



The Isshinryu Way Everything Karate & Kobudo

Isshinryu
Worldwide

Volume 21 Issue 1

Spring 2025

The Best Kata

What makes your best Kata the best Kata?

It might be the one that feels the strongest, the one that challenges you the most, or the one that you feel has the most effective techniques. It may change regularly.

Ultimately, it's the one that you want to practice the most. And the more you do it, the better it becomes. As practitioners of Isshinryu, we have many Kata to choose from when we start practicing. What's important is that we train and train regularly.

Now that we've established that the best Kata is the one you want to practice, the way you practice becomes crucial. If you really want to do your best Kata, it must be done with that intention. Every time you practice a Kata, it should be to improve.

Improvement may come in many forms, you might do it stronger, sharper, or quicker than previous times. However, in most cases it will be smaller and focused in your mind.

The biggest improvements you can make in your Kata are the visualization of the techniques. Imagining the application of the movements will affect how you do the techniques and makes them infinitely better.

As you visualization the movements and the movements of opponents, steps become tighter, body mechanics sharpen and anyone watching your Kata can see your understanding.

Every day is another day to really make it your best Kata, keep your mind active and away during training and every day you can do your best Kata.

Upcoming Events

Events

May 2025—Isshinryu Expo—Thunder Bay, ON, Canada

May 30th—50 Sunsui, Webinar

July 2025—Isshinryu Hall of Fame—Gatlinburg, TN, USA

Inside this Issue:

Karate and Culture 2

Book Review: Art of Expressing the Human Body 4

Chitora Promotions 5

Isshinryu Hall of Fame 6

Visiting the Embukai 8

Essential Isshinryu is available!

For more information on the first Canadian Isshinryu book, visit www.essentialisshinryu.com!

Gratitude builds Strength



Karate and Culture

By Mark Ivanowich

Culture shock occurs when someone is put into an environment that is different from that which they grew up in. When an adult joins a martial arts club, especially when that person is without prior experience with Asian culture, they could experience this shock. Even though the dojo is down the street from the local boxing gym, martial arts clubs may receive preconceived judgment from the average uninitiated North American. Let's break down some martial arts concepts, and explore some cultural differences to understand what makes Karate unique. With this knowledge, we hope to dispel judgment and improve our training to become a better karateka.

In Japanese martial arts, etiquette and formality are highly emphasized. There are specific ways to bow, addressing the instructor, fellow students, and even a proper way to enter or exit a training space. For an American newcomer, these customs may seem superfluous, since casual or informal interactions are the norm. These customs are crucial to showing respect for the teacher, fellow students, and the art itself. Bowing is a gesture of respect in certain religions, certain Asian and European social settings, and as deference towards royalty. In Japanese culture, bowing can be used as a silent greeting, or to mark the beginning and end of important interactions such as ceremonies. To show focus and self-control, karate students should calmly bow before and after performing kata (choreographed forms) or sparring. Since American gyms tend to have more casual and relaxed etiquette, confusion could easily arise. For example, a boxing student could vent their frustrations in a boxing ring, leaving others to question if they were the cause of a personal grievance. A friendly relationship with an instructor could lead a student to believe they are waived of membership fees. Bowing and practised formality are powerful social tools that can help separate personal matters from professional ones. When bowing into the dojo, students should leave their problems at the door to focus solely on training and cooperation.

Japanese terminology is commonly used in martial arts, which may be unfamiliar to American students. Although most sensei (instructors) take the time to explain the meaning of these terms, it can still be challenging to apply them correctly. Learning these terms can enhance one's understanding of certain techniques and core principles. Some karateka even find that learning the Japanese language can be a valuable asset, both inside and outside the dojo. The English tongue has 24 consonant sounds and around 20 vowel sounds as a basis for the language. Meanwhile, Japanese has only 15 consonant and 5 vowel sounds. Because of how the language is structured, Japanese has many homonyms, or words that sound the same but have different meanings. This requires native listeners to pay close attention to context in order to understand what the speaker is saying. In martial arts practice, knowing the language could convey subtleties that cannot be easily translated. For example, a senpai (senior student) could explain that "hachi-ji dachi" is "horse stance" in instruction. A Japanese learner would know that "-ji" is often used when describing time, inferring a closer translation of "eight-o'clock stance". Just like the art of language, English and Japanese fighting styles have a basic building blocks which can be expanded into countless practical applications. Learning the original language of a style can prime you with better understanding.

