



国際大山空手道連盟総本部 World Oyama Karate

Honbu Newsletter

World Oyama Karate Newsletter - Winter, 2004

Black Belt - What does it mean ?

It's easy to build up a business by selling a Black Belt. You see this kind of Karate business everywhere these days - in shopping centers, in community centers, in sports centers, etc.. I call this "fast food Karate". World Oyama is definitely not one of these styles of Karate.



Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

The Black Belt is not used just in the Karate world. All kinds of BUDO ("way of the warrior", martial arts) use the Black Belt as the symbol of power. If you really want to know about a martial art style, observe the Black Belt. He or she is the "face" of the organization. By observing the technique, movement, and knowledge of the Black Belt, you will know the quality of their martial art style.

Black Belt - What does it mean ? ... Continue

When I got the Black Belt, I was 18 years old. It took me five years to get it. At that time we were training five days a week. Each lesson was four and a half hours long. Most students would even stay after class and continue to train. My master instructor was Mas Oyama, and when I first started training in Karate, he liked me. I was one of his favorite students. Mas Oyama made the ranks White Belt, Brown Belt, and Black Belt. That was all. When I was 16 years old, after two years of training as a White Belt, I got the Brown Belt. I was so excited!

When I started training in Karate, I thought there was no way I would ever get the Black Belt. It seemed impossible that I would ever reach that level. A Black Belt was like some kind of ghost or monster - something unreal that I could never even touch. But when I got the Brown Belt, I looked at Black Belts differently. I thought, "Yes, I can reach them." I was so excited about training that I would think about Karate all the time - everyday, day and night - especially KUMITE (free fighting). Finally I tried Black Belt promotion. I failed. Then I tried again. I failed. Then I tried again.... and I failed. It was pretty obvious that I wasn't Mas Oyama's favorite student anymore. It was just the opposite. And I couldn't understand why I failed. I did the basic techniques better than other students. I did the KATAS well - so smoothly. And I did the KUMITE (free fight) so well that I beat many of the Black Belts. I even knocked out one of them. After that promotion I felt so good. I just knew I had made it. A couple of days after that, I tried to find my name on the bulletin board. My name was not there. At first I thought that Mas Oyama had just made a mistake when he made out the list. Maybe he just forgot my name. But, at the start of the next class, he congratulated all the new Black Belts one by one. Everyone clapped as each name was called. My name was never called. WHY?! I was so mad! I had good confidence, good skill, good coordination, good condition, good spirit.... Why should I fail?!

During all my school years - elementary school, junior high, and high school - I was a great athlete. But I didn't like most academic subjects at all, especially math and science. I would actually shy away from my teachers and try to keep a low profile in class. But when it came to P.E., I was king! I was the big man on campus when it came to athletics. I would say, "Watch me..." I was proud to show everyone how good I was at any sport. It was the same in Karate training. I did KIHON, KATA, and KUMITE better than anyone. I would even teach and help my KOHAI (junior students). They passed Black Belt promotion! They got the Black Belt! I failed for almost three years. During that time when we did free fighting in class, I couldn't wait to go after my opponent, especially if Mas Oyama was there. I wanted to prove that I could beat any Black Belt. I would punch, kick and throw very hard. Black Belts would even come to me before class

and ask me to please use more control.

Then one time we took pictures for Mas Oyama's book. This Is Karate. Mas Oyama put me in a black DOGI (uniform) and make-up to make me look sinister. He told me to demonstrate the bad examples of KIHON (basics). One day we took pictures of all types of breaking techniques using many different objects - boards, ice, even rocks. One rock was really big. A couple of Black Belts tried to break it without success. I was standing back just watching all this and thinking, "Psha! I could break that." Mas Oyama looked at me, and I think he could read my mind. He called me over and said in front of everybody, "If you can break that rock, I'm going to give you Black Belt." I yelled, "ASHA!!!" All the Black Belts yelled "ASHA!!!" too, and clapped their hands. They were as excited about this idea as I was. They thought that if I made Black Belt, we would be the same rank, and maybe I wouldn't fight them so hard. So I set my mind to this task and concentrated like never before in my life. I thought, "This is MY rock to break and I will have Black Belt!" I put all my pent-up anger into this, too, thinking, "WHY have I had to wait three years for Black Belt?!" I could see my energy going through the rock. Then with a very strong KIAI, I came down with all my focused power and sliced through the rock with my knife hand!! The rock fell away into two clean-cut pieces. This is the sign of a very good break, not smashing the rock into many pieces. These rocks looked like a power saw had sliced them apart. After this everyone was clapping and yelling "ASHA!!!!". Even the photographer yelled, "Good!" He had gotten a good photo. It can be seen on page 247 of Mas Oyama's book. This Is Karate. (I am the only one in a black DOGI. He used another student to hold up the broken rock pieces.) Mas Oyama observed all this and didn't say anything at first. He just smiled slightly. After a little while, he said, "Many people hit that rock. It doesn't count." Well, in that one instant, I went from the top of the mountain to the bottom of the lake!

