



# Okuden: The Hidden Teachings of the Martial Arts



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By Joe Varady

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## INTRODUCTION

For millennia, around campfires and in great halls the world over, stories have been told of legendary heroes, men and women of incredible ability who accomplished fantastic feats worthy of tale and retelling. In that same tradition, tales of great martial arts masters have been passed down attributing to them wondrous skills and miraculous powers. These were later exaggerated in martial arts films for entertainment purposes, but at the root of every story lay a kernel of truth. Some martial arts masters were absolutely fanatical in their training, and became seemingly super human in their abilities. Could they have passed on secret knowledge in the martial systems they spawned? It is rumored that, even today, secret techniques, a concept the Japanese refer to as **okuden** (hidden teachings), still exist in the Asian martial arts.

It is true that for over a thousand years, in China and elsewhere, it was not unusual for warriors who relied on their particular martial art for their very survival to keep certain key techniques or principles very private. Those techniques that were especially effective were taught only to the most trusted of students, if they were ever taught at all. They were never shared with outsiders, who might later misuse the knowledge or use it against them. The concept of okuden was especially useful to the Okinawans when they introduced Karate to Japan in the 1920s and 30s. Centuries of brutal oppression had made the Okinawans distrustful of the Japanese, who looked down on them as *gaijin*. It would seem that Gichen Funakoshi and other Okinawan karate masters taught the Japanese the moves to the karate kata, but did not explain the *bunkai*, or applications, that made them effective for fighting. Those techniques were kept secret and taught only to the most senior and trusted students. Today, there are people who believe these secret teachings still exist; indeed there are those who believe that no martial art can be complete without them.



So what, then, are the okuden, or hidden teachings, contained in Cuong Nhu's Karate-do kata? The kata of all linear, hard karate styles share the same guiding principles that make them into effective methods of self-defense. The fact is that, today, in our style as well as others, what was once kept secret is now taught openly. Okuden is no longer a secret knowledge, but a level of training. The "hidden techniques" of Cuong Nhu's hard style are the advanced principles that make the kata applications, or *bunkai*, practical and brutally effective. In his book, The Mystery of Okuden, Charles James states:

"*Shoden* is a term used for 'a beginning', *chuden* for 'intermediate', and *okuden* is used for more 'advanced' instructional levels. The combination of shoden, chuden, okuden is the 'Way.' It merely means that the other side of the basics has more meaning that will eventually come to the practitioner as they reach a level in training that will reveal the advanced. An instructor can tell you and explain to you those advanced aspects of the art, yet when it comes to doing the advanced, a student will find it complex and overwhelming. This is why we have beginner, intermediate, and advanced training in any art."

I have found that our kata contain much "hidden technique." As I just stated, it's not really "hidden" at all, but unless one is taught the techniques, it is unlikely one would stumble upon their deeper, more "three dimensional" (3-D as O Sensei Dong Ngo used to refer to them) applications that make them especially effective. An overview of key concepts contained in our forms starts with forward flowing energy, or **chung chi**, as seen in the Pinan forms where we almost always move forward, into the opponent, even when blocking or being defensive. Therefore, moving into the opponent's attack is an important concept that must be thoroughly understood if one expects to find any meaning in our hard style forms. The key words here are **speed and momentum**, as power is generated by accelerating your body mass into the target, aided by techniques such as the "switch step." Another concept called **force summation and the kinetic chain** is aimed at helping you get the most "bang for your buck", that is, maximum results with minimum effort. Which leads us into an analysis of **alignment and structure**, for power can be lost much easier than it can be generated. Another idea crucial to making hard style kata effective is the simplified concept of **generalized defense**, being able to effectively apply the same move to a wide variety of attacks; a block is not always a block and a punch is not always a punch. The reaction hand plays a critical role, either as the primary blocking limb as seen when applying the **double blocking principle**, or as a grasping and pulling hand, **hikite**, which should twist as well as pull (3-D), breaking the opponent's balance (*kuzushi*) and basing him for you strike. **Basing** is not limited to hikite, however. When you hit someone, much of your energy is lost as the opponent's body moves. Knowledge of proper basing allows you to almost double the power you can put into a target. **Vital point striking**, hitting an opponent in a specific spot in a particular way for devastating effect, also becomes important in the final transfer of energy into the target. Foot sweeps and sticky leg techniques, known as **chi geru**, attack and control the opponent's lower body at the same time that you are attacking high with your hands. Finally, **recycling** is the tactic of using an opponent's body as a weapon via a takedown, throw, or projection, and is especially useful in multiple opponent scenarios. Finally, you must adopt a mindset of focused **intensity**. Understanding each of these concepts is very important to your understanding of hard style, linear karate. Indeed, they are the very "hidden techniques" that are sought for by so many! We have quite a lot to examine, so let's get started.

