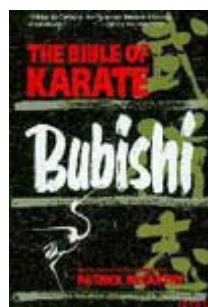


The double edged sword

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Brisbane 2002

May I begin by revealing that English is not my first language and so I do apologize for any spelling errors, misuse of vernacular idioms and my grammatical inadequacies. Next, may I also state that I am part of that local choir that McCarthy sensei preached the mechanical principles and application rationale of karate to at the Karate Teacher's College. Studying under this master, I came to see how his theories, like his experience, is based upon many years of questioning the

unanswered mysteries, trial & error, cross comparative studies and hands-on research at the original sources where the many of the different arts unfolded and developed. Having just spent an entire year in Brisbane studying under his personal direction, what I found most interesting about his work is how he's simplified the ambiguous and brought together the different physical, mental and technical elements of karate into a single and easy to follow study. I must admit most other teachers I have come into contact with rarely emphasized such things let alone ever expand upon what I now understand to be issues central to mastering this tradition, including the pathway to spiritual introspection. Re-reading several of the Japanese-to-English translations sensei & Yuriko san have tackled over the years I understand them in a different light and suddenly understand their words as if I never read them before.



Simple issues that sensei espouse in his daily lectures compelled me to rethink what I had previously believed to be true: Karate [i] was never meant to be used in an arena against a trained athlete. Karate was never a single complete system superior to any other system. The Okinawan pioneers didn't know everything. Karate in its original form wasn't budo. Styles are just personal interpretations of common themes. Right or wrong depends entirely on outcomes. No style/interpretation of karate has remained unaltered through generations. The interpretations of karate today are just that. Interpretations! Such interpretations have been affected by both the culture in which it have been handed down to us and the personality of those it's teachers. Provocative comments? Definitely! But can anyone argue these points, based on facts, not emotions? If so, I want to read them and see the sources cited.

I know that you reading this are equally aware, if not more, of these facts than I am. And although I'm praying to the converted it's important that we all are aware about the state of mind people might have about their martial art and their perception about what they do.

It is fascinating how a competent teacher can speak to people from all varying walks of life and help them all in their training, the only way for this to be possible is if the teacher addresses principles and not individual techniques, leaves emotions aside and focuses on facts. However, this mighty sword has two edges.

An intelligent person who doesn't know any other reality than to what he has been introduced may very well read a text and based on his limited experience of the art, use this text to further justify that what he is doing is the original/best thing. Take for example, a fully normal karate-ka, in his daily training he practices kata to perfect the form. His bunkai are against oi-zuki and mae-geri from a long distance, he uses blocks as the only tools to defend against these techniques and gyaku-zuki to counter to accepted target zones in order to subjugate the attacker. Interested as he is, he reads books explaining,

for example, that kata are for self-defense only. He is probably nodding his head and thinking, yes, that's correct and that is exactly what my teacher always says, so I'm training like the old masters once trained. This discovery that he is training the 'real thing' makes him/her feel good. The fact that nobody in a real-life scenario attacks from zenkutsu-dachi and lunges forward into a perfectly timed oi-zuki with impeccable form and kime is of lesser importance. The fact that a kata doesn't teach him anything about self-defense whatsoever doesn't occur to him, the sole thought occupying this person's mind is that he practices kata for self-defense, as did the ancient masters. This will justify him to continue with training as he always have and will teach it the same way as well. The worst part is that this person most often doesn't realize that he/she's the one I'm using as an example here. (Because he/she's training like the old masters and others are not.)

This interesting fact of selected assimilation of facts and inadequacy to think outside the box must be one of the biggest obstacles in trying to pioneer a movement that questions the established contextual basis upon which martial arts today rests. One other major obstacle are those people who are "afraid of the light", but that is another issue.

It is amazing to acknowledge how many educated people [directors, engineers, politicians, teachers, doctors, butchers, clerks etc] everyday use their brain rationally to make deductions based on information they know to be true, only to leave the brain in the locker room after changing into their white pajamas! Think about it, a medical company tells a doctor that this drug will instantly cure cancer without any side effects. All the doctors in the world will without exceptions say: Oh yeah? Lets see some evidence, show me the proof, lets see the research behind this statement. Yet, the same evening when this doctor has slipped into his white pajamas and stands in the line with his mates, the teacher says that this ancient master could use his qi to hit an attacker from three meter and send him flying to be knocked senseless against a tree. The very same doctor thinks: wow that's cool. Rarely are these stories questioned, and when they are, the answer is bound to be: this is the truth because my teacher said so and who are you to question him? The result is that this individual would think twice before he questioned his teacher's stories again. And once again the narrow-mindedness has won a small but important victory.