Long story short, I did finally get the Black Belt. I still remember the first time I put on my Black Belt and looked in the mirror. I was so proud. Mas Oyama told me, "Do you know why you failed so many times? You're strong, but you are too rough when you free fight. You have no control. Also, I hear that you are making trouble in school and out on the street." He taught me a good lesson. After that, I thought about his words and my life changed. My KUMITE changed a little, too.

To get the World Oyama Black Belt, you must master all the basic techniques. This means that you must thoroughly understand all of the World Oyama Karate Kyoten Books, Volumes I-IV. I want to remind everyone that in World Oyama KIHON KAI KO (basic training), you must make contact



Black Belt - What does it mean ? Continue



Shihan Goda

Mas Oyama

Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

with the individual basic techniques. This is the only way to understand the point of each technique. For most styles KIHON KAI KO is just punching the air, kicking the air, and blocking the air. We do not train this way alone. You can get the general point of each technique by punching, kicking, and blocking the air, but to deeply understand, you must feel the technique by making contact. If you train with contact, you don't just imagine using the technique. Instead, you feel the special point of the technique throughout your entire body. So study the Karate Kyoten books to learn the point of each individual technique. Then train all the way to the point of making contact with each of these techniques. Next you must study to understand how to properly connect one technique with another to make effective fighting combinations. This is the purpose of KATA training. To correctly train, don't execute a KATA the same way each time. Try to control the KATA in three different ways. Train to control timing, train to control power, and train to control speed. Vary these controls and think about the result of each combination as if you were in an actual fighting situation. Finally train in KUMITE (free fighting). Always try to understand your strong points and your weak points. What is your personal style? Is it driving KUMITE? Is it counter KUMITE? Are you best at changing angle? Train in all. This is the only way that you can discover what works best for you. Discover the elements of your own personal style. You have to understand all of this to rise

to the level of World Oyama Black Belt.

Karate is not a team sport. It is an individual sport where each student is different. Some students have good coordination, some have bad coordination, and some are in between. It doesn't matter. That's what happened to me at Black Belt promotion. I didn't understand that becoming a Black Belt was not just about my own physical ability. I needed to understand individual skill and ability - of myself and others. When I got the Black Belt, I entered a totally different world. After getting Black Belt, I looked back on my training and my life with a more critical eye. I began to train more carefully in KIHON, KATA, and KUMITE. My teaching style changed also as I helped my fellow students. I began to demonstrate and explain to students according to their individual character. When I observed a student's reaction to my instruction, I understood the student better. I also understood the technique better and developed a deeper understanding of it.

We call first degree Black Belt SHO DAN. SHO means "to begin" or "to start." So remember that Black Belt is not the final goal. It is the beginning of the Karate journey. As in any sport, if you don't continue to train and study, your technique



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and your sixth sense will fade away. If you don't continue to work, not only will you lose your Karate "edge" - your intuition about Karate - but also your foundation will crumble. This is what it means to be a World Oyama Black Belt. It is definitely not "fast food" - easily attained, briefly satisfying, and quickly gone. World Oyama Black Belts are on a life-

long journey of careful study and diligent training always seeking to deeply understand themselves, their Karate, and their fellow students. I am proud of my Black Belts.

Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

January 1st, 2004

The Road to Japan by Shihan Dai Perry Burnett

Chapter 2

It's one thing to get a trip like the one I made to Japan set up. It's a different matter getting there. As assistant instructors and new Black Belts know, it's one thing being a student but it's a different matter instructing students.

There was no way that Saiko Shihan was going to send me to Japan without first making sure that I could adequately represent being a student of his and the U.S. Organization. He made sure that I learned how to instruct and manage a group of students; students that were at different levels mentally, physically, by rank and more importantly different in character and attitude.

