

Back to Basics

by David Hooper

One of the things that epitomizes karate training, [Shotokan] style, is its preoccupation with basics. From my first day's training at the Honbu dojo in Tokyo, and later, perhaps even more so at Takushoku University, the format was always the same: basics, basics, and then more basics. The more advanced the class became, the more basic it became, an anomaly I will subsequently explain. Even the instructors' class regularly began with all the senior Japanese sensei performing sets of repetitions of basic, fundamental techniques.

...It's important to understand that karate... is fundamentally simple. That's not to say it's easy, but that every subsequent movement is based on a prior movement. One thing stems from another. A misunderstanding at the basic level cannot be corrected higher up the chain. Let me give a specific example:...

The basic stepping punch *oizuki* relies first and foremost on an understanding of the hips in *chokuzuki*, the straight punch from a natural stance. When punching with the left hand, it is the right hip initially rotating back—to pull the right reaction hand—and then thrusting forward so the hips once again return to their square position, that enable power to be generated. The muscle in the back of the right thigh is especially important, and this tenses at the end of the technique, along with the muscle under the left punching arm and those of the abdomen.

The hip movement is fundamental. For beginners, it may well be useful to exaggerate this movement in early practice. In high-level performers, the hip movement may be almost imperceptible, but it will be there. Without that hip movement, no matter how much huffing and puffing may accompany an apparently strong technique, the technique will lack *kime* (focus) and cannot be considered to be karate—no matter how great the resemblance.

From this natural stance (*shizentai*), front stance (*zenkutsudachi*) can be formed by bending the knees, keeping the back straight, not moving the body position backwards and sliding one leg back in a straight line maintaining the same width of stance. The position of the front knee is automatically correct if it is formed in this way. All the lengthy explanations about the exact weight distribution, or the number of centimeters from the big toe to the perpendicular of the knee become superfluous. If *shizentai* is performed correctly, then *zenkutsudachi* can be, too.

Practising thrusting forward from *shizentai* into *zenkutsudachi*, by bending the knees and then driving off either the right or left leg, is an excellent half way measure to understanding the feeling of moving forward in front stance. Feeling the weight and force on the back heel and outside of the back foot is something that takes a lot of practice. Understanding the feeling in the rear leg (which, incidentally, is not locked straight) is only made possible if it has already been felt in the correct execution of *chokuzuki*.



The hip movement in *oizuki* is essentially the same as that of *chokuzuki*. It is, however, much easier to learn the movement in the more basic of the two techniques before trying to understand it in the advance. This process of continually referring back and studying the technique in its most basic form, and thus at greater depth, is essential to making progress.

Charging up and down the dojo doing stepping punches accompanied by the most blood-curdling *kias* does not constitute practicing *kihon*. *Kihon* practice needs to be directed and focused: what is the correct feeling in the back leg? Which muscles actually tense, and when? How should one breathe? What does [it] mean to be rooted to the ground and the end of the punch, with the weight and force driving down on the heel of the back foot? Finding the answers to these questions may take years of training, but the pay-off is worth it.

...A second example perhaps illustrates this point of simplicity and progression even better. I had been training at Takushoku University for a few months when an important championship was held...Takushoku lost. At the following days training, the assistant coach spent at least twenty minutes bawling out the students... The following week's training would not be spent on advanced sparring. On the contrary, each three-hour session would consist of only *kihon gohon kumite* (basic five-step sparring). Why? Because all their weaknesses could be spotted in this basic practice...Problems with timing, distance, speed, *kime* or whatever, that could not be overcome at this basic level, could not hope to be identified, let alone solved, higher up the chain.

...Yahara Sensei can perform his spinning backfist fist one way and then the other for the same reason he can perform the spinning downward block in the first of the Heian katas. The movement is fundamentally the same...The spinning high outside block in Jion Kata that finishes in back stance, for example, is fundamentally the same movement as the first spinning downward block in Heian Shodan...

... "So why do you do karate and what do you hope to achieve?" is a question that I'm often asked. The first part is difficult to answer, but the latter part is easy: like all the top...instructors and the best of the competition fighters in Japan, I, too would like to be seen as someone who was beginning to "get the basics under his belt."

