

NODAN KARATE



The Five Principles

by Nodan

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**The
Five Principles**

by NODAN

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Warning !

The breaking and self-defense demonstrations shown in this book can be dangerous and should not be attempted without the supervision of a qualified instructor!

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Preface

After fifteen years of training in a number of throwing and striking arts, I reached the upper limits of my physical ability as a karateka. I was aware of stories about “enlightened” masters who possessed extraordinary psychic power and superhuman strength, and I began a quest for Enlightenment that would make me a great master.

I discovered that karate can be practiced on two levels. The first is physical, where only one’s natural abilities are used. The various breaking experiments demonstrated in my YouTube videos were all performed at this physical level.

The second level is spiritual, in which the martial arts become “the Way” to Enlightenment. In following this path, I trained with an enlightened master, spent many hours in meditation, and engaged in a number of occult practices.

In time, I came under the influence of an occult spirit of enormous ferocity and power that could not be expelled by force of will. I was only delivered from this evil entity when I repented and surrendered my life to Jesus. In that moment, a wonderful spirit of love poured in from above and I experienced a peace that passes all understanding. In that moment, I **knew** Jesus was real.

Besides this startling revelation, my spiritual journey showed me that a metaphysical spirit realm does, in fact, exist and that our consciousness continues after death. While in the “outer darkness,” I also learned there is a coming judgment of everything I do in this life.

More than thirty years have passed since my life-changing encounter with Jesus. Along the way, I have often failed to live up to his lofty ethical teachings, a shortcoming that has caused me much disappointment.¹ Even so, I have found that trusting in Jesus has been more satisfying than anything this

world could ever offer. In spite of my many years of rejecting him, Jesus loved me enough to deliver me from spiritual darkness.

In 2004, I released a dvd intended to warn practitioners against seeking Enlightenment through their arts. At that time, I created the “no dan” character as a disguise, in order to protect the identities of certain people that would not want their names associated with my past occult practices.

In 2011, I wrote an account of my “enlightenment” experience but, like my dvd, the book failed to effectively communicate the message and has since been discontinued. In spite of these failures, I have benefited from remaining unknown, because humility finds refuge in anonymity.

I formulated The Five Principles by reverse engineering my suspended horizontal breaking experiments. While none of these principles are new to the martial arts, they have nonetheless largely disappeared from modern karate practice. This book is intended to be a guide for practitioners who want to improve their performance of their martial art. As such, it serves as a companion resource to my karate videos at the **nodankarate** channel on YouTube.

Peace be with you,



¹ Matthew 5-7, “The Sermon on the Mount”

Nodan Karate

Nodan Karate is practical self-defense that utilizes flexible makiwara training and The Five Principles to develop “one strike” power. Throughout this book, hypothetical street scenarios are illustrated, because martial artists should be ever mindful of this fact: what we practice is what we will do when faced with a real attack.

Ultimately, the goal of self-defense training is to create a level of self-confidence that helps students meet the everyday challenges of life and affirms the old adage: A man learns to fight so he will not have to fight.

The YouTube video, “Nodan Karate,” shows The Five Principles described in this book. For a demonstration of the street defense scenarios, see the video “Nodan Self-Defense.”

Makiwara Training

Along with developing expertise in The Five Principles, the primary tool for forging “one strike” power is the makiwara (striking post). The traditional Okinawan version is a wooden post wrapped in rice straw and buried three feet in the ground. These outdoor posts are stiff and hard, with limited flexibility. Over time, serious practitioners develop thick calluses and bone calcifications on their hands and feet, which can lead to joint problems later in life.

In the early 1990s, I taught karate street defense to two young men, Yakov and Yohan, who were avid guitar players. To minimize their risk for hand injuries, I fabricated a flexible indoor striking post with a thick layer of soft rubber padding. The flexible post is based on the principle of “graduated resistance,” in which resistance increases over distance. Over time, this proved to be a safe and efficient way to develop the

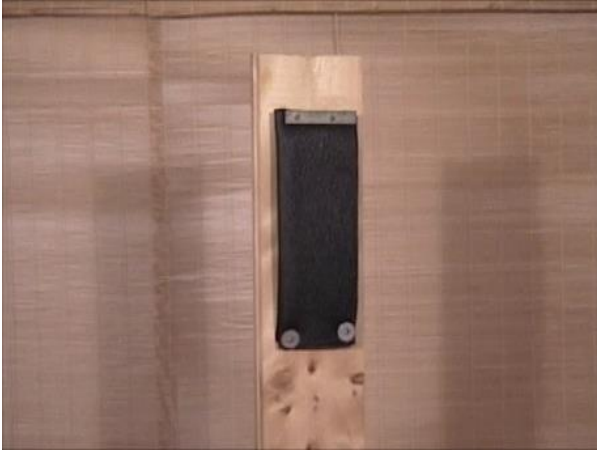
powerful “one strike” techniques. Moreover, callus formation is not necessary for effective street defense.

