

# ***Kata*** ***Culture*** **& the Mind**

型~文化~心

by

**Patrick McCarthy**

*“The source of human weakness is internal, not external...  
hence, the journey must be inward, not outward as the true enemy lies  
within, and it’s there where all battles must be first fought and won.”*

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# Introduction

型

## **Kata**

*Matsubayashiryu* founder *Nagamine Shoshin* said, "that only through the relentless study of *Karatedo* could one achieve the highest standards of inner beauty and strength. The fusing of the body and mind through *Karatedo* is indescribably beautiful and spiritual. When totally absorbed in *kata*, one is brought into complete contact with the central core of their being. It is there that the essence of *Karatedo* is to be discovered."

*Shitoryu* founder *Mabuni Kenwa* concluded that understanding *Karate's* deepest meaning first meant transcending ego-related distractions and finding inner-peace. In an abstract poem, *Mabuni Sensei* wrote, "when the spirit of *Karatedo* [written as "bu" for *budo*] is deeply embraced, it becomes the vehicle [described as a boat] in that one is ferried across the great void to enlightenment [that Master *Mabuni* described as an island].

Correctly studied, *kata* reveal both the physical and metaphysical precepts of *Karatedo*. Best described through the abstract tenets of "*shuhari*," *Kinjo Hiroshi*, a man characterised by *Richard Kim* as a walking encyclopaedia of *karate* history, philosophy, and application, maintains that *kata* is the bible of *Karatedo*.

### **More on *Kata***

To a beginner of *Karatedo*, *kata* is the vehicle through which the central principles of self-defense are first learned. If there is anything else to be discovered beyond that, it is only something that manifests itself after intense study and thousands of repetitions; a practice that compels one to turn their attention inward. *Miyamoto Musashi*, a well-known *samurai* of feudal Japan, when describing the *kata* ritual, once wrote, *Senjitsu no keiko Tan To ii, Banjitsu no keiko Rento Yu* ("1000 days to forge the spirit, 10,000 to polish it"). *Wise teachers often warn that when the spirit of repetition is not properly cultivated or, even worse, lost, the kata* ritual becomes uneventful, even boring. A popular expression among old masters in *Okinawa* says that there can be no limit placed upon *kata* training, philosophical assimilation, or protracted introspection.

A Confucian tenet, (Analects 7:8) that permeates Japanese *budo*, describes the master unwilling to enlighten those who are not enthusiastic, or educate those who are not anxious to learn. He will not repeat himself to those who, when he raises one corner, do not return having raised the other three corners. It is the disciple's responsibility to maintain enthusiasm and willingness to seek out *Karatedo's* deepest meaning.

Consumed in and by the *kata*, impermeable layers of silence shield one from both external and internal distractions. Inner confusion gradually dissolves until it no longer exists at all. Regulating the flow of air from within the body and synchronising it with the execution of each physical contraction, the *kata* becomes a powerful vehicle of introspection through which external performance and internal thought correspond harmoniously. Both external and internal disturbances fade away into a muffled roar until they are no more disturbing than the distant sound of rolling thunder.

Captured by the essence of introspection, personal concessions, diligent training, and philosophical assimilation establish an inner balance. Through this balance, immunity against life's trivial distractions gradually unfolds. So much so that, detachment from illusion becomes easier and quicker in time. Breath is the gateway between the body and the mind, between the physical and the spiritual. In this light, *kata* becomes *Karate's central vehicle*, like meditation in motion, and training becomes as much mental as it is physical. Beyond exhaustion, despite aching muscles, I have experienced peacefulness flowing quietly

within the brutality of *Karatedo*. It is through this tranquillity that our pursuit of fulfilment is realized.

There are no superfluous movements in the orthodox *Karatedo* paradigms. Every movement represents a specific principle, which corresponds to its defensive application. Practicing *kata*, one's performance is enhanced if the *karateka* can actually visualise the physical application of each technique, hence employing varying degrees of rhythm, power, and focus. Knowing this, we can better understand what Master *Kinjo Hiroshi* meant when he said: "*The performance of technique reveals one's understanding of it.*"

Up until the turn of this century, in *Okinawa* most, if not all, local disciplines revolved around only one or two *kata*. However, during *Itosu Ankoh's* era, this tradition changed due in large part to the introduction and popularity of *Toudi-jutsu* (the name then used) in the school system. Later, when *Toudi-jutsu* was taken to mainland (Japan) group instruction, school clubs, and the competitive format completely revolutionised the practice of *kata* and study of *Karatedo*.

