

THE TWENTY PRECEPTS OF KARATE DO

The man credited as the founder of modern Karate-do, Funakoshi Gichin took the art to Japan and lay down his philosophy for his students to follow. The highly structured Japanese had these bullet-points laid out to remind them of Master Funakoshi's thinking, as translated by Schlatt.

1. Never forget: Karate begins with rei and ends with rei.
(rei has the meaning of courtesy, respect)
2. There is no first hand in Karate.
(There is no first attack in Karate)
3. Karate supports righteousness
4. First understand yourself, then understand others.
5. The art of mind is more important than the art of technique.
6. The mind needs to be freed.
7. Trouble is born of negligence.
8. Do not think Karate is only in the dojo.
9. The training of Karate requires a lifetime.
10. Transform everything into Karate; there lies the exquisiteness.
11. Genuine Karate is like hot water; it cools down if you do not keep on heating it.
12. Do not have the idea of winning, while the idea of not losing is necessary.
13. Transform yourself according to the opponent.
14. The outcome of the fight all depends on the manoeuvre.
15. Imagine one's arms and legs as swords.
16. Once you leave the shelter of home, there are a million enemies.
17. Postures are for the beginner, later they are natural positions.
18. Do the kata correctly, the real fight is a different matter.
19. Do not forget the control of the dynamics (of power), the elasticity (of body) and the speed (of technique).
20. Always be good at the application of everything that you have learned.

Later, the JKA provided their Dojo Kun, or Dojo Rules, based on the Chinese Kun from the time of Bodhidharma. These five principles are said to have been used by the Okinawan master Sakugawa Shungo:

One, to seek the perfection of character!
One, to follow the path of truth!
One, to cultivate the spirit of effort!
One, to esteem etiquette!
One, to admonish brute courage!

The JKA version of this is:

Seek perfection of character
Be faithful
Endeavour
Respect others
Refrain from violent behaviour

The differences appear slight, but you are encouraged to note the thinking behind those differences and discuss them with the sempai and each other.



COURTESY

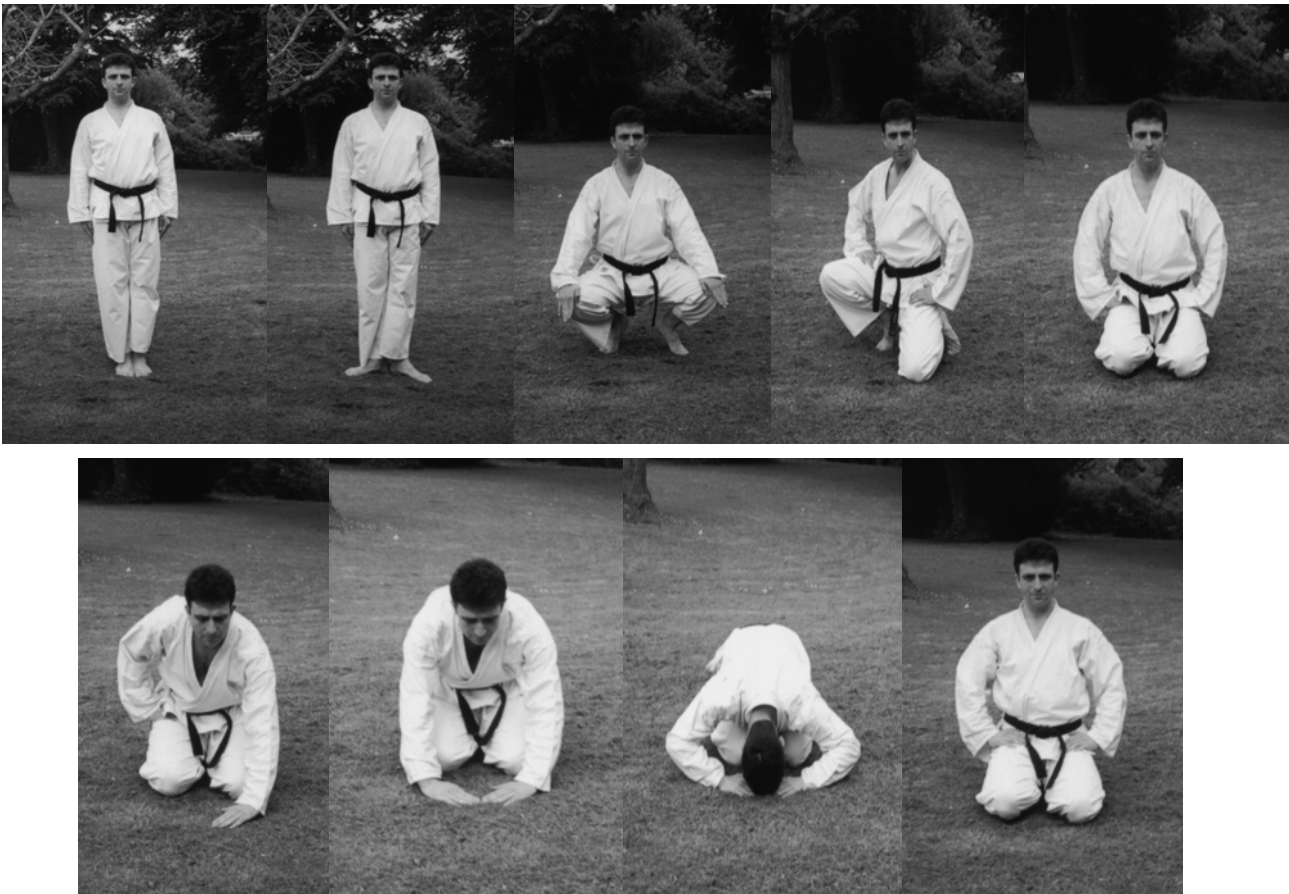
“Karate do begins and ends with courtesy” Gichin Funakoshi.

