



The Isshinryu Way Everything Karate & Kobudo

Isshinryu
Worldwide

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Seek Challenges

True Karateka know that there is no end goal, the training is the purpose. The true essence of the discipline lies in the deliberate pursuit of discomfort. Seeking challenges in karate isn't just about physical training, it's the unification of mental and physical.

Whether it is refining a complex *kata* until the movements become subconscious or enduring the grueling pace of high-intensity *kumite*, these hurdles are designed to peel back the layers of a practitioner's ego. By stepping into the dojo with the intention of being tested, a student transforms the dojo from a gym into a laboratory for personal growth.

The beauty of karate is that the challenges scale with the practitioner. For a beginner, the challenge might be the simple coordination required for a basic reverse punch. For the "experts", the challenge shifts toward internal mastery, maintaining perfect breath control while the body screams for oxygen, or finding the "still point" in the heat of a fight. This constant raising of the bar prevents stagnation. When you intentionally seek out a partner who is faster or stronger

than you, you aren't looking for a win; you are looking for the technical gaps in your own defense that only a superior opponent can reveal.

Ultimately, the challenges encountered within the four walls of the dojo serves as a rehearsal for the complexities of everyday life. Karate teaches that pressure is a privilege because it facilitates refinement. When you face a daunting grading or a difficult technical transition, you are practicing the art of staying calm under duress. This "warrior mindset" ensures that when life presents external hardships—career setbacks, personal loss, or exhaustion—you don't collapse. Instead, you fall back on your training, meeting the world with the same focus and resilience you used to master that one impossible kick.

As Sensei Trevor would say, Cry in the Dojo so you can Laugh on the Battlefield!

Upcoming Events

Events

May 2026—Isshinryu Expo—Thunder Bay, ON, Canada

July 2026—Isshinryu Hall of Fame—Gatlinburg, TN, USA

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Essential Isshinryu is available!

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

Hard is good



Why I Train

By John Meilleur

This article started in the direction of sharing why I am practicing Isshinryu karate, but it then evolved into a slightly different direction looking at the different aspects of karate training. Hopefully both “why I train”, and the aspects of training will be relayed.

These lines summarize a core reason I practice;

I come to you with only Karate, empty hands. I have no weapons, but should I be forced to defend myself, my honour or my principles, should it be a matter of life or death, of right or wrong, then here are my weapons, my empty hands.

There is a big part of me that has a core desire to be strong, and to know that I know, how to defend myself if forced. I have managed not to get into an actual fight for over 40 years, and I would like to continue this trend. However, the “if forced” part is important to me. I do not go looking for a fight, but desire to know how to navigate a situation if ever needed.

In the continuing quest to improve and learn Isshinryu karate, there are a number of aspects that are essential parts of the practice for me. They are like tires on a car. The ride of learning and practicing are dependent on the aspects below. They are interdependent and it becomes clearer to me that this is a voyage. Not necessarily a destination to arrive to.

They key aspects of my Isshinryu karate practice are listed below. There is a road to improving each individual aspect. And as each aspect improves, it supports the evolution of the karate practice.

Self Defense

The self defense aspect of karate is a core reason I am practicing Isshinryu karate. Although my last physical fight was over 40 years ago in high school, there is part of me that wants to know that if the situation ever required it, I am capable of taking care of myself and loved ones.

I want to know that I have the technical skills, physical conditioning and mental discipline all while keeping my ego in check with humility, and being part of the karate community. This, and four additional aspects all contribute to my karate practice in their own way.

Physical

The physical aspects are essential and have 3 key areas for me to focus on. I have been going regularly to the gym since September 2022, and physical

training always remains an area I can improve on. Having recently turned 59 years old, it is essential my physical body training continue in order to improve my karate practice as well as maintain good health.

Strength conditioning is important for the entire body.

Legs, core, upper body all essential areas that come together to move efficiently.

Cardio capacity is super important to enable sustained intense movements. My personal favourite cardio sport is cycling, and I have to say I’m very happy summer is arriving and can cycle outside.

Flexibility is also necessary to enable smooth and wide ranges of motion. For this, yoga classes at the gym assist with maintaining and improving mobility.

Food is the fuel of the car. Healthy nutritional intake is mandatory to maintain a strong healthy body. The amount of alcohol consumed also directly impacts my ability to train. This is a case where less is more, and less alcohol allows me to train stronger.

Mental Discipline

The mental discipline to practice on my own at home and Get My Ass To Class (GMATC) are critical on the karate road. The practice and discipline is to do something even though my body may not feel like it. To get up and do something regardless of the lethargy of my body that would prefer not to.

Learning and becoming proficient in kata techniques requires the discipline of the mind. New pathways in the mind are required, and mental discipline is foundational to incorporating new ways of moving such that they become natural and quick.

This mental discipline aspect is an essential ingredient on the road of continuous state of refinement. It is the essential ingredient that gets me to class each Sunday. And I know, the most difficult part of getting to class, is to get my duffle bag and get into the car. Once I’m in the car I’m good.

