

# ***The Power of The Way***



**A Spiritual Journey**  
by Nodan

**Lighthouse Productions**  
**ISBN-13:978-1493541911**  
**ISBN-10:1493541919**  
**Revised Edition 2023**

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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**

# **TABLE of CONTENTS**

## **The Introduction 1**

## **The Way of Technique**

<b>A Brief History</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>One Strike Power</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>The Five Principles</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Kicks and Blocks</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Street Defense</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Breaking Protocols</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Flexible Makiwara</b>	<b>58</b>

## **The Way of the Spirit**

<b>The Dojo Spirits</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>The Enlightened</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Enlightenment?</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>The Aftermath</b>	<b>90</b>

## The Introduction

In 1981, I began to train with an “enlightened” master known as “Sensei,” who showed me that karate could be practiced on two levels. The first is physical, in which only one’s natural ability is used. This is *karate jutsu* (technique). All the board breaking examples in the YouTube videos at the **nodankarate** channel were performed at the physical level.

The second level is spiritual, where enlightened adepts like Sensei can display amazing psychic power and superhuman strength. This is the highest level of *karate-do* (the Way), a path that leads to enlightenment. In my quest to gain powers like Sensei, I engaged in occult practices and spent many hours in Zen meditation. The last time I trained with the master he told me, “You can get power from the dark side or the light.” Indeed, the terrifying energy infusion I received two weeks later came from the dark side.

In 2004, I began filming my breaking demonstrations for a DVD intended to warn artists not to seek enlightenment through their arts. At that time, I created the make-believe karate master “no dan” (no rank) as a disguise, in order to protect the identities of persons who may not want to be associated with my occult past. To this end, I have changed the names of key characters in my story.

Nodan karate is not a “style” of martial art, but rather a method of forging “one strike” techniques for street defense. The method utilizes five striking principles and flexible post makiwara training to develop “one strike” power. As such, Nodan karate is *karate jutsu* rather than *karate-do*, because it does not attempt to lead practitioners to enlightenment and superhuman strength.

While Nodan's buffoonish persona is a fitting parody for my misguided quest to become a great karate master, the breaking demonstrations in my YouTube videos are real. I used the scientific method to empirically measure board strength, so that interested karateka can compare their striking power with an established standard by observing the breaking protocols on pages 56-57.

This book is about the power of two Ways. The first Way, "The Way of Technique," describes the physical methods used to develop "one strike" power. I was fortunate to learn refined versions of the five principles from my last karate teacher, Quan Li, who received his black belt from Sensei, the most powerful martial artist I ever saw.

The second Way, "The Way of the Spirit," chronicles my personal journey to "enlightenment" and superhuman power. This account is based on my perceptions of the phenomena that I experienced and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of others connected with my story.

**Sakugawa**  
**(1733-1815)**



**Roshi**  
**(Zen master)**



**Nodan**  
**(faux master)**



The Nodan character was inspired by an old Okinawan karate teacher, "Tode" (karate) Sakugawa, and anime Zen master, Roshi. To complete the disguise, I contrived a soft, high-pitched voice with a phony accent.

# **The Way of Technique**

## A Brief History

Beginning in the 9th grade, I lifted heavy weights for seven years and the strength I gained gave me an added advantage in karate. Despite being lean and wiry, in college I could deadlift 3x my body weight. Years later this background was an important factor in my ability to break thick board stacks, especially when using my “weak side” left hand.

After high school I went to college and began training in Okinawan Uechi-ryu karate. This in-fighting style emphasizes Sanchin, a kata that uses a hard focused breathing pattern to condition the body to withstand an opponent’s blows. The art utilizes circular blocks and snapping kicks and punches, and employs a strategy of attacking the opponent’s pressure points with the finger tips, thumbs, and single knuckle strikes.



**Sanchin is a narrow hourglass stance designed for stability. The art is characterized by numerous open hand techniques. (Seisan is included in the YouTube video, “Nodan katas.”)**

## Combat Jujitsu

My main interest in studying karate was to learn how to apply the techniques in street situations, but my Uechi-ryu school did not teach practical self-defense. Fortunately, I met a college classmate, Tex Barnes, who was proficient in combat jujitsu. He brought a metal training knife to our first practice together and succeeded in “killing” me numerous times. Afterwards I had large red welts all over my body. My formal blocks were too slow, I was always out of position, and I lacked a strategy for defending against a skilled knife fighter. This was a wakeup call that showed me reality self-defense was very different from formal dojo training.

Tex taught me how to defend against the kinds of assaults street criminals were most likely to use. This training, in conjunction with karate, became foundational to my future approach to street defense.



**My students, Yohan and Yakov, practice a twisting joint hold defense against a knife holdup. This was the kind of practical street defense I learned training with Tex Barnes in the '60s.**



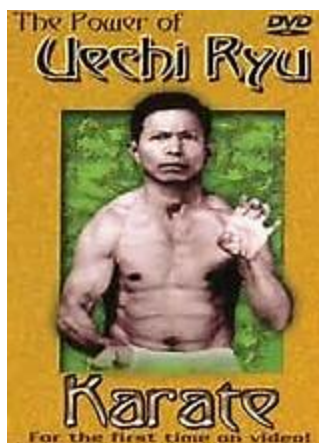
## The 1970s

After graduating from college, I moved away to pursue graduate studies in psychology. There were no Uechi dojos in the area, so I joined a school that taught Gichen Funakoshi's Shotokan karate, with elements of judo, Shorinryu, and Chinese kempo thrown in. I especially identified with the school's practical approach to the martial arts, which was summed up in the moto, "If it works use it."

This eclectic style was very different from the Uechi-ryu I had studied. The breathing pattern was natural and the training stances were deeper. The emphasis was on freestyle sparring and the katas were very similar to the official forms endorsed by the Japan Karate Association (JKA) Shotokan.

The school offered private self-defense courses, many of which I taught due to my prior training in jujitsu, and the chief instructor introduced me to Zen meditation, which led me to begin a study of Eastern philosophy and religion.

**Kanei Uechi (1911-1991)**

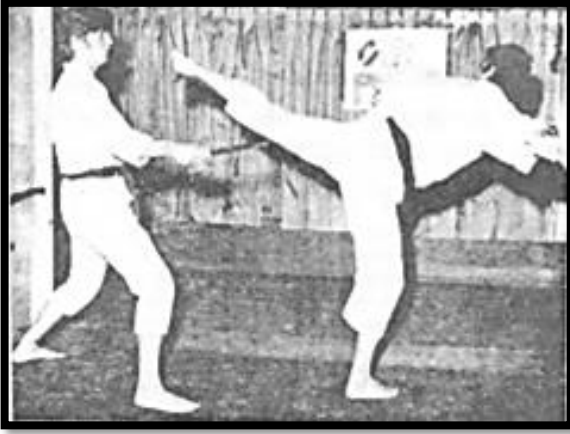


**Funakoshi (1868-1957)**



Uechi-ryu and Shotokan were major influences on my karate.

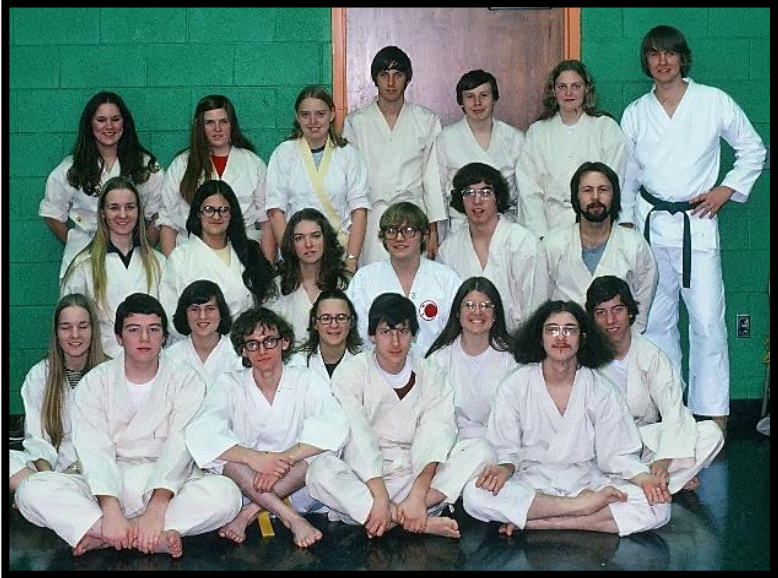
After receiving an instructor certification and dojo charter, I relocated again and took a position as a psychologist at a large teaching hospital. I also began teaching Shotokan and self-defense courses at colleges and community centers.



**I taught karate as street defense during the 1970s.**



**My senior students, Rik (left) and JD (right), often assisted me in teaching. The town newspaper covered this class in 1973.**



**A senior student and future black belt, “Big Ed” (right), assisted in teaching this self-defense course at a local college in 1975. By the end of the decade, I had promoted seven men to black belt.**



**My first black belt, JD, opened his own school.**

## The 1980s

I met Quan Li in 1980, and after our second workout together I became his student and training partner for five years. Quan's speed, power, and precision techniques made him the best traditional karateka I had ever seen,

Quan was as good a teacher as he was a martial artist, and my descriptions of the five principles are based largely on insights I learned while training with him. He emphasized upright, "centered" stances with proper bone alignments, powerful hip rotations, and the extension of ki (follow through). He also taught that 45° angles maximize leverage and applied aikido's "unbendable arm" technique to his karate. Quan received his black belt from Sensei, whose Shotokan was based on the early *Shuri-te karate jutsu* that Master Funakoshi introduced to Japan in the early 1920s.



