

# *How to train a real Karate Kid*

Excerpt from *Mastering Karate* by Jerry Beasley, Ed.D. All Rights reserved 2010

***Let me introduce this “karate4kidz” edition from my book Mastering Karate by noting that the actual physical skills being taught in your selected martial arts program are not as important as the social atmosphere that is presented. Call the art kung fu, karate, kickboxing, taekwondo or jujitsu, it doesn’t matter. If you want to develop a real Karate Kid you must follow the status system. In so doing you allow the child to build a new self image, one of strength and compassion. Each of us must eventually face and defeat the “bully”. Having the courage and confidence to tell others is the first step. Jerry Beasley, 9<sup>th</sup> Dan.***

Several years ago, as a graduate research student, I conducted an interpretive analysis of the social interaction component to the process of socialization into the techniques and ideology of karate. The data was obtained through participant observation; use of informants, periodicals and testimonials; interviewing; activity analysis; and an extensive survey. The data was collected between the years 1973 and 1977. I include the information from that analysis in this text because I believe that any thorough analysis of karate must explore karate training within a context of social meaning at both an idealized and functional level. Successful karate instructors address both the acquisition of physical skills and the social dimensions that will result in success or failure for the dojo.

In my research I found that it is important that the student in the karate dojo earn membership in a peer group (associated with rank) and that this membership facilitate the student’s advancement to the next level. Moreover, each new level must redefine the student’s sense of purpose and feeling of self-worth, commitment to the cause, and valued membership in the group. Because the majority of karate students will never test their skills in street encounters, true karate teaches one to avoid hurting others, even if that means turning the other cheek to the aggressor. The effectiveness of the art is measured in everyday interaction with others, both in the dojo and in public.

An art that can address the social needs of a diverse group can grow to include many loyal devotees. The way we teach the art is more important than what techniques are defined as part of our art. Thus, karate (including Japanese, Korean, American, and Chinese interpretations) has been the most successful form of self-defense ever developed.

Many come to karate to learn self-defense and, in so doing, gain confidence, respect, a feeling of self-worth, and other enviable traits. Ask any karate instructor what he or she teaches, and almost always the instructor will mention the students’ acquisition of these characteristics as part of the overall program. Most schools incorporate sophisticated physical self-defense techniques with diverse patterns for instilling these highly regarded character traits.

Karate is a regimented leisure activity. Therefore, each participant undergoes a socialization process in which he or she takes on the values of the group, with the focus of achieving the behavioral goals important to the group. Karate participants engage in a challenging program in which they are asked to submit to the requirements of a dangerous activity. Instructors teach self-defense skill by carefully leading students through exercises. In the process, students come to recognize the importance of acquiring these skills and, by internalizing the values of the group, tend to refrain from using their skills in all but the most threatening situations.

The development of the right attitude is as important as the acquisition of self-defense skills. Therefore, instructors need to spend as much time outlining a plan to accomplish character development as they do in teaching self-defense skills. With minimum effort, an instructor can acquire an effective method for providing the other part of instruction—the right attitude. The outline acts as a rite of passage system in which the student will be at ease in the proper setting (the dojo), recognize the values of the group (etiquette), learn the skills of self-defense in the class routine, and demonstrate his ability to others (promotion).

This chapter outlines the socialization process used in traditional karate schools and discerns the manner in which the right attitude can develop in the process of learning self-defense. The right attitude may be exemplified in a person's willingness to help others and walk away from a fight, honesty, courage, and other traits mentioned in the Code of Bushido, the Samurai code of conduct on the battlefield, commonly recognized by all karate styles.

## ***THE TRADITIONAL DOJO***

The traditional, or classical, dojo was first introduced in the United States in the mid-1950s. Now, these traditional schools are being replaced with more contemporary dojos that lack the militaristic posture once thought necessary for success. Many of the great masters were brought up in the traditional dojo setting. However, a majority of today's karate students have little knowledge of the origins of the karate dojo. It remains to be seen whether modern dojos that lack the traditional social structure can educate students with the same level of social conformity valued by traditionalists.

The Japanese term dojo is given to the training hall in which the physical techniques and cultural traditions of karate are taught. The grand patriarch of the dojo is the sensei, who as teacher and chief role model sets the example for students to follow. Because of the camaraderie and group identity enhanced by the dojo, it is sometimes seen as a pseudo-family unit in which students are referred to as brothers and the sensei regarded as the father.

