	Eight.
<b>Ku (九):</b>	Nine.
<b>Ju (十):</b>	Ten.
<b>Ju ichi (十一):</b>	Eleven.
<b>Ju go (十五):</b>	Fifteen.
<b>Ni ju (二十):</b>	Twenty.
<b>San ju (三十):</b>	Thirty.
<b>Yon ju (四十):</b>	Forty.
<b>Go ju (五十):</b>	Fifty.
<b>Roku ju (六十):</b>	Sixty.
<b>Nana ju (七十):</b>	Seventy.
<b>Hachi ju (八十):</b>	Eighty.
<b>Ku ju (九十):</b>	Ninety.
<b>Hyaku (百):</b>	One hundred.

The numbers 四 and 七 are often pronounced as “yon” and “nana” respectively, rather than as “shi and “shichi.” This is because the homophone 死 is “death”: the preferred pronunciations of “four” and “seven” reflect a Japanese number-superstition like the one that westerners have about thirteen.

Larger numbers are made by combining elements from largest to smallest; for example: hyaku go ju ichi (百五十一): one hundred and fifty-one; yon hyaku roku ju hachi (四百六十五): four hundred and sixty-eight. In the dojo, you are not likely to be expected to count up to any number greater than ten.

It is a little difficult to get the hang of counting objects in Japanese because what you need to say depends entirely on the sort of object being counted. In English, we sometimes use

“counters” (one *cup of tea*; two *pairs of shoes*) and sometimes not (three books; two dogs). In Japanese, *all* types of objects have “counters” specific to them (called *josushi*: 助数詞) that cannot be omitted. Thus “three books” is *hon o san satsu* (本を三冊): “three (bookish object) book”; “two dogs” is *ni hiki no inu* (二匹の犬): “two (small creature) dog.” Another difficulty is that there exists an older method of counting that is still used for some purposes. In this older system 1 to 10 is:

Hitotsu (一つ)  
Futatsu (二つ)  
Mittsu (三つ)  
Yottsu (四つ)  
Itsutsu (五つ)  
Muttsu (六つ)  
Nanatsu (七つ)  
Yattsu (八つ)  
Kokonotsu (九つ)  
To (十)

We mention these complications as a matter of interest only. You are not likely to come across them unless you start to take a special interest in the Japanese language.

## *Stances*

- Fudo dachi** (不動立ち): “Solid stance”: a low, strong stance with the weight distributed equally between the feet.
- Hachiji dachi** (八字立ち): “Number eight stance”: a relaxed stance with the the heels at approximately shoulder-width and the feet forming a shape on the floor like the Japanese numeral 八.

- Han getsu dachi (半月):** “Half moon stance”: a wider version of Sanchin dachi (qv).
- Han kokutsu dachi (半後屈立ち):** “Half backwards yielding stance”: a shorter and higher version of kokutsu dachi (qv).
- Han zenkutsu dachi (半前屈立ち):** “Half front bending stance”: a shorter and higher version of Zenkutsu dachi (qv).
- Heiko dachi (並行立ち):** “Side by side stance”: a relaxed stance with the feet parallel and at approximately shoulder-width.
- Heisoku dachi (閉足立ち):** “Closed feet stance”: an upright stance with the inside edges of the feet side by side, touching or nearly so.
- Kamae (構え):** The posture of the whole body in “fighting” mode; an “on guard” stance expressing readiness and determination. Cf. Tachi, below.
- Kiba dachi (騎馬立ち):** “Horse-riding stance”: the feet are wide apart and parallel and the knees bent, as if one were sitting astride a horse.
- Kokutsu dachi (後屈立ち):** “Backwards yielding stance”: kokutsu dachi is more or less the same as fudo dachi but with the weight transferred predominantly onto the rear leg.
- Kosa dachi (交差立ち):** “Crossing stance”: a cross-legged stance with the knee of the rear leg resting against the back of the knee of the lead leg.

