

# Karate Masters



JOSE M. FRAGUAS





# Teruo Hayashi

## *In Pursuit of Karate Excellence*

*HAYASHI SENSEI IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST RESPECTED AND ADMIRER KARATE MASTERS. BORN IN NAHA, ON THE ISLAND OF HONSHU, OCTOBER 1924, HAYASHI TERUO STARTED IN JUDO AND EARNED HIS BLACK BELT AT AGE 16. HE REACHED HIS 3RD DAN IN JUDO AT 23 YEARS OF AGE AND WAS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST PROMISING YOUNG BLACK BELTS OF THAT GENERATION. HOWEVER, ONCE HE WATCHED KARATE HE BECAME SO IMPRESSED THAT HE GAVE UP EVERYTHING TO STUDY IT FULL TIME. TODAY HE IS THE CHIEF INSTRUCTOR OF JAPAN KARATE-DO HAYASHI-HA SHITO-RYU.*

*SENSEI HAYASHI STARTED HIS KARATE TRAINING IN OSAKA, JAPAN, UNDER KOSEI KUNIBA, AN ORIGINAL SHITO-RYU KARATE-DO STUDENT OF KENWA MABUNI, WHO ALSO RECEIVED INSTRUCTION FROM CHOKI MOTOBU AND FUNAKOSHI GICHIN. LATER ON, HAYASHI WENT TO STUDY UNDER THE GREAT MASTER OF THE GOJU-RYU SYSTEM, SEKO HIGA, FROM WHOM HE LEARNED A GREAT DEAL OF PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE NAHA-TE METHODS. THIS INSPIRED HIM TO TRAVEL TO OKINAWA FOR FURTHER STUDIES.*

*IN OKINAWA, HE PRACTICED SHORIN-RYU WITH CHOSIN CHIBANA AND THEN ANOTHER SHORIN-RYU METHOD UNDER CHOJIN NAGAMINE AND MASTER NAGA. HE ALSO STUDIED KOBUDO UNDER MASTER HOHAN SOKEN, SHINKEN TAIRA AND KENKO NAKAUMA, WHO NOT ONLY TAUGHT HIM KOBUDO, BUT ALSO A KARATE METHOD CALLED "RYUEI-RYU." SENSEI HAYASHI DECIDED TO NAME HIS KOBUDO METHOD "KENSHIN-RYU," WHICH MEANS "HEART," AND IS ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING "RYUEI-RYU."*

*KNOWN INTERNATIONALLY AS "THE WEAPONS MAN," BECAUSE OF HIS IMMENSE SKILL AND KNOWLEDGE, HE BECAME RESPONSIBLE FOR REFEREEING TOURNAMENTS OF THE WORLD UNION KARATE-DO ORGANIZATIONS, OR WUKO. SENSEI HAYASHI IS RECOGNIZED AS A GREAT MASTER WHO DEVOTED MOST OF HIS LIFE TO A SELFLESS DEDICATION IN PURSUIT OF KARATE EXCELLENCE.*

### **Q: How did you start training in martial arts?**

**A:** I remember that I was strongly attracted to martial arts at a very young age. I began training in judo and I got my black belt at 16. I was 20 when I went to the military service and I served as a co-pilot in the Air Force during the war. For a long time I could not train openly since all martial arts systems were prohibited by the Americans—but nobody could prevent me

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from training privately with my friends. When I reached 3rd dan, many people considered me one of the most promising students of my generation. Almost three years later I was introduced to an unknown martial art called "karate." After training for a while, I fell in love with the art and I gave up everything else. I decided that I wanted to be a full-time karate student.

**Q: Who was your first teacher?**

A: When I was 18 I went to live in Osaka. I started with Master Kosei Kuniba and then I studied the goju-ryu style under Master Seko Higa. He taught a great deal and I progressed very consistently for a long time. But then I decided to go to Okinawa to train. The main reason I did this is because I believed Okinawa to be the cradle of the martial arts, and I wanted strongly to go to the source of the knowledge. Now I know I was right because I was astonished by the amount of knowledge that I received there. I studied shorin-ryu under Choshin Nagamine, and I was formally introduced to the art of kobudo which I studied under Hohhan Soken, Shiken Taira, and Nakaima Kenko, who also was a karate master of a method called "ryuei-ryu."





*"In fact, I incorporated much of the ryuei-ryu theory into my own style."*

**Q: Did Nakaima Kenko train you in empty-hand karate methods?**

A: Yes, he did. As a matter of fact, it was very difficult for me to be accepted into his dojo. Ryuei-ryu is a family art imported from Southern China over three generations before I went to Okinawa. The reason I went to him was because I was looking for a kobudo teacher. At the time, it was almost impossible to find a master who would teach an outsider, which is what I was. When I found Nakaima Kenko, his only student was his son and he had no intention of breaking that tradition. I sat in front of his house for many hours and begged for months until he decided to accept me as a disciple.