In my breaking experiments, I used a single layer of rubber padding as a precaution against knuckle bruising. In reality, my hands were sufficiently conditioned from flexible makiwara practice to safely break boards without padding. But, on those few occasions when the board stacks did not break on the first attempt, the thin layer of rubber padding provided an added margin of safety.

I trained on a flexible makiwara for twelve years before filming my breaking experiments. Makiwara practice is essential for developing “one strike” techniques, because graduated resistance builds bone and muscle strength. In addition, striking makiwara creates a different timing and “feeling” in the body that cannot be learned without contact.



See YouTube video “Nodan Makiwara” to construct a flexible indoor makiwara using materials found in most home improvement centers.



This post was made from two 1x8 inch wide pine boards. Resistance can be adjusted by changing the width or type of wood. Several layers of soft rubber padding have been attached to the post using a bracket and fender washers.



Post holder was built using 2x4s and framing brackets. It is attached to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch plywood with 4 inch long bolts.

The correlation between flexible makiwara practice and “one strike” power is illustrated in the following suspended board breaks, in which I used my “weak side” left hand to highlight the effectiveness of this method. These experiments were conducted while I was in my late fifties, in order to show the advantage of sound technique (The Five Principles) over sheer physical power and athleticism.

My breaking experiments used the “scientific method” and can be duplicated by following the proscribed protocols that are defined on pages 11-12. Thus, karateka can test and compare the effectiveness of their own striking techniques with the breaking standards established by Nodan.

5 Board Break with “weak side” Reverse Punch



Nodan’s un-spaced 5 board stacks are nearly 4 inches thick and can support a 650 lb. (295.45 kg) barbell placed across the centerline of the wood and running parallel with grain.

5 Board Break with “weak side” Elbow Strike



Nodan’s shoulder is held down and back, in order to reduce power losses through the shoulder joint. Elbow strikes also eliminate power losses through the elbow, wrist, and knuckle joints in the hands.



This was my strongest horizontal “weak side” strike.

4 Board Break with “weak side” Bent Wrist



WARNING! Nerve damage to the wrist and arm can occur if the hands are not properly conditioned beforehand with the makiwara.



This “weak side” bent wrist break took 3 attempts and was the most difficult of all my experiments.

Training Both Sides

Training both sides of every technique is an important part of self-defense training, because an injury to either side can occur before or during a street confrontation. Street attacks are fluid and unpredictable, and having the option of using either hand is a major strategic advantage.

Left and Right 4 Board Palm Breaks



“One strike” power from the neutral stance position is an essential skill for close quarter street defense.

Left and Right 7 Board Bottom Fist Breaks



In spite of practicing twice the number of repetitions with my “weak side” left hand, my “strong side” right hand breaks the seven board stack with greater ease.

Board Breaking

To provide tangible evidence for “one strike” power, I used un-spaced suspended horizontal board breaking. This kind of breaking is difficult, requiring both a substantial body weight transfer into the board stack and sufficient speed to overtake the movement of the 75 lb. bag. Also, horizontal striking and kicking techniques are the most useful in real street defense situations.

My boards were cut from 1x12 inch wide (actual mill size $\frac{3}{4}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches) white pine donor boards, which are available at home improvement centers throughout Canada and the U.S. White pine boards are used in breaking competitions and demonstrations because they are relatively easy to break, which makes it possible to compare the strengths of a variety of striking techniques (compare the 7 board bottom fist break on p. 10 with the 1 board push break on p. 46).

All of my breaking experiments used 1x12x10 inch wide pine boards. Testing revealed that each board could support, on average, a 130 lb. (59 kg) barbell placed across the centerline of the wood and running parallel with the grain.

