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H A P P I N E S S

Chapter 1

TIME REFERENCE

Time is a very precious commodity, as we really understand and realize only when we grow up; only then do we start to truly appreciate and respect it and try our best to use it in a proper way.

Time is the topic of many books, both philosophical and practical essays, which have been and will be written and which will continue to be discussed in the future. Here we will present a few stories and aspects that are connected directly and indirectly to the world of martial arts.

a. Timeframe, Speed, Length of Time and the Subconscious

In the early days of 1945, Japan was still at war, with the war getting closer and closer to the Japanese islands. The city of Karatsu in Kyushu, southern Japan, was organizing school students to do service for the nation. They needed every support possible, since all adults of legal age were already on the front lines facing the enemy on the land, on the sea and in the air.

At this time, the middle-school students were helping to build stairs on a mountain slope in order to direct the flow of water and create a dam that would gather the water in a certain location.

On one of these days of hard work, the labor was suddenly stopped, and all the children aged 12-15 looked up at Tsutomu, who was standing on the highest step that they had just built. Some of them looked very worried, and others seemed very excited. No one dared to make the jump, as it was too high, more than 7 meters. It was their custom to jump down from the stair that they had just created — usually this was a drop of 2-3 meters, sometimes even 4 meters, from which only a few dared to jump. But this time it was about 7.5 meters, and no one wanted to take the risk of being injured or maybe even of being killed. It was too much: it was not fun anymore, it was just too dangerous. Nevertheless, 2 kids jumped while the sand was soft and could absorb their landing.

The 3rd one, Tsutomu, a young leader in the senior class, simply said, “I will take the jump after these two.” Tsutomu looked down, and it seemed to be an endless drop; it was frightening. He had never attempted such a jump before, but he had already made up his mind, and now everyone was looking at him and wondering, “Is he really going to jump or reverse his decision?” At first glance, he could see the faces of his friends: some looked very worried and some looked astonished with their eyes wide open. But then he just concentrated on the jump and could no longer see any of them. Ohshima jumped.

Probably he thought that it was going to be the end of his life, since in the few seconds during his fall, many pictures from his entire 14 years of life went through his mind and passed before his eyes. Still in the air, while his entire life passed before him, he wondered why he had not landed yet; it seemed like such a long time.

When he finally reached the ground, his legs didn't sink into the sand, since the 2 kids that had jumped before had compressed

the sand, and it had become very hard. Because of his acceleration during the long fall, the right side of his face crashed into his right knee. He almost fainted, and for some time he was not able to realize the extent of what had happened. He could not give any answers to the worried questions of his friends who were leaning over him, wondering if he was OK.

Much more shocking and confusing to him was the emotional and spiritual experience that he had just gone through in this long fall over a short time. He was lying there, facing the slice of sky that he could see between the crowded faces of his worried friends, and he wondered what had just happened — how could he see or experience this strange ‘movie’ of his life?

But then, the pain from the ‘punch’ of his knee to his face brought him back to reality, and he stood up, touching the right side of his face with his hand. For a few months he suffered pain in his face, which changed colors from red to black and blue. He finally recovered from the injury; as a young man, it did not bother him anymore.

But the experience that he had during his fall he could never forget; it continued to influence his life. Subconsciously, he realized that the frame of time has many faces or structures. Logically, he could not figure out how it was possible that the history of 14 years of his life could go through his mind and imagination in only a few seconds.

Having this experience when he was young and having similar experiences later in life, Master Tsutomu Ohshima, in the 21st century, related to this phenomenon with these words: “I realized that it is very difficult to explain to martial-arts students, and sometimes even to some senior members, that one must find the

way in one's mind to see the movements made by one's opponent as if they are in slow motion, so one will have enough time to react to, control or prevent the actions of one's opponent. In order to be able to reach this level, one must enter into the subconscious mind, and in order to successfully enter this subconscious state of mind, one will have to practice and experience it many times. Probably one will have to pass through difficult and risky situations in order to experience such a feeling.

“For example, I always try to explain to *karateka* that have already achieved a high level of expertise that in the ‘long *ma kumite*,’ when opponents get closer, one must be able to accelerate one's own speed with the right timing in order to win the match, as this allows one to control in one's mind the frame of time for both sides. It means that in one's mind one may succeed in making one's opponent move in slow motion, and by accelerating one's movement, one may catch one's opponent just before the opponent can react or change their course.”

Using just oral explanation, it is not so simple to transmit this feeling and understanding of ‘the different frames of time’ and, at the same time, use subconscious reaction/action. Even when giving demonstrations while teaching this phenomenon, it is difficult to transfer the knowledge and understanding to students and teachers of Karate and other martial arts. Therefore, a *budoka* that would like to really understand and reach the ability to do it must work hard, open his mind and heart, and try again and again.

{Author's note} The Far East martial arts see the subconscious as one of the most important elements that are needed in order to reach the highest levels in a martial art. Sports science in the twentieth century found that in order to react subconsciously to

make one basic movement, you must repeat it around 30,000 times. Of course, if you make a wrong movement many times, it is almost impossible to correct it; most probably, you will have to start all over again and do it in the right way another 30,000 times or more. That is why it is important to have the right way of practicing and teaching from day one and to correct mistakes as soon as they appear.

