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USA SEIWA KAI NEWSLETTER

Dedicated to Traditional Goju Ryu Karatedo
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ICHI GO ICHI E

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By Jim Pounds

Editor's note: Ichi-go-ichi-e is a concept attributed to the Tea Ceremony, however it is frequently used in budo to teach students who make a mistake to move on with the technique despite the mistake rather than to stop and "try again." In a life-or-death struggle, there is no chance to "try again." Additionally, even though a technique has been practiced over and over, each and every technique should be seen as a singular and decisive event. However there is much more to this concept.

Some time ago, I was taught about a concept known as Ichi go Ichi e. Loosely interpreted ichi go ichi e means essentially "one life, one opportunity" – a concept perhaps foreign to many Americans, as accustomed as we are to having so many opportunities to start over, seemingly without penalty. Ichi go ichi e implies an altogether different mindset – a mindset of realization that this may be the only opportunity we have and all our chips are on the table.

This mindset seems to come from the Zen Buddhist concept of living meditation through mindfulness of every action – a conscious attentiveness to every detail of every action whether we are weeding the garden, preparing a meal, or performing a kata. Each breath is unique and important because this particular breath is the one here and now but it could also be our last.

Ichi go ichi e also brings to mind the ancient budo adage of "one blow, one victory". It means you must say goodbye to self, to ego, and be totally in the moment because that is where the matter of living or dying resides. In sword duels the Samurai had to first kill his own sense of self in order to attain the detached sense of total focus required in such an endeavor. The slightest wavering of attention or hesitation of action meant it would be your head lying in the dust.



*Spirit, swift;
Mind, calm;
Body, light;
Eyes, clear;
Technique,
decisive!*

*~ Yamaoka
Tesshu ~*

The idea is that whenever you leave your house and family in the morning for work, you must be aware there is a possibility you may never return. Perhaps it is your day to die in a traffic accident. Or your spouse. Or your child. Would your actions and attentiveness to them be different if you knew that? The people we read about in the daily paper who perish in some accident, murder, or who have a heart attack probably believed they would return home that night – that they had all the time in the world to make amends with estranged family members; or write that novel; or to learn to play the piano.

So when you leave your house for any reason, you should take your leave as if you will not be coming back. That means looking deeply into your wife's eyes when you kiss her goodbye; telling your children how much they mean to you; saying farewell to your home and possessions.

“Focus your attention on the link between you and your death, without remorse or sadness or worrying. Focus your attention on the fact that you don't have time and let your acts flow accordingly. Let each of your acts be your last battle on earth. Only under those conditions will your acts have their rightful power. Otherwise they will be, for as long as you live, the acts of a timid man.”

~ Yaquí Indian Brujo Don Juan to Carlos Casteneda ~

Many times, we were instructed to perform a kata as if it were the last opportunity we might have because we might walk out of the dojo and get run over by a bus! Somehow, that never fails to elevate the action and precludes that we won't be half-assing it.

In the martial arts, cultivating an ichi go ichi e mindset allows us to train with the property intensity and focus. Even if you are unable to visualize yourself involved in a sword duel, you can surely understand that some tragedy could befall you at any moment and end your training – if not your life. When I internalize the belief there may never be another chance to train, my training becomes a thing to be valued and my “acts flow accordingly.” I find myself training with a spirit of joy and appreciation because I may only have this last chance. I'm then fully living in the now, in my growing tip, and that's all we ever have.

It's obvious how the ichi go ichi e concept applies to kumite. One of the best things about sparring is that we get to flush everything else from our minds. We're focused! When dealing with punches, kicks, and distancing your mind isn't wandering. You aren't thinking about the grocery list! I remember attending a seminar by Ryobu-Kai Sensei Kiyoshi Yamazaki and he spoke about the importance of taking total advantage of the few opportunities to score on your opponent in a kumite shiai. He repeatedly reminded us “only one chance” and “only two minutes”. It was another practical application of the ichi go ichi e concept. In real self-defense situations the stakes are exponentially higher so the development of ichi goes ichi e in the dojo is emphatically important.

“In reality, shīn - spīrit - is what matters first; technique and body come afterward. In olden days things were different because life was at stake and then, ultimately, intuition decided the outcome. It should be that way today: every fight should be fought as if life were at stake, otherwise they are only a game. In reality, physical strength and strength of technique and mind are more or less equal, but it is always shīn, the spīrit, that decides the fate of battle.”

