

THE MAKIWARA

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE AOKA

Mentoring

By Grandmaster Mitch Kobylanski, AOKA President

**February
2009**

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Mentoring is not a new concept but it is one that is not utilized to its fullest. As an instructor, you are always mentoring your students but how many of your students mentor others in the class. It is not necessary to be a Black Belt in order to be a mentor.

There are many times that a Kyu can also be a mentor. Students always look up to those that are ahead of them. We should all keep our eyes open for the fellow students that can use some additional help. Teaching is the prime aspect that gives all of us an in depth understanding of the knowledge that we have acquired.

Life comes at each and everyone of us fast and furious. There is always something else that keeps us from concentrating on the task at hand. Being a mentor not only helps your fellow student but it also prepares you for the eventual black belt. Start now and see if you don't learn more about yourself, your karate and your fellow students. Be a mentor.

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newsletter@aoka.org

Why Do We Practice Kata?

By Jack Harvey, Nidan, Charlotte, NC

Are you tired or perhaps even bored from practicing KATA? Have you wondered why we spend so much time working on KATA as part of our Isshin-Ryu training when we could be doing something more exciting? Have you wondered what relationship the practice of kata has to fighting? To self-defense? I have. When I was contemplating becoming involved in martial arts, the main motivation was to learn to defend myself...kick, punch and (hopefully) block. When karate training became a reality for me, I was excited. Finally I was going to learn how to fight. As time went by, it became apparent to me that we spent a lot of time on other things, such as KATA, rather than SPARRING (which was, in my mind, the learning to fight that had brought me to the class in the first place). This was an Isshin-Ryu class. Had I made a mistake? What if I had chosen another style of karate, perhaps a Japanese or Korean style? Or even an eclectic "American" style? Would it have been the same? Where would the training time have been spent? Over the years, I have been involved in several styles of karate and guess what?! A LOT of

of training time is spent on KATA! This MUST mean that the practice of KATA is very important. Let's take a look at why this is so.

We'll start with a definition that I picked up along the way that has been meaningful to me, and includes several of the important reasons for the practice of kata. "Kata is a formal exercise which combines individual thrusts, blocks and kicks into a set form so that we have a route by which to practice our form, speed, balance, strength and timing, all at the same time." Let's look at the components of this definition.

Each kata is a formal exercise which may be relatively simple (Seisan) or more advanced (Kusanku), and may be done with empty-hands or with a weapon. That is, each kata is a prescribed set of movements...stances, kicks, punches and blocks...executed as an encounter occurs against an imaginary opponent(s).

Kata practice gives an opportunity to practice our form. Our "form" includes our stance, posture (balance) and the correct execution of all techniques. So by practicing kata we have an opportunity to perfect our stances. This includes the correct foot position, weight distribution and what I have been taught to call our "frame." To maintain our "frame" means that we do not lean during the execution of a technique. In order to maintain a correct frame, the ear should be over the shoulder, the shoulder over the hips and the knees slightly bent. That is, your body should be straight and you should be relaxed. If this "frame" is not maintained, we are off balance...even if only slightly. And of course we all know that "a person's unbalance is the same as a weight." Form also encompasses the correct execution of our techniques. Thus, in kata we have an opportunity, in a practice situation, to make sure that our fist is formed correctly, that we are focusing the strike

(hand or foot), that the technique is striking with the correct "striking surface" (for example, the blade of the foot on kick #3) and that techniques are executed with power.

In kata we have an opportunity to practice speed and timing. Developing speed does not mean that you are going to be going thru the kata as fast as you can. I'm sure that you have heard this before: It IS possible to do the kata too fast. Speed and timing are closely related. The result of this is that the technique itself will be executed with speed, but it will also be executed at the right time. When is the right time? That is going to be up to you and will become clearer as you gain an understanding of the particular kata. In general, when you engage the opponent the techniques will happen in a "rapid fire" fashion until the opponent is finished. During the encounter you should consider what effect the strike has on the opponent and time your next strike accordingly. For example, if the strike would cause the opponent to bend over, time your next strike giving time for this reaction to take place before executing the next technique. Said another way, you don't want to punch where the opponent SHOULD be, but where he IS based on his reaction to the previous strike. Yes, the "action to strike is when the opportunity presents itself" but this actions needs to be timed appropriately to have the greatest impact.