Prior to the turn of this century, curiosity on Japan's mainland about *Toudi-jutsu* first surfaced from the attention it gained when the Imperial Army considered its value as an adjunct to physical training. Impressed by the physical conditioning of several *Okinawan* conscripts during their medical examinations in 1891,<sup>1</sup> the Army ultimately abandoned its interest in *Toudi-jutsu* because of unsafe training methods, poor organization and the great length of time it took to gain proficiency. However, that was not before a local campaign surfaced in an effort to modernise its practice. The movement, headed by *Itosu Ankoh* (1832-1915), was ultimately successful when *Toudi-jutsu* became a part of the physical education curriculum of *Okinawa's* school system at the turn of the century. In linking the past to the present, *Itosu's* crusade to modernise *Karate-jutsu* resulted in fundamentally revising its practice.

Beyond *Itosu's* letter to the Ministry of Education and Department of War in 1908, there is little testimony to support (or deny) allegations that *Toudi-jutsu* was developed to better

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically, *Hanashiro Chomo* and *Yabu Kentsu*.

prepare draftees for military service. Notwithstanding, *Toudi-jutsu* was ultimately introduced into *Okinawa's* school system under the pretence that young men with healthy bodies and good moral character were more productive in modern Japanese society.

With Master *Itosu's* modification, the emphasis shifted from an art of self-defense to a cultural recreation and form of physical fitness, which featured kata as a group practice, without the focus of *bunkai* [functional application training]. Ignoring the spiritual foundation upon which it rested and not teaching the hidden self-defense applications (to disable, maim, or even kill, by traumatising anatomically vulnerable areas), the old discipline became obscured and a new tradition evolved. These geometrical paradigms virtually became only exercises for health and fitness during *Itosu Ankoh's* generation.

This radical transition period represented the termination of a secret self-defense art and the birth of a unique recreational phenomenon. This phenomenon was introduced to mainland Japan, where it ultimately conformed to the forces of Japanese-ness and blossomed into a remarkable recreational discipline.

When compared to the mother paradigms of Chinese *quanfa*, the traditional *kata* of Japanese *Karatedo* are noticeably different. However, without understanding how anthropological forces affect the growth and direction of any cultural phenomena, it is perplexing at best to actually conceive the connection between Japanese *Karatedo* and its progenitor, *quanfa*.

Understanding the social matrix from whence it evolved, we can more easily understand how Japan's inflexible and ritualistic society transformed these Chinese traditions once cultivated in old *Okinawa*. An old Japanese *kotowaza* (proverb) aptly describes how things or people that are "different" (not in balance with the "*wa*") ultimately conform or are methodically thwarted by Japan's omnipotent cultural forces: "*Deru kugi wah utareru*" ("a protruding nail ultimately gets hammered down").

As I noted earlier, presently there are various styles of Japanese *Karatedo* as each generation has produced innovators who have found reason to reinterpret the principles of *Karatedo*. However, if one looked deep enough, it would soon become obvious that the principles upon which combative subjugation rest are universal.

In his illuminating dissertation (at Japan's *Budo* University in 1990) on the evolution of *Zen* Buddhism and its effects upon Japanese culture, *Suzuki Kakuzen Sensei*,<sup>2</sup> aptly described how variations in human behaviour (personality/attitude) were responsible for the advent of *Zen's* various sects.

Comparing his dissertation to *karate's* myriad of eclectic interpretations, it is easy to arrive at the same conclusion: the style is directly proportional to the experience, personality, and nature of its originator and or those people most responsible for its transmission. There is only one message, maintained *Suzuki*, however, there are many ways of teaching it. A popular *kotowaza* used by men of *budo* in Japan reads: "*Many paths lead up a mountain, but only one moon can be seen by those who achieve its summit.*" The principles upon which self-defense rest never vary, as human personalities do, hence it should be those principles that we strive to master.

After being introduced to the mainland of Japan, the *kata* of *Okinawa Toudi-jutsu*, like other ritualised Japanese disciplines, evolved into elegant, but fixed traditions, beautiful in their simplicity. Compared to the complexity of Chinese *quanfa* forms, which, like other facets of Chinese society, remained abundant yet enigmatic.

### ***The Roots of Karate***

Numerous Chinese *hsing* were introduced to *Okinawa*, perhaps even hundreds may have haphazardly made their way to the tiny island kingdom over many generations. However, all that remains are about 50 or so, perpetuated in more than a dozen different self-defense traditions. Influenced by various cultural and individual factors, *kata* are a distinct collection of a style's hallmark techniques.

