KARATE JUTSU

The Five Principles

by Nodan

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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!

Karate as Martial Art

Readers are advised that the "Nodan" character is a disguise intended to protect the identities of people described in my first book, *The Power of The Way: A Spiritual Journey.*

Karate Jutsu: The Five Principles describes my teacher Quan Li's five striking precepts which, when properly applied and augmented with makiwara training, can double even an experienced karateka's striking power. The dvd, *Nodan Karate: The Five Principles*, is a companion resource which can be viewed at the ***nodankarate*** channel on YouTube. Timeline references to this dvd have been provided throughout the text.

Quan Li trained in kempo, taekwondo, Kyokushinkai, Shaolin, and Shotokan karate, along with judo, aikido, and kobudo (weapons). He received a black belt in karate-do from his teacher, *Sensei*, who was the most powerful martial artist I ever saw.

By the mid-1980s, Quan Li had become an outstanding karate master. His brilliance was in his striking technique, which I quantified and named *The Five Principles*. These principles are not new to the martial arts, but Li's radical interpretation of the 1-2 Timing and his emphasis on the Extension of Ki set him apart. Ki (chi) is the dynamic energy that is in all living things. "To extend ki" is to *follow through* with every technique, "all the way to infinity."

In Li's interpretation of the 1-2 Timing, the hips are fully rotated *before* the arm or leg moves, by using a *double whip-returning wave* hip action. This technique increases the terminal velocity of the strike and generates more power. The human body has 206 bones, 187 joints, and more than 640 skeletal muscles. Li's striking method maximizes leverage through precision bone alignments and a highly refined firing sequence of all the major muscle groups in the body.

I lifted heavy weights for seven years and practiced karate for fifteen years before training with Quan Li, but I could never have performed the breaking demonstrations seen in my videos without extensive makiwara practice and proficiency in *The Five Principles*.

The Five Principles

1st Proper Bone Alignment (stances are "centered" in the hara, a point two inches below the navel)

2nd 1-2 Timing (the hips are fully rotated with *double whip-returning wave* hip action *before* the arm is extended)

3rd Extension of Ki (Mind Principle: "follow through" with every technique "all the way to infinity")

4th Correct Breathing (inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth using the diaphragm)

5th Soft and Hard (the correct sequence of relaxation and contraction of all the major muscle groups)

Karate Jutsu

Quan Li's art is karate jutsu, and based on the Okinawan Shuri-te that Gichen Funakoshi introduced to Japan in the 1920s. According to Bruce Clayton's research, this style was developed during the 19th century by Shuri castle bodyguards. Dr. Clayton writes:

"The new art, called Shuri-te, was fundamentally different from traditional chuan fa. . . The new style made no attempt to subdue the opponent through painful nerve strikes or immobilizing joint locks. Instead, every element of the new art emphasized destroying the opponent completely in one or two seconds."[1]

Soken Matsumura was the head of the Shuri castle guards for fifty years and was instrumental in the development of Shuri-te. He was considered to be the best martial artist in Okinawa, and former students described him as very fast and deceptively strong. He was also known for his powerful hip movements and terrifying "piercing eyes." His student, Anko Itosu, created the five Pinan katas and taught Master Funakoshi, who founded Shotokan karate.

Matsumura (1797-1893)

Anko Itosu (1831-1915)

Soken Matsumura was the principal archetect of linear karate. His student, Itosu, taught Funakoshi and created the five Pinan (Heian) katas which are still practiced by karate schools today.

Gichen Funakoshi (1868-1957)

Introduced Shuri-te to Japan and founded Shotokan karate.

Kata and Kumite

Traditional Asian striking arts use a system of kata (pre-arranged formal exercises) to train practitioners in the style's fundamental techniques. For the 19th century Shuri-te masters, kata and makiwara practice formed the core of training (competitive sport karate did not begin until the 1930s). Quan Li taught prearranged sanbon (three step) and one point (one step) kumites, and considered free-style sparring too dangerous before the black belt level.

Quan Li's kata system was based on the early Shuri-te forms that Master Funakoshi introduced to Japan in the early 1920s. At that time, Funakoshi's stances were considerably higher than the deep training stances seen in today's JKA Shotokan. I have studied a variety of striking arts and have concluded that *The Five Principles* can be effectively applied to all of them.

Master Quan Li

Quan Li taught a five part karate-do workout, in which kata was the heart and soul of the training. (see "Nodan's Teacher" at *nodankarate* channel)

Karate as Street Defense

There are no rules in the street. Spear hand strikes to the eyes and throat, grabs and strikes to the groin, and biting are among the many effective street tactics that are not permitted in sport. In competitive sports like MMA, there are established rules to protect the players. Competitors wear mouth gaurds and protective hand padding, and a referee oversees the action. Also, sport fighters do not train against armed or multiple opponents, and karate jutsu's "one strike" techniques can be the equalizer in those kinds of street situations.

Understanding the predatory nature of street criminals is essential for developing good self-defense strategies. For a traditional martial art to be effective as street defense, it must be adapted to real attack situations, because *what we practice is what we will do* when confronted with a real assault. Throughout this text, self-defense examples are provided to show how "one strike" power, along with a strategy of deception and misdirection, can produce a formidable array of self-defense applications.