The status structure of the dojo is divided into a clearly defined social hierarchy based on skill attainment and dramaturgical adeptness, or a person's ability to act the part. As the student progresses from novice to black belt, ideally he comes to accept a disciplined way of sport and life reflected in the cultural traditions, pageantry, and rituals of karate that are integral to the social fabric of the dojo.

## ***Bushido, Black Belts, and Broken Boards***

Although they are often considered uniquely Oriental, karate, kung fu, and other Asian fighting arts bear some semblance to ancient Western combative methods. A form of shadow boxing that Plato called "fighting without an antagonist" uses an imaginary opponent, which is strikingly similar to kata, or form training, a method of practicing karate. The popular method of breaking inanimate objects characteristic of karate training was demonstrated well over 2,000 years ago by Greek and Roman boxers who broke stones for spectator appeal. Additionally, the karateka's (karate enthusiast's) emphasis on abdominal

shouting (called *kiai*, or spirit meeting) was used by ancient Greeks and others who used empty hand or primitive weapon-oriented arts.

Though we may conclude that, historically, all fighting skills exhibit some physical similarities, we also may note that each skill exhibits the culture of its enveloping society. For this reason, we may say that Chinese boxing differs from Roman boxing because Chinese boxing emphasizes spiritual development, a reflection of cultural values.

In most cases, the development of physical prowess is a primary goal of learning fighting skills. With the development and acceptance of modern weaponry, hand-to-hand combat became less effective for any situation. However, certain fighting skills were valued more for their cultural and intellectual expression than for their effectiveness in war. Indeed, some societies maintained their fighting arts for the sake of promoting social skills exemplified in the pageantry and ritual of the martial art. For example, the knights of feudal England aligned their fighting skills with a code of ethics called chivalry. Chivalry as a moral code found expression in what was known as rules of fair play in fighting; it gained acceptance as the commonly reinforced expectations of performance. In short, the precepts of knighthood—the practice of courtesy, respect, loyalty, and so on—were characteristic of the social ideals of the society.

As the need for the knights' specialized fighting skills disappeared, the corresponding moral code also lost its appeal, because the actualization of chivalry required physical abilities acquired only through success in battle. In times of peace, when the battlefield was no longer the meeting place for warriors, tournaments were popular. Regardless of whether the battle was real or make-believe, the physical success of victory and the resulting self-confidence permitted the actualization of chivalry and in turn were tempered by it.

Just as the knights maintained a code of ethics exemplified in their martial skills, Japanese samurai also were noted for conduct in battle. Samurai, known primarily for their martial arts skills, gained popularity in Japan during the Muromachi period (1392-1573), when the Japanese warlords gained prominence.

The bushi, or samurai, were employed by the warlords to protect their lands. To best serve their lords' purpose, the samurai developed *bugei*, martial arts that used both empty hand and weapons combat. A samurai's daring deeds and displays of tenacity in personal combat immortalized his fighting skills and his loyalty to a master. The samurai was a professional fighter because he was paid a salary and given other benefits.

Though he dealt in violence and death, the samurai was a man of honor who swore undying allegiance to his master. *Bushido*, the way of the warrior, was the ethical and philosophical code of the samurai. *Bushido* was a moral standard composed of justice, courage, benevolence, politeness, veracity, honor, and loyalty that determined the use of the samurai's skills. The samurai was at once both a brutally efficient killer who lacked Western conscience and a culturally gentle and civilized man by the standard of the day.

The samurai was expected to study martial arts with the sole intention of attaining self-perfection. Martial arts taught physical skills and mental development; these two were not to be separated. The samurai did not seek mental perfection without seeking physical perfection, or physical perfection without seeking the other.

Originally samurai used martial fighting skills to protect the group cause. Martial arts training developed the right frame of mind and technical skills for defending or promoting the warlord's cause. During times of feudal war, the bushi could test his martial prowess and practice *bushido* in his daily affairs.

As feudal warlords became obsolete, the fighting samurai became less a part of society. The samurai found that his martial arts training was no longer a necessity. The martial arts that were once a way of life

for the samurai were now confined to practice in the dojo. In the dojo, the practitioner could engage in mock battle in the form of sportlike competition and actualize the precepts of bushido.