In the world of martial arts, this has been known for thousands of years: that it is crucial to react in a timely manner with the right reaction, otherwise one may suffer the consequence of injury or death, or 'just' lose the battle.

So we have to build ourselves in a way that our correct reaction to any dangerous situation will happen subconsciously, which means to act and react with the exact timing that is appropriate but also in the right way which we have practiced many times over. Therefore, martial arts students must practice the same basic movements thousands of times, *kihon*, and then repeat again and again the same situations of *kumite* (combat). The same is true with the practice of *kata*. {End of note}

Ohshima-*sensei* always asks his students to concentrate their practice on one personal *kata* and to do it at least 50,000 times, until they can really master it. When you succeed in mastering one *kata*, it will positively affect the performance of other *kata* as well.

That is why Master Funakoshi decided to focus his teaching on 'only' 15 *kata*. The people who did not have a deep understanding of Karate were asking him, "How many *kata* do you know?" believing that the more *kata* you know, the higher your level is. However, this is absolutely untrue; the number says nothing about your real level in Karate.

To act subconsciously and to also be able to use and create different frames of time in your mind is much more difficult than ‘just’ reacting subconsciously to a certain attack. Since it is not enough to try to practice a certain technique many times, on top of this, you will have to experience the different frame of time at least once in order to know what to look for and to search for ways to repeat and practice this experience. Otherwise, it might stay only as a theoretical idea in your mind.

Well, of course, it is not a practical suggestion for every budoka to try to jump from a cliff of 7.5 meters; but when you reach the right level, technically and mentally, at which you can take risks, when you have, technically and mentally, the ability to go through the danger in order to succeed in surprising your opponent and winning the battle, like in the practices of ‘long ma kumite’ and *‘irimi,’ then there is a chance that you may experience it in the right way — to make your opponent’s movement slow in your mind. Only then can you understand what Ohshima-*sensei* is talking about.

** This term will be mentioned and discussed in other parts of this book, since it also involves other important elements.*

b. ‘Personal Age,’ Centuries, Past, Present and Future

“After reaching the age of 50, I realized that I was already half-a-century old, which means that when talking about previous centuries it was no longer so far away; different periods of history can be understood much better, and the frame of time takes on another meaning.”

I heard Ohshima-*sensei* saying this some years after celebrating his fiftieth birthday. (It probably takes some years to ‘digest’ the

idea that you are already half-a-century old.) People are different from each other in many aspects. One of the elements that shape our character and influence our way of life and the way we make decisions is the experience that each of us goes through. So the age of 50 years most probably differs from one person to the next, even for people that have a similar character, education and background, since they, most probably, went through their lives having different experiences.

The origin of Karate, according to legend, was 'only' 15 centuries ago. We do not know how old the founder was, but he had definitely had very interesting and unique experiences in life. According to traditional stories, several hundred years ago [there are a few versions about the exact date], an Indian person, perhaps a priest, crossed the Himalaya Mountains from India to China and tried to teach his Chinese students Zen Buddhism. After he found out that his students did not understand what he was talking about, he realized that they did not have the mental and spiritual tools to follow his teaching. Therefore, it is said, he created the martial art that is today called Karate or Kung Fu. He also brought yoga to China and used it for the same purpose.

As part of their meditation practice, he taught yoga and a new system of martial arts in order to bring his students to the highest mental level possible, which would enable them to follow the teachings of Zen Buddhism and to have the right 'tools' and capabilities to become enlightened people. How he arrived at the conclusion that teaching them how to 'fight' would make them more capable of Zen understanding is a long story and one must research and study it. Basically, anyone can find out about the legend of Budidarma (Chinese name) or Daruma Daishi (Japanese

name) in the book *Karate-do Kyohan*, written by Master Gichin Funakoshi in Japanese, translated into English by Master Tsutomu Ohshima; but in our IT world, you can find and read many versions of his legend.

Nevertheless, here is a short explanation of one of the best-known versions.

The Chinese students could not concentrate enough in order to reach calmness and relaxation in their mind and body, the basic practice that is needed for Zen. They were not able to reach the necessary level of understanding, both physically and mentally, to reach the connection of mind and body.

In his life experiences, Daruma Daishi faced the risk of death many times but managed to survive. Since this happened many times, he gained mental and spiritual power that became a natural part of his body and soul. The ability to bring forth at any one time, the mental, spiritual and physical powers whenever they were needed became a subconscious reaction. More importantly, since he had done it enough times, he could control this ability consciously and could decide to use it whenever he wished, not only in the face of death.

Since it became a natural ability for him, he could also use it in Zen practice. Therefore, when it was needed, he could use all the necessary abilities of his heart, mind and body in a natural way.

So, according to legend, he created dangerous situations for his students in order to make them practice and experience this feeling and to build their abilities. Unfortunately, many of them died during these varied practice sessions since they did not have enough tools and were not ready to face these dangerous situations and survive. He understood that he could not teach them how