Quan taught classes in Sensei's Shotokan style at his home dojo. He performs Heian IV and V in the video, "Nodan Teacher."



Besides Shotokan, Quan studied judo, aikido, taekwondo, kobudo, kempo, and Mas Oyama's Kyokushin karate.



Quan taught Sensei's interpretations of the Shotokan kata.

## Shuri-te Karate Jutsu

Sensei's Shotokan was based on the "one strike, one life" (ikken hissatsu) strategy of 19<sup>th</sup> century *Shuri-te karate jutsu*, a style that was invented by Shuri castle bodyguards charged with protecting the Okinawan king. In ***Shotokan's Secret***, Dr. Bruce Clayton references the art's "one strike" approach:

"The new style made no attempt to subdue the opponent through painful nerve strikes or immobilizing joint locks. Instead, every element of the new art emphasized destroying the opponent completely in one or two seconds."<sup>1</sup>

Soken Matsumura was head of the castle bodyguards and was instrumental in the development of Shuri-te karate. His protégé, Anko Itosu, taught Gichen Funakoshi and is credited with systematizing the art and changing the combat oriented *karate jutsu* to the more spiritually minded *karate-do*.

Shuri-te utilized the kata to teach techniques and the makiwara to strengthen and condition the hands, elbows, and feet to deliver "one strike" power techniques.

**Matsumura**  
(1797-1893)



**Itosu**  
(1831-1915)



**Funakoshi**  
(1868-1957)



**Matsumura was known for quickness and strong hip rotations, while Itosu became famous for his powerful punch. Funakoshi was considered by many to be "the father of modern karate."**

## One Strike Power

The goal of Nodan karate is to develop “one strike” techniques for street defense, and I used suspended un-spaced board breaking to provide tangible evidence of “one strike” power. Board breaking, however, is meaningless without an empirical method of determining board strength, and I devised a way to measure this factor. (See “Breaking Protocols” on pages 56-57.)

The following breaking experiments show how the five principles and makiwara training develop “one strike” power. I conducted these experiments while in my late fifties to show the advantage of using proper technique over raw physical power. To further illustrate this point, I used my “weak side” left hand to break the thickest board stacks.

### 5-board break with reverse elbow strike



5-board stacks are nearly four inches thick. With few exceptions, I used this 75 lb. suspended heavy bag.





**I trained on this makiwara for 13 years before filming my Nodan board breaking demonstrations in 2004-2005. For instructions on how to build a flexible post makiwara and board holder, see the YouTube video, “Nodan Makiwara.”**

### **5-board break with reverse thrust punch**







**WARNING:** Without proper hand conditioning, striking objects with the bent wrist can result in serious nerve damage to the wrist and forearm.

#### 4-board break with bent wrist strike



Note that the entire board stack breaks before the 75 lb. suspended bag begins to move.

### 5-board circular palm break from neutral stance



Developing “one strike” power techniques from a neutral stance position is advantageous in close quarter self-defense situations.



Nodan can counter attack with a palm strike to the head or ribs.

Training both sides is important, because an injury can occur to either side before or during a street confrontation. Street assaults are fluid and unpredictable, and having the option of using either hand is a major strategic advantage.

### **Left and right hand 4-board palm breaks**



**Master Funakoshi advised practicing the opposite side “double.”**

### **Left and right hand 7-board bottom fist breaks**



**Despite practicing more with the “weak side” left hand, my “strongside” right broke 7 boards with much greater ease.**

### Horizontal vs Vertical Breaking

In vertical downward breaking, the striking arm has the advantage of moving along a longer trajectory with gravity, which generates optimal speed and body weight transfer. Also, the rigid supports used in downward breaking more efficiently transfer the force of a strike compared to the energy lost when using a softer, suspended bag.

Using spacers between the boards enables them to be broken one at a time in rapid succession, which requires far less force. For example, each board in a “spaced” 5-board stack could be broken with only 135 lbs. of weight, whereas the un-spaced 5-board stacks pictured below could each support a 650 lb. barbell placed across the centerline running parallel with the grain.



**The 5 suspended boards (left) are considerably more difficult to break than the 5 rigidly supported boards on the right.**

## The Five Principles

### 1st Principle: Proper Bone Alignment

Proper bone alignment is foundational to all martial arts. Whether training stances are high or low, their center of gravity must be located or “centered” in the hara, a point approximately two inches below the navel. The ability to “move in center” is vital for the transfer of maximum power through the hips. To learn the 1st Principle, maintain the hips in a pelvic tilt position and mentally locate the mind in the hara. This is “thinking from the center.”

In the demonstration featured below, Nodan is assisted by Yakov “the hammer” and three of his former students, who will attempt to push Yakov out of a one-leg crane stance.



From left to right: Yakov “the hammer,” Nodan, JV, JD, and Smiff



**Yakov maintains his “centered” crane stance as the three men try to push him backward. By using the proper bone alignments, Yakov redirects their energy into the floor.**



**Yakov pushes the men backwards by “moving in center.”**



**“Moving in center” with a lunging step**



**This technique is used to preemptively counter attack a knife threat. Nodan will use a quick head feint before advancing.**



**He blocks attacker's weapon hand as he begins to move in.**



**Nodan holds an upright “centered” position as he strides in prepared to execute a palm heel thrust to opponent’s jaw.**



**Nodan’s back foot and palm heel form a straight line through his “center,” which enables a 3-board break. Thrusting above shoulder level significantly reduces the power of the strike.**



## 2nd Principle: 1-2 Timing

The hips rotate **before** the upper body “actively” turns toward the target (step 1). Next, the upper body is rotated **before** the arm is “actively” extended (step 2). The 1-2 Timing generates power through the hips and accelerates the arm.



**Step 1- Nodan's hips are sharply turned, while his upper body and arms remain relaxed and advance naturally with his hip rotation.**



**Step 2- His upper body is rotated 45 degrees toward the target and his striking arm is extended.**

In the 1-2 Timing, the hip rotation (step 1) and the upper body rotation (step 2) are distinct actions. In addition, the upper body rotation and the extension of the punching arm move in a 1-2 timing sequence. This must be studied well, because many techniques utilize a 1-2 timing within the 1-2 Timing principle. These actions spiral the energy generated by the legs, hips, and body core muscles up the spine and out the striking arm. In Japan this leveraging technique is known as the “double whip” or “returning wave.”

Note the bone alignments in Nodan’s finishing position above. His rear leg forms a straight line extending through his “center” up to his right shoulder, which has been rotated 45 degrees. Karateka must consciously separate the two steps within the two 1-2 timing sequences, until they become a natural part of every technique.

The 1-2 Timing is grounded in the 1st Principle, Proper Bone Alignment, because without a “centered” stance the hips will not generate enough speed and body weight transfer to project “one strike” power. This is true for all striking, kicking, and blocking techniques.

To learn the 1-2 Timing, the mind must be “located” in the hara or “center,” two inches below the navel. If the mind is allowed to locate in the striking hand, the arm will “lead” rather than “follow” the hip and upper body rotations. This will result in a “push” rather than a leveraged “thrust.”

It is worthy to note that sports that hit a ball, such as baseball, tennis, and golf teach 1-2 timing, in which the hips are turned *before* the arms are extended. Ironically, this principle has been all but lost to many karate schools today.

### **Throwing a baseball uses 1-2 Timing**



**The hips rotate (center) before the throwing arm is extended.  
Follow Through (right) is the 3rd Principle (Extension of Ki).**

Yakov demonstrates a simultaneous downward block with reverse thrust punch. The suspended bag caroms off his fist like a pinball, because he has applied the 1-2 Timing. This is what “one strike” power looks like, and what distinguishes a leveraged “thrust” punch from a much weaker “push.”



**Yakov maintains his upright position as he holds “center” throughout the technique.**

### 1-2 Timing in the lunging elbow strike



Nodan keeps his hips cocked as he steps into a diagonal straddle stance (left). Step 1- He rotates his hips towards target (right).



Step 2- He rotates his upper body and extends the elbow strike.

### **3rd Principle: Follow Through (Extension of Ki)**

Quan Li taught the “extension of ki” on every technique, “all the way to infinity.” I changed the name of this principle to “Follow Through,” because Westerners can more easily relate to the follow through concept taught in sports that throw, strike, or kick a ball. In Eastern thought, ki is the vital life force that makes up the universe, and it can be gathered and projected by certain masters. The common denominator between the Eastern and Western interpretations of the 3rd Principle is that the force of each technique is maximized when it is “mentally” extended, “all the way to infinity.”

The Follow Through principle is essential for breaking multiple un-spaced board stacks, because the kinetic energy of a strike dissipates as it meets the resistance of each successive board. The function of Follow Through is to help maintain hand speed all the way through the board stack.



**The graduated resistance of the flexible post makiwara helps in the development of the 3rd Principle, “Follow Through.”**

### Follow Through with the “push” break

This is a safe, but difficult test of the 1-2 Timing hip rotation and Follow Through principles. The challenge is to thrust against a single board with enough speed and body weight transfer to break it before the suspended bag begins to move. This is a “zero inch” break, because the thrusting hand remains in contact with the board from the beginning to the end of the technique.



First, Nodan rotates his hips sharply toward the target. Next, he rotates his upper body and arm through the board, while following through (extending ki), as if projecting his hand “all the way to infinity.” Before executing the break (left), his stance is relaxed, the spine is straight, his head is erect as if suspended on a string, and his elbow is turned under to reduce power loss through the elbow joint. Note how his right arm remains relaxed throughout the technique, which illustrates the 5th Principle, Soft and Hard.



