

# Haruyoshi Yamada's Journal

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Mu-dai

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"Sensei, my knees hurt because of training too much." "My old back pain has gotten worse by training too hard". Since I have been teaching karate for a long time, I've often heard about the people blaming their physical problems on their karate training. Because I run a clinic that sets bones, these complaints are not new. I often meet patients who have similar problems. As a bone setter, I would take care of these people, study their damaged body parts, and prescribe medications. As a karate instructor, these injuries are not pleasing to me at all. Attributing these injuries to karate training does not sound right. Although in Kumite (karate fighting), an accidental injury might occasionally occur, one would never damage one's health by proper training. This is what we refer to as "karate-do training".

Let us start by examining why those physical problems do happen from the medical point of view and how karate training should be from both mental and physical aspects as well. The human body reacts to the various movements of the muscles and bones. Exercise is an activity that requires reasonable stretches of the joints by the contractions of the muscles, which are controlled by the nervous system. However, it is not true that one could put enough pressures on one's joints in the normal course of karate to cause damage to bone and joint structure. "Karate-do training" involves finding the correct degree of pressure to place on the joints so as to tone but not to damage them. Damage comes from extreme pressure either at an acute or obtuse angle on the joints and can cause breakage. It has been said recently that this has led to the prohibition of bunny hops, because it causes fracturing of bones. Sit-ups with one's knees stretched gives excessive pressure on one's spine and back. Using the proper angle will cause less pressure on one's knees and make one's bones and muscles strengthen in an efficient and safe way.

The ideal karate training sessions are structured with sufficient warm-ups with both speed and pressure exerted one's body controlled, maintenance of one's joint flexibility with stretches, developing aerobic abilities through basic or katas drills, and most of all, designing a flexible workout that allows individuals to choose one's own karate style. As you know, our bodies are designed symmetrically except for some organs. If one would punch in the air, the direction of movements is toward one's back and legs and a pull back arm (Hikite). It provides a degree of forced pressures upon somewhere in one's body. If these forced pressures are repeated successively on the same joints in the same direction, it will lead to bone and muscle damage. The greatest degree of damage is found in one's lower back, but it tends to develop slowly with little notice in the beginning. By the time one realizes there are problems, it is usually too late to correct. Katas are designed as a perfect symmetric exercise with only a few exceptions. Katas have been designed so that if one would practice in a proper manner and apply pressure on as many body parts as possible in balanced manner, it is believed that damage should be prevented.

One should consider these warnings and note that it is best to practice symmetric well-balanced training exercise, not to mention the use of basic drills as the best and most reliable methods to prevent bone breakage and joint damage. Katas are not only a treasures of technical skills, but they also provide excellent training menus.

Now let us examine the problems from the mental point of view. In general, maintaining one's focus and concentration would prevent any accidents and it said will bring excellent results in one's performances in competitions. This is the same reasoning that allows athletes who compete in the Olympics, who often are seen on TV, to do so well in their performances. Concentration makes one ready for the races before they starts. However, in Budo, being focused would rather mean not being excited but concentrating as a state of mind. If the Western sports are the positive, then the Eastern sports are the negative. They are placed in opposition to one another.

One's ultimate state of mind is concentration while being encouraged to be relaxed. These are important factors, which allow one to exert maximum power while not affecting the level of performance under any circumstances. This allows the competitor to analyze the situations promptly and react with the appropriate actions consequently, while maintaining one's self-composed state of mind. Though the purpose of both is to maintain one's awareness, the difference comes from the interaction of the participants. With the one, the proper movements applied are scripted through practice and restrain while the other is a reaction of combatants. An example would be the difference in methods of fighting. It can be shown that boxing, a typical Western fighting sport, displays actions based on the opponent's attacking movements whereas Budo, an Eastern fighting competition, focuses more on the value of self-defense. Budo is primarily for defence, not attack. This explains the reason why all katas begin with the defense techniques, not the aggressive or attacking movements. In short, whether they are katas or kumite, the principle of

judging the proper extent of movement can prevent breaking of bones and joint damage. This is especially true in kumite fighting which can result in serious accidents if a participant misjudges the principle for successful competition. Breathing is an important factor to develop to aid in concentrating. One type of breathing is very calm and quiet similar to Zen breathing. Another is very fast is generated when doing technique drills. Here I mentioned that breathing is not an action simply for the exchanging of oxygen and carbon dioxide, but which is enabling the storage of energy for the power and spirit it generates.

A Chinese doctor "ka-jya" in a Chinese post-Kan era wrote a book called "Gokin no gi," which described animal behaviors from the ecological science point of view. According to this book, breathing is one of the techniques which all animals possess instinctively. By the combination of timing of exhaling and inhaling, they become relaxed. Breathing changes as a reaction to their body movements in various situations. "Kikou-jutsu" is said to be a good use of this breathing technique. It teaches that by exerting the ultimate concentration and releasing Ki (spirit) a competitor would not only be able to control one's own actions but also the action of the opponents. "Kikou" literally means "the spirits of oneself" - by freely controlling one's latent energies, these spirits directly address one's body and the spirit and in turn affect the spirit of the opponents. A basic principle of Kikou trainings, to the best of my knowledge, would be a breathing technique with which one's spine straight up. To take energy from the natural world into one's body by inhaling slowly and then make it explode by exhaling it all at once. This is what we called utilizing the stored energies of the powers and the spirits.

