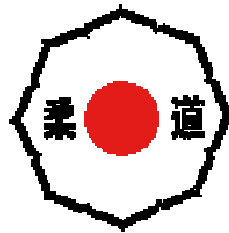


# The Tao of JUDO

Eastern Wisdom for  
Western Practice



Keo Cavalcanti

## Those Who Know Do Not Talk...

I've resisted writing this book for at least six years. Not for lack of enthusiasm – Judo and Taoism are life-long passions of mine. The problem is that writing books about Judo or Taoism is such a Western thing to do. How many “The Zen of...” books have you seen lately? As the Tao says, “those who know do not talk. Those who talk do not know”<sup>1</sup> (chapter 56). If you have to put things in writing, you may be missing the gut-level learning of practice.

Everything about Taoism and traditional Judo seem to discourage writing a book. The two traditions are not keen on “missionary” activity. There is no push to make converts. Their approach is – if you enjoy practicing the art, if it makes a difference in your life, then do it. No need to shout it from the rooftops.

The Tao Te Ching is clear about not making a big deal of one's learning. The sage is always someone who works without recognition. Real wisdom comes from doing what has to be done without dwelling on it. The wise do not show off knowledge (chapter 77). “More words count for less” (chapter 5). What really matters in life is indefinable anyway (chapter 14). What can be defined is never the true essence of the experience (chapter 1).

That is why, “from the beginning those wise in the Tao ways did not try to enlighten others, but kept them in the dark” (chapter 65). The Tao warns self-appointed teachers that people are hard to “enlighten” because they consider themselves enlightened already (chapter 65). There are several passages in the Tao where the sage laments people's lack of interest in true wisdom. “My words are easy to understand and perform, yet no one under heaven knows them or practices them...” (chapter 70). This is not exactly the kind of encouragement a new writer needs before setting pen to paper!

Traditional Judo has a similar approach. “Don't try to be too popular. Don't turn Judo into a franchise,” my Sensei used to say. It takes time, energy, and commitment to practice an art properly. That is not a very popular path. When something takes years to perfect, most people opt instead for a quick fix. People choose what's easy to obtain, or what is entertaining, or what provides instant gratification.

That is why most seasoned martial artists do not write about the arts. They know the practice cannot be imparted through reading. So, traditional martial arts are not a huge industry in America. They survive in small, independent clubs. To outsiders we may not seem very enterprising. We tend to keep to ourselves, we don't use advertising or mass marketing. We screen prospective students carefully. We are very selective. Our arts are passed down to a small number of hand-picked students. And they are encouraged to pass them only to a small number of hand-picked students too.

So, why write a book about Taoism and traditional Judo?

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<sup>1</sup> The Tao Te Ching is perhaps the oldest Taoist text known to us. Given its importance to Taoism, I use it extensively throughout this book. I recommend the English translation of Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English (*Tao Te Ching*, New York: Vintage Books, 1972). In this text I use my own looser translation, still based on the excellent work of Feng and English, but adopting a more inclusive language.

Perhaps it is a sign of middle-age. At this point in life I'm feeling the need to share what I've learned from practice. Perhaps I'm more aware of the passage of time. Since I brought my art to the United States, I've formed three generations of black belts. Two out of my three masters are gone. My first master, Asano Sensei, died a few years back. He was an immigrant to Brazil. I'm told his grandchildren still keep the school open, but I haven't been back to visit since I immigrated to America. Mac Sensei, my other influential master, died recently. Our art is still struggling with the aftermath of his demise.

Perhaps I write out of gratitude. When I look back to the path I traveled, I'm overwhelmed by the guidance given. They were always there, every step of the way. In the best Taoist spirit, my masters guided me without claiming fame, worked without taking credit, and led without dominating. This is what is considered Primal Virtue (chapter 10).

Finally, I'm also thinking of my Judo "grandchildren." My senior students have clubs of their own. They continue to transmit the art. I feel that I owe it to them, for the sake of their dedication and commitment, to leave something in print of what we've learned together. Time erases so much! Fortunately, we can register our accumulated experiences in word form.

The Tao tells us the sage "never stores things up. The more he does for others, the more he has. The more he gives to others, the greater his abundance" (chapter 81). So these lessons are shared in the same spirit. I've worked hard in the practice of these two disciplines. I shared them in the hope of giving a little back.

Richmond, Fall 2001

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## Introduction

# Being Armed Without Weapons<sup>2</sup>

Ever desireless, one sees the mystery.  
Ever desiring, one sees its manifestations.  
Tao Te Ching, chapter 1

This book is not for those who want to win tournaments. There are no secrets tips here on how to become the next national champion. It won't make you a better competitor. In truth, the book is not even about Judo. It is about practicing a martial art in the right spirit. It is written for those who wish to learn the difference between practicing to win and practicing as a life journey.

To find the answer to that we must go back to ancient Asia, to medieval China and Japan. I know, you're thinking, "where the great warriors lived." No, we are not looking for warriors or wars. There is no glamour in war. Weapons are instruments of fear, not glory. "Weapons are not a sage's tools" (chapter 31). Those who trust in them flirt with tragedy. Every time you give weapons to volatile and passionate human beings you are looking for disaster. "A brave and passionate person," teaches the Tao, "will kill or be killed" (chapter 73). War, even in victory, should be mourned in heartfelt sorrow (chapter 31).

We are instead small, secluded monasteries, and quiet, soft-spoken monks. They may much to teach us about martial arts. You see, there are two approaches to the arts – the way of the *warrior* and the way of the *monk*. There is nothing wrong with the way of the warrior, of course. But so much has been written about it already, that this book is dedicated to the way of the monk.

In fact, I think we're too familiar with the way of the warrior in the West. The 20<sup>th</sup> century had the bloodiest wars in history, with the most frightful tools of mass destruction ever conceived by humankind. We are also very familiar with the *ancient* way of the warrior. Hollywood has done a great job of glorifying ancient wars as well. Look at Mel Gibson or Richard Gere or Kevin Costner brandishing broadswords and bows and arrows in legendary England.

The West has glorified even ancient Eastern warriors. The Samurai and Ninja are ever present in martial arts movies. They are so stereotypical, they've become caricatures. It's amusing to see people dressed as medieval Ninja in stories that take place in the present day and time. Those uniforms were used hundreds of years ago! Who dresses like that any more? It is the equivalent of dressing up a Manhattan detective in a suit of medieval armor to film a murder mystery.

Martial arts movies make the arts look glamorous. The heroes are mean, aggressive and invincible on the silver screen. They can fight forever and never get hurt. They kill so often we become desensitized to the taking of a human life. There is no sense that each person killed had a mother, a father, a sister or brother who will miss them. There is no sense of tragedy

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<sup>2</sup> Tao Te Ching, chapter 69.

attached to death anymore.

True martial artists have a more realistic picture of the arts. They know they don't have super-human strength. And in the great scheme of things, they know that life is not about winning or losing. It is about living it well. Sometimes we cannot escape tragedy. But the way we deal with tragedy shows whether we are truly martial artists or not.

Real martial arts practice teaches us to live with our limitations and imperfections. They show that life is fragile and things don't always work the way we expect. "Sometimes things are ahead and sometimes they are behind; sometimes breathing is hard, sometimes it comes easily; sometimes there is strength and sometimes weakness; sometimes one is up and sometimes down" (chapter 29). The question is not whether we can fight forever, the question is whether we can walk the path in serenity despite everything life throws our way.

It is easy to see why we love the way of the warrior in the West. It is more exciting. Who doesn't want to be an indestructible super-human fighter? But we should remember that the medieval Chinese and Japanese warriors were paid soldiers, and most never lived to see their 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. Yes, there was some glory. But they practiced martial arts out of necessity, not choice. They needed the arts to survive in battle in the service of their Lords. Losing meant certain death. Much like today's soldiers, ancient warriors knew wars were tragic. They knew the suffering that came with them.

Monks, on the other hand, had a different approach to the arts. They practiced them with greater freedom. True, there are stories that monks first learned the arts to protect themselves against highway robbers. But if you lived in a monastery nestled high in the mountains and did not travel frequently, learning the art for personal protection did not make much sense.

Unlike warriors, monks had no practical purpose for the arts. They practiced by choice. The point of the practice wasn't survival, it was spiritual growth<sup>3</sup>. The arts were a natural extension of monastic life – monks worked, meditated, and practiced the arts. They were part of their spiritual preparation. Spiritual conditioning and physical education went hand in hand. A quiet mind was the source of energy to a disciplined body. This wasn't done to impress people or claim great glory. It was part of following the path, the "way" (*Tao*). "The greatest Virtue [was] to follow Tao and Tao alone" (chapter 21). The arts were the physical extension of a spiritual quest.

What the Chinese called "Tao" (the Way), the Japanese called *Do* – The same "Do" that appears in most modern Japanese martial arts: *Ju-Do* is the way of gentleness; *Aiki-Do*, the way of harmony; *Karate-Do*, the way of the empty hand. The "Do" at the end of the name indicates that the arts are practiced as a way of life, as a form of spiritual training. Someone who learns only the techniques finds his/her training incomplete.

According to the way of the monk, *Budo* (the collection of all the Japanese arts) was meant to guide students into deeper learning. *Budoka* were expected to have a better

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<sup>3</sup> The word "spiritual" doesn't mean something "supernatural" or "church-related" or "religious." It is used here in the Taoist sense of *te* (virtue), of being true to one's nature, fulfilling one's calling. A blade of grass is virtuous if it fully becomes a blade of grass, no more, no less.

understanding of their true nature and the nature of life. The techniques were tools for polishing one's character. Practice was meant to foster patience, humility, compassion, loyalty and so on.<sup>4</sup> The founders of the modern Japanese martial arts knew that the learning of techniques without soul-work was empty. And a martial art taught without spiritual content was dangerous, since it could be easily used for good or evil.

### The Way of the Monk

For monks, the martial arts were means to an intuitive ethical education. Monasteries used the arts to educate the soul. In practice students combined body and soul, finding internal peace and a deeper knowledge of life. "The ancient masters were subtle, mysterious, profound, and responsive," precisely because of the depth of their practice (chapter 15); a deeper knowledge that helped them make wise use of the techniques.

Even ancient warriors knew that martial arts had a spiritual content. For the Japanese the true Bushi or Samurai was a cultivated person. He dedicated a life time to polishing his soul. Along with the arts, he studied philosophy, history, poetry and art. It was not unusual for high-ranking Samurai to be poets or artists (which gave them a keen sense of aesthetics). Being warriors, of course, they also studied the military ways.

Miyamoto Musashi, the classic example of a cultivated Samurai, was known as the greatest swordsman of old Japan. Coming of age at the end of Japan's civil wars, he is credited with developing the art of using both the *katana* (the long sword) and the *wakizashi* (short sword) in battle. Early in life he had the great fortune of having the Buddhist priest Takoan as his guardian and mentor. It was Takoan who taught Musashi to control his temper, rein in his desires, and abandon his wild ways. Through secluded studying, Musashi learned all the classics of Chinese literature. In his traveling years he developed a taste for poetry, painting and sculpting, as well as the practice of Zen. It is safe to say Musashi would not have become the great Samurai he was without the wise counsel of his mentor.

So, this book is an effort to call attention to the way of the monk. It reflects my strong belief that martial arts practice requires spiritual roots. We practice the arts to learn how to live life. There are too many "warrior" martial artists in the West these days and too few "monks." If we don't pay attention to spiritual cultivation, if we don't help our students discover a finer way of being themselves, we as *Sensei* (teachers of the arts) will be contributing to the spread of violence in modern life and to the misuse of the arts.

This book uses Judo to highlight the spiritual principles of Taoism. But the lessons are not restricted to Judo. The principles discussed here inform the practice of Aikido, Karate, Kung Fu,

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<sup>4</sup> There were seven spiritual virtues in *Bushido* (the way of the Samurai), the collection of martial arts that preceded Budo. The martial artist developed them as part of the practice in the arts of war. The seven virtues were: *gi* - right attitude, living righteously; *yu* - bravery, courage under fire; *jīn* - universal love, compassion for all living things; *rei* - etiquette, courtesy, knowing one's place in the world; *makoto* - complete sincerity, truthfulness in all situations; *melyo* - a sense of honor, of dignity; and *chugo* - devotion, loyalty, gratitude for those who provided for one's well-being.

Tai Chi, Tae Kwon Do and other Asian arts. They also inform good living for folks who don't practice the arts. As a philosophy, Taoism spread throughout Asia during the early period of Chinese civilization. Its practice produced a unique disposition toward life, whether one was a martial artist or simply someone interested in wisdom.

### **Why Mix Taoism and Judo?**

Taoism provides a frame for practice for those of us who practice the arts for life (and not just while we have the stamina of youth). Its principles help us to evaluate the lessons behind the art's techniques. It leads us to search for those deeper lessons that should inform our exercises and drills. Are your students understanding these lessons at the gut-level? How do we know if we have "arrived" in our practices? Is it all about accumulating ranks and belts or is it about internal transformation?

The spiritual practice of the martial arts leads to a certain kind of detachment or dispassionate living. One no longer practices for fame, but for contentment. Amazingly enough, that kind of detachment connects you to other living things, bringing true fulfillment. The Tao is quite direct on this point: "Fame or self: What matters most? Self or wealth: Which is more precious? Gain or loss: Which is more painful? The one attached to things will suffer much. The one who saves will suffer heavy loss. The contented person is never disappointed. If you know when to stop you will not find trouble. Such a person is forever safe" (chapter 44).

This book is an invitation to the spiritual roots of the arts. When you practice an art without its spiritual roots, anything can be used to fill that void. No wonder some people end up thinking that it is all about personal glory, medals and trophies. In that pursuit they reduce their art to a means to other ends. The techniques are just instruments instead of having their own deep meaning to bestow.

The reason I use Judo to exemplify the way of the monk is because I've been practicing the art for 35 years now. And for at least the past 11 years I've used Judo to express Taoism. More importantly, I use Judo because I'm afraid that we have lost the Judoka way of the monk in the West. Judo was "Westernized" sooner than the other Eastern Martial Arts when it became an Olympic sport. And it has been reduced to a "sport" ever since.

### **Judo: Sport or Art?**

When Judo became an Olympic sport in 1964, its spiritual side was greatly minimized. As the art was exported to other countries, it was feared that if it were promoted as a Japanese art, it might not become popular in the West. So, sessions on spiritual principles (*ko* and *mondo*) that were used in the early days, and emphasis on pre-arranged drills (*Kata*) were replaced by conditioning exercises and the more competitive aspects of the art (*randori* and *shiai*). Judo is an example of what happens when a traditional art is re-formatted as a sport. Once it becomes a sport, the art is used mostly for personal or national glory. Victories and trophies replace its true meaning.

When winning becomes everything, the way of the monk is lost. People use whatever works to stay competitive – they alter the techniques and take short cuts on elegance and style. If a technique "works" better with muscle, then you don't spend a lot of time learning it the right way. You lift weights, build body mass and use muscle! Instead of cultivating the art, Western Judoka perfected wrestling skills. Nowadays it is hard to see any difference between an Olympic Judo match and a wrestling bout.

This single-minded pursuit of victory is, of course, the opposite of the deeper goal of the art. When the only thing that matters is being a champion, one is constantly feeding one's ego instead of building one's character. If you think I'm exaggerating, read magazine interviews with European or American Judo champions. They come across with a tremendous amount of arrogance. They'll say things like "I'm the best in the world." A few may qualify their statement: "I'm the best in the world in groundwork," or "I'm the best in the world in foot techniques." But the idea is pretty much the same: "I'm a cut above." Two hundred years from now, who will know? And who will care?

There is, of course, nothing wrong with winning. After all, the Olympics are a test to human determination. Track and field stars have the same mentality and the same drive of Olympic Judoka. The problem is that Judo was not created for self-promotion or personal success. When it feeds one's desire, it cannot lead to the monk's detachment. So, the art loses its way. "There is no greater sin than desire," warns the Tao, "no greater curse than discontent, no greater misfortune than wanting something for oneself" (chapter 46). Only one who knows when enough is enough will always have plenty.

To Taoists desire clouds the mind. Desire for victory blinds the Judoka to what is real in the practice. The more you desire, the more you feed your ego. At some point it is no longer about polishing your soul. It is a form of narcissistic self-love – "look at me, look at how great I am..." The tragic part about this is that no one in the West is helping Judo athletes to find the real meaning of the art. Coaches push for more medals; presidents of Judo federations want greater glory for their countries; and athletes want the gold. Nobody considers the good of the art.

To illustrate how sad this is, let me share with you what the former president of the largest Judo organization in the West had to say about Judo. The words come straight from his foreword to the organization's 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Senior Handbook. See how he spends more time talking about American superiority than the art itself:

It is not uncommon now for an American to defeat a Japanese champion (although from our standpoint it doesn't happen quite often enough!)... We have now matured enough to stand on our own two feet . . . After all, American Physical Education is the best in the world, why should we be ashamed to use it in Judo? ...We have now set ourselves upon a course which will, with God's help, place us in the first rank of world Judo by the Games of 1988 and 1992.<sup>5</sup>

Now compare those comments to the words of Shihan Kisshomaru Ueshiba (son of the founder of Aikido) for those who wish to pursue a martial art. This is the difference between a sports administrator and a master:

The training and discipline common to all the Ways, martial or cultural, consist of three levels of mastery: physical, psychological and spiritual. On the physical level mastery of form (*kata*) is the crux of training. The teacher provides a model form, the student observes carefully and repeats it countless times until he has completely internalized the form. Words are not spoken and explanations are not given; the

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<sup>5</sup> Philip S. Porter, "Foreword to the Third Edition," *The United States Judo Association Senior Handbook*. 5<sup>th</sup> Printing. Colorado Springs: USJA. 1984.

burden of learning is on the student. In the ultimate mastery of form the student is released from adherence to form.