As martial arts moved from the battlefield to the dojo, the practitioners carried with them the pageantry and ritual, cultural norms, and traditional values that had governed their mode of behavior for centuries. Thus the dojo became a place in which people could assume new roles replete with symbolic status and maintain the virtues of 17th-century Japanese knighthood, even in 21st-century United States.

## *Feng Shui in the Dojo*

Feng shui is the structural ecology and cultural decor in the dojo. The popularity of karate made the dojo a ubiquitous establishment on the American urban scene and precipitated a diffusion of bushido and Oriental martial arts that involve individuals from all walks of life. Given the large number of people who pursue karate and other martial arts, it is interesting that an apparent alternate status universe, a way of recognizing and conforming different groups into a homogenous classroom, ultimately takes shape in each dojo. This society of karateka is reinforced (indeed, formed) in part by the efficient design of the dojo.

The classical dojo. Students are led through rigorous kata. There is little room for individuality in a class that stresses obedience and conformity. Many of the great champions of American karate learned the art in a classical dojo.

For devotees, the dojo is more than a space. The dojo is designed to facilitate a unique way of life in which a feeling of brotherhood and love for the dojo is developed. Traditionally, each student was responsible for the upkeep of the dojo. Class might begin with all students—doctors, lawyers, and janitors alike—on their knees wiping down the hallowed halls of the dojo.

These and other experiences in humility served to form both a union of mind and body and a sense of belonging in which a student recognized and accepted the importance of his position in the life of the group. A well-arranged and decorated dojo sets the stage for a student to accept the instruction and forget his life outside the dojo.

In general, the dojo tries to create an atmosphere in which the student can become properly indoctrinated in Oriental culture and ideology as part of socialization in the martial arts. This socialization emphasizes achieving an effective dramaturgical context to lend credence to the dojo. The structuring of the various areas serves to use space and decor to alter mood and elicit appropriate behaviors. In effect, the ecology and decor of the dojo aim to satisfy customers' desire to assume an ephemeral and exotic social role: It provides a dramaturgical context with the trappings of Oriental culture, and it restructures operations through a functional separation of dojo space.

A dojo might include an office area in which certificates or awards are displayed. Seeing the certificates and trophies awarded to the dojo, the student enters the dojo through the office. In some dojos, the office serves as a general store in which karate items are marketed and sold. Guests and parents are required to stay in the waiting room or viewing area so that practitioners (especially young karateka) are separated from family and friends, permitting the sensei to exercise more complete control over instruction and indoctrination. In some dojos, viewing areas are not permitted.

The teaching area usually includes mirrors or other teaching aids and appropriate decorations suggesting the school's style, former masters, and the like. The workout area is usually arranged so that students face national flags when they enter the area. In most cases, mirrors, punching bags, and weight training equipment are found in the workout area. A larger dojo may have changing areas (including dressing rooms, showers, and lockers) separate from other facilities.

The traditional dojo is decorated with calligraphy composed of characters that correspond to the appropriate language and other items from the country represented. For example, a Korean karate dojo would have the Korean flag, statues representing Korean art, and perhaps a few pictures of famous Korean karate masters on the wall. Likewise, a Japanese dojo would exhibit Japanese art and calligraphy to associate the student or visitor with Japanese cultural traditions.

## *Dojo Etiquette*

The karate student's behavior in the dojo is prompted by deep respect for the practice hall, its purpose, and the people who use it. All students are expected to adhere to a precisely circumscribed code of conduct from the moment they enter the dojo until they leave the premises. Dojo etiquette is a ceremonial form adopted from the martial customs of the Orient and is rigidly observed by the practitioners of most Asian fighting arts today.

Upon entering the dojo, the student bows to the practice area in the direction of the national flags. If a sensei is present before class begins, students bow to the sensei and exchange words of appreciation. The manner of the bow varies with the martial art. Basically, the student begins to bow by standing erect and then bending at the waist, hands by the sides. He then resumes an erect position. Certain styles of karate, however, may require that the student strike the chest with the hands as he bends forward, perform a particular hand movement, or recite a series of phrases declaring his allegiance to his art and its country of origin.