The act of breathing is physical as well as biologically important factors for athletic aspects of one's health. It requires a very intensive concentration and heavy demands on the body far greater than one could imagine. In ordinary life, one would maintain the balance of the time of breathing and movements unconsciously, however, judging by discomfort one feels in the diaphragm, especially after being sick or having a cold, one easily realize that the act of breathing demands so much more from one's consciousness than simply inhaling and exhaling. The less active other parts of the body become, the more instinctive breathing becomes. This is one reason why one can not do hard exercises and maintain a natural breathing pattern, as it especially inhibits the reflexes and the ability to move accordingly. Therefore, not to mention in kumite fighting, it is very important for one to not let the opponents to sense one's breathing level, so as not to give any advantage for the opponents to gain a superior position.

An important point of the physics aspect of breathing is the contraction of one's muscle. That is, the body becomes hard by controlling the timing of one's breathing. An example would be the avoidance of serious damage from an attack by making one's muscles tense. This allows all of one's energies to come together in the large areas of one's body. By temporarily increasing the peculiar vibrations on the body muscles, by doing so, the body is able to absorb the pain from the damage to one's body and block the nervous system's reaction to damage. One can imagine this by considering the difference it would be between one flicking Tofu with a finger and flicking of Konnyaku jelly (devil's-tongue). It is certainly very important to develop the strength needed for receiving the blows as well as the techniques of attack. The moment to deliver stored energies of the powers and spirits to the opponents, as I mentioned it before, would be displayed by the tightening of muscles so one could make good use of the stored energies for attacking instead of concentrating on the pain of received blows.

Let us explain it in detail.  $F$  (Force) =  $m$  (mass)  $a$  (acceleration). As you can see, this is Newton's theory (the second rule). In order to increase the power to deliver effective movement to the opponent, that is  $F$  (Force), one would either need to gain  $m$  (mass), or  $a$  (acceleration), or both. In present kumite competitions, it is debated as to whether this theory is important or not, I would rather leave it to other opportunities to discuss, nevertheless, it is needless to say that one's daily trainings are all about this equation. For karate-do attacking, the forces that counteract  $F$  (force) would be friction-resistance and air-resistance. Consider the front of the fist area, one could ignore the later, however the former, friction-resistance would be increased when one's body is unnecessarily tensed. Therefore, one does not need excessive strength in the whole body's movements, rather just enough strength to hold one's body steady while the fist is in motion.

Let us discuss Oi-tsuki (stepping forward and reversed punch) and think about mechanics of this motion. Take the power that is produced by the instant moment when one's body steps out from being relaxed kamae(basic guard); the moment a foot is landed without being interrupted by the law of inertia, making one's joints locked from an appropriate angle towards the toe, ankle, knee and finally back. Add the energies that are produced by the Hikite (a pull-back arm) action as well. The sum of the energy that is generated by these coordinated movements of the body are then concentrated into the fist and delivered to the opponent. Even the velocity of the foot being landed would make good use of its reactionary power. Energies exerted by the movements, such as circles or straight lines, on the various kinds of bodies parts are controlled by the lengths of time that it takes to complete the motion and the amount of contract with the joints; energies expended are increased by  $m$ (mass) by focusing on the final target; increasing  $a$ (acceleration) when being relaxed; and finally  $F$ (force) is increased as a result of the total action. For putting these into practice, ones must have, not to mention, enough stamina to endured a rigorous training, perfected focus technique to foresee the target's movements, and above all, it is essential that one must achieve and maintain the spirit, which is superior to the opponent's.

So far I've mentioned and emphasized how important it is for one to understand that the control of one's

body's hardness is maintained through timing of breathing. By mastering this timing, one could exert the massive potential and powers to defeat opponents. I've outlined my way of karate-do by using tactics, mental conditioning, and physical fitness and control. In general, we tend to ignore these concepts and approach karate-do as a negative, extremely rational or strictly spiritual experience. However, we probably can only explain and understand the things in these ways because mankind is only aware of a small segment of the total picture. Even medical science or natural science is limited in its perception of the total experience. If we only pass on the tradition to the next generation, karate-do would have been died out generations ago. The fact is there are many common things therein when ones approached the core of the things. It is not so hard to imagine that karate-do was formed for several years ago and that it was approached as it is now, by many of karate-do practitioners have evolved the art based on their experiences, knowledge and even their political briefs.

I will conclude this journal by the confession that it is my mission to contribute to the future of karate-do, not to utterly take what my former Sensei instructed me for granted, but with diligent study of the arts of karate-do, learn and pass on what many previous karate-do practitioners have experienced.