Nodan's Students (dvd 26:10)

From a "surrender" position, Yakov applies a joint hold to Yohan's wrist and uses a front kick counter.

The Two-fold Gaze

The *twofold gaze* of perception and sight[2] enables a martial artist to see everything simultaneously, and not be distracted by details or sudden feints by his opponent. *Perceptually*, this has the effect of slowing down the adversary's movements. With a clear mind devoid of anticipation, one can perceive the attacker's strength and intention. My introduction to the *twofold gaze* happened as I trained with *Sensei* for the first time. I have described the experience as follows:

"Next, he stood in front of me in a relaxed front stance with his arms hanging loosely at his sides. He said, "Attack me." I recall pausing and wondering if he was serious but, Sensei just stood there with a strange stare emanating from his eyes. I shifted into a front fighting stance and cautiously looked for an opening. There was none. It was as if he was empty and had every possible attack covered."[3]

Pre-emptive Defense (dvd 8:16)

Using the *twofold gaze*, Nodan perceives that his assailant is about to launch a lethal attack. He assumes a fighting stance with his arms "floating" in a non-aggressive attitude. Note that he keeps his body just out of the attacker's effective thrusting range.

Nodan surprises his assailant with a quick head feint. He immediately follows this with a sliding step toward the attacker, in which his lead foot moves first. As he slides in, he uses a sweeping knife hand block against the attacker's weapon hand. He continues stepping through and strikes his attacker's jaw before he can react and counter attack. To appreciate the speed at which this technique must be performed, see the dvd @ 8:16.

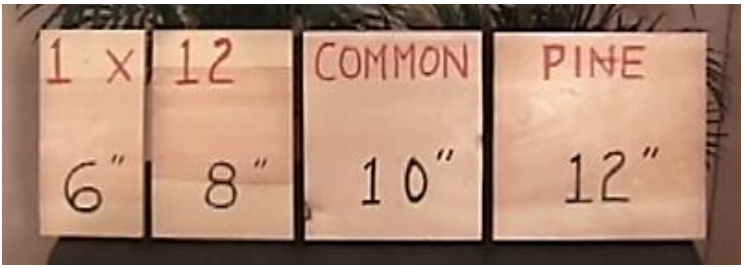
Nodan continues stepping through and strikes the attacker with a palm heel thrust (3 board break).

Middle Block with Hook Punch (dvd 19:38)

Using the *twofold gaze*, Nodan perceives a thrusting attack. With a sliding angle step to avoid the knife thrust, he blocks and counters with an overhead hook punch (3 board break).

Board Strength (dvd 3:14)

To show the power in Li's striking methods, I performed a number of suspended breaking demonstrations using 1x12x10 inch wide pine boards. Testing showed that each board could support, on average, a 130 lb. (59 kg) barbell placed across the centerline of the wood, running parallel with the grain. When the boards are un-spaced, the resistance increases proportionally.[4] For example, a 5 board stack could support a 650 lb. (295.5 kg) weight (5x130 = 650).



Four, 6 inch wide boards @ 130 lb. test strength are equal to four, 12 inch wide boards @ 130 lb. strength. The strength depends on width and moisture content. (see "Board Testing" on p. 55 for testing details)

A loaded barbell is placed gently along the centerline, running parallel with the grain. On average, my boards broke @ 135 lbs.

Makiwara

The makiwara was the main tool used by 19th century Shuri-te practitioners to develop powerful striking techniques. The traditional Okinawan makiwara was a wooden post wrapped in rice straw and buried three feet in the ground. These outdoor striking posts were hard and stiff. With intense training, practitioners formed thick calluses and bone calcifications on their hands and feet.

In the 1960s, *Sensei* trained with Mas Oyama, the founder of Kyokushinkai Karate. Oyama was considered by many to be the most powerful karateka of his generation. He became famous for fighting bulls with his bare hands, and for his breaking demonstrations, in which he broke objects such as boards, bricks, and stones. *Sensei* said that Oyama once confided to him that, after many years of intense makiwara practice, his hands were damaged to the point where he always knew when it was about to rain because of the pain and stiffness in his knuckles.

To protect my students from these long term injuries, I designed a flexible rubber padded striking post based on the principle of *graduated resistance*. Over time, this proved to be a safe and efficient way to develop powerful striking techniques. Besides this, callus formation is not necessary for effective street defense.

Mas Oyama breaks boards with reverse thrust punch.

Oyama trains on a rigid, tree mounted makiwara.
Large calluses are clearly visible on his right hand.

My flexible indoor makiwara has a ¾ inch plywood base and is designed to utilize *graduated resistance.*

The post is made from two 1x8 inch wide boards. Layers of soft rubber padding protect the hands. Resistance is altered by changing the post width. Post holder is made from wood and framing brackets, and is attached to ¾ inch plywood.

Board holder is constructed from ¾ inch plywood and cut to fit the curved shape of the heavy bag.

The Okinawan Shuri-te masters used the makiwara as their primary tool for developing powerful striking techniques. The relationship between flexible makiwara training and horizontal striking power is illustrated in the following breaking demonstrations, in which I have used my "weak side" left hand to highlight the effectiveness of this training method. Also, I filmed these demonstrations while in my late fifties and well past my physical prime, in order to show the advantages of good technique (*The Five Principles*) over pure athletic ability.