Karate has a specific dress code that must be followed. The karate gi (uniform) must be clean, neat, and have an obi (belt) properly tied. American gyms do not have a significant dress code and instead give their students the freedom to wear whatever is comfortable. Most martial arts indicate a student's experience with coloured belts, with a black belt at the end. Having a clean gi is not just a matter of personal hygiene but also demonstrates consideration of others when part of a group. Some martial arts styles require junior ranks to wear a fully white uniform to symbolize their purity and potential, similar to a blank canvas. Inexperienced observers mistakenly believe that the black belt is the final belt to earn. Martial arts practitioners know that martial arts do not end with a belt or a trophy, but is actually a lifelong journey. There should always be due respect towards others of



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By Mark Ivanowich

all ranks, including those with no rank at all. The martial arts dress code serves as a visual reminder of our origins: we all had to start somewhere. When wearing a clean gi with a belt honestly representative of your experience, it makes you more approachable to a partner looking for assistance.

Japanese culture places a great importance on hierarchy and respect for authority. In the dojo, this hierarchy is established with the uniform's coloured belt progression, with the sensei at the top. Even among sensei, the hierarchy is refined further with masters and grand masters. Karateka are expected to show deference to their teacher and seniors, accepting their word as correct. Japan has a dense homogeneous populace: the people prefer not to stand out as to create disorder, as any deviation from the norm creates problems for the many people around them.

This is different from American culture, where respect must first be given before reciprocated, information undergoes heavy scrutiny, and opportunities are first-come-first-serve. New students may find it challenging to navigate hierarchy, especially if they come from an environment that praises freedom of speech, or see it necessary to question powers of authority. In the dojo, hierarchy creates a system of support for learning martial artists: a learner may ask an equal-or-higher peer for assistance, while the sensei will always have a definitive answer. The Japanese martial arts hierarchy is helpful for those who are focused on the independent training of kata and bunkai (analysis/disassembly), but not necessarily competitive goals.

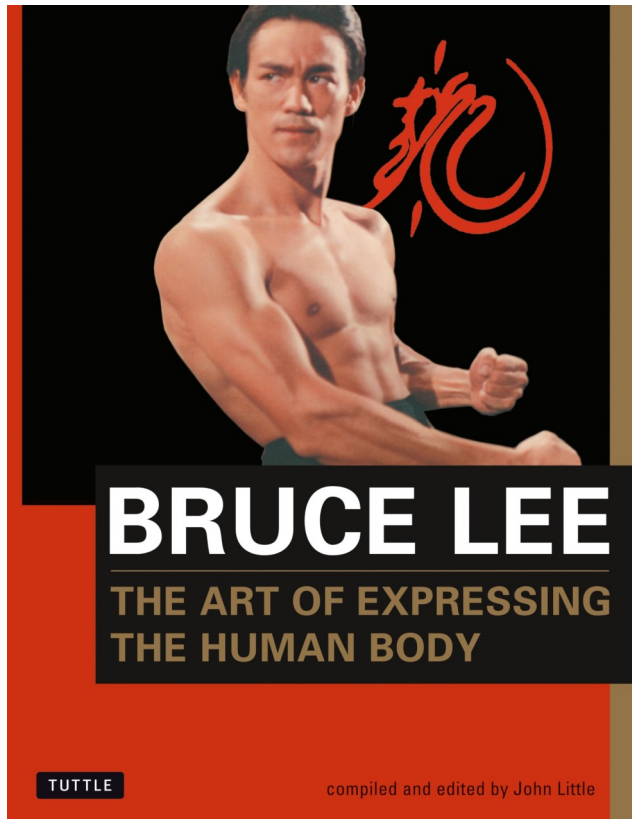
In Japanese martial arts, there is a strong emphasis on spiritual aspects of training. The Karate Spirit has nothing to do with religion or supernatural beliefs: The Karate Spirit represents a set of values and attitudes which can be applied both in- and outside the dojo. With the rise of instant gratification and inflated rewards in modern society, introspection has become a foreign concept. The western world is built upon capitalism; American students may think of