Wood strength varies widely depending on type, size, and moisture content, so a sample from each donor board should be tested just before breaking to insure consistency. Assemble each stack from the same donor board with the grain patterns aligned and facing in the same direction, in order to facilitate the boards breaking along a fairly straight line.

When the boards are un-spaced, the resistance increases proportionally. Each 5 board stack could support at least a 650 lb. (295.5 kg) weight ($5 \times 130 = 650$). Board strength can be adjusted by changing the width of the boards. For example, five 8 inch wide boards @ 130 lb. test strength are equal to five 10 inch wide boards @ 130 lb. test strength.



On average, each test board supported a 130 lb. (59 kg) barbell placed across its centerline for one full second.



Board strength can be adjusted by changing the width. Board testing was conducted within a 5 lb. range. On average, each test board broke with 135 lbs. of weight.

Strength Factor

The traditional karate masters advocated a variety of training methods to increase strength, which included weightlifting. I never used steroids and did not develop large muscles, but lifting heavy weights for seven years strengthened my body core and helped me execute 4 and 5 board suspended breaks using my “weak side” left hand.



I began lifting heavy weights in high school.



My college weightlifting coach executes a one-arm bent press with 150 lbs. using leverage techniques similar to The Five Principles. (At the time of this lift, “Coach” weighed in at 148 lbs.)

Speed Factor

Hand and foot speed is a function of genetics, flexibility, and many thousands of repetitions of each technique. Because flexibility increases speed and quickness, karateka should maintain a stretching routine that works the entire body. The significance of speed (Velocity) as compared to body weight transfer (Mass) for suspended board breaking is reflected in a physics formula, in which the speed of the strike is squared.

$$\text{Force} = \frac{\text{Mass} \times \text{Velocity}^2}{2}$$

7 Board Downward Break with “weak side” left hand



Downward breaking is easier than suspended horizontal breaking, because it generates greater hand speed and leverages more bodyweight onto the stack. Also, rigid supports reduce power loss that occurs when the suspended bag absorbs the energy of the strike.

Nodan tests the limits of his punching power



Nodan easily broke 7 boards with his “weak side” bottom fist strike but failed to break 7 boards using his “strong side” punch, because he could not generate enough speed to overtake the motion of the bag.



The 75 lb. bag absorbs all the energy of his strike.

Aikido, Sword, and Staff

I trained in aikido, which teaches circular movements, the “unbendable arm,” and the extension of ki. These techniques have been incorporated into my Nodan Karate street defense. Also, studying the sword and staff provided insights into the philosophy and techniques of the unarmed striking arts.



My brother (right) has trained in aikido for 25 years.



My niece operates her own aikido school. Aikido is a throwing art that seeks to do as little damage as possible to the attacker.

The Five Principles

1st Proper Bone Alignment

Stances are *centered* in the hara, a point two inches below the navel

2nd 1-2 Timing

The hips are fully rotated *before* the striking arm or leg is extended

3rd Extension of Ki

(The *Follow Through* Principle)
Follow through with every technique

4th Correct Breathing

Inhaling through the nose and *exhaling* through the mouth using the diaphragm

5th Soft and Hard

The correct sequence of *relaxation* and *contraction* of all major muscle groups

1st Principle: Proper Bone Alignment

Proper Bone Alignment is foundational to all martial arts. Whether training stances are low or high, the center of gravity must be located, or “centered,” in the hara, a point two inches below the navel. The ability to “move in center” becomes critical for the effective transfer of power through the hips. To learn this principle, students should practice putting their minds in the hara, in order to “think from the center.”

Below, Nodan stands at attention with his hands in the closed gate position. His feet grip the floor, his spine is straight, his head erect, and his shoulders are held down and back. With his hips held in the “pelvic tilt” position, Nodan’s “centered” stance is immovable.



Yakov cannot push Nodan out of stance, because his energy force is being redirected downward.

“Centered” Stance Testing



Nodan is assisted by Yakov and three former students in stance testing demonstration, in which the three men will try to push Yakov out of his one-leg crane stance.



Yakov holds “center” as the men try to push him out of his stance. Then, by “moving in center,” he pushes the three men backwards.

“Centered” Front Kick



Yakov executes a front kick from a “centered” stance.



From his “centered” one-leg stance, Yakov uses the 1-2 Timing (2nd Principle) and the bag caroms off his foot.