Saiko Shihan started training me in a new way. He told me to go home and write a class plan and bring it to him to check out. I thought, "No problem - punch, kick, move around, class over." Needless to say he tore up that paper and threw it in the 'round' file. Then he said, "Go to the store and buy a notebook, a thick one, not a small one, because you are going to need it." I had to come up with two class plans everyday; one for beginners and one for advanced students; five days a week. This went on for several months because I was having some problems getting my visa approved. Saiko Shihan went through my class plans, tore them apart and had me rewrite them. I met with Saiko Shihan as he went over my class plans. I took notes while he lectured me on a lot of different topics related to teaching and managing large and small groups. He would tell me that I would almost have to develop a sixth sense to be able to take in the personality of each class and be able to make quick changes to stay in control and manipulate the tempo to keep everything moving in a smooth direction. But the basic idea is to pick a theme for a class and build on that theme and create the class around it. For example, an entire class could be based around counter fighting and how to use one block in several different ways to achieve a desired outcome and how to make these moves fit each individual student no matter what type of body they had. I was getting a lot out of this process and thought everything was fine until he hit me with the shocker. I would be taking this teaching system to Japan and teach it to the instructors.

This was not how it was done over there. Imagine how I felt. I was a young, 1st degree Black Belt from Alabama and I was going to Japan (the country where karate originated) to show the Japanese how it was supposed to be done. I thought, "I feel like I just got kicked in the stomach." Then I thought, "No, I've felt that before (many times), this is much worse". Then I thought, "oh well, just trust Saiko Shihan. I'm sure he knows what he is doing even if I don't." Saiko Shihan said "Don't get me wrong, the fighters in Japan are very strong and tough. And there are still some good instructors and influential people in the karate culture but everything is moving towards tournament fighting and the roots and technical aspects of karate are getting pushed aside." At that time Saiko Shihan was (and still is) a very popular figure in the world of karate and known as being a great technician. Because of that, he said the people in Japan would be interested in what I had to offer. As it turned out he was right. All the sweat and hard work that Saiko Shihan put me through would paid off.

The whole Japan experience, from the planning stage until my return to Alabama, was full of challenges.

As I mentioned, I was having trouble getting my visa approved. I had applied for a cultural exchange visa which would allow for a six months stay (instead of the usual three months) with one extension. This would give me the one year stay I was looking for. I provided the proper authorities with all the requested information and waited for their response. As my luck would have it, this type of visa was normally used for concert musicians, ballet dancers and professionals of all types but there had never been a request for a karate instructor. The application process usually took a few weeks but this went on for months. The office in Japan responsible for processing and granting my visa kept asking for more information. The list kept getting longer and longer and went way beyond their initial request. They asked for information such as my family's financial status and documentation relating to my American citizenship. They also asked for a lot of personal information from Shihan Goda (the Shihan in Tokyo I would be training and teaching under). All of us involved were stunned by the obstacles the Japanese authorities kept throwing at us. It added to the anxiety I was feeling about the enormous task that lay ahead. I was so frustrated I started to

The Road to Japan ... Continue

think I might not get to go. Just as I was about to give up on the whole thing my luck changed. A Japanese student in my dojo was going home for a visit. Saiko Shihan gave him all of the details and had him look into the situation when he got to Tokyo. What he found out was that the official in charge of my visa did not believe I was for real. The official thought my application was a joke. He said "You mean an American guy is going to come to Japan to teach karate in the most powerful full contact organization in the world?" When the student explained that I was a student of Saiko Shihan Oyama, the expression on the man's face changed. He apologized and pulled my papers from the bottom of his stack.

I arrived in Japan on February 19, 1985. I was told to wear a karate t-shirt so that I could be located at the airport. I got off the plane and went through customs. I was standing around not knowing what to do when a young Japanese man came up to me, pointed and said "Alabama?" I responded "Osu". He waved for me to follow him. When we got to the dojo it was late. It had been raining and I was wet, cold, tired and confused. The very next night I went to the dojo. It was packed with White Belts and students of every level up to veteran Black Belts. Shihan Goda pointed to me and said "Teach." It was the first time in my life that I was to teach a whole class on my own.

To be continued.....



Shihan Dai Perry

Founders Go To White House - Photo Journal



White House Visit

A few months ago, I saw a big controversy about the President Ronald Reagan story. Supposedly, CBS produced a miniseries and then decided not to show it. But, according to the news, cable TV will soon air the series. At least this is my understanding from the news reports.

I have great personal memories of President Reagan. In 1984, just before Christmas, my brother called me. He told me that we were invited to the White House. I said, "That's interesting." Anyway, on January 24, 1985, at 4:30 p.m., we were to meet with Ronald Reagan, President of the United States. His secretary, Mr. Fre-

*To Shihan Oyama
With best wishes,*

Ronald Reagan

Founders Go To White House - Photo Journal



derick J. Ryan, called to say that he would be waiting for us. So, I flew to Washington, D.C. where I met my brother and my nephew Ted. We were so excited.

