

## **The Path of the Uechi-ryu Artist: by David Mott, Renshi**

The path which we take as Uechi-ryu Artist is one of self discovery. It could be said that there are many "levels" to this self discovery but, just as each piece of a hologram contains the complete information to make the entire hologram, each "level" contains the same potential for complete growth as all or the other "levels". We call it a path, and paths usually guide us from place to place but in reality, this path is a circle. Despite the gradual attainment of rank, which marks the development of one's skill and knowledge, many of us will continue to discover new and ever more subtle lessons as we return again and again to what we may have thought was material already absorbed and which no longer required our attention.

Nevertheless, what is discovered along this path often reveals itself in a natural - though unrestricted order. That order is presented with the understanding that just as our effort may turn towards new directions, what has been learned must continue to be relearned and refined. Even though it is possible to learn most of the martial arts movements in a few short years, the depth and flavor of those movements will be ever changing according to one's growth. Like these movements, the depth and flavor of one's life will also be ever changing in the process.

**Fear and Anger:**

We have all undoubtedly been victims at some point in our lives whether as a child or as an adult. This victimization takes many forms, from the emotional to the physical, from the subtle to the horrific. The most basic aim in Uechi-ryu practice is for each of us to develop the confidence that we can protect ourselves. In doing so, we take a significant step forward towards removing fear from our lives and preventing the potential for any future victimization.

Anger is the complement to fear in that it often unconsciously arises in response to one's sublimated experience(s) of being a victim. Unresolved fear and anger is frequently the unconscious motivation for the adult who makes victims out of others. Uechi-ryu schools unfortunately have their share of teachers who do not recognize this and use fear/anger in their dojo (karate school) to create an unhealthy emotional environment, thereby preventing the resolution of these two negative and debilitating emotions. Developing skill and power as a martial artist without the opportunity for personal growth is both undesirable and dangerous. A developing confidence in one's ability as a martial artist, must be accompanied by developing the personal qualities of integrity, wisdom, humility and compassion. Recognize fear/anger as you would recognize unnecessary tension in your body. As you train and remake your body, learn to see these emotions and release them. If they cannot be easily released, channel and transform the energy into the intensity of your training.

## **The Yi**

The mind is what moves the body. In the beginning of one's training, the mind is fully occupied with learning how to

move the body correctly with individual and sequenced movements. There is no extra mind-space for daydreaming or maintaining our habituated internal dialogue. At the intermediate and advanced levels, the mind should be applied towards attention and intention. Here there is difficulty however. The body can now move itself with only a little intention, leaving the opportunity for the mind to wander without the mind's attention. Intention can never fully develop. This is because at the higher levels of mastery, it is intention which activates the chi (our intrinsic energy) to augment muscle strength and efficiency. The chi can only be activated by using one's attention to discover what is at first only a very subtle feeling.

Intention requires that the mind be fully and completely engaged in each individual movement as well as the flow of movements. As one progresses, there is more and more to be discovered in the feeling and flavor of each movement. Always be attentive to the inside of the body as well as the outside of the body. Let the body and the mind become one.

## **The Li**

If the body is weak or unhealthy, one's external strength will be insufficient as a martial artist. Cultivate a natural desire to develop the strength needed to support your martial arts

growth and practice. This must be in harmony with the totality of your development, as over emphasis on one's external strength will also restrict one's progress. There is an old martial arts saying that with the accumulation of excessive external strength, the "core will rot."

Eat healthfully and with awareness of how food nourishes the body. Allow yourself the necessary sleep and rest to regenerate the body. Drink pure water and seek out pure air, breathing deeply to rid the body of the accumulated toxins of the modern urban environment.

Learned negative physical habits or restrictive patterns of body movement contradict one's development of strength and must be unlearned. Become aware of how the body communicates the messages of the self to others.

## **The Jing**

Developing the jing, or physical power, is more than simply strengthening the body so that one's techniques are effective. It is learning the correct body mechanics so that the body completely supports the purpose or application of each movement. An arm which moves without the support of the body utilizes only 10% of one's total strength. An arm which moves with the body's support utilizes 90% (excluding the other arm) of one's total strength. Physical power is dependent upon the centering of one's body and the integrity of one's stances and posture. The hands should always strike with the support of the feet; the body should root into the earth to achieve heaviness or should float like a cloud to achieve lightness.

Renew your awareness of your breath and how it empowers the movement of the body. Sink the breath for heaviness, float it for lightness. Store the breath to accumulate strength, release it to discharge strength.

Naturally coordinate the body with the senses to enable accurately timed movements without accurate timing, physical power will be either wasted or cut short. Like a tiger preparing to leap, learn to gather your energy, learn to wait and know when to move for the greatest advantage.

## **The Chi**

As one's body ages, it becomes more and more necessary to cultivate the internal energy to offset one's naturally declining youthful strength. Besides aging, this cultivation comes about as the result of your Uechi-ryu Practice "reaching the right temperature". It is not only the practice of mindful intention, it comes from the process of learning of stillness. If you can learn to let go of the internal dialogue when not moving, you can discover the wholehearted power of intention when moving.