Fore Fist Bone Alignment

The interosseous membrane connects the two bones in the forearm (the radius and the ulna), and a 45 degree fore fist rotation maintains the proper amount of tension in the membrane.

Besides properly aligning the two bones in the forearm, the 45 degree rotation makes it easier to keep the elbow under throughout the movement of the arm. This is critical for the straight line thrust punch, because a significant power loss can occur if the elbow is allowed to turn outward.

To find the ideal fore fist thrust position, extend both arms against a wall as if trying to push it over. Then, with the arms held straight and the elbows turned under, form a fist from the hand position as it pushes against the wall.

The fore fist thrust punch is commonly delivered from a reverse punch position or with a lunging forward step. An effective variation of the 45 degree position is the vertical or standing fist, which is used extensively in the Chinese arts.



Nodan executes a 4 board break from a one-leg stance (p. 32).

“Centered” Straddle Stance Defense



Yohan initiates a takedown attempt. Yakov steps back into a “centered” straddle stance.



Yakov's "centered" stance causes his feet to "stick" to the floor. This allows him to thwart takedown attempt and counter attack using a downward reverse punch.



Yakov follows up with a downward elbow strike.

“Moving in center” with cross-step



Nodan uses a fighting stance against a knife threat. His body is relaxed as he applies the “two-fold gaze” (p. 70).



He may use a head feint before preemptively reaching in to block away the weapon hand.



He maintains “center” as he cross-steps toward his opponent.

3 Board Break with cross-chest Knife Hand Strike



In order to break the 3 boards, Nodan must momentarily plant both feet in a “centered” straddle stance as he executes knife hand strike. (Note: striking above shoulder height substantially reduces leverage)

“Moving in center” with spinning step



Nodan raises his hands to give gunman false confidence.



His initial pivot moves him out of the line of fire.



He continues to spin into a “centered” straddle stance as he traps the gunman’s weapon arm.



Nodan counter attacks with a hook punch to the temple.

2nd Principle: 1-2 Timing

Nodan's hips are fully rotated **before** his upper body and arm are **actively** extended into the target. The 1-2 Timing uses the first principle, Proper Bone Alignment, to generate speed and power. This concept must be studied well.



Step 1- As the hips are fully rotated, the upper body and striking arm move naturally and remain relaxed.



Step 2- Nodan's upper body is rotated 45 degrees into the target and his punching arm is extended.

In the 1-2 Timing, the hip rotation (step 1) and the upper body rotation (step 2) are distinctly separate actions that transfer body weight and accelerate the striking arm.

Note the bone alignments in Nodan's finishing position. His fore fist forms a 45 degree angle and his rear leg and spine form a straight line. His shoulders are held in the down and back position as they are rotated 45 degrees.

Because the hand is quicker than the eye, full speed strikes appear to be one continuous motion. Therefore, beginners must consciously separate the two steps within each blocking, kicking, and striking movement until the 1-2 Timing becomes a natural part of every technique.

Close Hook Punch using the 1-2 Timing



Nodan is grabbed by the lapels and feigns surrender. He lowers his arm into ready thrust position (right photo).



- Step 1- Nodan turns his hips toward the target as his punching arm moves naturally with rotation.**
- Step 2- He rotates his torso and shoulders and extends the striking arm through the 3 board stack.**

Hip Rotation Exercise using Flexible Makiwara



The shoulders are squared to the target, while the hips are positioned at a “cocked” 45 degree angle.



The hips and upper body are rotated forcefully into the makiwara and the entire body is focused hard.

4 Board One-Leg Break with 1-2 Timing



Step 1- Nodan turns his hips toward the target as the punching arm moves naturally with his hips.



Step 2- Nodan extends his strike into the 4 board stack.



The 75 pound bag absorbs the excess energy of the strike.

Lunging Elbow Strike with 1-2 Timing



As he begins to step, he executes a knife hand block against the weapon hand of an imaginary attacker.



**He steps into a “centered” straddle stance (left photo).
Step 1- He rotates his hips sharply towards the target.**



Step 2- He rotates his upper body and elbow into the 4 boards.

Circular Palm Strike with 1-2 Timing



Step 1- His hips turn as arm moves naturally and stays relaxed.

5 Board Break with Circular Palm Strike



Step 2- He rotates his upper body and arm into the 5 board stack while applying the “unbendable arm” (p. 62).

