

To AJKA-International
AJKA-I of PA
Instructor Trainee's Report #1

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According to Webster's Dictionary, karate is, "a Japanese system of self-defense characterized chiefly by sharp, quick blows delivered with hands and feet."¹ However, that definition does not come close to what karate truly is and how it should be conceived and defined by the general public; who are now inundated with advertisements from many different martial arts schools all claiming to teach karate.

The word karate is a combination of two kanji characters – "kara" and "te". Originally, Kara and Te were written as 唐手 and were defined as "Chinese hand". The meaning was a way of expressing that this form of martial arts² was derived from China.³

However, the shift in definition was the result of Okinawans taking advantage of a homonym; two words with different definitions but identical pronunciations. Id. The kanji "kara" and "te" were changed to 空手 which means "empty hand".⁴ Adding the suffix "-do" ("karate-do"), meaning "way," implies karate as a total way of life that goes well beyond the self-defense applications. Moreover, adding a "ka" (Karate-ka) means "a practitioner of karate".

If we were to define Karate in only one word it would be "Budo". While the kanji is translated as the "martial way" it is the means by which karate becomes a "human development tool" used to cultivate great human character. Besides Budo karate is made up of three other themes: self-defense; physical education; and sport.⁵

As Self-Defense, Karate is a Japanese martial art whose physical aspects seek the development of offensive and defensive movements against armed and unarmed opponents. It consists of dynamic offensive and defensive techniques which uses all parts of the body to their maximum advantage. This is done by training and forging one's own

¹ Webster's New World Dictionary; Third Edition, Simon & Schuster 1991, p. 737

² Martial arts is defined as any of various systems of self-defense originating in the Orient such as karate, kung fu . Webster's New World Dictionary; Third Edition, Simon & Schuster 1991, p. 830

³ Funakoshi, Gichin, Karate Do: Kyohan, Kodansha Ltd, Tokyo, Japan, 1973 p. 3, fn.1

⁴ The earliest known document reflecting this change is Chomo Hanashiro's "Karate Kumite," first published in August 1905. Funakoshi Sensei, while not the first to use the "empty hand" (kanji) for karate, he was influential in popularizing this meaning by calling on his colleagues to abandon the "Chinese Hand" meaning of karate in favor of "empty hand." John Sells in his book, "Unante: The Secrets of Karate" notes that as early as 1933 the head of the Butokukai (the semi- official Japanese organization founded in 1895 to preserve and promote the martial arts and ways in Japan) while visiting Okinawa suggested the change in characters. Funakoshi in his 1935 book, "Karatedo Kyohan" did reflect this change (empty hand)

⁵ Nishiyama, Hidetaka, Karate The Art of "Empty-Hand" Fighting, Tuttle Publishing 1960 p.13

body into a weapon keeping in mind that “karate is a defensive art and must never serve offensive purposes.”⁶

We learn that in Physical Education there are five components: flexibility, speed, strength, endurance and knowledge. With each of the first four components there is a point when practice ceases to increase your ability to become better and you begin to see a decrease. An individual will begin to lose flexibility at age 10, speed at age 20, strength at age 30 and endurance at age 40. However, knowledge is the exception in that you can always learn more.

With regard to physical education karate is unique in that it uses every part of the human body in its practice. The karateka will forge his/her body into a weapon to use as a defense. Karate is one of the only sports that you do not need any team or equipment to practice. In addition, you can have limited space and still practice the art effectively. Essentially, karate can be performed anywhere, anytime, by anyone no matter the age or their physical condition “as a means of keeping in top physical shape”⁷.

Lastly, karate has become a worldwide Sport. With death of Master Funikoshi Nakayama Sensei decided to create tournaments so that Karate-Ka could practice and compete with other Karate-ka in kumite and kata. The use of tournaments allowed karate to move from a solely brutal self-defense martial art to a beautiful sport in which you control your techniques in order to obtain points. Because you need a variety of techniques and split-second timing to effectuate them it calls for a very athletic person to compete on an international stage. However, the beauty of the sport is that even the very basic karate-ka or a person with limited physical ability can compete locally and still enjoy karate as a sport.

A typical karate class consists of three main components: *Kihon* – Basics, *Kata* – Forms and *Kumite* – Sparring. In a traditionally taught class, *Kihon* (basics) should be the primary focus of the class. As in any sport, the mastery of the basics is essential in karate as they are in any physical activity.

Once the basics are learned they are then applied in the form of a *kata*. *Kata* literally is defined as “shape” or “model”. It is a formalized sequence of movements which represents various attacks and defense postures; essentially, an encyclopedia of self defense techniques. The basics are then are given life-like meaning. In Shotokan karate, there are 26 recognized *katas* that start out relatively simple and become progressively more difficult. *Kumite* is the actual application of basic techniques against an opponent. We start out demonstrating basic technique in a very controlled manner and then progress to freer forms of *kumite*.

⁶ Funakoshi, Gichin, Karate Do: My Way of Life, Kodansha Ltd, Tokyo, Japan, 1975 p. 93

⁷ Nishiyama, Hidetaka, Karate The Art of “Empty –Hand” Fighting, Tuttle Publishing 1960 p.14

Karate has spread throughout the world and is practiced in almost every country on earth with many different styles of karate. The only way to fully understand karate is get on the dojo floor train and make karate part of your life.

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