This release occurs because of internal psychological changes taking place from the very beginning. The tedious, repetitious and monotonous learning routine tests the student's commitment and willpower, but it also reduces stubbornness, curbs willfulness, and eliminates bad habits of body and mind. In the process, his or her real strength, character and potential begin to emerge. The spiritual mastery is inseparable from the psychological but begins only after an intensive and lengthy period of training.<sup>6</sup>

Do these two seem light years apart? Of course they are. For the first, Judo is the means to other ends: victory, glory for the country, greatness for the organization. For the second, the martial art is an end in itself. This is the difference between practicing a martial art as a sport and practicing it as a way of life. When you practice it as a way of life, it is a path of enlightenment.

It is not surprising that we find little room for humility, balance, or consideration of others among Western Judo champions. For them the coach and the other athletes exist for a single purpose – to make them famous. What no one explains to these Judoka is that the expectation to win at all times is utterly unrealistic and it burdens their practice. When you use Judo as a means to other ends, you don't enjoy practicing it for its own sake.

Think for a minute – how many would love to be like Michael Jordan? Of those millions, how many actually do it? How many would like to be a famous singer? Of those, how many become one? If your only reason for sing or playing ball is to get to the top, you will be very miserable in life, and miss the joy of engaging in two very delightful activities.

Let's take the example a bit further – suppose you do reach the top. If you are an athlete, how long do you stay in the spotlight? 5 years, maybe 10? If reaching the top is all that defines your worth as a human being, what happens when you are no longer there? More importantly, how do you deal with unplanned and undesirable mishaps along the way? Suppose a Judoka tears a knee ligament right before the world title match. What then? What happens if after years of practice you place third and miss qualifying for the national team? What happens when you gets too old to be swift and muscle people around?

If you dedicate 5 or 10 years of your life to Judo thinking only of reaching the top, anything less than being number one will feel like a failure, like a waste of time. The training will seem pointless, the dedication will seem unjustly rewarded. At the end of the day, there is the feeling of not being "good enough," as if being good enough was all that it took to get to the top. There are so many other variables at play here: appropriate funding, best coaching, timely preparation, who else shows up, who is refereeing, who gets placed in your weight division, whether or not you can handle long-distance traveling and foreign food well...

Sometimes, even when all the variables line up favorably, you may still miss on your opportunity. Remember when President Carter decided to boycott the Olympic Games in Moscow? Some of the top American Judoka peaked that year. Can you imagine what they felt like when they saw the President on TV calling the whole thing off? People got discouraged, burned out. Some stopped practicing altogether. Many felt that the best part of their Judo life

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<sup>6</sup> Kisshomaru Ueshiba, *The Spirit of Aikido*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1987.

was already behind them.

The drive to win at all costs also brings physical damage. Judo has one of the highest rates of injury among Olympic sports. Many Judoka retire early due to broken bones or torn ligaments. The irony is that this is not because Judo is a dangerous or rough art. Its name means “the Gentle Path.” It is because of the way we practice it in the West! Consider this – Dr. Jigoro Kano, Judo’s founder, practiced the art far into his old age. Judo’s great master, Kyuzo Mifune, practiced it every day until he died in his mid-seventies. At the time he died in his mid-seventies, my Sensei was practicing Judo five times a week. What did these folks know that we don’t?

I suggest that they were practicing the art for its own sake, with the kind of detachment we find in the way of the monk. It is no coincidence that Kano founded his Judo school, the *Kodokan*, at a Buddhist temple. His main goal was to help students perfect themselves as human beings. Judo’s two guiding principles – inner-tranquility (*Seiryoku Zenyo*) and outer-harmony (*Jita Kyoei*) were supposed to lead students to being at peace with themselves and the world. You use economy of inner energy to neutralize an attack, even as you consider the mutual benefit and welfare of all involved in the bout.

Unfortunately, the old Kodokan ways were short-lived. Judo was created when Japan experienced rapid social and political transformation. The country opened its doors to the West and began to modernize. Whatever got in the way of modernity was severely curtailed. Bu-Jutsu, the Samurai martial arts, was a case in point. When the Emperor forbade its teaching, Bu-Jutsu schools were forced underground. To save the arts (*Jutsu*) some masters developed a philosophy to go along and offered them as an educational program or “way” (*Do*). Ju-Jutsu became Ju-do, Aiki-Jutsu became Aiki-do, and so on. The ways of war became ways of life.

Seeking a place for his art in this new order, Kano had a tough choice. If he preserved Judo as traditional Bu-jutsu, the art would spread slowly, mostly in Japan, and it would be practiced only by a small number of dedicated followers (which is what happened to Aikido). If he turned Judo into a sport, the art could be introduced into schools, colleges, physical education clubs, and police training. It could find a home in the new Japanese society, and maybe spread throughout the world. Needless to say, Kano chose to turn Judo into a sport.

I’ve often wondered whether he realized how much he was sacrificing in the process. To have an idea of the price we paid, compare Judo to Aikido. One has become a sport but lost its soul. The other has survived as the unique art it was meant to be. At the time, however, the choice must have seemed right for Kano. Especially when Judo became an instant success. Schools adopted it as part of their physical education curriculum, Ju-jutsu masters gave up their styles to join Kano’s school and the Kodokan became a prestigious martial arts center in the world. Eventually, Kano became a member of the Olympic Committee. He died at sea in 1938 on his way to an Olympic Committee meeting.

I’m sure the Olympic ideal of the amateur pursuit of athletic excellence appealed to Kano. He imagined that Olympic practice was compatible to the way his art was practiced. Plus, the Olympic glitter could make Judo an international sport and touch many more lives. What Kano could not envision was that the games would change his art.

The techniques remained the same after Judo became an Olympic sport, but everything else about it changed drastically. In France you had to get a physical education college degree to teach Judo. In the U.S. the largest Judo Association pushed for a coach-certification

programs. Weight-lifting, interval training and other forms of physical conditioning became the way to prepare Judoka. Slowly the art went out of Judo. In little more than a century, it changed from being the “Gentle Path” to being wrestling.

Why did things change so much? The answer is simple. When a country imports something from another, it doesn't necessarily understand how it fits in its larger culture. For instance, we are very fond of Chinese food in the U.S., but very few Americans understand how food preparation in Chinese society reinforces kinship and Chinese cosmology – the beauty of balance and the harmony of forces. We enjoy the sauces, the exotic taste, but miss that deeper meaning that comes from sharing the food.

The same thing happened to Judo in the West. We “Westernized” the art after it became an Olympic sport and lost something very important in the process, the very essence of the practice. Now, practically all Western nations have Judo teams. There are World championships, along with the Olympic games. Much like in Japan, schools and universities offer Judo as physical education around the world. Local, regional and national championships are held in each country to find its true Olympic champions. National pride fuels the whole process. Trophies, medals, and fame have become the most important incentive for practicing the art.

The price we paid was losing Judo's soul. The real reason for the art was completely watered down in the West. If you read a little bit of Taoism you won't be surprised with such outcome. The Tao warns that desire blinds us and keep us from the true meaning of things. *A desireless attitude is a prerequisite for practice.* It is the only way to find answers that go beyond the techniques. The Japanese claim that a true martial artist should be *mushotoku* (desireless of profit). And they are right. There is more to Judo than we could have imagined in the West. In the chapters that follow we explore what that something might be.

## Chapter One

### My Words Have Ancient Beginnings<sup>7</sup>

Judo is only 120 years old, but its techniques are ancient. They are derived from Ju-jutsu, a Japanese hand-to-hand combat system that dates back more than 600 years. Its origins are lost in time, but the *bushi* (Samurai) and monks are credited with its propagation. Ju-jutsu has had several names over the years: *taijutsu*, *yawara*, *kempo*, *kugusoku*, *kumiuchi*, *koshi nomawari*. The main difference between Ju-jutsu and Western wrestling is that in Ju-jutsu one relies on flexibility rather than strength to overpower an opponent. Economy of energy is the hallmark of the Ju-Jutsu master; s/he is soft and pliable, winning by appearing to yield.

The *Densho Chusaku*, a classical Ju-jutsu text of the Kito school, has one of the oldest descriptions of the art. In Ju-jutsu, it says, one should discard one's strength and use the enemy's to win the match. Discarding one's strength is "returning to the fundamental principle" or "returning to the source" (Tao Te Ching, chapter 16). Thus the master relies on *ki* (life energy), using the enemy's strength to defeat him or her. That way, the weak overcomes the strong (chapter 36).

During feudal times, Ju-jutsu was part of the bushi training (along with other warfare arts – archery, spearfighting, swordsmanship, firearms, horsemanship, and tactics). It was also used in temples and monasteries. With the rise of the Samurai class, after the Heian period, the art increased in importance. During the subsequent periods of Japanese history (Kamakura, 1185-1336; Muromachi, 1336-1573; Tokugawa, 1603-1868) it evolved into very specialized styles. In the beginning of the Tokugawa era there were hundreds of specialized schools (*ryus*). Even by the end of the nineteenth century, with the Meiji restoration, there were still over seven hundred Ju-jutsu ryus in the Japanese islands.

Ju-Jutsu schools were known by their distinct fighting styles and strategies. Some favored throwing (*nage*) while others preferred ground fighting (*osae* or *toraе*, *shime*, *kansetsu*) or striking (*atemi*). As expected, there were advantages and disadvantages in each style. Throwing or striking might be more advantageous when dealing with multiple attackers, but groundwork might be preferable in the case of a single opponent.

In strategy, some schools valued taking the initiative while others taught students to use timely reaction to an opponent's attack. Schools following the principles of swordsmanship (*Ken-Jutsu*) insisted on a sudden, total attack. The others relied on defensive techniques, neutralizing an opponent's attack after it was unleashed.

Japan's constant state of war during the feudal period gave ryus plenty of opportunity to test their methods on the battlefield. But 300 years of peace that followed the Japanese civil wars gave the art a chance to reach its peak. Under Tokugawa law, armed combat was forbidden. So, unarmed bouts became more frequent. The rise of the common citizen led Ju-Jutsu schools to adapt their techniques to the needs of a civilian society. Several ryus gave up ceremony and ritual in favor of a more practical approach. With the Meiji restoration, *Bu-Jutsu*, the ancient fighting styles created for warring became *Budo*, the fighting "ways."

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<sup>7</sup> Tao Te Ching, chapter 70.

Budo was more than a collection of fighting styles. Each style followed certain spiritual principles that organized its techniques. By 1868, several Bu-jutsu schools had changed their names and practices to follow this new orientation. They transmitted their styles to students by blending their techniques with a unique philosophy. Students were expected to be fully versed in hand-to-hand combat that embodied the philosophy of the ryu's founder.

## The Birth of Judo

Judo was one of Budo's fighting styles. Dr. Jigoro Kano, its founder, was born in Mikage, Hyogo Prefecture, on October 28, 1860. He came of age in the last days of Bu-jutsu, as part of the generation of Japanese masters who ushered the new Budo era. In youth Kano studied Ju-jutsu under Sensei Yagi and Fukuda (specialists in the *Tenshin-Shinyo* style). After graduating from Tokyo University, he enlisted under Sensei Iikubo to learn the *Kito* style. He would spend a lifetime studying the martial arts.

As an avid student of hand-to-hand combat Kano never stopped researching ancient styles and contemporary martial art forms. He invited Funakoshi, Karate's founder, to his Judo school. He sent students to observe Ueshiba's Aikido and was extremely touched by its spirituality and effectiveness. He even watched Western wrestling with great curiosity. Some think he got the idea for *kata guruma* (a shoulder throw) from Western wrestlers.

After college, Kano was searching for a unifying principle for the techniques he learned. The principle was *Seiryoku Zenyo* ("inner tranquility or efficiency," also translated as "maximum efficiency in mental and physical energy"). He used it to select techniques for his art that only used the opponent's strength to neutralize an attack. Kano called the system Judo ("the Gentle Path") and founded the *Kodokan* (the "school to learn the way") in 1882 to propagate it.

Kano's system combined three arts (*waza*): throwing (*nage*), groundwork (*katame*) and striking (*ateimi*). A Judoka was expected to be equally comfortable using any of them or combining them to fend off an attack. His throwing techniques were subdivided into "standing" and "sacrifice" throws (*tachi* and *sutemi waza*). For the standing throws the Judoka would use hands, hips or feet (*te*, *koshi*, and *ashi waza*) as leverage points to throw an opponent. In the sacrifice techniques the performer would fall backwards (*ma sutemi*) or sideways (*yoko sutemi*) to project the opponent over himself or herself.

Judo's groundwork was subdivided into groundholds or pinning techniques (*osaekomi*), chokes (*shime*) and joint locks (*kansetsu*). Kano was careful in teaching groundwork. Groundholds were relatively harmless, but chokes were lethal and joint locks could cripple someone. So groundholds were taught earlier, but *shime* and *kansetsu* were shown only to higher ranking students, who had proved their dedication to the art. High ranking students were also taught resuscitation (*kappo*) to conduct their training in a safe and responsible manner.

Striking techniques had a more limited role in Judo. They were used to stun an opponent before a throw, or as a finishing technique once the opponent was downed. Like the other Judo techniques, strikes were not based on muscle power. Their effectiveness was based on knowing *where* to strike and using one's *ki* to strike. Judo strikes included upper (*ude atemi*) and lower limb blows (*ashi atemi*) using fists, hand-edges, fingers, elbows, knees and feet. Because of its lethal nature, *Atemi*, was only taught to high ranking Judokas at the Kodokan.

The Judo curriculum (or syllabus) was very structured. Students mastered a certain set of techniques for each rank before they were allowed to move on to the next. Standing techniques

were grouped into five sets (*Gokyo no waza*), ranging from less strenuous or technically difficult to more advanced throws. Groundwork and striking techniques were also grouped into sets. Each set represented a level of expertise in the art and was identified by a different color belt. Students (*deshi*) were divided into *mudansha* (color belts) and *yudansha* (black belts). *Mudansha* had five ranks (*kyus*): yellow, orange, green, blue and brown belts. *Yudansha* were ranked into ten degrees (*dans*) of black belt, usually working on the more developed aspects of the art like *kata*.

## The Spirit of Judo

To complete the transition from *Jutsu* to *Do*, Kano added a strict code of ethics to his fighting style. Kodokan instructors and students were expected to be outstanding examples of good character and honest conduct. Fights outside of the dojo or behavior that brought shame to the school would lead to suspension or expulsion. His strict policies were a firm standard for martial artists,

Kano therefore gave his Kodokan Judo educational substance in tune with Meiji times. Above all, he insisted on a strict code of ethics for all Kodokan members. Examples of good character were set by himself and his instructors. This brought Kodokan Judo to the level of a medium for moral education. By additionally requiring lectures and energetic debates on the technical and philosophical essences of Judo study, Kano brought his Judo to the level of an intellectual endeavor. He further rounded out his system and met the criteria of physical education by creating *kata* patterns of his own.<sup>8</sup>

Kodokan training was concerned with the well-being of the individuals and the community. Kano employed four teaching methods: *randori* a free practice of all techniques, similar to the physical training of the Ju-jutsu schools; *kata*, the pre-arranged forms, considered a more advanced aspect of the art; *ko*, his systematic lecturing; and *mondo*, periods of question and answer.

During one of those question and answer sessions he stumbled upon Judo's second basic principle – *Jita Kyozei* (“outer harmony” also translated as “mutual benefit and prosperity”). Kano wanted students to realize that they could not progress in the art at the expense of others. He was so firmly convinced that mutual prosperity was the key to human progress that he regarded its diffusion as his greatest mission in life:

...judo is a mental and physical discipline whose lessons are readily applicable to the management of our daily affairs. The fundamental principle of judo, one that governs all the techniques of attack and defense, is whatever the objective, it is best attained by the maximum-efficient use of mind and body for that purpose. The same principle applied to our everyday activities leads to the highest and most rational life.

Training in the techniques of judo is not the only way to grasp this universal principle, but it is how I arrived at an understanding of it, and it is the means by which I attempt to enlighten others.

The principle of maximum efficiency, whether applied to the art of attack and defense or to refining and perfecting daily life, demands above all that there be order

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<sup>8</sup> Tadao Otaki and Donn F. Draeger, *Judo Formal Techniques*. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle. 1983, page 22.

and harmony among people. This can be realized only through mutual aid and concession. The result is mutual welfare and benefit. The final aim of judo practice is to inculcate respect for the principles of maximum efficiency and mutual welfare and benefit. Through judo, persons individually and collectively attain their highest spiritual state while at the same time developing their bodies and learning the art of attack and defense.<sup>9</sup>

## Judo and the West

Kano's system came of age in 1900 with the founding of the Kodokan *Yudanshakai* (the black belt association). Five years later, on July 24, 1905, eighteen Ju-jitsu masters representing the leading Japanese ryus gathered at the Butokukai in Kyoto at Kano's invitation. There they joined Kano's style. The transition from Ju-jitsu to Judo was complete. The Kodokan became a foundation in 1909. In 1920 Kano put the final touches in the Gokyo no Waza and in 1922 the Kodokan Cultural Judo Society was created to promote the preservation of Judo's moral philosophy. By then Judo had become a modern Japanese art.

