

Personal Discoveries in Karate-do... ...a synthesis of Okinawan & Chinese arts

by Richard Kay, Goju Kensha Karate-do

My personal discoveries from training in *karate-do* are many and varied. My aim here is to present a collection of thoughts, ideas and feelings relating to my study and subsequent analysis of martial arts, both in general and specifically to the *Goju-Kensha* of Ohtsuka Sensei. I hope to express some ideas that have been revelations to me personally, and that have significantly altered my development as a human being. I do not intend to relate my ideas to discoveries of technique and strategy as they pertain to the physical act of combat, for whilst I feel they are plausible, they are not unique nor are they important in the whole scheme of things as they relate to 'the way'.

Martial arts can be quite a complex field of study, with a myriad array of technical and philosophical frameworks and cultural inferences affecting the development and presentation of the various arts. At the end of the day, training is a uniquely personal experience, and no 2 people can ever experience it the same way. We will experience similar teachings in vastly different ways, each assimilating various components into our physiological and psychological makeup as it suits us.

The study of *budo* is a uniquely personal undertaking, as is our own development as individuals in life.

I remember many years ago, Ohtsuka Sensei stating that the study of *budo* is really the study of interpersonal interaction and human relations. Ultimately, all the *important* discoveries I have made through my own personal study of *budo* relate heavily to this concept, and it is this idea I wish to make comment on.

Aggression is a natural part of our biological makeup. It helps us compete and survive and propagate our genes, which is the instinctual, innate and fundamental desire of all living organisms. Aggression is caused primarily by fear...a fear of being 'harmed', either through an inability to protect ourselves against an external physical attack, or a lack of internal fortitude to enable us to withstand an emotional or psychological attack.

Budo, as opposed to *bujutsu*, aims to train people to eliminate both aspects of fear and thus harness aggression, thus making them more productive members of society. This is what I feel Ohtsuka Sensei is referring to in this statement, and this is the ultimate discovery I have made so far in my study of *budo* in general.

Personally, I don't classify *karate-do* as a 'martial' art in the classical context. Martial implies war, or military involvement and such systems of combat for war, such as *kenjutsu*, *jujutsu*, etc, were the domain of the professional soldier. Whilst the techniques or *jutsu* aspects of karate can certainly be used in this manner, *karate* was developed more as a civilian fighting system of self defence, and therefore it's' philosophical basis is different.

The key pretexts commonly associated with *karate-do* indicate that the primary philosophy of true *karate-do* is non-violence and harmony:

- 'There is no first attack in karate-do'
- 'Karate-do begins and ends with good manners'

This also fits in with Ohtsuka Sensei's perspective of 'harmony between people through training to forge the spirit'.

However, *karate-do* can accurately be classified as a form of *budo*, without contradicting its' fundamental philosophies. *Bu* means 'combat' and presupposes a confrontation but also includes the art of evasion. It is equally synonymous with harmony and with the reconciliation of man and the universe. *Budo* is 'the way of combat', a recent tag for [Japanese] martial arts in general, with emphasis on their peaceful aspects. In addition to the physical discipline and the techniques of movement it implies an attitude of mind and a certain ethic.

Budo is distinct from *bugei* (arts of combat) and *bujutsu* (techniques of combat), as these latter approaches are concerned chiefly with real fighting, and *budo* is concerned with the physical and spiritual training offered through the study and practice of martial arts.

I believe Ohtsuka Sensei's synthesis of Japanese *karate* with Okinawan and Chinese arts aims at addressing more effectively *both* the fundamental aims of training in *budo*...protection against harm from the external threat of attack and the internal threat of self-doubt.

The technical aspects of karate-do serve as a vehicle for both these elements. Obviously, applied correctly they give the user the ability to protect themselves against a variety of common physical attacks. With practice the practitioner learns to face this fear of harm and work through it by addressing plausible solutions. At higher levels, the aim is to circumvent the need for using the technical aspects at all by avoiding or de-escalating the situation.

Obviously, though, if a situation requires a physical solution, then karate certainly offers many valid and realistic choices. Again, this is tempered by the philosophical framework of karate to choose a physical solution that causes minimal harm to others whilst simultaneously ensuring your own safety and well-being.

Regular training also serves as a vehicle for self discovery and provides an increase in the sense of self-worth, though this most frequently occurs in hindsight rather than arrogant foresight. It is only by reflecting back on where you've been and where you've come from do you gain an insight into what you've achieved.

I think Ohtsuka Sensei looked to the Okinawan and Chinese arts as a means of integrating 'reality' into the technical framework of *karate-do*. Obviously, if you are going to employ physical control strategies, then they should be effective, and effectiveness in *budo* means maximum affect with minimal effort.

Ohtsuka Sensei recognises the practicality of the Okinawan arts for learning to generate martial power in technique, whilst the Chinese arts provide versatility of options and techniques. Being a practitioner of *Goju Ryu*, they also represent the essence of hardness and softness respectively, further enhancing his understanding of these 2 universal elements that pervade all things. Hence his idea that Chinese martial arts are the father of *karate* and Okinawan arts the mother.

The other aspect of integrating the Chinese arts is the concept of fighting the unseen internal enemy...disease and poor health...through good practices and effective breathing techniques. Ohtsuka Sensei sees *budo* as a lifelong pursuit and acknowledges that as we age, the yin/yang cycle reverses. In our youth, we tend to focus on hardness, with softness being a minor by product. As we age, and hopefully become wiser, we find the benefit in softness and that hardness (effectiveness) is there to an even greater extent.

The final aspect I wish to make comment on relates back to the initial concept of Ohtsuka Sensei's belief that 'the study of *budo* is really the study of interpersonal interaction'. Through proper, diligent training our moral development should undergo a subtle yet important transformation. It is an established fact that psychologically, we are all responsible for our own choices and the consequences of those choices.

Personally I believe that the key factor missing in society today, and the cause of most of our negative issues, is a general failure in people as a whole to accept personal responsibility for themselves and their actions...to choose cause without considering effect, or to accept effect without acknowledging cause.

All action has to begin as mental thought; therefore we are all responsible for the action since the thought originates in our own mind. So as in life, this is the same in *budo*, though the relationship between cause and effect is usually more obvious and immediate, and often involves much more serious consequences. Therefore, practitioners of real *budo* learn to think more about the relationship between cause and effect, to think before acting, and once a choice is made, they are also more likely to accept the consequences or effect.

This, I believe, is the basis for Ohtsuka Sensei's statement...training to control fear, and through that process, gaining an appreciation of the worth of people and realizing that cause and effect are intrinsically linked. Everyone is equal in *budo*, for everyone must strive individually to achieve personal success through diligent application. We are guided by others who have walked the path before us, learnt lessons, made mistakes and triumphed over adversity. Ultimately, we learn that we are all masters of our own destiny.

Footnote: this essay was submitted October 2005 as a requirement for Godan grading



Richard Kay (left) receiving Godan certificate from James Sumarac Kyoshi, Lancefield, November 2005