The bent wrist break from a cat stance was executed from a “weak” cross-chest position and required a powerful hip rotation, along with a very concentrated Follow Through.



Nodan must mentally follow through (extend ki) well beyond the 3-board stack, “all the way to infinity.”



## 4th Principle: Correct Breathing

Breathing is controlled using the diaphragm, inhaling through the nose, and exhaling through the mouth. Shuri-te styles like Shorinryu and Shotokan use natural breathing, whereas Goju and Uechi-ryu use a forced breathing style. I have trained in each of these arts and can attest that they all teach, **inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth**.

When executed vocally, the *kiai* yell is carried on the breath and manifests as a primal roar that emanates from the depths of the hara or “center.” When Nodan executes *kiai* without a vocal yell, a loud and forceful rush of air can be heard on every focused technique. Correct Breathing is vital for executing rapid focused movements, because it facilitates the application of the 5th Principle, Soft and Hard (see the YouTube video, “Nodan Dagger Form”).



Correct Breathing uses the diaphragm (left) and not the intercostal muscles in the upper chest (right). Boxers, wind instrument players, and opera singers are all trained to breathe using the diaphragm.

## 5th Principle: Soft and Hard

Soft and Hard 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 upper body and arms are sequentially contracted and the entire body focuses hard upon impact. After the strike, the body again becomes soft. Mastering the 5<sup>th</sup> Principle requires many thousands of repetitions, until the *transitions* within and between the techniques flow without tension.

In the example below, Nodan is accosted by two men. In defending against multiple opponents, surprise, speed, and “one strike” power are important factors in mounting an effective defense. The correct application of Soft and Hard is critical for maintaining proper form, in order to maximize speed and body weight transfer.





**Nodan rotates his hips and attacks one of his assailants.**



**His relaxed (Soft) transition following this first break will maximize speed and body weight transfer into the next.**



**Nodan rotates his hips and strikes the second attacker.**



**The ability to become Soft during transitions enables him to break both board stacks in about 1 second.**

## Kicks and Blocks

Kicking and blocking techniques utilize the five principles. For example, for self-defense, the middle and lower-level applications of the front, side, and back kicks 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 and allows for greater flexibility of movement, which maximizes speed. The knee should be raised higher than the intended target, because a “down and in” motion gives the front thrust kick its greatest power.



**Nodan assumes a front fighting stance as he confronts a knife threat.**



His hips rotate as he raises his knee above the target.

### **5-board break with reverse front thrust kick**



A “down and in” trajectory gives front thrust kick its power.

### **Front thrust kick on the suspended bag**



**Yakov applies the five principles to the front thrust kick.**



**The bag explodes off Yakov's foot, which distinguishes the front "thrust" kick from a "push." Note how he maintains his "center" and hand positions throughout the technique.**

### Front kick defense from “surrender” position



Yohan waits in a “surrender” position for his assailant to attack.



He holds “center” and keeps his hands in fighting position.  
Timing is critical when defending against moving assaults.



### Low back kick defense



**Nodan feigns surrender before he launches a preemptive low back thrust kick against the knife wielding assailant.**



**As Nodan abruptly turns, he strikes towards attacker's face to distract him, and then transitions to a guarding block.**



**Nodan's hips are cocked and ready to execute a low back kick to adversary's knee joint. Note how his blocking arm holds its position as a distraction from his real intention.**



**Head to heel, Nodan's body forms a straight line through his "center," as he breaks through the 4-board stack.**

### **Formal downward block**

The five principles are applied to blocking techniques. The formal version of the downward block is an example of a “one strike” technique that hits with the entire body, and not just with the arm and shoulder.

According to Quan, all blocks use the “unbendable arm,” in which the blocking arm is extended in a soft/hard state of tension using the triceps and latissimus dorsi muscles that run along the upper sides of the back. The “unbendable arm” causes the blocking arm to become like a “slightly bent steel rod wrapped in cotton cloth.”

Formal blocks use the full range of motion to develop proper form. With training, however, karateka can project strength into the shorter and quicker street adaptations.

### **5-board break with formal downward block**



**This break was made possible by applying the “unbendable arm.”**

## Abbreviated downward block defense



To defend a surprise front kick assault, Nodan must be able to block with power from a “hands up” surrender position.



Nodan drops into a “centered” stance and projects his blocking arm downward to intercept the kick.

### Formal middle level block



As the hips begin to rotate (left), the blocking arm moves naturally. The hips are rotated (center) before the block makes contact (right). (Note 45° angle of the block as he applies the “unbendable arm.”)

### Abbreviated middle level block defense



Nodan defends a knife thrust using an angle step and abbreviated middle block, while countering with a hook punch to the head.

### Formal Rising Block



He lifts his blocking arm using his shoulder and latisimus dorsi muscles on the upper sides of his back. The block will assume a 45° angle on completion as he applies the “unbendable arm.”

### Abbreviated rising block defense



Nodan steps in and jams overhead knife attack by adjusting his rising block outward, in order to intercept the angle of the attacker's arm.

## Street Defense

With its emphasis on developing “one strike” power techniques, Shuri-te karate jutsu (p. 11) was never intended for sport fighting. It was designed as a defense against multiple armed attackers who were unskilled in the art. In fact, the early Okinawan masters believed karate jutsu was far too dangerous to be a competitive sport.

Street attacks are fluid and unpredictable, and having “one strike” power capability is a big advantage amid the chaos and confusion of a real attack, especially wherever firearms are restricted. Yet, to be truly functional as street defense, a martial art must be adapted to respond to specific kinds of assaults because, ***what we practice is what we will do when faced with a real attack.***

Today, the MMA (mixed martial arts) 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. But this latest expression of the martial arts is very different from reality self-defense.

***There are no rules in the street.*** Strikes to the eyes and throat, attacks to the groin, and biting are among the many tactics prohibited in competition. Sport fighters have the advantages of warm up time, a referee to monitor the action, and safety equipment like mouth guards and gloves. More importantly, sport competitors do not fight multiple armed attackers where grappling skills become largely irrelevant.

The following examples show the kinds of tactics that are banned in sport fighting. (See the YouTube videos, “Nodan Self-Defense,” “Nodan Dagger Form,” and “Nodan Students” for examples of street defense applications.)

**Spear hand strikes to the eye and throat**



**Nodan raises his hands in surrender when mugger threatens him by holding a knife to his throat.**



**After blocking weapon hand away, he executes a double spear hand strike to the eye and throat.**



### **Spinning defense against a pitchfork attack**

Every year many people are assaulted by an array of improvised non-weapons, such as hammers, baseball bats, chairs, tire irons, machetes, and pitchforks to name a few.

Defending against a pitchfork assault is similar to facing a thrusting sword or staff. A good strategy is to use an initial head feint before executing a spinning maneuver behind the assailant. This strategy positions the defender to execute a decisive strike before the adversary can turn and counter attack. (See the YouTube video, “Nodan Dagger Form.”)

A “spin and run” maneuver can also be used as an escape tactic when surrounded by multiple assailants. It is worthy to note that rugby players and football running backs use this strategy to spin out of the grasp of would be tacklers.



**Nodan takes a position just outside opponent’s effective thrusting range and patiently waits (left). He utilizes a sudden head feint to momentarily freeze assailant before beginning to spin outside the line of attack. MMA competitors do not face armed opponents.**



**The assailant reacts to the sudden head feint and thrusts, but Nodan has already moved out of the line of attack. He holds “center” as he continues to spin behind assailant.**



**He spins into a “centered” ready thrust position, from which he can strike with a reverse punch to the back of head or the spine, targets that are prohibited in sport.**

### **Defending against a machete attack**

The machete is an essential tool that is employed in many areas throughout the world. However, when used against a human being, the machete becomes a lethal weapon. For instance, in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, countless thousands of Tutsi civilians were hacked to death with machetes by Hutu militia groups. Practicing to defend against this kind of unconventional weapon attack is an essential part of realistic street defense training.

Defending a machete assault is similar to confronting an overhead or side arm club or hatchet attack, in which the weapon is large enough to require a “hitch” in the assailant’s swing. One strategy is to move in quickly as the aggressor begins to hitch, in order to jam the attacker’s weapon hand before it can generate enough speed and leverage to cause serious bodily injury.



**Nodan maintains a strategic distance so he can maneuver in or out, depending on the actions taken by the attacker.**



**As the assailant hitches his arm to attack, Nodan steps in with his back foot, in order to close the distance.**



**After closing the distance, Nodan jams the attacker's arm by executing a simultaneous rising block and front kick to the solar plexus (he can opt to kick or step in and strike).**

## Defense against a gun hold up from behind



Nodan gives gunman false confidence by raising hands in “surrender” and saying “Okay, take anything you w...”  
Words of compliance can have a “disarming” effect.



Before finishing his sentence, Nodan abruptly swings his arm up, which turns him out of the line of fire (left). He continues to pivot 180 degrees and “wraps and traps” the gunman’s weapon arm.



**He strikes to the temple. With practice, the element of surprise makes this street defense easy to apply.**



**Nodan applies “one strike” power to neutralize threat.**

### Self-defense oriented black belt test

In 1992, I began to teach karate street defense to two young men, Yohan and Yakov. After training for five years without receiving any rank, they became so proficient that I had them tested by an independent panel of judges for the black belt in *Shotokan Karate Jutsu*.