For instructions on how to construct a flexible indoor makiwara, see my video, "How to Build a Makiwara and Board Holder," at the ***nodankarate*** channel on YouTube.

5 Board Break with Reverse Punch (dvd 4:07)

5 board stacks are nearly twice as thick (3¾ inches) as the ideal 2 inch penetration for a horizontal strike. A 5 board un-spaced stack could support a 650 lb. (295 kg.) barbell.

4 Board Break with Palm Strike (dvd 14:49)

Striking with power from a neutral stance position is vital for effective street defense. Palm strikes eliminate power loss through the wrist and knuckle joints in the hands.

5 Board Break with Elbow Strike (dvd 4:25)

This proved to be my most powerful horizontal breaking technique due to the centrifugal force generated by the circular path of the arm. Also, power losses through the elbow, the wrist, and the knuckle joints in the hands are eliminated.

Training Both Sides

Developing both the left and right sides of every technique is an important part of karate jutsu training, because an injury to one side or the other can occur before or during a street confrontation. Also, street attacks are fluid and un-predictable, and having the option of using either hand is a major strategic advantage.

4 Board Palm Breaks from Neutral Stance (dvd 14:49)

7 Board Bottom Fist Breaks (dvd 25:41)

7 boards will support a 910 lb. (413.6 kg.) barbell.

First Principle: Proper Bone Alignment (dvd 5:08)

The fore fist thrust punch became the signature technique of 19th century karate jutsu. This strike can be delivered from the reverse thrust position, or with a lunging forward step.

Fore Fist Bone Alignment

The fore fist is rotated to a 45 degree angle, in order to maximize the energy transfer through the forearm. The *interosseous membrane* connects the two bones in the forearm (the radius and the ulna). This 45 degree rotation maintains the correct bone alignment and tension in the membrane. The traditional Okinawan thrust punch utilizes a fully rotated "cork screw" motion and, after many years of training, this position is natural to me. But, the 45 degree angle shown below is technically correct. Besides properly aligning the forearm bones, a 45 degree rotation makes it easier to keep the elbow under throughout the movement of the arm. This is critical for the straight line thrust punch, because power is lost if the elbow is allowed to turn outward.

To find the proper fore fist striking position, extend both arms against a wall as if trying to push it over. Then, with arms held straight and the elbows turned under, form a fist from the hand position as it pushes against the wall.

Reverse punch to solar plexus from front stance

The Five Principles are foundational to all the striking arts. So, whether a style's training stances are low or high, their center of gravity must be located, or "centered," in the *hara*, a point approximately two inches below the navel. Properly centered stances are critical for developing powerful "one strike" techniques.

Quan Li's training stances are unusually high. In the photograph below, his front stance assumes a natural walking step, his feet grip the floor, his back leg and spine are straight, his head is held erect, and his shoulders remain down and back. 45 degree angles are integral to Li's highly leveraged techniques, and his arms, front leg, and back foot are positioned at 45 degree angles.

Technique from the Heian Yodan kata

Master Li stressed the importance of "moving in center" whenever stepping forward or backward, because the transfer of power through the hips will be significantly diminished if the legs are not firmly rooted to the ground upon impact with the target.

"Moving in Center" with Lunging Punch

Li's arms, front leg, and back foot form 45 degree angles. As he steps, he maintains his center as his front foot "seeks" out the correct foot placement.

Li holds ready thrust position and keeps his hips back as he steps forward. Then, he rotates his hips to the front and punches (see "Nodan's Teacher," at *nodankarate* channel).

"Moving in Center" with Spinning Defense

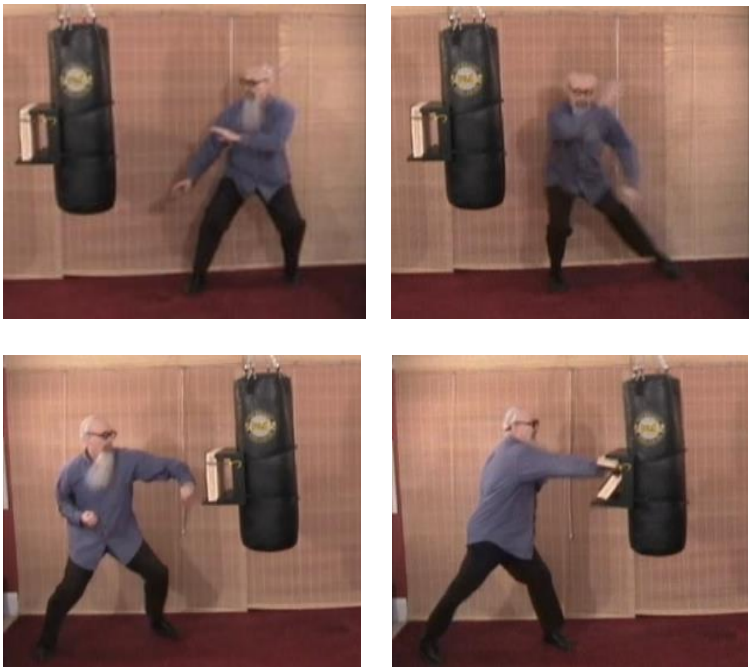
A spinning defense can be a useful strategy when facing a longer weapon such as a sword or staff. Nodan demonstrates the technique against a pitch fork because its effective stabbing area, when held horizontally, is wider than that of a sword or staff. This makes the initial evasive movement more difficult.

