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# *The Power of The Way*



A Spiritual Journey

by Nodan

**Lighthouse Productions**

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# **Warning!**

**The breaking and self-defense demonstrations shown in this book can be dangerous and should not be attempted without the supervision of a qualified instructor**

# TABLE of CONTENTS

Introduction 1

## The Way of The Spirit

The dojo Spirits	4
Meeting Sensei	6
Enlightenment	11
Postscript	15

## The Way of Technique

One Strike Power	17
Breaking Protocols	24
The Five Principles	26
Kicks and Blocks	42
Street Defense	50
A Brief History	57

## Introduction

In January 1981, I began to study with Quan Li, who received his black belt in Shotokan karate-do from an “enlightened” master we called “Sensei.” I learned Sensei’s style from Quan, because the master had stopped teaching his “ferocious striking art” in the 1970s, in favor of aikido and kobudo (sword and jo).

This book describes two ways. “The Way of The Spirit” gives a brief account of my journey to enlightenment and superhuman strength, in which I trained at Sensei’s aikido dojo, engaged in occult practices, and spent many hours in Zen meditation. Without these experiences, this book and the Nodan Karate YouTube karate videos would not exist.

“The Way of Technique” describes a striking method that applies five principles to flexible post makiwara training to forge “one strike” techniques. In 2004-05, I filmed a series of board breaks for a DVD warning karateka not to pursue enlightenment through their arts. I created the make-believe master, “Nodan” (no rank), as a disguise to hide the identities of those who would not want to be associated with my occult past. To that end, I have changed names without altering facts or quotations attributed to individuals.

In 2009, I began posting videos at the **nodankarate** channel on YouTube. Although Nodan’s buffoonish persona is a fitting parody of my misguided quest for enlightenment, the board breaking demonstrations are authentic and can be repeated by following the protocols on pages 24-25.

**Sakugawa**  
(1733-1815)



**Roshi**  
(Zen master)



**Nodan**  
(faux master)



The Nodan character was inspired by "Tode" (karate) Sakugawa, who was the first Okinawan karate teacher, and by the anime Zen master, Roshi. As a disguise, I used a glue-on beard and mustache, a fake pair of black glasses, and a high-pitched voice with a non-descript accent.

## YouTube Videos at the **nodankarate** channel

**Nodan Karate (20:01)** A comprehensive summary of Nodan Karate's "one strike" training method with SD applications

**Nodan Five Principles (8:41)** Provides a concise summary

**Nodan Makiwara (4:52)** Instructions on how to build an indoor flexible post makiwara and board holder

**Nodan Self-Defense (4:07)** "One strike" street applications

**Nodan Board Testing (3:51)** Board testing using a barbell

**Nodan Students (3:46)** Edited black belt test

**Nodan Katas (2:44)** Tekki Shodan, Seisan, and Onsum

**Nodan Dagger Form (2:19)** Advanced Chinese/Okinawan form that features rapid-fire focused techniques

**Nodan Teacher (1:23)** Quan Li performs Heian IV and V

**The Way  
of  
The Spirit**



## The Dojo Spirits

The traditional Japanese dojo (Way room) is where the departed spirits of the masters meet with the followers of the Way. Portraits of these masters occupy the kamiza (high seat of honor), and before and after each class students are led in a ceremonial kneeling bow before it. This ritual includes Zazen (sitting meditation), which is intended to open the mind and make it more receptive to the spirits.

### The Traditional Ceremonial Bow



**My karate teacher, Quan Li, taught the master's "one strike" Shotokan style at his home dojo.**

Most Westerners view these rituals as a show of respect for the masters that have nothing to do with contacting spirits. This was my perspective until I built a dojo with a kamiza in my home and strange things began to happen.

Quan came to my dojo once a week to train and taught me the *Shotokan Karate-do Workout* that Sensei instituted when he taught the art. The workout burned away the ego, which was essential to reaching enlightenment. Special emphasis

was on the katas, because they functioned as “moving Zen,” and we practiced the Shotokan forms using tempos that ranged from slow motion to full speed. We used a kiai on every technique and without realizing it, I began using the sacred Hindu word “om” as my kiai shout.

One night my wife, Kay, discerned a “presence” beside the kamiza, and two weeks later we held a Ouija Board séance where we received some amazing answers concerning our training, Sensei, and the departed masters. I do not know “what” Kay had encountered, but I believe it was connected in some way to the spirit/s we contacted during the séance.

During training, Quan and I routinely experienced unusual phenomena. For example, when we practiced prearranged three-step sparring, a mysterious dynamic caused our arms to barely make contact, even though our blocks were easily deflecting the full power punches we were throwing.

One time the dojo was filled with such energy that the wooden floor vibrated beneath our feet. And, on two occasions the 2x4 makiwara post broke during practice. The power I was experiencing was exhilarating and steeled my determination to reach further and further beyond my natural strength, and during the week I often practiced Sensei’s workout on my own and spent many hours in Zen meditation.

Ironically, I could not see that, rather than burning away my ego, the workout was subtly inflating it with the pride of becoming more and more powerful!

## **Meeting Sensei**

After training with Quan for a year, I wanted to meet Sensei, who was operating an aikido dojo. Quan had regaled me with many fantastic stories about the master and it was time to see for myself.