Because karate is a vigorous activity, students are expected to wear clean uniforms and shower before and after workouts. During the practice session, talking usually is forbidden as is chewing gum or making inappropriate noises. Before leaving the mat, students bow to the sensei, then to the flags, and once again to the dojo as they leave. While bowing or talking to the sensei, the student is expected not to stare the sensei in the eye (or to make any eye contact) because this may be considered a demonstration of insincerity.

## **THE STATUS SYSTEM**

Status ranking in the karate dojo is a reflection of the national habits and customs of its enveloping society. For example, Asian society places an emphasis on the superior-subordinate relationship, and in such relationships a person tends to assume the position that corresponds to his particular status level within the society. Thus, the karate neophyte is thrust into a position of subservience and must accept the attendant posture of humility and deference to superiors until he may be able to elevate himself through demonstration of progressive levels of proficiency in the sport.

The system also provides each person with an indication of his position in relation to others within the group. Martial artists and experts in Japanese culture reinforce the attitude that the martial arts status ranking system is a reflection of the junior/senior structure seen at all levels in Japan.

In essence, each member loses a sense of individuality by maintaining an allegiance to the organizational structure. It has been said that the Japanese maintain a denial of individualism in favor of a collective

orientation. The collective orientation is an indication to some that group membership is considerably more important to the Japanese than to Americans.

In pre-World War II Japanese society, the system gave each person his own niche and permitted him to experience security and purpose within the group. Furthermore, the organizational structure made the individual feel a degree of responsibility to the group (he accepts their values, adheres to group norms, and so on). Thus the individual subsequently supports the system that included him in its order.

This philosophy of putting the group ahead of self may seem strange in western culture. In fact, at the end of World War II, many Americans were shocked to learn that so many Japanese had committed ritualized suicide in response to losing the war. So strong was the shared sense of responsibility that some Japanese felt that the only way to save face was to give their lives as testimony of shared remorse.

One of the more interesting social dimensions of the hierarchical structure seen in the practice of karate concerns the availability of achieved status. A person can move rapidly through the hierarchy and attain clearly defined status, a fact that no doubt appeals to the social mobility-conscientious American. In this regard, modern-day martial arts dojos are somewhat similar to fraternal organizations in which one enters the system in a subordinate position and, through experience and demonstrated proficiency, assumes positions of increasingly higher status and social honor. The status associated with acquired skill allows practitioners to enjoy a higher degree of prestige and recognition regardless of their social position outside the organization.

One sociological study found that most advanced students in some inner-city dojos of the 1970s tended to be working-class males. The researchers observed that through the social order of the belts the advanced students could realize the respect and success that otherwise would not be available to them in society. The karate dojo offers an attractive status arena for members of the working class because they can achieve meaningful recognition through the symbolic social mobility of the hierarchical proficiency structure of the sport.

Today, some 30 years later, it is more likely that the status system available in the dojo attracts those from all strata of society. College students in particular seem to enjoy the rank system, as do professionals in all lines of work. Today a majority of karate students are children who are encouraged by their parents to advance in rank. These parents may well experience advancement vicariously through the achievements of their children.

Although all martial arts ranks maintain certain similarities (they begin with white and progress to black, for example), some segments of the martial arts sports may promote students in a manner unique to a given discipline. Students in the dojo are divided into two categories: kyu rank (or grade) and dan rank (or degree). The kyu (Japanese), gup (Korean), or grade rank refers to beginners. Dan (Japanese), dan (Korean), or degree ranks are awarded to advanced students. It has been asserted that one is considered a true student of karate only when he has attained the rank of first-degree black belt.

As the student progresses through the grades from 10 through 1, corresponding belt colors give the student additional recognition. Belt colors usually are awarded in the order for the grades shown in table 1.1. In some cases the dojo may award a red belt instead of a brown one or an orange belt instead of a gold one, for example. Because instructors charge for promotion, some instructors use additional colored belts as part of the cost of promotion. Korean karate practitioners use a red belt instead of a brown belt in most cases. In addition to the colors, students may wear hashmarks that designate their grades in the color. For example, a green belt may have one mark designating the rank of fifth grade or two marks designating fourth grade. As students demonstrate advanced skills, they may be tested for higher ranks.

