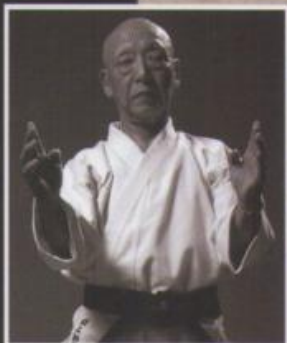
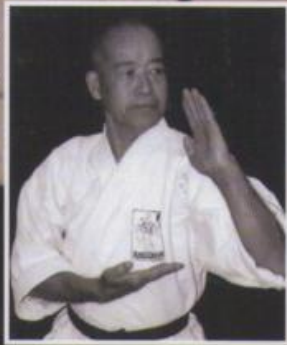
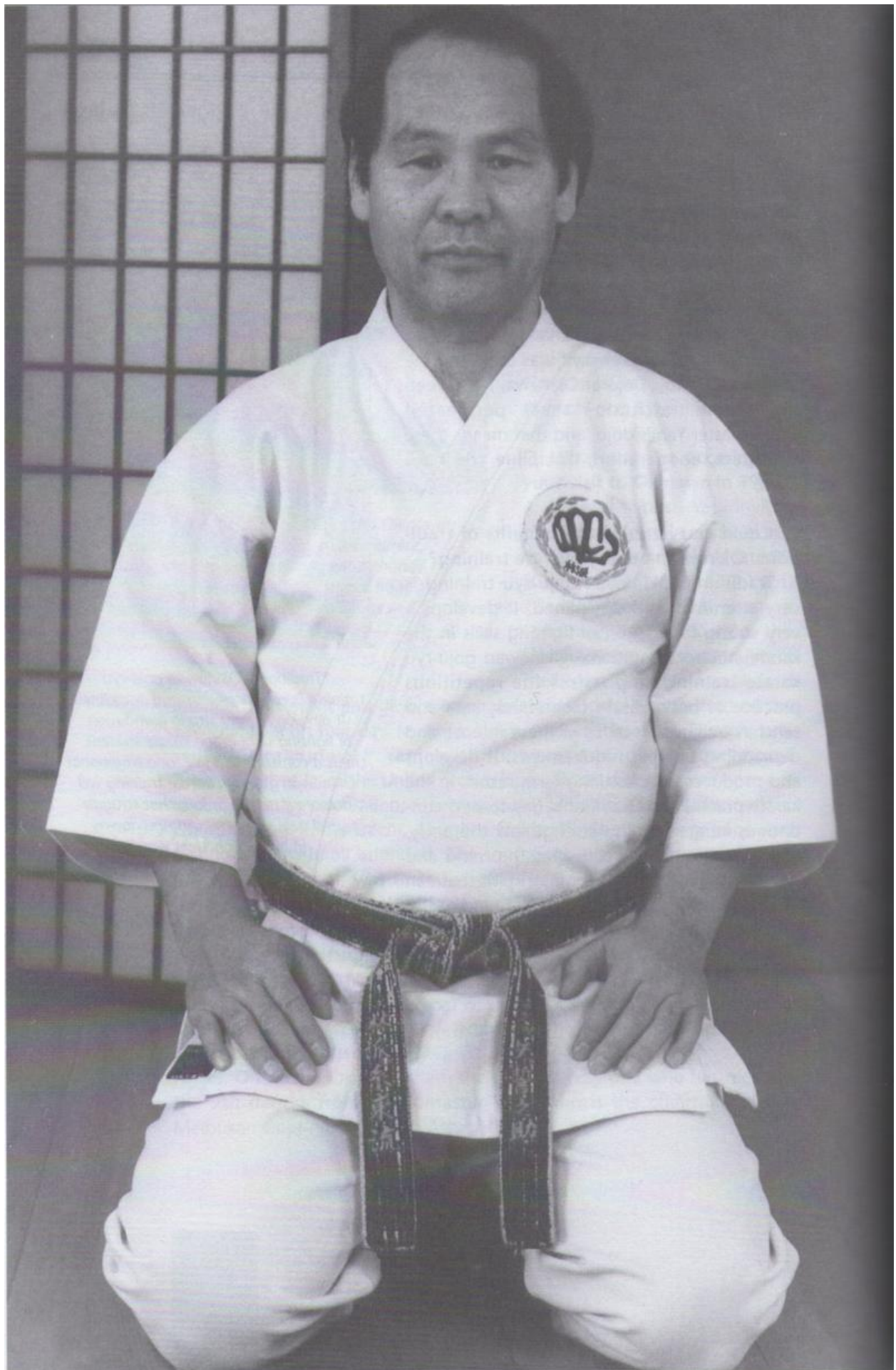


