

***Do*: what does it mean?**

Introduction:

The Japanese word *do* means “way” or “path” in a philosophical sense. Many traditional Japanese arts have the suffix *do* in their name. There are martial arts such as karate-do, judo, kendo and aikido. Additionally, there are *cha-do*, the way of tea and *kado*, the way of flowers. The concept of path means the way to practice these arts. The fundamental idea is that practicing the art is also mental exercise which supports growth as a human being. The art is not practiced only for its practical goals but because it is a method to study oneself.

Gichin Funakoshi, the father of modern karate, named his new martial art to karate-do. With adding the small “*do*” word, sensei Funakoshi wanted to say that by training this new martial art regularly, it was possible to develop the body, the mind and the spirit all at the same time. Obviously, he wanted to highlight that the path is more important than technique.

When it is talking about *do*, very often rises the term *Bushido*, “The way of the warrior”. *Bushido* has been the samurai code of conduct in Japan for centuries. Based on the teachings of Zen, *Bushido* is considered to help samurais control themselves. *Bushido* consists of the following essential principles: sincerity, kindness, honesty, bravery, loyalty and honor. These same guidelines are applied in karate-do – all karatekas should aim these ideals in their life. It is, however, notable that these same kind of virtues exist also in the Western philosophy. For example, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant wrote about virtue, morality and duty.

Training karate-do in Finland in 21st century has not the same martial and moral motives as samurais had in Japan centuries ago. However, traditional karate training still applies those teachings. The framework of mental and physical growth is described in the *dojo kun* which is completed and explained more detailed with Funakoshi’s 20 principles. It is notable that this guideline is not applicable only at the *dojo* but it can be applied wider in one’s life. Together with fighting techniques, the guideline forms real traditional karate-do.

Why tight ethical guidelines are required in the martial arts? In my opinion, they are needed because *do* is something that separates *karatekas* from barbarians. Karate is not a game of points, weight classes or showy demonstrations – although general public thinks so. It is a martial art and a way of life that trains a practitioner to remain peaceful in a threatening situation. However, if a conflict is inevitable, a karateka is able to take down the opponent with a single blow. Still it is notable that even when a person is challenged by an aggressive opponent, he should try to avoid striking a fatal blow. It is essential to let the opponent reconsider and regret his actions.

Ethical framework

As mentioned, the ethical framework of traditional Shotokan karate-do is based on the *dojo kun*. The Japan Karate Association, (JKA) uses following translation of the *dojo kun*:

Seek perfection of character
Be faithful
Endeavor
Respect others
Refrain from violent behavior

Seeking perfection sounds a little bit strange to me because I am taught that no one can be perfect and I always can improve myself. In this sense, karate-do is an irrational phenomenon since as a karateka I should aim to the perfection. Basically, this means that I should perform basic techniques such as punches, kicks and blocks and their sequences stronger, more relaxed and more balanced. The rule has to be applied also with *kata* and *kumite*. I have realized that the older I become the more challenging it will be to maintain both, flexibility and good technique. It is obvious that I need more work just to keep my current level in future – and currently I am not even close to the perfection.

According to my *do*, I should not concentrate only on the technical side of karate. Actually, it would be a good idea me to understand something about different styles of karate as well as other martial arts. Furthermore, it might make sense me to know something about Japan, its history, language and culture. Outside of *dojo*, I should learn

new things and improve knowledge I already have. Idea suits me because I am hungry to explore new things and ideas. For example in my free time, I study hard such an exotic topic as firm valuation. I also use a lot of time to improve my business skills since working in management consulting sector requires continuous development of professional knowledge.

Being faithful and honest means sincerity in everything I do. Naturally, it means honesty with other people but honesty with myself too. In other words, I have to take care of my duties and try my best every time. In karate training, I always do exactly what sensei tells me to do – and I do it in the best possible way. As a senior student, I want to help and support my fellow karatekas. Additionally, I realize that younger students follow my example and thus I am some kind of role model at the class. In that sense, it is not indifferent what I do and especially how I do things at the class.

It is notable that karate-do stands on the side of justice. I think that whenever I see injustice for example at work place or on the street, I have to resist it. Very often, resisting inequity requires lots of courage and thus it may feel uncomfortable – still I have to do it. When I used to give karate classes to youngster, I faced a couple of times a situation where one of my student said that he does not want to train with his current partner – he wanted to change the guy. I told whole class to stop what they were doing and then gave a speech to everyone how that kind of behavior does not belong to the *dojo*, school or actually anywhere. Additionally, I encouraged my students to support their friends who are treated in the mentioned way.