The test consisted of Shotokan basics, bag techniques to demonstrate “one strike” power, pre-arranged kumite sets, the Shotokan katas, Jion and Kanku Dai, and street defense.

Street defense was the most important part of the test and they were required to successfully defend against a variety of attacks that concluded with an opponent making continuous freestyle attacks with a knife. This was the critical phase of the testing, because true confidence comes from having the ability to defend oneself in difficult situations. An edited version (3:46) of the black belt test appears in the YouTube video, “Nodan Students.”



Yohan “the bull”



Yakov “the hammer”



**Self-defense testing culminated with random knife attacks, which require the highest level of skill.**



**Yohan and Yakov (center) receive black belts and pose with judges.**



### Back and side head strike defenses

The number of boards that can be broken with a given technique does not always indicate its effectiveness. For example, my back head strike lacked enough speed to break more than two boards, but the mass of the head makes it a devastating strike to the face. Likewise, a snapping side head strike can easily stun an opponent into submission.



**Nodan pins the attacker's arms (left) and executes back head strike. Speed and power are generated using a "double whip" hip thrust.**



**Nodan feigns surrender while subtly moving his head out of the line of fire (left). He applies a twisting joint hold (center) and follows up with a snapping side head strike to face (right). I once accidentally made light contact with a training partner while practicing this defense. Stunned, he dropped to the floor, which is why head strikes are banned in sport.**

## **The Best Martial Art?**

Debates over which is the best martial art should begin with the question, “best for what?” There are traditional throwing and striking arts, competitive fighting styles like sport karate and mixed martial arts (MMA), and reality-based self-defense systems like combat jujitsu and Krav Maga. Each of these arts develops its own strategies and techniques.

Ultimately, the best martial art is the one that best addresses ***your*** goals. Those who would seek instruction should research and visit their local schools, because there are good and bad teachers in every style, and each art has its strengths and weaknesses.

In reality, not all practitioners can develop the “one strike” power necessary to stun and stop a determined attacker with a single blow. Furthermore, for many people “one strike” training may not be available, or may be too expensive or time consuming to pursue.

## **A practical alternative**

A practical alternative is to take a hands-on self-defense course and carry pepper spray (mace), which is available in handy pocket size containers. Pepper spray is non-lethal, relatively safe, inexpensive, and legal in most countries, which can be a major factor wherever firearms are restricted.

As with any defensive weapon, users should become familiar with its proper use and legal applications, and should practice arming and discharging live canisters in both indoor and outdoor settings. Fortunately, there are number of excellent YouTube videos showing the proper use of pepper spray.

## Breaking Protocols

I used 1x12x10 inch wide boards cut from 1x12 inch wide #2 common pine donor boards. Knots along the centerline were spliced out, which limits the number of usable pieces. (#1 clear pine is knot-free, but much more expensive).

Testing revealed that each board could support 130-135 lbs., which was determined by gently lowering a loaded barbell across the centerline of the wood running parallel with the grain. The full weight of the barbell was left on the test board for 1 full second before being lifted off.

Pine boards can vary widely in strength depending on their moisture content and, to ensure consistency, a sample from each donor board should be tested just prior to breaking. When breaking suspended board stacks, it is critical to hit along the centerline, in order to evenly distribute the force of the blow across the board holder's "floating" supports.

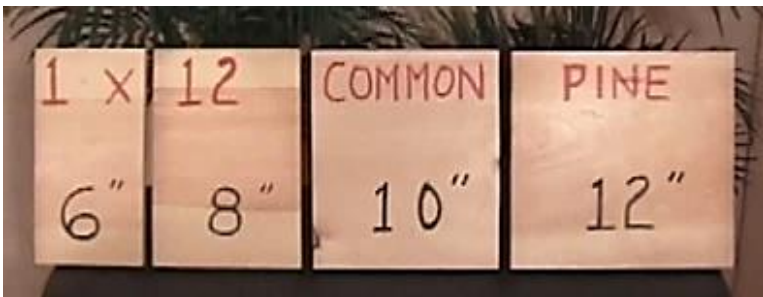
### Board testing using a barbell



**Each test board could support at least 130 lbs.  
On average my test boards broke with 135 lbs.  
(See YouTube video, "Nodan Board Testing")**

Each board stack was assembled from the same donor board with the grain patterns facing the same direction. This causes the boards to break along a fairly-straight line, which matters when they are suspended.

Resistance increases proportionally with each additional board. For instance, my 5-board stacks could support at least  $5 \times 130 = 650$  lbs. (295 kgs.). Board strength, however, can be adjusted by changing the width. Thus, five 10-inch-wide boards at 130-135 lb. test strength are equal to five 8-inch-wide or five 12-inch-wide boards with the same 130-135 lb. test strength.



**Board strength can be adjusted by changing the board width.**

At the local home improvement center, I chose the lightest common pine donor boards I could find, because they were consistently drier from the start. I used 10-inch-wide boards because that size is frequently used in board breaking competitions. On average, they broke with 135 lbs. of weight.

Using a little arithmetic, pine boards can be cut to any size that is proportional in strength to my 1x10-inch standard test boards. For example, if a 1x10 inch-wide board breaks with 150 lbs. of weight, then a 9-inch-wide piece from the same donor board would break at the 135 lb. protocol standard.

## Flexible Makiwara

The traditional Okinawan makiwara was a tapered post buried three feet in the ground. The striking surface was hard, with limited flexibility, and it was covered with straw padding attached with rope. Serious users developed thick calluses and bone calcifications in their hands and feet, which could lead to long-term debilitating injuries later in life.

The legendary Kyokushin karate master, “Mas” Oyama, used a traditional style makiwara and became famous for his sensational breaking exhibitions. Sensei met Oyama in the mid-1960s and told me that Oyama had confided to him that he always knew when it was about to rain, because of the pain in his hands. At the time, Oyama was in his early forties.



**Iconic photo shows Master Funakoshi practicing on a traditional makiwara.**

### **Indoor flexible post makiwara**

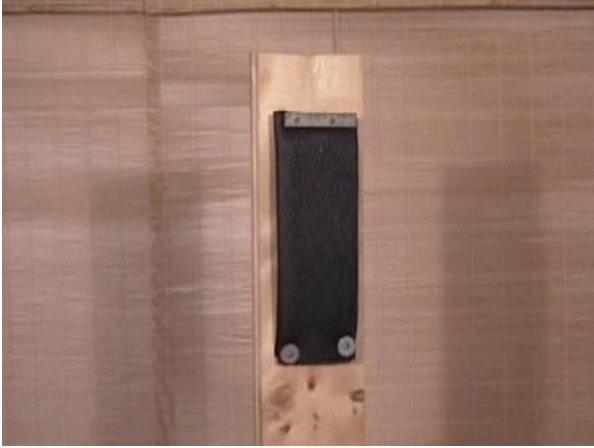
When I began teaching Yohan and Yakov in the early 1990s, they were both avid guitarists. To protect their hands, I fabricated an indoor flexible post makiwara that utilized “graduated resistance” to develop “one strike” techniques. Since callus formation is not necessary for effective street defense, I covered the striking area with several layers of soft rubber padding to give additional protection.

Over time, this flexible post makiwara design proved to be as effective a tool for forging “one strike” power as the traditional makiwara. For instructions on building a flexible makiwara and board holder from materials found in most home improvement centers, see video, “Nodan Makiwara.”

### **A basic indoor flexible post makiwara**



**The 4x4 foot platform was cut from a 4x8 foot sheet of  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch plywood. Space permitting, platform length can be extended up to 8 feet, which gives maximum stability during training.**



The post was made from two 1x8 inch wide pine boards and padded with several layers of rubber attached with flat brackets and fender washers.



Post holder was built using 2x4s and metal framing brackets that were attached to the  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch plywood platform with 4" bolts. I am not a skilled carpenter and believe that others can improve on my design.



Board holder was made from  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch plywood and cut to fit the curve of suspended bag. It is attached using two heavy duty bungee cords.

### Training with Floor Bags

I began using a traditional style makiwara in 1980 after training with a suspended heavy bag for 15 years. In the early '90s, I began practicing on the flexible post makiwara.

Years later, I purchased Century Martial Art's BOB (body opponent bag) and Wave Master XLL floor bags, which are excellent for horizontal striking and kicking techniques.

**BOB**



**Wave Master XLL**





# **The Way of the Spirit**

## The Dojo Spirits

In the late '70s, I learned the first eight katas of Gogen “the cat” Yamaguchi’s Japanese style of Goju karate. Yamaguchi incorporated Zen Buddhism, Shinto, and yoga into his system and was considered one of Japan’s great karate masters. In the documentary film, “Way of The Sword,” he is seen in his dojo kneeling before a crystal ball conjuring up the martial spirits. Described as an ordained Shinto priest and 10th degree black belt of “near mythical proportions,” the film’s commentator translates the Goju-ryu master’s words:

“In my crystal ball, I conjure up spirits of past and future. I talk to the samurai warriors of old and to the fighters who are yet to come, and the secrets they tell me I pass on through my karate school.”<sup>2</sup>

### Yamaguchi (1901-1969)



“The cat” appeared on many magazine covers during his celebrated career.

### **Traditional Japanese Dojo**

The traditional Japanese dojo (Way room) is where the departed spirits of the masters meet with the followers of the Way. Portraits of these masters occupy the kamiza (high seat of honor), and before and after each class students are led in a ceremonial kneeling bow before it. This ritual includes Zazen (sitting meditation), which is intended to open the mind to make it more receptive to the spirits.

