

Sword and Pen

Official Newsletter of the International
Combat Martial Arts Federation (ICMAF)
and the Academy of Self-Defense

Editorial

The Only Relationship Between Ch'an ("Zen") And The Martial Arts

WHILE it is fashionable in some “martial arts” circles to strive endlessly to appear profound and “deep” and very “philosophical”, and to project this persona as some sort of byproduct of one’s (ahem!) advanced and expert level of comprehension of the Asian fighting arts, those who have a genuine understanding of what, for example, Ch'an or “Zen” is, see those pretenders as the silly fools they are.

Not that those who are Buddhists are either silly or foolish. They most certainly are not. Buddhism is a beautiful philosophy and religion, and — as a Christian — we will say personally that the finest Christians we have ever met have been Buddhists! Buddhists are truly humble. They are gentle, realistic, self-supporting, hard working, nonaggressive, reasonable, and kind. Certainly some of those who profess to be Christians are, too;

but the number who are, pales in comparison to the number of Buddhists who are. At least, that has been our experience.

The problem is in regard to this common belief that, somehow, there is this inextricable “link” between the arts of karate in its numerous forms and — Ch’an. Ch’an is the original Chinese name for the self-cultivating spiritual discipline that, characteristically, the Japanese copied and refer to as “Zen”. Ch’an is practiced by Buddhists as a path toward the attainment of enlightenment, or, as adepts might say, “a return to the original face”.

This is not a treatise on Ch’an. We have a specific point to make (and we shall shortly make it). However, for any readers who are interested in reading more about Ch’an and finding out precisely what it is (it isn’t the posturing nonsense that some idiot in a karate dojo is pretending to impart when he teaches blocks, punches, and the use of a samurai sword!) we recommend:

- Works written by Lu K’wan Yu (Translations are available in English)
- Works written by Daisetz Suzuki
- Works written by Alan Watts

So — is there any relationship between Ch’an (Zen) and the martial arts? Yes and no.

In the practice of Ch’an the adept attempts to achieve a clear, “empty”, non-grasping mind. This “empty mind” (“no mind”, as the Japanese Zen masters call it) — or the “original face” — is devoid of all thoughts, preconceptions, or ideas. What might be analogous in Western thought is Aristotle’s concept of tabula rasa (“blank wax tablet”) which it was his

opinion the human mind is at birth. (Note: We often wonder, personally, if in fact most people's minds do not remain "tabula rasa" — throughout their lives! But that is an aside).

Now, here's the "combat" or "martial arts" connection:

The warrior who was trained traditionally and correctly in the armed and unarmed martial arts was inevitably admonished never to try to guess at what action or movement his enemy was going to take. Rather, he was taught to retain what the Japanese karate schools refer to as mizu no kokoro ("a mind like water"). This "mind like water" remained as still and clear as undisturbed water. In such a state, a body of water reflects with perfect lucidity everything around it. The image parallels the reality — exactly. However, should a pebble (analogous to a thought entering the mind) be tossed into the water, then the disturbance creates the unclear and blurred imagery. Thus, by striving to achieve the "empty" mind as advocated in Ch'an meditation, one achieves the undisturbed mind so necessary to reflect clearly the exact movements made by one's enemy when that enemy acts.

That's it. That doesn't mean that karate masters are Buddhists or "Zen masters" or any other such drivel. Many native Asian martial arts teachers are of course Buddhists. But this is because Buddhism is prevalent in Asia; not because being Buddhist is some sort prerequisite for "martial artistry". (Interesting enough, one of Japan's greatest traditional karate masters, Gogen Yamaguchi — headmaster of the Japanese GoJu System) was a Shinto (not a Buddhist!) priest. He was also a physician and a lawyer. And his religion was no more integral to his karate than his medical or legal training was!