Hypothetically, students may advance, be demoted, or receive no change at all at each testing period. Students are encouraged to test for advancement because higher rank carries increased prestige and

authority in the dojo. Whereas white belts are considered babies and relegated to standing in the back of the class, higher grades such as brown belt or student black belts assume positions at the head of the class next to the sensei. Full progression in the pecking order develops as the student advances from the back of the lines (white belt), to the center lines (green belt), to the front lines (brown belt), perhaps eventually to the head of the class upon acquiring the position of instructor or sensei. Examinations are given every three months. A student usually is ready to test for a higher grade rank at each promotion.

Advancing in rank is important to the student because advanced students receive more attention from the sensei, and advanced rank entitles the student to participation in advanced instructional periods. These privileges are sociologically important as they facilitate the acquisition of skills that in turn may elevate the person's position even more.

## ***CLASS ROUTINE***

Competition for advancement in karate is expected, with each student attempting to learn as much as possible during instructional periods to minimize his chances of failure at the next testing period. For the karate student, each series of class routines trains him for the next level of proficiency.

As he rises in rank, he learns the skills associated with the subsequent status and prepares to advance to a new rank at the end of the three-month period. The student follows a cycle in development—earn rank, adjust to the position, test and assume a new rank, adjust, test, and so on.

Before, during, and after each class routine, the student takes part in a learning process that eventually will complete his integration of dojo technique and ideology and assure his full acceptance into the group. The cycle of development parallels an effective socialization process in which the individual develops a social self that corresponds to the generalized other characterizing the group.

As the student enters the dojo, he bows before entering the workout area and then changes clothes. The practice uniform, or gi, consists of loose-fitting pants, a wrap-around jacket, and a belt. Because karate training facilitates fitness and requires that the student be physically fit, some students take time and pleasure in changing clothes so as to give full exposure to their well-developed bodies. Students exhibiting outstanding muscular development receive recognition from both fellow students and sensei.

In the traditional dojo, women are treated the same way as men in both sparring and physical training. In this regard, the dojo seems to emphasize a “one size fits all” atmosphere so that everyone—man, woman, child, overweight, underweight—becomes an important part of the organization of the dojo. Acceptance in such an organization gives members personal satisfaction by compensating for any deficits outside the dojo.

When it is time for class to begin, the senior man signals the beginning of formal training. Students who have arrived early and eagerly await the beginning of class quickly form ranks. The highest-ranking students move to the left of the instructor. Others are situated according to rank in straight lines close together in a militaristic posture. Suddenly, without a sound, everyone drops to the floor in a formal position ready to bow because the instructor has entered the dojo. When the instructor is ready, the senior student calls the command to bow to the teacher. The teacher returns the bow, and class begins.

Frequently, a high-ranked or respected sensei will take several minutes after the students are in the kneeling position (a very uncomfortable position with the feet situated underneath the body) before entering the class and returning the bow, thus testing students' patience and endurance. Some venerable instructors institute a chain of communication, from high belt to low belt, in addressing the class. Only the highest-ranked and most-dedicated student may speak directly to the sensei.

After a period of exercise, instruction in karate technique begins. The teacher, calling out the proper phrases, instructs the class in both manner and method of technique. Students are expected to imitate each motion of the instructor. Each student works long and hard to perfect his technique and gain recognition from the teacher. Certain outstanding pupils, or “pets,” receive much attention from the sensei and usually are made aware of their abilities.

Basic instruction consists of a series of universal techniques, including blocking and attacking methods, that are practiced in most dojos. The techniques are arranged so that they physically exhaust the student as well as develop the student’s skill.

After students demonstrate proficiency in the basics, they are taught kata, prearranged fighting dances. Beginners usually are awkward in attempting to perform the kata. Advanced students who have moved beyond mere mastery of the movements seek personal enlightenment and mental transportation from the state of mind the performance produces.

While performing kata, students visualize imaginary opponents and simulate actual combat. The exercise encompasses a series of stylized routines executed in a traditional, prearranged pattern. Kata mimics true life-and-death combat and, in enacting the dance, the student is able to take the role of the ancient samurai. A skilled kata practitioner can produce a convincing illusion of being involved in physical combat with an opponent. Students who are adept at kata are accorded special deference, and they in turn tend to adopt an attitude of superiority over students who have not demonstrated the same degree of skill.