their training as a transaction, where accomplishment can be purchased with raw brute force. The Karate Spirit is courage, perseverance, respect, humility, and discipline: more simply defined as 'mindfulness'. Practising mindfulness has proven to decrease anxiety, stress, and lower blood pressure. Mindfulness paired with physical exercise is not only a great for one's health, but also promotes confidence to tackle new challenges. A karateka should take brief moments between activities to question themselves of where they can improve. A student should listen to what their body and emotions are saying in response to a workout. An American gym may provide similar support in the form of a coach or a personal trainer by tailoring new challenges based on the student's goals. A personal trainer is an external approach to the same objective. As some martial artists are not as competitive as others, some students may not require any external support.

In summary, new students may see the language and hierarchy as outdated. Other students may think the white uniform and gestures are symbols of a religious sect. In reality, karate and other martial arts are highly structured systems built over hundreds of years of tradition, culture, and mutual respect. By breaking down these aspects of karate, we learned that martial arts students should learn terminology and cultivate a focused mindset. We also learned that martial arts students should represent themselves honestly, following the hierarchy to create a system of support. Lastly, we learned that while it may seem strange to a newcomer, karate's structure is mostly rooted from respect. By keeping these aspects in mind, Americans can develop a strong foundation for their martial arts practice and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and the art.

Book Review: Art of Expressing the Human Body

By Ben Lamoureux



The Art of Expressing the Human Body by John Little is a compendium of various exercises and routines used by Bruce Lee throughout his career.

The book draws heavily from Lee's own notes, as well as interviews with people who knew him, in order to give an accurate account of how Lee built his impressive physique. After some opening general remarks, much of the book is taken up by descriptions of the exercises Lee commonly used, organized by the muscle group they were designed to strengthen (forearms, abdominals, etc.), as well as other goals, such as improving overall flexibility. The book closes with a collection of routines and schedules taken from Lee's personal notes and training diaries.

As far as the exercises themselves go, most of what is presented in the book is not particularly unique or unusual. Few exercises will be unfamiliar to those who have already taken part in strength or fitness training. Furthermore, for the exercises which are less familiar, it is often difficult to discern how ex-

actly the exercise should be performed based solely on a written description. As such, as a source for learning specific exercises, the book has limited value.

However, as noted in the foreword by Linda Lee Cadwell, Lee's widow, the process that Lee employed in his training was more important than any individual exercise he used. Lee saw each workout session as a learning opportunity, experimenting with a wide variety of exercises he could in order to find those that would produce the best results, while also reading widely to learn more about the human body. As such, understanding the how and why behind his training is just as important as the what. This can be seen in various anecdotes throughout the book; in one example, Lee read a study on the beneficial effect of weight training for swimmers, and applied the insight – that one should train for an activity using greater resistance than will be present in the activity itself – to his own martial arts training. As such, much of the value of the book comes from seeing the specific ways that Lee used and combined the exercises described – for example, that he would often alternate between general cardio training exercises, such as jogging or skip rope, and martial arts training. There are also notes of caution, such as one anecdote where Lee damaged a nerve in his back by doing a set of “good mornings” without warming up first, serving as a reminder that we should always take care of our bodies while exercising.

The Art of Expressing the Human Body was certainly an interesting read, although it's not the kind of book I'd normally seek out. I'm sure most of the information about the exercises can probably be found elsewhere, but the idea of learning how Bruce Lee did it certainly provided an engaging enough hook. Anyone looking to improve their fitness can probably find something of value in the book. However, as noted in the book, what really set Lee apart was his dedication, his willingness to put in the time and effort and his refusal to place any mental limits on what he thought he could achieve. And that's not something that can be learned from a book.

Chitora Dojo Promotions

Chitora Dojo is happy to announce the following promotions took place on January 21st, 2025.