As instructed, we met Mr. Ryan about 30 minutes early at the White House gate. He greeted us there and took us to a room somewhere in the White House. There's a popular show now called "The West Wing." As we walked in, Mr. Ryan explained to us where we were, but whether it was the West Wing, the North Wing, the South Wing – who knows. We just kept smiling and saying, "OSU! OSU!" When we came to a certain room, Mr. Ryan asked us to please be seated.

Mr. Ryan told us about many rules. He explained what we could and could not do. He was quite business like, but also very nice - and so polite! I remember one restriction in particular. We had bought a special camera just for this occasion. Of course, we wanted to take lots of pictures. But, we were quickly told that we were not allowed to take any pictures at all. This was a little disappointing at first, but we

were soon told that the official White House photographer would be taking plenty of pictures.

We waited in that first room for about 10 to 20 minutes I think. We were getting more and more excited as the time passed. I was excited, of course, but my heart was not beating too hard. My brother and Ted though were getting very uptight as we sat there. They began to get the "dry mouth."

Mr. Ryan finally asked us to follow him once more to yet another room. We followed him thru several narrow hallways, turned left here, turned right there, up stairs, then down. Mr. Ryan casually mentioned that President Reagan would later be meeting with a particular African head of state in one room that we passed. As we walked along the hallways, we saw many impressive portraits hanging on the walls. I'm not sure, but I think these were of past Presidents. We were concentrating on keeping up with Mr. Ryan and had no time to stop and read. We had no idea where we were going, so we didn't dare fall behind. Besides, there were one or two Secret Service men at every turn. We didn't want to get shot!

We saw Secret Service men at the corners of hallways and in rooms as we passed. I noticed that they were all wearing nice suits. I don't know how expensive their suits were, but they didn't come from Wal Mart! And I could tell that the bodies under those suits were well trained and in good condition. They were all friendly to us and very polite. They smiled and greeted us with "Hi!" or "Hello!" They were very sincere about this, and didn't say it in a fake way like some airline attendants. Anyway, we finally reached the next waiting room. We remained there for about 10 to 15 minutes I think.

In this room a Marine stood guard beside a pair of double doors. He looked powerful in his perfect full dress uniform. Suddenly, he snapped to attention, sharply turned to the double doors behind him, and opened them both fully. After a perfectly snapped salute, the Marine turned to us and strongly proclaimed, "President Ronald Reagan, 40th President of the United States of America!" The Marine then stepped aside.

Mr. Ryan walked into that doorway facing the next room. There he grandly announced, "Mr. President, I present to you the Grand Masters Oyama!" We followed Mr. Ryan as he entered this next room. Little did we know what we were about to see. All the previous rooms had been small and a little dark, but now we were entering the President's own Oval Office – WOW! It was very large and full of bright lights and video cameras. Many people stood in a gallery to our left behind velvet ropes. We hardly noticed all of this though, because

Founders Go To White House - Photo Journal

directly in front of us stood President Ronald Reagan with arms outstretched. With a big smile, he enthusiastically greeted us with, "Welcome, Masters Oyama!" It was all very different than how I had imagined it. I thought there would be just the President and a couple of Secret Service men, but this was much, much more!

As I approached President Reagan and shook hands with him, something struck me about his appearance. In this close, face-to-face encounter, I noticed that he was wearing makeup. I remember thinking about the fact that in ancient times, a Samurai would wear makeup when he was going to see the king. The Samurai certainly didn't wear this makeup for sex appeal. He wore it so that the king would see him as a strong, healthy man in good condition. The Samurai hoped that the king would see him as a soldier who would fight well to defend the kingdom. This was also a common custom in ancient Europe. President Reagan knew very well that a healthy appearance has a strong positive effect on people. Sometimes I look at my own face in the mirror. I see a few more wrinkles, and it looks a little saggy. I wonder to myself, "Should I be wearing a little makeup, too?" But then I think, "...Nah."

I suppose everybody carefully thinks about what they will say to the President of the United States before they are to meet him. Of course, we had done this, but suddenly in this moment, we forgot it all. He praised us as great Karate teachers of the world, but we could only get out a few words in return. I think we said something like, "You are a great leader. We appreciate all that you have done for the country." We presented him with an honorary 5th Degree Black Belt with certificate and dogi. This brought a big smile, and it seemed to please him very much. President Reagan then told a joke. We didn't even understand the joke at the time because we were too excited to get it, but everyone in the audience cracked up in laughter. We just smiled politely.

After we got back to the hotel, I tried to remember President Reagan's joke. I think he said, "Well.... (in his typical way).. I've got a Black Belt now. I'll bet I can beat old Senator "ABC" and win over the Congress now!" When I



thought back on this, I didn't think it was all that funny, but it does show that he had a good sense of humor.