For most Western practitioners, bowing down before the kamiza is a symbolic act of respect that has nothing to do with contacting the spirits of deceased masters. This was my perspective until I set up a traditional dojo in my home and began to experience strange phenomena.



**Quan Li's dojo kamiza displayed samurai swords, sai and tonfa, dojo certificates, and several portraits of departed masters.**

### **Zazen (sitting meditation)**



Japanese dojos follow the tradition of performing meditation and a ceremonial bow at the beginning and end of each class.

### **Traditional Ceremonial bow**



Quan trained to perfect his techniques and wisely did not seek enlightenment and superhuman strength as I did.

### **My Home Dojo**

Following Quan Li's example, in 1980 I set up a dojo in my home and Quan came once a week to train. He showed me the *Shotokan Karate-do Workout* that Sensei instituted when he taught the art. The workout was designed to burn away the ego, which was essential for reaching enlightenment. Special emphasis was placed on the katas, because they functioned as "moving Zen," and we practiced many repetitions of the Shotokan forms using tempos that ranged from slow motion to full speed.

We also adhered to Sensei's practice of executing a forceful kiai yell on every focused technique. At the time, I was unaware of the subtle spiritual influences operating through the workout, which caused it to function as a kind of martial arts yoga.

During our workouts together, Quan and I routinely experienced unexplainable phenomena. For example, when practicing prearranged 3-step sparring a mysterious dynamic caused our arms to barely make contact, even though our blocks were easily deflecting the full power punches we were throwing. One time the dojo was filled with such energy that the wooden floor vibrated beneath our feet, and on two occasions we were so energized that the rigid 2x4 striking post was split at its base during makiwara practice.

The power I was experiencing was exhilarating and steeled my determination to reach further and further beyond my natural strength, and during the week I often practiced the workout on my own and spent hours in Zen meditation. Ironically, I could not see that, rather than burning away my ego, the workout was subtly inflating it with the pride of becoming more and more powerful!

### **The invisible man**

One evening the energy in my dojo was exceptionally strong, so I asked my wife to come in to see if she could feel anything unusual. Kay entered and followed the energy source to the right side of the kamiza. With outstretched hands, she traced the outline of an invisible “presence” standing in the corner. When she realized what she had done, Kay became spooked and rushed out of the room.

Shortly afterwards, Sylvester our cat entered the room to make his nightly inspection of the dojo. Quan and I watched to see if the cat would be aware of the invisible man in the corner. Sylvester began his customary walk along the back wall, then abruptly veered off course and went to the spot where Kay had encountered the spirit. He sat down and stared up at the “presence” for about a minute, after which he stood up and nonchalantly sauntered out of the room.

Later that evening, Kay commented that the invisible man stood about five feet tall, which happened to coincide with the height of the diminutive Shotokan karate master, Gichen Funakoshi, whose portrait graced the kamiza.

I do not know if Funakoshi’s spirit was in the dojo that night, but I believe the “presence” was associated with the spirit(s) that we contacted during an incredible Ouija Board séance shortly afterwards.

### **The Séance**

My former student, Gary, came to visit with his girlfriend Deedee. They brought a Ouija Board, and after Quan and I finished our evening workout we all agreed to take the channeling device into the dojo to ask it questions. We positioned the spirit board on the floor in front of the kamiza

and Kay lit several candles. I turned off the lights and the five of us sat down in a circle around the board. With pen and paper in hand, we were ready to begin.



**Spiritualists invented the spirit board in the late 1800s, in order to communicate with the dead.**

Deedee and Kay placed their fingers lightly on the planchette and asked, “Is Master Funakoshi’s spirit in this dojo?” To my surprise, the planchette began to move and pause briefly over specific letters on the board’s alphabet. Gary and Quan acted as spotters and I wrote down the letters as they called them out. ONLYFORTWO. When we divided the letters into words the message read, “Only for two.”

We asked, “Which two is he here for?”

When the spirit answered, “For true believers,” Quan and I were certain it was referring to us.

Quan asked, “Is Master Ueshiba here?”

When the spirit answered, “All are here if you learn the truth. The truth is in this room,” my initial skepticism of the channeling process came to an end.

I inquired, “Are we following the right path?”

The spirit answered, “Many have trained. Few will develop

the gift given by..." The planchette stopped moving.

We persisted, "Given by whom?"

"It must start from within."

At this point, Kay became somewhat unnerved by the weirdness of the channeling experience and stopped using the planchette. Fortunately, Deedee was able to continue by herself and asked, "Who is speaking to us?"

The spirit gave an evasive Zen-like reply: "Like the sky, all is open. The sword moves with wisdom."

Quan's teacher, Sensei, believed in reincarnation and had told Quan that they had trained together in previous lives. Quan asked, "Does Master Funakoshi live in the flesh?"

When the spirit responded, "I, you, he," Kay gasped and exclaimed that Funakoshi's portrait on the kamiza had just morphed into a three-dimensional image and projected itself out towards her. Quan recalled how Sensei had told him that Funakoshi's picture did that sometimes, but Kay had seen enough. She sprang to her feet and rushed out of the room declaring, "I'm out of here!"

After Kay's departure Quan asked, "Will Jay and Quan become masters?" The spirit gave another evasive answer.

"All will be known when each level is attained."

Unsatisfied with the spirit's noncommittal response, Quan asked, "What kata level should Quan be training?"

The spirit responded with a curt, "Good-bye."

Undeterred by the rebuff, Quan asked about his future in karate: "Is Quan destined to teach in the future?"

The spirit answered, "Giving is receiving the ki."

Deedee was puzzled when she saw this written out on paper and asked why "key" was spelled "ki." She had never heard of this Japanese word denoting energy. I had watched



Deedee occasionally to see if she could be choosing letters, but she was not even looking down at the planchette as it glided effortlessly back and forth across the board.

Deedee asked a follow up question, "What is the ki?"

The spirit answered, "Look to yourself."

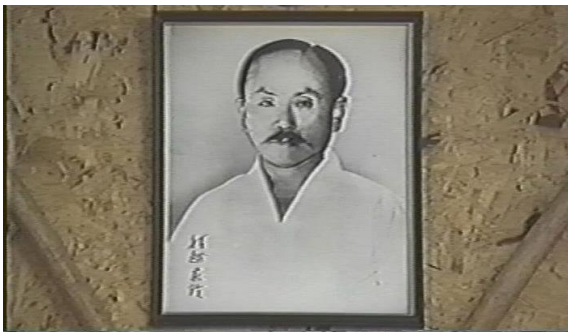
Quan then asked, "Will karate-do die with Sensei?"

"Like the seasons winter sleeps. Slowly spring comes. Have..." For a second time the planchette stopped moving.

We asked, "Can you finish this statement?"

The spirit appeared to have had enough and responded, "Greed is given to all. I give to two with much to learn."

With that the séance was over... or so I thought. In fact, Deedee repeated her earlier question, "Who is speaking to us?" This time the spirit shocked Deedee and Gary when it answered, "The Devil." Somehow, I managed to ignore or repress this last communication to the point where even today I have no memory of it ever happening. The séance had convinced me that a spirit realm did exist, but I was not prepared to accept the possibility that an evil supernatural being called "the Devil" could be real.



**Kay was terrified when Funakoshi's picture became three-dimensional and projected itself out at her.**

## **The Medium**

Shortly after our séance I went to see an old Spiritualist minister named Gert, who gave psychic readings. In practice, mediums summon up spirits, who temporarily speak through them by taking over in a benign form of possession. I visited her on four occasions, hoping to gain additional insight into the workings of the spirit world.

On my first visit, Gert led me to her kitchen and informed me that a five-hundred-year-old Native American spirit guide was assigned to act as her psychic gatekeeper. We sat down at a table and she took hold of both my hands and began to speak in tongues. When Gert opened her eyes she said, “Now as I come into close contact with you...” Immediately, numbers of spirits began trying to come through and Gert frequently shook her head disapprovingly and spoke out, “No, not you,” to certain ones she did not want to come across. I got the impression there were a number of departed souls not associated with me, who were trying to get messages through this portal from the other side.

Gert knew details about my family that she could not have known beforehand and I have no doubt she was in contact with the spirit realm. Surprisingly, when I told her about our Ouija Board séance, she became very angry with me and proceeded to denounce Parker Brothers for trivializing the spirit board’s significance by marketing it as a parlor game, which she believed put an uninformed public at risk.

Ironically, the well-documented case of demon possession that inspired the 1973 block buster horror movie, “The Exorcist,” began shortly after the thirteen-year-old boy (not a girl as portrayed in the film) was introduced to a Ouija Board by his aunt, who was herself a practicing Spiritualist!<sup>3</sup>

### **In Hindsight**

In hindsight, I realize there was no way for me to know for sure who or what Gert was channeling, or whether all the information was accurate. This applies to our Ouija Board séance as well. After all, what would prevent the spirits from giving misinformation or telling deceptive half-truths?

Although psychic mediums and objects such as Ouija Boards and dojo kamiza have no power in themselves, they can become portals for spirits to come through. It is due to the potential dangers posed by the demonic realms that occult practices are prohibited in the Tanach (Old Testament) and New Testament writings. Historically, this is remarkable considering that the dominant world cultures during biblical times embraced the occult as a way of elevating humans to a godlike status.

Since the 1960s, Western culture has seen a proliferation of occult themes in gaming, books, art, and music, not to mention the many “self-help” influencers using New Age techniques to promote “happiness” and “well-being.” Taken together, these occult influences are causing many young people to think the spirit realms are mere fantasy, which could not be further from the truth.