The idea of cultivating a non-grasping mind (ie a mind that does not attempt to “figure out”, “predict”, “anticipate”, or “guess” what one’s opponent is about to do in a personal encounter, is valuable and important for the proper mental conditioning of the warrior. The Asian sword and karate and ju-jutsu masters knew and taught this (and in the better schools, still do) and we should be grateful for their having brought the matter so clearly to our attention.

Training with the sword may be archaic. But training with one’s hands, feet, a knife, a stick, a pistol, a tomahawk, etc. is not. And the concept of developing that same “non-anticipatory” and non-grasping mind of the Ch’an practitioner is well worth utilizing for modern close combat training.

The truth is that the actual statistically average Japanese samurai was a cruel bastard. He killed whenever he had the opportunity to do so with relative impunity, often for amusement, and he respected no one but his retainer and other samurai. (Don’t tell me about Miyamoto Musashi, please. He was anomalous, and bore the same relation to the typical samurai warrior that Eric Hoffer bore to the typical longshoreman.)

When training for self-defense work hard at gross movement reactions that are natural, destructive, and generally applicable to a wide variety of situations. Then, if preempting is not appropriate, and you are confronting someone from whom you expect trouble, avoid fixating your mind on any particular action or move that you might imagine him making. Just let your eyes rest on him. Keep distant (out of arm’s reach), and hold to the ready posture — off angled, hands at sternum level, relaxed, and in mental

condition orange. Whatever your opponent then elects to do will be clearly perceived as the aggression it is, and you will then smoothly proceed to clean his clock! Okay? Got it? Good. Now let's forget about those ridiculous topknots, the fake Asian accents, the Asian garb, and all of the accouterments of pretentious idiocy that are so irresistibly popular in the martial arts, shall we?

Next time some “self-defense” teacher insists that you need to sit in “zazen” and meditate, tell him “No thank you!” and look for a real combat teacher who understands the relation between Ch'an and the martial arts — or at least one who doesn't absurdly insist that the two are inseparable. Hell, the two were never integral in the first place!

How Much Training Time Is Required?

IN point of fact it is almost impossible to practice any physical art “too much”. Weight training can easily be overdone, but when learning a physical skill, the more the better. If you had the time and the energy and the interest it would not be overdoing it to train for three or four hours every day.

But let's be realistic. First, very few people have three or four hours daily in which to do nothing but train. Second, even if they had the time, it is doubtful that — even if they were serious students and were willing to work hard at learning — that they would be willing to spend that much time on the project. Third, while it might be okay and even beneficial to spend three or four hours daily on training, absolutely excellent results may be enjoyed by devoting only a fraction of that amount of time to training. In fact, when it comes to practical close combat and realistic self-

defense skills, anyone who puts in 30 minutes, five or six days a week in hard training will do fine. An hour is a near perfect amount of time for a good, rounded practice session, and no one really “needs” more time than that (although, again, spending more time is always a great idea if you can manage it).

For practice to be most effective, it is better to have frequent sessions throughout the week than to have a single lengthy session once a week. Four half hour periods of practice on separate days, in other words, is better than a single two hour session taken on one day.

Quality means everything in practicing close combat skills. Take a handful of movements that are effective for you and drill them to death. Five intensive minutes working on the chinjab or on the handaxe chop, for example, can be valuable beyond belief — particularly when mental concentration and vivid imagery accompanies the physical drill.

Regularity is critical. The cumulative effect of practice sessions taken several times a week that last even as little as 20 minutes each over a five or six month period is astonishing.

The typical student of martial arts is a youngster who will be interested in what he’s doing (usually taekwon-do, or kung fu, or karate, etc.) for a period of between six months and two years — and that’s it. The group classes that he attends may consist of one, two, or even two and a half hour workouts, but a good deal of the “training” will be in exercises intended to stretch and condition the body, techniques that are utterly impractical for real combat, and “waiting time” during which the teacher speaks to the class, demonstrates, or works with one or another pair of

students. Adult classes tend to be little better, and adult persistence in training is little better. Very, very few people continue to train permanently. Those who do, and who do so on practical, no-nonsense real world skills, so not require lengthy sessions with groups. Half hour periods of intensive effort on practical moves is plenty. More time is better, but it isn't necessary.