The sayings of Master Funakoshi provide us with sentiments of many layers. We can take the literal translation; that the way of the open hand is started and finished with courtesy. This emphasises the beginning and the end of the lesson, and every section of the lesson in between.

The bow is our physical show of courtesy, performed in a serious manner it is a display of our mindset whilst practising Karate do.

The mental courtesy manifested in the bow is of detachment from outside concerns. To make full use of our training time we must set aside our worries and problems from our everyday lives and concentrate on perfecting our Karate. A side effect of our attempt to do this is to allow our subconscious brain to work on our problems while our consciousness is busy with Karate; our subconscious brain is better able to provide solutions and put our problems in order than our muddled waking brain.

In bowing to our training partner/opponent we are showing them that we will train seriously, and with their best interests in our minds.



We do not help our partner by “going lightly” on them but rather we prevent them from truly benefiting from training.

Being serious does not take away our enjoyment of training, but allows us to enjoy it without losing the maximum benefit or our safety. Seriousness and courtesy *allow* us to trust our partner/opponent. We can still laugh and have fun, but not whilst executing a potentially dangerous technique. Laughing has to wait until we are resting, recovering, and stretching.

The very use of courtesy prevents “larking around” in the dojo. If we are respectful of our training partners then we do not abuse their trust in us by attacking them outside of our instructed occasions. When practicing with a partner we demonstrate control/focus of our technique, and only to the degree instructed. Attacking a student outside of a lesson is an assault, making the assaulter no more than the type of person we are training to protect ourselves from. If the technique has not been asked for by an instructor then it is not in the lesson.

Showing someone “now I could do this” when it has not been asked for or allowed for in the lesson plan is disruptive and disrespectful. Offering advice to other students can be helpful, but we need to be mindful of the right time and place for this advice. Jumping the gun by anticipating the next part of a practiced combination means that you are not concentrating on the part you are *meant* to be practicing - which is inattentive and rude.

When we examine the mindset for courtesy we find that it is linked to another famous Karate tenet; “In Karate do there is no first attack”. By remaining courteous we strive to avoid the situations when the physical aspect of our art would be necessary. We do not enter into situations where we have to fight because we behave properly, do not antagonise, and seek to defer violent situations. With courtesy there is a beginning to our way and an end to fighting. The paradox of a method of fighting producing a pacifist person is one of the fascinating aspects of The Way of the Empty Hand.

A reading of the phrase between the lines could be taken to mean that “The Way” ends when courtesy ends, leaving us with the assumption that what we are left with is our “Empty Hands”.