Bound by an ironclad ritual of secrecy, the hidden self-defense applications of any style have always been handed down through oral tradition. Taking years of meticulous study, it

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<sup>2</sup> An *aikido shihan* and the head priest at the *Enkaku* Temple in *Kita Kamakura*, where *Funakoshi Gichin's* monument "*Karate ni Sente Nashi*" is located, *Suzuki sensei* is a professor of religion and is in charge of the Zen Research Center at *Komazawa* University.

is no wonder that its practice, when compared to tournament fighting, became overshadowed and ultimately obscured.

### **The Magnitude of *Kata***

If we were to consider the myriad of self-defense related phenomena to which a single *kata* applies, it would become readily apparent why *kata* is in itself an entire tradition. That is also why old masters of orthodox *Karatedo* once advocated the mastery of only one or two *kata* rather than the pointless, but popular, accumulation of many.

In addition to the seizing, holding, grappling, throwing, joint locking, dislocations, strangles, and traumatising of anatomically vulnerable locations present in the *kata*, let us also consider some of the other principles with which they are concerned: *Yoi no Kishin*; mental preparation; *In/yo* (yin/yang); understanding the magnitude of defense and offence; *go no sen*; defensive initiative; *Sen no Sen* and *Sen*; the two levels of combative initiative; *Maai*; understanding engagement distance and how to utilize *Ma*; the space or interval established through body change (*Tai sabaki*; the principles of balance and leading control); *Tai no Shinshuku*; expanding and contracting, gyration of the hips, body mechanics, and the summation of total joint forces; *Chikara no Kyojaku*; the proper amount of power for each technique; *Kiai-jutsu* building and releasing intense *qi*; *Waza no Kankyu*; the speed and rhythm of technique; *Ju no ri*; the principle of resiliency and the willingness to bend in the wind of adversity; *Kokyu*; synchronising the breath with the expansion and contraction of muscular activity; *Taekuean*; understanding the application of each technique; *Zanshin*; mental alertness and continued domination before and after the fact; *Seishi o choetsu*; transcending the thoughts of life and death.

Understanding the magnitude of *kata*, especially when it is combined with spiritual doctrines, it becomes perfectly clear how a single paradigm (*kata*) can represent an entire fighting tradition. Once a student comes to grips with the gravity each *kata* represents, their personal training will take on new direction and more meaningful dimensions. Moreover, by genuinely embracing the precepts upon which *Karatedo* rest, one is assured that its social ramifications will permeate the character of its user, hence, the value and direction of one's life in general is profoundly enhanced.

## **The Value of *Karatedo* in Modern Times**

To be the very best one can be, regardless of whether or not it is in fighting, sports, business, or just life, requires indescribable resolve and inner strength. Transcending the barriers of the ordinary, such indomitable fortitude is never possible without first making enormous personal sacrifices. A prerequisite that any combat veteran, athletic champion or successful businessperson can attest to.

Through the virtues of *Karatedo*, one comes face to face with one's weaknesses. It is through these virtues that weaknesses are turned into strengths and strengths into even greater strengths, thus the tradition fulfils its purpose. Indomitable fortitude insulates us against the powerful forces of resistance and provides the resilience to withstand personal failure.

A mind tempered in the tradition of *Karatedo* will remain impervious to worldly delusion and illuminate the darkness of selfishness and ignorance. As with the *samurai* warrior undaunted in the face of fear, preparation, patience, and humility is 90% of fighting, winning, and living. With greater control over our minds, or the world- within, we can have greater control over our bodies and lives, or the world without. It is by putting this power and knowledge to work everyday that our lives are enriched and fulfilled in ways we never thought possible.

Those of you familiar with the power of combining physical training with methodical introspection can readily testify to the self-conquests made possible through *Karatedo*. However, we in the West were first introduced to *Karatedo* as a practical form of self-defense and a demanding but rewarding competitive recreation.

That its metaphysical significance remains unknown and is the subject of intense curiosity in the West, lends importance to the provocative words of Henri Poincare (1854-1912). French mathematician and philosopher, Poincare wrote "*Science is built upon facts much in the same way that a house is erected from bricks, but that the mere collection of facts was no more a science than a pile of bricks a house.*"<sup>3</sup> Like any other science whose foundation

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<sup>3</sup> "Hypothesis of Science" 1905 by Henry Poincare.



has been fractured, abused, or removed altogether, *Karatedo* has reduced in substance, taking on the characteristics of its new circumstances.