A good practice schedule is one that accommodates your lifestyle and your other activities. If in fact you are in this field professionally, then giving priority to a considerable time investment every week is only logical. (Even then, remember that if you teach and/or participate in other endeavors, you reach a point of diminishing returns rather quickly, after about an hour or so of training. The physical/mental demands of teaching combined with your own training, can make you go stale very easily if you don't balance things out and moderate your own training efforts carefully.

Enthusiasm is a much underestimated thing. Twenty minutes of enthusiastic practice is worth more than two hours of practice that is resented or that is felt to be drudgery. So pace yourself. You want to train in a manner that permits you maintain the highest possible level of enthusiasm as much as possible. (Naturally we all get bored or go stale, occasionally. But with realistic scheduling and common sense we can reduce these unfortunate and negative feelings to a bare minimum.

With weight training the amount of time required is not too great. We urge anyone who trains in combat martial arts to regard weight training as part and parcel of his personal program. By spending anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes, three times a week in weight training, you can achieve just about everything you could wish to achieve. Set a two hour workout limit for

yourself. No one needs to spend more than two hours on a single weight training workout, no matter who he is and regardless of how strong or how advanced he may be.

How many weight training sessions per week? At least two. Three is ideal. No more.

Weight training and techniques practice can be done on the same day, time permitting. However, while practice days can run in direct succession (ie Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday . . . etc.) weight training days should be spaced. At least one day should separate weight training workouts. (Note: This is, perhaps, the place to emphasize that we stress whole body workouts. We have no regard for “split” training with weights, and believe that such workouts provide poor muscular development results, and terribly inefficient conditioning benefits. We are well aware that almost everyone would disagree with us. That’s fine. We’ve stated our position.)

What about missed training days?

They occur, occasionally. Regularity is important, of course. But no one, to the best of our knowledge, goes 365 days throughout every single year without missing practice sessions and physical training workouts. It becomes a big deal only if you make it one. Over the long haul if you keep striving to workout and to practice regularly, you will. The few days during any given month when you will for whatever reason miss your training will have no effect on your long-term development and skill mastery.

Some Principles Of Knife Fighting

WE have always liked fighting knives. We purchased our first Fairbairn-Sykes Commando Knife from “Davega Sporting Goods” on Fordham Road, in the Bronx, when we were about twelve or so. It cost \$5.95. Our mother had to purchase the knife, as the proprietor of the store wouldn’t sell the thing to us!

Did we ever have a blast practicing what we learned from Get Tough! and Kill Or Get Killed. Obviously, we could not carry the fearsome blade. But we could practice with it in our room. Today, that knife hangs in our School.

Knifework (our preferred term) is interesting. It is at once extremely simple, yet at the same time — for some people — impossible to master. The reason is not all that difficult to understand: Some people just do not have the mindset and the “stomach” to go after another human being and stab him and cut him to death with a sharp blade. And that, in the final analysis, is what knifework (“knife fighting”) is all about.

But you’d never guess this from the nonsense that some “experts” have put into print and onto DVD’s! The idea that knifework is some kind of exotic or elaborate “science”(!?) is fostered by those who have no actual knowledge of either hand-to-hand combat or the role of the fighting knife in hand-to-hand combat.

We have no intention of attempting to present our method of knifework here in a Newsletter, but for the benefit of those who are fascinated by the subject we’d like to point out some facts about what real knife fighting encompasses and entails. The following may save you a small fortune

in books, manuals, and DVD's that you avoid:—

- Knifework has nothing to do with dueling

Knife vs. knife is for the most part, nonsense. We remember Rex Applegate telling us that he had never ONCE, throughout the whole of WWII, heard of any knife vs. knife encounter between two men occurring. Charles Nelson said the same thing.