Other facets of our courtesy are manifested with the word “Oss”. The word is used when agreeing with instruction; Acknowledging an instruction or good techniques from a partner; to gain the attention of an instructor, and many other situations. Oss does not have a simple translation, but the characters used to write the word in Japanese give the impression of perseverance;- both asking for it and exchanging the intention to do it. One article used the term “please be patient with me” as the translation, as both an apology and an exclamation of the intention to try again and try harder.

Physically, courtesy is expressed by simple things, such as wearing your finger and toe nails short and clean. This is common sense and a factor in the health and safety of the members of the dojo; but really it is your attitude to training made manifest.

Courtesy is something to practice, just like every other part of our art.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF KARATE-DO

If those who practised karate only trained their bodies and had no philosophy to train their minds then they would end up as no more than thugs. Within our art there is a tradition of training ourselves to be better people, and nowhere is this made more plain than in the words of **Master Funakoshi Gichin**:

“The ultimate aim of karate-do lies not in victory or defeat, but in the perfection of character.”

In karate we learn how to use our bare hands as weapons which are capable of inflicting great harm, so it is only right that we should train our minds to not wish that harm on anyone. We take a vow to only use our art in defence of ourselves, our family, and our friends, or in pursuit of justice. In this way we assure those around us of our honourable intentions and try to prevent bad publicity of our art and our fellow artists.

It is worth noting that of Master Funakoshi's 20 precepts of karate-do, the majority of them are to do with mindset. Only two of the 20 are concerned with technique.

Karate thinking has a zen attitude about it, though you do not need to be a zen practitioner to appreciate “the Way”.

By the term “zen”, we should understand a way of *being*, not a religion or organisation. People can not worship zen. The term is concerned only with living for the moment, for accepting what life has to throw at us and not crumbling beneath it.

Elements of zen refer to just “being”, not anticipating the future or dwelling on the past. Glories and tragedies are nothing in zen, they do not affect how you are now.

This was the attitude of the samurai, and the only way a man can act in battle without being overcome by thoughts of consequences. Consequences do, of course, play a part, but they should be considered *well before* the heat of battle.

We must know, when we use our martial arts, that it is as a **last resort**, and that we have not encouraged the situation to a point where our skills are necessary.

**“To search for the old is to understand the new.
This is a matter of time.
In all things man must have a clear mind.
The Way, who passes it on straight and well?”**
- poetry by Shoto.

KEIKO

Keiko is a very important term to us in our organisation. The word is often translated simply as “**practice**”, and it is true that it means this. There are, however, underlying principles conveyed when a person views the characters which make up the term “keiko”.

Japanese writing does not just tell you how to pronounce a word, it contains *ideas!* The characters which make up the word keiko contain the elements of *waza, ki, & shin.*

Waza is the term for technique, performed correctly and without embellishment.

Ki is the term for spirit, soul, and the internal energy which does not rely on brute force. This same symbol is used in the terms *Kiai, Kime, and Aikido.*

Shin is the term for mind, and heart. A practitioner must always practice with the correct intention and determination, as embodied by shin.

Together, these terms make up a word with the ultimate meaning of maturing one’s self through practice. This was the way that martial artists trained in the past, and further translations of the term could be “**consider the old ways**” or “consider the past”. When we train in this manner we are agreeing to help our juniors, respect our seniors, and be mindful of the safety of ourselves and our training partners. This training is not to be taken lightly. It requires dedication, a sincere attitude, discipline, and care.

Without this attitude underlying our study we would become nothing more than thugs and bullies. This would certainly not be a good way to practice martial arts. We prefer to take the moral high ground.

As we train in a tradition which depends upon techniques being passed on in the same manner they were taught to our forebears it seems that keiko is a good name for our group.

As you can see, **KEIKO** is more than just a name!

Incidentally; **Kangeiko** is Midwinter training/Cold training, your uniform is a **keikogi** (practice clothes), and **renzo kugeiko** are your flow drills.



BUDO

Budo is a much misunderstood term. Usually translated as “the Way of the Warrior”, budo is the method by which the ancient Samurai conducted their affairs.