Excerpted/severely edited from article, "Thoughts from Japan/JKA Shotokan: Back to Basics" by David Hooper, PhD., printed in Dragon Times, Vol. 14, pp 9 and 12, 1999.

CALENDAR of EVENTS

Oct 23:

Sweeping Seminar, 1PM SM Dojo

Nov 4-6:

**2011 ISKF National Championships,
Denver, CO**

Dec 10:

Dan and kyu exams, 1PM SM Dojo

Samurai Tales



Beyond
Technique

In the martial arts, work on technique is indispensable, usually for ten or twenty years. But ultimately, state of mind or consciousness takes precedence...

In China, Mishotsu, who was a disciple of Lao Tzu, wrote a story on the subject of fighting cocks that illustrates [this] very clearly.

There was once a king who was determined to own a champion fighting cock, and he asked one of his subjects to train one for him. The man began by teaching the cock all the techniques of combat.

After ten days, the king asked, "Can I organize a fight for this cock?"

The trainer said, "Certainly not! He's strong enough, yes; but his strength is empty, hot air; he wants to fight all the time, he's overexcited, he has no endurance."

Ten days later the king again asked the trainer, "Now can I organize a fight?"

"No, no! Not yet. He's still too fierce, he's still looking for a fight all the time. Whenever he hears another rooster crowing, even in the next village, he flies into a rage and wants to fight."

Another ten days of training, and the king made his request a third time. "Now is it possible?"

The trainer replied, "Well, he no longer flies into a passion now, he remains calm when he hears another cock crowing. His posture is good, and he has a lot of power in reserve. He has stopped losing his temper all the time. Looking at him, you aren't even aware of his energy and strength."

"So we can go ahead with the fight?" asked the king.

The trainer said, "Maybe."

So a great many fighting cocks were assembled and the tournament began. But no bird would come anywhere near that one. They all ran away terrified; and he never needed to fight.

The fighting cock had become a cock of wood. He had gone beyond his technical training. He possessed enormous energy but it was all inside, he never showed it. That way, his power stayed within himself, and the others had no choice but to bow before his tranquil assurance and undisplayed strength.

If you practice...regularly, you can know the secret of Budo unconsciously, naturally, automatically. Then, it may not be necessary to use a technique...Other people will keep their distance and there will be no need to fight.

The secret of the sword is never to unsheathe the sword: you must not take out your sword because if you try to kill someone, you must die for it yourself.

What you must do instead is kill yourself, kill your own mind; then other people will be afraid and run away. You are the strongest and the others will keep their distance. It is no longer necessary to win victories over them.

Taisen Deshimaru, **The Zen Way to the Martial Arts**, Penguin Group, USA, 1982, pp 50-51.

WELCOME!

ISKF Southwest Region's newest club: ISKF Los Angeles,

with chief instructor Bradford Burke, Nidan.

The club, located within Jesse Owens Park at 9761 S. Western

Ave., LA 90047, meets Tuesdays and Thursdays 6 to 8:00 PM and Saturdays 9:30 to 11:30 AM. The club was 1 year old in July, and already boasts 30-40 members.



Brad has had a lot of experience teaching, having been the co-instructor (with partner Ron Bourgeois) of Kobayashi Dojo in south central LA for many years. He began his karate training in 1972, joined Santa Monica Dojo in 1977 and was a member of the 1985 US Men's Kumite Team. He is assisted periodically by former Santa Monica student Young Lee, yondan. Welcome, ISKF LA!



Exercise counteracts aging effects

Keeping active won't let you live forever, but it can stave off the ravages of time.

As we age, our bodies change in ways that challenge athletic ability. But exercise also can slow down — and in some cases even prevent — some of the physiological ravages of time. "A lot of things that we thought were just inherent to the aging process and were going to happen no matter what don't really have to happen if you maintain an appropriate lifestyle," says Jim Hagberg, a professor of kinesiology at the University of Maryland in College Park.

— Los Angeles Times, September 01, 2011/By Amanda Mascarelli

In other words....

"Those who think they have not time for bodily exercise will sooner or later have to find time for illness." —Edward Stanley, English statesman and prime minister (1799-1869)

In other words...

Keep on punching!