Circular Palm Strike Application



Grab and choke holds from the front can be defended with a circular palm strike to the temple or rib cage.



Nodan uses the “unbendable arm” technique to eliminate power losses through the elbow joint.

Back Head Strike defense uses 1-2 Timing



Nodan pins the attacker's arms to his chest and prepares to deliver a stunning back head strike.



The speed needed to execute this 2 board break is generated by a forward "double whip" 1-2 Timing that "throws" the head backwards into the target.

Side Head Strike defense uses 1-2 Timing



Nodan raises his hands in surrender and distracts gunman with a question, as he subtly moves his head out of the line of fire. He applies wrist lock and executes side head strike.



To generate enough speed the side head strike uses the 1-2 Timing, in which the hip action “throws” the head sideways. After stunning the attacker with a head strike, he can disarm him using a wrist break.

Back Elbow Strike defense with 1-2 Timing



Nodan is grabbed in a one arm choke hold. He drops into a “centered” stance and prepares to throw an elbow strike.



**He can use both arms for added power (left photo).
The 1-2 Timing is applied in the reverse direction.**

The 1-2 Timing must be studied well, because all striking, kicking, and blocking techniques rely on this principle to generate maximum speed and power. To learn this principle, the mind must be located in the “center,” a point 2 inches below the navel. If the mind is in the striking hand, the arm will “lead” rather than “follow” the hip rotation, resulting in a “push” rather than a properly leveraged “thrust.”

It is noteworthy that the first two principles, Proper Bone Alignment and 1-2 Timing, are used by athletes to hit a baseball, strike a golf ball, and stroke a tennis ball. Ironically, these two essential precepts have become largely lost to modern karate. I could not have executed the 4 and 5 board horizontal breaks using my “weak side” left hand, without proficiency in these two principles.

Throwing a baseball uses the 1-2 Timing



Nodan compares the 1-2 Timing used in karate’s blocking, striking, and kicking techniques to the 1-2 timing used to throw a baseball, in which the hips are fully rotated before the throwing arm is extended.

Thrust Punch Demonstration



Yakov applies the 1-2 Timing to a simultaneous downward block with a reverse thrust punch.



The bag caroms off Yakov's fist like a pin ball, which is what distinguishes a proper thrust punch from a push.

Push vs. Thrust Experiment



Nodan strikes a 4 board stack with his “strong side” right hand without using the 1-2 Timing. His “push” lacks the speed to overtake the movement of the bag.



He applies 1-2 Timing to his “weak side” left hand “thrust” and easily breaks the same 4 board stack.

3rd Principle: Extension of Ki (Follow Through)

For the Asian martial arts, ki (chi) is the vital energy and activating life force inherent in all living things. As such, some adepts actively cultivate the ability to channel and project this unseen energy. I do not advocate seeking this energy source. Rather, I describe this principle as “Follow Through,” in which one’s natural physical energy is mentally “extended” through each technique “all the way to infinity.”

Follow Through is “mental” and not a physical technique. Hence, this precept is placed at the center of The Five Principles, because the body follows the mind. Along with Proper Bone Alignment and 1-2 Timing, the Follow Through principle is emphasized in sporting movements that involve hitting, throwing, and kicking a ball.



A flexible makiwara that utilizes graduated resistance helps promote the development of Follow Through.

Follow Through with Bent Wrist Strike



Nodan's bent wrist break from a weak, cross chest position required a concentrated Follow Through.



The strike is extended "mentally" beyond the 3 boards.

Follow Through with the Push Break

This break is a relatively safe test of hip thrust and Follow Through. The push break, however, is deceptively named because no amount of “push” will result in a successful break. The challenge is to “thrust” abruptly against the 1x12x10 inch wide pine board with at least 135 lbs. (61.4 kg) of force **before** the suspended bag moves. This is a **zero inch** break, because the initial position of the thrusting hand is fully extended against the board. This break requires concentrated Follow Through and is not possible to execute without the Proper Bone Alignment and a well-developed 1-2 Timing.

In the photo below, Nodan’s stance is relaxed, his rear leg and spine are straight and his shoulders are held down and back to reduce power loss through the shoulder joint. His head is held erect, as if suspended on a string and his elbow is held under to minimize power loss through the elbow joint.