The foundation I speak of, the training of one's mind, is the very foundation upon which our predecessors, men like *Funakoshi Gichin (1867-1957)*, *Motobu Choki (1871-1944)*, *Miyagi Chojun (1888-1953)*, and *Mabuni Kenwa (1889-1952)*, placed so much emphasis.

*Funakoshi Gichin* described *Karatedo* as an intangible vehicle through which inner discovery provoked a deeper understanding of the self, life, and the world. Concerning the "kara" of *Karatedo*, he wrote: "Just as a valley can carry a resounding voice, so too must the person who follows *Karatedo* make himself void or empty by transcending self-centeredness and greed. Make yourself empty within, but upright without. This is the real meaning of the *kara* of *Karatedo*." The great master maintained that the ultimate aim of *Karatedo* lay neither in victory nor defeat, but rather in the perfection of one's moral character.

In 1927, *Motobu Choki*, a principal *Toudi-jutsu* authority unquestionably one of the tradition's most controversial figures, and one of its most celebrated fighters, wrote that, in seeking to understand the essence of *karate*, we must search beyond the immediate results of physical training and not place too emphasis upon competition or record breaking but rather to seek wisdom through self-knowledge and humility.

# 文化

## **Japanese Culture**

In many ways, *Karatedo* is a miniature representation of Japanese society. Therefore, studying the pensive culture and provocative language from whence it came can also help deepen one's understanding of the art. Based upon feudal customs, inflexible ideology, and profound spiritual conviction, modern Japan is rich in cultural heritage, but also a society, which remains bound by ancient ritual.

For the most part, Japan's people are disciplined and idealistic. A microcosm of the austere society whence it evolved, *budo*, as practiced in Japan, is also idealistic and disciplined. Ritual is the platform upon which *Karatedo* is taught. It is through ritual that one's attention is ultimately turned inward to where a lifelong journey for spiritual harmony is pursued. In

this light, *kata* becomes the central vehicle of *Karatedo* and training becomes as much mental as it is physical. However, it is necessary to balance this ritual with philosophy and introspection before the light inside each of us can be turned on.

In his preliminary analysis of methodology, American anthropologist, Dr. Stephen Fabian described *jujutsu* as a miniature representation of Japanese culture and society. I believe that Dr. Fabian's use of the word *jujutsu* represents Japanese *budo* in general, of which *Karatedo* is a part. Drawing upon Dr. Fabian's analysis, we can easily observe how the same principles apply to *Karatedo*.

Dr. Fabian wrote, "as an outgrowth of the warrior ethos of pre-*Meiji* (before 1868) Japan, *jujutsu* is in many ways a microcosm of Japanese culture and society. It is more than a mere reflection of its setting, however; its practitioners dynamically interact with the socio-cultural environment of which they are an integral (if today but a small) part, and by doing so reinforce certain socio-cultural attributes."<sup>4</sup>

The combative principle of *ju*, or pliability, is also a precept found in general application throughout Japanese society, one where direct confrontation and occasionally even contact between interacting parties is avoided as much as possible in Japanese society, as in *budo* the principle of *wa*, is of the utmost importance. It is an attitude that, to varying degrees, is customarily practiced in all aspects of Japanese society. "*Wa*" is perhaps better described as the uninterrupted display of a readiness to sacrifice one's personal interests for the sake of communal tranquility.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Fabian continued his analysis by describing another set of related concepts observable in both Japanese society and *budo*, by describing the *tatemae/honne* and *omote/ura* precepts. Drawing upon Hall & Hall's study<sup>6</sup>, he described *tatemae* as that which is openly presented,

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<sup>4</sup> Hoplos, "*Hontai Yoshin Ryu Ju Jutsu*" ("A feudal based combative tradition") Vol.7, #2, Winter Issue, 1992: (Honolulu: International Hopological Society) pp 1-7.

<sup>5</sup> Karel van Wolferen, "The Enigma of Japanese Power," p 412.

<sup>6</sup> Edward T. Hall and Mildred Reed Hall, "Hidden Differences" (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1987), p. 61.

the face of things; while *honne* remains the inner, or true feeling. Similarly, *omote* and *ura* are virtually synonymous with the *tatemae/honne* principles. For example, *omote* means the front, the face or the image one presents; while *ura* means the back, or that which cannot be seen, one's feelings. These principles are observed in the study of *kata*, where what is presented on the surface is not always what is truly intended.