Endeavor consists of two main parts: mental power and avoidance of problems beforehand. These two parts together make the combination of ‘mentality over technique’ -concept of karate-do. The former must rise above the latter.

History teaches us that good fighting spirit can beat the greatest technique of an opponent. This also can be considered a metaphor. In karate training, I face single basic techniques and sequences that feel difficult to learn. Especially sequences of several kicks cause challenges to me. However I am very sure that by own determination and hard-working training, even the hardest sequences are possible to be learned.

This analog works outside of the *dojo* as well. In the school or at the work place, some tasks may feel more challenging than others. Nevertheless, it is not mandatory to master

everything but one never should give up pushing. Surrender and quitting without struggle is a very bad habit which should not be learned.

On the other hand, many Japanese stories teach that even the best fighting technique is totally worthless if it is possible to avoid the conflict. If I am able to avoid a fight, I am hit less than a person who knows blocking techniques very well. The key of avoiding troubles is critical thinking. I have to consider why I end to troubles and whether there is a way to do things differently. During the last six years, I have faced a couple of aggressive troublemakers in night life. My secret method to escape those situations is to tell these guys that I cannot fight with them because I would lose my reputation as an honorable man and karateka. My answer always confuses them so much that I have to order them a beer and tell them more about the topic. After the nice conversation, there is no reason to fight any longer.

One of my favorite movie scene which illustrates motives and action in a very concrete way is in *The Karate Kid II*. In the movie, the hero Daniel finds a poster showing a karateka breaking a log with his bare hand. He asks whether his sensei Mr. Miyagi is able to do the same. Mr. Miyagi answers that: "I don't know. I have never been attacked by a tree".

The very first Funakoshi's principle says that karate-do begins and ends with respect (*rei*). *Rei* refers to the formal bowing we do at the beginning and the end of every class and several times during the class. However, respect is much more than just bowing. It separates martial arts from brutal violence, and karatekas from animals.

In the *dojo*, the easiest way to show my shortage of respect to my partner is that I lack control in partner work. Another very good method is that I let my partner understand that I prefer training with someone else. These both ways lead very quickly to the situation where no one wants to train with me. The direct consequence is the fact that I am not able to learn anything at the class.

I emphasize politeness and respect at outside of the *dojo* as well. It is obvious that people treat me exactly same way as I treat them. Therefore, it is foolish to "forget" good manners and thus give a bad impression of myself to other people. I think it is very worrying that some people have significant challenges to show good manners.

However, it is good to realize that respectful behavior and politeness reduce the risk to end to a fight.

Funakoshi's second principle says that there is no first strike in karate-do. Someone can argue that this principle is applied in many *katas* which start with a blocking technique (*uke waza*). However in karate, offensive techniques can also be used to block and defensive techniques to attack. Therefore, I prefer the interpretation that there is no first initiative in karate-do. Very often, the very first initiative appears sooner than first strike. And sometimes, performing the first strike is the best way to avoid fight longer. However, I should try to cause as less damage to the opponent as possible.

As a karateka, I learn strong and fatal techniques and develop my self-confidence to be able to defend myself from an external attack. I don't attack people or use my skills against anyone if it is not mandatory. The purpose of my *do* is to avoid fighting to the last moment. According to my code of conduct, as an honorable man I have to bear things to very limit of my ability before taking action. Only after reaching the point where the situation can no longer be tolerated, is my sword – hands and feet – drawn from its scabbard. What might be the situation that crosses the critical line? I don't have an exact answer but I think it should be such a serious situation that getting arrested by police is smaller issue than losing the fight. Fortunately, I have not faced this kind of situation since I started training karate-do. So, I can argue that I really do follow my *do*.

Conclusion

The ultimate aim of my *do* is to provide methods to me to grow as a human being. Everyone has their own *do* to follow but basically every single *do* should lead more or less to same destination. According to the philosophy, I have to try become better today than I was yesterday. Furthermore, I have to become better tomorrow than I am today. There is no any single point that marks I am achieved the highest possible level – there is always a higher level. Therefore, it is more important to seek continuous improvement by working hard, with keeping honesty and humility in my mind and heart, than being too satisfied with my current knowledge. And that is what my *do* is all about.

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