1 Board Push Break with “weak side” left hand



The explosive hip rotation is barely discernible (left) before his shoulder and arm are extended with Follow Through.

In the left photo above, Nodan rotates his hips sharply toward the target. His legs, hips, and abdominal muscles are focused hard, while his upper body, shoulders, and arms remain properly aligned and relaxed.

In the right photo, he rotates his upper body and thrusting arm into the board as he focuses hard and exhales with a kiai yell. Throughout the technique, Nodan follows through as if projecting his energy “all the way to infinity.”

During the break, his hand never breaks contact with the board. The break occurs when the pisiform bone located on the outside part of the base of the wrist is pressed firmly against the board. This action causes the ridge of the hand to rotate slightly off the board, which can give the false impression that his hand has momentarily broken contact.

Follow Through along two vectors



Nodan steps in and jams an overhead knife attack. A simultaneous rising block and palm strike to the jaw gives the adversary no time to counter attack.



Nodan projects his rising block outward to intercept the $\frac{3}{4}$ swinging arc of the assailant's attacking arm.



He simultaneously follows through along the vectors of the rising block and palm strike (3 board break).

4th Principle: Correct Breathing

Breathing must be controlled with the diaphragm- inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth. Shuri-te styles like Shorin-ryu and Shotokan prefer to train using a natural breathing pattern. Naha-te styles like Goju-ryu and Uechi-ryu practice Sanchin, a kata that utilizes a forced breathing technique and dynamic tension to strengthen the body core. I have trained in each one of these styles and can attest to the fact that they all teach, “inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth using the diaphragm.”

When executed vocally, the “kiai” is a primal roar that emanates from the depths of the hara or “center.” When performed without the yell, Nodan’s kiai manifests as a forceful rush of air on every focused technique (See the YouTube video, “Nodan Dagger Form”).



Correct Breathing uses the diaphragm (left photo), not the intercostal muscles in the upper torso (right photo). Boxers, players of wind instruments, and opera singers are specifically trained to breathe using the diaphragm.

5th Principle: Soft and Hard

The Soft and Hard principle refers to the “sequential” contraction and relaxation of the major skeletal muscles in the body. For example, in the reverse thrust punch, the legs, abdominals, and hips are contracted first, while the muscles in the upper body remain relaxed. Next, the torso and arms rotate into the target and the entire body focuses hard upon impact. Immediately after the strike, the body again becomes soft, prepared for a follow up technique.

Developing proficiency in Soft and Hard requires many thousands of repetitions until the transitions within each technique flow without tension. Not surprisingly, this is the last of The Five Principles to be fully mastered.

Soft and Hard Self-Defense Application



WARNING! Wear safety goggles when practicing eye strikes!



Nodan deflects the knife thrust using a bent wrist block.



Using a continuous soft and hard motion, Nodan executes a spear hand strike to his attacker's eye.



He follows with a continuous motion snap punch that applies Soft and Hard to maximize speed.



His striking hand returns to ready thrust position.

Soft and Hard Combination Break



Nodan's first strike is a snapping back fist, in which his lower body is focused hard as the hips throw out the striking hand. During this movement, his upper body stays soft until focusing hard on impact.



The second strike flows from the first. The Soft and Hard principle quickens transitions between techniques and the elapsed time between the two breaks is only .2 of a second.

Kicking Techniques

Kicking techniques also follow The Five Principles. For street defense, the middle and lower level applications of the front, side, and back kick are the most practical. Lower level kicks are easier and safer to perform, and are more effective against un-trained street criminals.

Front Thrust Kick

In the front thrust kick, the hips are rotated 45 degrees as the knee is raised. This opening of the hips releases the hamstring muscles, which allows for greater speed and flexibility of movement. The knee should be raised higher than the intended target, because a “down and in” motion gives the front thrust kick exceptional power.



5 Board Break with Front Thrust Kick



Nodan raises his knee above the intended target.



The “down and in” trajectory gives the kick its power.



Nodan’s leg extension reveals concentrated Follow Through.

Front Kick with the lead foot



Kicking with the lead foot is more difficult because the “center” must first be shifted back away from target.



He maintains a “centered” stance and breaks 3 boards.

Low Back Kick Defense



As Nodan turns, his lead hand feigns a strike toward the attacker's face and then transitions into a block.



Head to heel, Nodan follows through the 4 board stack.