In fact, there are any number of ways for the demonic to influence a person. Whenever we open ourselves by using psychedelic drugs, abusing alcohol, or engaging in occult practices, a door is created for spirit entities to pass through. Once the demonic has entered, it can be very difficult to expel. This is especially true for those who use Eastern disciplines like Zen, yoga, and the martial arts as spiritual paths to higher consciousness and enlightenment.

## The Enlightened

After training for a year with Quan, I wanted to meet his former karate teacher, Sensei, who was teaching aikido and kobudo (sword and jo). Upon meeting the master, I knew at once that he was everything Quan had said about him. His presence was different from that of other men, and when he performed his art a powerful energy flowed through him that seemed to transcend the physical realm. Now I knew what kind of “enlightened” master I wanted to become.

I asked Sensei if he would consider giving Quan and me private lessons in his karate-do, but he was skeptical and said, “You’d have to be a saint to find the Way through karate today.” His misgivings, however, did not discourage us from going back to see him several months later. After his last class, he invited us onto the mat. As we kneeled before him, Sensei looked at me and said, “Jay, everything you know is wrong.” Although Sensei, by his own admission, had barely finished high school and I was a psychologist working for a prestigious university hospital, I knew he was referring to more than my knowledge of karate.

Straight away the master set about proving his point. First, he moved behind me and instructed that I not look back until I could sense that his fist was close to the back of my head. I waited until I could feel him almost touching me. When I turned around, he was standing ten feet away!

I tried again. This time I was confident that he was some distance away, because I did not sense anything close to me. When I turned to look, the side of my face lightly grazed his extended fist. Somehow Sensei was able to extend and withdraw his ki (vital energy) at will.

Next, he faced me in a relaxed front stance with his arms hanging loosely at his sides. He said, "Attack me." I shifted into a fighting stance and cautiously looked for an opening. There was none. I felt as if he could anticipate any attack I may have been considering.

Finally, he asked me to perform a kata and I chose the first beginner form, Taikyoku Shodan. Sensei considered my performance for several moments before concluding, "It's not that it's wrong- it's just not right."

After this encounter with a true master, I was more motivated than ever to keep training in karate. I intensified my home workouts and Quan and I continued to meet with the master every few months to have him critique our progress in karate.

After six months I made a momentous decision. Quan and I would continue practicing karate together but, to better access Sensei's spiritual wisdom, I joined his aikido dojo. The three-hour-round-trip commute limited the number of monthly classes I could attend, but studying aikido and weapons with Sensei for four years added a new perspective to my spiritual understanding of the martial arts.

### **Sensei's Strength**

A senior student told me that when Sensei taught karate he equipped his dojo with free weights, and that he could power snatch a 150 lb. dumbbell up overhead with one hand. Perhaps even more impressive, he could lift and press the 150 lb. senior student overhead with relative ease. Yet, the master's awe-inspiring physical strength was nothing compared to the spiritual power he could project. One time, he gave Quan a dramatic demonstration of that power.

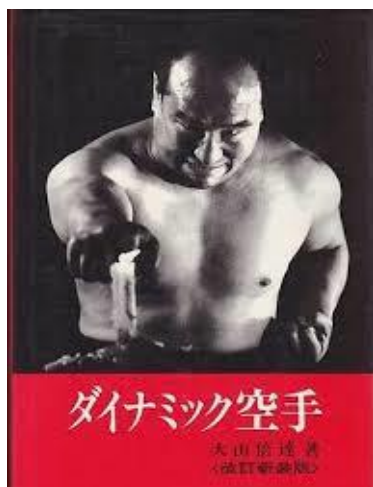
This happened when Sensei directed Quan to touch his collar bone and Quan received a surprisingly strong electric shock. Afterwards Sensei explained that the “little” jolt was only a fraction of the power he could project.

On another occasion Sensei told Quan, “If I hit you, you should be dead before you hit the floor,” and, “Once you have the Martial Spirit, no one will ever fight you.”

Aware of these claims, I asked Sensei how he would compare his strength as a martial artist to that of the legendary Kyokushin karate master, “Mas” Oyama, who was considered the strongest karateka of his generation. Oyama was famous for fighting bulls with his bare hands, spectacular breaking demonstrations, and his prowess in kumite.

Sensei paused briefly to consider the question and then replied matter-of-factly, “We’re about the same strength.”

### **Mas Oyama (1923-1994)**



**Sensei compared his strength to that of this iconic karate master.**

## **The Martial Spirit**

When I asked Sensei how he had come by his superhuman strength and martial arts prowess, he told me about a life-changing visitation he received from the Martial Spirit in the late '60s. He explained how he had been suffering with serious health issues, but that he was determined to find the ultimate "Truth" (Sensei's term for "enlightenment") or to die trying. He was pushing himself to the limits of physical endurance with many hours of kata practice.

One day as he was training alone in his dojo and practicing the Heian Godan kata, a tremendous energy entered his body and he heard an audible voice ask, "Do you want it to stop?" He knew he must decide quickly or the powerful force would be gone. I surmise that the moment Thomas Fox acquiesced to the Martial Spirit and its power, he joined the ranks of the "enlightened" ones and became "Sensei."

Afterwards, Sensei believed he had become invincible, because he could see any weakness in the techniques. Years later, however, he would acknowledge that it took him some time to learn what to do with the "entirely new energy" he received on "that fateful day."

## **Sensei's Aikido**

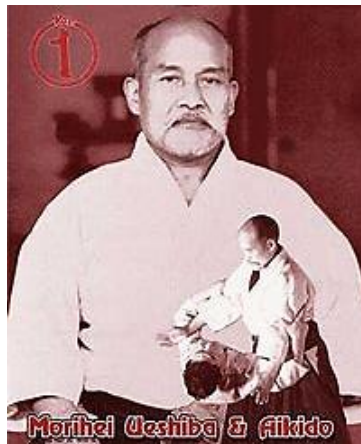
Sensei taught a style of Morihei Ueshiba's aikido based on his background in judo, aiki jujitsu, karate, and kendo (Way of the sword). Sensei's encounter with the Martial Spirit was comparable to Ueshiba's enlightenment following a contest with a skilled swordsman, in which he defeated the man without fighting. He accomplished this by anticipating and avoiding the path of his opponent's attacks. Afterwards, Morihei was bathed in a "golden light" from heaven that was

described as a “rebirth.”<sup>4</sup> Like Sensei, he believed he had become invincible. While Sensei had been “possessed” by the Martial Spirit, Morihei believed he was indwelt by Izunome, the Angel of Purification,<sup>5</sup> a Shinto goddess who is associated with energy, fire, and enlightenment.

During his lifetime, Ueshiba was deferentially addressed as “O Sensei” (The Sensei) by his students and admirers, and was believed to be the most enlightened martial artist in all Japan. To memorialize his experience and elevation to godhood, aikido’s founder commissioned a stylized portrait depicting himself as a powerful Shinto deity.<sup>6</sup>

The late aikido researcher and archivist, Stanley Pranin, penned the article, “Channeling the Power of the Gods,” in which he noted how Ueshiba’s early students talked about his superhuman strength, and that the master often spoke about “channeling the powers of the kami or dieties.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969)**



**Aikido’s founder urged his aikidoka,  
“Move on toward enlightenment.”<sup>8</sup>**



### **Sensei as Swordsman**

Sensei believed he was the reincarnation of the last true samurai, Saigo Takamori (1828-1877). While Takamori's role in restoring the Japanese emperor to the throne made him a national hero, his subsequent rebellion against the state turned him into a traitor. Sensei confessed he had been allowed to remember his past life as Takamori, and that this had caused him much sorrow.



**Sensei bore an uncanny resemblance to Takamori, whose bronze statue stands in Tokyo's Ueno Park.**

Sensei was a master of the two swords style (Niten Ichi-ryu), in which both swords are wielded simultaneously. The art was invented by the 17<sup>th</sup> century samurai, Miyamoto Musashi (1584-1645), who wrote the famous treatise on strategy in swordsmanship entitled, ***A Book of Five Rings***. According to legend, after Miyamoto had become invincible, he retired to a cave and practiced Zen meditation until he reached enlightenment and wrote his classic work.

The first time I trained with Sensei he used Miyamoto's "twofold gaze"<sup>9</sup> to thwart any attack I may have been considering (p. 74). The gaze sees distant things as close and close things as distant, which perceptually slows down the opponent's movements. With a mind devoid of anticipation, the opponent's strength and intentions are easier to discern. This makes the gaze especially useful in defending against moving armed assaults.



18<sup>th</sup> century artist's rendering  
of Miyamoto's self-portrait.

### **Yoga, Zen, and Budo**

Sensei believed that yoga, Zen, and the martial arts (budo) all shared the common goal of achieving enlightenment. The Japanese word for “the Way” is “do,” and Sensei’s karate-do, aikido, and kendo were all expressions of his budo. For Sensei, enlightenment is attained when the ego has been annihilated and the illusions of the physical world disappear. The emerging divine soul is no longer bound to endless cycles of birth and rebirth, but has been absorbed like a drop of water in a vast cosmic ocean. One becomes One with the universe. This Eastern philosophy, that we are divine souls inhabiting a divine universe, stands in stark contrast to the Judeo-Christian concept of a Creator God who transcends the physical and spiritual realms.

