

## The Map is Not the Territory

The title of this article, which I also used as one of the chapters in *Cracking the Kata Code*, should be attributed to Polish philosopher Alfred Korzybski (1879-1950). When I wrote the book, it was a phrase bandied about the new age community without attribution, so I did not know its source at the time. Now that I do, more needs to be said about Korzybski and about this concept as it relates to kata and kata analysis.

To the extent that our perceptions lead us astray, they need to be interpreted. Korzybski argued that there were different levels of abstraction that we often confuse. A map is a useful generalization, and just as a map cannot possibly include every detail along the real route, generalizations often function adequately but not definitively.

There is a story, perhaps apocryphal, about Korzybski's making a point about "what you see is indeed what you get", i.e. substituting a map (appearance) for a territory (reality). In a lecture, Professor K began munching cookies from a bag, excusing himself as having missed his lunch. He shared some with students then showed the bag, which read "Dog Biscuits". His students responded with a few dry heaves and a couple of sudden trips to the lavatory. Were the cookies really cookies or dog yummys? If they were really cookies, then the student discomfort was a result substituting the map (the false perception of dog biscuits) for the territory. If they were really doggy treats, why were the students not ill until the bag was revealed? It seems they had assumed that the map (the false perception of cookies) was the territory, so that what they saw was "what they got."

Certainly every martial artist knows, or should know, that a kata is neither a real nor a simulated self-defense encounter. Non-traditionalists once criticized traditionalists for believing they could fight by replicating a kata, but no fight proceeds with idealized techniques or in preconceived patterns. Partially this criticism was due to thinking that self-defense was the same as fighting, partially it was due to thinking that training for combat must simulate actual combat itself. These non-traditionalists (and some traditionalists for that matter) believed that what they saw in kata would be what they got in application.

After any real self-defense engagement, certain technical tendencies can be recognized and recorded. In order to build a set of pseudo-engagements that one can learn from, one needs some kind of technique and some sort of pattern. You can't learn from something unless it has form. Once the form of a technique is decided upon, it only makes sense to idealize it in order to practice the technique in its most perfect representation. In this way, although the kata is not the engagement, it is a blueprint to the reconstruction of several aspects of self-defense engagements.

Similarly, in ju-jutsu and aiki-ju-jutsu, where kata are not used as training devices, prearranged *waza* are. Students work hard to perfect them. The model they use is an idealized technique performed against an idealized attack, both of which are unlikely to occur in reality. In other words, these *waza* become kata. All training in martial arts is by its nature phony. If it were real, it would not be training, but an actual encounter.

Training is the map; the encounter is the territory. One kind of map is kata. Since it is an idealized map, it can easily be seen as unrealistic and thus can lead us astray. That is why kata *must* be interpreted. Just doing kata is good exercise, but interpreting self-defense engagements out of kata and practicing them as pseudo-encounters, although it will never be the territory, will go farther in simulating a territory than doing a meaningless martial exercise or not doing kata at all.