Nodan's hands are held in guard position. With a quick head feint, he begins to spin outside of the line of attack.

Nodan continues to spin until positioned behind his assailant and ready to counter attack. The weapon's length and forward position make it difficult for the attacker to turn to defend against the reverse punch.

Nodan can strike to the spine or kidney.

Spinning Technique with 3 Board Break



This spinning maneuver can be viewed in YouTube videos, “Nodan Self-Defense” and “Dagger Form.”

"Moving in Center" with Pivot Spin (dvd 7:58)

Nodan raises his hands in surrender and distracts the gunman by asking a simple question like, "Have you heard if it's going to rain tomorrow?" He can begin his counter attack by turning his upper body on the "to" syllable of the word "tomorrow," because the gunman's brain will continue to process the question. This diverts the gunman's attention away from his trigger finger and gives Nodan an opportunity to execute his defensive maneuver.

Nodan's pivot spin turns him out of the line of fire and enables him to apply a wrist trap to the gunman's arm (top of page 23). He continues turning into a straddle stance, from which he strikes his assailant in the temple before he can react (bottom of page 23). This movement can be performed in either direction, depending on the location of innocent bystanders.

It should be noted that, in most holdup situations, a criminal uses a weapon to threaten and control his victim, without intending to shoot. So, it is always advisable not to resist, unless one has full confidence in a well-practiced defensive technique.

Nodan feigns surrender because his mugger's intention is to rob him. Most often, criminals use a gun to control, not shoot their victims.

Strategically, *one strike* techniques are intended to stun an attacker, leaving the option for escape or a finishing technique (strike to temple area with 3 board break).

“Moving in Center” with Side Step (dvd 26:10)

Yakov waits for Yohan to commit to a lunging attack.

Then, he simultaneously blocks and side steps away, positioning himself for an immediate counter attack.

Stance Testing (dvd 9:22)

Nodan and his senior student, Yakov "The Hammer," are assisted by three former students in this stance testing demonstration. Yakov will maintain a one-leg Crane Stance while the three men try to push him out of his stance. Then, by "moving in center," Yakov will push them backwards. Master Li often used this testing method to assess the progress of his students in the first principle.

Yakov "The Hammer" with Nodan and three former students

Yakov pushes the three men out of their stances.

The Immovable Stance (dvd 26:10)

Yakov defends against Yohan's quick takedown maneuver by stepping back as Yohan drops low and shoots for his leg. The key to a successful defense is for Yakov to drop into a properly centered *fudodachi* (immovable stance). From this position, he can strike to the back of his attacker's head with a downward punch.

With fudodachi, Yakov's feet "stick" to the floor, thus making his stance "immovable."

After stunning his attacker with a punch to the back of the head, he follows with a downward elbow strike.

A downward elbow strike to the upper spine is a dangerous counter attack that is only used if one is under threat of serious bodily injury.

Second Principle: 1-2 Timing (dvd 10:41)

Step 1- The hips are fully rotated toward the target using a *double whip-returning wave* hip action. The punching arm remains *relaxed* and moves *naturally*.

Step 2- The punch is extended as the torso is rotated to 45 degrees into the target. The back and rear leg are straight, the shoulders are held down and back.

The picture below shows Nodan's finishing position in the reverse punch break. His rear leg and spine form a straight line as his upper body is rotated 45 degrees into the board stack at the moment of impact. His shoulders are held *down* and *back* to minimize the power loss through the shoulder joint, and his elbow remains *under* throughout the movement of the arm.

4 Board Break with Reverse Punch (dvd 6:27)

It is essential to train oneself to *subconsciously* move and strike from the center. To master Proper Bone Alignment and 1-2 Timing, concentrate on putting the mind in the hara. If the mind is in the punching arm rather than in the hara, the arm will remain tense, and will move simultaneously with the hip rotation. Thus, the strike will not be optimally leveraged by the 1-2 Timing. Learning to keep the mind in the hara is essential, because all striking, kicking, and blocking techniques emanate from the center. This is a vital point that must be studied well.

To appreciate the power that can be generated in the *double whip-returning wave* hip action, see the example in the dvd @ 27:27.

4 Board Break from Crane Stance (dvd 2:47)

This breaking demonstration from a Crane Stance shows the power of bone alignment and 1-2 timing.

Step 1- He rotates his hips sharply toward the target, while keeping his upper body *relaxed*.

Step 2- The arm is extended as the torso is rotated strongly into the target. The elbow remains under, the back straight, and shoulders down and back.

The Extension of Ki (follow through) sends the excess energy of the strike into the bag as the torso rotates 45 degrees to the front.

1-2 Timing from Straddle Stance (dvd 14:07)

The *double whip-returning wave* hip action generates power in the hips *before* the striking arm extended.

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4 Board Break with Bent Wrist (dvd 14:07)

I trained many years on a padded makiwara before breaking boards with the bent wrist.

This was my most difficult and dangerous breaking technique. Nerve damage can occur if the hands are not well-conditioned beforehand on the makiwara.

Gun Holdup Defense (dvd 15:23)

Nodan raises his hands in surrender and distracts gunman with a simple question as he subtly moves his head out of the line of fire. Then, he applies a wrist lock and counters with a side head strike.