A myriad of comparative socio-cultural principles permeates the Japanese combative disciplines, and is worthy of our attention. However, while an entire analysis might better illuminate the magnitude of that study, this lecture is geared only to draw your attention to its existence.

In Western society we often measure the degree of our success or happiness by how much we possess. It is deeply ingrained in Japanese culture that true success and happiness is not necessarily found in acquiring more but rather learning to appreciate less. Indicative of what the Japanese call "*mu*" (nothingness, the void), this is a precept that permeates Japanese culture, including *Karatedo* and the other Japanese combative traditions as well.

The Japanese believe that if one is able to get beyond ego-related distractions, the need for physical violence can be reduced entirely to chance. Basically speaking, it is ego that gets people into trouble. Like other Japanese *budo*, *karatedo* (the way of *karate*), is a conduit through which Japaneseness is funnelled. People who have mastered *Karatedo* respect the principle of "*wa*" and find sincere personal reward cultivating harmony, both within and without.

This is a concept rarely observed in the West, but one that represents a cornerstone of Japanese society. When one cannot get beyond the immediate results of physical training, *Karatedo* remains purely a recreational pursuit. Captured by the essence of introspection, *Karatedo* becomes a fascinating vehicle of inner exploration, through which untold personal rewards are made possible. Those of you familiar with the power of combining physical discipline, philosophy research, and meditation can readily testify to the self-conquests made possible through *Karatedo*.

Cultural differences, which have traditionally divided the East and West, have made the understanding of oriental philosophy appear somewhat bewildering if not totally confusing to the Western mind. However, now during an era when so many of us are seeking ways to

transcend the stress-related sicknesses of today's fast-moving society, the introspective traditions of the East, like *Karatedo*, offer deeply rewarding alternatives. Teaching us how to get back to nature, so to speak, *Karatedo* is 100% holistic.

Some examples of this cultural essence can be found in the translated publications of *Muso Soseki's "ni sente nashi"* precept, *Tsukahara Bokuden's "Spirit of the Immovable Mind," Yamamoto Tsunemoto's "Hagakure," Takuan Soho's "Unfettered Mind," Miyamoto Musashi's "Book of the Five Rings,"* and *Yamaoka Tesshu's "Sword of No Sword,"* to name a few of the more popular ones. Reading these works can help enthusiasts better understand the Japanese mind, as well as having affected the *Karate's* development.

Notwithstanding, personal research is vitally important to the growth and maturity of everyone who studies *Karatedo*, regardless of how sceptical they may at first feel. The research process is equally as important as is the end result. While it is fine to focus upon the rewards of success rather than the penalties of failure, it is critical not to lose sight of the importance of daily effort. Quite often we are so preoccupied by the ends to which our choices would be a means that we rarely if ever give any attention to the causes of which our choices may be an effect.

The results of one's research usually hold more personal value when interest develops from attraction rather than promotion. In short, it is better to find out on your own how valuable research can be rather than have someone else tell you how great it is. With one's attention drawn inward, the prolonged physical discipline of *Karatedo* has a way of influencing the mind. It is in that regard that a *Karatedo* student begins to recognise this tradition's depth. However, it usually takes quite some time and effort to begin to understand that there is something beyond the immediate results of physical training worthy of one's undivided attention. One must make sacrifices and work diligently to learn, for what can one ever discover if one is not first willing to explore. Only a fool takes no pleasure in understanding.



## The Mind

Understanding the significance of *Karatedo* as a path upon which its followers may discover the source of all human misery and how to transcend its powerful forces is to understand the spiritual foundation upon which all *budo* rests. This is what is meant by the "Do" ("Way") of *Karatedo*. Lest we be burdened by the politics of religion, does it not seem more advantageous to simply honour the principles of spiritualism, rather than argue over which god is better?

There is no god or devil, heaven and hell exists only in one's mind. Such blasphemous words bring about confusion in the minds of people holier-than-thou. In 1927, Sigmund Freud, in "The Future of an Illusion," wrote: "The truths contained in religious doctrines are after all so distorted and systematically disguised that the mass of humanity cannot recognise them as truth."<sup>7</sup> The ancient Hindu Vedas<sup>8</sup> tell us that: "Truth is but one, yet the sages speak of it by many names." An ancient Chinese proverb says that "There are many paths which lead up a mountain, however, there is but one moon to be seen by those who achieve its summit."