The best way to understand any concept is to gain first hand experience by experimenting with it yourself. O Sensei was fond of saying, "You hear, you forget; you see, you remember; you do, you

*understand."* This was to express to teachers that talking about a technique was the least useful method of teaching a physical technique. Showing the student, first at full speed and then more slowly, allows them to better process and replicate the movement, but when the student actually does the technique themselves, they actually feel the movement for themselves, allowing them a much deeper understanding than could ever be achieved through observation alone. Therefore, it is imperative that you investigate each of these concepts yourself over several sessions if you are ever to understand them, and in most cases, over several years before you can claim any sort of proficiency in their execution.

To help you assimilate the concepts we will look at each separately, although you will notice that there is much overlap between them. Each is a small component in a holistic approach to making your body into an effective weapon of karate-do.

## Chung Chi

In the martial arts you must learn to use your body's energy. *Chung chi* is a Tai Chi term for "middle energy", that is, neither too little nor too much. I first became aware of this concept through my training in Wing Chun Kung Fu, where it was referred to as "forward flowing energy", and it has become an integral part of everything that I do in all the different "styles" that I study. In fact, proper use of your body's energy is basic to the proper performance of all martial arts. In karate kata we can see the practitioner almost always moving into the opponent, taking the initiative by jamming the incoming attack before swiftly counter attacking. This is the basic strategy of the Taikyoku and Pinan kata. The strategies and tactics of moving into the opponent's attack must be thoroughly examined if one expects to find any meaning in these hard style forms. This is actually very easy to understand and utilize in comparison to the strategies and tactics of soft styles which aim to quietly intercept, combine with, and redirect an opponent's energy, which requires not merely the mastery of forward flowing energy, but the mastery of a multitude of energy circuits moving in all directions.



In Tai Chi, the concept of chung chi is taught by visualizing your body's energy emanating from the area of the kidneys, then flowing evenly throughout the rest of the body. Half of the energy flows up your torso to split evenly down each arm. The other half of the energy flows evenly down both legs into the ground. You are rooted and strong, but not immobile or tense. In both Tai Chi Chuan and Wing Chun kung fu, the strategy is to make cohesion with the opponent, allowing you to sense his body's weaknesses in structure and alignment through direct contact (touch) and then counterattack by flowing through holes sensed in the opponent's guard. Both styles are expressing the same concept, only in slightly different ways. In Wing Chun, the energy is combined with centerline principle and channeled directly into the opponent, thus the mis-translation of "middle energy" as "*forward flowing energy*", but again, neither too little nor too much energy is applied.

Wing Chun and Tai Chi lack one thing that karate possesses, however, and that is power generated through forward momentum. Once you have an understanding of the more static version of chung chi, you can learn to flow your energy forward through your stance and into the opponent using the dramatic footwork characteristic of karate. This forward movement of your body, combined with an inner feeling of chung chi, turn your body into something of a tank, allowing you to use the weight of your body to its greatest advantage. You might not be invincible, but you should have the feeling of being "armored" and able to exert your will upon the opponent.

This brings us to another interesting aspect of chung chi. Could chi, or ki in Japanese, transcend the physical? Professor Ernie Cates recounted how he used it to win his judo matches before he ever entered the ring, by "ki-ing" his opponent with his eyes. His technique served him well until the day that he entered the ring to find his opponent ki-ing him back!