After a head strike, he can disarm his attacker with a wrist break. To generate speed, the snapping head strike must use a *double whip-returning wave* action.

1-2 Timing Experiment (dvd 1:20)

Nodan strikes 4 boards with his strong side right hand *without* using the 1-2 Timing (he does apply the other four principles).

***Without* the 1-2 Timing, his strong side punch lacks enough speed to overtake the movement of the bag. Bag movement reveals the amount of force being transferred by the punch.**

Nodan adds the 1-2 Timing to the other four striking principles, which enables his *weak side* left hand to break the same 4 board stack with relative ease (lower right photo). 53 seconds of the original unedited video serve to show that the boards are solid, and that the demonstration is authentic (see dvd segment @ 1:20-2:13).

5 Board Break with Palm Strike (dvd 4:46)

Circular palm strike from the neutral stance requires a powerful 1-2 Timing hip rotation. (This was my strongest upper level strike.)

The *unbendable arm* (p. 52) reduces power losses through the elbow, and striking with the palm reduces power losses in the hand.

Front Choke Defense (dvd 4:49)

One strike **power from a neutral stance position is especially useful in close quarter self-defense.**

Third Principle: Extension of Ki (dvd 21:10)

Ki (chi) is the vital energy and activating life force inherent in all living things. Quan Li learned this principle from his teacher, *Sensei*, and then applied it to his karate. The concept of "extending ki" is fundamental to the throwing and weapons arts. It requires a concentrated mental effort to "follow through" with every technique.

In *The Power of The Way: A Spiritual Journey*, I write about my first training experience with *Sensei* and his remarkable demonstration of this principle:

"… Sensei moved behind me and instructed me not to look back until I could "feel" his extended fist close to the back of my head. I waited until I could sense him almost touching me. When I turned to look, Sensei was standing ten feet away. I tried again. This time I felt certain he was some distance away because I could not sense anything close to me. But, as I turned to look, the side of my face lightly grazed his extended fist. Somehow, he was able to extend and withdraw his ki (vital energy) at will."[5]

Yin and Yang

Symbol represents the primordial masculine and feminine energies.

3 Board Break from Cat Stance (dvd 21:34)

This difficult bent wrist break from the cross chest position requires a concentrated "follow through."

Ki must be extended beyond the breaking point.

Extending Ki with the Push Break (dvd 22:20)

This is a simple, but difficult test of thrusting hip speed and power. The challenge is to exert at least 135 lbs. of force (61kg) on a single board before the 75 pound suspended bag moves.

Nodan's stance is properly aligned with its center of gravity in the hara. His body is soft, with only enough tension to hold the stance together. The rear leg and spine are straight and the shoulders are held down and back, in order to reduce power loss through the shoulder joint. His head is held erect, as if suspended on a string, and his elbow is held under (note the relaxed position of the right arm).

With the starting position of his "striking" arm fully extended against the board, the acceleration required to overtake the movement of the bag must be generated by a very quick and explosive hip rotation (see the hip thrust example in the dvd @ 27:27).

Step 1: Nodan rotates his hips sharply while, at the same time, he keeps his upper body, shoulders, and arms properly aligned and *relaxed* (his leg, hip, gluteus, and abdominal muscles are all focused hard).

Step 2: Nodan focuses his torso, shoulders, and "thrusting" arm as he rotates his upper body into the board and exhales with a kiai yell. The entire movement of the Push Break takes only a split second to perform using the 1-2 Timing. Throughout the movement, Nodan "follows through" the board with a concentrated Extension of Ki, as if projecting a stream of energy "out to infinity."

Note that Nodan's right arm remains relaxed throughout the technique, an application of Soft and Hard principle.

Simultaneous Block and Counter (dvd 17:11)

Simultaneous block and counter techniques require a higher level of skill, because ki must be extended along two vectors.

Simultaneous rising block and palm thrust to jaw gives Nodan's assailant no time to counter attack. (Nodan executes 3 board break with palm thrust)

Fourth Principle: Correct Breathing (dvd 23:32)

Breathing is controlled with the diaphragm. Inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth. This is the same breathing method taught to boxers and opera singers, and it is foundational to all Asian martial arts and meditation practices.

The Naha-te karate styles, Goju-ryu and Uechi-ryu, both practice a form of Sanchin, a kata that utilizes dynamic tension to develop the body and activate powerful breathing techniques. For the striking arts, it is essential to exhale sharply on every focused movement. I found that training in these two karate systems improved my breathing efficiency and my ability to focus hard upon impact. Shuri-te styles do not practice Sanchin, preferring to train using a relaxed, natural breathing pattern. Neither *Sensei* nor Quan Li included the form in their Shotokan based karate-do.

In the 1960s, *Sensei* trained with Mas Oyama, the founder of Kyokushinkai karate. He attended one of Oyama's demonstrations, in which the master performed Tensho kata, a breathing form based on Sanchin dynamics. The event was held at a local movie theatre, and *Sensei* recalled his amazement at the tremendous sound of Oyama's breathing, which filled the entire auditorium!

Kiai is the union of mind, body, and spirit at the focus point of a technique. When properly executed, the kiai yell is a ferocious primal roar that emanates from the depths of the hara. Quan Li told me about an incident that happened while he was training at *Sensei's* karate school back in the 1970s. One night they heard a loud commotion coming from the barroom down the street. They all went outside and saw a gang of thugs beating a man who was lying on the ground. Immediately, *Sensei* went running toward them with his fist raised in the air and roaring like a lion. Not only did the gang scatter and run for their lives but, according to Li, *Sensei's* ferocious kiai yell terrified him and his fellow students as well!