~ Taisen Dehīmaru ~



Perhaps the concept isn't quite so clear when it comes to kata, repetition drills, partner work, and the daily “chop wood, carry water” grind of training. Internalizing the ichi go ichi e attitude means it will become impossible to give any less than your absolute best effort every time. How would we perform if we knew in advance this performance would become our legacy? It could be. To have not done our best would not do our legacy justice.

Attention to the small details in the dojo – how you enter, proper etiquette, the length of your fingernails, or the cleanliness of your uniform are all proper ichi go ichi e because that same attention to detail in a confrontation – how many attackers, where the exits are, is there a weapon – could save your life.

So the next time you bow into your dojo, try to practice this concept of ichi go ichi e – one life, one opportunity. Better yet, why not incorporate it into the fabric of your life? You may not notice the difference

immediately, but I'll bet others, including your Sensei, will.

Tell your wife you love her next time you leave for work. Go ahead...hug your dog too.

Spotlight

Karate for the Health of It

By Sam Mahsoul PhD

I just wanted to tell my personal story about how I met Sensei Vassie and began training in his Santa Monica Dojo. More than twenty years ago, I had ten years of karate experience and was a brown belt in another style, but because of my career and my family I stopped practicing. By the time that I was past most people's retirement age, I was overweight and had many health problems, so I began checking into several Karate dojos in the Los Angeles area with the hope of losing weight and improving my health. Out of all of the dojos that I visited, I discovered that Sensei Vassie's dojo was by far the best. Now after five years of training with Sensei Vassie, my physician tells me that I am a twenty year young man in an old body. I owe my improved health and spirits to Sensei.



Sam Mahsoul is 2nd from the left in the back row

Sensei Vassie is not only one of the best instructors, but also is a wonderful person trying hard to help anyone at any time. I am very happy to have met Sensei Vassie and all the Karate members from Goju-Ryu. I am seventy-three years old, and I got my black belt last year.

Seiwa Kai Humor



Actually, I was referred to your dojo by my marriage counselor.

CHOJUN MIYAGI
1888 to 1953
THE FATHER OF GOJU RYU



Chojun Miyagi

宮城 長順

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Chojun Miyagi was born into a wealthy merchant family in 1888, [i] and he was accepted by Kanryo Higaonna as a student in 1902. [ii] All of the students who trained under Mr. Higaonna found the training extremely severe and demanding: “Most of the students didn’t have the perseverance to continue such hard training and many of them stopped.” [iii] However, young Chojun Miyagi not only persevered the severe training, he excelled in his martial arts studies and became one of Mr. Higaonna’s most knowledgeable students. Mr. Eiichi Miyazato explains: “Not only did Miyagi Sensei have the fortitude to continue training, but he was so enthusiastic in his research, that he often forgot to eat or sleep and practiced late into the evening. Because of this, Kanryo Higaonna Sensei treated Miyagi like his own child.” [iv]

Students were required to learn Sanchin kata for a period of three or four years before they were allowed to learn any other kata. [v] In those days, this kata was performed while moving forward and backward across the room. All the while, Higaonna Sensei would perform shime, pushing and slapping the student to see if his stances were correct and to see if he was contracting his muscles correctly. When students appeared tired, he would tell them that their training had just begun and to perform the kata “one more time.” Sometimes the students would lose consciousness during these severe training sessions, and on other occasions they would report seeing blood in their urine. Only a few persevered. Young Chojun Miyagi was required to repeat the Sanchin testing procedure of Mr. Higaonna again and again. Eventually he developed callouses on his shoulders from the repeated strikes of his teacher. [vi]



Miyagi Sensei conducting Sanchin Shime

Mr. Higaonna would never teach a student the true essence of his karate until the student had proven that he was earnest and trustworthy. Furthermore, he taught each student differently depending on a variety of factors including their age, ability, and body type. The young Miyagi earned the complete trust of his teacher and was often asked to remain after the other students had been dismissed from the training session. Mr. Miyagi began to receive the type of instruction from Mr. Higaonna that few others received. Because the young Mr. Miyagi was trusted, physically strong, and talented, Mr. Higaonna taught him Suparinpei as the first kata he learned after Sanchin. This extremely complex kata became Mr. Miyagi’s specialty. [vii]

As time went on and their relationship deepened, Kanryo Higaonna wanted his student to experience the same type of training that he had experienced in China. Consequently, he told Mr. Miyagi: “Before you die you must go to China and see Fuzhou with your own eyes.” [viii] Consequently in 1915 he, like his teacher before him, left Okinawa to study martial arts in Fuzhou. Upon arriving in China, he sought out the legendary Ryu Ryu Ko only to discover that he had died. Mr. Miyagi then visited the grave of his teacher’s teacher and paid his respects.