I don't know a lot about politics, but I do think Ronald Reagan was one of the greatest Presidents of the United States. That's the end of the story. But, I want to tell you about what you'll see in the next issue of the World Oyama Newsletter. In that issue I'll tell you about the actor Sony Chiba, star of the hit movie, "Kill Bill."

Budo Boy - Interview

Budo Boy challenges Bruce Glee

Hey, what's up? It's me again, Budo Boy (reporter extraordinaire, international heartthrob, etc.). What did you think of my last interview? Not bad, huh?

Well, let me throw another story at you. Recently Tony, our

technical assistant for the newsletter, found a fantastic Chinese restaurant. A dozen fried dumplings just \$4.00! Fried noodles with beef and vegetables (enough for two people) just \$4.50! Unbelievable! Delicious! I think this restaurant will put a serious dent in McDonald's and Burger King's business. Discovering this place was better than winning

Budo Boy - Interview

the lottery. Good food is highly important to a karate man like me. I can't say it too loudly, but sometimes, even more important than my girlfriend. Shh! Don't tell her. Most likely a karate instructor is poor financially but very rich physically and mentally. No question about it, health is wealth.

So, anyway, one day last week we had an unusually vigorous and rigorous noon class. By the time we approached the end of practice I was getting so hungry some of the students' faces were starting to look like fried dumplings. After class I hit the shower and took off for the Chinese restaurant with Tony in tow. I'm telling you again, it was absolutely awesome! We ate until we were as full and bloated as two ticks on a dog. It only cost \$12.00, including a \$2.00 tip. Can you believe that?!

After eating all that cheap food I almost felt obligated to wash dishes. But duty called. I had to get back to the dojo. I returned feeling happy and satisfied. I went straight to the dojo library (that's what I call the bottom shelf behind the business counter) and grabbed my book. Saiko Shihan has always told me I should read at least fifty pages a day. Mission: impossible, but I try. The book he had me reading last week was titled 'ZEN'. He said it would be good for my mental development. Good book. Really gave me peace of mind. So, anyway, I began reading it, but before I finished five lines I was so at peace that, I don't know why, but my eyes started to close. The ceiling fan was playing such a soft and beautiful melody. Saiko Shihan was right. 'Zen' is a very powerful book.

Suddenly, I was sitting on a white puffy cloud like an eagle on his perch. Wow! It felt so good. The breeze was cool, crisp and clean. The sun was warm. Perfect!

As I looked back down on earth, surveying my domain, I saw what appeared to be a Shao Lin Temple. I tried to 'will' the cloud to take me there and wouldn't you know it, it obeyed instantly (unlike my girlfriend).

I stepped onto the temple roof and looked down into the courtyard where I saw maybe 100 people. They were all fighting! Cool! It looked like around 70 of them were wearing white dogis with black belts and probably 30 wore black kung fu uniforms. They were really going at it, pounding each other with reckless abandon.

Suddenly, I heard a shrill, piercing shriek "What the h..." --I mean, "What in the world was that?!" I wondered.

"Heeeaaaah! Whoooohh! Aaaaahh!" screeched one of the fighters. He wore black pants and his torso was bare, show-

ing off his well-defined physique. He wasn't big; maybe 5'7" and 140 pounds. But his muscles were tight and well-developed. He had the whole package- triceps, biceps, deltoids, traps, lats, pecs, and a six-pack stomach.

"Heeeeh! Haaaiyaah! Wooooohh!" he shrilled, sounding a lot like a drunken bird. While doing so, he seemed to flex all his muscles as tightly as possible and restrict the release of his breath. And with every technique he would flex every muscle, also. Looked really tight, but every time he attacked, bodies would spew up into the air like a water fountain. Then, I got a good look at his face. I recognized him. He was Bruce Glee!

After about five minutes all his foes were knocked out and Mr. Glee was not even sweating and had no bruises. I felt an interview coming on. It was time to enlighten World Oyama Karate members and readers in general.

I was a bit timid but I inched my way down a rose trellis to the ground (hard to do on a full stomach). As I approached him he studied me curiously and then smiled.

"How are you, Budo Boy?" he asked.

Surprised that he recognized me, I just said "Osu!"

"How are Soshu and Saiko Shihan? Are they doing great?" he asked.

"Yes, they are, thank you," I said with a friendly smile.

"That was quite a fight. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions for my column?"

"Not at all. My pleasure."