The third area of instruction is practice in kumite, or freestyle fighting. During freestyle, one student prepares to meet another in mock combat. The participants first bow to the referee, then to one another. The referee gives the command “Hijame!” to begin. The fighters attempt to gain points by striking at target areas (head or front of body above the waist and sometimes the groin) with a suitable offense (a ridge hand, straight punch, front kick). Because actual contact in these matches would cause injury, each opponent pretends to hit the other.

Although kumite is only play fighting, some students may embellish the dramaturgical (acting) aspects of the bout to their own advantage. Loss of control means disqualification, so a student may act as though he had been hit hard to cover up a lapse in control. Similarly, he may dance around to give the illusion that he is in better command of the bout than he actually is. Such theatrical antics are intended to disguise defects in techniques and win the approval of viewers. Whereas good performers gain recognition from other members, the performance of poor fighters receives criticism and their group acceptance may be significantly eroded.

The main instructional method is learning by rote: The instructor sets the example for students to follow. In learning a new technique or principle, students attempt to mimic the instructor’s voice and ape the instructor’s every move. Students are expected to perform the techniques over and over again until the sensei is satisfied with the performance of every student in the dojo. Many of the early dojos were staffed by Asian Americans who spoke very little English. As a result, students tended to memorize the movements without a clear explanation of purpose. What’s interesting is that many first and second generation sensei continued to teach in a similar manner.

In keeping with the Japanese concept of education and their perspective of social responsibility, karate assigns a higher priority on imposing a strong sense of conformity on the student than on encouraging the expression of individuality. As the instructor defines the performance of each technique through acting out the part, students respond with a group effort in an attempt to perfect their own proficiency in individual skills. As students perform the techniques, advanced students or assistant instructors usually are available to show students exactly how the technique should be performed or reinforce a student’s action by agreeing that his techniques are valid or appropriate.

During class, students begin to receive recognition of their acquired skills. Because the emphasis is on achieving higher ranks, students often form particular groups or cliques that serve several purposes. The members of a particular clique tend to congregate to avoid mixing with students in lower belt ranks. Having achieved status and prestige by virtue of their belt color and corresponding skill, students of higher belt ranks serve as examples for lower ranks. Realizing that lower ranks will emulate them, those with higher belt ranks may engage in light kumite or practicing techniques. Although they may look as though they are simply practicing technique, they often do so to impress others with their abilities. Members of a clique may exchange impressions of outstanding performers or discuss their persuasions and prejudices about such matters as the bunkai (translation) of the kata. Such an exchange tends to reinforce group attitudes and posture. Cliques also act as pressure groups to enforce expected modes of conduct.

Status groups composed of the highest-ranking members of the class make a point of acquainting new members or visitors with the dojo. As class representatives, they present a favorable image by virtue of their respective skills for persuading visitors to join the class. So also, they act as a greeting party for unwelcome visitors, sometimes called spies, who come to the dojo to steal techniques or challenge dojo members.

Dealings with spies usually result in an invitation to join in kumite competition in which the class champion attempts to defeat and humiliate the opponent. Or the entire class may choose to simply ignore the spy. The possibilities of encountering a spy from another dojo are great because it once was common practice to attempt to steal secret techniques from other dojos. These minor incidents serve to give in-group cohesion to those in the dojo. These and other similar incidents effectively socialize the person into particular roles that reflect the collective solidarity of the student group. The dojo (kumite) champion is supported in his role in that he serves an important group function in representing the skill, thus the honor, of the group.

Each person—whether the champion, the spy, or supporting dojo members—interacts in an elaborate behavioral configuration tempered by the cultural norms of the group. To this extent, the dojo's formal organization provides an alternate status universe for its members, which is limited to the confines of the dojo. In the dojo, students may achieve status and prestige otherwise unavailable to them in society. An important and added dimension is that, as the student achieves rank and prestige in the dojo, he may be able to translate this new self-concept into improved avenues for success in everyday life. Thus the child black belt becomes the class scholar, and the adult black belt, lacking formal college education, becomes the professional martial arts instructor or school owner and manager.

Some dojos have been known to require students to achieve superior academic grades before testing for advanced belts. This practice of fostering an improved self-concept is a by-product, if not a direct mission, of formal training in the classical karate dojo.