Judo's Western expansion started a little earlier. In 1889, with the support of the Japanese government, Kano traveled to Europe and America to promote his art. Between 1889 and his untimely death on May 4, 1938 he made as many as eight trips to other continents. He also encouraged some of his best students to venture far to spread his system.

From 1912 to 1952, when the International Judo Federation (IJF) was founded, several of Kano's high ranking disciples immigrated to other countries or trained Americans and Europeans at the Kodokan. Noticeable examples are Gunji Koizumi, 7th Dan, who went to Great Britain in 1918, where he founded the London *Budokwai*; Mikinosuke Kawaishi, 7th Dan, a world expert on Judo kata, who went to France in 1922; and Sumiyuki Kotani, 8th Dan, who trained the first team of American Judoka in 1952. That group was the seed of American Judo and the founders of the United States Judo Association.

Unfortunately as Judo moved West, it became more of a sport and less of an art. Its Olympic status and popularity in the World Games pushed the physical aspects of the art to the forefront. With more nations adopting the art, Judo became very competitive. Few Judoka would have the benefit of learning the art's earlier style. To preserve that earlier style, my ryu (*Zen Judo*) was created in 1974. We are committed to practicing Judo in traditional ways. We use an older syllabus and our dojos do not participate in tournaments. The art is practiced for its own sake.

It was natural for Zen Judo to have developed in Great Britain. The country had one of the earliest Judo programs in the West, one that preserved the earlier ways. There were British citizens practicing at the Kodokan even before Japanese Sensei traveled to England. E.J. Harrison, master British Judoka, achieved the rank of *Sandan* (3<sup>rd</sup> degree black belt) at Kano's school. He started Judo in 1904, at the same time that masters Tani, Uyenishi (who taught the art to the British Army at Aldershot) and Koizumi were traveling to the United Kingdom.

That early approach to Judo was soon challenged in England with the creation of post-war athletic associations. British Judo became more sport-like. In fact, The British Judo Association (BJA) became the representative of sports Judo in the country. The British Judo Council, under the influence of Sensei Tani, struggled to keep the early style, without much success. Only the

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<sup>9</sup> Dr. Jigoro Kano, *Kodokan Judo*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1986, page 25.

*Kyu Shin Do*, founded by Kenshiro Abe, maintained Judo's traditional approach.

Our ryu evolved from the *Kyu Shin Do*. Sensei Dominick "Mac" McCarthy, founder of Zen Judo, was trained in that system. Wishing to preserve the art's original roots, Mac founded Zen Judo in September 1974 at the Petersfield Community Center. Since then, the ryu has spread across the United Kingdom and beyond. We have two Zen Judo associations in the UK, one in Spain, and one in the United States. We've also had clubs in Germany and Canada. I had the privilege to open the first Zen Judo dojo in America on March 6, 1991 in Nashville, Tennessee. Five years later, the American Zen Judo association was founded to promote traditional Judo in the United States.

## Chapter Two

### Holding Fast to the Center<sup>10</sup>

One of the first things you learn in Judo is etiquette (*reishiki*). White belt students learn to bow as a sign of respect. They bow as they enter the dojo, to their Sensei at the beginning of class, to each other before engaging in drills, and to the Sensei at the end of class. The bowing may seem silly in the West, where we live in a world of handshakes and first names. But bowing is important.

Etiquette, in general, teaches students that everyone has a place in the dojo, that the dojo is an ordered world. The order is a natural result of the privileges and responsibilities associated with ranks. In the dojo we are all related, and there is a right way to treat each other. Depending on your rank, you may be asked to teach beginners or be allowed to have advanced students instruct you.

Etiquette is a way of honoring the dojo's order. It teaches you to be respectful of those with whom you practice. Though the roles are *voluntary*, they come with a set of expectations, responsibilities and privileges. Finding one's place means understanding how one's role fits with the rest of that universe.

One of the first steps toward living in harmony is to be aware of one's place and how that relates to others. It sounds simple. However, most problems in a dojo are related to a lack of understanding of that principle. Roles are relational. One is a yellow belt in relation to a black belt; one is a beginner in relation to a more advanced student. There is an inextricable link between you and those who practice with you. That is also true in life – you cannot be a son or daughter without someone being your parent. You cannot be a wife without someone being your husband.

Wisdom comes from understanding such web of connections and learning how to navigate that web (How close or far do we need to be from each person we are related to? How much space do we need? How do we prioritize relationships? Who comes first? Why?). Multiple roles are bound to create conflicts as they compete for our attention. Knowing how to balance them, how to honor their demands is an important lesson. The more we understand the nature of our interactions, the more grounded we become.

Judo etiquette helps us to learn how to balance interactions. It is not enough to know where you stand in relation to others. It is important to know how to treat them. For example, it is rude for a beginning Judoka to demand the attention of a senior student. The invitation should come from the more advanced student. If you've practiced something longer you know what a beginner may needs. Similarly, it is rude for an advanced student to correct or contradict the Sensei in front of the class. In this sense, the dojo universe is quite orderly. Nevertheless, respect flows both ways. If a Sensei does not respect the students, the students will not respect that Sensei.

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<sup>10</sup> Tao Te Ching, chapter 5.

## Judo Etiquette and Life

Etiquette also gives us a deeper understanding of the way the world works. I've found it's made me more attentive, more sensitive to small gestures of kindness. It has given me a greater appreciation of others. We take so much for granted day in and day out. For instance, it is very easy when we are growing up to think that our parents' duties are to feed us, clothe us, keep the house clean, cook our food, nurse us back into health, drive us to games, pay for our expenses, and give us their best years. We don't understand that this is a gift of love. It is only when we become parents that we realize the sacrifice made.

The fact is, the world does not owe us anything. Thankfulness springs from knowing that. Etiquette reminds us we are not self-sustaining – somebody else makes our clothes, cooks the food we stuck in the micro-wave, builds the houses we live in. So we should be grateful, period. Every breath of air inhaled, every bit of sunshine enjoyed, every drop of water taken reflects the universe's kindness in keeping you alive. Give thanks.

The Tao compares earth's generosity to a motherly touch: "the valley spirit is... the woman, the primal mother. Her gateway is the root of heaven and earth, like a veil barely seen. Use it; it will never fail" (chapter 6). Gratitude teaches us appreciation for the beauty and goodness that surrounds us. Yes, there is a lot of pain and suffering in the world, but we shouldn't discount its life-giving beauty.

The gift of life is so precise! A few miles closer or further away from the sun and we might not have this blue planet at all. It could all be ice or fiery gas and lava. Not all planets have skies so blue or oceans so deep. Not all planets are life-giving. Not all planets have sunsets or sunrises. Etiquette points to all of these things and say "bow!"

The ancient masters had a deep appreciation of life. "Something mysteriously formed, born before heaven and earth. In the silence and the void, standing alone and unchanging, ever present and in motion. Perhaps it is the mother of [all in nature]. Not knowing its name, I call it Tao. Lacking a better word, I call it great" (chapter 23).

Finally, etiquette is about a deeper understanding of one's self, of one's place in the larger world. "Knowing others is wisdom; [but] knowing one's self is enlightenment," says the Tao (chapter 33). We spend our lives in the balance of knowing others and knowing ourselves. It is a fine line to walk. That is especially true as roles become malleable and constantly change. Try to determine the right standard for any modern role ( friend, sibling, student, professional, lover, spouse, parent, believer, activist, citizen) the result is the same. The more people you consult, the less clearer the picture. As standards grow fluid, role performance becomes challenging.

For the martial artist etiquette is a stabilizing influence. It teaches us to appreciate the goodness of the world and to honor our place on it. This kind of practice takes time, a lifetime. But learning it makes all the difference.

A little bit of advice, though – Respecting our roles does not mean blind obedience. Don't give someone else the power to set up inflexible rules for you. Being centered is something natural, something that comes from within. When you give someone the power to determine how you should live, you give up thinking for yourself, and being yourself.

Life is full of choices, with no clear-cut rule of thumb to make important decisions easier. In a way, we learn the road by walking it. That is why martial artists do not rely on pre-arranged

drills to prepare for a real attack. The possibilities are infinite! If you only know how to block you better pray that your attacker gives you a chance to use that skill. No matter how much you've trained, you can't tell in advance when and how a real attack will take place or how you will react to it. It's the same thing in life. We don't always know what choices we'll have. But etiquette prepares us to face it with the right attitude.

## **Etiquette and the Order of the Universe**

When I talk about order, whether in the dojo or the universe, I do not mean a humanly created order, something imposed on life. I mean a natural order. Senior students are not honored because they are "better" than junior students. They are honored because they've been lived with the art longer and should have a better understanding of the way things work. The order of the universe is a natural phenomenon, the kind of natural ordering that scientists find in all living things. What distinguishes animate from inanimate objects is the way life organizes itself biologically. Life brings order out of chaos.

If we try to impose an artificial order to the universe, we'll find out soon enough that life follows its own ways. The more we think we can control things, the more we discover they escape our control. Look at the ecological problems facing us today. We think we can dominate nature, but instead we deplete our environment. That kind of thinking is bad enough when aimed at nature, but is worse when used in our personal lives. We create rules that don't take into consideration the way the world really works. Or we expect the world to work the way we want. The world works the way it does.

I've found that I get frustrated the most when I try to make the world fit my own expectations. Life eventually reminds me in no uncertain terms that things are what they are; and there is great wisdom in such arrangement. "Do you think you can take over the universe and improve it?" asks the Tao Te Ching. "I do not believe that it can be done. The universe is sacred. You cannot improve it. If you try to change it, you will ruin it. If you try to hold it, you will lose it" (chapter 29).

Confucians, the contemporaries of the early Taoists, believed in a rigid top to bottom order, which organized heaven and earth, nature and society. They believed it was the only way to fight chaos. It was our human duty to follow this order as carefully as possible. We had to strive to make things right. Taoists knew better. They knew the universe was what it was and it followed its own logic.

Coming to terms with the order of the universe means understanding that it is in the nature of things to be the way they are. Our task is not to "fix" life, but to learn how it works. That is how we discover the real order of the universe. "The world is ruled by letting things take their course. It cannot be ruled by interfering" (chapter 48). If you understand the way things work, you can blend or flow with them and your actions will follow a natural path. This is the fundamental idea behind Judo's first principle: never counter, always blend; never resist, connect instead.

You cannot imagine the amount of time and energy you can save by practicing this. It will free you from going against the grain. But that kind of attitude requires a great amount of letting go, a great deal of faith that the world is ultimately nourishing and that things tend toward a natural balance. "All things arise from Tao. By virtue they are nourished, developed, cared for, sheltered, comforted, grown, and protected. Creating without claiming, doing without taking credit, guiding without interfering, this is Primal Virtue" (chapter 51).

The order of the universe emerges naturally from the nature of things. Knowing your

rightful place should never be a burden or an effort. It is more a matter of living it. It should be something that is effortless. Taoists even have a term for that. We call it *wu wei* (“effortless action”). When circumstances are ripe, action requires little or no effort on your part. It will match the conditions in the situation and flows along with the way everything is organized, finding little to no resistance. This is what the Tao means by “non-action”( “Tao abides in non-action, yet nothing is left undone,” chapter 37).

General Sun-tzu was following that logic when he taught that those who knew themselves and their enemy would win without danger and those who knew the heavens and the earth (the way the world works) would win over all.<sup>11</sup> When you act naturally, things happen the way they are supposed to. One does not have to teach a bird how to sing or a fish how to swim. A rose does not strive to be a rose. It simply is. It is the same with your place in the world. You know your place by living it. That makes it easier to respond to any situation.

Of course, it takes time to reach that point. But once there we're at peace with our condition and the world. Mind you, it may not be always eternal bliss. Knowing the way things work gives you a very realistic approach to life – “... having and not having arise together. Difficult and easy complement each other. Long and short contrast each other. High and low rest upon each other” (chapter 2).

When we know the way things work, no matter what we face, no matter how hard it is, we respond without losing inner tranquility. When you act from inner tranquility, you operate in a state the Japanese call *mushin*, “no mind.” As the Tao says, “a truly good person is not aware of his/her goodness, and is therefore good. A foolish person tries to be good, and is therefore not good. A truly good person does nothing, yet leaves nothing undone. A foolish person is always doing, yet much remains to be done... the truly great person dwells on what is real and not what is on the surface, on the fruit and not the flower. Therefore accept the one and reject the other” (chapter 38).

## Etiquette and Judo

Reishiki in Japanese literally means “salutation” or “thanks.” It has to do with the right way to treat people. Reishiki was not the exclusive domain of a certain social class in ancient Japan. *It was the way a cultured person related properly to others.* It was a mark of cultural sensitivity.

In Judo reishiki teaches students to live honestly, respectfully, and free from distractions instinctively. In practice we defend against attacks that happen so fast, we don't have time to stop and think. We respond instinctively. Reishiki teaches us to respond instinctively to others in a positive manner also. Since doing something instinctively requires repetitive practice, we perform reishiki rituals until they become second nature to us. Dr. Kano believed manners were at the heart of Judo's culture. For him, Judoka should always be polite in and out of the dojo. Politeness should be an unconscious trait of our daily practice.

How is reishiki practiced in a modern dojo? Its outward sign is the bow or *rei*. Bowing can be performed from a kneeling (*zarei*) or standing (*tachirei*) position. We bow when entering or leaving the dojo, when an instructor enters the dojo (all should stop and bow), when entering or leaving the mat area (*tatami*), before and after a class, and before and after each drill.

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<sup>11</sup> Eiji Yoshikawa, *Musashi: An Epic of the Samurai Era*. Tokyo: Kodansha International. 1981.

In practice, Judoka show courtesy toward each other by bowing and saying “*onegaishimas*” (“please, may I have the honor to practice with you?”) before initiating any activity. Once the activity is over they will thank each other for the drill (“*domo arigato gozai mas*”) before sitting down.

This is called being mindful, being present. It is the cultivation of both awareness and respect. The Tao explains it well: “... the sage takes care of all and abandons no one. The sage takes care of all things and abandons nothing. This is called ‘following the light’” (chapter 27).

## Chapter Three

### Seeing the Small

Paying attention to the small is the next part of practicing the art. It means being aware, paying attention not only to the details of each technique but to one's surroundings. The idea is to be 100% present in every situation (what Buddhists call "one-minute Zen"). This, of course, doesn't come easy, since we are easily distracted. But it is an important part of our practice.

The first step is learning to accurately gauge a self-defense situation... how far is someone from you? Is this person left-handed or right-handed? How heavy is that person? How likely is it that this will develop into a dangerous situation? What steps could be taken to diffuse the situation before it gets out of hand? How much space do you need to deal with a possible attack?

Paying attention to the basics is not easy for beginners. They get excited with the techniques and forget that it is all about interaction, about being in a relational process. They want to know when they get to throw people? And they don't mean, "when do I learn my first basic throw?" They mean, "what is the flashiest, most spectacular technique you can show me right now?"

That request always brings a smile to my face. It reminds me of my days as a white belt. I was so impatient with the "small stuff." As a 10-year old, I wanted Asano Sensei<sup>12</sup> to teach me the "real" stuff in two or three lessons!

Isn't that the way we are in the West? We live on fast food, drive-ins, and automated teller machines. We have little patience with anything that takes too long or demands our full attention. We want to learn before the thrill of the new wears off. It is exciting, of course, to dress up in a brand new Judo uniform, to step onto the mat for the first time, to learn exotic Japanese words. But the excitement eventually fades.

When it does, practicing the art feels like being back at school. You have the same lessons day in and day out, do the same techniques the same way, *sute-geiko* (controlled practice, where one student throws and then is thrown in exchange) and *randori* (free practice, where students improvise and learn how to use the throws in a more realistic context) with the same peers over and over. Pretty soon you are telling yourself, "this is taking too long! I thought it was going to be fun, but now it is getting boring..." It never fails. Out of a class of 20, I'm lucky to have one or two who make it to black belt!

Getting to the top requires a solid beginning. This is the way of the monk, where "seeing the small is insight... Yielding... is strength." If you use that insight you can be safe from harm. "This," says the Tao, "is learning constancy" (chapter 52). Constancy is built on paying attention

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<sup>12</sup> I'll never be able to thank my first Sensei for all he taught me. As an immigrant to Brazil, he was the "doctor" of town's small Japanese community. His house was a center for the Japanese arts. Besides the traditional healing arts, his family also practiced *ikebana* (flower arrangement), *chado* (the art of tea) and *shodo* (Japanese calligraphy). The house always smelled of incense and was filled with charts of the human body. Gentle Eastern music was always playing on the background. For a 10-year-old boy, it couldn't get more exotic than that!

to the basic blocks of the art. Simple things like walking, breathing or posture are essential to your progress; or things like careful repetition – repeating a drill even after you think you've learned it well already.