Upon meeting the master, I knew immediately he was everything Quan had said about him. His presence was different from that of other men, and when he performed a powerful energy flowed through him that seemed to transcend the physical world. I asked if he would give us private lessons in his karate, but he cynically replied, "You'd have to be a saint to find the Way through karate today."

Sensei's misgivings, however, did not discourage us from going back to see him several months later, and after his last class he invited us onto the mat. As we kneeled before him, he looked straight at me and said, "Jay, everything you know is wrong." Although Sensei had barely finished high school and I was a psychologist working for a prestigious university hospital, I knew he was referring to more than my knowledge of karate.

### **Sensei proves his point**

Straight away the master set about proving his point. First, he moved behind me and instructed that I not look back until I could sense his fist close to the back of my head. I waited until I could feel him almost touching me. When I turned around, he was standing ten feet away!

I tried again. This time I felt confident he was some distance away, because I did not sense anything close to me. Yet, when I turned to look, the side of my face lightly grazed his extended fist. Somehow Sensei was able to extend and withdraw his ki (vital energy) at will.

Next, he faced me in a relaxed front stance with his arms hanging loosely at his sides. He said, "Attack me." I shifted into a fighting stance and cautiously looked for an opening. There was none. It was as if he could anticipate any attack I may have been considering.

After these remarkable encounters, I was more motivated than ever to pursue an "enlightenment" experience that would make me a great master with "powers" like Sensei. After six months I made a momentous decision. Quan and I would continue practicing karate together, but to better access Sensei's spiritual wisdom, I joined his aikido school. The three-hour-round-trip commute limited the number of classes I could attend, but studying aikido and sword with the enlightened master over the next three and a half years radically transformed my understanding of the arts.

### **Sensei's Power**

Sensei once gave Quan a dramatic demonstration of his power. He instructed Quan to touch his collar bone, upon which Quan received a strong "electric" shock. Sensei explained that the "little" jolt was only a fraction of the power he could project. Another time he informed Quan, "If

I hit you, you should be dead before you hit the floor,” and, “Once you have the Martial Spirit, no one will ever fight you.”

### **Sensei and the Martial Spirit**

I asked Sensei how he came by his martial arts prowess and he told me about the visitation he received from the Martial Spirit. He was practicing the Heian Godan kata when a tremendous energy entered his body and an audible voice asked, “Do you want it to stop?” I can only surmise that when Thomas Fox chose to accept the Martial Spirit, he became “Sensei,” the most powerful martial artist I have ever seen.

Years later, in a revealing choice of words, Sensei admitted that it took him some time to learn what to do with the “entirely new energy” he received on “that fateful day.”

### **Sensei’s Philosophy**

For Sensei, the martial arts functioned as a form of yoga, in which the highest goal was enlightenment. This level of higher consciousness is achieved when the ego has been annihilated and the illusions of the physical world disappear. The emerging divine soul is no longer bound to endless cycles of birth and rebirth, but has been absorbed like a drop of water in a vast cosmic ocean. One becomes One with the universe. This Eastern philosophy, that we are divine souls inhabiting a divine universe, is different from the Western concept of a Creator God who transcends the physical and spiritual realms.

## **Sensei as Swordsman**

Sensei believed he was the reincarnation of the last true samurai, Saigo Takamori (1828-1877), who was fictionalized in the 2003 movie, "The Last Samurai." Takamori's role in restoring the Japanese emperor to the throne made him a national hero, but his subsequent rebellion against the state turned him into a traitor. Sensei said he remembered his past life as Takamori, and that this had caused him much sorrow.



**Sensei bore an uncanny resemblance to Takamori, whose bronze statue stands in Tokyo's Ueno Park. Sensei claimed that in his youth, he had a little dog just like Takamori's.**

Sensei embraced the Zen philosophy of the 17<sup>th</sup> century samurai, Miyamoto Musashi (1584-1645) and was a master of Musashi's two swords style (Niten Ichi-ryu), in which both swords are wielded simultaneously. According to legend, after becoming invincible, Miyamoto retired to a cave and practiced Zen until reaching enlightenment. Afterward, he wrote his famous treatise on strategy, ***A Book of Five Rings***.

The first time I trained with Sensei he used the "twofold gaze"<sup>1</sup> to thwart any attack I was considering (p. 7). The gaze sees distant things as close and close things as distant, which has the effect of "perceptually" slowing down an opponent's movements. After learning the gaze, I found it especially useful for defending against moving armed attacks.



**18<sup>th</sup> century artist's rendering of Miyamoto's self-portrait.**

## Enlightenment

One night after class, Sensei began to impress upon us the commitment required to reach enlightenment. He said that to access his kind of “power,” we had to want it more than anything and expect to receive it. Then he admonished us, “You can get power from the dark side or the light.”

Sensei’s demeanor changed and he pointed at me and declared, “Jay, you’re going to get this. And when you do, you’re going to come back at me, ‘you goddamned son of a bitch!’” I was too dumbfounded to respond, but two weeks later his prophetic words came true.

It began when I looked in my dojo mirror and the eyes staring back at me were not my eyes! They were black and piercing, and projected an alien intelligence of their own. Without forethought, I inexplicably beckoned to them and demanded, “Okay, show me the kundalini fire.”<sup>2</sup>

A cool, softball size “presence” manifested in my lower spine and intensified as it radiated throughout my body. The superhuman strength that I experienced was thrilling, yet terrifying. As I watched the mirror, Sensei’s face suddenly superimposed itself over my own and morphed into a monstrous demon of enormous ferocity and power! It was shocking to see the source of Sensei’s power. I sprang back and declared, “If this is what it is, I don’t want it!