B.B.: Mr. Glee, Saiko Shihan has always taught us not to be tight or stiff. Stay loose and maintain a relaxed posture until the instant of impact. At that moment you unleash all your power and speed. In any sport or martial art, if you are still or tight you can't do that. Your technique will be slowed and weakened. Beginners always tense up because they are trying so hard to learn a new skill. They overdo it. They try to use more muscle power than the technique requires. But after training for a while they relax and their speed and timing improve. And because they are not wasting so much energy by tensing up, their endurance improves. So why are your muscles so tight when you punch and kick?

Budo Boy - Interview



- B.G.:** Well, this is entertainment.
- B.B.:** Oh, so you're an entertainer. That's why you always remove your top and show your physique. Yeah, yeah, image is everything. Many people think you are a real master.
- B.G.:** Yes, I am a master. A very important aspect of my business is to convey a strong image to the public.
- B.B.:** Mr. Glee, would you mind punching me in the stomach?
- B.G.:** What? You want me to punch your stomach?
- B.B.:** Yeah, go ahead.

B.G.: Assiiyaahh! Heeeehh! Whooooohhh!

Humph! I opened my eyes and looked up and Saiko Shihan was Standing over me with one foot resting heavily on my stomach. What a dream that was.

“What’s the matter with you? What was all the screaming about? Did you have a nightmare?” he asked.

“No sir! Osu!” I moaned (the pressure of his foot on my stomach almost causing me to hurl my dumplings).

Anyway, that’s the end of that story. Saiko Shihan told me that if you train long enough with dedication and perseverance you will learn to use your legs, hips, waist, torso, arms and chin - your entire body - in a harmonious and fluid motion when executing any technique. And in time you can tell the difference between true fighting and just faking. If you train in World Oyama Karate for a while you can watch boxing, football, ice skating, tennis or whatever and tell who is a great athlete and who isn't. If you train long enough you can tell who the real deal is and who's a fake. You can read his attitude, his courage (will he give up or fight to the end) his strengths, his weaknesses, the effectiveness of his technique, etc. That’s why we train. You guys remember that!

Anyway, don't eat too much. Don't think about it. Don't talk about it. Just sweat! Challenge yourself. You are beautiful.

Bye for now. I'm hungry again.

“Yo, Tony!”

空手物語 Champion's Road “Karate Monogatari”

by 拳気 一
ken ki hajime

Chapter 4

Continue ...

Lucky me. Here I was again, on the front row, directly to the left of Sensei Ken. Toby unfortunately was right in front of him, so at least I knew things could be worse. “Stretch” said Sensei, and dropped down into a full split. It was incredible how effortlessly he slid down to the floor. I put both hands

down onto the mat to balance myself as I tried to stretch my legs down. Toby moved his body forward a little, to make his legs closer to the floor. “Don't cheat!” said Sensei Ken. Toby's face was red with sweat. I guess that's what he gets for drinking all that beer.

Ken looked around to all the students. “Listen to your body!” he said. “Talk to your body! You guys are lucky to all have very healthy bodies.”

This struck me as very true. It wasn't something I thought about all the time. Usually we don't listen to our bodies. But how was I supposed to talk to my body now? It couldn't even

Champion's Road “Karate Monogatari” 空手物語 ... Continue

move! My ligament had so much pain I'm sure it couldn't listen to me if it wanted to. I tried it anyway. In my mind I ask “How are you doing, leg?” then “What's up, back?”

“Nothing!” it said to me. “What's the matter with you? Have you gone crazy today?” Our conversation was interrupted when Ken said:

“Turn to your left!”

I was startled by the thud to my left as Toby crashed onto the mat. I tried to stumble my way around to my left side, and managed not to crash. “Don't spoil your body!” Ken yelled to the class. In the mean time, I was thinking what a good job I must have been doing. My body was screaming: “Help! Help!” so it couldn't be getting spoiled at all!

After around five or seven minutes Ken told us to stand up. The pain was over... for now. Stretching seemed to me more difficult than punching. But I guess this is a very important part of karate.

Chapter 5

Sensei Ken told us to form two lines. He said “*Hadari Ashi Mae – Kumite No Tachi*.” I didn't understand a word of it, but I copied what he did, moving into a fighting stance. “*Hiza Geri*.” I just opened my mouth and tried to copy the sounds he made. “Knee kick.” Finally some words I understand.

I expected this to be easy. I imagined that I just needed to pick my knee straight up forcefully, but this was totally different. He tried to demonstrate that we must thrust the knee forward, into a target, and not up into the air. He explained that we must use the power of our upper body, moving its momentum back, to match the forward thrust of our knee.

