

## THE SECRET OF KARATE

When a student dreams of entering Karate practice, he has visions of himself as a medieval knight on a quest to right the wrongs a capricious world has foisted upon a defenseless humanity. Karate is the miraculous mental power that will make him able to do the wonderful, stupendous and terrifying deeds that he must accomplish to reach this goal. He fantasizes himself invulnerable to common assaults on his person; he is invincible, with powers to encounter and conquer the worst life has to offer.

Then he enters practice. He finds the lofty dreams and fantasies were all an illusion. The mental and spiritual strength imagined for the Karate Master disappears and instead he finds human frailty, immoral behavior, and sports injuries. Here, disillusioned, is where the average man stops his search. The dreams of invincibility are no more, the decay of the aging sports figure is just too evident. The elder Karate man is just an aging "jock." Was there ever anything real in Karate? No, of course not. It is just a game for people who like to fight and thrive on pain and injury.

Is this the truth, or is there something more? If there is, why can't it be found? If it can be found, who will show the way?

Karate really is what you wanted it to be when you first became interested in practice. But very few ever find it. Why? Why don't seniors point the way?

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The old cliché that people must be kept in a dull, unclear situation so that serious personality flaws will rise to the surface and terminate the practice of those not mentally and physically suited for a life of Karate, has worked itself into the fabric of practice to the point that even the instructors cannot tell where they are. Just ask any serious practitioner what he considers a Black Belt to be, and this opinion will be readily confirmed. This dead end stifles the mind and will not permit it to go forward to dreams of result and the accomplishment of self-fulfilling prophecy. Each person should be taught to imagine himself as he would like to be and then shown how to go about completing this vision.

Karate, as generally practiced today, deals with and solves sports problems which are often confused for the push and shove confrontations that are encountered in reality. There is seldom the physical "squaring off" in the classical sense. The usual order is close body contact, pushing, stumbling over furniture, and clumsy wrestling type attacks. The "squaring off" is usually mental, but the new Karate person cannot even imagine anything else than a swift punch in the nose, or a short kick to the groin. So, how do you get away from the real threat, the sucker punch? How can you avoid someone just walking up and hitting you? Can you just walk up and hit some one if you want to? If not, throw Karate away for this is our Western situation and we do not want delusions when we

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are about to get "had." Why can't Karate cope with real problems without always giving some lessons in dancing, tag, and mental mumbo-jumbo that turn everyone off. Strutting around with a Black Belt is fun, but it has never been known to be of use when some one is after your "ass." Is Karate able to do the job or not? And if it can, where the hell can a serious fellow find out how to use it.

This is the classic problem posed to the practitioner. His ability to reach a solution and the reliability of the application is the measure of his perception and the recognition of his Dan Grade.

In the KWANMUKAN, a Black Belt is a practitioner who knows the requirements for his grade and can perform them according to current regulations. This person also knows why we do these actions and understands the resultant consequences of their application.

If the Dan Grade requirements are established solely to provide this base, one can easily see the necessity for broader, more culturally encompassing, and stronger philosophical technical requirements for those who would lead Karate.

The Kwanmukan grade system is set accordingly. As the Dan advances in grade, the philosophical and cultural thrust broadens, while at the same time, the technical aspects become more vital and directly applicable to self-preservation.

When the student begins practice, the accent is on long range techniques that are conducive to proper body conditioning, movement and control. The sporting aspects are concentrated toward developing an alert and positive attitude. As the student advances, the training changes to encompass mid-range systems which enable the practitioner to keep defensive distance but still maintain the closeness for counter-strikes.

At this plateau, the Karate-ka, if he is a reasonably good fighter, assumes he has attained the secret of Karate; that is, until he encounters a good Judoman who, from a close inside position, either strangles him or throws him on his head. What a way to go

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for a "Karate Expert."

It becomes increasingly clear that the real gist of Karate exists in the consideration of a Primary Strike Capacity. In an altercation which has progressed to the physical point, three things can occur: 1) Your opponent can hit you first 2) You can hit each other at the same time, or 3) You can hit the opponent first. If the quality and ability of the opponent are not known, the only acceptable course is the latter. But we cannot just hit. The moral and legal consequences would be enormous and unacceptable. We must be able to know timefully and positively when we are about to be assaulted and we must use the primary strike capacity as a defensive countermeasure. In this light it can be seen that the primary strike is a counter attack structured in ethical and cultural considerations far beyond the actual application of fighting skills.

When I was the senior student in our Song-Moo-Kwan dojang, my teacher's teacher came to visit our gym and observe our practice. When practice was over, we went to one of the city's finer restaurants to relax, drink, and enjoy conversation. After dining, the elders sat back and began to talk about Taekwondo, telling stories and remembering practices and great fighters of times gone by. As I was becoming caught up in the conversation, the Master Instructor turned to an elder and spoke to him in Korean. The elder then turned and addressed me.

He informed me that the Master wanted to examine me and would ask me one question. I was to answer very carefully as this was a

test of our Senior Student, me. Alerting myself as best I could, I sat up and presented my finest attentive attitude.

Through the interpreter, the following question was posed: "If I were to threaten an attack and appear ready to attack you now, what would you do?" The master was sitting to my left and in an armless chair. I puzzled for a brief moment, being careful to show the due consideration, and then answered.

I said that I would move my left hand as if to execute a back-fist impelling him to cover my arm with his right hand. With this hand committed, I said I would then palm a spoon and with a spear hand thrust jam it into his throat, overturning him onto the floor. This is truly an unstoppable technique if one can be said to exist.

The master was informed of my answer and immediately glowed and congratulated me on passing the test, and commended me on my alertness and choice of attack. But then he added something that ever since that time has profoundly influenced my thinking. He said in these exact words, "But then you would already have lost something." Do you know what he meant? Can you see it? Do you understand? That "something" to which he referred was my peaceful nature. I would have lost my "peaceful nature." And all my life I had been practicing the Martial Arts to be at peace, to live without fear, and here I would lose it all with the same instrument I was using to maintain it. It reminded me of the old adage, "Men who

live by the sword, die by the sword."

The consideration of maintaining a peaceful nature even in the most dire circumstances should be the object of intense study for every would-be Karate person. The attaining of the "peaceful nature" should be the most sought after achievement of the advanced Practitioner. The manifestation of this nature is the measure of the Karate Master. If there ever was a secret to the application of practice, this is it.