From the myths of ancient man came spiritual rituals through which future generations could discover and study the life-enhancing ways of those who had already made the journey. Whether presented in the vast, almost oceanic images of the Orient, in the vigorous narratives of the Greeks, or in the majestic legends of the Bible, various traditions described a separation from society, an inward penetration to the source of power, and a life-enhancing return. While the passage of this journey may be outward, in essence, it is inward, into the centre of our own existence. There, obscure resistance is finally overcome, and we experience a marvellous expansion of our powers, a vivid renewal of life.

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Campbell, "Hero with a Thousand Faces;" Princeton University Press, 1973: preface.

<sup>8</sup> The most sacred writings of ancient Hinduism provide some of the world's earliest spiritual philosophy.

In *Karatedo*, a disciple learns that self-mastery can only be accomplished by detachment and transfiguration. This fundamentally means transferring one's attention from the external world to the internal, from the macrocosm to the microcosm. It is a retreat from the quiet desperation's of the material world to the tranquil realm of the world- within in an effort to resurface free from the bondage of egotism.

Cultural anthropologist Joseph Campbell told us that throughout the inhabited world, in all times, and under every circumstance, myths have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestation. Religion, philosophy, the arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth.<sup>9</sup>

In 1953, in describing the correlation between spiritualism and the Japanese fighting traditions, the eminent *Zen* scholar *Suzuki Daisetsu*, wrote, that *budo*, as studied in Japan, is not pursued for its utilitarian purposes, nor purely for its aesthetic enjoyment rather, it is meant to train the mind; indeed, to bring the mind into contact with the ultimate reality.<sup>10</sup>

Can you imagine if one internalised their training to balance their physical conditioning, what results it would have on mind control and the art of thinking. In fact, it would be no understatement to say that the source of all human power begins in thought, and that it is in the actual application of our thoughts that the condition conducive to growth and harmony (attitude) is created.

It is only through cultivating our spiritual nature, that faith, courage, and enthusiasm brings forth the abundant rewards of accomplishment. Our spiritual nature can only be cultivated by "doing." In fact, the law of growth depends entirely upon reciprocal action: "we can only get as much as we give," "only reap that which we sow." Cultivating our spiritual nature

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p3.

<sup>10</sup> Eugene Herrigal. "Zen and the Art of Archery." Preface

begins with mastering a ritual of introspection and physical stillness long before its benefits can be put into practice.

With our attention drawn inward, thoughts are focused until the mind attracts the conditions necessary for their fulfilment. Concentration must become so intense that you become so identified with the object of your thought that you are conscious of nothing else. Ultimately, thought is transmuted into character (we are what we think), and character is the magnet that creates the individual's environment. Through developing our powers of perception, wisdom, intuition, and sagacity, our concentration intensifies. We need only to recognise the omnipotence of our spiritual nature and the desire to become the recipient of its beneficial effects.

However, to exercise the mind, one must understand the law of cause and effect; causation depends entirely upon polarity: a circuit must be formed, the universe is the positive side of the battery of life; the individual is the negative, and thought forms the circuit. The knowledge of this power provides the courage to dare and the faith to accomplish. The degree of success with which anyone will ever meet, depends entirely upon the extent to which one realizes that the infinite cannot be changed but must be cooperated with. A change of thought means a change in conditions. The results of a harmonious mental attitude (the ultimate aim of *Karatedo*) bring forth harmonious conditions in life. Selfish thoughts contain the germs of contamination. One's ability to appropriate that which one requires for growth from each of life's experiences determines the degree of harmony that we will attain. Obstacles are necessary for one's wisdom and spiritual growth.

Our ability to think is the ability to act and bring what we think into manifestation for the benefit of others and ourselves. What we do depends upon what we are, and what we are depends upon what we think. Success or failure is determined more or less by one's lifestyle. One's lifestyle is dominated by one's attitude. One's attitude depends entirely upon one's thoughts, underscored by the expression, "we are nothing more than the sum total of our daily thoughts and decisions." Therefore, a person is what a person thinks. How a person speaks and behaves is, in essence, what that person thinks. Subsequently, thinking is crucial to being. This is true because one must "be" before one can "do," and one can

“do” only to the extent that one “is,” and what one “is” depends entirely upon what one “thinks.”<sup>11</sup>

We cannot express powers that we do not possess. We must discover the power within and learn how to use that power to strengthen and enhance the world without. *Karatedo* is an art that teaches how to do this.