Both *Sensei* and Quan Li trained their students to vocalize the kiai on every focused technique, while other styles restrict the yell to certain points in the kata. In either case, the principle remains the same. In my demonstrations of the kata, kiai points are not vocalized,

and a loud rush of air can be heard on each focused movement. I call this “breathing,” or “breath” kiai.

Masutatsu “Mas” Oyama (1923-1994)

Sanchin utilizes dynamic tension to develop ibuki (quick energy breath) and nogari (slow breath).

Master Kanei Uechi (1911-1991)

Uechi-ryu karate helped me develop hard focus.

Fifth Principle: Soft and Hard (dvd 26:58)

This principle refers to the complex sequence of contraction and relaxation of the more than 640 skeletal muscles in the body. Mastering the Soft and Hard principle requires many thousands of repetitions for each technique. It is the last of the five principles to be perfected.

The Goju-ryu practitioners who first named their style "Goju" (hard/soft) were referring to the balance between internal and external tension, which is characteristic of Sanchin dynamics. Quan Li did not practice Sanchin, and for him the Soft and Hard principle referred to the proper sequence of *relaxation* and *contraction* of the various muscle groups, in order to maximize speed and leverage. This is not a contradictory interpretation, but rather another way of understanding the soft/hard dynamic. In Li's karate, the body is always relaxed (soft), except for the short focus (kiai) points.

Hand and foot speed is developed through hundreds of thousands of repetitions that correctly apply the Soft and Hard principle. Another important factor for creating speed is flexibility, and practitioners should maintain a stretching routine that emphasizes the shoulders, hips, arms, and legs.

The Five Principles can also be applied to sports techniques like driving a golf ball, stroking a tennis ball, and hitting a baseball. Each of these movements requires many thousands of repetitions to perfect. In driving a golf ball, for example, Proper Bone Alignment and 1-2 Timing are critical because of the speed generated in the swing. The Zen saying, "To miss by an inch is to miss by a mile," becomes an apt metaphor for an errant tee shot over a 250 yard distance.

For the striking arts, mastering *The Five Principles* requires a serious commitment of time and effort, and I recommend that people carry *pepper spray* as an alternative to intensive self-defense training. But, as with any weapon that is carried for personal protection, users should thoroughly familiarize themselves with its proper use and application, because *what you practice is what you will do* when faced with a real situation.

Soft and Hard Combination Break (dvd 26:06)

Nodan remains relaxed before striking. His first strike is a snapping back fist, in which his lower body is focused hard. His upper body stays soft until focusing hard upon contact.

The second strike flows from the first, and during the transition between the two breaks, Nodan's upper body becomes relaxed. (start to finish, the two breaks take about ½ second to complete)

Kicking Techniques

Quan Li's kicking techniques follow *The Five Principles*. In the front thrust kick, he taught that the hips are rotated 45 degrees as the knee is raised. This "opening" of the hips releases the hamstring muscle and allows for greater speed and flexibility of movement. The "down and in" motion gives this kick its power.

5 Board Break with Front Kick (dvd 18:48)

Kicking with street shoes reduces speed but is more realistic in self-defense. Also, lower level kicks are more effective in street situations.

Low Side Kick Defense

A surrender position keeps Yakov's hands out of reach from Yohan's slashing attack.

Yakov begins a counter attack by striking toward his assailant's face to draw his attention upward.

As he prepares to execute a low side kick, Yakov's hands take a defensive position.

Yakov can kick *through* his attacker's knee while keeping out of reach of a knife thrust.

Low Back Kick (dvd 7:50)

The back kick option offers more protection. Nodan checks his attacker's weapon hand as he executes a back kick against the knee cap.

4 Board Break with Back Kick (dvd 7:50)

Head to heel, ki is extended through the target.

Front Kick Defense (dvd 20:39)

To launch an effective attack with a hatchet, the assailant must "hitch" his swing first, which gives Nodan plenty of time to use a front kick counter attack to the groin area.

Kicking effectively with the front leg requires a strong, centered one-leg stance. Nodan simultaneously executes a knife hand block as he chambers his right hand ready to strike. A "down and in" motion through the boards provides the front kick with its power (3 board break).

Blocking (dvd 16:23)

Blocking techniques also follow *The Five Principles.* Master Li taught that the formal downward, middle, and rising blocks are *striking* movements that must hit with the entire body, and not only with the arm and shoulder.

Li also used the *unbendable arm* technique, whereby the arm is extended in a soft/hard state of tension using the triceps muscles in the back of the upper arm and the latissimus dorsi muscles that run along the upper sides of the back. The *unbendable arm* has the effect of causing the striking arm to become like "a slightly bent steel rod wrapped in cotton cloth."

The blocking techniques in Li's karate use the full range of motion to develop form, speed, and power**.** With proper training, however, practitioners learn to project strength into the shorter and quicker street applications of these formal blocks.

Formal Downward Block (dvd 17:19)

Yakov defends as Nodan steps in with a full power lunging thrust punch. Without extensive arm conditioning, protective pads must be worn to absorb the shock of full power blocks.