He remained in China for another two months researching the training methods and the kata of Ryu Ryu Ko. Mr. Miyagi was able to locate an elderly man who had also been a student of the late Ryu Ryu Ko. In fact, he had been a junior student to Mr. Higaonna and they had trained together under the late master Ko. Mr. Miyagi was able to train with the elderly gentleman, and during these training sessions was able to verify that all nine of the kata that Mr. Miyagi had learned from Mr. Higaonna were the same nine kata that were once taught by Ryu Ryu Ko. During his stay in Fuzhou, Mr. Miyagi also learned the Chinese characters used to write the names of these kata. [ix] The nine kata were Sanchin, Saifa, Seiyunchin, Sanseiryu, Shisochin, Seipai, Seisan, Kururunfa, and Suparinpei. (三戰 碎破 制引戰 三十六手 四向戰 十八手 十三手 久留頓破 壺百零八)

Upon his return from China, Mr. Miyagi diligently practiced both what he had learned from Mr. Kanryo Higaonna and what he had learned from the research that he had conducted in Fuzhou. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Mr. Miyagi returned to China for a second time again in 1936 with the purpose of expanding his knowledge of the martial arts. [x] These trips, his diligent research, and his relentless practice would lead him to establish what is now known as Goju-Ryu Karate-do.

THE EVOLUTION OF TWO NAMES

It must be noted that during this period of time, there were no specific style names for karate. *Chinese-hand* was the general term used for the Okinawan martial arts. Then in the mid-1920s, karate was referred to by the city of its origin. For instance, Naha-Te (*Naha-hand* 那霸市手) was a name that referred to the martial arts which were being taught in or around Naha, Okinawa. This included the teachings of Mr. Miyagi and several others. However, when karate was being introduced into the larger Japanese society during Kokutai (national essence), all references to karate by these general terms would come to an end. Specific style names were needed in order for karate to become genuinely Japanese.

As the national essence program (Kokutai) was forging Japan into a homogeneous empire, many of the Okinawan karate instructors realized that they must give their styles specific names or face their rejection by the Japanese public. Consequently, Mr. Chojun Miyagi gave his karate an official name to make more acceptable within the Japanese Empire: “He realized that it was important for his style to have a formal title, especially if it was to be recognized and respected by the Japanese as a martial art comparable to judo and kendo.” [xi] In 1930, Mr. Chojun Miyagi selected the name Go-Ju after a quote from a text on martial arts, *The Bubishi*. “‘Ho go ju donto’ (The way of inhaling and exhaling is hardness and softness.) Given the nature of Miyagi’s style, a style containing hard and soft techniques with the emphasis on breathing, Goju seemed to be an ideal name.” [xii] Hence, the martial art that Ryu Ryu Ko had taught to Mr. Kanryo Higaonna and that he had transmitted to Mr. Chojun Miyagi became known as Goju Ryu – the hard and soft style.

Go Ju Ryu
剛 柔 流
Hard Soft Style

An evolution of another name would also occur. As mentioned previously, *karate* originally meant *Chinese-hand*. However, world events would cause virtually all karate teachers and karate styles to change the character *Kara* from *Chinese* to *Empty*. Japan was involved in a military conflict in China, and things of a Chinese origin were considered unpatriotic. Consequently, changing the name from *Chinese-hand* (唐手) to *empty-hand* (空手) was viewed as an act of patriotism. [xiii]

In October of 1936, a meeting of Okinawa's leading karate teachers, political leaders, and military officials was sponsored by an Okinawan newspaper company in the meeting hall of Naha, Okinawa. There "Chojun Miyagi and most of the karate-ka were amenable to the use of the characters for 'empty hand'." [xiv] Hence, what was formerly known as *Chinese-hand* was changed into *empty-hand*, the same term we use today. (For more on this subject, refer back to Chapter 6.)

