

KARATE-DO SHOTOKAI BASIC VOCABULARY

(*Kanji according to Gichin Funakoshi, with rough translations by Peter Enyeart, 1st Dan, American KDS, from a personal interview with Master Mitsusuke Harada Sensei, Principal of the KDS at KDS Summer School in Canterbury England, August, 2003*)

空手道松涛会 *karate dou shoutoukai* (*Karate* means “empty hand.” *Dou* means “way,” “path,” or “road.” As I understand it, *Shoutou* was Gichin Funakoshi’s pen name. It means something like “pine waves” or “billowing pines.” *Kai* means “meeting” or “association.” So, the next time someone asks you what style of martial arts you do, tell them you belong to the Billowing Pines Association! [AKDS NOTE: This *Kai*—or association—is separate and distinct from the *Kan*—as in *ShotoKan*—which was simply the dojo, or training hall purpose-built for karate instruction]).

原田満典 *Harada Mitsusuke* (*Harada* means “fields.” It is a fairly common Japanese surname. *Mitsu* means “full,” “fullness,” “fulfilled,” or “complete.” The kanji for *suke* means “law” or “ceremony.” So, his first name might be translated as “The Fullness of the Law” (which might be a Buddhist reference).)

Techniques

突き *tsuki* (punch)

蹴 *keri* (kick (the verb form is *keru*))

追突き *oizuki* (*oi* means “drive away,” “chase,” or “pursue;” *zuki* is punch)

逆突き *gyaku-zuki* (reverse punch)

前手 *mae-te* (forward hand)

裏拳 *ura-ken* (back (of the) fist)

前蹴 *mae-geri* (forward/front kick)

蹴込 *kekomi* (*ke* is kick; *komi* is hard to translate, but alone it is variously translated as “congested,” “crowded,” “built in,” “included,” etc. It shows up in a lot of compound words in Japanese, and in those situations it seems to add shades of meaning akin to “close” or “involved/entangled/wrapped up in.” So perhaps you could translate it as “involved kick.”)

蹴上 *ke-age* (*ke* is kick; *age* is “high” or “raise”)

廻し蹴 *mawashi-geri* (*mawashi* is to make something go around or in an arc/circle; *geri* is kick)

踏込 *fumikomi* (*fumi* means “step (on),” “tread (on),” or perhaps “stamp;” see above for *komi*)

下段払 *gedan-barai* (low level sweep)

腕受 *ude-uke* (*ude* is arm; *uke* is to receive)

打込 *uchi-komi* (*uchi* means to hit or strike; see above for *komi*)

揚受 *age-uke* (*age* is to raise; *uke* is to receive)

底掌払 *teishou-barai* (bottom (of the) palm sweep)

手刀受(?) *shutou-uke* (I forgot to ask Sensei for the kanji for this one, so this is my best guess. A Google search seems to confirm it. *shu* is “hand,” *tou* is “sword” or “blade,” and *uke* is to receive.)

前屈立 *zenkutsu-dachi* (forward bending stance)

後屈立 *koukutsu-dachi* (backward bending stance)

不動立 *fudou-dachi* (immovable stance- This seems to be related to a concept in Japanese Zen Buddhism, the “immovable mind,” which is the state that Zen practitioners are supposedly trying to reach.*)

*Here’s a quote from Takuan Soho’s Mysterious Record of Immovable Wisdom (in Japanese, 不動智神妙録 (*fudou chijin myou-roku*)) that explains what is meant by the term “immovable.” “Although wisdom is called immovable, this does not signify any insentient thing, like wood or stone. It moves as the mind is wont to move: forward or back, to the left, to the right, in the ten directions and to the eight points; and the mind that does not stop at all is called immovable wisdom. ... Glancing at something and not stopping the mind is called immovable. This is because when the mind stops at something, as the breast is filled with various judgments, there are various movements within it. When its movements cease, the stopping mind moves, but does not move at all. If ten men, each with a sword, come at you with swords slashing, if you parry each sword without stopping the mind at each action, and go from one to the next, you will not be lacking in a proper action for every one of the ten. ... But if the mind stops before one of these men, though you parry his striking sword, when the next man comes, the right action will have slipped away.”