VOLUME 3

Karate Masters



JOSE M. FRAGUAS



Seinosuke Mitsuya

The Distant Dream

HE IS ONE OF THE MOST EXPERIENCED KARATE MASTERS IN THE WORLD, AND HIS KNOWLEDGE OF SHITO-RYU IS ABOVE AND BEYOND WHAT MOST OF THE CURRENT INSTRUCTORS OF THE ART KNOW. STUDENT OF THE LEGENDARY HAYASHI TERUO, MITSUYA SENSEI ADHERES TO THE TEACHING OF HIS INSTRUCTORS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE AND INSISTS THAT TECHNIQUES HAVE NOT CHANGED MUCH. "KARATE TECHNIQUES HAVE NOT CHANGED FROM WHEN I STARTED. DEVELOPED? YES. BUT NOT CHANGED. SOMETIMES THEY ARE TAUGHT INCORRECTLY OR ADAPTED BECAUSE SOME INSTRUCTORS ARE UNABLE TO CORRECT TECHNIQUE, BUT THIS IS NOT BECAUSE THE TECHNIQUE IS LACKING."

IN DEFENSE OF YOUR LIFE, SENSEI MITSUYA BELIEVES THAT YOU MUST BE CAPABLE OF KILLING YOUR ENEMY WITH ONE BLOW. THAT IS WHY HIS TEACHING EMPHASIZES THE TRUE ELEMENTS AND PHILOSOPHY OF JAPANESE BUDO. LESSONS WITH HIM ARE MORE THAN A PHYSICAL WORKOUT. THEY ARE ALSO A KARATE HISTORY LESSON. "THE PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF KARATE-DO MUST BE LEARNED FROM THE KARATE-KA'S VERY FIRST VISIT TO THE DOJO, SO THAT, FROM THE OUTSET, HE WILL PROGRESS BOTH PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY. IN THIS WAY, AS THE COMPLEXITY AND POWER OF THE PHYSICAL TECHNIQUES INCREASES, THE KARATE-KA'S DISCIPLINE AND CONTROL EVOLVES TO COMPLEMENT IT."

MITSUYA SENSEI HAS REACHED A LEVEL OF KARATE THAT—FOR THE MAJORITY—IS NOTHING BUT A DISTANT DREAM. HE REPRESENTS THE TOTAL KARATE EXPERIENCE.

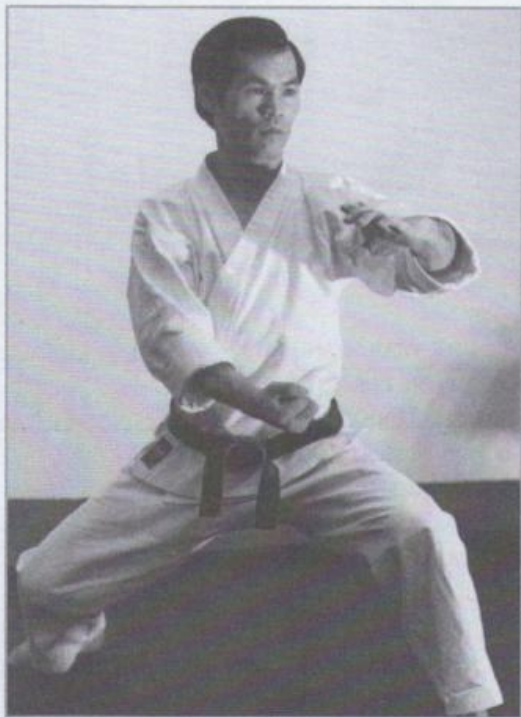
Q: How long have you been practicing the martial arts?