The characters which make up the term budo consist of symbols for a *spear*, denoting conflict, and another for *stopping*. As such, a budoka (practitioner of budo) can be said to be involved in methods of stopping conflict.



The need for an ethical code of conduct for warriors evolved during times of peace – after all, during times of war they did what they *had* to do. Warriors living by the code of budo can be likened to the European tradition of chivalrous knights. The samurai were expected to be gentlemen, and this code of honour prevented the warrior caste of society from being too powerful for the overlords to control.

Samurai acted as professional soldiers, bodyguards to their lords, and a police force. There certainly were instances when the power given to them was abused, but the individuals who went against the code of budo would be ostracised from society and expected to atone for their actions.

For a martial artist there is a responsibility to learn techniques well. There is also a responsibility to protect others with our knowledge and abilities. Sometimes this protection takes the form of NOT doing something - like fighting - when that is what is required. Sometimes we are obliged to “Do the Right Thing”, even when it is difficult, emotionally or physically. We are obliged to set ourselves high standards, to live by as well as in technique. This obligation is part of “The Way of the Warrior”, Budo.

The spirit of budo which has been passed down to modern times is reflected in our words and actions and how we represent our art and ourselves. When we swear our oath to only use our skills in defence of ourselves and our families, and in pursuit of justice, then we are practising budo. When we train hard, and push ourselves to our limits, remaining in control of our behaviour and our aggression, we are budoka. Being conscientious and courteous, and *aware* of our actions and our surroundings is budo.

Budo is being a good martial artist.

THE NEED FOR GRADING EXAMINATIONS

What belt you wear is not really as important as it may sometimes seem. We appear to place a lot of emphasis on gradings and moving up the belt ranks, but in truth the rank is just an indicator of what each person has achieved so far. It is good to set yourself the goal of gaining a new belt, so long as you realise just what that entails. You are really committing yourself to learning a new set of techniques, and to attending the lessons with the right attitude to accomplish that.

So why do we have examinations instead of simply awarding grades to deserving students?

The answer is that the pressure of attending an examination and performing techniques before a judge does not resemble anywhere near the amount of pressure one feels in a conflict situation.

Once again we are training a facet of our personality as well as our body.

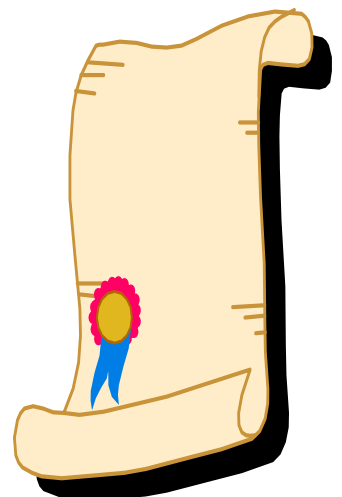
In times past there was no need for grading; practitioners stood or fell on how well they performed in actual combat. Teachers introduced the white belt for their apprentices, which, legend has it, one wore until it turned black. Now that we train in a **do** art, and especially here in the west where we tend to need such milestones to aim for, there are various coloured belts to gain along the way to black belt.

It is possible to be examined every three months, though this is at the instructor's discretion. There is no automatic right to attempt a grading, and there is no guarantee of a pass, either. The instructor will propose that a student grades based on the student's attendance, general attitude, and the ability level displayed at regular training.

One of the facets of gradings which is frequently mis-understood is the idea that there are a certain number of lessons to attend to become eligible to grade. Grade is a measure of progress. Progress is not merely physical but is also measured in moral values, understanding, effort, and willingness. Someone who is physically able to perform advanced techniques but who has not developed the right character may not be permitted to grade - reflecting their lack of progress. Sometimes a lack of physical perfection of technique will be overlooked if there has been sufficient development in other areas - thus demonstrating progress. Effort is the key.

More is expected of those capable of more. Less may be expected if someone is less capable. Grade is a very personal award and not a measure of one's abilities against those of another.

A student who does not grade every three months is not necessarily a bad student, they just need more time to polish their technique.



BASIC TECHNIQUES - STANCES

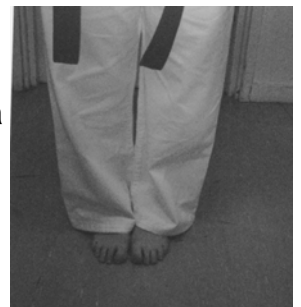
Before we can look at the combinations which you must perform to be considered for each grade, we must first look at the basic stances and techniques.