Blocking Techniques

Blocking techniques also follow The Five Principles. The formal downward, middle, and rising blocks are examples of striking techniques that hit with the entire body and not only with the arm and shoulder.

These blocks apply the “unbendable arm” technique, in which the arm is extended in a soft/hard state of tension using the triceps muscles in the back of the upper arm and the latissimus dorsi muscles that run along the upper sides of the back. The unbendable arm has the effect of making the blocking arm feel like a slightly bent steel rod wrapped in cotton cloth.

The formal karate blocks use the full range of motion to develop proper form. With practice, however, karateka can learn to project strength into the shorter and quicker street applications of these formal kata techniques.

5 Board Break with Formal Downward Block



Nodan uses an “unbendable arm” technique to minimize power loss through his elbow joint.

Downward Block Street Defense



From “surrender” position, Nodan patiently waits.



Nodan steps back and to his right, as he “thrusts” his blocking arm downward to intercept the front kick.

Formal Rising Block



The blocking arm moves to the front and the hips are rotated.



Nodan lifts his blocking arm using the shoulder muscles and the latissimus dorsi muscles on the upper sides of his back.

Rising Block Defense



Nodan steps in against an overhead knife attack and adjusts his rising block outward, in order to intercept the swinging arc of adversary's arm.

Formal Middle Block



Step 1- As the hips rotate, his arm moves naturally.



Step 2- The hips rotate before the blocking arm engages. He maintains the “unbendable arm” as he rotates his torso, shoulders, and arm into a focused block.

Middle Block Defense



Nodan defends against a thrusting knife attack by using an angle step with abbreviated middle block and hook punch to the head.

Self-Defense

During the 1960s, I trained with a college classmate who practiced combat jujitsu. Tex brought a metal training knife to our first session together and succeeded in stabbing me a number of times. Afterwards, I had large red welts all over my body. This convinced me that street defense was different from the traditional training I was receiving at the dojo. My formal blocks were too slow, I was out of position, and I lacked a strategy for defending against a skilled knife fighter.

Tex taught me wrist locks and joint holds that were useful in close quarter situations involving guns and knives. We practiced against the kinds of grabs and holds street criminals were likely to use and against moving knife and club attacks. This early jujitsu training was an important influence on my subsequent approach to karate and self-defense.

Today, the mixed martial arts (MMA) have taken center stage as an entertainment blood sport. At the professional level, world class athletes compete for fame and fortune in heavily promoted cage matches. This latest expression of the martial arts, however, is not self-defense. For example, practical tactics like striking to the eyes and throat, grabbing the groin, and biting are all prohibited in sport. Also, sport competitors do not have to defend against armed or multiple attackers, where grappling skills are much less useful.

In order to be effective as self-defense, a martial art cannot be programmed to only respond to competitive sparring techniques. Rather, practitioners must take into account the psychology and predatory nature of street criminals, and then adapt their art to respond to specific street assaults. After studying street defense for many years, I have concluded that the physical and psychological contributions to effective self-defense each represent approximately 50% of the equation.

Banned from Competition

Spearing and gouging the eyes and throat, striking and grabbing the groin, and biting are effective street defense tactics that are banned in sport karate and mixed martial arts.



Nodan raises his hands in “surrender” before blocking away the assailant’s weapon hand.



**He counter attacks with a double spear hand to his adversary’s eye and throat.
(See the video, “Nodan Dagger Form”)**

The Two-fold Gaze

The “two-fold gaze” of perception and sight enables one to see the big picture and not be distracted by small details or sudden feints by an aggressor. Perceptually, this has the effect of slowing down the adversary’s movements. With a clear mind devoid of anticipation, the opponent’s strength and intention can be perceived.

To learn this technique, concentrate on seeing everything simultaneously and do not allow the mind to wander or focus on any one detail. Practice with a partner who stabs randomly with a training knife. Resist the urge to focus on the weapon. Relax and “see” his weapon hand without looking and the blocking hand will blend with his attack. This requires discipline, because the “two-fold gaze” is a state of mind and not a physical technique.



Using the “two-fold gaze,” Nodan senses that his assailant is about to launch a thrusting attack.



Nodan preemptively counter attacks with a sweeping block.



He steps through and strikes with a palm heel thrust to the jaw.

