

More to Learn

I remember seeing an article in *Black Belt* magazine by a leading American exponent of Shotokan claiming (or admitting) that all the material of his chosen art took no more than 15 years to learn. Double that time for him to master what he may have learned: in 30 years, he is a Shotokan master, right?

Let's assume his statement and my calculus is correct. Why then would a martial artist in that position continue to practice karate? Well, you may respond, he would continue to practice in order to teach others. Certainly, I can't deny that. Do teachers learn more about their art in the process of teaching? Almost every teacher says this is the case. So even if the Shotokan master (and this could be a master of any martial art) never took another formal lesson, but simply continued teaching, he would be learning. **This, of course, implies that there must be more to learn.**

If there is a fixed number of kata in a karate system, one cannot learn more kata without leaving the system. Certainly broadening one's base and taking in aspects of other systems is one way to find more to learn, but even if a master instructor, stays only within his given art, could he not discover other schools' variations of his standard kata? Could he not further investigate the applications of those kata? Could he not add an emphasis on throwing, locking, pressure points, or effortless action to those applications—information not commonly taught in his art, but nonetheless present, or at least possible to infer?

I began investigating the differences between SKA and JKA performances of the same Shotokan kata early in my martial arts career because I had taken separate classes from Tsutomu Ohshima (SKA) and Masataka Mori (JKA). Then I bought books (there were no DVDs or YouTube back then) on the Shorin and Shito variations of the same kata. Whenever a performer showed a movement in an unfamiliar way, I assumed that his method was purposeful and that he must be seeing its application differently than I see the application for my method. That got me to branch out to the Goju side of Shito, then Goju itself, and then Uechi, which art's principle kata seem similar to Goju's—still more to learn, even though mentally I was just adding to my Shotokan base.

Okay, but once you can perform 80 or so kata, there is no need to add yet another, is there? Well, certainly there are more kata to learn, but you can expand your knowledge without taking that route. I investigated many [Hidden Throws and Takedowns of Karate-do](#) and [Hidden Joint Jolts](#), as well. My study of aiki-ju-jutsu led me to see [Aiki Locks from Karate Kata](#) and [Aiki Throws from Karate Kata](#). But the average martial artist may not have the advantage of studying more than one art at a time, so how can he increase his knowledge base without appending other arts? How about studying efficiency of movement? As you gradually strip away the inefficiencies of your art in an attempt to become faster with less effort (and thus improve your timing and efficacy), you may find yourself doing techniques that resemble other arts. When, for example, in my Shotokan class, I advocated an in-to-out forearm block that resembled Wing Chun's *tan-sao* because it required less force, dojo-mates thought I was jumping ship. I was actually advocating [Elbow Awareness](#), an

important principle that I had not yet named and that they had never considered. Now I perform that reception (“block”) several different ways with different body movements, each with very little arm-work.

Recently, I did a seminar called [*The Aiki Aspect of Karate*](#) in which I tried to offer ways to make powerful karate movements work with much less power. I planned another seminar called *Minimizing Karate* on a similar theme. Now, when I go back over my original kata, I see more and more applications.

Perhaps the old Okinawan masters did not intend my applications to be in those kata, but masterpieces often yield unexpected results, and often the results keep coming. Even if I had stayed within only one of my arts, Shotokan for example, there would still be more to learn.