Mr. MIYAGI'S ORIGINAL SYLLABUS and METHODOLOGY

Originally, Mr. Miyagi taught a syllabus that is very different from the syllabus which is taught today. From the nine katas that he had learned from Mr. Higaonna, he taught each student only two katas – Sanchin and one other kata. "Before the war Miyagi taught one heishugata, Sanchin, and one kaishugata according to the needs and abilities of each student." [xv] The only way that students could learn another kaishugata was to learn it from another student. The rest of the syllabus included "hojo undo, uke harai, ude tanren, yakusoku kumite, (and) kakie". [xvi]

Teaching a standardized karate-do curriculum to large groups of students is a relative new development. Mr. Miyagi taught in secrecy, and did not teach to large groups of students. He taught only to individuals that he had personally chosen: "Practice was quite secretive and took place behind closed doors...The martial arts at that time were taught to only carefully selected students whose character had been observed by the teacher." [xvii] Consequently, before Miyagi would actually give a student detailed instruction, they had to endure a "long-term testing and evaluation period of performing chores and learning only basics. Unworthy members would be weeded out or kept at a basic level" [xviii]

Additionally, his methodology was individualized and geared to the needs of each person. Mr. Miyagi taught the same kata to many different students. However, he did not teach the same kata the same way to each person. Mr. Miyagi taught kata by the same method that he had learned it from Mr. Higaonna. This method was based on the belief that no two students were exactly alike in their needs and abilities, and consequently they should not be taught the same thing in the same manner. Mr. Miyagi explained: "Whether we consider factors of age, physical strength, nature of work, nutrition, etc., each person's position in life is different. It therefore follows that each person's physical development will be different." [xix]

This methodology of teaching in secrecy and individualizing instruction is greatly different from the group classes and standardized curriculum that developed later and which is currently used in today's modern approach to karate-do.

THE EVOLUTION OF GOJU-RYU

Before the Pacific War, Chojun Miyagi realized that the world was changing and that alterations in the original Goju-Ryu syllabus and teaching methodology needed to be made in order for Goju-Ryu to thrive in modern Japan and in the world beyond. In January of 1936, Mr. Miyagi delivered a speech in Osaka, Japan. He told the audience: “The days of teaching karate in secret are over. The time has now arrived where karate-do must be practiced with a commitment to society...This trend is not limited to Japan; ...it will spread throughout the world and become truly international.” [xx] Mr. Miyagi was quite prophetic in his prediction about the future of karate-do, and he initiated changes which would ensure that Goju-Ryu would be accepted first by the Japanese and later by the international community.

In his in his speech, Mr. Miyagi outlined the five parts of the Goju-Ryu syllabus that needed to be taught. These five parts are (1) *junbi-undo* (the stretching and strengthening exercises which were developed by Mr. Miyagi), (2) *hojo-undo* (exercises with supplementary equipment), (3) *kihongata* (the fundamental kata of Sanchin and Tensho), (4) *kaishugata* (the eight other Goju Ryu kata), and (5) *kumite renshu* (sparring training). [xxi] (Please note that the fukyugata Geki Sai Ichi and Geki Sai Ni were not developed until 1941.)

Mr. Miyagi explained that *junbi-undo* will “strengthen the body and develop stamina.” *Hojo-undo* will “develop strength and power in the body as a whole.” *Kihongata* will “develop good posture and form, correct breathing methods, and correct harmonization of breath with movement.” Mr. Miyagi concluded by stating: “Through *kaishugata* and *kumite* practice, even the smallest details of karate-do may be absorbed into the body. With practical applications of attack and defense the true spirit of the martial arts can emerge.” [xxii]

GOJU RYU AFTER THE WAR

The aforementioned changes in Goju Ryu came about before the Pacific War. During the war, Mr. Miyagi was witness to a great deal of death and destruction that resulted from the Battle of Okinawa. During this terrible conflagration, he saw many of Okinawa’s finest karate instructors and students die. All of his literature about karate and its history was destroyed by the allied bombing, and most tragically, three of Mr. Miyagi’s children perished. [xxiii]