Although clique membership is a common method for achieving recognition, success in free sparring and general appearance constitute other alternatives. Even though advanced rank usually indicates fighting prowess, it is not uncommon for a white belt who is particularly strong or large to beat an advanced belt in competition. If the lower rank defeats a brown or green belt, he usually is ignored by higher ranks and congratulated by his own peer group, reinforcing the concept that, in the traditional dojo, belt color or rank represents avenues of achieving prestige regardless of external indicators such as winning a fight.

In addition to the student's appearance, the performer's manner (expressions that suggest a performer's demeanor or mood) further indicates each person's position in the dojo. The traditional karate gi, depending on its condition, is an indicator of prestige. The gis worn by beginners in the early dojos usually were large and almost yellow in color. As the gi is repeatedly washed it becomes whiter and more

limp, and it tends to cling to the body as if to give a tailored effect. Similarly, the belt, as it is dyed to change colors as one advances in rank, becomes very loose and somewhat frayed.

The karateka's hands are true indicators of his years of dedication. A common practice for toughening and strengthening the hands is to strike the makiwara board. Over time, calluses form on the knuckles, giving the hands a weaponlike appearance. Although students remove the gi after practice, the hands continue to give the student recognition. Callused knuckles are a certain indicator of dedication and potential superiority should the karateka encounter aggressive people.

The equating of the karateka's hands with lethal weapons may be attributed to the popular but perhaps misleading practice of breaking inanimate objects such as boards, bricks, stones, and ice. Post-World War II karate instructors, both Asian and American, used the art of tamashiwara to attract attention to their demonstrations of the art of karate. Tamashiwara, a testing of the spirit, presents the art of breaking with bare feet and hands. Although these 1950s to 1960s karate experts intended to demonstrate the spiritual practice that has been popularly termed "mind over matter," the audience inadvertently misconstrued the performance to be solely a demonstration of the intended lethal effect of karate applied against an attacker; thus, the karateka's hands were considered by many to be likened to lethal weapons.

During the class routine, the student becomes acquainted with the formal organization and culture of the dojo. During practice sessions, the student registers new moves, learns new ideas, and displays his knowledge of technique and etiquette in an attempt to gain acceptance from his peer group. As each three-month practice period ends, students prepare to be examined. The student's progress through the ranks totally depends on his success during the promotion.

## ***PROMOTION***

Whereas the class routine may be viewed as a series of dress rehearsals in which students perfect technique and learn their parts, the karate promotion is the final stage performance in which heroes are born and future roles are established. The standard method of conferring rank is the examination. During the examination, students, instructors, and referees take utmost care to ensure that everyone knows his part. Visitors often come to watch this examination. Although such visitors have no vote in final decisions, their acceptance is desirable.

Students usually arrive before the exam and practice their techniques. At times students who know ahead of time that they will be tested together may rehearse a free-sparring sequence. Because free sparring is spontaneous and unrehearsed, the referees usually recognize who is actually sparring and who is awaiting a cue to attack, which would suggest pretesting rehearsal. The students' gis are especially clean and neat, and many students starch their gis for extra snap. In general, candidates for promotion are quite active as they try to rid themselves of stomach butterflies. Each student is expected to do his best because it will be three months before there is another chance to test.

When the sensei enters the dojo, the students hurriedly line up and are particularly careful to find the correct order in the lines. Exam time is a special time for the sensei, who usually wears a kimono over his karate gi. Honored guests and fellow examiners arrange themselves in a line with the sensei, and the formal examination begins. After a brief introduction of guests, the sensei addresses the candidates, bows, and takes his seat at the head of the dojo. One by one, students perform for the sensei: first the white belts, then the intermediate students, then the advanced students. During the exam, waiting students remain seated and refrain from talking.

After students demonstrate basic techniques, perform katas, and break boards and tiles, the student receives his final chance to perform as the freestyle sparring exam begins. During freestyle, those who truly have learned the ways of the warrior attack with total commitment. Weaker or more timid students

are easily defeated and usually fail the test. During the exam the period of kumite emphasizes survival of the fittest, ensuring that only a select few will advance in rank. The exam signifies a trial by ordeal, after which successful candidates partake in the rites of passage symbolically dealt with by the ritual of the exchange of belts during the awards ceremony. This process is not unlike the issuance of flight wings to the aviator or the ceremonial stripping off of the boots and then hurling them in the air practiced by naval recruits. When the exam is completed, students form lines and bow. The sensei then dismisses the class and retreats to his office to grade exams. Visitors and guests usually congratulate the students who have performed skillfully and reassure them that they did their best.