## **Speed and Momentum**

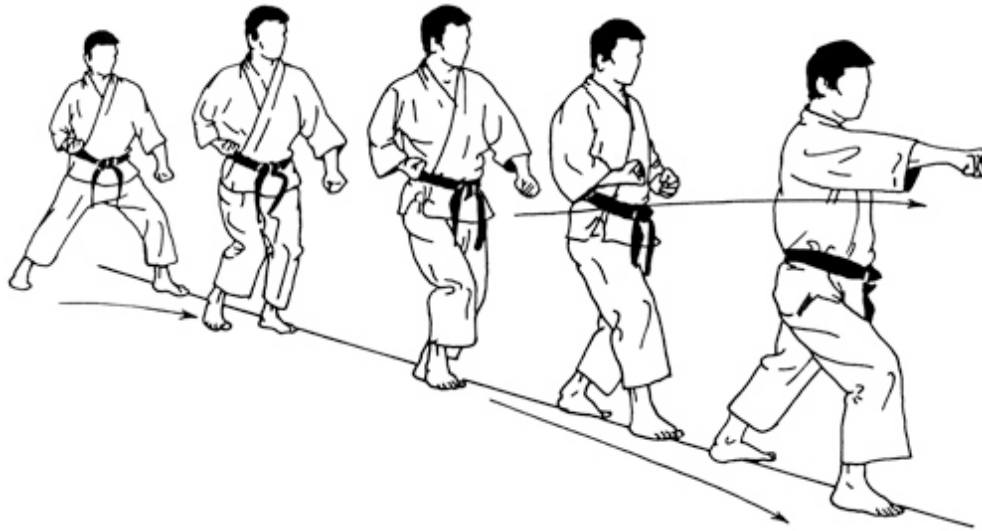
If I throw a bullet at your chest, it might hurt a bit. If I shoot it at you with a slingshot, it will hurt a lot more. If I shoot that same bullet at you with a gun, it could easily kill you. The difference is speed, and the key to speed is relaxation.

To understand speed, you must understand how the body makes each motion. Every action involves the tensing of muscles, but not all muscles are needed for every motion. Protagonistic muscles are those muscle groups that help you make a particular motion, while antagonistic muscles work *against* your intended motion and must remain relaxed in order for you to be fast. Since each movement requires different muscle groups, you must, through self-exploration, examine and identify which muscles are used to execute each technique, and learn to relax those muscles that are not contributing to the technique. The focus at the end of a strike (*kime*) comes from the sudden tensing of the antagonistic muscles, acting as a "brake" to stop your technique. This tensing of the whole body at the moment of impact brings the power to a sudden halt, creating a focused strike.

Even when executed with perfect technique, the speed of your muscles has an upper limit. The only way to add further speed to the strike is to add momentum by moving your entire body. Imagine for a moment that you can throw a ball at 50 miles per hour. If you get in a car moving at 50 miles an hour and then throw the ball out of the window ahead of the car, the ball will now be

moving at close to 100 miles per hour. This is how momentum of your body can add speed to your strike.

You must move your body perpendicularly to the target so the power generated from movement can be directed along the attacking limb and into the opponent. This is the ingredient that made karate unique among Asian martial arts. The use of the legs and bold footwork seen in the Taikyoku and Pinan kata get your entire body moving quickly and powerfully behind the strike, generating tremendous power.



## Force Summation and the Kinetic Chain

The primary tactic of hard style, linear karate, the one that has made karate so effective, is hitting with debilitating power. Basic physics teaches us that force equals mass times acceleration. While this is relevant on a basic scale, when dealing with static masses and constant forces, the martial arts aspect of this basic law is perhaps better understood in terms of momentum and energy transfer through what biomechanics refers to as the *kinetic chain*. Each element added to the kinetic chain adds to the overall energy expenditure to deliver the strike. What techniques aim to do is maximize the energy output of the kinetic chain through most efficient use of body structure. While this still requires an amount of energy that is not insubstantial, the output is maximized through efficient motion gained through proper training. Therefore, you must first learn to commit as much of your body's mass to the technique as possible, then work on increasing the acceleration of each strike.