As the Kundalini fire slowly receded back into my lower spine, I was transported to the outer darkness of the void, where I existed as a disembodied consciousness. The veil



of self-deceit was lifted, revealing that despite trying to do right by family and friends, on a deeper level I had been living out of pride and self-interest. The ghastly vision soon faded, but not before I passed judgment on myself.

For the rest of the day, I contemplated how I might rid myself of the alien “presence” that continued to slowly undulate up and down my spine. Later that evening the idea came to me that nothing purges like fire. I gathered up things associated with my martial arts and began burning them in our living room fireplace. These included rank certificates, books and magazines, portraits of the masters, and a prized personal letter from Sensei.

After a while the most astounding thing happened. Out of the blue, in my mind’s eye I saw Jesus sitting in the chair across from me asking, “Do you love me more than these?”

My heart dropped into my stomach. Like most baby boomers born just after World War II, I had been raised in the church and knew the story of Jesus. But as an adult, I had studied the writings of modern bible scholars and concluded that Jesus may have been a great moral teacher, but nothing more. Besides, my ego identity was firmly wedded to my art and I had developed extraordinary power in my techniques. And now Jesus was asking me to give it all up for him?

I knew saying “yes” would mean certain ego death, so I stalled and continued to search out more items to burn. Among things found was my original black belt, who’s frayed

edges had turned white, a witness to my many years of dedicated training. Even so, I cut the belt into pieces and sacrificed them to the flames.

Yet, as the evening progressed, I came to the realization that the alien spirit could not be purged by fire or expelled by force of will. I recalled giving Sensei a small token of appreciation, a brass plaque with the kanji ideogram for “hope,” and how he had mournfully opined, “I have no hope.” Remembering Sensei’s despair and the terrifying encounter I had with the demonic earlier that morning, I reluctantly acquiesced and chose “hope.”

The moment I said “yes” to Jesus the occult spirit, along with my ego identity as a karateka, drained onto the floor. I became empty and deep despair engulfed my soul. This psychic death was far worse than any physical death I could have imagined. I was abandoned and alone.

Within a few seconds, however, a truly miraculous thing happened. A wonderful *Spirit of Love* poured in from above and filled the void with sublime peace that cannot be described in words. Now I *knew* Jesus was a real, life-giving Spirit and Friend, who loved me enough to deliver me from spiritual darkness. He forgave me for all the years I had rejected him and accepted me with unconditional love.

Hence, my relationship with Jesus is personal, and not grounded in religious doctrines or theological abstractions of belief, but in the mystical encounter I had with him in early December, 1985.

### **Lessons Learned**

My “enlightenment” revealed that a spirit realm exists that transcends our physical world, and that evil has a metaphysical reality. In the outer darkness of the void, I discovered that consciousness survives death, and what we do in this life matters. Most importantly, I learned that Jesus can be accessed through a sincere act of the will.

### **Following Jesus**

Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies and be forgiving and merciful; to be peacemakers and not pass judgment on others; to keep a humble spirit and not serve money, but to be generous towards the poor.

I sometimes fall short of these lofty ideals, because I am not perfect. But striving to live in union with Jesus’ *Spirit of Love* makes me the best person I can be, which is more satisfying than all the wealth, and power, and fame this world could ever offer.

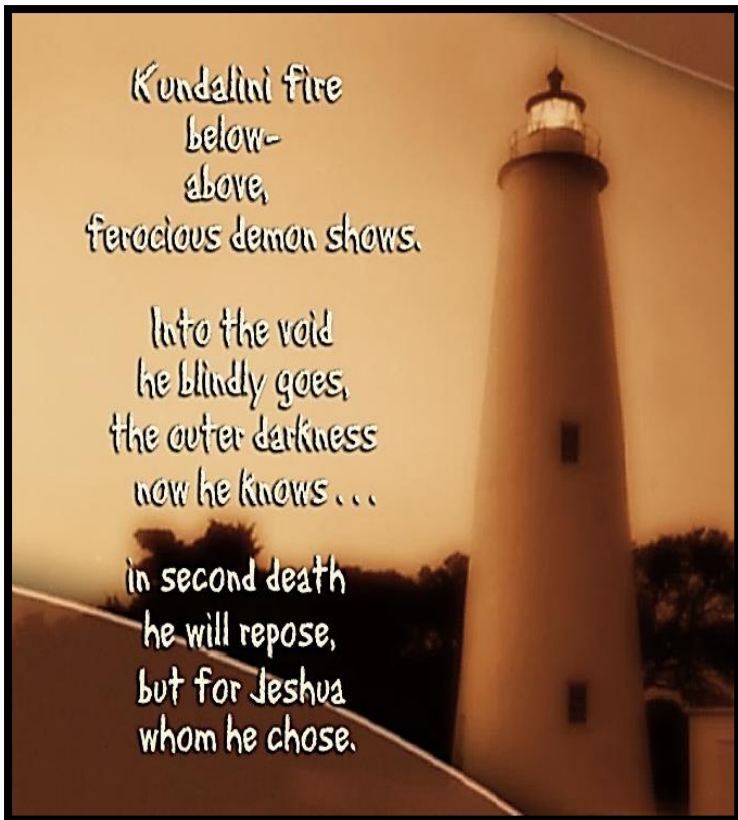
Besides, in the next life these worldly ambitions will be meaningless- a chasing after the wind.