If you have your knife in hand you will not — unless you have rocks in your head — give the other guy a chance to draw his knife, so that you can “knife fight”. And do not expect that, should the enemy have his knife in hand, that he will give you any opportunity to arm yourself in kind before he moves in for the kill.

“Do knife fights ever occur?” Yes. Among and between uncivilized, useless human debris who inhabit taverns and bars, and who, as the subhuman manure they are, find that a suitable means of “settling things” is to go out back in the alley and have it out with blades. But for heaven’s sake, please tell us that such scum are not amongst our readers!

- The stiletto design is slightly to be preferred over the Bowie design when a knife is selected solely for close combat.

Good knives of the Bowie configuration (ie Randall Model 1's, 14's and 15's, the Loveless Fighters, etc.) are fully serviceable for hand-to-hand combat; but the stiletto or “dagger” design is the result of focused attention in knife-making to the matter of producing a blade intended solely for killing.

Fixed blade knives are infinitely superior to “folders”.

The best folders for personal combat (ie the Applegate-Fairbairns, in their various configurations) are still inferior to fixed blade weapons. If you carry any folding knife for personal protection, please

- ✓ Make certain that its blade is of legally permissible size, wherever you live. If you live in England, carrying any folding knife or blade of any length may be illegal — and you should always obey the law.
 - ✓ Learn to employ it as a yawara stick before taking any time to open it, in an encounter.
 - ✓ Be certain the knife is a lockblade folder.
-
- Attack by surprise! When and if (in a home defense, hostage, military combat, or other lethal situation) you find yourself armed with a knife and having to use it to take out an enemy take no stances or “positions” prior to attacking. Just go after your man with 100% deadly ferocity. Give no warning, and do not allow your enemy to see that you have a knife.
 - A sudden, piercing shout combined with throwing dirt, sand, or other item in the enemy’s face as you attack (if you are attacking from the front) is the best way to go. Then drive the blade deeply into the enemy’s abdominal cavity and rip the blade across his mid-section (we call this the “disembowelment cut”). Withdraw the blade and stab into the enemy’s neck or throat, or cut open his throat.
 - Should your adversary somehow manage to see that you have a knife, remember that your objective is to attack him, not to jockey about and spar. Kick him, drive your fingers into his eyes, chop at his facial/throat area, and then attack viciously and by moving in with total body commitment. The more fiercely you attack, and the **SIMPLER** and more **DIRECT** your attack, the better. The **STAB** is, generally, the decisive, finishing action with a knife. Cuts or slashes get you in, so to speak; they can pave the way in certain instances for a savage stabbing attack. Never depend upon slashing and cutting, however. Tough, hardened fighters will

easily take cuts and slashes to their extremities in order to get in and attack, themselves. So don't play with your knife. Get in there and stab with it!

- Always keep your knife moving fast, once you bring it into attacking action. Never simply stand and "hold" the knife. And don't "set yourself" for an attack. Keep that blade slashing, hacking, cutting, and stabbing viciously in the air until you can plunge it deeply into a critical target area. Note: The late John McSweeney utilized a very similar action to our own when employing the knife in self-defense. Applying the inward circle striking action of kenpo-karate, we both had reasoned that a continuous, intimidating circling cut action could be used to psychologically unnerve an opponent, and to keep the blade in powerful motion so that a hack-followed-by-a-stab would be easy to execute. In any case, keep that knife moving when and if your enemy perceives that you have a knife!

This use of the knife for self-defense (as opposed to close combat silent killing) posits situations in which not only will the opposition know that you have a knife, but you will want him to know — so that, hopefully, he will be scared off and there will be no need to actually use the weapon to conclusion.