A: I have been practicing for more than 45 years and that includes both karate and kobudo simultaneously. I also practiced sumo between the ages of 6 and 12 and judo between 12 and 18. I started in karate (hayashi-ha shito-ryu) at the age of 14. My first teachers were my elder brother, Jinichi, and Soke Teruo Hayashi.

Q: Tell us some interesting stories of your early days in karate under the guidance of Grandmaster Soke Hayashi Teruo.

A: Soke Hayashi used to give very little explanation about the technique. He just gave his commands to perform the techniques and the kiai. That's all. It was up to us to watch carefully when he was moving and notice the

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"Western people are generally very interested in those aspects [traditional Japanese training that] they like, especially [things like] ethics and morality. They also wanted to learn about the traditional art and today's Japanese culture."

details of the techniques. Our ability to do this was directly related to our level of knowledge and maturity in the art. But I also was very lucky. Somehow, when Soke wanted to study, analyze, and practice techniques and actions he would call me aside and make me attack him. He would tell me which *atemi* to perform, and I was unaware of what would happen next. I couldn't really see much, but I surely felt it. I was very lucky that he chose me. At that time, no one else but me was used for that purpose. I learned very much from those intense training sessions. Not only were they very satisfying, but they stimulated me to continue karate with more passion and dedication than before. At night, the only thing I could do was rest so I would have the energy to train the next day. It was very intense training, and my body literally dropped after the last workout. Today, virtually nobody is willing to undergo such training, and that may be simply because this is a different time.

Q: When you began teaching outside of Japan, how did you find that the

Westerners responded to traditional Japanese training when they visited your dojo?

A: Western people are generally very interested in those aspects [traditional Japanese training that] they like, especially [things like] ethics and morality. They also wanted to learn about the traditional art and today's Japanese culture. The Japanese culture of yesterday, as well as the one of today, is very much interconnected with the spirit and technique of budo.

Q: Were you a natural at karate? Did the movements come easily to you?

A: Yes, for me it came quite easy. I felt it inside myself from the beginning.

However, even if it is easy and natural [for anyone], it is important to always improve. There is no end to that. It is necessary to coordinate your thoughts and actions, and you need to continuously practice hard every day and never give up your personal training. Obviously, I always try to improve, and I continue learning, studying and practicing. I realize how the maturity of the physical techniques develops through time, especially when I trained with Soke Hayashi.

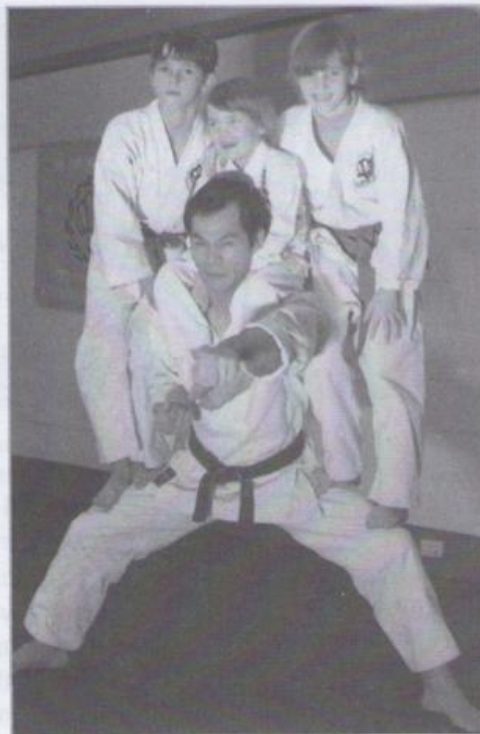
Q: What are the most important points of your teaching philosophy?