Peace be with you,



## Postscript

In 2004, I asked my Lord for help in summarizing my “enlightenment” experience with kundalini fire, the outer darkness, and Jesus (Jeshua). These lines suddenly came to me, as if out of thin air, which was all-the-more amazing since I am not an accomplished writer, much less a poet!



**The Way  
of  
Technique**

## One Strike Power

I met Quan Li in late December, 1981 and became his student and training partner for five years. His speed, power, and precision techniques made him the best traditional karateka I had ever seen. Quan was as good a teacher as he was a karateka and my descriptions of the five principles are based largely on insights I learned training with him.

Quan received Sensei's permission to teach his "one strike" Shotokan style, which Sensei claimed was based on the Okinawan *Shuri-te karate jutsu* that Shotokan's founder, Gichen Funakoshi, introduced to Japan in the early 1920s.



Quan taught Sensei's Shotokan karate at his home dojo. In the YouTube video, "Nodan Teacher," he performs Heian IV and V.

### What is Nodan Karate?

Nodan Karate has no kata system and is not a *style*, but rather a *method* for developing “one strike” techniques for street defense. The method applies five striking principles to flexible post makiwara training to forge “one strike” power. Since callused hands are not necessary for effective street defense, I used a rubber padded makiwara with a flexible post to protect my students from serious hand injuries.

The following breaking examples illustrate how the five principles, when applied to flexible post makiwara training, develop “one strike” power. I was in my late fifties when filming these demonstrations and used my “weak side” left hand to break some of the thickest board stacks.

#### 4-board break with “weak side” bent wrist strike



This was my most difficult break, due to the limitations of the side straddle stance to transfer full body weight into the board stack.



I trained on this flexible post makiwara for 13 years before filming the breaking videos in 2004-05 (See video, “Nodan Makiwara”).

### 5-board break with “weak side” elbow strike



All the boards in the board stack must be broken *before* the 75 lb. suspended bag begins to move.





**Soft rubber padding on the flexible post conditions hands and elbows well enough to execute thick board breaks.**

### **5-board break with “weak side” reverse punch**



**The bag must be motionless on contact. If it is moving back the strike is weaker; if forward, it is stronger, which is why karate is more effective when used as a counter attack.**

### 5-board circular palm break from neutral stance



Developing “one strike” techniques from a neutral stance position can be especially useful in close quarter self-defense situations.



“One strike” power is intended to “stun,” not kill or maim attacker, which is why, except for kicking defense scenarios, the self-defense examples shown in this book have been limited to 3-board breaks.

### Training Both Sides

Training both sides is essential, because an injury can occur to either side before or during a street confrontation. Street assaults are fluid and unpredictable, and having the option of using either hand is a major strategic advantage. Master Funakoshi, for example, advised students to practice their opposite sides “double” when training on makiwara.

#### Left and Right 7-board bottom fist breaks



**Despite practicing more with my left hand, the right broke 7 boards with much greater ease.**

**Left and Right 4-board palm breaks**



**Forward thrusting with “one strike” power from a neutral stance can be advantageous in close quarter situations.**

## Breaking Protocols

**Suspended bag:** I used a 75 lb. suspended bag, but I believe the bag can weigh between 50 and 100 pounds without appreciably influencing breaking difficulty.

**Materials:** 1x12 common pine donor boards (actual mill size .75 x 11.25 inches) were cut into 1x12x10-inch-wide pieces.

**Measuring Board Strength:** Board breaking is meaningless without an empirical method for measuring board strength. A 130 lb. barbell was *gently* lowered across the centerline of each test board, running parallel with the grain. The full weight of the barbell was left on the test board for 1 full second before being lifted off. If the board held, the weight was raised to 135 lbs. If the board broke with 135 lbs., the donor board met the protocol standard.



**Each test board must support a 130 lb. barbell for one full second, and then break it with 135 lbs.**

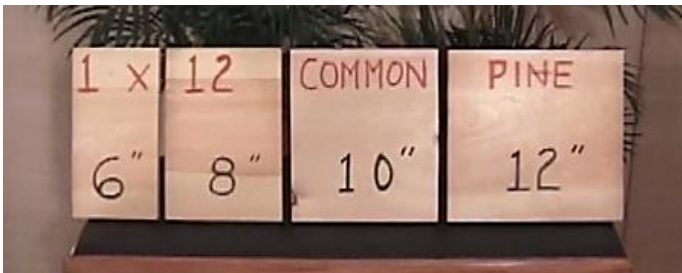
**Breaking Methodology:** Unspaced, suspended horizontal breaking was used to measure the relative striking power of techniques commonly used in street defense situations.

When assembling board stacks, the boards were arranged with their grains facing in the same direction, which causes them to break along a fairly-straight line.

Pine boards can vary widely in strength depending on moisture content. To ensure consistency, a test board from each donor board should be tested just prior to breaking.

**Proportional Resistance:** Resistance increases proportionally with each additional board. A 3-board stack should support at least  $3 \times 130 = 390$  lbs. 5-board stacks should hold at least  $5 \times 130 = 650$  lbs.; 7 boards should hold at least  $7 \times 130 = 910$ .