STANCES:

One of the foremost criteria for all stances is that weight should rest on all parts of the feet equally. This means that there should not be any extra tension or pressure on the outside or inside part of the sole, but rather that the whole foot should bear the weight.

HEISOKU DACHI

Feet together stance. A formal position in preparation for beginning a technique or to bow.



UCHI HACHI JI DACHI

Inverted figure "8" stance. The knees are very slightly bent, the feet are parallel at the outside edge and only one shoulder width apart. This stance is close to being relaxed, and is adopted as a waiting-but-ready posture. It is important to note that the weight should be evenly distributed between the legs, and that no more pressure is placed on any area of the sole of the foot than on any other.



MUSUBI DACHI

United stance. The heels are together and the toes are turned out to at least 45 degrees.



ZENKUTSU DACHI

Front Stance. A dynamic, moving stance with the weight forward, ready to take a fresh step. The front knee is bent, and the back leg is straight but not locked. The feet are parallel and aimed in the direction of travel.



This stance should convey the feeling of being ready to spring forward, with your weight over the front knee.

Almost as though someone were pulling you by your belt. When you move it should be a relief to your muscles, not an effort.





KOKUTSU DACHI

Back stance. A defensive posture used for receiving an attack. The weight is heavily on the rear leg, which is bent and aimed to the side; and the front leg is aimed forwards and not allowed to fully straighten. One of the keys to making this stance correctly is the alignment of the back foot, knee, and hip; as a vertical line should appear to join them.

KIBA DACHI

Horse riding stance. The weight is central and the feet are parallel, two shoulder widths apart. The body should be lowered dramatically to assume a sitting position with a vertical spine, as though riding a horse. The knees should be projected forwards rather than to the sides in order that no extra tension is placed on the outsides of the feet.



SHIKO DACHI

Square stance. Like kaba dachi with the toes aimed outwards.



HANGETSU DACHI



Half moon stance. The feet move in a crescent shape. This stance looks like kiba dachi performed at a 45 degree angle to the viewer and with the knees angled inwards as a defensive posture.



NEKO ASHI DACHI

Cat-foot stance. Both feet are angled forwards, and the weight is placed heavily onto the back leg. The front foot is arched so that only the ball of the foot touches the ground, and then only lightly. This is an exception to the "equal weight distribution" theory as the front foot has only the slightest of pressure, and then only on the ball of the foot.



SOCHIN DACHI or FUDO DACHI



Strong/calm stance or Immovable stance. Like hangetsu dachi, but with the knees aimed outwards.



There are many more stances that are not initially required. Those shown above are all that are required prior to black belt, although stances such as kosa dachi occur in kata there is no real need to *study* them at this stage.

When stepping from one stance to another:

- keep your feet close to the ground. This keeps your centre of gravity low and helps your balance. It also helps to avoid you getting “swept” off your feet.
- usually use a “C” shaped step, bringing your feet together in the middle of the step. This allows you to step “off-line” or into an opponent without telegraphing the fact. It also allows you to use your knee and toes as weapons where a straight step might be less effective.
- finish your step as you use your technique. Not before your weight has landed, not once your weight has settled, but together.
- make your legs keep up with your arms. Arm movements tend to be quicker, but legs have more muscle mass. Fast leg movements make fast techniques.

LINE THEORY

When attacked, imagine a line between your opponent’s weapons and yourself. This is the line which is most dangerous to you and the one which is easiest for him to use. By being aware of this line you can decide to be “on” it or “off” it. Obviously you are safer being “off-line”, as his weapons will not have a direct route to you.

Moving directly backwards does not take you “off-line”, it merely makes the line longer. Being further away can help, of course, but in the end the fastest one of you will win, and that could be your attacker.

Moving to one side or the other takes you “off-line”, but only until your opponent can turn to face you.

Moving directly past your opponent takes you off-line, brings you in close to use a retaliation, and positions your opponent so that he cannot easily bring his weapons to bear.

Your prime concern must always be to move to a position of safety.