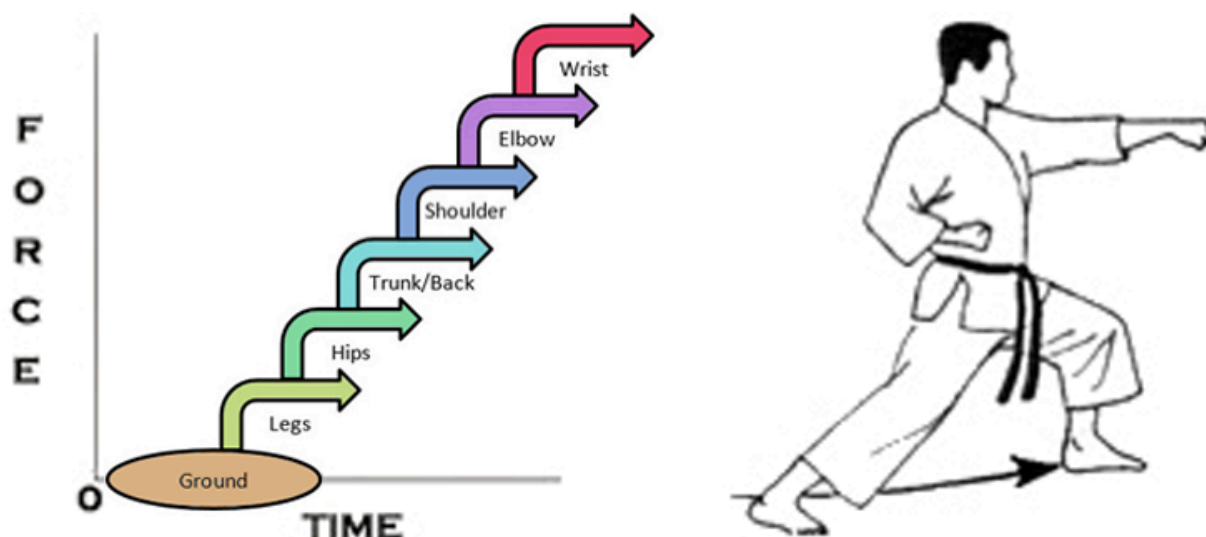
Force summation is aimed at getting maximum results with maximum efficiency. You are acquiring, storing (or in the case of momentum, "generating"), and ultimately transferring energy and momentum to your target. When you strike a target, you apply an impulse to the target, which is defined as a force exerted for a certain time interval. This impulse is directly correlated with the target mass and the change in velocity of the target produced by your strike. Therefore, the faster and larger the impulse generated, the greater the transfer of energy.

There are two methods for generating this impulse: bottom up, as in karate (utilizing muscle power and linear structure), or top down, as typically seen in western boxing (utilizing gravity and a twisting motion).

Bottom up begins with the rear heel and, as you execute the technique, each muscle group adds its own power to the technique. No energy should be lost on other trajectories (vertically by coming up in your stance or out the back door through the back heel); all energy must funnel directly into the technique. The striking surface (hand, foot, elbow, knee, etc.) is merely the vehicle used to convey the power of the body.