**Adjusting Board Width:** For filming purposes, I used only 1x12x10-inch-wide boards that conformed to the protocol. But, board width can be adjusted. For instance, If a 10" wide test board breaks with 150 lbs., a 9" wide piece from the same donor board should break with the protocol standard 135 lbs. ( $135/150 = .9 \times 10$  inches wide = 9 inches wide.)



**Boards can be cut to any size that conforms to the protocol.**

## The Five Principles

### 1) Proper Bone Alignment

Proper bone alignment is foundational to all striking arts, in which the center of gravity is located or “centered” in the hara, a point approximately two inches below the navel. For the karateka, this “centering” creates a stable stance. The ability to “move in center” is vital for the transfer of maximum power through the hips, which assume a slight pelvic tilt position. The mind must be “located” in the hara or “center,” which I call, “thinking from the center.”

In the demonstration below, Nodan is assisted by Yakov “the hammer” and three former students, who will attempt to push Yakov out of his “centered” one-leg crane stance.



Left to right: Yakov “the hammer,” Nodan, JV, JD, and Mr. Smiff



**Yakov maintains a “centered” crane stance as the three men try to push him backwards. Using the proper bone alignments, Yakov redirects their energy into the floor.**



**By “moving in center,” Yakov drives the men backwards.**



**“Moving in center” with a lunging palm strike**



**Nodan utilizes Shotokan’s signature lunging step to initiate a preemptive defense against an assailant’s knife threat.**



**He uses a quick head feint before blocking opponent’s weapon hand, while stepping in to counter attack.**



**Nodan holds an upright “centered” position as he strides in to execute a palm heel thrust to the adversary’s jaw.**



**Note that a straight line extends from Nodan’s back heel, up through his “center,” and up to the palm heel break.**

## 2) The 1-2 Timing

The 1-2 Timing uses the “centered” bone alignments of the 1st Principle to generate speed and body weight transfer through the hips. In Step 1 (below), the hips are fully rotated *before* the upper body is *actively* turned toward the target.



**Step 1-** The hips are rotated sharply towards the target as the upper body remains relaxed and turns naturally.



**Step 2- The shoulders rotate while the striking arm remains relaxed. Next, the punch is *actively* extended into the stack.**

In the 1-2 Timing, the hip rotation (step 1) and the upper body rotation (step 2) are separate actions. In addition, the upper body rotation and the extension of the punching arm also move in a 1-2 timing sequence. This must be studied well, because most striking techniques use a 1-2 timing within the 1-2 Timing principle. These actions spiral the energy generated by the legs and hips, up the spine and out the striking arm. In Japan, this technique is known as the “double whip” or “returning wave,” and karateka should *consciously* separate the movements within the 1-2 Timing until they become a natural part of every technique.

Note how his fore fist forms a 45° angle to enable his elbow to remain turned “under” throughout the technique. This reduces power loss through the elbow joint.

## 1-2 Timing generates speed and body weight transfer



**Step 1-** Nodan “sits” in a “centered” crane stance and rotates his hips toward target. A one-leg stance limits the amount of weight transfer.



**Step 2 –** He rotates his upper body and extends the punch. Despite the limited weight transfer, his “strong side” hand generates enough speed to easily break a 4-board stack.

**1-2 Timing in the lunging elbow strike**

Nodan steps into a “centered” straddle stance with hips cocked at a 45° angle (left). Step 1- he rotates his hips toward target (right).



Step 2- He rotates the upper body. His elbow strike follows. This is 1-2 timing within the 1-2 Timing.

### 1-2 Timing in the back elbow strike



**Nodan is grabbed in a choke hold from behind. He drops into a "centered" stance and applies 1-2 Timing in reverse direction.**



**Step 1- Nodan's hips are sharply turned backwards.  
Step 2- Shoulders and upper body are rotated back towards the target and the elbow follows.**

### 3) Follow Through

I learned this principle from Quan as “extension of ki,” but have found that Western practitioners more easily understand the “follow through” concept taught in sports that throw, hit, or kick a ball. Philosophically, the Eastern concept of “extending ki” is different from the follow through practiced in sports. Practically speaking, however, it is similar in that the energy of every block, strike, and kick must be *mentally* extended or projected, “all the way to infinity.”

Follow Through is essential for breaking multiple unspaced board stacks, because the kinetic energy of a strike dissipates as it meets the resistance of each successive board. The function of the 3rd Principle is to maintain the speed and momentum of the strike all the way *through* the target,



**Flexible post makiwara training helps to develop Follow Through.**





**3-board bent wrist break from cat stance was executed from a “weak” cross-chest position. It required a quick 1-2 Timing hip rotation and Follow Through, “all the way to infinity.”**



### Follow Through with a zero-inch break

This is a safe, but difficult demonstration of the 1-2 Timing hip rotation and Follow Through principles. The challenge is to push against a single board with enough speed and body weight transfer to break it before the suspended bag moves. This is a zero-inch break, because the hand remains in contact with the board from beginning to end of the technique.



Above, Nodan first rotates his hips sharply towards the target. Next, he rotates his upper body and arm through the board (right), while following through “all the way to infinity.” Before the hip rotation (left), his stance is relaxed, the spine is straight, his head is held erect as if suspended on a string, and his elbow is turned under to reduce power loss through the elbow joint.

## 4) Correct Breathing

Breathing is controlled through the diaphragm, *inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth*. Shuri-te styles like Shorin-ryu and Shotokan use natural breathing, while Goju-ryu and Uechi-ryu use a forced breathing style.