He did not want to see the karate that he loved destroyed and lost to future generations. Consequently, he became determined to survive the war so that he could pass Kanryo Higaonna’s karate on to future generations around the globe. After the war Mr. Miyagi altered the curriculum and training methods even further in order to promote Goju Ryu to the younger generations in Okinawa, in Japan, and around the world. Mr. Miyagi had developed the relatively simplistic Gekisai Ichi and Ni kata in 1941, but their use in teaching had previously been limited. After the war, these two kata took the place of Sanchin as the first kata which all students learned. He also arranged the kata into a fixed sequence of how they were to be learned. After the two Gekisai kata were learned, students were to continue with Sanchin, then Saifa, Seiyunchin, Sanseiryu, Shisochin, Seipai, Kururunfa, Seisan, Suparinpei, and finally Tensho. This last kata was developed by Mr. Miyagi to emphasize the soft elements of Goju Ryu. [xxiv]

Together, these twelve kata make up the core curriculum of virtually all of the traditional Goju Ryu organizations today, and these changes transformed Goju Ryu from a secretive and selective Okinawan martial art into an international martial art that is practiced by millions of men, women, and children around the world.

It must be noted that one element of Goju Ryu that Mr. Miyagi never altered was his approach to awarding dan ranks (black belts). He never awarded a black belt or any other rank to any of his students. Mr. Miyagi took this approach because he feared that his students would be recognized by their belt rather than for their abilities: “Chojun Miyagi believed that once a dan rank had been awarded, it would inevitably lead to trouble. For those reasons Chojun Miyagi awarded ranks to no one, neither Okinawan nor Japanese.” [xxv] The first Goju-Ryu black belts were not awarded until after Mr. Miyagi’s death in 1953. [xxvi]

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

The tradition of using an education in karate as a means of developing the character of its students can be traced back to the earliest beginnings of this art in Okinawa. Without a doubt, Kanryo Higaonna continued this tradition, and Chojun Miyagi followed in his teacher’s footsteps. Mr. Miyagi tells us that: “Training the body and mind in karate results in the cultivation of a strong character and an indomitable spirit.” [xxvii]

Mr. Eiichi Miyazato was a direct student of Mr. Chojun Miyagi. After Mr. Miyagi’s death in 1953, Mr. Miyazato assumed the responsibility of teaching in Mr. Miyagi’s Garden Dojo. Shortly thereafter, he established the Jundokan, one of Okinawa’s oldest Goju Ryu organizations. He explains that karate-do must “Begin with Rei [respect] and end with Rei [respect],” [xxviii] and advises us never to compromise our character by losing our respect for ourselves and for others: “From time to time Rei [respect] is lost, mistakes are made, and lifetime regrets are often the result... Ancient Budo teaches that the fighting techniques are techniques used to escape... The wisest thing to do in a confrontational situation is to run away.” [xxix] As we can see, Mr. Miyazato goes beyond the concept *karate ni sente nashi* – there is no first attack in karate. He tells his students to avoid confrontations altogether.



Finally, Mr. Miyazato tells us that the message that Mr. Miyagi wished to pass “on to his students is best summed up by the words ‘modesty’ and ‘hard training’.” [xxx] Today, the best Goju-Ryu instructors encourage their students to develop their character, to be modest, and to train hard. Consequently, the Goju-Ryu tradition which began in the 1800’s on the tiny island of Okinawa continues in the lives and in the training of each one of its dedicated students.

Eiichi Miyazato, a student of Chojun Miyagi

End Notes

- [i] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 29
- [ii] Miyazato Eiichi: *Okinawan Den Goju Ryu Karate-do*: page 22
- [iii] Miyazato Eiichi: *Okinawan Den Goju Ryu Karate-do*: page 22
- [iv] Miyazato Eiichi: *Okinawan Den Goju Ryu Karate-do*: page 22
- [v] Miyazato Eiichi: *Okinawan Den Goju Ryu Karate-do*: page 22
- [vi] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: pages 37-38
- [vii] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 39
- [viii] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 53
- [ix] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: pages 53-56
- [x] McKenna, Mario: *Dragon Times*: page 15
- [xi] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 68
- [xii] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: pages 68
- [xiii] McCarthy, Patrick: *Bubishi*: page 55
- [xiv] Cook, Harry: *Cook, Harry: Shotokan Karate*, page 100
- [xv] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 103
- [xvi] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 103
- [xvii] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 133
- [xviii] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 133
- [xix] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 87
- [xx] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 87
- [xxi] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: pages 87-88
- [xxii] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 88 and 142-143
- [xxiii] Miyazato Eiichi: *Okinawan Den Goju Ryu Karate-do*: pages 23-24
- [xxiv] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 104
- [xxv] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 90
- [xxvi] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 90
- [xxvii] Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: page 87
- [xxviii] Miyazato Eiichi: *Okinawan Den Goju Ryu Karate-do*: page 29
- [xxix] Miyazato Eiichi: *Okinawan Den Goju Ryu Karate-do*: page 29
- [xxx] Miyazato Eiichi: *Okinawan Den Goju Ryu Karate-do*: page 24

