

Midori Yama Budokai: *Hanshi's Corner*  
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***Ichigo, ichi e: One life, one meeting***

MASTER  
FUNAKOSHI GICHIN  
(1868-1957)



Funakoshi Gichin was born in Shuri, Okinawa, November 10, 1868, the same year the Meiji Restoration began. He was of *samurai* lineage, from a family that in former times had been vassals of Ryukyu Dynasty nobles. As a child he was weak, sick, and in poor health. His parents brought him to Doctor Tokashiki, who prescribed herbal remedies to strengthen him. While living with his grandparents, he started attending primary school where he was classmate of Asato's son. It was then he received *karate* training with, Azato Anko. Many consider Azato the reason Funakoshi developed such a disciplined mind and *karate* technique. Between the doctor's medicine and Yasutsune's good instruction, Funakoshi soon blossomed. From Azato Anko (Yasutsune) he learned *Shuri-te*, and from Itosu Anko (Yasutsune), he learned *Naha-te*. Arakaki and Sokon "Bushi" Matsumura were his other teachers. He married in his early twenties, old by Okinawan standards, and Funakoshi paid great tribute to his wife and remained a loyal and faithful husband. His wife also became proficient in *Karate*. When he came to Japan in 1922, he stayed among other Okinawans. This was at the prefectural students' dormitory at Suidobata, Tokyo. He lived in a small room beside the entrance. During the day, when the students were in their classes, he would clean the dormitory. He also worked as a gardener. At night, he would teach them *karate*. When Funakoshi came to mainland Japan, he taught 16 *kata*: 5 *pinan (heian)*, 3 *naihanchi (tekki)*, *kushanku (kanku) dai* and *sho, seisan (hangetsu)*, *patsai (bassai dai)*, *wanshu (enbi)*, *chinto (gankaku)*, *jutte* and *jion*. Actually at least 40 *kata* were included in the curriculum. These were later included in the limited edition and monumental work by Egami Shigeru, *Karate-do for the Specialist*. During this time his three sons but not his wife, who wished to stay in Okinawa, joined him. This was a long period of separation for Funakoshi from his wife; they were not reunited until the end of the Second World War. Funakoshi himself suffered intense personal tragedy with the death of his eldest son. He left Tokyo to be reunited with his wife in Oita, Kyushu province. She had fled the destruction of Okinawa. The now elderly *karate* master could be seen scavenging the beach for anything edible,

including seaweed, to feed his wife. He was to witness her death of malnutrition and asthma in 1947. The heart-broken Funakoshi returned to Tokyo by train, carrying his wife's ashes, with his students paying their respects along the way.

When he had earned sufficient means, he opened his first school in Meishojuku, followed by his *Shotokan* in Mejiro. He now had a *dojo* from which he sent a variety of students. Among these were: Takagi and Nakayama of *Nippon Karate Kyokai*; Yoshida of Takudai; Obata of Keio; Egami Shigeru from Waseda, who became his successor; Hironishi from Chuo; Noguchi of Waseda; and Hironori Ohtsuka (Otsuka). The martial arts world in Japan, especially from the early Twenties and up to the early Forties, was ultra-nationalist, and they looked down their noses at any art that was not pure, calling it a pagan and savage art. Funakoshi overcame this prejudice and finally gained formal recognition of *karate* as one of the Japanese martial arts by 1941. Consequently, many *karate* clubs flourished on mainland Japan. One day, when Ohtsuka was teaching at the Shichi-Tokudo, Kogura, a *sandan* degree in *kendo* from Keio University as well as a black belt in *karate*, faced Ohtsuka with a *shinken* (open blade). All other students felt that no one could face a live blade held by a *kendo* expert. Ohtsuka calmly watched Kogura and the moment he made a move with his sword, Ohtsuka swept him off his feet. As this was unrehearsed, it attested to his skill, and attested Funakoshi's philosophy that *kata* practice was more than sufficient in times of need. Just as importantly, it attested to Master Funakoshi's great ability as a teacher and Karate technician. In 1927, three men, Miki, Bo and Hirayama decided that *kata* practice was not enough and introduced *jiyu kumite* (free-fighting), devising protective clothing and *kendo* masks to utilize full contact. Funakoshi heard of these bouts and, when he could not discourage such attempts, which he considered belittling to the art of *karate*, he stopped visiting the Shichi-Tokudo. Neither Funakoshi nor Ohtsuka ever returned to that *dojo*. Following this event, Funakoshi Gichin prohibited sports sparring, and the first competitions did not appear until after his death in 1958. Towards the latter half of his life, Master Funakoshi became extremely dissatisfied with the direction in which his system had been developed. He felt that the pressure point striking of true *karate* were gradually being removed. Emphasis on fighting and training with *kata* had devolved to little more than endurance training, with little understanding of *kata*'s true meaning. Funakoshi described it as follows: "Like the smooth surface of a mirror reflects everything and a quiet valley reflects every sound, that's how a *Karateka* should free himself from greed and selfishness so he can handle every situation that crosses his path."