Ok, tell me again, what does this have to do with fighting (sparring) and/or self defense? Because we have spent the time working on kata...kicks, punches, strikes and stances... we have gotten these techniques into our "muscle memory" by sheer repetition. They can be executed without really thinking. This allows us to block a technique coming at our head as if we were on "auto pilot". We can also execute a counter technique in the same manner. From a self-defense perspective, it does not mean that we would do

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Seisan kata if faced with a self-defense situation. It does mean that the techniques which have been drilled into our memory by practicing Seisan can be extracted from the kata and applied for self-defense.

In conclusion, practicing kata is a vital and integral component to our study of Isshin-Ryu. By practicing kata we have an opportunity in a “safe” environment to perfect (a life-long pursuit) our balance, technique, speed and timing of our techniques. This practice allows our muscles to “memorize” these movements so that they can take

place on a sub-conscious level...that is, without our thinking about their execution. Within the kata, these techniques are executed against imaginary opponents with the karate-ka facing in specific directions. For sparring and self-defense situations, these would be “extracted” from the kata and applied to the real opponent in the direction from which the attack was being initiated.

Look forward to your kata practice realizing that as your kata improves, other aspects of your Isshin-Ryu training also improve.



Cardio Karate at Toshikai Dojo of Ottawa

For several years now, Toshikai dojo of Ottawa has been offering cardio-karate classes to the community. Cardio-karate is our name for the melding of the hand and leg strikes with a cardio workout. It is a high energy hour where the sweat pours and students get re-energized. Many fitness clubs and martial arts centres offer these types of classes under different labels such as cardio kick boxing or kick ‘n fit. When they were first organized, Toshikai’s cardio classes were offered as advanced training sessions for the traditional Isshin Ryu students. After a short time, the classes evolved beyond the traditional techniques and were opened up to anyone. They quickly became popular with friends and family members and it expanded the Toshikai circle.

On top of being a lot of fun, the cardio karate classes offer a great interval type workout. The Toshikai approach is to change up the techniques and rotate between different activities or stations. Where the fitness club workout will tend to repeat on a foundation of basic kicks and strikes and simple combinations, our classes try to work in more ad-

vanced techniques over time and to help students progress into more complex and challenging combos. Towards the end of an eight week session students will be introduced to combos that bring together three, four, or more of the kicks and strikes.

Toshikai offers two classes a week, each offering a slightly different regimen. Sensei Tim Leonard has students moving between stations of hanging heavy bags, floor bags, chin-up bars, and a speed bag during his Monday night classes. For my Saturday morning class, I use heavy striking shields and focus mitts for striking drills on top of core strengthening and balance exercises. Both the Saturday and Monday classes have the same overall structure. Using music in the background, each starts with a warm-up to get some heat in the joints and muscles and to help with flexibility, and the classes always ends with a chi replenishing, sweat pouring, exhausting series of punch and kick outs. When you think that you can’t go anymore ... you find that you can. Crazy! Everyone leaves the classes void of any en-

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ergy. You are completely spent. Each class end with some stretching.

Each class has its advantages. Sensei Tim's class, with the hanging heavy bags and grounded water bags offers stationary targets which you can move around, and which are good for solo work. Heavy bags allow students to hit harder without any restraint or fear of injuring a partner. Of course bad technique and over-enthusiasm can result in twisted wrists, scuffed knuckles or a bent toe. The speed bag drills are also an excellent opportunity to fully develop eye-hand coordination and twitch muscle response.