He explained that, in all techniques, even punches and blocks, all power must come from the stance, the legs. In all kick techniques, the upper body is very important; the hands must be used to *read* the technique. You must use the full body for effective technique. If the shoulder and upper body are stiff, he explained, you are going to lose balance, and your kick techniques will not be sharp or powerful. One can easily lose balance between the body above and below the waist.

To make a sharp, strong knee kick, he explained that we must use both feet as springs, pulling the upper body back to ensure a powerful forward thrust of the knee. “Most likely, beginner's mistake” he said in his broken English, and signaled for us to watch him. He demonstrated the knee kick just as I

had imagined it, thrusting his knee straight upward toward the ceiling, into his chest. He showed how, when done incorrectly, a student's balance might shift entirely forward, causing him to fall onto the foot that had kicked. I couldn't quite catch every word of his explanation, but his movements spoke volumes, and truly helped me to understand.

Now it was our turn to kick. He counted “one, two, three, turn,” as I clumsily attempted to knee kick with my right, then left, then right knee, over and over. Of course, I made exactly the mistakes he warned us about, falling forward onto my kicking foot each time. I knew that this must just be the simplest of techniques, but to me it was pretty hard.

My mistakes seemed bad until I saw another white belt, in front of me once we turned around, kick his knee up far too high, and flip onto the mat, flat on his back. “Whoops!” said Sensei Ken, but nobody laughed. He stood up quickly, red faced and embarrassed.

After the knee kick, we practiced the front snap kick (*Mae Geri*) and roundhouse kick (*Mawashi Geri*). When we practiced our punches, I thought maintaining balance was difficult, but kicking made this even more of a challenge.

After we watched Ken and attempted several roundhouse kicks, Ken stopped to explain to Toby a major mistake. Toby had been lifting his knee straight upward into his chest before kicking. Ken demonstrated the correct form: the leg lifted to the side of the body before pivoting toward the target and kicking with the top of the foot. “You need to stretch more,” I understood him to say to Toby, who could only kick about waist-high. “Osu!” said Toby.

I found myself able to kick a little higher than Toby – almost to the face area. Sensei Ken and some of the others pointed out my mistakes and tried to correct my form. With each adjustment I made, I could feel more power and balance in my kick. I tried harder every time to get it right. Even though I couldn't always understand Sensei Ken's English, I learned to listen with my body, to watch his movements and replicate his technique.

I am truly fascinated. Never before had a workout been such an exercise of the mind and body, all at once. I found myself challenged physically, as I attempted to keep my body moving despite my exhaustion. My mind was also challenged, as I tried to correctly execute each punch and kick.

It had been an hour. Ken signaled for us to begin the final stretches. Now that it was over, the whole thing seemed to have gone by so quickly! My uniform was soaked in sweat. When we had finished stretching, Ken nodded to Jim who

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said powerfully: “Sit on your knees! *Mokuso* – close your eyes.” I closed my eyes, put my hands to my side, and this time I truly meditated.

During the meditation at the beginning of class, I was so nervous that I couldn't clear my mind of my worries and anxieties. But this was different. “Open your eyes,” he said after a little while. “*Makuso Yamei. Saiko Shihan Ni Rai. Sempei Ni Rai. Otagui Ni Rai.*” With each “*Ni Rai*,” we all bowed with a decisive “*Osu!*” The term was becoming very natural to me.

Toby and I walked up the stairs to the dressing room. There were two showers there, but we decided to just get dressed to leave. Sitting in the car, driving back to the apartment, I felt so good inside. I was excited to feel so exhausted. “I think karate seems pretty cool,” I told Toby.

Toby seemed excited too, but a little unsure. He talked such big stories before, about his previous experience; now I think he felt a little embarrassed by his sweat and his stiff limbs. I felt that something in my body had been awakened. Or maybe that something had discovered me. Something about the smell of sweat in the dojo made me feel exhilarated and powerful. I thought about the possibilities of one day being a black belt – like Ken. That night, the beer tasted like heaven, well-deserved after a tough workout.

Chapter 6

The next morning, I got out of bed and my body was aching all over. I was surprised, because I felt exhausted last night, but didn't feel the aching that I felt this morning. I thought I was in great shape. I had been running, lifting weights consistently, two times a week, every week for a while now. I thought that I could handle this. But ... we must have been using different muscles in karate class, because this pain was very real.

I looked at the clock. 7:30 am. I had to be at class at 8:00, but now I could barely move myself out of bed. My chest and inner thighs were sore and stiff. I rolled out of bed with a groan and struggled to the shower. I managed a quick wash, only to realize my stomach was growling, when I came out of the shower. I found some pizza in the refrigerator. It looked a couple of days old. Smells ok... tastes delicious!