Budo and yoga offer similar paths to the same goal of enlightenment. In the final analysis, all yoga styles are based on kundalini awakening.<sup>10</sup> Kundalini is the Hindu snake goddess who manifests as an indwelling corporeal energy coiled at the base of the spine. A dominant characteristic of kundalini awakening is energy infusion or possession.<sup>11</sup> When awakened, kundalini fire spirals upward toward the crown chakra to bring on enlightenment.

Even though this yoga paradigm is not commonly applied to the martial arts, Sensei had an intimate knowledge of it. Perhaps this was because the superhuman physical and psychic powers of “enlightened” martial artists, Zen masters, and yogis come from the same spiritual source.

Despite never having practiced yoga, the event that initiated my enlightenment experience happened when I looked into my dojo mirror and inexplicably found myself demanding to see the “kundalini fire.”

## Kundalini Fire



**Kundalini fire is indwelling corporeal energy coiled at the base of the spine. It is the Indian manifestation of the goddess and is similar to Ueshiba's Izunome, the Angel of Purification.**

## Zen master and provocateur

I understood Sensei as a self-styled Zen master, who liked to make provocative statements on a range of subjects. Jesus Christ and Christianity were often the targets of his sarcastic wit. For instance, when Pope John Paul II was nearly killed by an assassin's bullet in 1981 Sensei exclaimed, "He ought to be shot!" Another time, referring to the biblical account of Jesus feeding five thousand men with only two fish and five loaves of bread, he sarcastically quipped, "That boy should've have been a baker." Then Sensei looked heavenward and sneered, "That boy is out there running around looking for a

way to come back and do it all over again.” His disregard for Christianity was often expressed in statements such as, “The bible is all lies,” and, “There’s no such thing as the devil. You create your own demons.”

### **Pulling wrists with the “Big Guy”**

Concerning demons, Quan told me about a truly bizarre incident that occurred years earlier when Sensei was still teaching karate. One night he announced that he wanted to pull wrists (arm wrestle) with the Big Guy, and that he had asked the Big Guy if he could be the head demon over the United States. If not, could he be the head demon over the East Coast. And if that exalted position was not available to him, could he be the head demon of his home state. Barring that, could he at least be the head demon over his home town?

Quan recalled that he and his fellow students were completely dumbfounded by this fantastic story and were at a loss to know what to make it.

### **The most shocking thing**

Far and away, however, the most shocking thing we ever heard Sensei say concerned his comparison of the power of Jesus Christ to the highest power of the martial arts. On more than one occasion he told us, “Boys, if you think the power of the martial arts is something, grab ahold of Jesus Christ. There’s a power that’ll knock you right on your ass!”

How startling it was to hear these words from Sensei, who spoke them with the authority of someone who had firsthand knowledge of the fact. Years later, I went back to visit him and asked why he told us such a fantastic thing about Jesus?

about Jesus. Sensei appeared embarrassed and claimed that he had no memory of ever having said it.

### **A man with no hope**

I once gave Sensei a small token of appreciation that provoked a stunning response. It was a small brass plaque in the shape of the kanji symbol for “hope.” He slowly reached out and took the gift in both hands and mournfully opined, “I have no hope.” I could not begin to fathom his melancholy response. Besides possessing superior martial arts ability and superhuman strength, he had a successful commercial dojo, a live-in student who attended to his needs, and a loyal student following that revered him as a great master.

Sadly, at the end of his life Sensei became paranoid and alienated from his family and friends. By his own admission, Thomas Fox died without hope.

### **The Sensei Mystique**

For those of us who trained with him, Sensei was the proverbial riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. Some believed his mystique came from using hallucinogenic drugs, while others thought him mentally ill or possessed. None of us doubted his brilliance as a martial artist.

Perhaps Quan best captured the essence of Sensei’s mystique years after we had stopped training with him. After spending several hours together reminiscing about our experiences with the master, Quan half-jokingly concluded, “He’s not from this planet!”

## **Enlightenment?**

The curious imposition of Damien Wilson into my journey to enlightenment sheds light on how the demonic can work. Damien was having an affair with one of our neighbors and heard that I practiced karate. He asked if he could train with me. Damien had never studied a martial art, so I took him to a training session at Quan's dojo.

During our drive to Quan's house, Damien told me he had grown up with the occult and that he was very psychic. He claimed to experience astral projection (soul travel) while sleeping and that he could take thoughts out of people's heads. Then he made several stunning pronouncements. He said, "I know where Sensei's power comes from," and then boasted, "Now that I'm going to be training with you, you're going to see the real power of the martial arts."

By the end of our workout, Quan and I agreed that Damien Wilson was the weakest and most uncoordinated man we ever saw try to learn a martial art. We concluded that his grandiose claims were nothing short of delusional.

### **Damien meets Sensei**

Damien wanted to meet Sensei and I arranged for him to accompany me to a class. Sensei had always been friendly toward visitors and would often sit with them and explain the workout as a senior student took over the class. But, when I introduced Damien to Sensei neither man appeared to acknowledge the other. In fact, I doubt they spoke a single word to each other during the entire evening. They sat on opposite ends of the visitor's bench and completely ignored one another.

After class Sensei invited Quan and me onto the mat as Damien looked on from the visitors' bench. Sensei began to expound on the kind of commitment required to find the ultimate Truth. He said that, in order to access his kind of power, we had to want it more than anything in the world. He concluded by advising, "You have to ask for it and expect to receive it."

Following this Sensei made two startling statements. First he admonished us, "You can get power from the dark side or the light." Then he added, "My power comes from god" (at the time I did not know enough to ask him, which god?).

Sensei's face and demeanor suddenly changed and he pointed at me and said, "Jay, you're going to get this, and when you do, you're going to come back at me, 'you goddamned son of a bitch!'" Say what? I was dumbfounded as I left the dojo, unaware that this would be the last class I would ever take with Sensei.

On our drive home, I asked Damien how he felt about his meeting with Sensei, who had completely ignored him. To my surprise, Damien expressed genuine satisfaction with his visit and smugly boasted, "Me and Sensei have an understanding." Say what? Now I was utterly flabbergasted by the incredible things I had heard that evening.

### **The transfer of power**

Damien accompanied me one more time to Quan's dojo where we were joined by another black belt, John Bauer, who operated his own Shotokan school. During the workout, I witnessed several extraordinary events. First, I watched as Damien casually sidled up to Quan and stood face-to-face with him, no more than a foot away. In a flash, Quan pointed



his finger in Damien's face and chided, "That's not going to work!" Damien showed no visible reaction to Quan's strong rebuke and slowly moved away.

At the first opportunity, I took Quan aside and asked him what the incident with Damien was about. Quan retorted, "Oh, he was trying to go right down into my one-point," which refers to the energy field located in the hara or "center," a point two inches below the navel. (Remarkably, when I asked Quan about this incident two weeks later, he had no memory of it ever happening.)

A second odd occurrence happened when I paired off with John Bauer to practice formal 3-step sparring. As we bowed to one another, John suddenly sprang back as if he had just seen a ghost. (Several weeks later he admitted that he had been startled by my "piercing black eyes.")

The third incident brought our workout to an abrupt end. It happened as Quan and I engaged in the same 3-step sparring exercise. After I had blocked his third lunging punch, Quan stopped and exclaimed, "Jay, you're killing my arms!" He rolled up his sleeves and exposed large welts on both his forearms. This was incomprehensible to us. We had been practicing this same exercise together with full power punches and blocks for five years and neither of us had suffered so much as a minor bruise. On the drive home with Damien, I tried in vain to think of possible explanations for these unusual occurrences.

Things became even stranger after I returned home. As I lay in bed that night, an eerie "presence" manifested itself in my lower back. It was a cool bundle of energy about the size of a softball that slowly undulated up and down my spine. I have no idea when it happened, but unbeknown to me, after

Quan had rejected it, I was infused with occult power by Damien, who himself remained as weak as ever.

Clearly, I was the kundalini spirit's second choice, because Quan's dynamic personality, exceptional teaching skills, and superior techniques would have made him the ideal host for a powerful occult spirit, who could masquerade as an enlightened karate master possessing extraordinary psychic power and superhuman strength.

### **Is this enlightenment?**

Two weeks after that last workout at Quan's dojo, Sensei's prediction about me "getting it" finally came to fruition. I had managed to repress the eerie "presence" in my lower back, until I caught my reflection in a mirror and the eyes staring back at me were not my eyes! They were black and piercing, and projected an alien intelligence of their own. Without thinking, I beckoned to them and demanded, "Okay, show me the kundalini fire."

The alien "presence" manifested itself again in my lower spine and rose up, intensifying as it radiated throughout my body. The strength I felt was both thrilling and terrifying. As I watched in the mirror, Sensei's face suddenly superimposed itself over my own and morphed into a monstrous demon of enormous ferocity and power. The holographic-like image leaped out at me with a thunderous roar. I was shocked to finally see the source of Sensei's power. Could this be the enlightenment I had been seeking? I quickly stepped back and exclaimed, "If this is what it is, I don't want it! "

As the kundalini fire receded into my lower spine, I was seamlessly teleported into the outer darkness of the void, where I was disembodied but conscious, forever bound to an

eternal “now” beyond time and space. The veil of self-deceit was lifted, revealing a record of everything I had done, both the good and the bad, during my thirty-eight years on earth. I saw that, despite trying to do right by my family and friends, on a deeper level I had been living out of pride and self-interest. The ghastly vision soon faded, but not before I had passed judgment on myself.