When executed vocally, the *kiai* shout is carried on the breath and manifests as a primal roar that emanates from the depths of the hara or “center.” When Nodan executes *kiai* without a vocal shout, a loud and forceful rush of air can be heard on every focused technique. Correct Breathing is vital to effective application of the 5th Principle, Soft and Hard (see the YouTube video, “Nodan Dagger Form”).



**Correct Breathing uses the diaphragm (left) and not the intercostal muscles in the upper chest (right). Boxers, wind instrument players, and opera singers are also trained to breathe using the diaphragm.**

## 5) Soft and Hard

Soft and Hard refers to the sequential contraction and relaxation of the major skeletal muscles in the body. For example, in the reverse thrust punch, the legs, abdominals, and hips are contracted first, while the muscles in the upper body remain relaxed. Next, the upper body and arms are sequentially contracted and the entire body focuses hard upon impact. Mastering the 5th Principle requires many thousands of repetitions, until the *transitions* within and between the movements flow without tension.

In defending against multiple opponents, surprise, speed, and “one strike” power are key factors in an effective defense. Soft and Hard is vital for maintaining form and maximizing speed and body weight transfer.



**Nodan becomes Soft before preemptively attacking.**



**He rotates his hips and strikes one of the assailants.**



**His relaxed (Soft) transition following his first strike will maximize speed and body weight transfer into the next.**



**Nodan rotates his hips and strikes the second attacker.**



**The ability to go Soft in transition enables him to break both 3-board stacks in slightly more than 1 second.**

## Kicks and Blocks

Kicking and blocking techniques utilize the five principles. For self-defense, the middle and lower-level applications of the front, side, and back kicks are the most practical. Lower-level kicks are easier and safer to perform, and are more effective against un-trained street criminals.

### Front Thrust Kick

In the front thrust kick, the hips are rotated 45 degrees as the knee is raised. This opening of the hips releases the hamstring muscles and allows for greater flexibility of movement, which maximizes speed. The knee should be raised higher than the intended target, because a “down and in” motion gives the front thrust kick its greatest power.

### Reverse front thrust kick defense



Nodan faces a knife threat using a front fighting stance.



He steps in and sweeps away the attacker's weapon hand as he punches toward attacker's face to disguise his kick.

### 5-board break with front thrust kick



He thrusts to the groin using a "down and in" trajectory.



**1-2 Timing front thrust kick on a suspended bag**



**Yakov applies the 1-2 Timing to his reverse front kick.**



**The suspended bag rebounds off Yakov's foot, which is what distinguishes a front "thrust" kick from a "push." Note how he remains "centered" throughout the kick.**

### Low back thrust kick defense



From a surrender position, Nodan turns and strikes toward his attacker's face, which he immediately transitions to a guarding block that helps obscure his intention of kicking to the knee.



From head to heel, Nodan's body forms a straight line through his "center," as he breaks a 4-board stack.

### **Formal downward block**

The formal downward block is an example of a “one strike” blocking technique that hits with the entire body, and not only with the arm and shoulder.

According to Quan, all blocks use the “unbendable arm,” in which the blocking arm is extended in a soft/hard state of tension using the triceps and latissimus dorsi muscles that run along the upper sides of the back. With the application of the “unbendable arm,” the downward block becomes like a “slightly bent steel rod wrapped in cotton cloth.”

Formal blocks use the full range of motion to develop proper form. With training, however, karateka can project strength into the shorter and quicker street applications.

### **5-board break with formal downward forearm block**



**This break is made possible by applying the “unbendable arm.”**

### **Abbreviated downward block defense**



**To defend against a thrusting knife attack, Nodan must block with power from “hands up” surrender position.**



**Nodan drops into a “centered” stance and thrusts his blocking arm downward to intercept the knife attack.**

### Formal middle level forearm block



As his hips begin to rotate (left), the blocking arm moves naturally. The hips are rotated (center) before the block makes contact (right). (Note 45° angle of the block as he applies the “unbendable arm.”)

### Abbreviated middle level forearm block defense



Nodan defends a knife thrust using an angle step and abbreviated middle block, as he counters with a hook punch to the head.

### Rising forearm Block Defense



**Nodan moves in to jam the attacker's overhand knife attack.**



**He adjusts his block slightly outward to intercept attacker's arm.**

## Street Defense

From the beginning I did not believe the “point” sparring practiced in sport karate during the 1960s was realistic. For me karate was an exercise in survival and my interest was in learning how to apply the techniques to street situations. The training at my karate school, however, did not teach practical self-defense. Fortunately, a college classmate, who knew combat jujitsu, showed me street defense strategies that could be used in conjunction with karate.

Today the mixed martial arts (MMA) have taken center stage as an entertainment blood sport. At the professional level, highly trained world class athletes compete for fame and fortune in heavily promoted cage matches. But this latest expression of the arts is different from reality street defense.

**There are no rules in the street.** Spear hand strikes to the eyes and throat, and attacks to the groin are among the tactics prohibited in sport competitions. And biting, which is a strong deterrent against grabs and holds, is a disqualifier.

Most sport competitors use mouth guards, hand and groin protectors, and have a referee to monitor the action. They also have warm up time and do not fight armed or multiple opponents where grappling skills become largely irrelevant.

To be practical as street defense, a martial art cannot be programmed to only respond to competitive fighting techniques. Practitioners must understand the psychology and predatory nature of street criminals and adapt their arts to respond to different kinds of assaults.