A: Harmony among mind, spirit and body. Also, I make sure that I teach the right strategy (mental and spiritual) and tactic (action). There should be coordination in the body and in the mind, too. To get the maximum benefits from the art, it is very important to learn how to put together and coordinate all the mental and physical elements of karate.

Q: With all the technical changes during the last decades, do you think there still are "pure" styles of karate?

A: Masters transfer the "purity" of the styles to the students who are strong spiritually and technically, because these students have the "strength" to continue the tradition. That's why they are "real" masters; they are the ones who have a serious school and a real grandmaster. Each style represents a different flavor in the big landscape of the art of karate.

A *ryu* (a style or system) is a method, and it is tradition, manners, philosophy, culture, science, technology, et cetera. Styles are different methods of training and represent different answers to the same problems. All of these aspects are like a sort of genetic identity or a DNA. The more talented old masters studied for many years ... even the smallest details. Some of the characteristics of hayashi-ha shito-ryu include the trust and credibility that Soke Teruo Hayashi gained through [many] great sacri-



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fices. Every style reflects the method, the correctness and the rectitude of the master who created it. Some great masters have practiced for many years under their teachers and then created their own style and unique method. After years of study, they implemented the most effective and functional techniques. Master Teruo Hayashi traveled often to search for the most traditional masters so he could study their techniques, their

kata, and their methods both in karate-do and kobudo. Through these experiences, he founded the hayashi-ha shito-ryu of karate-do and the kenshin-ryu of kobudo. Soke Hayashi was a man of great temper and charisma, as well as a great fighter. He gained respect from the most relevant masters in budo—and became one of them—due to the great depth of his knowledge in martial arts. He demonstrated this knowledge on a number of occasions, and many considered him No. 1 among the current masters of karate and kobudo. He not only prepared technicians and fighters on a very high level, he successfully asserted his school all around the world.

Q: How would you describe the life and dedication of Soke Hayashi to the arts of budo?

A: Soke Hayashi practiced karate-do and kobudo with the spirit of the Japanese budo [Yamato Damashii] for all of his life. For decades, he demonstrated the art in world championships and events in front of the most respected martial artists and politicians around the world, and the public always anticipated his presentations the most. And this is how people from all cultures and styles were able to recognize the art and the value of these arts. Because of his enormous knowledge, he was president of the referee council of the WKF (previously known as WUKO) for more than 10 years, and he greatly contributed to the revisions and improve-

ments of the competitions and rules. A change in kumite is one example of that. In earlier times, there was the *ippon shobu*, which was the traditional Japanese form. To make the competitions more sport-oriented, Soke Hayashi created the system of *sanbon-shobu*. While this made it more accessible to the rest of the world, it kept the traditional elements. Certainly, he was the person who has contributed the most to the development of traditional karate-do and kobudo.

Q: Do you think that karate in the West is at the same level with Japanese karate?

A: If we talk about sport competitions, then the West and Japan are at the same level. Philosophically and culturally, however, the differences are obvious and this affects the way karate is not only practiced in the dojo but also how the practitioner understands the art. Generally, karate is a serious matter for Japanese; it is not simply a sport. Unfortunately, due to the differences in culture with the Western world, I often notice a certain lack of seriousness from the Westerners who are involved in the arts of budo.



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Q: Do you feel that there are any fundamental differences in approach or in the physical capabilities between Japanese karate-ka and European or American karate-ka?

A: There should not be any difference in the sport competitions. The referees, however, make a difference through their interpretation of the rules, their ability and knowledge.

Q: Karate is nowadays often referred to as a sport. Would you agree with this definition or do you think it is only budo?

