

Midori Yama Budokai: *Hanshi's Corner*

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July 2016

Ichi go, ichi e: One life, one meeting

Shingi

Among other meanings, *shingi* refers to the process of learning to think about techniques and maintaining the same emotional level in combat. Physical techniques are not enough. Mental techniques must also be mastered. In this context, mental techniques refer to mental awareness. This awareness is very important in discerning signals or “tels” from the opponent. When the student masters *shingi* the thought process may be thought of as *ku*, or emptiness, or *mu*, nothingness. With the use of *ku* and *mu*, the martial artist is not referring to a nihilistic meaning, but that the mind is empty of pre-conceived thought. This type of non-thought lets the exponent see what is really happening and react appropriately. *Ku/mu* is the culmination of intuitive thought, which permits the correct response at the correct instant. Just as the body is trained for muscle memory, the mind is trained for intuitive reaction.

Gokui Waza: “Secret Techniques”

Although usually literally translated as “secret techniques,” *gokui waza* has a somewhat different meaning in actual use. The term refers to a technique best suited for any given situation. When attacked and forced to defend, the technique best designed for that defense is a *gokui waza*. Consequently, each person will select his or her own techniques which are easiest for him or her. “Easiest” in this instance refers to simple techniques which may be done without conscious thought when the need arises. *Gokui waza* depends upon *shingi*, as described above. It is imperative that one remain calm and relaxed so the intuitive mind can guide the body in the appropriate defense. This is a practical application of *shi-ki-chikara*.

Ma and Ma-ai

Ma is the distance needed for the exponent to complete a technique. It is the potential distance for striking for an individual. *Ma-ai* is the actual distance between two exponents. *Ma-ai* is the same for both persons, but *ma* differs from one person to another. Although both are the same distance from one another (*ma-ai*), one may be able to deliver a strike, due to a greater reach, so his or her *ma* would be greater than the opponent's. Greater in this instance refers to capability, not distance in the sense of further away.

Dan-Kyu Ranks

The *dan-kyu* system was devised by Kanō Jigorō *Shihan* and first adopted for *karate* by Funakoshi Gichin. Kanō *Shihan* devised the system in 1883, awarding students Saito and Tomita the *dan* rank of *Shōdan*. Ironically, Kanō *Shihan*'s intention was to have the students realize that training was never ended. In fact, the title of *Shihan* was chosen to prevent persons from pursuing numerical rank. Kanō was accepted as *Jūdan*, and when he promoted some of his students to this rank, the *Kōdōkan* added *Jūichidan* and *Jūnidan* to promote Kanō beyond his students. Kanō stated that adding ranks did not make the art

or person better, and that there would be no further increase. These ranks were included in the 1955 printing of *Illustrated Kodokan Judo*, on page 284. Today, many persons have as their goal, “to get the black belt.” This usually does not go any farther than *Shodan*, which is the real (literally) beginning. Colored belts were not originally used, and the first “black belts” were issued in 1886 by Kano *Shihan*. They were actually sashes to be worn with *kimono*; the belts as we know them today were not introduced until 1907 when the *judogi* replaced the *kimono*. The first *dan* ranks of *karate* were awarded on April 12, 1924. Funakoshi awarded *Shodan* to seven students: Tokuda, Otsuka, Akiba, Shimizu, Hirose, Gima and Kasuya. Shortly after this the *Dai Nippon Butokukai* instituted the titles of *Hanshi* and *Kyoshi*. *Kyoshi* was later changed to *Tashi*, although today *Kyoshi* is used. Some years later, the *Butokukai* added the rank of *Renshi*. The greatest problem with colored belts is the belt is sought rather than the learning the belt represents. That is, the belt, not the knowledge, is the goal. Many traditionalists feel that the colored belts should be dropped, and *budo* should be pursued for knowledge, as it was in the past.

Information about *shingi*, *gokui waza*, *ma*, *ma-ai* and *dan-kyu* ranks are based on *Karate-do: History and Philosophy* by Takao Nakaya.

Balance in T'ai Chi Ch'uan

According to Sifu Sophia Delza, T'ai Chi Ch'uan, balance includes both mind and body, with stationary and mobile equilibrium. Sifu Delza places balance fourth of five essentials. The essentials are: slowness, lightness, clarity, balance and calmness. There are seven phases to good balance, as follows. First, one must have physical ability; second, is an understanding of movement sequences. Third, is an even flow of the movements and the control of the inactive; fourth, is control of the changes from Yin to Yang and from solid (*shih*) to empty (*hsu*). Fifth, is the control of movement from space to form; sixth, is mental awareness (we're back to *shingi* again!); finally, there is a spirit of calmness. One must have the capability of performing the techniques as done as a form. Movements must be sequential and even, moving from a weighted leg to a non-weighted leg. You must do the movements as a whole, not in parts, remaining totally aware of the entire body and mind. Throughout, one must remain calm, without conscious thought.

Based on chapter III of “T'ai Chi Ch'uan Today” in *Handbook of the Martial Arts and Self-Defense* by William Logan and Herman Petras.