### **Do you love me more than these?**

For the rest of the day, I contemplated how I might rid myself of the alien presence that continued to occupy my lower spine. Later that evening the thought came to me that nothing purges like fire, so I began gathering things that were associated with my martial arts and burning them in our living room fireplace. These included certificates, books and magazines, portraits of the masters, and a prized personal letter from Sensei.

After a while, the most astonishing thing happened. Out of the blue, in my mind’s eye I saw Jesus sitting in the chair across from me asking, “Do you love me more than these?”

My heart dropped into my stomach. Like most American baby boomers, I had been raised in the church and knew the story of Jesus. As an adult, however, I had concluded that Jesus may have been one of history’s great moral and ethical sages, but nothing more. Besides, my ego identity was firmly wedded to my karate. I had been training for twenty years and had developed extraordinary strength in my techniques, and now Jesus was asking me to give it all up for him?

I knew saying “yes” to Jesus would mean certain ego death, so I stalled and continued to search for more things to burn. Among additional items found was my first black belt,

whose well-worn frayed edges had turned white, providing tangible evidence of many years of dedicated training. Even so, I cut my badge of honor into pieces and sacrificed them to the flames.

### **Enlightenment**

Nevertheless, as the evening wore on, I came to the realization that the alien spirit could not be purged by fire or expelled by force of will. I kept thinking about Sensei's hopeless despair and my encounter with the demonic earlier that morning, so the choice should have been easy. But the ego is a stubborn and rebellious master, and I forestalled making a decision for several more hours, until I accepted that I had no choice but to choose hope. I chose Jesus.

The moment I said "yes" to Jesus, the occult spirit, along with my ego identity as a martial artist, was vanquished and driven out. I became empty and a crushing despair engulfed my soul. This psychic death was far worse than any physical death I could have imagined. I was left abandoned and alone.

Yet, within seconds the most wonderful thing happened. A miraculous Spirit of Love poured in from above and filled the void with sublime peace that cannot be described in words. Now I *knew* Jesus was a real, life-giving Spirit and Friend, who loved me enough to deliver me from spiritual darkness. He forgave me for the years I rejected him and accepted me with unconditional love.

Hence, my knowledge of Jesus is personal and grounded in the mystical encounter I had with him during the evening of December 2, 1985.

## The Aftermath

The occult spirit had been driven out of me, but over the next ten days Kay and I experienced a myriad of strange and outlandish phenomena, such as our house lights flickering on and off and the toilets mysteriously flushing on their own.

On one occasion, Kay felt her foot pulled out from under her as she started down the steps. She took a frightening tumble down the stairway, but landed softly and sustained no injuries.

There were peculiar vibrations emanating from the kamiza wall in the dojo, which we had quickly converted into a bedroom, and Kay kept feeling a negative energy in our bedroom that she described as feeling like being stabbed in the back. After several days. I remembered that the wicker chair in the corner of our room had been used in the dojo I had operated nearly ten years earlier.

With each passing day, more manifestations appeared. At times these were accompanied by the pungent odor of sulfur, which smells like rotten eggs. We also experienced several unnerving episodes with our cat and a shocking incident that involved a relative's two dogs that were living 1500 miles away. But, to continue describing all the bizarre things that happened would only serve to give the dark side more notoriety that it deserves. Suffice it to say, our home was infested with demons and we were not sleeping well.

A fellow martial artist, who had become a pastor, heard about our plight and promised to pray for us. After a week Josh called and asked how we had slept that night. Had anything changed? Yes indeed! The malaise we had been feeling was gone and our home felt normal again. Then Josh

informed us that he and the deacons at his church had prayed the previous evening for our complete deliverance from all the demonic presence in our home. For us this was a powerful testimony to the power of group prayer.

### **Lessons Learned**

During my spiritual journey to “enlightenment,” I learned that spirit possession is real and cannot be explained away by neuropsychological processes in the brain. I also learned that a spirit realm exists that transcends our physical world of time and space, and that consciousness survives death. My encounter with Jesus, as a life-giving Spirit, convinced me there is an afterlife, and my time in the outer darkness of the void gave a glimpse into the loneliness and despair of hell.

While in the void, I discovered that I will be judged for everything I do in this life, but that the “arrow of time” makes it impossible to go back and undo the negative consequences of my past mistakes, whether they be unintentional or not. This is why the Gospel of John describes Jesus as Israel’s promised Messiah, who “takes away the sins of the world.”<sup>12</sup> The Prophet Isaiah, writing some 700 years before the historical event, anticipated the coming of Jesus and how God Himself would make atonement for our sins:

*“All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned everyone to his own way; And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”<sup>13</sup>*

With these lessons in mind, my testimony is this: my “enlightenment” experience revealed that, “Jesus is Lord,” and that He is the true Power of The Way. In fact, Jesus made that exclusive claim about himself:

*"I am The Way, The Truth, and The Life.  
No one comes to the Father but by me."*<sup>14</sup>

### **Following Jesus**

An expert in the Jewish Law once asked Jesus what he believed was the greatest of all the commandments. Jesus affirmed the centrality of love when he answered that the two greatest commandments were, "love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," and, "love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>15</sup>

Jesus taught his disciples what it means to love one's neighbor. For example, he instructed them to love their enemies and be forgiving and merciful; to be peacemakers and not pass judgment on others; to keep a humble spirit and not amass wealth, but to be generous to the poor. These and many other teachings of Jesus can be found in the oft-quoted Sermon on the Mount.<sup>16</sup>

Although I often fall short of Jesus' lofty ideals, I continue striving to live by his Spirit of Love because, in the end, all the power, and wealth, and fame this world has to offer will become meaningless- a chasing after the wind.

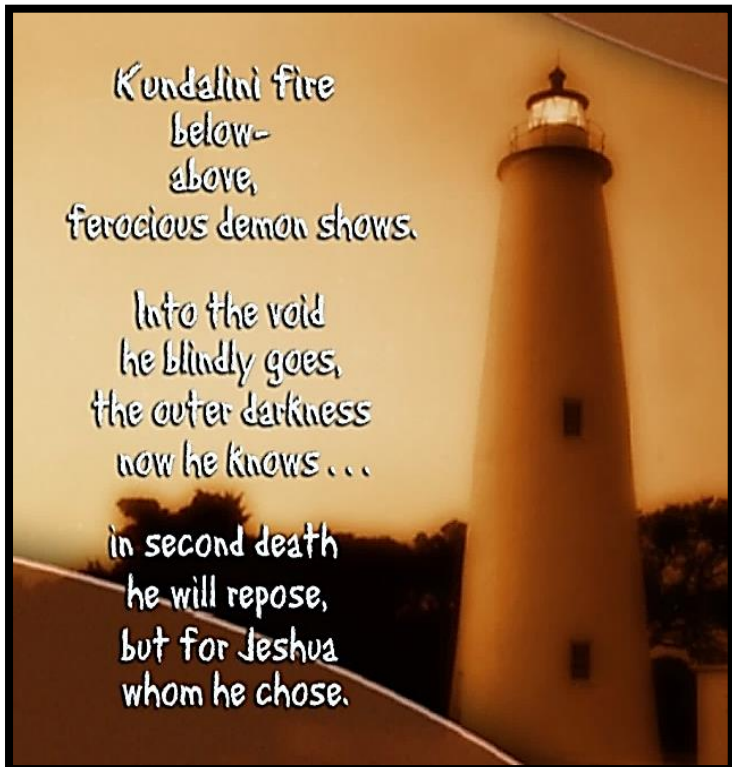
Peace be with you,



### Inspired Poem

Before making the final edit of my first DVD in 2004, I asked the Lord for help in finding a few concise words to describe the essence my encounter with Jesus (Jeshua). To my amazement, the following words suddenly came to me out of thin air, which was all-the-more surprising because I am not an accomplished writer, much less a poet!

After receiving this poem, I understood how the writers of the Bible could have been “supernaturally” inspired.



Kundalini fire  
below-  
above,  
ferocious demon shows.

Into the void  
he blindly goes,  
the outer darkness  
now he knows . . .

in second death  
he will repose,  
but for Jeshua  
whom he chose.



## END NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Bruce D. Clayton, Ph.D., *Shotokan's Secret*, Black Belt Communications LLC, c. 2004, p.viii
- <sup>2</sup> "Way of The Sword," c. 1976, distributed by Coe Film Associates, #65 E 96<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, N.Y. 10128
- <sup>3</sup> Thomas B. Allen, *Possessed*, iUniverse.com Inc. c. 1994, 2000, p. 2
- <sup>4</sup> Morihei Ueshiba, *Budo*, Kodansha International, Ltd., First edition, c. 1991, p. 13-14
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 29
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 20
- <sup>7</sup> Stanley Pranin, *Aikido Journal*, "Channeling the Power of the Gods," June 20, 2015
- <sup>8</sup> *Budo*, p. 28, 29
- <sup>9</sup> Miyamoto Musashi, *A Book of Five Rings*, The Overlook Press, 1974, p. 54-55
- <sup>10</sup> Hans Ulrich Rieker, *The Yoga of Light: Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, Seabury Press, c. 1971, p. 101
- <sup>11</sup> Tal Brooke, *Riders of the Cosmic Circuit: Rajneesh, Sai Baba, Muktananda... Gods of the New Age*, Lion, c. 1986, p. 610
- <sup>12</sup> John 1:2
- <sup>13</sup> Isaiah 53:6
- <sup>14</sup> John 14:6
- <sup>15</sup> Matthew 22:36-40
- <sup>16</sup> Matthew 5-7



Lighthouse Productions c. 2011