Downward Block Application (dvd 18:08)

Nodan waits in a ready, “surrender” position.

Using the *unbendable arm* and an Extension of Ki, Nodan projects his arm downward into the block.

5 Board Break with Downward Block (dvd 18:20)

The formal striking blocks follow the 1-2 Timing.
Step 1- hips are rotated sharply toward the target.

Step2- the arm is extended through the boards.

Board Testing (dvd 3:14)

Board breaking was never part of Master Li's teaching or martial arts training. But, appearances can be deceiving, and I felt it necessary to provide some visual evidence of the extraordinary power in Quan Li's striking methods. I used un-spaced, suspended board breaking because it is notably difficult, requiring both a substantial transfer of body weight into the board stack and enough speed to overtake the movement of the bag. Also, horizontal breaks reflect the kinds of strikes most often used in practical street defense.

The boards were cut from 1x12 inch wide (actual mill size ¾ x 11¼ inches) white pine donor boards, which are available at home improvement centers throughout Canada and the U.S. I used soft wood, in order to find the relative strengths of a variety of striking techniques. The ideal penetration distance for a horizontal strike is approximately two inches, the equivalent of 3 boards (2¼ inches). Four and five board stacks are more difficult to break because of the added thickness of the wood. A five board stack is nearly 4 inches thick, almost twice the ideal penetration distance. This means that the terminal velocity of the strike must be greater.

For skilled practitioners who wish to replicate these breaks, it is important to establish and maintain a uniform standard of board strength. Wood strength can vary widely, depending on size and moisture content, and a sample from each donor board should be tested beforehand to insure consistency.

Suspended wood stacks break in a fairly straight line because they are not rigidly supported on the ends, so use wood from the same donor board and align the grain patterns facing in the same direction.

Before assembling a board stack, strike test each individual board against a rigid surface to expose unseen weak points, such as cracks or splits, and avoid boards with knots along the centerline because the circular grain pattern will make them nearly impossible to break.

Downward breaking is considerably stronger than horizontal breaking because body weight transfer follows gravity. Also, the arm travels a longer arc which generates speed, and the rigid supports eliminate power losses into the softer, suspended bag. Finally, note

that placing spacers between the boards changes the physics of breaking, making it considerably easier. Spacing the wood is like breaking the boards one at a time in rapid succession.

Suspended horizontal breaking more closely resembles the kinds of strikes used in real self-defense situations.

Nodan used 1x12x10 inch wide pine boards in all his breaking demonstrations. Testing showed that each board could support, on average, a 130 lb. (59 kg) barbell placed across the centerline of the wood, running parallel with the grain. When testing a board's strength, the full weight of the barbell should not be rested on the board for more than one second, because actual contact time during a break is only a fraction of that time. When the boards are un-spaced, resistance increases proportionally. For example, a 5 board stack could support a 650 lb. (295.5 kg) weight (5x130 = 650).

The significance of speed for horizontal suspended breaking is reflected in the following formula, in which the velocity is squared.

$$\text{Force} = \frac{\text{Mass x Velocity}^2}{2}$$

For those who are serious about testing their striking techniques with suspended horizontal breaking, be aware that adding only one more board can significantly increase breaking difficulty. For example, increasing a stack from four to five boards will require 25% more striking force. This is somewhat analogous to raising a bench press lift from 400 to 500 pounds. Experienced weightlifters know how difficult it is to raise their workout weights by even a few pounds, once they have been training for several years.

Although I never used steroids and did not develop large muscles, the tendon and ligament strength I acquired by lifting heavy weights for seven years significantly strengthened my body core. I believe this was instrumental in my ability to perform these four and five board suspended breaks with my *weakside* left hand.

Proper Bone Alignment in Weightlifting

My college weightlifting coach performs a "one arm bent press" with 150 pounds. (At the time, "Coach" weighed 148 lbs.)

Self-Defense

For me, karate was always an exercise in survival, not a sport, and my main interest was in learning how to apply the techniques in real situations. In the 1960s, I decided to concentrate on street self-defense and began to work out with Tex Barnes, a college classmate who studied a style of combat jujitsu. Tex brought a metal training knife with a dull, rounded blade to our first practice session. He succeeded in "killing" me a number of times, and afterwards I had large red welts all over my body.

This was a wake-up call, because it exposed the fact that real street defense was something quite different from the traditional training I was receiving in the dojo. My formal blocks were ineffective, my body was out of position, and I lacked a strategy for defending against a skilled knife fighter's flowing combinations. Above all, I learned that in street attack situations, *indecision* and *hesitation* can be deadly mistakes, and once a self-defense technique is initiated, it must be decisively followed through to a conclusion.

Tex taught me wrist locks and joint holds that were effective in close quarter situations involving guns and knives. We also practiced against moving knife and club attacks, and the kinds of grabs and holds that street criminals were likely to use. This early jujitsu training was the most important influence in my future approach to the martial arts. It is no surprise that Tex Barnes went on to become a high ranking jujitsu master.

I stopped training in karate for nearly seven years after the life-changing events I experienced in late 1985. In 1991, I was brought back into the art by two young men who asked for self-defense lessons. Yohan and Yakov trained with me for five years and were awarded the black belt by an independent panel of experts.

