

Quality and Depth in Uechi-ryu Karate Do.

By David Mott

I've been asked on numerous occasions what do I look for when I observe someone's karate. This question arises particularly in relationship to testing ranks from white belt to dan. I offer the following in order to help each student and each instructor have a clearer understanding of what I recognize as quality and depth in the demonstration of karate.

This quality and depth is dependent on the cohesive understanding and integrated manifestation of the components of karate - body, mind and spirit. Initially, these are experienced as independent and separate from one another. Body does not communicate with mind, mind is unaware of the body, and spirit is absent. Sanchin, in its translation as three conflicts, presents the opportunity to resolve and integrate body, mind and spirit as One. It is my hope that through the offering of these guidelines that integration can occur and ever grow as a practise for each of you.

Body

- 1) Grounding: feeling the support of the ground through the feet.
 - a) The feet are firmly and directly repositioned in each stance after each step.
 - b) The feet plant and then root themselves into the ground (lifted toes or "loose" heels weaken this grounding).

- c) The feet are in a dynamic relationship with ground and body. This means that the energy of intent - incorporating both mindfulness and intrinsic energy (qi) - reaches from the feet into the ground and flows upwards into the whole body.

2) Centering: the understanding of the dan tien or belly in karate.

- a) The weight of the body positions itself appropriately in each stance.
- b) All movements connect to and radiate outward from the dan tien. (Reliance upon upper body strength as the primary strength negates the connection to the dan tien.)
- c) General emptiness in the dan tien is usually caused by a lack of intent being placed there or through the presence of tension or fear, both of which will cause the centre to rise into the chest area or higher.
- d) All movements are supported by the slight firming or compacting of the dan tien in coordination with the movement to activate the flow of qi.

3) Flow: the ease of movement in all of its various "flavours" (the activation of appropriate body mechanics in support of each individual movement).

- a) Tension creates rigid or uneven movement.
- b) The transition from movement to movement or stance to stance needs to occur with fluidity.
- c) The use of individual (not meaning personal) "flavours" creates a rich vocabulary of movement as opposed to a sameness of movement. Sameness arises from the tendency to want to make all movements feel strong in the same way.

If the function of each movement is understood and felt, its unique "flavour" will show.

4) Power: the natural heaviness in all movement as well the impact of each strike as the body supports the completion of each extension.

- a) The whole body responds and supports the movement as it begins, transits and finishes.
- b) There is an integration of body mechanics and intent.
- c) Movements of the limbs do not occur in isolation from the rest of the body.
- d) Body habits (poor posture etc.) are corrected.
- e) The body supports but does not compensate (i.e. by leaning in an opposite direction) for each movement.
- f) There is an alignment of structure (bone, ligament, tendon and muscle) to support each movement and impact.

5) Precision: all movements have a clear beginning, middle and end point.

- a) All movements demonstrate their potential with detail and refinement.
- b) There is a sharp, vivid quality to each movement.
- c) Gaps in the mindfulness of a movement (i.e. lifting the shoulder with a punch) are seen and eliminated.

6) Speed: the velocity of a movement to support power and flow and to create impact.

- a) Speed issues forth in a manner that is appropriate to the

- effectiveness of a movement.
- b) Unequal speed in the extension and retraction of a movement is avoided.
 - c) Too much speed in which a movement's fullness is sacrificed is avoided.
 - d) Too little speed in which an opponent's body is not shocked
(an important aspect of contact which allows for deep penetration) is avoided.
 - e) The creation of an appropriate pause in the cycle of extension/retraction allows the transference of power and intent.

Mind

- 1) Intent: the clear commitment to a movement involving both the body and the qi. It is a summoning of all of the resources in an appropriate way.
 - a) Each movement and stance projects and radiates the resources of commitment.
 - b) The eyes (the Uechi "glare") project an intense clarity of commitment.
 - c) There is no self resistance (i.e. dynamic tension) or ambivalence present in movement.
- 2) Mindfulness: spaciousness and clarity of being.
 - a) All aspects of the body are clearly felt.
 - b) The body and intent is felt in an integrated way at the same time as an individual movement is also felt.

- c) The function of each movement is understood and informs each movement.
 - d) The potential for change is always present in the moment.
 - e) One is not distracted by thought or emotion.
 - f) The mind is not "set" but flows freely from thing to thing, moment to moment.
- 3) Self: the body/mind experience of "me-ness" .
- a) One is not conflicted by self-judgment.
 - b) Feelings of self are relaxed into mindfulness.
 - c) One does not indulge in the pride of self inflation and glorification.
 - d) The bow is practised with gratitude for the Way of Karate rather than as a formality.
 - e) Fear and anger are no longer binding as both solo and partner work take place. They no longer manifest in the clear spaciousness of being.

Spirit

- a) Martial spirit is the evidence of martial force manifesting upon the integration of mind and body. There is not simply the demonstration of personal physical prowess but the clear flow of one or all of the collective forces of the martial art. In Uechi-ryu, this includes embodying the martial forces of dragon, crane and tiger.
- b) The Way of Karate comes alive and manifests throughout one's entire life.
- c) The relationship of student to teacher is one of humility and is heartfelt as is the relationship of teacher to student. The teacher/student

relationship further includes clarity, vision and compassion.

The various forms of karate, such as katas, drills, etc., are the means by which all that I have just described occurs. There are no fixed goals in karate that are ever achievable, because the practise of karate would then be limited and perhaps finite. So the last thing I look for is the practitioner's relationship to karate as a student.

- a) I've met many a practitioner who would change or re-arrange the forms to suit their own personal needs, desires or dislikes, not recognizing that to do so effectively deprives them of the inherent understanding that can spontaneously come alive in the practise of these physical movements. Katas have been practised by many for centuries, and as the student aligns and attunes to them in right relationship, then the understanding of karate can fill each one as the movement is occurring. From this depth of foundation, each person can evolve via karate, which is the very means by which karate evolves.