Although the process is protracted, it is also quite unique and can change one’s life and lifestyle if one so desires. There is an entire system to be learned that entails a series of mental exercises to be performed in methodical order.

### **The Technique**

Each day when you wake up and before you go to sleep, find a place where you can sit comfortably and undisturbed for up to about 30 minutes at a time. The cardinal point is to be comfortable and to be undisturbed.

Introspection is about becoming relaxed, finding inner-quietness and harmony. It is about separating yourself from everything else around you and setting your mind free like a bird soaring in the sky. Achieving this condition allows one to identify and transcend personal weaknesses, a prerequisite for honesty and methodical practice. An unusual but not difficult practice, *Karatedo* teaches that the passage to understanding self-discovery lies on the middle path between both extremes. To achieve this understanding, *Karatedo* employs both static and moving (*kata*) forms of meditation.

Introductory preparation for static training consists of sitting comfortably in a perpendicular posture (a chair will do nicely), but relaxed, with your hands resting together on your lap and eyes closed. Do not worry about what to think or if there is some exotic mantra to chant. Simply let your mind digress freely and breath quietly but deeply: In through the nose and out through the mouth; the technique must be supported by a posture that allows unimpeded diaphragm movement. It may seem to be a rather simple task, but many of you

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<sup>11</sup> "The Master Key," J.F. Fennell, undated manuscript and publisher unknown .



may have great difficulty finding the patience to perform even such a fundamental exercise for more than just a few minutes.

However, be sure that the benefits will manifest themselves within a few short weeks of regular practice. Points to remember are that regular exercise and mental training must work in harmony with each other in preparation for the next step. Patience is a virtue and I would encourage you to balance your physical and mental training with philosophical assimilation through reading the ancient documents left to us by our predecessors.

### **Conclusion**

*Karatedo* teaches one to embrace the moment, to live in harmony with nature and our fellow man. It teaches one to understand our own deep mystery. While the metaphysical principles upon which *Karatedo* rest are ancient, knowing their value is to understand how to apply them in the contemporary lives we lead, the relationships we share, and with the communities in which we dwell.

Those who believe that philosophy, introspection, and spiritualism have no part in *Karatedo* have yet to understand the essence of this profound tradition. We are so engaged in doing things to achieve purpose of outer value that we forget the inner value, the rapture associated with being alive.

Taught as an art form, *Karatedo* helps its students discover a message that transcends punching and kicking, winning or losing. Rituals help explain life's goals, the problems one will face along the way, how to overcome them, and what to expect in the end. *Karatedo* teaches how to defeat the bondage of egotism that is within all of us. The source of human weakness is internal, not external. Hence, the journey must be inward, not outward. Man's real enemy lies within, and it is there that all battles must be first fought and won.

The ancient master's spiritual teachings live on in the legacy of *Karatedo* and are cultivated in patience and humility. Humility builds strength from weakness, and is the product of austerity, which is called *Shugyo* in Japanese. It is through patience and humility that *karate's* innermost value is attained. It is also in patience and humility that *Karatedo's* rewards are best enjoyed.

In understanding that *Karatedo* is a deeply personal pursuit that affects each of us in different ways, how then can mastery ever be found in anything as shallow as physical prowess, race, orthodoxy of style, or even the lineage of one's instructors for that matter? It can only be in the sincere acceptance and genuine application of those virtues, values, and principles upon which *Karatedo* rest, that mastery without delusion emerges. This message made a significant impact upon the pioneers of this ancient fraternity. And, it is this message that has been perpetuated.

"*Bushi*" *Matsumura Chikudoun Pechin Sokon* (c. 1809-1899), the *Miyamoto Musashi* of the *Ryukyu* Kingdom, was responsible for introducing the teaching principles of *Jigen-ryu Kenjutsu* to the Chinese *quanfa* discipline that he was an expert of. Regarded in *karate* history as the principal authority of the self-defense traditions that developed in the castle district of *Shuri*, maintained that when ego-related distractions hampered one's personal progress, then it became essential to sincerely embrace humility.

The spiritual cornerstone upon which the fighting traditions rest, humility serves to remind one to place virtue ahead of vice, values ahead of vanity and principles ahead of personalities.