Nothing beats 2 minutes on a speed bag. The chin up bars and triceps dip stations also allow for focused muscle development. Along with the speed bag and the pull up bars, a Tuesday class will usually involve students individually working through a dozen stations on 2-3 minute rounds with 30 second changes. There are four heavy bag stations where students work different combos, a ground and pound, a mirror station to focus on form, and a cardio station.

As any student will tell you, the Saturday classes are just as exhausting. The partner work with focus mitts and striking shields at my classes make the workouts much more dynamic. Instead of moving around a somewhat static bag, working with a partner and target shields gets the students moving across the floor and around their partners. On a heavy bag you can change up your target zones—hit high and low, for instance—but, shield work takes that one step further. A partner can move the focus mitts around

forcing the striker to be more aware and more accurate. Plus moving across and around the floor adds extra cardio to workout. As anyone who has sparred knows, chasing someone around a ring is exhausting.

Shield or focus mitt drills require coordination with a partner and more individual coordination of movements. It can be slower at first because working with a partner and a shield requires more control and some restraint---depending on the partner of course. However, that self-control means make partner drills with shields a good preparation for kumite. As well, having to

hold or shift a position prior to striking a shield develops balance and stabilizer muscles. In Isshinryu we know that unbalance is the same as a weight.



In addition to improving fitness, both my Saturday class and Sensei Tim's Monday workouts add important elements to martial arts training and each have their advantages. Heavy bag workouts allow you to work alone and to hit harder and perhaps faster. Striking shield and mitt drills with a partner being more dynamic, develop timing, accuracy and balance and add a level of realism to the training. In the end, both shield and heavy bag drills are crucial to martial arts training. That is why both are used extensively in boxing and MMA gyms to train fighters.

In addition to improving specific techniques for traditional martial artists, cardio karate classes dramatically improve overall fitness, particularly baseline cardio for all students.

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It is a great interval type training and great for coordination and core strength. For our non-martial artist students, the classes provide confidence and power that are indispensable in self-defence scenarios. At Toshikai dojo, we have found that the cardio classes have offered an entry point for people into traditional martial arts training, as well.



From the standpoint of traditional Isshin Ryu development, Toshikai's cardio-karate classes have proven to be an adjunct to almost indispensable adjunct to the develop-

ment of students. We have seen improved sparring stamina, improved quickness to the target and accuracy as well as an improved understanding and application of techniques from the kata. It is essentially another way of practicing the techniques that we use in Isshinryu and other forms of karate. Some techniques are altered and some are added but it is at its heart, martial arts training. It trains the body to punch and kick hard, fast and on target. There is nothing wrong with adding that to a traditional karate regimen.



Toshikai Dojo of Ottawa

Wishes to thank all participants attending the Okinawa Goju Ryu seminar led by Sensei Mike Sywyk, 6th Dan held on Sunday Jan 31, 2010 from 2:00 – 4:00 PM.

Those who attended were trained on Seiunchin Kata – Bunkai & Rensoku Kumite Application of the kata & 2 person kata.

The Toshikai Dojo, students and instructors thanks the attendees and Sensei Mike Sywyk for conducting this seminar.. Those who attended seized this great opportunity to increase their skill and knowledge by training with our Martial Arts family and friends.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
20 Mar 2010	Athens, TN	38th Annual Athens Karate Games
27 Mar 2010	Dover, DE	OIKKA Friendship Tournament
10 Apr 2010	Nashville, TN	IKA Isshinryu National Black Belt Championships
24 Apr 2010	King George, VA	7th Annual King George Karate Isshin-Ryu Open Championship
22 May 2010	Canton, MI	5th Annual Metro Detroit Open Karate Tournament
	Knoxville, TN	31st Annual Isshin-Ryu Hall of Fame



Promotions

The following were promoted on November
28, 2009 at Mady's Chikara dojo
in Windsor, Ontario