When the class meets again, the sensei reads the list of candidates who successfully passed the exam. Upon hearing his name announced, the student falls into line for the presentation of belts during the awards ceremony. The lower ranks are called first. For the white belts, the chance to wear a colored belt represents an adequate reward for hours spent in the dojo. The green and blue belts are happy to have received promotions, but their excitement is more restrained as they attempt to display a posture of maturity and refrain from displays of delight and congratulations.

Promotion has special meaning for the brown belts of first kyu who receive their first dan black belts. Whereas kyu refers to youthful advocate, dan rank reflects full maturity. The years of work and dedication in the dojo require much discipline, and the results are significant.

*Once the socialization process required for attainment of the black belt is completed, it is never forgotten.*

According to Japanese social tradition, it can be argued that discipline in all Japanese traditional arts is so demanding that it tends to reshape the student completely, mentally and physically. As one master of Japanese arts related, a man who has attained mastery of an art reveals it in every action.

This change in character is perhaps the most significant part of martial arts training. The process of reshaping the person to fit the image of the warrior—trained in proper etiquette, skilled in the martial arts, and loyal to his sensei or dojo—begins with the initial lesson and continues to develop. The entire karate culture is directed to this end. The dojo provides a setting that facilitates the socialization process and enhances the student's responsiveness by separating the student from his routine of social life. Once the student is admitted into the dojo, the organizational structure maintains his allegiance through peer group pressures. Dojo groups tend to develop and maintain norms that circumscribe certain philosophical postures and encourage values to sharpen the person's perceptual acumen. Membership in the dojo group gives the student ego reinforcement from significant others. Eventually the student comes to inculcate the values of the dojo and strives to bring about the total integration of these values as he achieves maturity in the sport.

Membership in dojo cliques and participation in other karate activities—promotion, class routine, initiation—entail the development of skills that only a few may actualize. To this extent, nonmembers are recognized by their inability, whereas members are recognized for their displayed abilities and status. The total process in which students are socialized may be compared to the process used by adolescent gangs and various youth organizations. Just as members of adolescent gangs may develop skills and values that affect their adult lives, karate students recognize their own distinctive skills and values.

Of course, the values held in high esteem in the traditional dojo reflect the values of society: be a good citizen, give your life for your country, dedicate your future to success. Because of the rigors of training and the sacrifices students make to develop skills and progress in rank, students tend to remember the

effects of training and practice throughout their adult lives. Most students do profess a change in attitude and character development. Once students complete the socialization process, they never forget it.

Though the promotion to first-degree black belt signifies status in the dojo, it can in no way be considered the final stage. As the karateka removes the brown belt and accepts the black belt during the promotional ceremony (signifying a ritual death of the former student and the emergence of a new person), he anticipates a future life in the dojo. Black belts are expected to become teachers and propagate the art as they continue to progress through the organizational hierarchy. Wearing the black belt and displaying a mastery of student skills, the new shodan (first-degree black belt) now may prepare to assume the honored title of sensei. Again and again, he will engage in combat rituals, striving for perfection and symbolically growing weary with the battle, because he seeks only peace.

*Here, then, is the traditional dojo—the foundation for all modern karate dojos. Because the ultra-traditional dojo could turn out only a few graduates, it is often considered unproductive by 21st-century standards. In today's professional dojos, a student enrollment of 250 or more is considered average. In most modern dojos, an emphasis on pageantry and ritual has given way to an emphasis on utility. Although the overall structure has been maintained, each structural component may be altered. For example, the chain of command may be less militaristic to allow for more freedom of expression and to provide a more positive and relaxed learning environment. Certain practices, such as knuckle conditioning, may have been deleted entirely. New, more efficient training aids and advances in educational procedures have resulted in a system that can produce equally efficient students in greater numbers.*

***Excerpt from Mastering Karate by Jerry Beasley, Ed.D .***

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