

Techniques Are Tools

A hammer is a tool that comes in various forms: sledge hammer, ballpeen hammer, clawed hammer, tinner's hammer, etc. Screwdrivers have tips that are usually standard (straight) or Phillips-head (cross-shaped) and come in many different lengths and weights, with or without ratchets and offsets. Wrenches come in American standard and metric sizes, open- or close-ended, exterior and Allen, without or without ratchets and offsets. Drills can be many different sizes, with many different bits, designed for drilling wood, metal, or concrete. Obviously each tool is designed for a certain application.

A workshop may have a variety of these tools depending on the job the owner expects to accomplish. A carpenter will no doubt have several hammers, screwdrivers, drills, and planes, but he probably will not own as many sheet metal snips, locking pliers, or spot welders. He will have a supply of wood screws, and few if any metal screws. He will have rip and crosscut saws, but perhaps only one hacksaw.

Similarly, most martial arts were designed for application in specific circumstances. If you were an unarmed Okinawan in 1850, you did not expect to use your karate against mounted samurai employing *yabusame* (mounted archery). For their part, in occupying Okinawa centuries before, the samurai did not need the horses and bows commonly used in Japanese internecine wars that had been fought against other Japanese. Their prime tool would have been the *katana* (sword).

As modern traditional martial artists, we forget that we have inherited arts that, although morphed and adjusted through the ages, were not initially designed for self-defense against a gun-wielding thug robbing a 7-11, an unruly mob rioting in some protest gone awry, or a terrorist bent on slashing anyone without a beard. Original Okinawan Karate comes close to modern self-defense, but seldom considers defense against a knife and, of course, never considers gun disarming. Japanese Aiki-ju-jutsu was not a difficult or refined battlefield ju-jutsu, rather it was a skill usually employed by police or castle security to arrest those upper-ranked samurai whom the officer was not allowed to harm.

As much as the contemporary martial artist loves to learn new techniques and new applications to kata, he does not realize how limited his training may be. This is not the fault of his art, which can often be more holistic than he recognizes since it has morphed through the years, but the fault of his school. If his school concentrates on sport karate, he is actually better off with a half-dozen techniques that he can execute in many different circumstances. If his school concentrates on street self-defense, it will often drill students on responses that they can use against the most common attacks. This type of limited concentration is logical since it is an efficient use of the student's limit time. For example, I might focus on basics (thus repeating the same thing in different ways) and new kata interpretations (in order to open students minds to the myriad applications of what their bodies can already do). But all

these emphases tend to ignore two important items: developing good physical conditioning and what Jeet Kune Do calls “attributes”. This is not to say that schools emphasizing conditioning and/or attributes have somehow seen the light at the end of the martial tunnel. No, they have just chosen a different pipe to guide them.

A local karate teacher was justly proud of his students being in topnotch shape. His 2-hour workouts consisted of 1.5 hours of calisthenics, stretching, aerobics, and isometric resistance exercises. In fact, in his public demonstrations (usually lasting 30 minutes), the audience was “entertained” by his students’ ability to endure such physical training. Seldom did he have them demonstrate more than the most basic karate. Another instructor I know used exercises to develop the coordination and hand speed of his students. Performing his drills, they looked amazingly coordinated and fast, but attack them with something unfamiliar and they did not know what to do.

Obviously, any extreme that addresses a specific need tends to ignore other needs because of limited time—either limited hours per week, or limited years of commitment.

MORE ON THIS NEXT TIME