Allie Fenton—Yellow Stripe

Prince Sandre Juan—Rokyu—Yellow Belt



Expo Training By Richard Ruberto

Hello everyone. I will be one of many presenters at the upcoming Expo. As of right now I am co presenting with Mady Hanshi as well as presenting solo on Body Movement, Bo Basics and Sai Basics.

As always I avail myself to everyone interested.

Please don't hesitate to ask me for help. This year I will be traveling with two trusted friends:

Thomas Hudacko Shihan of Chung Do Kwan, who is also presenting, and Thomas O'Neill sensei, who

will be testing for Nanadan. Mr. O'Neill has been training since 1976 and has held Rokudan for nearly 11 yrs.

I look forward to attending, sharing, seeing my old friends and making new friends.

Isshinryu Hall of Fame 2024

By Tim Leonard and Susan Baldassi

The annual Isshinryu Hall of Fame is hosted in Gatlinburg, TN each summer and brings together the worldwide Isshinryu community to share and compete.

Here is a mix of Awards and competition results from the weekend.

Competition Results

You are never too old to compete!

Last summer, I got the chance to compete in a tournament. And what a tournament it was, the 2024 Isshinryu Hall of Fame tournament where Isshinryu from all around the world come to meet, learn and compete.

Never in my wildest imagination did I think I would ever enter a tournament again but I was inspired by the our team nicknamed The Gillette Crew to go for it as we all did. Pictured from left to right is Susan Balassi (first place in kata and second in weapons), Shannon Budiselic, Rick Wiljamaa (second in kata), Deb Fuchek (First in kata and second in weapons), Tim Leonard (First in kata and second in weapons), Tammy Trepanier Garant and Norm Rivard (third in kata) Evelyn McMahan also competed from Thunder Bay. Well done Team! Prepping for 2025 already!



Evelyn McMahan—Award Finalist

Evelyn McMahan of the Toshikai Dojo of Thunder Bay had an epic weekend at the Isshinryu Hall of Fame! She received an award as a finalist for the outstanding female martial artist under 12 years of age, competed in her first tournament and sang Oh Canada for over 500 people at the opening ceremonies !



(Continued on page 7)

Isshinryu Hall of Fame 2024

By Tim Leonard and Susan Baldassi

Toshikai Dojo Wins Dojo of the Year

Imagine a dojo where students of all backgrounds, including those who are neurodivergent, are not just welcomed but fully supported. As a guest instructor from Ottawa, I consistently leave the Toshikai Dojo feeling energised and inspired by the incredible vibe that permeates the space.

From 4-year-old beginners to 70-year-old veterans, each student at Toshikai is on a journey to optimise their martial arts skills and overall well-being. The classes are structured yet supportive, striking a perfect balance between learning and encouragement. Remarkably, Toshikai shares its dojo space with four other martial arts clubs, including Shotokan, Judo, Jiu Jitsu. This collaborative environment serves as a hub for promoting the benefits of martial arts, often leading to joint events and seminars that enrich the entire community. They host swim parties/social events with their dojo partners and model the spirit of collaboration.

The Toshikai Dojo has a strong presence in the community and has performed demos at the Japanese Matsuri Festival and other cultural events. As hosts of the international Martial Arts and Health Expo as well as international gradings conducted by Hanshi Mady, Toshikai dojo is a leader in Canada and in the global community of martial artists



Mike Fenton—Harold Long Spirit of Isshinryu

Mike's journey spans nearly four decades of committed training in Isshinryu Karate, supplemented by exploration of other martial arts disciplines. As an instructor and dojo owner for almost 30 years, he has cultivated a legacy of excellence, mentoring countless practitioners and nurturing a thriving martial arts community in Thunder Bay, ON, Canada. Notably, Mike's contributions extend beyond the dojo. He has tirelessly promoted Isshinryu across the North America, serving as an ambassador for the art and sharing his expertise generously. His leadership roles, include co-authoring "Essential Isshinryu", a comprehensive book that has been well-received in the Isshinryu community. He is the publisher of the Isshinryu Way Newsletter, celebrating the accomplishments of Isshinryu practitioners globally and sharing informative articles written by karateka. As well, Mike coordinates logistics for the International Blackbelt Gradings held at the Martial Arts and Health Expo and is a presenter at the event. Mike's achievements are numerous and commendable, from receiving prestigious awards such as the AOKA Dojo of the Year to organizing successful tournaments and seminars. His dedication to the spirit of Isshinryu, characterized by honor, loyalty, and courage, is truly exemplary.



