

My Karate Journey, Part 25 -- Rethinking My Thinking!

Karate is considered a hard-style of martial arts. It requires focused effort, split-second starting and stopping, abrupt quickness in tightening and loosening of muscles, and pushing your body to its limits to increase speed and power! Aikido is a good example of a soft-style. It has NO abrupt movements, requirements of speed or power, nor the need for the tightening of muscles. Its theory is to use your opponent's force and power against himself. Whereas karate initially attempts to stop an attack head-on, then delivers a counter-strike, aikido uses the flow and direction of the attacker's power to avoid and counter the attack.

In other words, karate is generally for the young and physically fit ... or the YOUNG AT HEART!!! With age quickly overtaking my abilities, and a body prone to bruising and injury, I now find myself rethinking my approach to training —AND teaching. I fully understand that I can no longer spar as I did when I was younger. The days of trading blows with my partner to see who blinked first are definitely over.

With age, physicality must definitely give way to technique, and I have now made it a mission to incorporate soft-style techniques into our training at the dojo. Although karate will ALWAYS be a hard-style, as it SHOULD be, there will always be room for alternative, softer, techniques to counter an attack — ALSO A MUST!!

However, age is NOT the ONLY reason to incorporate softer techniques into the training. Those less capable, less physical, smaller in stature and size, or less prone to violence need more options. In the last month, I have started teaching my advanced students smoother and more flowing movements to avoid an attack, instead of meeting it head-on. These techniques do NOT require speed and power. However, they definitely require more finesse in TIMING and PATIENCE!!

A note on karate as a hard-style: Interestingly, although it DOES require a concentrated effort of speed and power, this method is the easiest to learn. ANYONE can learn karate and become quite proficient in it. However, doing karate is QUITE different from applying it! Through our very structured and rigid methods, the student learns the techniques

and their applications. Constant repetitions and drills with partners give rise to increased trust and confidence in their ability to defend themselves. This is where many students find themselves after several years of training.

I developed shifting and sliding drills, at first for myself, and then to teach the Senpais. The initial plan was to teach these techniques to JUST the Senpais. Realizing that my teaching time was quickly shortening, I decided to include the higher colored belts also. Now, if I deem a group of students ready to handle these difficult moves, I will NOT hesitate to show them. At this point they have a solid grasp of the Shotokan basics, and are ready to take on the soft-style techniques. Although the soft-style techniques LOOK easy and simple to do, the students soon realize the level of difficulty has just grown exponentially! However, the confidence they have built learning the hard-style is an essential part of their potential mastery of the soft-style.

In the last month since I started teaching soft-style techniques, the students have been eager, intent, and hungry to learn the subtleties of the moves. The look of wonder, joy, and sense of accomplishment on their faces is the VERY reason that I have been doing karate for three-fourths of my life!!!

I LOVE IT!!!