“Seeing the small” is important. The Tao calls it “returning to insight.” Don't gloss over the basics just because you think they are not the real stuff. You may be missing the whole point of practice. Remember, “seeing the small IS insight.” Let me illustrate that with one of my favorite stories from the early Tokugawa period.<sup>13</sup>

Lord Yagyu, holder of the Koyagyu fief, was a renown sword master. He was also known for his love of wisdom. Owner of one of the largest libraries in the country, he had a center of studies (the *Shin'indo*) in his castle where Samurai learned about the history of Japan, swordsmanship, and Eastern philosophy.

His fief dated back to the tenth century. He kept it at peace during his life time by avoiding entanglements in national politics. By staying clear of conspiracies and revolts he maintained his fief peaceful throughout most of Japan's civil wars. The Yagyu valley, surrounded by the Kasagi mountains was blessed with unparalleled beauty. Even the water flowing in the valley was considered among the purest in Japan.

Lord Yagyu gave up warfare at the age of 47, a decision that was prompted by his sword Sensei. Once Lord Yagyu completed his training, the master asked him what was sword fighting without a sword. He pondered the question for many years, and eventually chose retirement as the answer. He built a smaller house behind his castle where he could dedicate himself to gardening, the art of tea, and the study of Zen.

Miyamoto Musashi came to Lord Yagyu's fief hoping to challenge him to a duel. In those days Musashi was still a young and ambitious *ronin* (unattached Samurai), wishing to build his reputation by defeating well-established masters. Fortunately for Musashi, someone else had beaten him to the punch. Denshichiro, the second son of the House of Yoshioka (a famous swordsman school), had arrived earlier in hopes of challenging Lord Yagyu himself.

Being at the same inn, Musashi became privy to Denshichiro's frustrated efforts. He heard the young Samurai talking to his assistants one night. Denshichiro was despondent of Lord Yagyu's refusal to fight. He had sent a senior retainer, Shoda, to the inn to explain that he was now retired and no longer accepted challenges. Shoda also brought some fruit for the Yoshioka group with Lord Yagyu's wishes that they enjoy their stay in the valley.

Denshichiro would not accept no for an answer. The next day he sent a note to Sekishusai demanding the bout, under the threat of dishonoring the Lord's house. This time, Lord Yagyu sent a female assistant, with a short message explaining he had a cold and therefore could not host Denshichiro for tea. Along with the note Lord Yagyu sent a peony from his garden. Disgusted with the old man's apparent weakness, Denshichiro looked at the flower and gave it right back to the messenger.

Later that day, the peony ended up in Musashi's room. The messenger gave it to the chamber maid, who used it in a flower arrangement. The flower intrigued Musashi from the

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<sup>13</sup> I first read this story in Eiji Yoshikawa's book, *Musashi: An Epic Novel of the Samurai Era* (Tokyo: Kodansha International. 1981).

minute he saw it. There was something special about it. Slowly he realized the cut in the stem had not been done with scissors or knife. This was the cleanest sword cut he had ever seen!

Astonished, Musashi asked the chamber maid to hold the flower. Pulling out his *wakizashi* he cut the stem and compared the two cuts. His was no match to the original! Humbled, Musashi sent a message to Lord Yagyu's castle, no longer seeking a bout. Moved by profound respect, he simply requested an audience with the gardener. A simple flower taught Musashi he still had much to learn. "Seeing the small IS insight."

## The Four Basic Pillars of Practice

Judo practice has four basic pillars: breathing, balance, distancing and timing. To learn the art, you must pay attention to all these details, because learning with your body is different from learning with your mind. It requires a different kind of concentration, unlike that of paying attention to a lecture or memorizing something for a test.

In Judo mind and body are synchronized. You can't teach one without the other. Breath (*kokyū*) brings them together; balance (*shizentai*) focus them on an impending attack; and right distancing (*ma-ai*) and timing (*ri-ai*) move them to perform a successful defense. Without the basic pillars your practice won't be satisfactory. Once you master them, the art will flow smoothly.

The Japanese have a word for this kind of work: *shugyo*. It means hard training that leads to enlightenment. What makes the training hard is not its physical aspects. It is the intentionality of the practice, working on being a 100% present in a given situation.

There is a Zen story about a monk who had just completed his requirement to become a teacher. To celebrate the event he paid a visit to a *roshi* (a Buddhist master). It was a rainy day when he stopped by the Roshi's monastery. After greeting the man, the Roshi asked if he had left his wooden clogs in the vestibule as he entered the monastery. Startled, the monk said "yes." "So," continued the Roshi, "did you place your umbrella to the right or left of your clogs?" Realizing he had not yet learned to be fully present, the monk became one of the Roshi's students and spent six more years working on being present.<sup>14</sup>

The point of practice is awareness. So, as you start an art, take time to do it right. Practice requires *patience*. If you don't have it when you start, you'll certainly have it by the time you reach the peak of your training. Quality doesn't come easy. Take *Kendo* (the art of the sword) for instance. A Kendo Sensei will tell you that it takes a lot of discipline to become a master. Sensei John Stevens<sup>15</sup> remembers how one of his Kendo teachers performed 1,000 strokes with a heavy sword every morning (3,000 on Sundays) for nearly half a century!

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<sup>14</sup> This story can be found in Paul Reps' *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989, page 34).

<sup>15</sup> I am indebted to Sensei John Stevens for this lesson on shugyo. Sensei Stevens has spent a life time studying the Japanese arts. My own analysis of shugyo relies heavily on an article he wrote for *Aikido Today Magazine* back in 1994 (#37, vol. 8, pages 13-14). Sensei Stevens is also the author of a thorough biography of Dr. Kano that I highly recommend: *Three Budo Masters: Kano, Funakoshi, Ueshiba* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1995).

Nothing is perfected without a substantial investment of time and effort. An intentional student must “season” in the techniques learned. The techniques must become truly his or hers. Being able to repeat a technique once, after your teacher shows it to you, does not guarantee that you will be able to perform it correctly when you need it in real life. Knowing *how* to do something is not enough. It must be second nature for it work in real life.

That is why *kokoro*, working from the heart, is an important aspect of shugyo. Your art must come from the heart. It should be performed with all your attention, all your vital energy put into the technique. Doing a technique from the heart means doing it with concentration of will, with focus. That is known among martial artists as *kime*, the tightening of a mind, so as to be completely dedicated to a single effort.

In order for your technique to flow from the heart your body and mind must be one. Only that way will the technique be an extension of your essence. If your mind wanders during practice, your work becomes sloppy, your timing suffers, your progress slows, and you risk injury. Any time I see a student too distracted or too consumed with a problem, I ask him or her to step off the mat and go take care of things. My students know they are supposed to leave their problems, plans, or whatever else keeps them busy during the day at the edge of the mat when they come to practice.

There is no point in practicing if your heart is not into what you are doing. Being 100% present is a cardinal principle of Taoism. “In dwelling,” says the Tao, “be close to the land. In meditation, go deep in the heart. In dealing with others, be gentle and kind. In speech, be true. In ruling, be just. In business, be competent. In action, watch the timing” (chapter 8).

## **Breathing (Kokyu)**

When we think of martial arts, we think of punching, kicking, or throwing someone down, never about breathing. Most of my students are surprised when I mention breathing. I can see them pondering, “What is wrong with my breathing? I’ve been breathing since I was born! Let’s get on to the important stuff.” But breathing IS important stuff.

To handle an attack you need to be relaxed and strong – relaxed, in order to take in the situation accurately; strong, to respond to the challenge. Remember, action uses up energy. Every time you move you use up oxygen. So if you are breathing quickly or panting while trying to move you are straining your body. If you breathe fast while under attack, your body tires quickly because your supply of energy is being drained. When you breathe at an even-flowed pace, you give yourself time to adjust to whatever the situation requires.

Martial arts breathing is similar to scuba-diving breathing. You can’t panic when you’re underwater. You do it, and it’s a big mess. Marathon runners are another good example of right breathing. They have to pace themselves. They must breathe so as to have plenty of energy for the entire journey. Unlike the breathing of sprinters, who only need a momentary burst of energy, the breathing in marathon runners must be methodical, slow, and paced to fit the needs of their bodies. It takes time to coordinate the pacing of your breathing with the way your body moves. Most marathon runners put in years of training to reach that ideal balance. But without right breathing their effort is bound to fail.

The Japanese call right breathing *fukushiki kokyu*.<sup>16</sup> That means filling one's self with *ki*, with life energy. When you read that description what comes to your mind? You probably think "deep inhalation," don't you? Filling one's lungs! But that is not what the Japanese have in mind. Filling your lungs gives you shallow breathing. You will get quick bursts of energy but they won't sustain you for long. If you don't believe me, try this – next time you're jogging or running, breathe in and out very quickly. I guarantee you won't go very far.

Fukushiki kokyu means breathing from the stomach (*hara*), deep and low in your abdomen. The Japanese believed that the seat of human strength, of energy, was the low abdomen, the area of your body located about two fingers below your navel. Martial artists breathe from their abdomens. We charge up that area by pushing air in and out that deep. Fukushiki kokyu builds up your whole abdominal area. The more you breathe this way, the stronger you feel.

Fukushiki kokyu is best illustrated by Roshi Deshimaru's account of Eugen Herrigel's experience with breathing. Taisen Deshimaru was the missionary general of the Japanese Soto Zen School in France. He was also a descendant of a long line of Samurai. Here's what he has to say about right breathing:

[Professor Herrigel] worked six years before he understood how to breathe. My master said, 'If he had come to me first, it wouldn't have taken him nearly so long.'

He succeeded when he understood 'push down on the intestines,' and not before. Judo also trains breathing, but most people don't know about it. Breathing doesn't come into it until the second or third dan [black belt] or degree.

Herrigel understood unconsciously: the arrow is released at the end of the outward breath. It's the same in judo: breathing out you are strong, breathing in you are weak. You must overcome your adversary while he is breathing in.<sup>17</sup>

When breathing from your abdomen you feel strong – not *muscle* strong, *energy* strong. Here's the difference: to build muscle you lift weights. Lifting weights builds body mass. And body mass limits motion. You may feel built up but you won't have flexibility when faced with a dangerous situation.

When you breathe right, your strength flows from the energy circulating in your body, pumped in by your breath. So, you can be thin or short and still be quite strong (think Bruce Lee). What makes you strong is the sustained energy flow that goes beyond mass and muscle. Now you have flexibility and the will to perform.

You breathe to replenish body energy. Once your blood is cleaned, it supplies your body with the energy it needs. So, the longer you keep that oxygenated blood circulating, the suppler your body. Your muscles have plenty of energy coursing through them without you being stiff or tense – flexibility *and* strength! How to accomplish that? Not by filling your lungs. Inhaling is limited. You can only breathe in for so long (until your lungs fill up). The process of inhaling is not long enough to sustain you in an attack situation. Especially if you are dealing with multiple attackers, four or five people coming at you at the same time.

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<sup>16</sup> E. J. Harrison, *The Fighting Spirit of Japan* (New York: The Overlook Press, 1955).

<sup>17</sup> Taisen Deshimaru, *Questions to a Zen Master*, New York: Arkana, 1981, pages 104-105.

Instead, try this: take a short in-breath through your nose (but one that fills your lungs). Inhale tightly, pushing the air down as if you were taking a drag on a cigarette. Now with lips pursed, exhale downwards through your mouth, as slowly as you can. Keep it an even, downward, slow flow. See how long you can make the exhaling last. As you get to “the bottom” of your exhaling, your lungs will instinctively reach for air. That will push you to take another short in-breath. The process starts all over again.

At first you might have a hard time breathing this way. It is hard to make the exhaling last. Chances are, you’ll get impatient. Your body will get impatient too, since it is not used to operating under these conditions (some people experience light-headedness) . Once you get the hang of it, though, you will notice that the exhaling will last longer and longer. At some point you’ll realize that it can be as long as you wish, since exhaling is totally controllable. By controlling the extent of your exhaling, you are able to pace yourself. Your motion, the amount of air your body requires, and the level of strength you need to perform the techniques will all be under your control.

Breathing right is at the heart of all martial arts. It will improve your techniques. Rather than using muscle to perform them, you’ll be using energy instead. Rather than reacting with shock or stress in a dangerous situation, you’ll be in control. It is breathing, not thinking, that links your mind to your body. When I’m in an emergency situation, my breathing automatically slows down. That gives me precious time to assess what’s going on. If I need to use a technique my body is already energized.

By now you’ve probably guessed what I’m about to say next. But I’ll say it anyway: *all your techniques should be performed while you are exhaling*. The longer you exhale, the longer you’ll be performing from a position of strength. When exhaling you are balanced, flexible and capable of responding to the challenge. So breathe in while dodging an attack, breathe out as you respond to it. Also, pay close attention to your opponent’s breathing. When inhaling, the opponent will be weak. So adjust your breathing to your opponent’s. Listen to what Roshi Deshimaru had to say about martial arts breathing:

*Who is breathing in, the opponent or oneself?*

**T.D.** The opponent. You yourself must breathe out when you attack. In karate a blow received while breathing in can be dangerous; not while breathing out. So you must seize the opportunity while the adversary is breathing in, because then he reveals his weak point, his empty space.

*Why?*

**T.D.** The opportunity always comes while the other person is breathing in because the body becomes lighter then, less concentrated. The in-breath of the other person offers an opportunity which your mind-body must know how to grasp. To attack while the adversary is catching his breath, showing his weak point, the flaw in his defense, his attitude: that is the key.

Breathing in is one great suki or opportunity, and too much tension, or too little, is another; in a tournament, it is impossible to maintain the same intensity of concentration indefinitely. At some point the attention wavers and we show a fault, a suki, an opportunity, which the opponent must be able to seize.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Taisen Deshimaru, *The Zen Way to the Martial Arts*, New York: Arkana, 1982, page

## Balance (Shizentai)

Balance is essential in Judo. A balanced posture is a telltale sign of expertise in the art. Such stance shows the artist's maturity and control. Time and practice alone help the martial artist to discipline the body to move according to the art. The stance is unaffected and understated. The point is not to make a show of it.

Being balanced means operating from the center, where things are judged according to one's own internal standards. As my Sensei used to say, "When you walk the path, you become the path." In fact, being balanced marks the transition from mimicking your Sensei to being your own self. It usually happens in three steps: first, you learn the proper motion, which means giving up your own idea of how to perform the technique; second, you copy the motion precisely as your Sensei performs it; third, you do it so many times, that you free yourself to make the technique your own, adjusting it to your body and style.

This freedom comes from practice. My students know that the art is perfected in stages. First there is *practicing*, when training requires will and conscious efforts (things don't necessarily come naturally yet at this point--you have to make an effort to do them right). Then there is *performing*, when your concentration no longer requires consciousness. Finally, there is *perfection*, when you have practiced the art for so long, there is true freedom in the way you move. Technique is no longer bound by form.

A balanced posture requires some important elements. First, there is a certain level of detachment in it. It shows the person's quiet sense of confidence. Not the confidence that would make someone abusive because of "superior skills," rather the confidence of someone who faces mortality and continues to walk the path with personal courage.

Even the best Samurai faced death every morning. They knew how fragile human existence was. Only the very young or very foolish walked around believing in their own immortality. The seasoned Samurai knew they were not invincible. They knew they could be killed. They knew they would age. They knew that muscle and speed are not with us forever. It was precisely because they knew that they were free to survive. "when people are not afraid to die, it is of no avail to threaten them with death" (chapter 74).

Then there is economy (and precision) of motion. The modern world mistakes complication with mastery. People confuse busy-ness with sophistication, depth. Powerful experiences do not have to be unnaturally multi-layered. Look at the special effects in action films – it is not enough to make things explode, they have to explode simultaneously. The action unfolds in so many different parts of the screen that there is no chance to absorb the whole experience. At the height of the action, the scene is a huge, loud blur...

For Taoists depth abides in simplicity. That notion finds echo in modern science too. A key ingredient of scientific explanation is parsimony, explaining things with the most economic explanation. There's a scientific principle called Occam's Razor which states that when faced with two explanations for the same phenomenon one should always chose the simplest one.

For Taoists busy-ness is the sign of an unsettled mind: "The five colors blind the eye. The five tones deafen the ear. The five flavors dull the taste. Racing and hunting madden the mind.

Previous things lead one astray. Therefore the sage is guided by what s/he feels and not by what s/he sees. S/he lets go of that and chooses this” (chapter 12).

Economy of movement has to do with the ability to use just enough motion to complete a task and no more. In fighting, that means ending a bout with the fewest number of exchanges possible. A peerless swordsman in old Japan won bouts with a single stroke of the sword. By comparison, think of how different fencing is in the West – the prolonged fighting, filled with multiple strikes. Think of a swashbuckler film – the hero fights multiple attackers going up and down the stairs, swinging from a rope or dangling from a ship’s mast.

Even martial arts films betray that sort of busy mentality. In Hong Kong’s action movies fights multiply. The choreography gets very complicated. People fly out of windows, jump over furniture, fall down stairs. Of course, martial arts films are done for entertainment. The point is not to educate, the point is to attract paying customers. You can’t create that kind of entertainment with a single sword stroke.