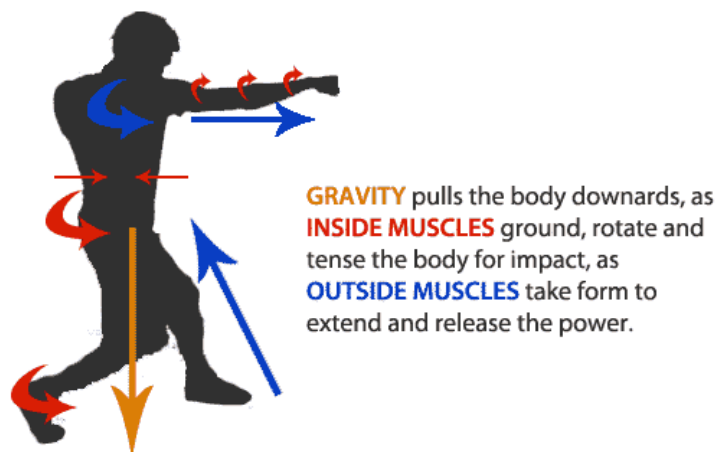
When applying karate's version of generating power through the kinetic chain, say shifting from a diagonal stance to a forward stance as you execute a lunge punch, you need to first root yourself in a strong stance, with the rear knee bent allowing it to act as a compressed spring. Begin by keeping your feet flat on the floor and driving off the rear heel, which is firmly rooted on the ground. This acts as the master link, or anchor, for your the kinetic chain. If it is not fastened properly, the chain can't maximize efficiency. Therefore, any movement of the heel, such as pivoting on the ball of your foot, will cause precious energy to escape "out the back door." It is important to note that the toe end of your foot may need to rotate slightly forward to allow your hip to turn freely into the technique, but be sure to pivot on your heel to maintain a solid connection with the floor.

From the heel, feel your body begin turning into the technique, each muscle group adding its energy to the final forward energy. The calf flexes, driving the knee forward, not upward. As this energy flows up your leg past the knee, the quadriceps flex, adding their tremendous strength to the forward energy that turns the hip, which rotates your torso on the spine. Your backbone acts as a pivot point around which your body turns smoothly as a single unit, tensing the muscles of the abdomen, chest, and back in such a way as not to inhibit the flow of energy, but rather to aid in conveying all the power of the legs to the shoulders. From the shoulders the energy is conveyed down the lead arm and finally through the fist and into the target. The motion of each body part contributes its own power to the technique: the straightening of the back leg, the rotation of the hips, the rotation of the torso and shoulders, the straightening of the striking arm, and the last second rotation of the fist as it makes contact with the target.



For comparison purposes, in the art of Western Boxing, as well as Muay Thai kickboxing, power usually is generated not from the bottom up, but from the top down utilizing the force of gravity to put power behind the punch (an exception to this is the uppercut punch which drives upward from the ground). To begin to understand the concept, we need to look at the way we walk.

The act of walking is perhaps better described as controlled falling. As you take a step you push off of your supporting foot to begin shifting your body's weight forward of your center. The rear foot then swings through to catch the body's weight and begin the process again. If the receiving foot is prohibited from moving forward for any reason, you "trip." When you trip, you fall forward (or sometimes backwards) with the full force of gravity pulling your body's mass down, as well as any forward (or backward) momentum you had at the time of the unfortunate incident. This can make for a hard fall. In boxing, the idea is to drop the body's weight in a controlled fall. You want to convey your body's mass and momentum combined with the force of gravity into the punch just before your receiving foot catches your body's weight. The result is a short, controlled, spiraling fall that pivots the torso on the spine then converts the rotational energy of the torso into a trajectory perpendicular to the target. This move was mastered by champion boxer Jack Dempsey and is known as the "drop step."



The "perpendicular slide" is another method of adding momentum and mass to your strikes. Energy is best transferred into the target when it meets the target at a right angle, allowing the maximum amount of energy to be transferred into the target. By sliding your body perpendicularly to the target as you strike, you can add significant force to the strike. Karate uses the perpendicular slide to develop forward momentum, attacking the target from the front with a linear technique such as a lunge or reverse punch. Muay Thai kickboxing uses the same concept to turn their roundhouse kicks into devastating attacks. The concept could be illustrated by visualizing a young man hanging out of a stationary vehicle and swinging a baseball bat at a mailbox versus swinging that same bat at that mailbox from a moving car. The latter would produce considerably more power than the first, because the forward momentum of the car increases the power generated by the swing.