### Back and side head strike defenses

The number of boards that can be broken with a given technique does not always indicate effectiveness. My back head strike lacked enough speed to break more than two boards, but the mass of the head makes it a devastating strike to the face. Likewise, the speed of a snapping side head strike can easily stun an attacker into submission (bottom photos).



**Nodan pins his attacker's arms and executes back head strike. Speed and power are generated by a "double whip" hip thrust to the rear.**



**Nodan feigns surrender while subtly moving his head out of the line of fire (left). He applies a twisting joint hold (center) and follows up with a snapping side head strike to face. Head strikes are banned from sport.**



### **Lunging palm strike against a machete attack**

A machete is a versatile tool used throughout the world to perform tasks like clearing jungle growth, cutting down trees, and preparing food. Yet, when used against a human being it can be a lethal weapon. For instance, in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, countless thousands of Tutsi civilians were hacked to death by Hutu militia groups using machetes.

Fortunately, a machete is large enough to require a “hitch” in the user’s swing. One effective strategy for defending a machete threat is to use a quick head-feint to preemptively step in and force attacker to “hitch” his swing. The goal is to jam the attacker’s weapon arm before he can generate enough speed and momentum to cause serious bodily harm.



**Nodan assumes a relaxed front fighting stance position just beyond his adversary’s effective striking range.**



**After a quick head-feint, Nodan preemptively steps in, which causes attacker to react and “hitch” his swing.**



**Momentum from Nodan’s “centered” lunging step, block, and palm heel thrust, stops the adversary in his tracks.**

## Defending a gun hold up from behind



**Nodan gives gunman false confidence by raising hands in “surrender” and saying, “Okay, take anything you w...”  
Compliant words can psychologically relax an attacker.**



**Before finishing his sentence, Nodan abruptly swings his arm back, which takes him out of the line of fire.**



He continues to pivot around into a “centered” straddle stance and secures the gunman’s weapon arm firmly against his side.



Nodan executes a “one strike” hook punch to the gunman’s temple. This kind of street assault and preemptive counter attack highlights the differences between sport fighting and reality street defense.

### **The Best Martial Art?**

Debates over which is the best martial art should begin with the question, “best for what?” There are traditional throwing and striking arts, competitive fighting styles like sport karate and mixed martial arts (MMA), and reality-based self-defense systems like Krav Maga and combat jujitsu. Each of these arts develops its own techniques and strategies.

Ultimately, the best martial art is the one that best addresses *your* needs and goals. Those who would seek instruction should research and visit their local schools, because there are good and bad teachers in every style, and each art has its strengths and weaknesses.

Not all practitioners will have the strength or athleticism to develop the “one strike” power necessary to stop a determined attacker with a single blow. Furthermore, for many people “one strike” training may not be available, or may be too expensive or time consuming to pursue. A practical alternative is to take a hands-on self-defense course and carry pepper spray (mace), which is available in handy pocket size containers. Pepper spray is relatively safe, inexpensive, and legal in most countries.

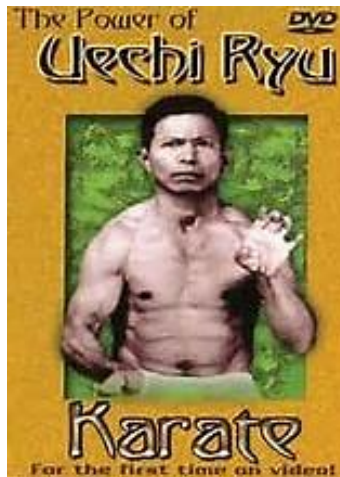
As with any defensive weapon, users should become familiar with its proper use and legal application, and should practice arming and discharging live canisters in both indoor and outdoor settings. Fortunately, there are excellent YouTube videos showing basic self-defense techniques and the proper use of pepper spray as a self-defense tool.

## A Brief History

### The 1960s

I began studying Okinawan Uechi-ryu in the 1960s during my first year of college. This in-fighting style emphasizes Sanchin, a kata that utilizes a narrow hourglass stance and a hard, focused breathing technique that trains the body to withstand an opponent's blows. The art makes extensive use of circular blocks and snapping kicks and punches Uechi-ryu specializes in attacking the opponent's pressure points with the finger tips, thumbs, and single knuckle strikes. I used Uechi-ryu techniques in my street defense and continued to practice the Seisan kata for many years.

### Kanei Uechi (1911-1991)



**Kanei helped develop the art his father imported from China.**

## Combat Jujitsu

My interest in karate was as self-defense, but my school did not teach practical applications. Fortunately, I met a college classmate, Tex Barnes, who was proficient in combat jujitsu. Tex brought a metal training knife to our first practice together and succeeded in “killing” me many times, which left large red welts all over my body. My formal blocks were too slow, I was always out of position, and I lacked a strategy for defending against a skilled knife fighter. This was my wakeup call, exposing the fact that reality street defense was very different from formal dojo training.

Tex taught me how to defend against the kinds of assaults street criminals were most likely to use. This training, in conjunction with karate, became foundational to my future approach to street defense.