Economy of movement in Japan is described as *kurai*, “a quiescent state of mind as if one were afloat in a small boat on the ocean. A boat obeys the impulses of the waves and currents and will not attempt to resist them.”<sup>19</sup> When you blend with an attack there is no need for multiple strokes. The precision of the motion is enough to achieve its purpose. That economy is praised by the Taoist – “It is not wise to rush about... If too much energy is used, exhaustion will follow. This is not the way of Tao. Whatever is contrary to Tao does not last long” (chapter 55).

The balanced posture in Judo is called *shinzentai* (basic natural posture). It is a natural posture in the sense that one is not easily jerked around, and his or her flexibility and agility are not impaired. There is no tension, no stiffness in *shinzentai*. Much like breathing, balanced posture requires a combination of mind and body. *Shinzentai* is relaxed attentiveness (*ki wo mitsuru*). Your body is relaxed, but your mind is alert (*zanshin*).

The mechanics of *shinzentai* are simple: feet should rest parallel to each other at about the same distance as your shoulders are apart. Knees are slightly bent, in a relaxed fashion. Hips are naturally squared with shoulders. And breathing is slow, with one ready to turn and twist in the direction of any attack.

Judoka learn the balanced posture in their first week of class. However, in most clubs, they never bother to practice it again. In traditional Judo *shinzentai* is a regular part of the practice, because being off-balance gives your opponent a *suki* or an “opening,” an opportunity to capitalize on your weakness. “The one who stands on tiptoe,” says the Tao, “is not steady. The one who strides cannot maintain the pace.” (chapter 24).

To neutralize an aggression, you must stay in balance while allowing your opponent to be off-balanced. This is an important lesson for life also: people are most vulnerable when they attack someone. You can’t keep your balance while attacking. Balance is a natural posture for defense (that’s one of the brilliant points of Dr. Kano’s creation).

When attacking you step forward or backward or sideways. The minute you do so, you’re no longer balanced. An expert Judoka will swiftly respond to your off-balance. The smallest

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<sup>19</sup> E. J. Harrison (*The Fighting Spirit of Japan*, New York: The Overlook Press, 1955), page 39.

motion on your part gives your opponent an edge. A Judoka will never resist an attack. Resisting uses up more energy than blending. Judoka give in or give way. They counter the opponent's move by unbalancing the attacker.

Here is what happens – if someone pushes a Judoka, the Judoka will give in to the force of the push, step in between the opponent's feet and spin downwards to throw him or her. Similarly, if someone pulls, the Judoka will go with the pull, step sideways and use a foot block or a sweep to end the attack. In Judo, the key to overpowering an attacker is to use the person's motions against him or her. When you blend you break the person's balance. Once that happens, your opponent can be thrown with minimum effort.

That works for life too. If you are centered you can deal with what life brings. When life tries to off-balance you or push you over the edge, don't resist, blend instead. "Empty yourself of everything. Let the mind rest at peace. [All things in nature] rise and fall while the self watches their return" says the Tao (chapter 16).

A monk was working his way back to a monastery on a snowy evening. As the snowstorm whistled around him, he saw a mighty oak piled high with snow. As the snow accumulated the heavier branches broke down with a loud crashing sound. Right then the monk noticed a small pine sapling. It was twisting and turning as the snow and the wind whirled around it. As the snow accumulated on the tree, it would bend until the snow fell off. Free of the snow, the tree would straighten itself back up. The key to survival was offering no resistance.

### **Distancing (Ma-ai) and Timing (Ri-ai)**

The key to an effective defense is right distancing and timing. Haste is the hardest thing to conquer in martial arts training. It is in our nature to grow eager in the face of danger. Nothing shakes you up more than a sudden strike. It is disorienting, frightening. Even the best-trained martial artists struggle with the adrenalin rush. You see a fist flying toward you and you want to jump! Eagerness wells up. You may try to grab the fist, run away, or strike back. It's only human.

Here is something to ponder – Let's say you try to grab or block the fist. Reach out too soon and your opponent's strike will carry your arm along, smashing it in your face. Reach out too late and you'll be knocked out cold before having a chance to defend yourself. Timing is of the essence here.

Distancing is also crucial in a sudden attack. I use a drill to demonstrate this to my students. I ask a senior student to throw a punch at me. Turning to the students I'll ask, "what should I do?" Hands go up and a few suggestions circulate: "block his arm," "grab his hand." I step back just a few inches and let the punch miss me. I step forward toward the attacker's upper body and circle with the punch, it never touches me.

What I try to show with that lesson is that your worst enemy is your haste. Fear, anxiety, or insecurity come into play when you try defend yourself. If you give in to those feelings, you'll act out of need, not out of being balanced. When you act out of need, you off-balance yourself. *Your attitude sabotaged your defense.* It doesn't help to know martial arts if your anxiety gets the best of you. You must conquer your haste.

One day Joe Hyams was having tea with his Master, when the mailman arrived with a letter from Korea. Knowing the Master was eagerly awaiting news from home, Joe paused the

conversation, expecting the Sensei to tear open the envelope and promptly read its contents. Instead the Master put the letter aside and continued to visit as if nothing had happened. The next day Joe asked him why he had not read the letter right away. The Master said putting the letter aside helped him conquer haste. Once haste was conquered, he was free to open the letter "as though it were something precious."<sup>20</sup> To be ready, you must be free of desire.

By using perfect distancing and timing you avoid relying on bulk and muscle. Without them, height and weight will always carry the day. That happens in sport Judo, where athletes are fighting for points. But it is not the case in traditional Judo, in self-defense. In fact, some of the greatest Judoka were rather short and light. Dr. Kano was 5' 4," Kyuzo Mifune 5' 3". My Sensei was even shorter. But you'd be a fool to think those men would be easily handled.

I have a videotape of Mifune that was done when he was 73 years old. In the tape, he works out with the European and Japanese champions of his day. Most were heavier and taller than the old Master. None managed to throw him once! All were thrown several times. Mifune ends the tape sparring with the top six or seven highest-ranking Judoka in Japan. One is so tall the camera cuts his head from the scene. Yet, one by one, Mifune methodically defeats all of them using the simplest techniques!

What allows a Judoka to throw someone heavier and taller with great ease is not physical strength. It is right distancing and timing. A Judo technique is dependent upon the proper use of the opponent's momentum: catching the person at a favorable angle in relation to your body, using your body as a leverage point to continue the attacker's off-balance, and having impeccable timing in pivoting. Unless your body learns distancing and timing, your knowledge of Judo will not be of much help in times of trouble.

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<sup>20</sup> Joe Hyam, *Zen in the Martial Arts*, New York: Bantam Books, 1982, page 23.

## Chapter Four

### Learning Constancy<sup>21</sup>

The problem with teaching standing techniques is not that students find them hard to learn. In fact, to an untrained eye, Judo seems quite simple: you learn a few falling techniques to protect yourself when thrown, then learn how to use hands, hips or feet to throw an opponent. A few months of practice and students think they're expert. Some become self-appointed consultants to their teacher!

I've had students with fewer than six months of practice who were ready to give me tips on techniques. They already "knew" how to make them more effective. Once in that frame of mind, students are impossible to teach. They approach each lesson with a critical eye ("but, wouldn't it be better to it this way?"). Needless to say, the attitude always amazes me. Nothing is more contrary to learning an art than trying to change it before you can see the whole picture. And you don't see the whole picture until you reach black belt.

So, the problem is this – how do you explain to a beginning student that the technique he's so eager to "correct" has been practiced the same way for at least six hundred years? How can we help students see that the techniques have been tested by countless generations of Judo masters? Attitude makes all the difference. Here too, the Tao is helpful (chapter 59),

In caring for others and serving heaven,  
There is nothing like restraint.  
Restraint begins with giving up one's own ideas.  
That depends on Virtue stored in the past.  
If there is a good store of Virtue, nothing is impossible.  
If nothing is impossible, there are no limits.  
When someone knows no limits, then s/he is fit to be a ruler.  
The mother principle of ruling is long-lasting.  
It is called having deep roots and a firm foundation,  
The Tao for long life and eternal vision.

Your first lesson in studying techniques is a simple one – *keep an open mind*. Taoists call this a "beginner's mind." Never think you've arrived (especially before you actually do!). Never imagine you know enough already. Martial arts are sophisticated systems that seem deceptively simple at first sight. Keep in mind that until you master the whole art, you won't be able to understand how each technique fits into the larger system.

In addition, by keeping an open mind, you get more from the art than just the techniques. When you begin to learn an art, you become part of a long-standing tradition. You're learning both techniques *and the process* by which they are transmitted to you (most students don't realize that until later, when they reach a senior rank). Your master transmits the art in the style the art was transmitted by her or his master.

So, when you start classes in a martial art, you become the latest link in a long chain of experts and you have the good fortune to be at the receiving end of that chain. The wisdom of

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<sup>21</sup> Tao Te Ching, chapter 52.

many generations travels past time and space to reach you. Sometimes it crosses several continents and changes many lives before it finds you.

That is why lineage is so important in martial arts. Your master studied with a master who studied with a master and so on. There are at least five masters in my lineage leading back to Dr. Kano. So, when you choose a master, you are choosing a line of masters. And you become their representative to the next generations. Your master has to choose well before taking you into the school. There is an interest to make sure the art will be well-represented in the future. By the same token, you should be careful when choosing your school. You will be associated with it for as long as you practice your art.

Once you start in an art, learn more about and be proud of your martial arts lineage. Try to understand what the art meant to the masters who preceded you. Why did they practice the art? What difficulties did they overcome? Each story will provide you with important lessons for your own journey.

One final note – be proud of your lineage not because the people who preceded you were super-human (you should never idolize masters), but because they offer you the wisdom of many generations. That wisdom was accumulated to help you find your own wisdom in life. So, do not close your mind to anything until you've seen the whole package, the whole art.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Right Approach**

The second lesson to keep in mind is simple too – *use restraint* (chapter 59). When you start learning techniques, don't act like a kid in a candy store. Don't try to learn everything all at once, as fast as possible. You shouldn't rush toward becoming a black belt. There is such a thing as a half-baked master, you know. Rushing your training deprives you of learning your art's soul.

Never learn in haste. Haste is the enemy of quality. As your Sensei shows the techniques, take time to learn them carefully. Make sure you understand what is involved in their performance. Never assume anything. When in doubt, ask questions. Keep asking them until you're satisfied. More importantly, don't assume you've understood anything too soon. *Always* ask yourself, "is this the most accurate way to perform this technique?"<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The exception to this rule of course is when the art you chose is hazardous to your health, or inflicts emotional or psychological pain. There is no reason to practice something that is mostly damaging and stressing you instead of being a source of satisfaction.

<sup>23</sup> This is why I recommend that students build a good collection of resources on the technical aspects of the art. Sometimes I have to consult books and videotapes before I can be sure of how a certain technique was performed in the past. This is similar to doing archaeological work – you mine the past for information for present practice. For those interested in further readings, I suggest five books on the technical aspects of Judo: for the art ingeneral, read Jigoro Kano, *Kodokan Judo* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1986), Pat Harrington, *Judo: A Pictorial Manual* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle, 1992), and Des Marwood, *Critical Judo* (London: A & C Black, 1992); for Kata practice read Tadao Otaki and Donn F. Draeger, *Judo: Formal Techniques* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle, 1983) and Mikonosuke Kawaishi, *The Complete 7 Katas of Judo* (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1982).

There is a reason for using restraint when learning a martial art. You may not see it at first, but in time you'll come to realize how crucial mastering the technical aspects of the art is. Become acquainted with each technique *as if your life depended on it*. Some day it might. Learn each technique as well as you can. When you feel you've learned it well, practice some more.

Let me give you a personal example of why techniques ought to be learned well. The first thing you learn in Judo is how to fall (*ukemi waza*). As a white belt I always assumed falling was part of the warm-up at the beginning of class. I usually didn't pay any attention to what was going on in class until Sensei Asano started showing techniques. I was lucky my Sensei had us practice falling in every session before he showed any technique.

By the time I was a green belt, my family was spending a holiday in the countryside. One day, while I was riding near a hill, something spooked my horse and he took off at full speed. When we reached a plowed field, the horse's front legs went down into a furrow. I was catapulted over his head. Instinctively as I neared the ground my right hand stretched out in front of me and I found myself tucking in my head and rolling automatically!

Luckily, the horse was not injured and neither was I (OK, my pride as a horseman was pretty bruised). But by the time I got up and brushed off the dirt, I had gained a deeper respect for a "minor" aspect of my art! One of my senior students had a similar experience while riding a bicycle. He got hit by a moving pickup truck, rolled over the hood and fell on the other side. He was quite grateful for the art of falling when he showed up at the dojo again!

By using restraint you have a better chance to understand the nuances of each technique. It takes at least two years of practice before you can discover the subtleties of the art. One of my American Sensei once told me when he was a 4<sup>th</sup> degree black belt that he was finally understanding a basic technique that we teach our students in their first week of class!

When you're first shown a technique as a beginner, you get its simplest rendition. The technique is relatively easy to learn then, since you're unaware of its more sophisticated aspects. As you mature in the art, you realize that that basic technique can be quite complex; that it wasn't taught just to break you into the art. So, if you hurry your learning, there will be aspects of a technique that will take longer to be discovered because you may be glossing over them.

Most people won't discover the more sophisticated aspects of the art until they reach the intermediate level. As you learn intermediate techniques, you begin to appreciate the depth of the basic techniques, you begin to see how they combine with other aspects of the art. The techniques become more useful for self-defense in a combined approach to a sudden attack.

Later on, when you reach a higher level and begin to teach the techniques yourself, you discover how multi-layered they are. It is only when you have to break down a technique into simpler steps to help your students learn it that you realize its hidden aspects. There will be things about it you might have overlooked or taken for granted until then.

Needless to say, all those aspects of the technique could not have been shown to you at the beginning of your martial art career. Doing that would only confuse you, since you did not have a full picture of the art. Only in hindsight are you able to recognize the importance of those aspects. Like all the other masters, you needed to put in the time to "discover" them. Taoists call this "virtue stored in the past" (chapter 59), an ability to have a deeper understanding of the art

that results from many years of practice.

When you practice something long enough, you can see how all its elements connect to form the system. For instance, in traditional Judo foot throws (*ashi waza*) are taught in a certain order. Students learn how to do blocks (*gake*) before they try sweeps (*hara*) and finally move on to learn reaps (*gari*). There is an inner logic in that progression that is only grasped after you've learned all the techniques. It is not immediately perceptible while you are moving along in the journey.

Foot blocks require far less balance than foot reaps. When you do something like *o soto gari*, your entire body is balanced on the toes of a single foot, while your opposite leg is sweeping your opponent off the ground. It takes time to reach that level of balance.

Nevertheless, as the Tao Te Ching says, if there is a good store of virtue (a deep understanding of the art), then nothing is impossible. If nothing is impossible, there are no limits to your art. You can continue to perfect it for as long as you wish, long after you've learned all its techniques. You reach a level where there is no beginning or end to the practice, just a constant dwelling in it.

This is what the Tao means by "having deep roots and a firm foundation." This is the stage when you enjoy a long and fulfilling life of practice and reach wisdom beyond your years. When my Sensei started our ryu,<sup>24</sup> after many years of practice, he put his thoughts about progress in the art into a poem. It took me a long time to understand the simple verses in real life. Sometimes I feel as if I'm still working on some of its meaning. I share the poem with you, in the spirit in which it was written:

**From Start to End:  
From Color to Color**

Dominick McCarthy

The white is yours from the start,  
so hold it well.  
Yellow, to eliminate your fear,  
brings out the best.  
Orange, to feed the fruit of your labors,  
to ban all pretext;  
Green, to gather wisdom like  
Mother Earth.  
Blue, to reach for the sky  
– its limits are yours.  
When Brown appears, like fertile soil,  
you are almost settled.  
Only Black, at the last, helps you peer  
through the darkness,  
to the everlasting light of Arts.

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<sup>24</sup> For those interested in learning more about the Zen Judo ryu, I recommend a book by our senior scholar, Sensei Brian Bagot, titled, *Zen Judo: A Way of Life* (Wareham: Dojo Books, 1989). Sensei Bagot can be reached at Bbagot@aol.com.

## The Origins of Judo's Techniques<sup>25</sup>

Kodokan Judo has ancient roots. The art is a careful synthesis of the best Dr. Kano found in the Ju-jutsu styles he studied. Judo's techniques represent what he thought was needed in all-around self-defense art. Judoka were expected to be equally competent using any of Judo's technical aspects: throwing (nage waza), groundwork (katame waza) and striking (atemi waza).

It is hard to be precise about the origins of specific techniques, but we have a good amount of information about the Ju-jutsu schools that influenced Judo's creation. There were at least five Meiji era schools that influenced Kano's training: the Kito ryu, the Tenshin-Shinyo ryu, the Takenouchi ryu, the Sosuishitsu ryu and the Sekiguchi ryu. These schools contributed both to the spirit and technical aspects of his art.