In all honesty, there are just a few people who have found a key to unravel the mysteries surrounding the martial arts. McCarthy Hanshi is one of those persons. However, when these persons, in their effort to impart their knowledge to the rest of us, lecture and write many interesting articles and books about the way they and other masters first learned to first find the doors and continue to explain how they obtained the key to the intriguing castle of martial arts and got access to what lies inside these walls, they can show us the location of these doors and explain to us where to find the key. But



Kinjo Hiroshi Hanshi working the makiwara

if we cannot grab a single key, of what use is it to know the location of 100 doors and 100 different keys? In my opinion, the key can only be obtained if the intended receiver is open-minded and willing to receive the key. Even if these terms are met, the key can rarely ever be obtained solely through the written texts or by lectures available today. If the intended receiver is not open-minded, the key can pass right before their eyes and they do not see it. The best way to assure that the receiver can grab the key and hopefully put it to use is by hands-on

transmission from a competent teacher to a student. Are all efforts writing articles, translating and writing books from McCarthy Hanshi and his peers wasted on us? Yes and no, sometimes even counterproductive to the intended purpose. How then can this knowledge be imparted in a better way? I think it cannot. If for example McCarthy Hanshi would write the naked truth without bothering to think about the consequences, he and all of us following him would be severely slandered. We could probably never show ourselves among other karateka again without risk of being verbally and/or physically abused if not ostracized from the martial arts community. So, in my humble opinion, the way things are being run today is the least bad way. Slowly as more and more open-minded persons is being introduced to Hanshi, hopefully they see the key in front of them and are able to pick it up and put it to use. The more students choose to follow Hanshi and themselves start to teach and introduce this art to more persons, the larger numbers get to see another side of the karate they thought they knew. And in time the movement will start to snowball and one day be an accepted alternative to the somewhat limited karate community we have today, thus making the martial arts community more complete. But if we try to speed up this process by against it's will trying to force the horse to drink, everything may very well backfire and ruin all the groundwork Hanshi and his peers have worked so hard to lay. So all this work balanced with hands on treatment J a.k.a. seminars, gasshuku and daily training, will eventually turn this slow tanker we know as karate around. Be patient and use the key wisely without forcing your opinion upon others and we will go into a bright and interesting future.

So, where did it go wrong in the first place? When did this ingenious civil self-defense system turn into an esthetic practice far removed from its original purpose of helping its practitioners in a society plagued by violence? Karate has often been used by some of its innovative pioneers as a vehicle to transmit values and agendas other than its original brutal purpose suggests. Every time this is being done successfully, a piece of the art is lost, or at best temporarily removed. The fact that karate before the 20th century was more or less a collection of techniques without a teaching curriculum and structure made it a perfect tool to carry different messages which suited scrupulous individuals. This was not always done with the best of the art in mind but for personal or political purposes, and hence contradicting the values they said were important for its learners.



Hanashiro Chomo

So, all in all, we have an art, which have been used and misused by generations. This continues to this day and will probably continue to be the case for many generations to come. The only thing one can do is to decide what the art represents for us and for what purpose we are involved in it. From there we can do the best we can and try to be the best we can, but we must never forget the original intentions of the art, which is brutal self defense.

Notes:

[1] Making a layman's distinction between the different types of karate, for the purpose of further discussions I see three types of karate: Classical, Traditional and Modern. No matter what style of karate you do, I believe that it will fall into one of these categories: Classical karate is an art personally handed down from master to disciple (jikiden) through kata which emphasized functional application principles using HAVP scenarios reconstructed in two-person drills. Traditional karate is what you see as mainstream karate, where kata is practiced from an esthetic point rather than a practical, the kumite is rule-based, the performance is uniform and standardized, and it's regarded as a budo-art. (shoto, shito, wado, goju, shorin etc.) Representing Modern karate are the arts which have broken out individual parts which classical & traditional karate are built upon and practiced as a individual study's (sparring, self-defense, fitness etc.).