- Never threaten with a knife. Use it or don't use it.
- If (and it's a near certainty that this "if" will never occur) you ever find that you must face an adversary who is himself armed with a knife, hold your knife on the lead leg side, close in to your own body. (This position derives from the Biddle-Styers System). If you ever confront an enemy who holds a stick or perhaps a chair for use against you when you have a

knife, hold your knife in the rear hand and use your lead hand and arm to block, parry, feint and foil. (This position derives from the Fairbairn-Applehate System).

Something To Bear In Mind

WE have been emphasizing since the 1960's that close combat and self-defense are 180-degrees different than competition and sport. One of the ways in which those who ought to know better (and quite possibly do) dupe the self-defense-seeking public into falling for the MMA/UFC/etc. genre as "preparation for combat" — which it most emphatically is NOT — is by incessantly "challenging" all and sundry to "Get out there and fight with us!", ostensibly as "proof" that the techniques of close combat and real self-defense are doable against the knuckle-draggers who love to brawl.

Entirely aside from the FACT that the contests (all of the contests — UFC, MMA, "cage" nonsense, etc.) have stringent rules that ban and prohibit virtually all of the most essential and fundamental combat actions that exist, it should be remembered that there is more than enough evidence that combat skills do work, and that they will work against anyone when properly applied! "Properly applied" is key here.

In self-defense or hand-to-hand combative encounters one does not "square off" with one's adversary and engage him in a bout. Ideally, one does not even permit one's adversary to know that one is ready to do battle! The element of surprise — in individual combat as in WAR — is key.

So is the use of unrestrained, foul “gutter tactics”. Self-defense and close combat have no sporting or contest purpose. One engages in these activities because one has no choice . . . not to garner a trophy, win a title, or wear a medal. Therefore, anything goes. Thus, the combatant (not the competitor or the “champion” — but the COMBATANT) combines the use of the element of surprise with 100% unrestricted, viciously foul and unfair, deliberately destructive actions. His sole aim to to destroy his adversary. It is, precisely as the title of the greatest classic ever written on the subject’s title proclaims: KILL OR GET KILLED.

- Richard Simmons (no “macho man” I think we might all agree) cold-cocked a UFC fighter — deservedly — when the punk mouthed off at him in an L.A. airport. No “viable combat techniques” (had Simmons chopped the lout in the throat he’d probably be in a cell today). But merely by taking the lout by surprise he successfully defeated him!

We concede that if Simmons had faced off against the UFC man in a scheduled match he’d almost certainly have been defeated. But he wasn’t defeated when he resorted — perhaps unwittingly — to the right tactics of unarmed close combat!

- Jeane-Claude Van Damme (also deservedly!) was knocked down and out when he unjustifiably mouthed off with what we have been told is his typically rude style, to a pretty formidable fellow in a NYC nightclub. The individual who took the actor down might not have fared well in a contest with Van Damme, but by using a good solid punch that he delivered without warning, and adhering to the basic rule of close combat (“Take ‘em by surprise!”) he made quick work of a legitimate karate expert.

- Mike Tyson discovered that when someone refuses to meet him in a face off in the ring — on his (Tyson's) “turf” — but instead resorts to anything goes actions with no purpose but to STOP HIM COLD by whatever means necessary, competition skills are of little value. Not long ago, poolside at a resort, Tyson went after some fellow who, after retreating rapidly under the ape's attack, grabbed a beach chair and attacked Tyson with it! Smashing the boxer powerfully, the fellow sent a “champion fighter” to the hospital, and was, himself, unharmed. Using a fundamental principle of close combat (“Use anything at hand as a weapon!”) — whether consciously or not — it was easy for this intended victim to defeat an experienced and skilled fighter.

Sure, Tyson would have pounded this man to a pulp if he had met him in a boxing match . But in a real situation, where and when “anything goes”, and where the adversary unhesitantly resorted not to sporting but to COMBAT type actions, he won.