Ted Sommerfield	Go Dan	Paulo Gallant	Sho Dan
Bill Chappus	Go Dan	Albert Pecorraro (Ohio)	Sho Dan
Matt Jordan	Yon Dan	Cassey Froese	Sho Dan Jr.
Kaitlyn Brown	San Dan	Samantha Froese	Sho Dan Jr.
Chucky Mady	San Dan	Suzie Eren	Sho Dan Jr.
Dave Kelica	Ni Dan	Jordan Marlein	Sho Dan Jr.
Ken Steele	Ni Dan		

Neil Smith, Norfolk, VA was promoted to Shodan in January.

Kyu Promotions

Teri Diederich - Ik kyu
Milomir Suvira - Ik kyu
Denise Santana - Yon kyu
Scott Leslie - Roko kyu
Emily Diederich - Shichi kyu
Jessica Strunk - White with Green Stripe



Back To Basics

By Master Tim Boykin, Charleston, SC

I teach self-defense techniques to a student the moment they enter the dojo because I feel that self-defense is one of the cornerstones of the martial arts. Once a student obtains the rank of Green Belt, I make it a point to return to the Isshinryu basics to demonstrate fundamentals, including tai sabaki (body shifting), situational awareness and systematic movement. Isshinryu basics have always been the proper vehicle to teach and demonstrate advanced principles and concepts.

For instance, one of my favorite techniques to demonstrate these principals is basic kick number two: the side/front snap kick. This particular technique teaches the student to defend against two simultaneous attackers, one directly in front and one to the side. The basic premise is to maintain your hands (and torso) towards the forward attacker while shifting your hips and head toward the side attacker. I like to take things one step further, by throwing in a third attacker (grabbing via an over the arms bear hug).

Principal (1): Drop in your stance while maintaining a posture (hands up/kumae). If you miss an incoming technique, the fight is over. A proper kamae for layered defense is critical to your survival.

Principal (2): Turn your head and shift to the left (to deliver a right side front snap kick). By shifting to the left into a cat stance

and ONLY moving the right leg and hips, you move AWAY from the attacker (increasing your defensive distance), move OFF AXIS for protection from the frontal attack.

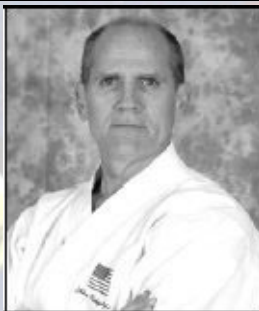
Principal (3): When you're grabbed from the rear, assume that the grab is over the arms and at the elbows. Based upon this premise, you may maintain your arms in a kamae with little problem. You may then use the concept of tai sabaki or body shifting. By shifting your weight to the left, you are actually shifting your HIPS to move the rear attacker off balance. The attacker holds on, but shifts WITH YOU and opens your arms for an empi strike to the rear with either elbow.

Let's put it together. Parry to the front against a right hand punch while shifting to the left with your hips and shifting your head. Deliver a side snap kick to the right. This will get you out of range (from the side), take you off axis for the forward attack and off balance the rear attacker for a follow-on empi strike. You can then move forward and use the parry to move into a wrist lock/strike and move between the two attacker for an escape. Multiple follow on techniques are optional at this point. Use what you need to get away and live to fight another day.



Hanshi Ridgely Abele, 9th Dan and Chief Instructor of Shuri-Ryu Karatedo, passed away 10 December following a long battle with cancer.

Hanshi Abele will long be remembered as a tireless promoter of the Martial Arts as it was meant to be. He travelled extensively and helped develop Shuri-Ryu around the world. One of his many



Ridgely Abele, 9th Dan

books, Karatedo: Art-Sport-Science, has become a treatise for the practice of Shuri-Ryu Karate.

Perhaps his greatest achievement was the International Martial Arts Symposium. An annual event bringing together hundreds of martial artists from around the world to train in all systems and styles of Martial Arts.