In 1922, Jigoro Kano the founder of modern *judo*, invited Funakoshi Gichin and a friend, Gima Makoto (Shinkin), to perform at the *Kodokan* (then located at Tomisaka) for an audience of approximately one hundred people. Gima had studied under Yabu Kentsu as a youth in Okinawa, and performed *Naihanchi shodan*. Funakoshi performed *Koshokun* (*kushanku dai*). Kano *sensei* watched the performance and asked Funakoshi about the techniques involved, as he was greatly impressed. Kano and Funakoshi became good friends, with Kano helping get *karate* recognized in Japan. Due to Kano's influence, Master Funakoshi produced the first ever "Dan Ranking Certification" in April 1924. To popularize the "local" Okinawan martial art in Japan, Master Funakoshi synthesized a complete system of techniques and theory. He changed the Chinese and Okinawan names

of the *kata* into standard Japanese, and in 1929, changed the name of *karate-jutsu* (Chinese-hand martial art) to *karate-do* (the way of the empty hand). In addition, he defined the Twenty Precepts of *karate*, giving *karate* a grand philosophy. [These precepts are given in the Midori Yama Budokai Newsletter, 2006.]

In his travels in and around Japan, giving demonstrations and lectures, Funakoshi always had Shimoda Takeshi, Yoshitaka Yoshitaka (his son, also known as Gigo), Egami and Ohtsuka accompany him. His main instructors in the thirties and forties were Shimoda and his son. Shimoda was an expert from the *Nen-ryu Kendo* School, and studied *ninjutsu*. Shimoda *sensei* was one of only five students of *soke* Nakamura Toshiro of the *Koga Ryu*. In 1934, while very young, he fell ill and died, after one of the exhibition tours. Funakoshi's son, Gigo, replaced Shimoda. Gigo was reputed to be a man of excellent character and technically highly qualified. Egami's opinion is there was none better qualified for teaching. In 1935, *Gichin Funakoshi* observed, "Hitting, thrusting, and kicking are not the only methods; throwing techniques, (*nagewaza*) and pressure against joints are also included. Depending upon the strength and skill of the opponent it is not always necessary to use to use powerful techniques like hitting, thrusting and kicking, but, in versatility adjusting to the situation, softer techniques such as throwing may be used. In 1936, a young man named Ro traveled to Japan to attend Chou University. During this time that his passion for the martial arts led him to seek out *Shotokan* founder, *Funakoshi Gichin*, which he studied with Chung Do Kwan founder, Won Kuk Lee. Later, after earning his black belt, during college vacations he returned home and taught friends and neighbors.

Due to his youth and vigorous (sometimes classified as brutal) training methods, conflicts arose with the older Ohtsuka Hironori. He left *Shotokan* to establish his own style, *Wado-ryu* (the Harmonious Way). It's obvious that the name alludes to the conflict with Yoshitaka. Yoshitaka's influence was very important in the future of *karate-do* but in 1945, he died at age 39 of lifelong tuberculosis. With Yoshitaka's involvement in *karate-do*, the technical developments and changes were great, modifying the style that had been practiced until then. The high stances of Okinawa were replaced with low, forced stances, which included a perpendicular lower leg with the knee over the big toe. These changes immediately placed training in a new dimension. This put strong pressure on both mental and physical practice. The low stances seem to have been an original development due to Gigo's genius. New kicks were developed along with changes in the general body stance (*hanmi*) and in the fist *tsuki* (blows). Gigo was also instrumental in including the standardization of a wide variety of *Kumite*. These changes placed a strong emphasis on the high repetition of techniques as a means of developing techniques. Coupled with strong changes in existing *kata*, (some ending up almost unrecognizable) and the creation of new *kata*, we have a clear divergence of *karate-do* from Okinawan *Karate*. Surely, enough to say Funakoshi Gigo created a Japanese Martial Art. Two other persons who strongly influenced the future developments and changes in *karate-do* after the deaths of father and son, never trained under Gigo Funakoshi. These individuals were, of course, Obata Isao and Masatoshi Nakayama. They lived outside Japan during those crucial years, and never got to know him well and possibly never met him.