THE FACT THAT YOU WOULD BE DEFEATED IN A MATCH CONTEST MEANS NOTHING AS FAR AS INDICATING HOW YOU WOULD FARE IN A REAL HAND-TO-HAND BATTLE — IF WE ASSUME THAT YOU WOULD RESORT TO THE TACTICS, TECHNIQUES, AND ATTITUDE OF CLOSE COMBAT.

By all means let those who participate in sporting contests do so, and let them enjoy themselves. However, do not be misled into following a sporting approach to training if your purpose is real world self-defense. There is no correlation between the two.

What Criteria Establish Quality When Assessing The Merits Of Close Combat Skills?

CLOSE combat skills and practical techniques of self-defense — if they are effective — are characterized by the following attributes:—

- a) They cause swift and serious injury.

“Injury”, please note — not “pain”. Pain is subjective, and, as a professionally trained and licensed hypnotherapist we can tell you without hesitation that there are some people who can literally ignore pain, per se. These persons are capable, for example, of undergoing surgery with no anesthesia save hypnotic suggestion! Amazing in the extreme . . . but true, nonetheless.

It may be assumed that anyone immersed in a deadly combative engagement is in a heightened state of mental-emotional focus and his threshold of pain, even if normally low, is momentarily very high. Pain is not going to bring a dangerous enemy to a stop . . . not in serious combat.

Injury will.

Massive shock to the body’s central nervous system and/or the cessation of breathing is what stops a determined killer. Reliable combat techniques smash important bones and bone connective tissue, rupture or shock severely, vital organs; and/or they abruptly stop the enemy’s breathing.

Unpleasant? Of course it is. We will say it again: Combat has nothing to do with competition.

- b) They can be applied in almost any conceivable situation.

The really good close combat techniques (ie chinjab smash, handaxe chop, low side kick, tiger’s claw, hammerfist smash, etc.) are infinitely adaptable. In an elevator, on a staircase, in an enclosed office area or

restaurant waiting section, in a parking garage, etc. etc. etc. it flat out doesn't matter much. The best techniques of genuine close combat and self-defense are not necessarily 100% adaptable — but they come damn close to being that!

When we were culling skills from the WWII systems, kenpo-karate, jujutsu, varmannie, rough-and-tumble ("street" and "alley") fighting, taekown-do, and other methods, we used the acid tests for the attributes we are herein describing. Naturally, we found that most of the classical/traditional skills, and even many of the so-called "modern self-defense" skills just didn't cut the mustard. So we got rid of them.

c) They can be utilized when one is in poor shape.

Even those of us whose profession it is to teach this sometimes have days or weeks when we neglect our own training a bit. The statistically average student of self-defense almost never remains in training for more than six months to a year. Often, following his training, especially after passing the age of 35 or 40, he often neglects to stay very fit. Suppose he is attacked when out of shape? If the combat skills that he spent time in learning and practicing "back then" were really good ones, then he may rest assured that he should be able to do something pretty effective, should he be so unfortunate as to need to employ his training in self-protection.

Now understand: We believe wholeheartedly in the need to stay in good shape. We also know that strength and condition are great assets in any combative engagement, and we are not saying that allowing oneself to get out of condition is "good". It isn't. It is very foolish. However, we are saying that if one does get out of shape after acquiring good combat skills, one will still be able to employ much of what he had learned, despite his being in less than stellar shape.

d) They work against larger, stronger — even more highly skilled — individuals.

We have often been accused of being “brutal” or “cruel” or “too violent” in our espousal of the kinds of techniques that we advocate. This is unfortunate, since the kinds of skills that we (and those few others of our ilk, who share our commitment to realism and practicality in self-defense) teach amount to nothing more than WORKABLE actions — in other words, actions that can be counted upon to work against attackers whose possess greater strength and size than oneself. These actions must be “brutal”. There is no other way!