The Kito school was Chinese in origin. It traced its beginnings to a Chinese art brought to Japan by Ch-En Yuan-Pin in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The school was very influential in the creation of two modern Japanese martial arts – Judo and Aikido. Kano studied Kito under Iikubo Sensei, while Morihei Ueshiba, founder of modern Aikido, studied the tradition with Tokusaburo Sensei. Kito was known for its rituals, elegance, and mystical teachings. The style emphasized throwing, with smooth fluidity of movement. Techniques were based on the principle of *wa* (harmony or accord), following a known Taoist principle (chapter 22),

Yield to overcome;  
Bend to be straight;  
Empty to be full.

To create harmony, the martial artist had to blend with the whole environment and not simply with the opponent's movements. Kito students were trained to be aware of their surroundings. There was an emphasis on peripheral vision and greater attention to all aspects of a given situation. It was never only about the person attacking you. There were other variables involved: space, timing, resources available to your attacker, resources available to yourself. Nothing should escape your attention when under attack.

The practice of *wa* also led students to develop internal energy. The cultivation of one's *ki* was a central aspect of the Kito tradition. Kito techniques flowed from *ki*. Furthermore, one's internal *ki* should harmonize with the universal *ki*, so that your motion followed the way (Tao) the universe worked, instead of going against it. Some of Kito's *ki* cultivation exercises have been preserved in modern Aikido. Its spiritual underpinnings are also evident in master Ueshiba's teachings. Judo preserved the school's formal exercises. Kano included them in the Kodokan Kata.

The Tenshin-Shinyo school was known for its emphasis on suppleness and insistence on quick delivery in counterattack fashion. Tenshin-Shinyo students were discouraged from relying on muscular strength. The school equated muscular strength with rigidity and slowness; and rigidity and slowness was equated with death. Flexibility and speed were the principle of life, so

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<sup>25</sup> This section relies heavily on the work of Dr. Jigoro Kano, John Stevens, Kisshomaru Ueshiba and Oscar Ratti and Adele Westbrook. The information was gathered from their books. I've mentioned Dr. Kano, Sensei Stevens and Sensei Ueshiba's books before. Ratti and Westbrook's text is titled, *Secrets of the Samurai* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1991). I highly recommend it for those interested in an in-depth history of Japan's martial arts.

the techniques were based on pliant agility.

Here the Tenshin-Shinyo approach followed closely Taoist principles – “A person is born gentle and weak. At death s/he is hard and stiff. Green plants are tender and filled with sap. At death they are withered and dry.” That is why the Tao sees “the stiff and unbending [as] the disciple of death,” and “the gentle and yielding [as] the disciple of life.” For Taoists, “an inflexible army never wins a battle. An unbending tree is easily broken.” In the end, the hard and strong are presumed to fall, while “the soft and weak overcome” (chapter 76).

The Tenshin-Shinyo was a fusion of two older schools, the Yoshin ryu and the Shin-no-Shindo ryu. Iso Mataemon, the Tenshin-Shinyo’s founder, brought the older traditions together in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Yoshin ryu emphasized the principle of *ju* (gentleness or suppleness). The art patterned its striking techniques after the image of a flexible, swaying willow, ready to bend and twist amidst the fiercest of storms. The Shin-no-Shindo ryu emphasized ground fighting and chokes. As a result, the Tenshin-Shinyo excelled in three arts: striking (*atemi*), groundwork (*torae*), and strangulation (*shime*).

The Takenouchi school traced its origin to Takeuchi Toichiro, a Samurai who lived in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Takeuchi developed his style of armed and unarmed combat after a time of isolation and hard training (*shugyo*). In armed combat, he excelled in the *bokken* (wooden sword) and *jo* (staff); in unarmed combat in groundwork (*osae*). The Takenouchi groundwork system was organized in five sets (*go-kyu*). Over time, the art developed more than 600 groundwork techniques.

The Sosuishitsu school was known also for fluidity of motion. Its founder, Fugatami Hannosuke studied under Takeuchi Toichiro before he developed his own method of hand-to-hand combat. Instead of a willow for inspiration, Hannosuke patterned his system after the movements of the “pure flowing waters” of the Yoshino river. The Sosuishitsu style blends with an attack in the same fashion that river water blends with its course.

Finally, the Sekiguchi school traces its origins to Sekiguchi Jushin, another 17<sup>th</sup> century warrior. The Sekiguchi school was very popular in the early Meiji era. Its techniques were based on the principles of honesty and objectivity in hand-to-hand combat. Students were instructed to avoid all forms of trickery or deceit in combat, preferring those movements that showed clean and straightforward action. The techniques were said to be the visible sign of a pure-hearted warrior.

Kano set up his own system after carefully studying these five styles. Being comfortable with both standing and ground fighting, he was well qualified to create an art that integrated elements from all five ryus. In fact, the ryus’ influence is quite evident in Kano’s system. The ways of the old styles are most visible in his kata.

To see how the ryus practice their art look at the two Kodokan self-defense kata: Kime no Kata and Goshin Jutsu Kata.<sup>26</sup> They are performed in the way the ancient ryus taught self-defense, with structured responses to an opponent’s attack. The attacker launches a strike, the Judoka blends to neutralize the aggression. This form of practice is not adopted in sports Judo,

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<sup>26</sup> You shouldn’t have any problem finding videotapes of the Kodokan kata on the internet. I know the United States Judo Association has done at least three kata tapes for its members.

where preference is given to free practice (*randori*), with students tugging and gripping at each other, trying to end the match with a single throw.

This is the crucial difference between traditional and sports Judo. In sports Judo you specialize in winning a three-minute match with a single throw or a groundhold. There is no follow-up to the throw, the person thrown does not get up and continue fighting as in real life. There are no multiple attack situations either, where after throwing an attacker the Judoka might still be surrounded by other assailants. In sports Judo getting that one point is all that matters. All aggression ceases artificially once you win the point. The difference between that and real life is night and day.

In traditional Judo students learn the techniques in ways that will serve them in a real life situation. The fighting does not stop after a referee yells “*sore made*” (“the match is over”). You may face more assailants. Traditional Judo students learn the techniques through self-defense drills, following the style of practice preserved by the Kodokan self-defense kata. That’s where traditional Judo excels, with drills that are much closer to real life.

Traditional practice is serious practice, the attacks and responses deal with real danger. There is a reverence and seriousness in the style that is different from the tugging and shoving of regular sports Judo.

Furthermore, the Kime no Kata and the Goshin Jutsu Kata preserve both parts of the Judo experience: attacks and defenses. Sports Judo students may think the art is mostly about throwing. But it is not. It involves the nuances and strategies of attack, too. For example, Judoka learn atemi (the striking art) in self-defense kata. It is all there – downward cuts, punches, kicks, slashes. Moreover, the kata teach students to combine strikes, throws, joint locks and chokes in response to a real life attack.

The kata prepare students for real life situations. The attacks are launched from different directions (front, back, sideways), different positions (sitting, kneeling, standing), under different conditions (what to do when held, what to do when attack comes from a certain distance) and employing armed and unarmed means. Students have to respond effectively to both unarmed (punches, fist strikes, elbow strikes, grips, efforts to choke, efforts to put an arm in a lock, knee strikes and kicks) and armed attacks (dagger strikes, staff strikes and sword strikes). Some techniques even deal with an attacker bearing a gun.

Other Kodokan kata preserve the old schools’ wisdom. Two that come to mind are the Ju no Kata and the Koshiki no Kata. These kata preserve the essence of blending and harmony (*wa*), suppleness (*ju*) and reliance on *ki*. The Ju no Kata shows Kano’s vision of harmony and suppleness. It literally means, “forms of gentleness” or “forms of suppleness.” The Koshiki no Kata preserves the beauty of the Kito ryu’s ritual forms.

The Ju no Kata has fifteen techniques, arranged in three sets. Performers stretch and blend in every possible direction as they diffuse attacks. The kata shows fluidity. Movements are slower and more focused, more intentional. There is a premium on balance in defending from attacks. The grips, pushes, and strikes are still real, but there is a state of calm, of inner tranquility in the Judoka defending from the attacks. One gets the sense that the defender has the situation under control at all times.

The Koshiki no Kata is still performed in the Kito’s ceremonial style, with opponents doing the techniques as if wearing Samurai armor. The impression I get watching the Koshiki is that the defender has a deep reservoir of internal energy. Unlike other Kodokan kata, in the Koshiki

the defender moves as little as possible. He or she is very solid, operating as the center of the universe.

If the Ju no Kata is fluid, the Koshiki no Kata is centered. There is a clear sense of permanence. All throws are executed with minimum effort and the smallest of motions (the techniques have names like “dreaming,” “water wheel,” “water flow,” “willow snow,” “wave on the rocks,” and “snowbreak”). Something happens when the attacker approaches the defender. We are not quite sure what it is, since the motion is very small. But the effect is spectacular. You can see the defender’s internal power moving the attacker.

Both Ju no Kata and Koshiki no Kata contribute to the spirit of traditional Judo practice. In a traditional dojo, students are taught to minimize effort when neutralizing an aggression. They are taught to be pliant, and most importantly, to have a deep sense of inner calm when performing techniques. Traditional drills involve a great deal of attack and defense situations. Students learn to respond to attacks without letting them disturb their spirit. The attacks do not break down their ability to channel internal energy into an appropriate response.

That spirit of harmony, centeredness, suppleness and reliance on ki permeates traditional practice. In that sense, we follow Dr. Kano’s original intent for the art. We also honor Judo’s ancient roots. When we preserve the format of ancient practice and the principles behind the techniques, we become the heirs of traditional styles that have existed for hundreds of years.

## Chapter Five

### A Great Tailor Cuts Little<sup>27</sup>

This chapter deals with throwing techniques. For the Judoka among the readers, I hope the chapter provides guidelines to enhance your practice. For those who do not practice Judo, I hope the chapter motivates you to look for the principles behind the techniques of your own art. If you are a martial artist, whatever art you pursue, it is important to know the principles that organize your system. Techniques are not grouped randomly or casually in a fighting system.

The guiding principle of “cutting little” is at the heart of Judo’s throwing techniques. Students are encouraged to make techniques flowing and effortless. The idea is to use only what is needed to deal with an attack. The proverbial tailor of the Tao Te Ching doesn’t cut little because he is worried about saving cloth. He cuts little because he is so skilled that’s all he needs to do the job right. Similarly, Judoka should be able to gauge the effort needed in a self-defense situation. They are not miserly, they just know how to blend into an attack to avoid wasting energy. The job gets done with the right amount of effort. No more, no less.

What makes throws effortless is not muscles, it is the proper use of balance. Judo techniques are built upon basic laws of physics. If you try to lift a large stone with your bare hands you may fail. But place a smaller stone next to it and use a sturdy plank for leverage, and the job will be easily accomplished without straining your body. Judoka follow the same principle. Rather than relying on strength, they use their bodies as leverage when throwing an opponent.

The first thing students learn is that a throw is divided into three parts: catching the opponent off-balance (*kuzushi*), entering into the throw (*tsukuri*) and finishing it (*take*). Through randori (free practice) students develop an alertness for catching an opponent off balance, so they can quickly enter into a throw without facing much resistance. The throwers use their body then as leverage to conclude the effort.

Since Judo throwing is all about balance, throwing techniques are taught in traditional Judo according to how much balance they require. They are organized along a continuum, ranging from demanding very little balance to requiring a great deal of it. Students first learn to throw with both feet planted on the ground. Then, on to intermediate throws, they start throwing opponents while balancing on a single foot. Finally, in advanced throws, students project their opponents while balancing on the toes of a single foot.

Judo throws (*nage waza*) are divided into standing and sacrifice techniques (*tachi* and *sutemi waza*). Judoka learn standing techniques first, since they require fewer balancing skills. In standing techniques hands (*te*), hips (*koshi*), and feet (*ashi*) are used as points of leverage for throwing an opponent. They are the fulcrum of the throws. Once an opponent is off balance, you can use hand, hip or foot to block, lift, twist, sweep or reap, producing the opponent’s fall.

Let me use *Te Hiza Sasae* (“the hand prop to knee throw”) to illustrate the point. In the throw your hand is the leverage around which an opponent “wheels” and falls. Here is how it is done: catch someone off balance to the front, turn into the person placing your back against the

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<sup>27</sup> Tao Te Ching, chapter 28.

person's chest, while holding your opponent's right arm with your left hand. Now, place your right hand on that person's knee as you turn to your left and pull your opponent's right arm across your chest. Your opponent will fall forward (or around you) right over your hand, with minimum effort on your part. This is what is meant by point of leverage.

As you can see, hands, hips or feet can be used as points of leverage. The question is whether you use them that way while solidly balanced on two feet, as in the example of the previous paragraph, or while moving in lighter fashion. Here's an advanced version of the same throw: catch your opponent off balance to the front, grab the opponent's right arm with your left hand and twist it around to that person's right side in a spiraling downward fashion. As your opponent's upper body topples forward, place your right hand on your opponent's right knee and circle the person's body over your hand to her/his right side. It's no longer necessary to use your body in the throw, your hands alone suffice.

Points of leverage and balancing are combined in all hand, hip and foot throws. They follow the same continuum. Hand techniques, for instance, start with throws that use a broader area of the thrower's body as point of leverage and allow the thrower to balance on both feet. From there we proceed toward throws that require very little body contact and more advanced forms of balance.

Examples of basic throws are *ippon seoi nage* ("one arm shoulder throw") or *kata nage* ("shoulder throw"), where students use a shoulder as leverage point. To perform the throws students turn into the opponent placing their backs against the opponent's chest, then use their shoulders as prop while pulling the opponent's arm around their chest.

Once students master this basic motion, they start learning throws that use less body mass as leverage. Intermediate hand throws rely on the students' arms as leverage points. Throws like *tai otoshi* ("the body drop throw") or *tsuri komi goshi* ("the lift-pull hip throw") come to mind. Here students turn into their opponents but instead of using their whole body to turn the person around, they rely on their arms as moving levers to wheel their opponent sideways, eventually spiraling them down.

After the students perfect the use of shoulders and arms as leverage points they are allowed to employ simply hands when throwing someone. In advanced throws, hands are used as leverage points. Judoka rely a lot more on off-balancing to project an opponent than on their own body mass as a leverage point. This is when students are introduced to sophisticated and flowing throws like *sumi otoshi* ("the corner drop throw") and *uki otoshi* ("the floating drop throw").

We use the same logic for hip techniques. In basic hip techniques students use very little balance. With an opponent off-balanced to the front, they turn half-way into the opponent so as to divide the opponent's body with their sides. Grabbing the opponent's waist, the students load the opponents onto their hips and slide them around and downward. Typical throws used at this point would be *uki goshi* ("the floating hip throw") or *tsuri goshi* ("the lifting hip throw").

After mastering basic hip techniques students are introduced to throws that use the same hip-lifting motion but now follow it with a sweeping upward leg. With opponents off balance to the front, students turn, placing their hip on the opponents' left side. That action is followed by a small lifting of their hip pulling the opponents up on their toes. An upward (almost rolling) sweeping motion of their leg finishes the throw by lifting the opponent and projecting the person over the sweeping leg in a circular fashion. *Ashi guruma* ("the leg wheel throw"), *o guruma* ("the

major wheel throw”) or even *hane goshi* (“the hip spring throw”) are good examples of intermediate koshi waza throws.

Finally, when students are ready for advanced hip throws, they are introduced to techniques that require them to balance an opponent’s entire weight on one hip, while using the same side leg to reap the opponent’s legs backward or forward depending on the direction of the throw. To perfect these throws students must learn to balance their opponent’s weight and their own on a single foot, sometimes on the toes of a single foot! *Harai goshi* (“the sweeping hip throw”) and *uchi mata* (“the inner thigh reaping throw”) are perfect examples of advanced koshi waza throws. In some cases, depending on how the technique is done, *o soto guruma* (“the large outside wheel throw”) could be included in this category.

Foot-throwing techniques are taught in the same fashion. Basic ashi waza throws are foot blocks. With an opponent off balance to the front (or the back), students block one of the opponent’s feet to keep the person from taking that extra step needed to regain balance. Throws that come to mind here are *ashi gake* (“the foot block throw,” which is *o soto gari* performed as a block) and *ko soto gake* (“the small outside block throw”) to the back, and *sasae tsuri komi ashi* (“the supporting foot lift-pull throw”) and *hiza guruma* (“the knee wheel throw”) to the front.

From blocking techniques students progress to foot sweeping throws. Foot sweeps require excellent timing. If done a moment too soon or a moment too late they allow the opponent to gain solid footing. Off-balancing the opponent to the front, students quickly sweep the foot in motion before it gets a chance to complete its step. Foot sweeps are truly effortless if done right. Good examples are *de ashi harai* (“the advancing foot sweep throw”), *ko soto gari* (“minor outside reap throw”), *ko uchi gari* (“minor inside reap throw”), *harai tsuri komi ashi* (“the lift-pull sweeping foot throw”) and *okuri ashi harai* (“the foot sweeping throw”).

Advanced foot techniques require students to balance on a single foot while using their opposite leg to lift their opponent’s legs in a reaping motion. Once again, senior Judoka are asked to balance both their own and their opponent’s weight on a single foot. It takes years of practice to perform foot reaps and end up balanced afterwards. Timing and distancing are of the essence in mastering these throws. Examples of reaping techniques are *o uchi gari* (“the large inside reaping throw”), *o soto gari* (“the large outside reaping throw”), and *o soto guruma* (“large outer wheel throw”).