This discipline also applies to me getting into the basement to practice the larger, and more subtle aspects of the kata. To repeat good kata enough times that good solid kata just happens. That the wiring in my mind has achieved sufficient solidity the experience of doing a kata moves away from the conscious and more to the unconscious execution of the patterns. When kata can happen without me consciously considering each move. And having practiced good, solid kata, it becomes a different part of the mind that takes over physical execution, to increase speed and efficiency without my conscious guidance and direction.

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Why I Train By John Meilleur

Faster and more efficient.

Personal Development

Isshinryu karate training has been my teacher in many areas, one of which is the area of ego and humility.

Previously, a Sensei had shared with me that occasionally students may want to compete against them in order to demonstrate they were stronger than the Sensei. That as the student became stronger and more proficient, they were as strong and proficient as the teacher. I of course shared with the Sensei that I would never do that.

Recently in class however, I had a clear opportunity to observe myself doing exactly what I previously shared I would not do. In a particular moment, I felt the need to demonstrate my strength with that Sensei.

I did not see it right away, but then I saw how I indeed wanted in that moment to demonstrate I was stronger than my teacher. It was a lesson in humility. I was reminded I must ensure I check my ego at the door. To come and train with humility. Do the work to improve. But check the ego at the door and pick up some humility on the way in. I am thankful for that lesson. I will continue to train. To improve and get stronger. But I will also need to stay in aware-

ness of those times my ego may want to express itself. I will not catch all those times since ego is ever present. But I will attempt to stay watchful.

Community

The last 4 years have been an evolving appreciation for the karate community I train in. Within our dojo as well as with those in remote cities and countries via Zoom.

I am humbled by the dedication of so many Sensei's, to the Isshinryu karate community. Where they continue to teach and share and support. When they are just as happy for the success of the students, as the students themselves. That week after week, class after class, Zoom call after Zoom call, they continue to share their time, expertise and experience with others, in contribution to the growth of others. I am grateful for all those teachers.

It is this community that I'm supported by, that I support. I'm one individual in the spider web of supported and supporters. It is this web that continues the lineage that Master Shimabuku is part of and that he started with Isshinryu. Without this web, or community, this lineage would be greatly diminished.

Summary

In summary there is indeed many more aspects to life in the dojo that just learning a specific kata. And it is all those aspects that come together to make a proficient students and teachers.

Chitora Dojo Promotions

Chitora Dojo is happy to announce the following promotions to Yellow Stripe that took place on Jan 20th, 2026

- Rohan Mercado—Yellow Stripe
- Allie Fenton—Rokyu
- Prince Sandre Juan—Gokyu





A Day with the Masters

By Tim Leonard

Members of the Toshikai Dojo of Ottawa recently traveled to Rockaway, New Jersey to take part in the Isshinryu event “A Day with the Masters,” hosted by American Isshinryu. The event brought together practitioners and instructors from across the community, creating an atmosphere rich in learning, collaboration, and shared passion for the art.

Sensei Tim Leonard and Deb Fuchek set the tone early by leading a 90-minute, high-energy session for children. Their presentation balanced fun with discipline, keeping young participants fully engaged. A standout feature was the introduction of the Tongue Drum—an idea inspired by Sensei Susan. The instrument not only captured the attention of observing instructors but also helped the children settle into moments of focus and reflection, adding a unique and memorable dimension to the session.

I had the opportunity to contribute by teaching a seminar titled “Unlocking Kata Through Bunka.” The session introduced the PCR Framework—Position, Control, and Resolution—a concept that distills years of personal study into a practical approach for understanding kata applications. It was rewarding to share these insights and see participants begin to connect structure and intent within their own practice.

The event also featured a range of exceptional instructors. Joe Lembke delivered an impactful session on body conditioning for martial arts, emphasizing resilience and preparation. Maury Levitz offered an engaging exploration of the Yawara stick, guiding participants through a kata and demonstrating its many practical self-defense applications.

A highlight of the day was the Masters Roundtable, which included Albert Mady, Marvin Carmona, and Rick Norris. Their sharing brought forward decades of experience, offering perspectives that were deeply technical in combative situations and Kobudo.

Overall, “A Day with the Masters” was exactly that—a day filled with knowledge, inspiration, and connection. Whether instructing or learning, the experience reinforced the value of sharing across dojos and generations, leaving everyone with new ideas to carry forward in their training.





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; ANY-THING!

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

kata - forms

kihon - basics/exercises

kumite - sparring/entangling or grappling hands

dojo - lit. 'place of the way'

dan - rank/degree

kyu - below rank

sensei - lit. 'one who comes before'/suffix for teachers, professionals, respected persons, and authority figures

senpai - senior

shihan -master or senior instructor

hanshi - lit. 'teacher of teachers'/master instructor

soke - founder

gi -uniform

shitogi - uniform pants

uwagi - uniform jacket

obi - belt

mon - crest

***The only way to do hard things
is to do hard things.***