There is a good reason why combative sports have weight classes, and why careful attention is given to who “fights” whom in the properly run contests and events (of judo, boxing, karate, wrestling, kick boxing, etc.). In real combat, there are no rule-setters, and no referees to see that the rules are obeyed. It is “anything goes”, and when it is anything goes you’d best be certain that the techniques upon which you rely are the most dangerously destructive, efficient “damagers” and “cripplers” that exist! It is just common sense to gouge an enemy’s eyes, to break his leg, to crush his windpipe, or to wrench his spine, when you are the sudden victim of a deadly, surprise attack, and it’s either you or him. Good techniques offer no “guarantee” of victory. But techniques that will not work (or that will not work “as well”) when your adversary is larger and stronger than yourself virtually guarantee that you’ll not prevail.

e) They can be learned quickly.

There is way too much B.S. being promoted as “self-defense” and “hand-to-hand combat”. Nothing wrong with elaborate and fancy skills. If you like ‘em, train in them all you want. But get it straight that the stuff you can rely upon when it’s “balls to the wall” is readily learnable, and

easily acquired. If weeks or months of “preconditioning” — stretching, bending, twisting, contorting, etc. — is demanded before you can “begin to grasp the proper movement” involved in the technique and begin to understand how it should be done, FORGET IT!

Real combat techniques that save lives are very simple. Most of them can be taught and developed within a few hours, and only an expert who will be a professional teacher really is advised to spend time on techniques that demand a bit more time to “get”.

Most people who just want to be able to defend themselves require a couple of dozen generalized self-defense reactions, perhaps six good, basic blows using the natural weapons, maybe four or five combinations, and a stranglehold and a throwing action or two. Quality skills that fulfill this requirement may be conveyed in a three to five month course easily.

Yes, combatives training can be a lifetime pursuit for those of us who love the activity and who are fascinated by the pursuit of excellence in all of its skills. But the simple task of learning how to defend oneself or prepare for battlefield combat need take very little time. Good techniques can be learned quickly.

f) They are readily retainable.

Ten or 20 years after learning quality combat techniques they will be available — albeit at somewhat reduced efficiency. We personally know of several instances that occurred during the last 25-30 years, during which WWII trained individuals (one with the O.S.S., one with the wartime FBI, and another who had served in the USMC Raiders) made speedy work of assailants who had thought the “oldsters” would be easy game! What techniques did they employ? Edge-of-the-hand blows, chinjabs, and low stomping kicks. That’s it. Decades after learning skills that were imparted under wartime emergency conditions, and within only

a few hours of formalized instruction, were immediately and effectively accessible when they were needed! That's the kind of stuff you want to learn for self-defense.

g) They require no “warmup”, no special clothing, no specific environmental conditions in order to be done.

We remember the ads for “karate stretch jeans” that used to appear in one of the popular martial arts magazines. Amusing. Okay for the kid who into some martial art because it's a fad. The ads showed a well known karate exponent — a tournament champion — executing high kicks in these jeans that were designed to enable the wearer to do high kicks!

Nice gimmick.

Utter bullshit for combative preparation.

We also remember how, when we were a student of taekwon-do, both ourself and others in the class needed at least twenty minutes or so of warming and loosening up and stretching before we could render our mainstay “side thrust kick” with anything resembling the height and the authority at that height, that our stylistic bias advocated.

Okay for classical training. Suicide for close combat.

Many techniques that are popularly taught require certain environmental conditions to be effective — or even to be executed. A cleared area, for example. Or a debris-free, even ground. Or a mat(!). Or good lighting. Or hands unencumbered by gloves or by mittens. Or a minimum of outer clothing. Etcetera. Such skills may make for excellent an interesting theatrical martial arts — or they simply may be enjoyable to learn for their own sake. But they are not the ones to learn and to master and to rely upon in a dangerous, real emergency!

h) They are obviously effective, even to a complete novice.