The Importance of Breathing

Your Professor Emeritus has mentioned the importance of breathing in a number of newsletters. The concept of correct breathing is studied in all traditional martial arts. One of the first to mention it in relation to combat situations was Kano *Jigoro Shihan*. Kano *Shihan* taught that “When [the] opponent inhales, his [or her] reaction time is longer than when he [or she] exhales.” One of the first things learned is that exhalation helps the exponent exert a stronger force. Philosophically, exhaling breath releases energy toward the opponent. Physically, this exhalation grounds the exponent and stabilizes his or her stance, giving him or her more power. When one inhales, stability is lost due to directing energy toward oneself. Incorrect breathing takes one off balance, making him or her more vulnerable to attack or counter-attack. Without training, the usual reaction is to inhale sharply when balance (physical or mental) is lost. Conversely, when balance is lost one usually inhales. In either event, inhalation may lead to defeat. One reason correct breathing is practiced is to defend against being abducted due to chloroform. When the

cloth is placed over the mouth and nose, the tendency is to breathe in deeply – a startle response. When this is done, the fumes are breathed in, quickening the point of unconsciousness. One method of training is to have someone place a cloth (without chloroform, of course!) over the nose and mouth to learn to breathe out, so you will not inhale the fumes. To simulate breathing in fumes, the substitution of banana oil may be used; it is unmistakable, and will indicate quickly if you breathe in! Breathing is one reason traditionalists do not condone doing *kata* to music. While aesthetically pleasing, with music the pattern of breathing in a *kata*, which should be learned, is lost; consequently, the combative principle is also lost.

It may be mentioned that Robert Fitzsimmons, in his book *Physical Culture and Self-Defense*, devotes twelve pages (with illustrations) to the art of correct breathing.

***Haragei* or Development of the Lower Abdomen Relating to Correct Posture**

The development of the lower abdomen, using correct posture, is of primary importance to the martial artist. The lower abdomen is variously known as *shita hara*, *tanden* and *seika tanden*. Regardless of the terminology (and there are others), there is a sound physiological reason for its development. The site of the lower abdomen, also known as the lower trunk, is the site of some of the body's largest and strongest muscles. In addition to supporting the spinal column, these muscles comprise about one third of the body's weight. Consequently, these muscles help coordinate the whole body's movement in a very dynamic fashion, resulting in harmonious movement of the body. One Zen master, Hida Harumitsu, stated that force exerted from the lower abdomen resulted in "correct centripetal pressure." Hida continued, "In a posture that ensures 'correct centripetal force,' you can master your will more easily, promote the unified growth of the motor nerve center and develop the nerve fibers running to the muscles from the motor center..." The body holds about eight to ten pints of blood, of which 2.4 to three pints are contained in the lower abdomen. If proper posture and breathing are not practiced, the blood may not circulate from the abdomen to the heart the way it should and health problems may occur. Correct posture, as defined here, refers to the *judo shizentai* or *karate teiji-dachi*. Inherent with *shizentai* (*teiji dachi*) is the movement of the head. The head, in an adult, is about the size and weight of a bowling ball (twelve to sixteen pounds). In addition, where the head goes, the body follows. To understand this principle, lay on your back on the mat with the head turned to the left or right. Have a partner place the palm on the side of the face and try turning opposite the direction you are facing. If the face is toward the left, try turning to the right. This means that when the head (twelve to sixteen pounds) and the lower abdomen (one third the body weight) are moving together as they should, the body will move as a whole and much more dynamically than if it moves in parts. If a person weighs 180 pounds, seventy-two to seventy-six pounds – over one third of the body weight – is moving the entire body weight in the desired direction. The force will include the entire body's mass rather than simply a leg or arm.

Basic Targets for Defense of Self or Others

The one overriding factor in defense is that a fight away from training is not a sport! No matter how physically demanding the sport is, it is still a sport with rules, referees and time limits. When one is fighting for his or her life, there are none of these!

Consequently, the areas attacked must be “fight stoppers.” Consistently hitting non-vulnerable areas is a non-skill. At best, they are ineffective. At worst, they may cause the attacker to “up the ante” and become more violent. Studies made of women who had to resort to physical methods of defense give three major vulnerable points of attack. First, are the eyes, usually tear gas or pepper spray is used to cause temporary blindness. This should give the person a chance to escape. Remember – escape is the primary concern. This is not a movie; do not “stand your ground” to “teach him a lesson.” Second, is the throat, which is best attacked by a punch (traditional *karate* teaches this in *Wansu* or *Empi*). If the attacker cannot breathe, it will be difficult to continue the attack. Again, use this time to escape! Third, is the knee; after all, if the attacker cannot stand s/he cannot attack. This of course does not apply to calibrated weapons, and possibly edged ones. The only time a woman (or man) should attempt to attack the opponent’s “groin” is with total surprise. Men have a built in reflex to protect that area of their body. If one tries and misses, the situation has automatically escalated. Whatever target is chosen, it must be attacked with 100% conviction. If there is any holding back, the exponent is doomed to failure!

Terminology

Tsukuri is moving your body to take advantage of your opponent’s body motion.

Damashi refers to spirit, as “he has spirit.” *Yamato Damashi* would be Japanese Spirit.

Yuka geri are kicks done from the floor.

Cho-un, as in *Cho-un no kon* (*bo kata* of *Cho-un*), literally means “butterfly cloud.” Actually, butterfly is a malapropism as its original spelling was “flutterby.”

Iji is the order of rank or seating. *Sekiji* is the seating order. *Shoza* is the seat of honor where the *shushin* (guest of honor) sits. *Kamiza* or *Joza* are the upper seats, reserved for high ranking officials; also referred to as *Jozeke* or the upper seat, or seat of seniority. *Shimoza* are the lower seats with *basseke* being the lowest seat.

Niretsu means “two rows.”

Moten means “blind spot.”

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