Visiting the Embukai

By Tim Leonard

Sensei Advincula once again hosted the 2025 Embukai, based out of Carlsbad, California. This event has always been on my bucket list so Sensei Deb Fuchek and I made the trip and it did not disappoint.

Day one consisted of Sensei Advincula telling stories of what it was like to train in Okinawa with Master Shimabuku. Sixty blackbelts sat on the tatami in rapt attention for four hours, very difficult to describe the experience other than memorizing.

Day two and three consisted of seminars, Okinawan dancers, lectures and demonstrations. Little did we know that all participants were expected to do a demonstration to showcase their skills. With nerves abound, we teamed up with my old dojo mate Sensei Sean Wadelius (in picture) to perform a unique version of team Wansu with Sensei Deb doing empty hand, Sensei Sean wielding the sai and myself using tonfa. I think we got the nod of approval from Sensei Advincula, which was the ultimate compliment.

Sunday evening ended with a little Sayanora party hosted by Sensei Heather Rancic. Such a great event and something I wish to repeat.

Pictured; Sensei Advincula (87 years young) holding a piece of Amethyst rock from Thunder Bay, which now

sits as a center in Sensei Advincula's Megami Garden Dojo.



50 Sunsu for Shimabuku Tatsuo

By Tim Leonard

On May 30, 2025, it will be 50 years since the passing of Isshinryu's founder, Tatsuo Shimabuku. To honour Grand Master Shimabuku, Sensei Tim Leonard will be hosting a free webinar in which all participants will do 50 repetitions of Sunsu kata (or Seisan if they don't know Sunsu).

This event is a collaboration of the American Isshinryu and the Isshinryu Karate International organizations. Anyone from any organization can participate.





Day with the Masters

By Susan Baldassi

Had an amazing time at *Day with the Masters* in NJ!

Big thanks to American Isshinryu for hosting and to Sensei Tim Leonard and Sensei Deb Fuchek for their support at my seminars: **Prepare for Battle: Closing the Reactionary Gap!** and a youth seminar on **Setting goals, Focusing our energy and Feeling our power.** Loved the crew's energy—everyone brought their A-game!

Training in the historic Don Nagle dojo in Jersey City, NJ (one of the original four who brought Isshinryu back from Okinawa) was a highlight of the weekend.

Thanks to American Isshinryu for this incredible experience!





About The Newsletter

Just as in our dojo training, the newsletter is about sharing and improving as a group. We regularly have contributions and updates from Quebec to British Columbia in Canada, as well as from Germany, New York and the Southern United States. Everyone is always welcome in my Dojo or to share via the newsletter.

Articles are welcome from anyone and everyone. They can be about anything related to the Martial Arts, a technique you think is just great; A better way to do a technique; History of a Karate Master; a tournament trick that works well; **ANYTHING!**

All articles are appreciated as e-mail. You can send it to your instructor to proof read and send in, or directly to me. (sensei@isshinryu.ca)

You can even include pictures if it helps your article!

Karate Terms

Dojo Oath—Mas Oyama

We will train our hearts and bodies for a firm unshakeable spirit.

We will pursue the true meaning of the martial Way so that in time our senses may be alert.

With true vigor, we will seek to cultivate a spirit of self-denial.

We will observe the rules of courtesy, respect our superiors, and refrain from violence.

We will pay homage to our creator and never forget the true virtue of humility.

We will look upward to wisdom and strength, not seeking other desires.

All our lives, through disciplines of Karate, we will seek to fulfill the true meaning of the Way.

I constantly see people rise in life who are not the smartest, sometimes not even the most diligent, but they are learning machines. They go to bed every night a little wiser than when they got up and boy does that help—particularly when you have a long run ahead of you.

Charlie Munger