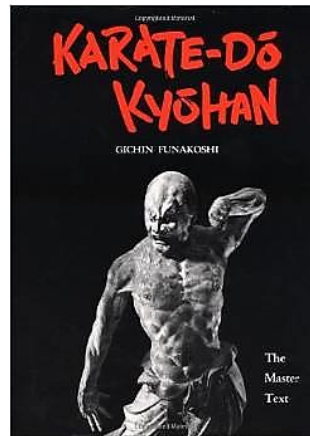
**My students, Yohan and Yakov, practice a twisting joint hold defense that I learned from Tex Barnes during the 1960s.**

## The 1970s

After graduating from college, I moved away to pursue graduate studies in psychology. There were no Uechi dojos in the area, so I joined a school that taught a hybrid style of Gichen Funakoshi's Shotokan karate that incorporated judo and elements of Shorinryu and Chinese kempo.

This eclectic style was very different from the Uechi-ryu I had studied. The breathing pattern was natural and the training stances were lower. The emphasis was on freestyle sparring and the katas were very similar to the official forms endorsed by the JKA (Japan Karate Association).

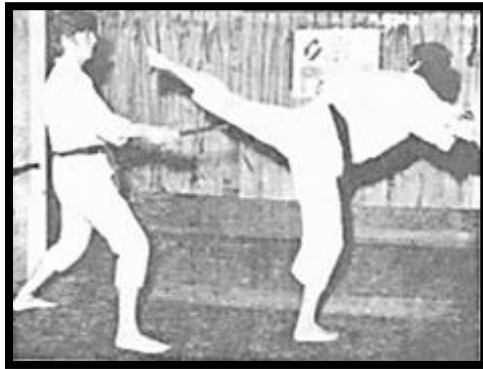
The school offered private self-defense courses, many of which I taught due to my training in jujitsu, and a senior instructor taught me candle gazing and Zen meditation.



Gichen Funakoshi (1868-1957) founded Shotokan karate, and his master text, *Karate-do Kyohan*<sup>3</sup> (right), served as my guide to the art until I began to study Sensei's Shotokan style with Quan Li.



After receiving a dojo charter, I relocated to work as a psychologist for a large city hospital and began teaching Shotokan/street defense at colleges and community centers.



**In 1972, I taught karate/street defense for a community center. Senior students, Rik (left) and JD (below) often assisted.**



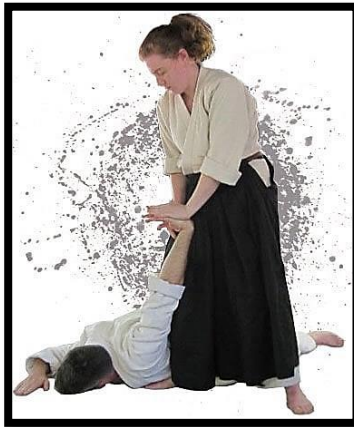
**My first black belt, JD, started his own school. By 1980, I had promoted 7 men to black belt.**

**1980-1985**

I trained with Quan Li in Sensei's Shotokan karate, and with Sensei in aikido and weapons (sword and jo).



**At Sensei's dojo, I studied aikido and weapons. My younger brother, wielding the jo, has practiced and taught aikido more than 25 years.**



**Aikido is a throwing art designed to inflict as little injury as possible.**

**1992-1996**

I taught Sensei's Shotokan karate and street defense to two young men, Yohan and Yakov. After they had trained nearly five years without receiving any rank, I had them tested for the black belt in *Shotokan Karate Jutsu* by a panel of judges. The test consisted of Shotokan basics, suspended bag techniques, pre-arranged kumite sets, and the katas, Jion and Kanku Dai. Lastly, the street defense testing required defending against a variety of assaults that culminated with random freestyle knife attacks. (See the YouTube video, "Nodan Students," for an edited version of the test.)



**Yohan and Yakov (front center) posed with their judges after they received their black belts in *Shotokan Karate Jutsu*.**

## 1999-2004

I taught karate/street defense to Rowdy, a former track athlete who was an excellent practice partner. We trained together once a week for five years, which helped keep me strong in karate into my late fifties. Rowdy reached the brown belt level and could break three suspended boards with a reverse thrust punch, a feat that would challenge many adult black belts.

### DVD, YouTube videos, and book

In **2004**, I purchased a video camcorder and began filming my board breaking demonstrations for a DVD warning martial artists not to seek enlightenment through their arts. After many difficulties, I eventually managed to produce a less than mediocre 30-minute DVD that my critics rightly savaged. They called my effort “cheesy” and pointed to the awful acting and terrible production values. With this failure, I concluded that Nodan and my warning were dead.

In **2009**, however, I finally “discovered” YouTube, which presented an opportunity to “resurrect” Nodan. This time I wisely hired a professional videographer to help edit videos for the **nodankarate** channel, which began posting on YouTube in March, 2009.

In **2011**, I finished the first edition of ***The Power of The Way: A Spiritual Journey***, which proved as big a failure as my DVD. Yet, I have continued revising the book with the hope of one day producing a satisfactory edition.

## END NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Miyamoto Musashi, *A Book of Five Rings*, The Overlook Press, 1974, p. 54-55.
  - <sup>2</sup> Kundalini is the Indian snake goddess, whose dominant feature is energy infusion or possession. When awakened, *Kundalini fire* spirals upward to the crown chakra to bring on enlightenment. Sensei possessed an intimate knowledge of the Kundalini Spirit, along with a reluctance to discuss it.
  - <sup>3</sup> Gichen Funakoshi, *Karate-do Kyohan*, Kodansha America, Inc., c. 1973
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Lighthouse Productions c. 2011