Obviously, Judo throws are not taught in the order described above – first hand, then hip, then foot techniques. Instead each rank combines a selection of hand, hip and foot techniques, usually about eight in average for each belt level. Most basic throws are taught at the first two ranks (yellow and orange belts). Intermediate throws are introduced during the next two (green and blue belts). And advanced throws are saved for the last two (brown and black belts). That way the students’ progress follows a structured plan, with their ability to use balance increasing as they approach more sophisticated techniques.

## **Sacrifice Techniques**

Sacrifice techniques are not taught until students reach a mid-level point in their Judo careers. The reason is safety. Students have to be very comfortable with falling before they can try sacrifice techniques. They are usually at the green belt level, preparing for blue belt exam, when they are shown the basic sacrifice techniques. In traditional Judo only a few sacrifice throws (three at most) are taught at this point. The rest is saved for brown and black belt

practice, when senior students have enough balance and control to throw each other in a safe way.

The teaching of sacrifice techniques is also organized around balance. The difference is that in sacrifice techniques the thrower falls in order to perform the throw. So, here students must have a refined sense of balance and be quite comfortable with falling. They are throwing themselves on the ground to project an aggressor when neutralizing an attack.

Basic sacrifice techniques are foot blocks that end in a slide or a turning around an opponent's side. *Yoko gake* ("the side block throw") is a good example of that. Blocking the right heel of an opponent with a left foot, the student pushes the opponent's foot forward while pulling the opponent downward. The effect is the equivalent of having someone pull a rug out from underneath you. It's a quick drop. Another throw that fits the category is *soto maki komi* ("the outside wrap around throw") where the student blocks the opponent's right foot with a right heel and turns into the opponent while spiraling down.

Intermediate sacrifice throws require students to use their leg to block an opponent's step so that they can project the opponent forward, backward or sideways. The difference between basic and intermediate throws is that in intermediate techniques the projection of the opponent relies more on balance than leverage. The thrower uses gravity instead of body contact to perform the throw. Good examples of intermediate techniques are *yoko otoshi* ("the side drop throw"), *uki waza* ("the floating throw") and *tani otoshi* ("the valley drop throw").

In advanced sacrifice techniques students fall on their backs to catapult their opponents in a circling motion over their heads. These throws are the hardest to perfect because they require far more balance on the part of the thrower than the previous sacrifice techniques. One has to control one's own body weight and the opponent's body weight while falling backwards! Timing and distancing are crucial. Circling motion back falls include throws like *tomoe nage* ("the circular throw"), *sumi gaeshi* ("the corner counter throw"), *yoko guruma* ("the side wheel throw") and *ura nage* ("the back throw").

### **A Note on Practicing Throwing Techniques:**

It is easy to get into a big ego trip when you start throwing people during practice. Throwing is satisfying. There's a rush that comes with it. You feel empowered, strong. So, it is not surprising that after students learn to throw, they go at it with great enthusiasm. The more they throw, the more satisfying the workout gets! They leave the mat walking on clouds.

Of course, when you think that Judo is about throwing, you want to do more of it; you want to throw as many people as you can in every practice. Pretty soon, everybody in the dojo starts getting very competitive. Students want to throw the most and fall the least. The problem is, when you have two students working out with that attitude, you have injuries the making. Two opposing forces that meet without yielding are bound to destruction.

Wanting to throw and not wanting to fall is the wrong attitude to have in Judo. Students assume that the goal of the practice is throwing without getting thrown. When Judo becomes all throwing and no falling you have a one-sided practice of the art. Students with that attitude are more likely to injure themselves and their partners... repeatedly. To avoid falling (and looking "weak"), they go to extremes – they fight back, resist, lose posture, and worse – quickly forget all the rules for safe practice.

The problems go beyond safety, as well. Animosity grows. People get upset with each other, sometimes in a vengeful mood. Collegiality falters. The dojo is no longer a friendly place. People take everything personally. Their pride gets hurt with just about anything. I've seen dojos like that. The atmosphere is tense, nervous, uptight. At that point Judo is no longer an art. It is a stress machine.

Students who do not fall develop big pride in their skills. After a while they'd rather die than fall, because they think they'll lose face. So they walk around with a serious aggressive attitude while inside they're scared to death of falling. Needless to say, they miss out on the real practice. That kind of attitude backfires – either the student gets hurt or runs out of willing partners, because they've injured everyone who works out with them. That's not Judo. And that's not art.

“A good soldier,” teaches the Tao, “is not violent. A good fighter is not angry. A good winner is not vengeful.” Skill in Eastern arts is divorced from passion. The more skilled one is, the less subject to her/his emotions. “This is known as the virtue of not striving... as the ability to deal with people. This since ancient times has been known as the ultimate unity with heaven” (chapter 68). We practice Judo to lose our egos, to conquer our pride, to overcome anger, frustration and vengefulness. Anything that feeds our emotions is contrary to practice. Simple as that.

In addition, and I want to be very clear about this – *throwing without falling is bad for mastering the art*. It is not real Judo. It might prepare you to be the bully of the dojo, but it won't prepare you to be a sensible martial artist. It has always been common knowledge around the Kodokan that the best competitors tend to be lousy teachers.

Here is the problem – *in order to perfect throwing techniques, you have to fall...* a lot. The more you fall from different throws, the more you appreciate what your partner goes through when you throw him or her. If you never practice being thrown, you have no appreciation for the dangers involved in falling. Therefore you won't know how to help your partner avoid injuries when you are throwing him or her. Moreover, you'll have no sympathy for your partner's effort to avoid getting hurt when being thrown by you.

In my dojo, every thrower is responsible for the well-being of the person being thrown. If you can't control your throws you are asked to leave. If you can't guarantee the safety of your partner, you are not in charge and if you are not in charge you are a liability to my dojo. I have no interest in having you there. The goal of the art is to make you a master of control. Throwing without falling will keep you from achieving that goal.

For one thing, you won't learn how to control your throwing unless you suffer the consequences of being thrown. When you are thrown you become aware of the ways you can control your partner's fall. Falling from a throw helps you realize what you can do to make falling easier on your partner. When you start taking your partner's well being into consideration, you stop slamming people down and you start your journey toward becoming a true master of the art. This is, in fact, your first step toward being a responsible martial artist.

Another problem with throwing and not falling is that when you wrestle to throw someone down, you are not developing the technical aspects of your technique. The tugging, shoving, pushing, and grabbing will keep you distracted. In the end people are falling not because of your technique's finesse or effectiveness. They fall because you are muscling them down. They don't learn anything other than getting resentful toward you, and you won't learn anything because

you're too busy wrestling them!

When you wrestle with a partner, you don't have a chance to study the details of the throw. You can't understand its principles or figure out how it works. More importantly, when you wrestle with your partner, you miss the opportunity to learn how to make the throw work without using muscle. The more you wrestle, the less you learn. This is not the path of traditional Judo, and it is certainly not the one suggested by the Tao.

Several passages in the Tao suggest that right practice should focus on perfecting techniques, not on defeating one's partner. In real life "one gains by losing and loses by gaining" (chapter 42). Sometimes you learn more about the art when being thrown than when throwing. As you are falling, you realize the dexterity, the distancing and the timing involved in the throw. It is a real learning experience. So, you get up ready to put what you learned into practice.

Chapter 42 also warns that "a violent person will die a violent death." I've seen that happen figuratively on the mat. Nobody likes to work with someone who has a chip on their shoulder, someone who has no respect for other people's well-being. A violent Judoka will end up with no one to practice with – alone. When other people no longer wish to work out with you, for all intent and purposes you've died for the art. You slowly worked yourself out of the picture. What is worse, there is no one to mourn your "passing" either.

The Tao is very clear about the way people should pursue the art. "Not exalting the gifted prevents quarreling. Not collecting treasures prevents stealing" (chapter 3). Where there is "no fight: no blame" (chapter 8). The more a dojo builds its practice around the gifts of a few members, the more divisive the atmosphere becomes. There will be jealousy, envy, bad-mouthing. People will use whatever they can to get the spotlight and eventually there will be a trail of injured players. I feel sorry for them. Judo has obviously failed them terribly. They walk away with less than what they brought in when they signed up.

Judoka should know the difference between sparring and fighting. When people fight, their egos are on a collision course. Their pride is on the line. They get mean, vicious, blood-thirsty. There is little or nothing socially redeeming about that. Fights create a lot of bad feeling and may lead to an unending cycle of revenge.

In sparring, people see each other as partners. They are supposed to be helping each other master the techniques. They are both walking toward the same goal – becoming black belts. And it is not a zero sum game. Both can become black belts. One does not have to get the black belt at the expense of the other. It is a mutually beneficial partnership – both are expected to grow in the art, both are expected to become better people.

That is why when people spar, their mental attitude is different from that of fighters. When martial artists spar, they engage in a process of simultaneous education. They give each other feedback. They may replay something until it is flawless. They will correct each other and build on each other's strengths and weaknesses. In that sense, practice partners are not fighting each other. They are fighting their own limitations. The point is not to defeat your regular workout partner. The point is to work with your partner to overcome your own limitations and help your partner overcome his or hers.

That is why in my dojo I insist that students spend more time doing sute geiko (a form of controlled practice where one student throws and then is thrown in exchange) than in randori (free practice, where whoever is more focused throws as many times as that person is able to do so). Sute geiko's controlled throwing and falling provides both partners with the best medium

to perfect techniques. They see what works and what doesn't in a controlled setting before trying it out in free practice.

There is a point to this process of mutual education. The goal is for both students to become masters. Not masters of the art only, but masters of themselves. "A brave and passionate person" says the Tao, "will kill or be killed. A brave and calm person will always preserve life. Of these two which is good and which is harmful? Some things are not favored by heaven. Who knows why?" (chapter 73). That kind of attention to detail and to other people's feelings is only achieved in a practice where people are relaxed, non-competitive and willing to keep working at it until they get it right. This, the Tao says, "is called: 'following the light'" (chapter 27).

If you can't control your emotions, especially *negative* emotions, you won't be able to think clearly in a dangerous situation. Not thinking you'll be driven by animal instinct when under attack. You will either fight with abandon on pure adrenalin or flee in pure terror with every ounce of energy in your body. No one who enters a self-defense situation like that can call herself or himself a master. Absolute control requires absolute detachment. If your emotions are doing the fighting you are no longer in the driver's seat.

...The Tao of heaven does not strive, and yet it overcomes.  
It does not speak, and yet it is answered.  
It does not ask, yet it is supplied with all its needs.  
It seems at ease, and yet it follows a plan.  
Tao Te Ching, 73.

When perfecting throwing, work on the techniques, not on defeating your partner. Make sure you can perform them even without adrenalin. Make sure they work even when you don't wrestle someone down. Keep them clean, timely, and to the point. Unless that is the goal of your practice, all you'll be doing is building your ego, not mastering the art.

*You can't do both.* This goes back to the Samurai era. Samurai training was a matter of life and death. So much so, the training focused them on having absolute self-control, emotional detachment, and peerless technique:

The warrior's instinct was not to be confused with animal instinct. Like a visceral reaction, it came from a combination of wisdom and discipline. It was an ultimate reasoning that went beyond reason, the ability to make the right move in a split second without going through the actual process of thinking.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Eiji Yoshikawa, *Musashi: An Epic Novel of the Samurai Era* (Tokyo: Kodansha International. 1981), page 898.

## Chapter Six

### Water and Wind

In the spirit of the early Kodokan days, the other two aspects of Kano's art – groundwork and striking – should be practiced as water and wind. Groundwork follows the Taoist principle of water: it is yielding and flowing in overcoming an attack. Striking follows the way of the wind. Strikes should not be unleashed as a summer storm. They should be used as a counter, as part of a blending defense in a real life situation. Unless practiced in such spirit, groundwork and striking become no more than street fighting.

#### **Katame Waza: The Art of Flowing Water**

Groundwork is called Katame Waza in Judo. It is divided into Osaekomi Waza (groundholds or pins), Shime Waza (chokeholds or strangleholds) and Kansetsu Waza (bone locks or joint locks). Some dojos refer to groundwork as Ne Waza, but that term is used more specifically to describe the way the techniques are performed on ground fighting. Katame Waza is more inclusive, since it also covers strangles and joint locks performed from a standing position.

With the exception of groundholds, in traditional dojos Katame Waza techniques are not taught until students have reached a senior rank. The art of holding someone down is not as dangerous, so instructors introduce it early on to beginners who are preparing for their yellow belt exam. The other two areas are taught much later.

In my own ryu, Shime and Kansetsu Waza are not introduced until Judoka have reached green belt level. Even then, students are not allowed to use the techniques in free practice. Given the greater risk of serious injury, Shime and Kansetsu Waza are always performed under carefully controlled conditions.

Although Judo is popularly thought to be the art of throwing, the arts of holding, strangling or applying jointlocks have also been intrinsic to its practice. Kano taught groundwork to students from the very early days of the Kodokan. The techniques are very useful in a self defense situation in which throwing is not possible.

When I think of groundwork, I think of water. Picture yourself in a swimming pool. You immerse your body into the water feeling very little resistance. There is no pressure, no sense of binding. The added sense of buoyancy makes you feel light. Yet, slowly, water surrounds all of you. It constrains all parts of your body, swirling around every time you try to move. It adapts constantly to your motion, giving in only to bind you further. Underwater you have a very limited range of motion, even if from your point of view it doesn't feel constraining.

Now, suppose you need to get out of the pool quickly. Someone's on the phone or somebody stopped by for a visit. When you try to walk or move your arms you realize how bound you are. Your motion is heavy, constrained by the weight of the water around you. It takes a lot of effort to push water around. If you push forward, water rushes in front of you, past you and around your back. Try moving a little faster and the weight seems to increase. A little faster and you're soon exhausted. The water takes in your energy and gives back just enough to keep you heavy-laden. It is an ongoing wearing down process.

Water never seems to strive, say the Taoists, it flows as it binds. “The softest thing in the universe can overcome the hardest thing. That without substance can enter where there is no room” (chapter 43). It is this ability to be without substance, to bind without putting unnecessary pressure on the attacker, that is at the heart of groundwork. When students perfect such ability, they can enter “where there is no room.” Their binding requires very little effort.

Of course, the idea of groundwork being like water is very alien to competition-oriented Judoka. Traditional and sports Judo have very different approaches to groundwork. What I describe above is the traditional view. In sports Judo, groundwork is practiced for a single purpose: victory in competition. So, sports Judoka use groundwork in a very specialized, very narrowly-defined way. In traditional Judo, groundwork is another means of self-defense. Its practice follows a broader orientation than that of sports Judo.

In traditional Judo, groundwork techniques are practiced as ways to escape or neutralize an aggressor while on the ground. Self-defense drills are used regularly to teach groundwork. Groundwork combines with joint locks, chokes, throwing and striking techniques to give traditional Judoka a wide array of defensive options in the case of a real life attack.

Here’s the difference between the traditional Judo and sports Judo approaches to groundwork: In sports Judo groundholds are used to finish a match. Let’s say you threw an opponent but it wasn’t a full throw, so you didn’t get a full point (ippon). You grab on to your opponent and use a groundhold to keep the person’s back on the mat . The referee yells “osaekomi” (“he/she’s immobilized”) to signal the table officials to keep time. Now your opponent has 25 seconds to escape. If the escape doesn’t happen, you win the match.

So, groundholds in sports Judo are very similar to pins in wrestling. People push and shove and struggle a lot. The person applying the groundhold holds on for dear life, trying to keep the opponent immobilized. The person taking the groundhold is pushing up, rolling around, trying to squeeze out of it in whatever way possible before the 25 seconds are over.

This sort of practice gives sports Judoka a very simplistic view of the art. They get the impression that once you put on a groundhold you should stick with it for good and use a lot of muscle to keep your opponent down. That is not very realistic in a real self-defense situation.

Instead of struggling to hold on to a pinned opponent, traditional Judoka are encouraged to move from one groundhold to the next as the opponent shifts, pulls or tries to escape.<sup>29</sup> The first groundhold is just a point of entry. Once you pin someone down, it doesn’t matter which groundhold you use or for how long. Every time your opponent moves, there is an opening to use something else. Much like water, you adapt the technique to your opponent’s motion.

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<sup>29</sup> We do have an advantage here, because there are seven groundholds in sports Judo and 12 (sometimes more) in traditional Judo. The seven official groundholds in sports Judo listed by the Kodokan are: hon kesa gatame (the scarf hold), kuzure kesa gatame (variation of the scarf hold), kata gatame (the shoulder hold), kami shiho gatame (the top four-corner hold), kuzure kami shiho gatame (variation of the top four-corner hold), yoko shiho gatame (the side locking four-corner hold) and tate shiho gatame (the straight locking four-corner hold). We add at least another five groundholds to the list in traditional Judo: makura kesa gatame (the pillow scarf hold), ushiro kesa gatame (the rear scarf hold), mune gatame (the chest hold), kuzure yoko shiho gatame (variation of the side locking four-corner hold), and kuzure tate shiho gatame (variation of the straight locking four-corner hold).