(Takuan Soho is famous as the spiritual advisor to some of the most renowned swordsmen and military leaders in Japanese history. In addition, if you’ve ever been to a sushi restaurant, the pickled ginger (it’s often pink) is called “takuan.” Tradition holds that it was invented by and named after Takuan Soho. The quote, by the way, comes from a collection of his writings called *The Unfettered Mind: Writings of the Zen Master to the Sword Master*, translated by William Scott Wilson.)

騎馬立 *kiba-dachi* (horse riding stance)

入身 *irimi* (entering body)

基本 *kihon* (basics/fundamentals)

組手 *kumi-te* (sparring; literally means something like “crossed hands”)

天之型 *ten no kata* (*ten* usually means “sky” or “heaven,” but in this case I suspect it might mean “natural,” as in *tennen* (天然); *no* is equivalent to “of,” *kata* (the same *kata* as those listed below) means “mold,” “model,” “pattern,” or “form.” So, *ten no kata* could possibly be translated as “natural form.”)

Kata (型)

(The meanings of the names of the kata are especially ambiguous; Sensei said even Japanese karate practitioners (including himself) aren’t quite sure just what some of them mean. Theoretically many of them are based on famous duels that occurred in the distant past, and theoretically some of the names may have something to do with the circumstances of those duels.)

太極 *Taikyoku* (*tai* means “thick,” “fat,” “great,” “noble,” or “extreme;” *kyoku* means “extreme” or “highest.” So, *Taikyoku* might be interpreted as meaning “The Highest Extreme,” “Intensity,” or something like that.)

鐵騎 *Tekki* (Iron Horse Riding (“Riding the Iron Horse?”))

平安 *Heian* (Peace)

明鏡 *Meikyō* (Clear Mirror** (or) Shining Mirror (This is another term that Zen Buddhists toss around regularly; it’s a metaphor for the ideal state of mind.))

** From Annals of the Sword Taia, here's a Takuan quote on the *clear mirror*: “If one sets up a mirror, the form of whatever happens to be in front of it will be reflected and will be seen. As the mirror does this mindlessly, the various forms are reflected clearly, without any intent to discriminate this from that. Setting up his whole mind like a mirror, the man who employs the martial arts will have no intention of discriminating right from wrong, but according to the brightness of the mirror of his mind, the judgment of right and wrong will be perceived without his giving it any thought.”

半月 *Hangetsu* (Half-Moon (Can also mean “semi-circle.”) This is another I forgot to ask Sensei for, but Google claims this is it, and it seems to fit.)

拔塞大 (小) *Bassai-Dai (Shō)* (拔 is an archaic form of 抜. It means “pull out,” “extract,” “escape,” “omit,” or any number of related words. *sai* means “block,” “obstruct,” “close,” “dam,” etc. Thus, *Bassai* might mean something like “Escaping Entrapment.” *dai* means “large” and *shō* means “small.”)

觀空大 (小) *Kankū-Dai (Shō)* (*kan* means “observe,” and *kū* means “sky” or “empty.” Thus *Kankū* might be translated as “Sky Watching.” *dai* is “large” and *shō* is “small.”)

慈恩 *Jion* (*ji* means “affection,” “love,” “pity,” or “mercy;” *on* means “gratitude” (In fact, it’s the word for a Japanese concept of gratitude that implies a debt owed to one’s benefactor.) Perhaps *Jion* could be translated as “Mercy and Gratitude,” or “Grateful for Mercy.”)

十手 *Jitte* (Ten Hands)

慈院 *Ji-in* (as above, *ji* is “affection,” “love,” “pity,” or “mercy;” *in* means, generally, “building” or “institution,” but can refer to a specific type of building like a temple, palace, mansion, school, or hospital. Apparently it sometimes refers to an ex-emperor, as well. So, some possibilities for the meaning of *Ji-in* could be “House of Mercy,” “Temple of Mercy,” or even “Mercy of the Retired Emperor.”)

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