A: Sport is governed by rules for athletic reasons. Karate-do is fundamentally a study for the body, mind and spirit. Therefore, it requires physical and mental discipline. Due to these reasons, karate-do can be considered as budo and can be practiced for life. Karate as sport is only a small part of karate-do and can only be practiced as such for a few years. A true practitioner of budo must study and practice his entire life. The study of

Karate Masters



"Every weapon has its peculiarities, and the body has to adapt and become stronger when using the weapon. All this preparation helps a student improve the mechanics behind the physical movements of karate."

the martial arts is similar to the research of modern technology; you never stop learning and studying. Soke Hayashi was a perfect example of an individual who studies, practices and lives the art of budo.

Q: At the present time, how do you see karate in general and hayashi-ha shito-ryu in Europe and the rest of the world?

A: In these last decades, karate has transformed a lot. It is following a sportive path more and more, and it is losing the effectiveness of its actions. In sport competitions, nowadays, what really matters is the spectacle. This is probably due to the big influence of the movies, but what you see in the movies has

nothing to do with real fighting or real self-defense. Many referees, often influenced by the public, don't know how to be objective and thus lose credibility in front of competitors and spectators. The hayashi-ha system, in my opinion, not only has excellent technique, but it's very efficient and functional, and it is rich in beauty, elegance and refinements. And this is how karate should be.

Q: Does it help empty-hand karate physically to train with weapons?

A: Yes. Every weapon has its peculiarities, and the body has to adapt and become stronger when using the weapon. All this preparation helps a student improve the mechanics behind the physical movements of karate.

Q: What's your opinion of makiwara training?

A: Makiwara training is not indispensable, but it can be useful if it is practiced properly. Young people and teenagers—especially—should not practice this before they have reached a certain physical maturity, as there is risk of serious deformations in the hands. The makiwara is necessary to develop precision of technique and resistance at the moment of impact against an object. However, practicing with the makiwara properly is very difficult, so a teacher must not only have thorough knowledge of this

training but also a lot of common sense. He must make sure that a student's hands do not become deformed or bleed because that can lead to serious problems, including HIV and infections.

Q: To progress in the arts, how should a sensei prepare his personal training? Once he reaches a high technical level, what elements should be emphasized?

A: He must dedicate special attention to the weakest parts of his body, acknowledge them and strengthen them, and continue to develop his strengths. When a sensei arrives at a high technical level, he must emphasize the coordination between the mental and physical because this is an important aspect of the whole picture. It is also important to search for a great master or teacher who can help him go forward and improve, assisting him in reaching the higher levels of the art.

Q: When teaching the art of karate, is self-defense, sport or tradition the most important?

A: Self-defense, tradition and sport. That is the order of importance, but each one is individually important because they all support each other to create a strong unit. Thus, you should not focus on only one or two of the elements. Instead, you should try to balance your practice. Of course, when you get older, the emphasis switches to tradition and self-defense because the sport aspect is gone.

Q: In training, what's the proper ratio between kata and kumite?

A: It is difficult to answer because it depends on the age, physical capabilities and character of the person, and all of these elements [combined] generally make the "perfect" proportion for an individual. When a student is young, it is easier to practice kumite, but this should be done with discipline and proper manners. However, after a student reaches the age of 30, maybe he will naturally feel more [inclined] to do kata.



"When a student is young, it is easier to practice kumite, but this should be done with discipline and proper manners. However, after a student reaches the age of 30, maybe he will naturally feel more [inclined] to do kata."

Karate Masters



"My advice is to always train with dedication and attention and, in addition to getting the proper education, you should incorporate the following values into your life: discipline, seriousness and respect."

Q: Sensei, do you have any general advice you would care to pass on to the karate-ka?

A: To the karate-ka of today, my advice is to always train with dedication and attention and, in addition to getting the proper education, you should incorporate the following values into your life: discipline, seriousness and respect. In other words, focus on technique, intelligence and spirit. For the art of karate-do, these are the most important values, and they are much more important than punching, kicking and muscle power.

Q: Some people think it is necessary to train in Japan. Do you agree with this point of view?