Grades in Traditional Karatedo

By Johnpaul Williams

Editor's Note: It is important for students of the traditional Japanese martial arts to know how to properly address their seniors and instructors. It is equally important to know how the kyu/dan system developed in the traditional Japanese martial arts.



Long ago I started writing this article after having learned a quick lesson the hard way. I was "reminded of my teachings" about how and when to properly reference to my seniors.

References for Grade and Titles

In Japan, when you address someone formally [Keigo], you should always start with the family name first and then whatever honorific designation [title] succeeds. The correct context of speaking to your Sensei should be phrased as "Hirano Sensei, "Douglas Sensei" or "Kikuchi Sensei" or just "Sensei".

Only in Western countries has the mistake been made to call teachers "O'Sensei Brad", "Shihan Victor", or "Soke Broc". Another common 'Western only' mistake is adding the formal title grade of an instructor to their title. Addressing someone as "Hanshi Dave", "Kyoshi Richard" or "Renshi Dan" is incorrect, and in Japan this mistake might be regarded as ignorant or even defiant. I know, you are not in Japan however if you are going to practice Japanese Karatedo, you must realize that the language of Karate is Japanese. In using Japanese terminology, it is appropriate to learn how to properly address others, either your peers or your seniors, properly. In Japan, titles are most commonly use after the person who holds the title has died! Yamaguchi Sensei was never referred to Yamaguchi Kaiso until after he was no longer with us, and the same goes for Chojun Miyagi Kensei [Sacred fist].

It should be noted that there are traditional Japanese instructors who do not totally adhere to this rule. My own Kobudo Sensei [Oshiro Sensei] has written instructions on his walls advising students to "bow and say oss" [Oss, which is another article all together] as well to say to "Shihan" while properly addressing him. Oshiro Sensei is as legitimate as they come, and in all honestly I refer him as Sensei, and I've yet to be corrected. Another example is my Hombu dojo in Japan, where our Hanshi, Fujiwara Sensei, recently started addressing one of his senior students as Saito Shihan. I asked him why and he explained in Japanese, to let the visiting students [Gaijin] know that Saito Sensei, was to be considered a Senior Instructor. As usual, I continue to address Saito Sensei as Saito Sensei and so do the local students of the Hombu dojo.

Also, you shouldn't worry about being asked of your grade or title by lower grades. Just as it is impolite to ask a woman of her age, it is impolite to ask a senior his grade or title. If a senior in grade wants to know your own grade he may ask without hesitation or he may ask another senior.



THE MYTH OF THE BELT SYSTEM

Most of us have probably heard the following story regarding the belt system in karate: Back when Kara-te was still known as Chinese hand or "Te," there was no need for a Belt grading system. Everyone in the Dojo knew who the senior student and Teacher or Master was. In the early days of Okinawan Martial Arts, all Karatedo practitioners started out with a White Belt. In time, and the change of seasons, spring would come about and with it green grass,

pollen and dust. Since the Belt was never washed as a symbol of hard work put forth into ones Training [as is today] Spring could leave behind on your white Belt a tinge of green, since most Dojo of the day were exposed to the elements or simply outdoors, and depending on how much training you participated in. With the coming of fall and winter the muck of nature would further stain the once white Belt. After several turning of seasons, and repeated summer's heat to bake and darken the colors, the Belt eventually turned Black. Even though this quaint little story is entertaining, it is nothing more than a myth.