## Alignment and Structure

I became acutely aware of alignment and structure while training in Wing Chun under Sensei Mike Rothman in the mid to late 1990s. He spent many hours teaching me the single and double hand traditional chi sao drills, always with an emphasis on holding the centerline. At first I primarily used my muscles to give strength to my techniques, and I quickly began experiencing pain and fatigue. I could not do the drills for very long before I needed a break. Gradually, I learned to back up my techniques with proper body structure and alignment rather than muscular tension, at which point our practice sessions went on for hours. At first it seemed Sensei Mike would stop me on every move to make subtle adjustments to my stance (usually tucking my hips under) as well as my hand techniques ("Get that elbow on your centerline!"). Slowly, painstakingly, I began to feel and understand what I was being shown. I learned to channel pressure applied to my block down my torso, through my legs, and into the ground. Sensei Mike is a medical doctor, and took a scientific approach to his teaching. There was no mysterious ki needed to do these techniques, just an understanding and development of proper alignment and structure. Your body's structure is not unlike that of a bridge or an arch. In winter climates, flat roofs are not as structurally sound as slanted roofs that direct the weight of snow to the walls and down to the ground. The secret lies in gradually angling the structure so that the weight of the load is properly distributed and directed smoothly to the ground.

This can be illustrated with a lunge punch in forward stance. Have a partner stand in front of you and push sideways on your fist. You will find it very difficult to resist sideways or vertical pressures against your fist because there is little structure to support your arm in these directions. The load can only be resisted by the muscles of your shoulder and armpit, which get effectively weaker as you move down towards the hand because your arm acts a lever. A lever is a simple machine, and the longer the lever, the less weight is required to overcome an opposing force. But if you have your partner press directly inward against the first two knuckles of your fist, along the same trajectory as your intended strike, you should be able to align your body in such a way that he can push as hard as he likes and you can resist the force with very little muscular tension. When you are properly aligned you should feel the force of his push flow down your body to your rear heel, where it meets the solid base of the ground.



## Generalized Defense

The concept of “lower block” is less than 100 years old. The technique was certainly practiced before that time, but it was not seen as a block. It was, and remains, a wide sweeping motion that allows you to intercept and neutralize a wide variety of incoming attacks. Herein lay the concept of *generalized defense*. If you don’t have to respond to a specific attack with a specific block, you can cut down your reaction time significantly by using a single technique to counter a variety of common attacks. For example, a lower block starts off much like an outer block, which can intercept head level attacks and then sweep the attacking limb downwards, possibly trapping it against the opponent’s body while clearing the upper line for a speedy counterattack. The same blocking motion can be used to intercept a kick, preferably above the knee of the kicking leg. When blocking to the inside (the live side), the lower block movement can be used to block the opponent’s knee with your elbow while simultaneously counterattacking with the fist of the blocking arm to the opponent’s groin. The lower block also makes an excellent defense against a variety of grabbing attacks. Against a single or even a double wrist grab, powerfully slam your lower block into the opponent’s wrist or forearm as you sharply withdraw the grabbed arm in a hikite (reaction hand) motion. Against a choke, you can attack the opponent’s elbows from either the inside or out with either the outer block or lower block, each actually part of a single motion. In this regard, one need only become a master of the lower block to be able to adequately defend oneself. This may be an exaggeration, but the efficiency of being able to apply a single motion against a variety of common attacks initiated with either left or right, hand or foot, as well as grabs, gives the defender an advantage. The defense plan has been formulated before the attack has even begun, with each possible outcome practiced and followed up by a speedy and effective counterattack.

## Double Blocking Principle

Different than a double block, the double blocking principle is a method of applying the basic blocks that dramatically increases the efficiency of your technique by incorporating your reaction arm actively into the technique.