A: Sometimes it may be useful if you don't have a good master, but it is not necessary because the best masters often travel outside of Japan [and thus are accessible] and many of them are already living outside of that country.

Q: What would you say to someone who is interested in learning karate-do?

A: First, I'd say that it is a great idea! Learning this discipline brings much serenity to a practitioner's life and one should stick to the art and have a strong will to succeed. If the practitioner puts in the time and effort, everything is possible. For every age and everybody, there is a better way to practice karate. It is not necessary to use the same method or approach for every single student. Each practitioner must take care of the details. This is the essence of traditional Japanese karate-do. Personally, I try to follow this principle. Thanks to my passion and thanks to the teaching of Soke Hayashi, I have always been among the best ones [instructors], and I intend to continue being among the top instructors in the world. I have always wanted to do better than others.

Q: What is your opinion about mixing karate styles? Does the practice of one nullify the effectiveness of the other or can it be beneficial to the student?

A: The mixing of styles often may cause mediocrity if [they are] studied superficially, because every style has its particular characteristics. The only way to attain time-lasting results is to carefully study the particulars of each style. Personally, I don't think that it is a good idea to study and mix styles, because it requires time and ability and a very high level of technical understanding that many people don't have. Thus, a serious karate-ka should dedicate more [time] to in-depth study of his style instead of jumping from one style to another without any logic behind [that decision].



"Kata is essential to karate. Kata organizes the technical foundation of the style from the base (kihon) to very high levels of technical expertise. Due to this, the ratio between form and action is often hard to understand. Sometimes it is simply the student's lack of study or capability."

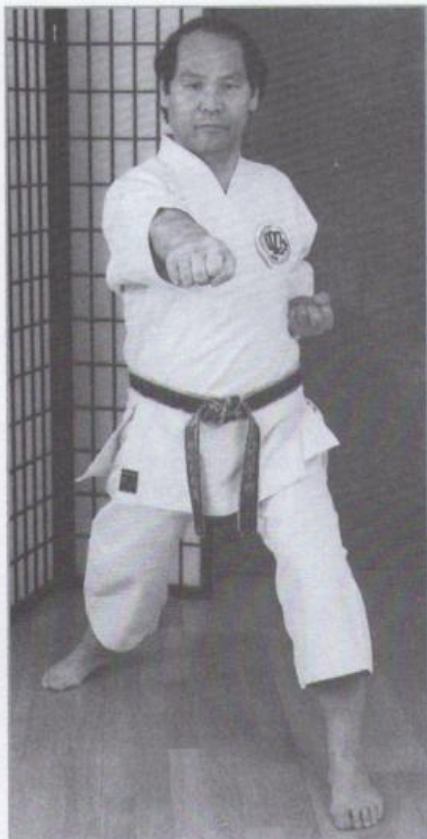
Q: Modern karate is moving away from the bunkai in kata practice. In general, how important is bunkai in the understanding of kata and karate-do?

A: Kata is essential to karate. Kata organizes the technical foundation of the style from the base (*kihon*) to very high levels of technical expertise. Due to this, the ratio between form and action is often hard to understand. Sometimes it is simply the student's lack of study or capability. That is also why the bunkai is sometimes very difficult to understand and tiring from a psychological point of view. I think that the best way to learn is to have a good and competent master who can truly teach you the essence of the form, its meaning and its applications, many of which are hidden, both for self-defense and for the health of the person.

Q: What is the philosophical basis for your karate training?

A: Harmony among mind, spirit and body. This has always been the key factor for me. Also, I always wanted to study, learn and exercise to keep my body and mind in perfect shape.

Karate Masters



"With correct training and the guidance of a good teacher, you can learn the right attitude, modesty, self-control and courage, and every black belt must maintain these principles."

Q: After all these years of training and experience, could you explain the meaning of the practice of karate-do?