Funakoshi was a humble man, who preached and practiced a basic humility of a man who is rooted in the true perspective of things. Being full of life and awareness, he lived at peace with himself and with his fellow men. On April 10, 1957, the Ministry of Education gave official recognition to the JKA, and it became a legal entity. A mere sixteen days later, at the age of 89, Master Funakoshi passed away, after humbly making the largest contribution to the art of *Karate-Do*. Funakoshi was a man of Tao. He placed no emphasis whatsoever on competitions, record breaking or championships. He placed emphasis on individual self-perfection. He believed in the common decency and respect that one human being owes another. He was the master of masters.

A student once asked, "What is the difference between a man of Tao and a little man?" The sensei replied, "When the little man receives his first *dan*, he can hardly wait to run home and shout at the top of his voice and tell everyone. Upon receiving his second *dan*, he will climb to the rooftops and shout it to the people. Upon receiving his third *dan*, he will jump in his automobile and parade through town blowing the horn, telling one and all about his third *dan*".

"When the man of Tao receives his first *dan*, he will bow his head in gratitude. Upon receiving his second *dan*, he will bow his head and his shoulders. Upon receiving his third *dan*, he will bow at the waist and quietly walk alongside the wall so that people will not see him or notice him".

### ***Chakugan* or *Heiho no Metsuke*: Point of Observation of the Strategy of Eye Control**

*Kata* translates as form, so then this suggests that *karate's* form and function can be found in its *kata*. *Kata* is like a living textbook of *karate's* techniques and their precise execution. *Chakugan* is important in *kata*! It refers to setting your eyes on your opponent. With your eyes properly set on your opponent, you can focus your techniques (*kime*) more crisply and with more confidence. *Kime*, is the source of the power of *karate* techniques; consequently, it is indispensable. In normal practice, one can see almost 180 degrees (90 to the left and 90 to the right) without moving the head. In combat, you lose most of that peripheral area, which results in "tunnel vision." The body's tendency in fear mode is to initially open the eyes wide and then narrow the vision down, which causes a peripheral loss. Fear response induces a type of paralysis, reducing motor function, and often making even the most conditioned responses more difficult to execute. This is an automatic and naturally instinctive response. Training in *chakugan*, with *kata*, reduces this instinctive response by developing different "muscle memory" in threatening situations. This is one great advantage of *kata* – through imaging, one can overcome the "fear factor," and perform technique better. When one truly sees the opponent as s/he performs *kata*, the body accepts what the mind tells it to do. In the case of *chakugan*, the body learns to respond to a threat in a positive manner. When one sees the opponent and the opening given, response time is lessened, and correct response becomes a conditioned response.

Once you are committed and NOT finding your opponent where you anticipate him or her to be is a real issue in combat.

*Shuri-te* and *Tomari-te* advocate that the look and the technique are made simultaneously. *Naha-te* stresses that you look first, and then apply the technique. In either case, the look (*chakugan/me-sen*) is of paramount importance.

*Chakugan* is the correct focus of your attention. This means looking at your opponent, or where your opponent should be. When practicing *kata*, you should train to see all movements. Where you focus is dependent on the style. Some teach to watch the chest, some the “third eye” some, the “triangle” formed from between the eyebrows, and both shoulders. The important thing is to focus on a point, or in a way, to observe all possible movements of the body. The eyes should reflect inner calm of being totally in the present moment (*zanshin*) with an immovable heart/mind (*fudoshin*). If this is not done it is easy to become distracted by the opponent’s gaze (projected intention). One has *mushin*, that is the mind does not attach itself to any single thing, but are aware of everything. One sees the opponent, his or her weapons, his or her body movements and the environment. This returns us to *bonyari shita hoshi wo miru*, or “looking at a faint star.” This, as has been mentioned, may also be referred to as *enzan o metsuke*, or “looking at a distant mountain.”