For instance, if your attacker is trying to get out of kesa gatame (scarf hold) by pushing your right arm up, let go of that arm and twist around into kami shiho gatame (a top four-corner hold). Now the attacker is facing your two arms down his/her sides instead of just one arm around the neck. Should the person struggle any further, quickly move on to the opponent's left side with a yoko shiho gatame (the side locking four-corner hold). If the struggle continues, straddle across your attacker's waist into tate shiho gatame (the straight locking four-corner hold). More struggle? Switch back to the original scarf hold. You can keep this on for a long time.

The idea here, of course, is that in real life there is no referee to stop the match after 25 seconds. So you may have to keep someone pinned for 15 minutes, half an hour or more before help arrives. If you try to keep the attacker down with a single groundhold for that long you will exhaust yourself and more than likely your attacker will escape.

No one can hold someone down that long in a single groundhold. However, if you keep switching from one groundhold to the next, your opponent will be the one spending all the energy. Much like water, you will be surrounding your opponent, binding the person's efforts just enough to wear him or her out.

This is another difference between sports Judo and traditional Judo. In traditional Judo groundholds are never applied too tightly, since it is assumed that eventually you'll move on to another technique. Rather than fighting hard to keep a single groundhold on, a traditional Judoka will extend ki downward, applying only enough pressure to keep someone from getting up.

From the attacker's point of view, there is apparently "room" to struggle and get free. But that "room" disappears very quickly anytime the attacker moves, because you apply a different technique to match the motion. What seemed to be a slack space, becomes tight and limiting. This is what the Tao means when it says that (chapter 78),

Under heaven nothing is softer and yielding than water.  
Yet for attacking the solid and strong, nothing is better;  
It has no equal.  
The weak overcomes the strong;  
The supple overcomes the stiff.  
Under heaven everyone knows this,  
Yet no one puts it into practice

## **The Art of Holding (Osaekomi Waza)**

The order of groundholds is structured to make it easy for students to move around an attacker's body. In my ryu, students learn two groundholds per belt. They are taught kesa and kuzure kesa gatame for the yellow belt rank, kata and makura kesa gatame for orange belt, ushiro kesa and mune gatame for green belt, yoko shiho and kuzure yoko shiho gatame for blue belt, kami shiho and kuzure kami shiho gatame for brown belt, and tate shiho and kuzure tate shiho gatame for black belt.

For those of you who are Judoka already, it will be easy to notice that practicing the groundholds in that order allows the Judoka to start by pinning the attacker on his/her right side, move around the attacker's head and neck toward the person's left shoulder, then over to the

opponent's upper body, ending by straddling across the attacker's waist, controlling the person's entire body. The circling can be started again, by simply shifting back to the first groundhold.

To help students understand this process of transitioning from technique to technique, groundhold techniques are taught in gradual steps. Students are first shown the techniques in a static position, with no struggle on the attacker's part. At this point, they work on the finer points of the groundhold, making sure the technical aspects are perfected in a precise way. They work on extending ki downward, gripping and distributing their weight according to the attacker's movement on the mat.

Once they master at least four groundholds, students begin to practice them in a serial mode. They move from kesa to kuzure kesa to kata to makura kesa gatame. They are taught how to transition from one hold to the next without losing their grip on the attacker. At this point the opponent is still not struggling.

After the students are comfortable with switching from technique to technique in a technically correct manner, the Sensei instructs their partners to move around and resist them as they try to switch groundholds. The more comfortable students become, the greater struggle the Sensei allows their partners. By the time students are black belt they can switch around all 12 groundholds despite their attackers' best efforts to get free. Students are also encouraged to practice groundholds both from a right and a left stance, to have a wider array of options.

The important thing to remember when using holds is that you must be able to react quickly to your partner's attempt to escape. Like water, you must adapt to your opponent's motion. Timing and distancing are key – an inch too close or too far will give your attacker the upper-hand. Also you'll find when you start practicing groundwork that it doesn't take long to get tired. Ground fighting takes a greater toll on your breathing than standing techniques. If you tense up and breathe quickly you will be as exhausted as your attacker in a very short period of time.

## **The Art of Choking: Shime Waza**

In traditional Judo, choking is used in combination with groundholds. Since groundwork is a part of a Judoka's self-defense training, the Judoka must be prepared to move on from a hold to a choke in case the opponent is too strong or too angry to be calmed down with a holding technique.

Chokes should be performed carefully, since they are lethal. My students are taught to monitor their partner's reactions very carefully and to release their grip quickly if the partner loses consciousness. Should they continue the choke a little longer there might be permanent damage to the partner's brain or even death. The practice of chokes should never be done lightly.

Chokes require expert control on the part of the performer. This is one aspect of Judo where the student has to be fully in control and be very competent, since there is little room for error. Your partner is willing to put his or her life in your hands when practicing Shime Waza. That is why Dr. Kano insisted that his senior students learned the art of resuscitation (Kapo) before they were allowed to practice choking. At any sign of their partner losing consciousness, students were told to let go of the choke immediately and start using kapo right away.

Judo chokes come in three sets. There are frontal chokes, back chokes and grappling

chokes. Frontal chokes are the easiest to apply. They are taught to green or blue belt students. Back chokes are the intermediate part of the art. They are introduced around the brown belt rank. Finally, grappling chokes are the most advanced, requiring greater skill in controlling one's body along with the opponent's. In my ryu, students are still working on grappling chokes when they take their Nidan and Sandan black belt tests

There are three frontal chokes: nami juji jime (the normal cross lock), gyaku juji jime (the reverse cross lock) and kata juji jime (the half-cross lock). In frontal chokes the Judoka is trying to stop the blood flow to an opponent's brain by applying controlled pressure on both sides of the opponent's neck. Notice the pressure is lateral, not frontal.

The set is known as frontal because the Judoka is facing the opponent when applying the choke. If you pressure the front of someone's neck you may break the person's windpipe. It is almost impossible to calculate the right amount of pressure needed for an effective frontal attack. A lateral attack is easier to control because the opponent will continue to breath partially even as he or she is passing out.

There are also three back chokes: hadaka jime (the naked lock), okuri eri jime (the sliding collar lock) and kata ha jime (the single wing lock). Here the Judoka approaches the attacker from the side and back. Lateral pressure is applied with the Judoka's forearm pushing against the side of the opponent's neck. The choke is completed by pulling the opponent backward and down. The opponent's reaction time is more limited since unlike the previous set, in this set the Judoka uses both arms to apply the technique.

Grappling chokes are the most complex because they assume the Judoka missed the chance to apply a frontal or back choke technique and is now wrestling the opponent on the ground. As arms and legs get entangled they are used as part of the choking strategy. The set has five techniques: katate jime (the single hand choke), ryote jime (the two hand choke), sode guruma jime (the sleeve wheel choke), tsukkomi jime (the thrust choke) and sankaku jime (the triangular choke). All five assume the use of collar, hand and forearm (sometimes aided by the help of the Judoka's legs) to create the choke.

In traditional Judo chokes are taught in structured drills. For the sake of safety, students are taught first in a static position, with no struggle by the partner. Students focus on the technical aspects of the choke, making sure they are able to control the amount of pressure needed to execute the technique.

Once students are confident in their ability to choke, we introduce self-defense situations where chokes are used by themselves or in combination with other techniques. Slowly students realize that their art offers a very eclectic array of self-defense possibilities. When you put throwing, pinning, choking, doing a joint lock, and striking together, you create a very flexible approach to self-defense.

## **The Art of Bending Joints (Kansetsu Waza)**

Much like Shime Waza, the art of bending and twisting joints should not be taken lightly. It is not used in free practice (randori) except by senior black belt Judoka, with special permission from the Sensei. Kansetsu Waza techniques are taught for self defense and should be used only when there's no other way out of a tough situation.

Kansetsu Waza is always practiced under qualified supervision. Since the techniques can

dislocate and break bones, students are advised to monitor their partner's reaction carefully as they apply the locks.

There are three sets of locks in Kansetsu Waza: side locks, back locks and grappling locks. Side locks are the first ones introduced to students, usually around the green or blue belt level. Back locks form the intermediate part of the art and are shown to brown belt students. Grappling locks are the most complex, requiring greater dexterity on the part of the Judoka. They are reserved for students who have reached the black belt level, and sometimes are not taught until students reach the ranks of Nidan or Sandan.

There are three side locks: ude garami (the entangled arm lock), juji gatame (the cross arm lock) and ude gatame (the arm lock). All three are usually applied to one side of the attacker with the Judoka pressuring the attacker's opposite shoulder. Juji gatame is the exception here, since it is applied to the opponent's shoulder closest to the Judoka. All rely on pressure on the attacker's wrist and elbow, the pressure building as the attacker's arm is further twisted.

There are three back locks also: waki gatame (the armpit lock), hara gatame (the stomach arm lock) and te gatame (the hand arm lock). Here the Judoka uses his own side as a prop against which to twist the opponent's arm. Pressure is applied more exclusively to the elbow, with the grip on the wrist used to anchor the technique. Another difference between this set and the earlier one is that the last two techniques of this set, hara gatame and te gatame, combine both a lock and a choke.

The grappling lock set assumes that the Judoka missed the opportunity to use easier locks and is now grappling on the ground with a more skilled opponent. So, these locks employ the Judoka's arms and legs, sometimes the entire body, to be fully effective. The set is made up of three techniques: hiza gatame (the knee arm lock), ashi gatame (the leg arm lock), and sankaku gatame (the triangular lock). In this set, the last technique combines a lock and a choke, with both being done by the Judoka's legs.

Similar to Shime Waza, lock techniques can be performed from a standing position or in ground fighting. Locks are very effective forms of self-defense against knives, sticks or even handguns. I usually recommend that my students use locks as a transition from a groundhold to a choke. If it is too difficult to keep an attacker pinned because the person is unusually strong, you may switch to a joint lock in hopes the pain will keep the person under control. Should that fail, switch from the lock to the choke to neutralize the aggressor by inducing unconsciousness.

Locks in traditional Judo are taught also in highly structured drills. For the sake of safety they are shown in a static condition, with no struggle on the part of the Judoka's partner. Students are encouraged to focus on the technical aspects of the lock, making sure they are able to control the pressure needed for the technique. As students' competence increases, we introduce self-defense situations in which the locks are employed by themselves or in combination with throwing techniques, groundholds, chokes or strikes.

### **Atemi Waza: Fighting like the Wind**

Unlike Karate or Tae Kwon Do, in Judo strikes are not central to the art. Striking is auxiliary, something used in combination with a throw, a groundhold or a lock. Its purpose is to stun the opponent long enough to add another technique as one neutralizes an attack. Judo strikes are not based on muscular strength or the hardening of one's hands or knuckles or

elbows. Rather, Judo strikes aim at vital spots. It is not the force of the strike, but where and how it lands that makes the difference.

The reason I associate striking with the wind is because in Taoism the wind is never permanent, never sufficient for accomplishing the task. Winds may have the strength of a storm, but storms are not long lasting (“High winds do not last all morning. Heavy rain does not last all day,” chapter 23).

So, for a Judoka engaging in a fist fight is inviting trouble. The outcomes of fist fights are hard to control. Furthermore, they tend to exacerbate negative emotions and use up a whole lot more of the body’s natural energy. “If too much energy is used,” says the Tao “exhaustion follows” (chapter 55). Great use of force is always “followed by loss of strength” (chapter 30).

So, striking on an ongoing basis depletes the body. It requires a greater amount of muscular strength and lots of conditioning to be adequately done. That is not the traditional way in Judo. Our strikes are small, well-placed, and employed sparingly. The reaction of a spectator to a Judo strike would be similar to the description in chapter 14 of the Tao, “look, it cannot be seen – it is beyond form. Listen, it cannot be heard – it is beyond sound. Grasp, it cannot be held – it is intangible.”

Judo strikes are quick and done from the *hara*, from one’s center of strength. Whether a punch or a hand knife or an elbow strike, the power comes from the abdomen. The energy is flexible and flowing until the instant of contact. Once the blow is delivered, the energy is fluid again. Needless to say, effective delivery depends a great deal on breath control, distancing and timing.

Strikes are divided into upper and lower limb (*ude ate* and *ashi ate*). Upper limb strikes include finger (*yubisaki ate*), knife hand (*tegatana ate*), fist (*kobushi ate*) and elbow strikes (*hiji ate*). Lower limb strikes include knee (*hiza-gashira ate*), ball of foot (*sekito ate*) and heel strikes (*kakato ate*). The techniques include fingertips, fists (striking in direct or inverted blows, using the back of fingers or knuckles), hand-edges (slanting or downward cuts), elbows, knees and feet.

The aim of striking is to deliver stunning blow to the right place. The human body contains many vital spots. Senior students are quite familiar with them. Among the head points studied by students are the *tendo* (area slightly above the forehead), the *uto* (the nasion point, in the middle of the forehead, between the eyes), the *kasumi* (the temples), the *jinchu* (spot directly under the nose), and the *kachikake* (chin).

Body points include the *suigetsu* (the lower part of the solar plexus), the *getsuei/denko* (the hypochondrium, area to the left or right of the stomach) the *myojo* (area between the navel and the genitals), the *tsurigane* (genital area), and the *shitsu* (kneecap area).

Strikes are used as stunning techniques, always followed up by a throw; or as finishing techniques, employed after the completion of a throw. In such instances, the fist, hand, elbow, or foot are pulled back once the blow is delivered. Remember, however, that strikes are used sparingly in Judo. “Heavy winds do not last all morning.” The idea is to employ them wisely.

Judo is training for life. Not only does it generate self-confidence, it helps with elements of self-control such as patience, controlled temper, and understanding others. The spirit of traditional Judo can be said to be the art of fighting without fighting. Sensei McCarthy always

stressed the peaceful settlement of any disagreement or dispute. For him the arts described in this section were of no use if a peaceful settlement was achieved. And that is ultimately the real master's goal. To avoid unnecessary pain or injury.

## Conclusion

### The Tao is Forever Undefined<sup>30</sup>

As you can see, this is not a book about winning tournaments. It does not prepare you for the next Olympics. When I decided to write this book I intentionally chose not to include anything that might give the impression I was marketing Judo as an athletic pursuit. Notice, for instance, that there are no photos or illustrations of Judo techniques.

In my opinion, if you want to learn the art, don't learn it from a book. Find the right master and sign up for classes. You should read about the art to learn more of its history, philosophy and technical aspects. But you should let your Sensei transmit the martial skills and principles you need to master it.

After deciding to learn a martial art, do everything possible to preserve the integrity of its transmission. Walk the path with your Sensei, watch the way your Sensei models the practice for you. Pay attention to the teaching of techniques, but pay even closer attention to the way your Sensei practices the art. What is important in your Sensei's practice? What is the proper demeanor for followers of the art? How does your Sensei live the art in real life? Does the Sensei practice the art both on the mat and off? Does the practice foster the cultivation of martial virtues?

For similar reasons, I did not include a list of previous Judo world or Olympic champions in this book. Many Judo books list famous competitors with a brief bio next to each name. While I honor the efforts of Judo athletes who have achieved glory in the sport, my goal is not to idolize the art.

You shouldn't go into Judo because you're thinking about collecting medals and trophies. You shouldn't use it for fame and fortune. You can, of course, do that. But it would not be the kind of practice I describe in this book. Those of us who do Judo for life, do it for the sake of what we learn, for the way it transforms us. Judo has shaped my life so deeply that this book is my way of giving thanks to the art.

This book is really about the spirit of the practice, not the technical details. That is why it is applicable to other martial arts. I focus on the aspects of the practice that tend to be invisible or taken for granted by students. When students sign up for a martial art, they come into the practice with an eye on the techniques. They assume everything else that goes on in the dojo is just background noise.

But it isn't. When you practice a martial art as a life journey, everything counts. Everything teaches you important lessons about life and the nature of things. In these pages I tried to share with you some of what tends to be invisible or unnoticed. My hope is that it will help you become more sensitive to what's going on in your dojo.

Another reason for writing this book was my desire to invite martial arts circles to consider the way of the monk. I've always wanted to see the way of the monk being more discussed in those circles. We all have learned so much from the way of the warrior. It has certainly made its

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<sup>30</sup> Tao Te Ching, chapter 32.

mark on the teaching of contemporary martial arts. But I believe there's much more to be learned from the other source of ancient martial arts practice.

Monks teach us to blend art with life, in a concentrated practice that is free of necessity and yet purposeful. That is why I take time to explain how the journey began in ancient Asia, to review how the arts are deeply connected with Taoism, and to suggest that the way of the monk may help us connect what we do in the dojo with what we do in everyday life. I cannot imagine practicing Judo any other way. This was the way of my masters and it has become my way.

In closing I share a chapter from the Tao Te Ching that has been influential in my own practice and life. It speaks to the kind of living that I've always desired. It is not easy to walk the path, but it is always rewarding. May your path bring you just as much fulfillment...

I have three treasures that I hold and keep.  
The first is mercy; the second is economy;  
The third is daring not be ahead of others.  
From mercy comes courage; from economy comes generosity;  
From humility comes leadership.

Nowadays people shun mercy, but try to be brave;  
They abandon economy, but try to be generous;  
They do not believe in humility, but always try to be first.  
This is certain death.

Mercy brings victory in battle  
and strength in defense.  
It is the means by which heaven saves and guards.  
(chapter 67)