In 1999, I received another request for self-defense instruction from Jason, a former high school track athlete who had previously trained in karate. Since there was only the two of us, I became his practice partner for five years. This training, along with regular makiwara practice, kept me strong in karate. Then, in my late fifties, I filmed these breaking demonstrations.

Today, the mixed martial arts (MMA) have taken center stage as an entertainment blood sport. At the professional level, world class athletes compete for fame and fortune in heavily promoted cage matches. This latest expression of the martial arts embraces a very different philosophy from that of Funakoshi and the Okinawan karate masters of his generation. For them, the martial arts were primarily for health and self-defense, and practitioners were encouraged to embrace these proverbs:

"To win without fighting is the highest skill."
"A man learns to fight so he will not have to fight."

Debates about which is the best martial art should begin with the question, best for what? There are the traditional arts, sport fighting styles like MMA, and practical street defense systems. Each approach develops its own unique set of tools and strategies. Ultimately, the best martial art is the one that best addresses *your* needs and goals. There are good and bad practitioners in every art, and each style has its strengths and weaknesses.

Yohan and Yakov (front center) pose with their judges.

Epilogue

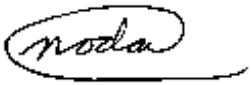
My dvd, “Nodan Karate: The Five Principles,” has been uploaded to the *nodankarate* channel on YouTube, because I do not want viewers to have to purchase it and pay the shipping and handling charges, which can be quite costly for those living outside the U.S. I have also uploaded the dvd and my books to the **nodankarate.org** website, where viewers can download copies for free, with no registration or sign-in requirements.

“Nodan Karate” has no kata or ranking system and is not a “style” of martial art. Rather, it is a guide to *The Five Principles* with some selected self-defense applications. The parameters of the breaking demonstrations have been clearly defined in this text and in the YouTube video, “Board Strength and Breaking Difficulty,” so that interested practitioners can replicate any of Nodan’s breaking experiments for themselves.

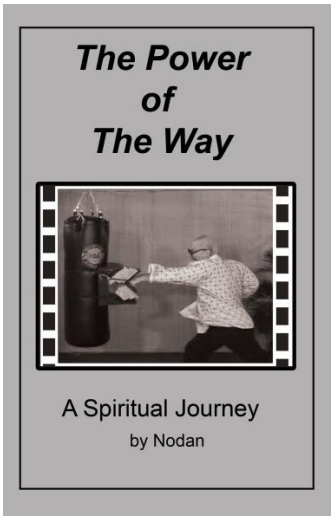
My karate teacher, Quan Li, taught me how to *double* my striking power. But *Sensei* possessed superhuman strength, and training with him took me to the “dark side” and supernatural power. Indeed, my breaking demonstrations are mere child’s play when compared to the strength that can be accessed from the spirit world.

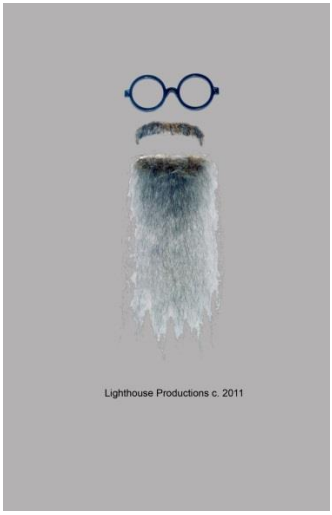
I have told the story of my training with Quan Li and Sensei, and the details of how I came to experience supernatural power, in my book, *The Power of The Way: A Spiritual Journey*.

Peace be with you.



Nodan's book and DVD





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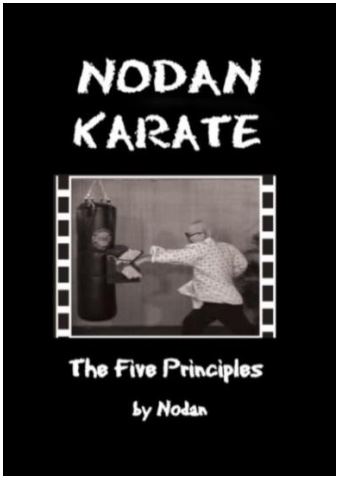

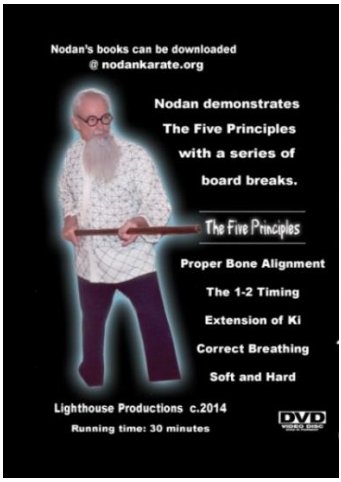

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END NOTES

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2. Miyamoto Musashi, *A Book of Five Rings*, Overlook Press, c.1974, p. 54-55

3. Nodan, *The Power of The Way: A Spiritual Journey*, Lighthouse Productions, c. 2011 (Revised December 2014), p.7

4. Jack Hibbard, *Karate Breaking Techniques*, Tuttle Publishing, c. 1981, p. 58-59

5. Nodan, p. 7

Nodan's books and dvd are free with no registration or sign-in requirement @ **nodankarate.org**

Nodan's dvd and videos are posted on the ***nodankarate*** channel on YouTube

Lighthouse Productions c. 2013