Defending against a machete attack

Every year people are assaulted by an array of “non-weapons” such as machetes, hatchets, pitchforks, and baseball bats. Practicing to defend against these kinds of attacks is an essential part of realistic self-defense training.

Defending against a slashing machete attack is similar to confronting an overhead or side arm club assault, in which the weapon is large enough to require a slight “hitch” in the attacker’s swing. (This may not apply when facing a skilled knife fighter or swordsman, who has been trained to “wield” rather than “swing” the live blade.)



Nodan keeps a strategic distance that enables him to move in or out, depending on the movement of the adversary.



As the attacker “hitches” his swing to begin his assault, Nodan steps in with his back foot to close the distance.



Nodan executes a front kick as he simultaneously blocks the assailant's weapon hand (left photo). He follows up with a reverse elbow strike to the throat (right photo).

Defending against a pitchfork attack



Nodan takes a fighting position just out of thrusting range.



He makes a quick head feint and executes a double parry cover block as he begins to spin outside his opponent's line of attack.



Nodan continues to spin behind the attacker. The length of the weapon makes it impossible for his adversary to turn and defend himself.



Spinning techniques must “move in center,” in order to finish in position for an effective counter attack.

Appearances can be deceiving

This gun defense from 8 feet away seems impossible, which is what makes it effective. The maneuver works due to the element of surprise that gives the gunman little time to react without “jerking” the trigger and missing his shot. I have used this defense many times against unsuspecting students and skeptics, who most often “freeze” without pulling the trigger. This maneuver would only be used in a “do or die” situation by a trained defender who believes the gunman intends to shoot, and a zigzag running escape is not an option (he may be accompanied by a companion or there could be a structural impediment).

The strategy is to deceive, misdirect, and move one step faster than the gunman’s reaction time. It takes .3 of a second to head feint and move out of the line of fire and another .5 second to stride in and block the gunman’s weapon hand.



First, Nodan raises his hands in surrender to give the gunman a false sense of confidence.



Nodan uses a quick head feint as if intending to move to his right.



The head feint and move to the left places him out of the line of fire and keeps him a step ahead of the gunman's reaction time.



Nodan strides in and prepares to block the weapon hand.



As he blocks, he remains out of the gunman's line of fire.



Nodan strikes the gunman's ribcage with a reverse punch.



It takes 1.1 seconds for him to head feint, traverse the 8 foot distance, and break the 3 board stack.

The Best Martial Art

Debates over which is the best martial art should begin with the question, best for what? Ultimately, the best martial art is the one that best addresses **your** needs and goals. Those who seek instruction should research and visit their local schools, because every style has strengths and weaknesses, and good and bad instructors exist in every art.

A Practical Alternative

In reality, street attacks are often fluid and unpredictable, and require on sight adaptations and flexibility on the part of the defender. Few martial artists will develop the striking power to stop a determined attacker with a single blow. Consequently, for most karateka, the “one strike” techniques are more intended to stun an attacker long enough to either escape or execute a follow up counter attack.

Developing “one strike” power requires serious makiwara practice and expertise in The Five Principles. Unfortunately, long time practitioners who were not trained in the Proper Bone Alignment and 1-2 Timing will find that re-learning the basics can be a long and arduous task. For others, this kind of instruction may be unavailable, too expensive, or too time consuming.

One practical alternative is to take a self-defense course and carry pepper spray, which is available in handy pocket size containers. This street defense tool is relatively safe, inexpensive, and legal in most countries. As with any weapon system, users should become thoroughly familiar with its proper use.

Black Belt Test

After my “enlightenment” experience in 1985, I stopped training for seven years. I was brought back into karate by two young men, Yohan and Yakov, who requested self-defense lessons. They trained with me without receiving any rank. After five years, they were tested by an independent panel of judges for black belt in “Shotokan Karate Jutsu.”

The test evaluated blocking, kicking, and striking power, along with their performance in two Shotokan black belt katas, Jion and Kanku Dai.

Lastly, they were required to defend against a series of street attacks that included a variety of armed and unarmed assaults. This last phase of testing culminated with free-style sparring against an opponent armed with a knife. An edited segment of their self-defense testing can be seen in the YouTube video, “Nodan Students.”



Yohan “the bull”



Yakov “the hammer”





Free-style sparring against an armed opponent





Yohan and Yakov are awarded black belts.



After testing, Yohan and Yakov pose with their judges.

website: nodankarate.org



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