Rather than gaining or acquiring excess baggage in life, *Karatedo* teaches us to remove useless and ego-related distractions. Instead of always striving to acquire more and more, *Karatedo* teaches one that genuine satisfaction can come from learning to appreciate less and less. Rather than only taking from *Karatedo*, we must also consider putting back into that which has given us strength and power. Remember that all power and success has to do with putting knowledge into action through mastering the world within. *Karatedo* teaches us how to enhance our world-without by accessing, cultivating, and mastering our world-within.

How much we experience, but how little we truly learn. We understand many things but realize practically nothing. We hold many facts and opinions but, in essence, know little about ourselves. Pretending will never change anything. How can anyone ever plan an escape without first realising that they are imprisoned? One must pound and polish the human spirit until it is as strong and vibrant as a samurai sword. The secret of change is not to fight the old but rather to focus upon building the new.

Metaphorically speaking, the *sensei* is like a lighthouse, "he reveals the locations of the rocks, however, how one navigates those dangerous waters is entirely their own doing." Karlfried Graf Durckhein once said, "*When you are on a journey, and the end (goal) keeps getting further and further away, only then can you realise that the real end (goal) is, in fact, the journey itself.*" *Karatedo* teaches one to embrace the moment, to get interested in the race rather than only the goal, in the pursuit rather than the possession.

The only place to enjoy the rewards of *Karatedo* is in the privacy of one's own thought. After years of travelling and seeking out the truth, I came to understand the old proverb, "That one need never leave the *dojo* to find that which one seeks. Look within to find the answers." When the teacher becomes the student, the master a beginner, and the end a beginning, the circle has been completed. *T.S. Eliot* once wrote: "*That we shall not cease from exploration, and at the end of all of our exploring, we will arrive where we first started and know the place for the first time.*"<sup>12</sup>

The passing of time, the changing of seasons, the erosion of land, and the death of loved ones. The "way" of *karate* teaches those willing to learn that everything in the circle of life is seasonal, changing, dying, reborn. A microcosm of spiritualism, *Karatedo* is but one path leading up the mountain; it teaches one to understand these changes, accept them, and live in harmony with them.

Our aging, the way we think, one's urges and sexuality, man's questions about the universe, our necessity to know ourselves, and the need to find a reason for existence, even accepting our own death, will always need meticulous examination and action. Because these questions will always exist, there will always be the need for a tradition that has the answers. *Karatedo* is one such tradition: a tradition that can only be brought to life by teaching its participants to look inward in an effort to discover the truth. This is the magnitude of *Karatedo*.

In discovering that which lies beyond the immediate results of physical training, we have learned about the art and spirit of *Karatedo*. It is something that each of you have inside of

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<sup>12</sup> "Four Quartets, Little Gidding" by Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) written 1942.

you but seek to better understand. Like the *karate* enthusiasts who have walked before us, we too need to establish a symbiosis with *Karatedo* so that our lives are just as much a product of the art as is the art a product of our lives. However, a provocative question remaining unanswered invites each of us to seriously consider not only what one can get by continually taking from this humble tradition, but rather, as responsible enthusiasts concerned with its future direction, what one can put back into *Karatedo*...the art and way of *Karate*.

*Itosu Ankoh* was noted for saying that: "*Karate* strives to build character, improve human behaviour, encourage modesty. However, by virtue of its practice, *Karate* cannot and does not guarantee it."

## **Conclusion**

I sincerely hope that my presentation has, if even only in some small way, helped you to gain an alternative perception of *Karatedo*. If so, then I will have succeeded in accomplishing what I set out to do. Thank you.

Patrick McCarthy



## **About the Author**

Patrick McCarthy is the director of the International *Ryukyu Karate* Research Society and based in Brisbane, Australia. His other works include, "The Classical *Kata* of *Okinawan Karatedo*," the English translations of the "*Bubishi*;" *Bushi Matsumura's* 1882 "Seven Precepts of *Bu*," as well as his 1885 "*Zaiyunomei*;" *Itosu Ankoh's* 1908 "Ten Lesson;" *Miyagi Chojun's* 1934 "Outline of *Karatedo*;" *Taira Shinken's* 1964 "Encyclopedia of *Kobudo*," *Nagamine Shoshin's* "Biographies of *Karate & Tegumi* Masters," *Motobu Choki's* "Watashi no *Karate-jutsu*," and "Tanpenshu," etc. He travels frequently to lecture on *karate* history, philosophy, *kata* applications, *Tegumi* grappling, the "*Bubishi*," and *Yamaneryu Kobudo* and can be contacted c/o [patrick\\_mccarthy@mac.com](mailto:patrick_mccarthy@mac.com)