Through meditation, whether standing or seated, discover the three stillness's: stillness of body, stillness of breath, stillness of mind. Of course, complete and absolute stillness is impossible but as one experiences more and more of the fine and subtle through approaching a point of stillness, the ordinary limits of the mind/body become open and unbounded.

The breath is the key to life. Shift your awareness to this essential element and discover how it flows through the body without limit.

Chi requires that you allow yourself the feeling of the subtle. As you work with this awareness of the subtle, it becomes magnified and will greatly aid your martial arts practice. It will also greatly aid your intention. This carries with it a responsibility to control your intentions. How will you use this energy, to take life or to give it?

## **The Shen**

The shen, or your spirit, must become strong, bright and clear through the regular practice of martial arts and meditation. The shen is best seen in your eyes. A powerful shen cannot be faked by making a dramatic facial expression. It should be an ever present clarity and liveliness but capable of an intense projection which some claim can even make the eyes glow in the dark. A Uechi-ryu artist should carry her/himself with a natural quiet dignity that is neither arrogant nor heavy. The eyes will register bad intentions and will carry the accumulation of such intentions with a duality of darkness regardless of their appearance. This darkness is called "bad shen" and will mark the person as clearly as if he wore a sign warning others of his intentions.

The eyes also give strength to the body movements. Without strong eyes, there cannot be strong movement.

Encourage the development of your spirit by committing 100% of yourself to every movement. If your spirit is lax, your body will be lax. If your body is lax, then your practice is empty. But if you put energy into your eyes, your spirit will miraculously rise up in even a tired body, providing you with renewed energy.

## **Form, Feeling, and Function**

These three words alone provide the key to quality Uechi-ryu practice. To have good form, one must understand the function of each movement and must feel that function. To have feeling, one must be keenly aware of the inner quality (as though one's eyes are gazing inward) of each movement, the outer purpose of its function, and the flow of the transition to the next movement. To have correct function, the movements must have the integrity of good form with the feeling of intention. If you practice these three things, your ability will always continue to grow. Without any one of these three things, your development will be limited.

## **Balancing the training**

Keeping all parts of our practice in balance is important. It is true that from time to time, each of us may devote our effort primarily to one area or another depending upon our need. Still, while recognizing our strengths and weaknesses as martial artists, it is important not to avoid a part of our training which may cause us more difficulty than the others.

Martial arts master Liang Shouyu writes of this balance of training and practice and his words are adapted below:

*A person who only fights is nothing more than a brawler.*

*A person who only practices his/her forms without being able to apply them, is nothing more than a dancer.*

*A person who theorizes about the martial arts without being able to demonstrate his/her knowledge is only an armchair theorist.*

*A person who practices all of these without applying the martial arts to the art of living misses the inner usefulness of all of this activity.*

*A person who practices all of these, applies it to the art of living and takes great pleasure from this effort, is a true martial artist.*

## **Openness and the Miraculous**

The ultimate goal of learning self defense is to become open. This means that through the process of becoming secure in your ability as a Uechi-ryu artist, the need to be defensive diminishes and eventually evaporates. When that happens it is possible to perceive the unity of this world without the quality of "me and other" or the perceptive boundaries of inside and outside. This is called the spiritual or the mystical. It is also called the miraculous. From this openness springs many of the legends about martial arts masters. In fact this openness, this unity, is our birthright. All young children have it and most lose it in the process of growing into adulthood. But as this is a natural process of loss, the path of the Uechi-ryu artist provides us with the means to return to this openness.

The most highly skilled masters were often able to defeat their opponents through what appeared to be only the most minimal, often casual effort. Efficiency of effort is only possible if: there is no mental gap between you and your

opponent; you have an attentive and creative openness to your opponent; you have a mirror like clarity with the ability to reflect back precisely what appears in front of you; you can spontaneously command your skill with complete and extraordinary ease.

But so far we have only been talking about fighting. Most of us seldom have to fight for reasons other than training. Nevertheless, all of the principles of "walking this path" can and should be useful to everything in one's life. One can perform even the most mundane task with wholehearted attention and intention. In doing so, Uechi-ryu mastery should become the "art of life" mastery. This means that you can live moment to moment applying yourself completely and appropriately. This provides us with freedom in that, while we can never change the things that happen to us, we can change how we respond to them. We cannot change the circumstances of our birth, but we can change the way that we live. Even so this is an active practice which can never be assumed just as even the most advanced masters still drill themselves on the fundamentals.

No doubt, every day, each of us encounters and has to respond to diverse problems. Fundamentally, this is no different than our martial arts knowing how to parry and block, side step and avoid, absorb and discharge, cut short and jam, or leap in suddenly, are techniques which are clearly available to us in our lives and interpersonal relationships as well as our Uechi-ryu. Can you act completely and spontaneously?

One final importance to being open is the possibility for insight. It is insight into our lives which provides us with the opportunity to develop integrity, wisdom, humility and compassion as people. These are personal qualities which

have to be earned every day of our lives. So how do you live your life? What self discovery has your Uechi-ryu art practice led you to? Do you understand yourself and your life? Do you naturally and unselfconsciously demonstrate your openness?

If you discover the true path of the Uechi-ryu artist, you will find that you can walk that circle repeatedly without it becoming a rut, without the familiar becoming the mundane, and with endless opportunities for self discovery.

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