**Q: What method did you study under him?**

A: Well, he taught me mostly the *kama* and the *sai*, and the empty-hand method of karate. In fact, I incorporated much of the ryuei-ryu theory into my own style. My other two kobudo teachers were Hohan Soken, from whom I studied the bo and kama, and Shiken Taira who gave me a lot of knowledge in several other kobudo weapons.

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**Q: Why did you study under so many masters?**

A: Well, this is a very complicated question. To begin with, each master only knew two weapons perfectly, and it was mostly in the form of kata. Each master had his own specialty since they were transmitting the knowledge in the same way they had received it from their instructors. When I arrived in Okinawa I realized that if the students of karate didn't do something, all these systems were going to die. So I committed myself to perpetuate these arts and when I returned back to Japan I kept all the information intact, but I updated some things and I tried to evolve a more practical and realistic way of training. Unfortunately, kobudo practice has degenerated around the world. You can find people who just took a couple of classes and became self-proclaimed masters. Then they teach and give certification and ranking! Some of them just take a short

trip to Okinawa and return as a 5th dan. I think this is really a shame and personally I just don't want to have anything to do with that.

**Q: Do you think that training in different disciplines is beneficial?**

A: Let me put it this way: it is very important to go deeply into one art and study everything related to it such as body movement, mechanism in the delivery of the techniques and body awareness, and to educate your body about the finer points, applying the proper energy, et cetera. When you truly understand your art after many years of practice and research, then you can look into something else and immediately have a greater appreciation of it because of your level of understanding. If you practice many styles without a base and without going deeply in one, you'll become a "jack of all trades, master of none." It is only after many years of training that you can research other methods effectively.



**Q: You have a great reputation as a fighter. In fact, it is well known that you used to travel and challenge other teachers.**

A: Yes, but let me explain this. Let me start by saying that no modern martial artist should ever degrade his art by trying the techniques out in the street or by going to challenge any other school master or martial arts method. Times are very different now. What I used to do, some say was brave, others foolish, but in fact it was an honored tradition known as *dojo yaburi*. You

fight against the lowest rank until you defeat the dojo's *senpai*. Then and only then, do you have the right to challenge the *sensei* himself. Probably, because of this practice, I became infamous and very good at *kumite*. Some didn't accept my challenge and would not let me get inside the door. Others, of course, did. Anyway, upon reflection I realized the reasons for my street-fighting were wrong.



*"Every time I got hurt, I used to go back and train much harder; so by the time I'd fight again I'd be able to win."*

**Q: Did you ever get seriously injured during any of these matches?**

A: Yes. Numerous broken ribs, a broken leg, a broken jaw, knee injuries, et cetera. But I always thought that if I was injured it was my fault for not being skillful enough to block or avoid the attacks properly. Every time I got hurt, I used to go back and train much harder; so by the time I'd fight again I'd be able to win. Please, don't assume that all my matches were against one person. On one occasion I fought ten men. I suffered head cuts but I was happy to find out that karate was and is a very good self-defense method.

**Q: Did you defeat all of them?**

A: No! I laid most of them out—but then I ran away!

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**Q: Is it true that Kuniba Kosei asked you to be his successor?**

A: Well, he asked me on his deathbed to lead his organization until his son, Shogo Kuniba, reached a level of maturity sufficient to assume the leadership. So I did. I became the president of seishin kai until 1970. After that, I passed Sensei Shogo Kuniba the mantle of leadership and decided to go on my own with hayashi-ha shito-ryu kai.

**Q: How do you keep yourself in such a good shape?**

A: I train hard every day. I've seen very good martial artists that stopped training after the 40-year-old mark. The secret is to keep training hard. Of course, you're going to lose some speed and power in your technique but you can make it up with superior experience and knowledge about both the mental aspects and the real way the techniques work. You must focus on developing what I call "fighting soul." On the other hand, there is no way of bypassing the basic school of learning the technique; there is no way around it.

In order to achieve this there is something every practitioner has to understand—your body changes and your karate changes with your body. You become softer as you grow older. Some young practitioners don't understand that everybody's karate has to be different, must be different, as the karateka gets older. It would be stupid for a 50-year-old practitioner to try to keep doing the same karate that he did when he was 25. It's against nature and common sense. For instance, take the principle of kime; it takes more time for a young practitioner to achieve the correct kime in the physical motion. For an older and more experienced karateka the time for the right kime is shorter. Some techniques can be very effective for young people, but they are impossible for an older practitioner to make work.

There are other kinds of skill the real karateka should aim for when he gets older. Many people ask me if I have changed my karate. Well, sometimes the question is confusing so I have to be very careful when I answer. I



did change my karate because I have changed myself both physically and mentally. I'm more experienced now than 20 years ago and have a broader perspective of things. My perception of life and of the world has evolved, therefore, yes, I have changed and these changes definitely affect the art I'm teaching. On the other hand, I don't teach karate to please the student. I teach the art the way I think it should be taught. Period. But as a teacher, I need to find better ways to communicate and pass the knowledge, depending on whom I'm teaching at that time. Students have different backgrounds, education levels, understanding, et cetera and you have to adapt accordingly.

