

A Short History of Shotokan Karate

Karate's origins can be traced back to the earliest instances of human civilization. The history of karate that is taught at Harambee Karate Club begins with the Indian Monk Bodhidharma who arrived in China sometime in the late fifth or early sixth century. After several years travel in the country he sensed that most practitioners of Buddhism in China were failing to grasp its central tenets. He settled in a cave across from the Shaolin monastery in Henan Province to show by practical demonstration the "correct" way to achieve what was so often easily misunderstood. Discovering that the monks did not have the necessary stamina to endure the physical and spiritual stresses his type of meditation required, he began instructing them in a method of conditioning that would come to be called *Shorinji Kempo*. Later on China replaced its civilian envoys to Okinawa with military personnel who were skilled in the arts of Chinese *Kempo*. Changes in the political leadership in the Ryukyu Island chain and subsequent changes in the relationship between Japan and the Ryukyus led local *ch'uan fa* groups and *tode* societies to band together in 1629 to form a united front. Out of this union came *Okinawa-te* that is a lineal ancestor of what we practice today called *Shotokan Karate-Do*. As it was fundamentally a combat art *Okinawa-te* was learned and practiced in secret. Indeed it was not until the end of Satsuma rule in 1875 with the Meiji Restoration that the three major styles, *Naha*, *Shuri* and *Tomari* named after in the cities in which they were located became visible. Too, because of the positive impact on the character of their participants they were incorporated into the physical education curricula of the middle schools on Okinawa. Funakoshi Gichin, a significant figure in the systemization of karate, born in 1869, began his study of karate at age 11. Living in a small village midway between Naha and Shuri he was able to study with noted masters of both the *Shorin* (Azato Yasutsune) and *Shorei* (Itosu Anko) styles. One consequence of his instruction in both was his combination of aspects thereof to create a hybrid style that had wide applicability in a variety of different situations. In 1922, Master Funakoshi was invited back to Japan to give demonstrations of his art at physical education congresses sponsored by the Ministry of Education. An invitation from Kano Jigoro to give a demonstration at the Kodokan Dojo resulted in increased interest in karate and the subsequent formation of numerous university clubs. His first book, *Ryukyu Kempo: Karate*, was published in that same year also. It was followed by a second, *Karate-do Kyohan*, in 1935 by which time he was installed in his own dojo in Tokyo. The ban against practicing the martial arts was lifted by the occupying allied forces in 1948; with two of his former students—Nakayama Masatoshi and Obata Isao—Master Funakoshi formed the Japan Karate Association. Its creation and the increased presence of U.S. servicemen stationed in the country led to a popularization of the arts and the need for the creation of an instructor training program to standardize the teaching of *Karate-do* worldwide. Oshima Tsutomu, a graduate of Waseda University, was the first of the JKA instructors to arrive in the United States. In 1955 he began teaching in a small club at Konko Shito church in Los Angeles California. When he returned to Japan he was succeeded by Nishiyama Hidetaka a former student of Master Funakoshi at Takushoku University. Okazaki Teruyuki, another student of Master Funakoshi arrived in the US in 1961 and began teaching at a small club in Philadelphia. In 1962 he established the East Coast Karate Association. In the ensuing years, intra-organizational tensions led to strife and schism resulting in the formation of the Delaware Valley Karate Association in 1965 and the creation of the International Shotokan Karate Federation in the early 1970s. Since that time numerous other *Shotokan* groups have arisen birthed by stylistic and ideological differences with the parent from which they separated including ISKF from JKA in 2007. Potential students are encouraged to visit several dojos to learn what each has to offer

before deciding that a particular dojo is THE ONE. This way one can secure information that might help clarify one's reasons for wanting to study the martial arts and the objectives that one seeks through training.

DOJO KUN.

The *Dojo Kun* is essentially a set of ethical guidelines applied not only to govern behavior in the training hall but also a schematic for achieving balance in one's life.

Seek perfection of character.

Be faithful.

Endeavor.

Respect others.

Refrain from violent deeds.

The equivalent in Japanese is:

Hitotsu! Jinkaku kansei ni tsuto nuru koto.

Hitotsu! Makoto no michi o mamoru koto.

Hitotsu! Do ryoku no seishin o yashinau koto.

Hitotsu! Rei gi o omonzuru koto.

Hitotsu! Kekki no you o imashi muru koto.

NIJU KUN

PRINCIPLES OF KARATE-DO

Master Funakoshi first published the twenty precepts or principles of Karate-Do that follow in 1938. According to John Teramoto, who translated this text from the original Japanese, their purpose was to guide the “spiritual and mental development of his students.” What they have to offer in terms of detailing the way of karate is even more important now because of the image karate has in the popular consciousness and the emphasis therein on the physical aspects of the art. Clearly there is much more to karate than just learning how to block, punch, kick and strike. Indeed, there is an entire cultural context that informs and illuminates the how, when and why of its operational reality and for that reason these precepts are placed on this website.

Never forget that karate begins and ends with respect.

There is no first attack in karate.

Karate fosters righteousness.

First know yourself, and then know others.

Rather than physical techniques, mental technique.

Let your mind roam freely.

Inattention and neglect causes misfortune.

Never think that karate is practiced only in the dojo.

Karate is a lifelong pursuit.

Everything you encounter is an aspect of karate; find the marvelous truth there.
Karate is like boiling water; if you do not keep the flame high, it turns tepid.
Do not think about winning; think about not losing.
Respond in accordance to your opponent.
Wage the battle with natural strategy.
Regard your hands and feet as sharp swords.
Step out the door and you face 10,000 foes.
Learn various stances as a beginner, but then rely on a natural posture.
The kata must always be practiced correctly; real combat is another matter.
Never forget your own strengths and weaknesses, the limitations of your body, and the relative quality of your techniques.
Continually polish your mind.