The Facts Regarding the Belt / Grading System

In actuality, the wearing of sashes and Belts was conceived of by the late founder of Judo, Jigoro Kano, and was endorsed by the Dai Nippon Butokukai 大日本武徳会(The Greater Japan Martial Virtues Organization). Kano developed the kyu/dan system because he foresaw the need to distinguish the difference between the advanced practitioner and the different levels of beginners while he was organizing his Judo system and association. The Dan, or Black Belt, indicated an advanced proficiency level and those who earned it became known as Yudansha [Dan recipients]; the Kyu degrees represented the varying levels of competency below the Dan, and were known as Mudansha [those not yet having received a Dan]



Kano Sensei felt it particularly important for all students to fully realize that one's training was in no way complete just because one had achieved the Dan degree. On the contrary, he emphasized that the attainment of the Dan grade merely symbolized the real beginning of one's journey. This is why we use the term "Sho-dan 初" which means "beginning level"

instead of “Ichi-dan” which would mean “first level.” By reaching Black Belt level, one had, in fact, completed only the necessary requirements to embark upon a relentless journey that would ultimately result in self-mastery.

After establishing the Kodakan Dojo, Kano Sensei distributed Black sashes to all Yudansha, which were worn around the standard Dogi [practice Uniform] of that era. Around 1907, the Black sash was replaced with the kuroi-obi [Black Belt] and was standardized by the Dai Nippon Butokukai for other martial arts. Around 1958 the brown belt was added and in 1960 the green belt as well. This hierarchy in training for Judo was adopted by Karatedo and many other budo styles.

Even though this account is not as picturesque as the myth that that has been told and retold in dojos around the world, it is the historically accurate story about the development of the belt system. It is preferable to know the truth than to believe the myths.

The following table describes the kyu/dan belt system in traditional Japanese Karatedo.

White	7th, 8th, 9th & 10th Kyu
Green	4th, 5th & 6th Kyu
Brown	1st [Ikkyu], 2nd & 3rd Kyu
Black	Sho Dan [Ho] and above

The Dumbest Question in Karate

By T'ung En Chik B.S.

A while ago, a friend of mine and a martial arts student of more than 40 years asked me and several other long-time students of karate a strange question. “Why do you practice karate?” Our answers were quite disparate – for the betterment of my health, for the value of self-defense, for the glory of competition, and for fear of what would happen if I stopped. While I thought that this question was perhaps the dumbest question in karate, I couldn’t get it out of my mind.

Additionally, I was not satisfied with our rather amateurish attempts to answer this inane question. After all, who are we to pretend that we can psychoanalyze our own motives of why we practice karate? Consequently, I decided to pose this question to several psychiatrists and psychologists. This was no easy task, and contacting them proved to be quite difficult. However I persisted in getting the professional opinions of three of the best known psychiatrists and psychologists – people who had studied with Sigmund Freud, B.F. Skinner, and Abraham Maslow.



When I spoke with a psychiatrist who had studied with Dr. Freud, he told me that my karate practice was a prime example of obsessive-compulsive behavior. Furthermore, I used this ritualistic behavior to cope with my unconscious childhood memories of an excessively ridged toilet training. Finally, Dr. Freud’s student told me that I would have to undergo years of psychoanalysis just to become normal. Now I knew that I had to be nuts to practice karate. However, I suppose that I didn’t really need to hear that from a student of Dr. Freud; my wife has been telling me that for years.



Next I went to a psychologist who had studied with B.F. Skinner, and he told me that I practiced karate because of the contingencies of reinforcement. I was repeating behavior that was reinforced, and that the promotions that I had received and the medals that I had won served as positive reinforcement. Just as a rat will race through a maze to get positive reinforcement (a piece of cheese), I was racing through a karate “maze” to get my positive reinforcement (a promotion or a gold medal). However, I suppose that I didn’t have to go to Skinner’s student to hear that either; others have said as much.



Finally, I went to a psychologist who had studied with Abraham Maslow. When he explained that the field of psychology could learn a great deal from Eastern philosophy, I was quite puzzled. What in the world could the Eastern philosophy and psychology possibly have in common? Next he asked me if I felt that I was responsible for my own behavior, if I believed that each person possessed a uniqueness, and if I had any profound mystical/spiritual experiences. When I said yes to all three questions, he explained that I might be practicing karate to fulfill a natural drive to reach my potential as a person. Well, I had never heard this

before, and I concluded that both Maslow and his student must be quacks.

After reviewing all of the reports and all of the opinions from the psychiatrists, psychologists, friends and colleagues, I've concluded that the majority of them must be correct. To practice karate, I must either be a nut case attempting to cope with my unconscious childhood memories or be seeking the positive reinforcement that karate promotions and sport medals offers. It is difficult for me to imagine that karate could help me or anyone else to actualize their potential as a person.