**Q: What's your opinion about grading?**

A: Well, in the old days the whole purpose was increasing one's own skill. We cared about karate training, not about rank. Belt ranking came from judo. We used to train hard and if we got a dan along the way, fine, but it was never the goal of the training. I'm totally against the concept of selling grades as is happening all over the world. I think this is a shame for the karate world. Students get advancement in grading because the monetary connotations of what they represent.

**Q: Do you believe in the use of ki?**

A: Well, we all have the energy but I don't like to spend time theorizing about it. I try to steer clear of that mysterious approach to karate training. The real skills come from correct training methods, strong conditioning and endless repetition. Too many stories have been around the art for too long; this master used to puncture an oil drum with his toes, that master's dojo had footprints on the ceiling, et cetera. I think it is more important to develop a fighting spirit which allows us to keep fighting against all the odds in life. That's why my classes are very hard. Good hard training is what I consider important. If you develop a proper understanding of the art with correct technique, timing, and kime, using your body accordingly,



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you'll be able to not only cope with different opponents, but also different situations in life. I do believe that a student must be strong, not only physically but also morally. I don't accept lazy people or those who lack willpower as students. It is important for the student to learn the true Budo mind and spirit. I understand that this is very difficult since the description of Budo is very confusing.

**Q: What is your best advice for karate practitioners?**

A: Always train in the basics. This is something I noticed during all the past years; some top-competitors have very weak basics, they lack kihon. And after the competition years, it is very hard for them to progress in the true art of karate-do. There is nothing wrong with training these basic competition techniques and becoming a champion, but the art of karate is not a sport, it deals with self-defense and this is another subject altogether. You can't build a house with just two or three tools, you need a variety of tools to accomplish that goal. On the

other hand, training should not stop once you remove your gi. Without the right spirit your karate will be of little use.

I would recommend striving to be intelligent. I'm talking about the proper attitude towards learning. One person can be intellectual and not intelligent. Of course, the academic aspect helps in karate training but it is not absolutely necessary. In the same way that a high education doesn't imply that the person has a high IQ, being academic in the art doesn't mean that you truly understand what you're doing. I understand that after many years of training the trick is how to get motivated to do the same things that you have been doing for so long. Fortunately, there are a lot of methods to achieve this. What is important is understanding how to achieve more with less training. This stage is reserved for those who have trained for many years. After a long time practicing, less training can bring more results than



more training at an earlier stage. Nevertheless, the main point is to keep training and keep constantly seeking the right attitude.

**Q: Are you against sport competition?**

A: No, not at all. To a certain extent, competition helps to improve your fighting ability—but in my time karate was full-contact karate; it was knock-out karate. I like contact karate because it is a very good method of making you cautious and it forces you to have your eyes open. The competition system is improving but there is still a long way to go in order to achieve the right scoring system that encompasses both the Budo and the sport aspects.

For instance, the *ippon shobu* system makes a fighter very careful, they have to be more precise and the technique more powerful. This is more realistic because when you fight for your life you fight more carefully, too. Competitive kumite has changed a few things—for instance, the concept of “*mai*” or “critical distance.” In the past we used to fight each other from further away. The idea was to make the opponent enter into our *mai* to deliver a decisive blow. These days, the fighting distance in competition is shorter because they know that even if they get hit they’re not going to die from it. The real dimension of danger has disappeared. Nevertheless, and at least to me, both aspects are very closely linked and constitute what we call “modern karate.”

In Okinawa, the art is practiced as a method of self-exploration, as an internal research, without focusing on fighting. And this is perfect for those who look for that particular goal but for those who look at karate as a fighting art, competition is necessary. On the other hand, the real purpose of karate training is not to get dan or compete against your fellow student but rather self-improvement as an individual, finding your own way in the martial arts. Karate doesn’t have to be your whole life but a major part of it. The philosophy and the training will help the practitioner to cope not only with difficult situations but also to show the proper respect to every human being. And that is tremendously important.

**Q: What do you feel is wrong with karate today?**

A: There are too many so-called self-promoted karate-do schools who will issue certification and rankings to non-qualified instructors. This practice not only dilutes the quality of the art but actually degrades karate-do to the public. Karate-do training should constantly pursue higher technical perfection. The practitioner should reflect how their achievements have enhanced society as a whole. Karate-do should be a lifelong endeavor which is enjoyable and beneficial, and not seen as a personal burden. O



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Author **Jose M. Fraguas**, a fifth-degree black belt in shito-ryu karate, is an internationally recognized martial arts authority who is well-known to the world's top karate masters. His desire to promote both ancient philosophy and modern thinking provided the motivation for writing this book. Originally from Madrid, Spain, he currently lives in Los Angeles, California.

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