- Musubi dachi (結び立ち):** “Knot-shaped stance”: a “bowing stance” with the heels together and the toes pointing outwards, forming a shape on the floor like the two ends of an obi emerging from the knot.
- Neko ashi dachi (猫足立ち):** “Cat leg stance”: a high stance with the whole of the weight on the rear leg and the toes of the lead foot resting lightly on the ground, poised to kick.
- Sagi ashi dachi (鷺足立ち):** “Heron leg stance”: an alternative name for *tsuru ashi dachi* (qv).
- Sanchin dachi (立ち):** “Three battles stance”: the stance associated with *Sanchin kata*. The rear foot and knee point forwards; the front foot is turned in slightly, and – at least in principle – the thighs are brought close enough together to intercept a kick to the groin. The relative positions of the feet, knees and hips in this stance are sometimes said to resemble an hourglass, and *sanchin dachi* is occasionally called “hourglass” stance in English; but the resemblance is not all that obvious.
- Shiko dachi (四股立ち):** “Sumo stance”: *shiko dachi* is exactly like *kiba dachi* except that the toes are turned outwards.
- Tachi (立ち):** Stance; posture. “Tachi” becomes “dachi” in combinations with other words. “Tachi” refers to the position of the feet and legs,

whereas “kamae” is a whole-body posture.

**Tsuru ashi dachi**

(鶴足立ち):

“Crane leg stance”: a stance on one leg, mimicking the posture of a large wading bird.

**Yoi dachi (善い立ち):**

“Ready stance,” resembling musubi dachi, but with the hands held forward at groin level with the left hand on top of the right.

**Zenkutsu dachi (前屈立ち):**

“Front bending stance”: a low forward stance; the lead leg should be bent and the rear leg kept straight, though the rear knee should not be locked out. The shin of the lead leg should be at right-angles to the floor.

### *Striking Techniques*

**Choku tsuki (直突き):**

A punch travelling in a straight line to the target.

**Empi uchi (猿臂打ち):**

A strike delivered with the hard bone of the elbow.

**Gyaku tsuki (逆突き):**

“Opposite side punch,” i.e. with the lead leg and punching hand on opposite sides.

**Haishu uchi (背手打ち):**

“Back hand strike”: a blow delivered with the back – the upper surface – of the hand.

**Haito uchi (背刀打ち):**

A strike delivered with the inside edge – the thumb-side edge – of the hand, chiefly using the side of



- Hebi uchi (蛇打ち):** the knuckle at the base of the index finger.  
“Snake strike,” made with the extended index and middle fingers, in imitation of the fangs or forked tongue of a snake; a technique that is neither much seen nor of much use.
- Hiji ate (肘当て):** An alternative name for *empi uchi*.
- Ippon ken uchi (一本拳打ち):** “One knuckle strike,” using the middle knuckle of the index finger with the finger supported from below by the thumb.
- Kizami tsuki (刻み突き):** A “jab” punch.
- Koken uchi (腕拳打ち):** A strike made with the upper surface of the wrist.
- Mae te uchi (前手打ち):** “Front hand strike”: an alternative name for *seiken uchi* (qv).
- Nakadaka ken uchi (中高拳打ち):** A knuckle strike resembling *ippon ken uchi*, but using the middle knuckle of the second finger rather than the index finger.
- Nukite tsuki (貫手突き):** A penetrating strike delivered with rigidly extended fingers, as if the hand were a dagger or a spear.
- Oi tsuki (追突き):** “Following punch”: a punch accompanied and driven by a step or lunge forward.
- Seiken uchi (正拳打ち):** “Forefist strike”: a punch with the lead leg and punching hand on the same side.

- Shita uchi (下打ち):** A short-range “uppercut.”
- Shotei uchi (掌底打ち):** A strike with the “palm heel”: the muscular surface at the base of the palm of the hand.
- Shuto uchi (手刀打ち):** “Sword hand strike”: the proverbial “karate chop” with the outside edge – the little finger side – of the hand.
- Tate ken tsuki (縦拳突き):** A punch with the fist held vertically, particularly characteristic of Isshin Ryu.
- Teisho uchi (底掌打ち):** An alternative name for shotei uchi.
- Tettsui uchi (鉄槌打ち):** “Iron hammer strike,” using the little finger side of the clenched fist in a motion like that of striking with a hammer.
- Uraken uchi (裏拳打ち):** A strike with the first two knuckles of the fist delivered with a whipping action, as though the fist were a weight attached to the arm by a spring.
- Ura uchi (裏打ち):** “Reverse strike”: a short range punch delivered with the knuckles downwards: i.e. with the fist reversed from its usual position.