Self-defense students, soldiers, police officers, etc. need to be immediately confident in the authenticity and reliability of that which they are taught. If a student (who, remember, will neither likely stay with training for a long time, nor train with absolute dedication for a short time) does not feel confidence in what he is being taught, then he will likely never summon the nerve to use it, should he find himself in a tight spot.

Anyone, in other words, can understand (once shown, and having had it demonstrated carefully on himself) that the chinjab smash is a powerful, practical, and reliable technique. The application, on the other hand, of some complex wrist or arm lock (or fancy throw) will almost certainly leave an intelligent novice wondering — “But will this really work against a strong guy?”

i) They cannot be done to anyone in practice, “full bore”.

Judo and kick boxing competitors, wrestlers, boxers, karate contact fighters, etc. can utilize vigorous contact when participating in their matches and sparring sessions because the techniques that they do can be done safely. For example, if a man is able to execute his falls, he can be thrown with full power by his opponent, regardless of the throw. Boxers hit for real. So do contact karate fighters and kick boxers. Wrestlers really wrestle . . . etc. But never can a hand-to-hand combat trainee “really” chop a training partner across the neck or throat, ram his fingers into his eyes, kick him in the testicles or knee, or crush his sternum or rip his ears off. He can TRAIN CAREFULLY on these actions with a partner, but — clearly — they remain too dangerous to carry to conclusion, except in a real emergency.

Combat arts trainees strike posts, dummies, heavy bags, etc. — but they do not strike each other!

The few throwing actions that are suitable for hand-to-hand combat,

such as the flying mare (shoulder throw), the chinjab smash-to-tiger's-claw and palm-to-kidney takedown, etc., can be practiced carefully, but applying one full force would mean tragic consequences. They are just too dangerous.

One would think that the obvious fact that anything that can be "played" full force is too mild for a deadly encounter would be all too evident. However, when we observe how people are assured — constantly — that the sporting/competitive techniques that they are training in "can be used for self-defense too", it becomes obvious that an awful lot of B.S. is being passed on to a very gullible public.

j) They are readily adaptable to multiple attacker situations, weapon attacks, and attacks under odd, unusual, or extreme conditions.

Many martial arts skills demand that their applicant have plenty of room, that the ground be firm, cleared, and free of debris, or that lighting be adequate, and that there be lots of warning before the action in question is attempted. Often, the opponent must be in a certain set stance or position, etc. Many techniques are utterly worthless the moment a second and third attacker enters the picture. Ditto for weapon attacks.

The proven techniques of functional close and hand-to-hand combat are extremely versatile and adaptable to anything that might occur, and to the widest possible variety of situations and circumstances. If a technique has too limited application, it generally means that it is not practical for real combat.

k) They can be employed by either gender, and are usable by persons of any age.

There is a reason why the senior Gracie is "retired" from competition! One does not and cannot "retire" from the position of human individual

— and as a human individual one may be called upon to defend oneself or those whom one loves at any age.

Men do not fight women (or attack them) in rationally orchestrated sporting combat events. However, it is a sad and true fact that women are sometimes attacked by men, and so, that which they learn as self-defense must enable them to at least stand a good chance of disabling or killing a determined male assailant if and when their life is ever threatened.

Anyone of either gender may at any age need to defend him/herself against a powerful and dangerous human predator. If a technique requires physical or chronological parity with one's foe in order to stand a reasonable chance of working, FORGET IT!

We wish to say again that we in no way intend to be critical or disrespectful of any martial art or theory of martial arts training. We speak exclusively about close combat, and if or when an individual's interest lies in a direction other than practical application it is probable that our views will hold little if any value for him. Our focus — our only concern — is real world close combat and self-defense.

In Conclusion

WE greatly value and appreciate visitors to our site, and readers of our material. If there are topics that you would like us to touch upon, or perhaps some questions regarding personal combat that you feel you would enjoy having us give our answers to, let us know.

Until October then, train hard and keep your mind combat ready!
Brad Steiner
(Prof. Bradley J. Steiner)