A: Self-control or *seigyo*, which is what we call it in Japanese. To apply this in your life, you have to completely understand it. It can be interpreted as seriousness and dignity, and as I said, it can be applied to every aspect of life. The practice of karate-do begins at black belt level—not at white belt. Prior to this phase [black belt], students are only going through a period of study and reflection to try to understand their own tendencies. With correct training and the guidance of a good teacher, you can learn the right attitude, modesty, self-control and courage, and every black belt must maintain these principles. At that level, black belts must become examples for their kohai. The only way to understand every aspect of karate-do is through constant practice and dedication. As in any other activity, it is necessary to have professionalism and dignity.

Q: Compared with those who were being taught in your early days, is there anything lacking in the way karate is taught today?

A: Generally, teachers today provide plenty of explanations, but they do it with more talking and less action [or demonstrations]. In the early times, there were few explanations, and it was necessary to pay strong attention. [In those days], there was more action and less talking.

Q: Why is it, in your opinion, that a lot of students quit after two to three years of training?

A: The reasons vary from person to person, but the majority of students. After two or three years of practice, many believe that they are already good, and they don't think that they need to train anymore. They think that they are "there" because they have developed an evident skill [compared to when they started]. This is the wrong approach, and the only

Mitsuya

way to prevent that is to teach the student he is still a beginner, regardless of how far how he thinks he has progressed ... even if he has been training for two or three years. This is the reason why it is so important to teach the philosophy of budo. It simply keeps the mind at the right place and prevents the ego from getting too big.

Q: There is very little written about you in magazines. You obviously do not thrive on the publicity. Why?

A: I am not an exhibitionist. I have had chances to appear in magazines all over the world, but that is not my goal. I am well known in the karate world because I have always demonstrated my qualities and the authenticity of my teacher's art with actions and not just with words. The little publicity I have received from magazines may result from the fact that I never wanted to compromise my goals to anyone, and I have always kept my professional dignity untouched. I am Japanese deep to my core, and I have the spirit of the samurai. We all know what conditions of servility you need to undergo to be considered by the politicians of the sport, and I can't accept that. Now it should be easy to understand why I don't pursue publicity.



*"I am Japanese deep to my core,
and I have the spirit of the samurai.
We all know what conditions of servility
you need to undergo to be considered
by the politicians of the sport,
and I can't accept that."*

Q: Is there anything else you would to add for the readers?

A: Seek and strive to be the best. Do not let yourself get dragged [down] by anyone's words or by what only appears to be good. This can be very deceiving. ○



Karate's Finest Masters Teach Martial Arts' Greatest Lessons

After the acclaimed success of the first and second volumes of *Karate Masters*, the author presents *Karate Masters 3*, with a new repertoire of historical figures such as Gogen Yamaguchi, Ryusho Sakagami, Anthony Mirakian and numerous contemporary world-class

masters such as Teruo Chinen, Tetsuhiko Asai, Jiro Ohtsuka, Masahiko Tanaka, Shojiro Koyama, et cetera. In this third volume of *Karate Masters*, new interviews with 23 of the world's top karate masters have been gathered to present an integrated and complete view of the empty-handed art of fighting, philosophy and self-defense.

With information that has never appeared anywhere else, the interviews contain intriguing thoughts, fascinating personal details, hidden histories and revealing philosophies. In these 23 exclusive interviews, each master reveals a true love for the art and a deep understanding of every facet associated with the practice and spirit of the Japanese art of karate-do as a way of life. No matter how well you think you know these karate masters, you haven't really experienced their wit, wisdom and insight until you've read *Karate Masters 3*. Any martial arts practitioner who appreciates karate history and philosophy, and who feels that this rich heritage is a necessary stepping-stone to personal growth, will find this book an invaluable reference and a "must have" addition to their personal library.

Author *Jose M. Fraguas* is an internationally recognized martial arts authority who is well-known to the world's karate masters. A prolific writer and publisher, he has hundreds of articles, dozen of books and numerous screenplays to his credit. 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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