### *Kicking Techniques*

- Ashi barai (足払い):** A reaping motion of the leg/foot intended to sweep away an attacker’s leg.

- Fuetsu geri (斧鉞蹴り):** “Axe kick”: the leg is raised high and the heel brought down onto the target in a chopping motion.
- Fumikomi geri (踏み込み蹴り):** A stamping kick, delivered with the heel.
- Hiza geri (膝蹴り):** Not really a kick at all, but an upward strike with the knee into an attacker’s body.
- Kakato geri (踵蹴り):** A kick that uses the bone of the heel to strike with.
- Kansetsu geri (関節蹴り):** A kick intended to hyperextend or otherwise damage a joint.
- Keri (蹴り):** Kick; “keri” becomes “geri” in compounds with other words.
- Kin geri (金蹴り):** A rising kick into an attacker’s groin, delivered with the upper surface of the foot.
- Mae geri keage (前蹴り蹴上):** A “snap” kick to the front, usually delivered with the ball of the foot.
- Mae geri kekomi (前蹴り蹴込み):** A kick to the front, usually delivered with the ball of the foot, but with a thrusting or pushing action.
- Mawashi geri (回し蹴り):** A turning or “roundhouse” kick, delivered with the ball of the foot, the instep or the shin.
- Mikazuki geri (三日月蹴り):** A “crescent” kick moving from the ground to the target in an arc and striking with the sole of the

- foot; often taught as a disarming technique.
- Otoshi kakato geri**  
(落とし踵蹴り): “Descending heel kick”: an alternative (and more usual) name for fuetsu geri.
- Sokuto geri** (足刀蹴り): A kick with the outside edge of the foot.
- Yoko geri** (横蹴り): A sideways or horizontal kick (“horizontal” in the sense that the kicking foot is horizontal to the ground); the striking surface can be the heel, sole or edge of the foot. Like mae geri, yoko geri can be delivered as a snap kick (keage) or a thrust kick (kekomi).

### *Joint Locking Techniques*

- Gaeshi** (返し): “Reversal” of a joint against its normal direction of movement.
- Hiji gaeshi** (肘返し): Elbow lock; “arm bar.”
- Kote gaeshi** (小手返し): Wrist lock.
- Yubi gaeshi** (指返し): Finger lock.
- Kata gatame** (肩固め): Shoulder hold.
- Ude garami**: (腕搦み): “Arm entanglement”; “figure four” lock.

### *Defensive Techniques*

- Age uke** (上げ受け): Rising block, deflecting an attack upwards.
- Ashi uke** (脚受け): Leg block, mainly used against kicks.

- Chudan uke (中段受け):** Mid-level block; an alternative name for soto and uchi ude uke (qv).
- Gedan barai (下段払い):** A low level sweeping deflection (usually of a kick) with the forearm.
- Gedan uke (下段受け):** A low level block with the forearm, superficially resembling gedan barai but with a greater sense of impact.
- Hiki uke (引き受け):** Pulling block, used in combination with (e.g.) kake uke (qv) or shuto uke (qv).
- Juji uke (十字受け):** An alternative name for kosa uke (qv).
- Kake uke (掛け受け):** Hooking or hanging block, made with the outside of the wrist or the lower part of the forearm, with the hand “hanging” over the attacker’s arm ready to grasp and pull.
- Kosa uke (交差受け):** A block with the arms crossed at the wrists.
- Mawashi uke (廻し受け):** Turning block: a two-handed block combining shotei uke and kake/hiki uke.
- Morote uke (双手受け):** An augmented block with both hands.
- Shotei uke (掌底受け):** A block with the palm heel.
- Shuto uke (手刀受け):** A block made with the outside edge of the hand with fingers extended.
- Soto ude uke (外腕受け):** A block made with the outside (the thumb side) of the forearm moving outwards relative to the centreline of the defender’s body.
- Tora guchi (虎口):** “Tiger mouth” or “tiger gate”: a two-handed block flowing immediately into a two-handed shotei uchi, seen at the end of several Goju kata.

**Uchi ude uke (内腕受け):** A block made with the inside (the little finger side) of the forearm moving inwards relative to the centreline of the defender's body.

**Uke (受け):** "Block," though the usual translation, does not quite capture the meaning of "uke," which is better understood as a "reception" of an attack.

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