I drank some milk – fortunately not out of date. I remember a chef I saw once on television who said “if you're hungry enough, anything tastes delicious.” I guess he was right, I thought as I scarfed down my breakfast of pizza and milk. This morning, I felt more genuinely hungry than I had in a while.

My professor of English was kind of old and, well, honestly, heavy. She had a way of staring her students down that forced everyone to be alert, even during especially boring days in class. I had a strategy, though: I always find a couple of big guys sitting together, and squeeze into a desk behind them. This always helped me get in at last a few minutes of quality shut-eye.

I had my karate book (*Kyoten*) with me. I saw it peeking up out at me from my backpack, which rested open on the floor: VOLUME 1. I watched my professor closely as I sneak it out of my bag and in between the pages of our thick English text. Very sneaky. I looked over yesterday's stances and kicks, and my body spoke to me a bit, reminding me of the pain that those kicks have caused it.

My body ached, but somehow I still couldn't wait for the next lesson. When the class got up to leave, I awoke from my trance and got my things together.

Outside, the sky was blue and the air was cool with the approaching autumn. The sunshine was still bright and felt warm on my skin, but the occasional breeze reminded me that the seasons were changing. It was exhilarating. I lay on the grass and was entranced by the beautiful day. Then I heard a thud at my side. It was Toby. “*Osu!*” was the first thing I said to him.

He looked at me with an awkward expression, like he didn't know what I was talking about at first, but eventually got it. He rolled his eyes. I could see the soreness in his face, and he grunted with every movement. “What's the matter?” I asked him with a smile.

“What do you mean?” he demanded. “I couldn't even get out of bed this morning!”

“Yeah – me neither.” I confessed. “But you know, I feel kind of good about it!”

“Feel good about it? Whatever, man. I almost decided to stay in bed all day. I barely made it to class. What's their motto at the karate place? Just sweat?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“They ought to think of changing it to ‘Just pain’!”

“C'mon, Toby,” I said. “It's not so bad! Remember that brown belt, Jim? He said it'd take a few weeks for our bodies to get conditioned.”

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"Yeah, but..."

When I told him about my inner thigh and chest muscles aching, he chimed in with an exaggerated: "I couldn't move my leg even an inch! I had nightmares all night, with that Japanese counting, 'Ich, Ni, San,' being forced to stretch. It was awful!"

Toby noticed the book in my bag. "What the matter with you, man?"

"I'm just curious, that's all. Anyway, are you coming with me to class again tonight?"

After a great deal of Toby's complaining, I convinced him that he should go back. I reminded him of what Jim told us: that we need to keep pushing on even when we get sore. Toby looked at me with a bit of hesitation, but finally stutered "Yeah. Yeah, sure I'm going. Just let me know when you want to leave."

After a brief afternoon nap back at my apartment, I called Toby. He answered the phone like someone who had been woken up in the middle of the night from a deep sleep. He clearly had just woken up. "C'mon Bruce Lee! Get up! Let's go!"

"Just give me a little more time," he groaned. "I'll go. I promise."

"Get up!"

We walk in the dojo and were immediately hit by the same smell of sweat that had struck me with such power yesterday. But I was more struck by someone who I had almost forgotten about. Rachel, the girl with the brown belt and the long blonde ponytail was stretching and talking to another girl, who was also getting ready for class. "Osu!" she said politely as she looked up toward us while we walked inside. "I'm glad you decided to start!" she said. I was so excited that she remembered me.

"Yeah, we started yesterday," Toby said excitedly. His attitude had significantly changed now that he'd seen her. I could barely drag him in here, but now he seemed ready to fight.

We went upstairs to get dressed. I still didn't know how to tie the belt. Toby helped me out a little, and now we were both ready to go. I looked in the large mirror at myself, and I felt like a gladiator, with the fancy uniform and shin pads.

In the little time before we began the class, I wanted to make the brave move to talk with Rachel. She was practicing a kick, though, and I didn't want to interrupt her. So I just stretched. I noticed Toby looking at himself in the mirror while I stretched. "Toby - you look like Bruce Lee!"

"Shaddup!"

Sensei Ken came onto the mat like a force, and the atmosphere suddenly transformed. There was no room for my jokes now. Now there was tension, a feeling of seriousness, but excitement. He was a mass of muscle, an intimidating presence. He glanced briefly at Toby and me. I think I caught a glimpse of surprise in his eyes that Toby and I were here again so soon. He nodded, maybe with a little bit of respect. He said "You guys read the book?"

To be Continue ...



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