



Contents

Preface xiii

Entry into Training 1

The Motives for Martial Art Training 3

Our motivations change during the years. What is important is that we keep motivated. Occasionally, however, someone else's motivation can be demotivating.

The Rationale for the Hakama 7

Beginners would be happy simply to be able to tie their belts without having to think about it. Black belts smile at this because they know, especially with their current rank, that things never are quite as easy as they seem, or as complicated.

The Aiki Defense 11

Ueshiba said that "aiki" is love. If you can't kiss and make up, at least give your opponent a little present.



What You See is Not What You Get 15

To the uninitiated, martial arts can seem like magic. Magic, being often a matter of *leger de main*, depends on the audience's willing participation.

Status and Stature 19

Martial arts were developed by big men in little packages.

All Off the Grass is Alligator Water 23

If you intend to train, don't expect to get free passage as well.

Shihan and Shoshinsa 27

If the people at the top could pull up the people at the bottom by their own bootstraps, perhaps it wouldn't be so lonely up there — or so frustrating.

The Old Man and the Sword 33

"Fear" is "False Evidence Appearing Real." It is also the sound of a quickly drawn sword.



Early Training 37

The Sempai's Shinai 39

Cultural biases may be dying, but in some cases, the death-blow may come from an older time — and another culture.

Brawl at the Dojo Door 45

Karate is backed by ethics. Unfortunately, sometimes ethics are backed by force.

The Straightline Attacker 49

Passing the torch along maintains the tradition of a martial art; but, occasionally, in the passing, someone gets burnt.

Faking Karate 53

Sincere training can become costly. To be thrifty, use talk. Talk is cheap.

Shihan's Taikyoku 57

Strict traditionalism always goes by the book...

The School of the Secret Kick 61

The things most missing in martial arts today, both in the West and the East, is quality. It doesn't matter how many schools, styles, or arts are created. What matters is what is missing.

Why Karateka are (Too Often) Contentious 67

Karate is so deadly that it must be practiced in a rather theoretical and highly stylized manner. That makes it safer...and takes away the element of truth.

Verbal Judo 73

Training is 90% physical and only 10% mental. Self-defense is 90% mental and only 10% physical.

Sensei, the Sanitary Engineer 77

If you do not have self-discipline, it will be provided for you.

Calling for Help 81

Stoic traditionalists often learn to grin and bear it. That builds character and self-reliance. Unless you are over your head.

Later Training 87

Rebuilding the Carrier York 89

Sometimes directions make it just too simple! But without them it is impossible to teach others...or yourself.

Efficiency, Efficacy, and Aiki 93

Rules are meant to be broken. Breaking the rules, after all, may be an unwritten rule.

“OS” ...or *Semper Paratus* (Always Prepared) for Karate-ka 97

The boyscout motto may seem a little juvenile for full-grown martial artists until they realize that boyscouts, businesspeople, soldiers, and budoka are in the same training field.

Ping-Pong Strategy 103

“Sign up, line up, and shut up” was once given as a motto for beginners in the martial arts. For more senior practitioners it may be simply, “Stand up or put up with being put down.”

“Arriving” 107

In college, the student has to qualify to take some upper-level courses. In budo, sometimes the student has to examine in order to take an exam.

The Speed of a Champion 111

The old codgers still can move; the new ones still can dream.

Keeping Your Posture 115

Sometimes, keeping your back straight means keeping a stiff upper lip and a supple mind.

Playing with the Big Kids 119

The big in “bigshot” is a matter of repute, not necessarily of size. Repute is a matter of being able to handle even the little problems.



Life Training 123

Fighting with Fables 125

Those who can do. Those who can't either teach, talk, or dump on those who can.

“i sing of Olaf glad and big” 131

The problem with the class clown is that he seldom graduates.

Concentration, Infatuation, and Kendo 137

Focus your mind and you will get what you focus on; but, what you don't focus on might get you.

Byron, Going to the Warres 141

The student often teaches the teacher, and those lessons are often the hardest of all.

Jealousy and Self-development 147

What is detrimental to personal development is not ego but the ego misunderstood.

Expectations and Beyond 151

When you count your blessings, the very act will keep the curses away.

Summer and Smoke, and Other Folk 157

There are many roads up the mountain...and many mountains with meandering roads.

The Source of Wisdom 163

Solomon, Socrates, and Yoda had two things in common: years and mileage.

Appendix:

The Twenty Precepts of Gichin Funakoshi 169

Glossary of Foreign Terms 171

Index 177

Tales of the Dojo





The advantage of a pithy, concise volume is that it avoids Ambrose Bierce's criticism, "The covers of this book are too far apart."

Preface

NO ONE WANTED TO LISTEN WHEN YOUR father started his story, “Well, back in the old days when I was in school...” But if your instructor (whether sifu, sa bum nim, or sensei) starts a story about when he was a beginner, people in the room imitate those old E. F. Hutton commercials. No matter how many times you have heard it before, you listen again, because there is a lesson to be learned. Each school (whether kwoon, dojang, or dojo) has its own stories, some true, some augmented slightly for dramatic effect. Unfortunately, you are familiar with only your own school’s stories. From a number of sources, *Tales of the Dojo* makes accessible those narratives which may serve to enrich the student’s mind while he or she is developing technique. It therefore links the art of one school to that of another.

I have always loved to learn. I was convinced at an early age that learning equalled improvement. I thought that meant being better than Johnny or getting an A when everyone else was getting Bs. I quickly found out, however, that as much as I felt superior to those around me who were not so committed to learning, everyone around me was also my superior in some way. There was too much knowledge in the world to know everything. Even the Johnnys who did not get Bs but Ds knew multitudes of stuff I did not. How did they get their knowledge if it wasn’t in academia?



When I started the martial arts in 1964, I realized that an art could be a sport, but I was especially interested in acquiring self-defense knowledge no one else had. Knowledge was power, after all. Achieving black belts in three traditional martial arts before the age of 30 made me realize that there is a limit to the knowledge a teacher teaches directly. This was especially evident when my personal training emphasis changed from self-defense to a more general self-development. There is no limit, I told myself, to the knowledge available to me. And, I can teach myself! But what would be my source?

Combining my academic career with my martial arts pursuits, I read every book on the martial arts I could lay my hands on. By and large, they were verbal discourses on physical techniques. Wisdom, self-improvement — mastery, if you will — could not be learned by books alone. The key, instead, was experience. What had I experienced? I had not been a national judo or karate champion. I had not been a rough and tumble war-hero, street-fighter, or bar-bouncer. I had not been the bodyguard to the Shah of Iran. I just worked on my stuff. And I found, often, that that was enough.

As Bette Midler said, “I never know how much of what I say is true.” Yes, many of the tales are autobiographical. I have pastiched a number of true stories together so as to get my point across without fictionalizing too much. You can enjoy reading historical fiction, yet you always wonder how much is history and how much is fiction. I am not so notable in the martial arts that I am worthy of an official biography, and not so self-centered that I am ready to write an autobiography. These stories, then, are not me; only their messages are.

Tales of the Dojo, therefore, is an exercise in applying principles of the martial arts to daily life and, more importantly, applying lessons learned in daily life to the principles learned in this way of life — the traditional martial arts.