Sensei Joe Montague introduced me to the double blocking principle in the early 1990’s. The concept was simple, but it was an absolute epiphany for me. The idea is that the chamber motion acts as the initial intercepting block or parry, with the actual “block” acting as a clearing motion or even a counterattack. Let’s take the inner middle block as an example. The inner middle block as traditionally taught (2D) is difficult to apply against a strong, fast attack. The outer block is both faster and stronger. Now imagine the chambered position for the inner middle block. Your reaction arm crosses your body much like an outer block, which is what it can be! Blocking with the outer block is fast and strong, but it has the disadvantage of crossing the centerline of your body, leaving you susceptible to being trapped. Therefore, the inner middle block motion quickly clears the attacking arm after the initial block with the reaction hand, and can even go on to strike the opponent all in the same motion. If your initial outer block led into a grab, the following inner middle block could hyperextend, or even break, the elbow joint. Blocking with the reaction arm also allows you a good opportunity to grab the attacking limb in order to apply hikite and add devastating power to the next, and perhaps final technique. Double blocking is twice as fast as trying to block an attack with a two dimensional inner middle block alone (which also provides no counterattacking motion). The double blocking principle makes your blocks

more efficient and practical and can be easily applied to hard and soft versions of the lower, middle, rising, and knife hand blocks. It can also lead into opportunities to apply hikite (reaction hand) techniques (see next section).

This principle can also be seen in Wing Chun, where the initial block, usually a pak sao, crosses the center but is then quickly cleared from below with a technique such as tan sao. Double blocking principle is a good way to lead into Wing Chun related drills such as the three and four-step punching drills.

## Hikite (Reaction Hand)

The reaction hand plays an important role in hitting hard. The concept of *hikite* is related to *double blocking principle* and to the concept of *basing* (see next section). If you simply punch an unsupported opponent, much of the power can be lost in horizontal motion away from the technique as his body moves with the punch, dissipating the force of your strike. However, if you grab the opponent first and hold him, you are effectively basing him, keeping him from moving and therefore allowing more force to be applied to the target. If you pull the opponent into you sharply as you retract the grabbing arm to the chambered position on your ribs, you begin adding to the force of your punch.

To look at it another way, if you punch an unbased opponent with 100 theoretical units of energy and he moves as you hit him, he may absorb only 50 units of your total energy in the impact of your strike (even less if he purposely rolls with the punch). However, if you hold him still as you hit him, all 100 units can be transferred, and if you can get him moving toward you by pulling him in with your reaction hand, you might be able to increase the force to 150 units.



It is extremely difficult to grab an opponent's attacking limb directly. However, the double blocking principle provides us with the perfect vehicle for achieving a solid grab on the opponent's arm (or leg) in order to apply a strong hikite. When you look at even the basic kata in this light, they become effective fighting forms; blocking with the chamber arm, leading into a counterattack and grab with the "blocking" hand, then pulling the opponent into a devastating counterattack, finishing him in "one blow" before recycling him into the next opponent or group of opponents.

Hikite can serve other purposes as well. O Sensei Dong Ngo taught that a straight pullback of your grabbing arm is only a two-dimensional application of hikite. If you grab and *twist* the opponent as you withdraw your hand into the typical palm up position at the ribs, you can apply kuzushi as well, breaking the opponent's balance as you counterattack.

## Basing

An opponent needs to be supported in order to hit him with maximum efficiency. It is the principle on which hikite gets its power, and it is an important concept to understand when your objective is to hit your opponent with maximum force. As explained in the section on hikite, if you punch an unsupported opponent, much of the power of your strike will be lost in horizontal motion away from the technique as his body starts moving with the punch, dissipating the total force transferred into the target. If the opponent is leaning against a wall, however, his body cannot move away and therefore receives the full brunt of the blow. Since it is not always convenient to ask our opponent to stand against the wall so that we may hit him, we must find other, more subtle ways of basing. These include the concept of hikite outlined in the last section, as well as the practice of grabbing behind an opponent's head before delivering a punch or roundhouse elbow strike to the face ("*mortar & pestle*" technique). But basing works in other ways as well. You can use the ground along with your opponent's own leg strength and body structure to base him against downward techniques, such as an axe kick or downward elbow strike. In the same way, you can use gravity to base him against upward techniques such as an upper cut punch or front snap kick. Your opponent's own forward momentum can serve as a base as well, increasing the power of your punch like two cars running into each other head on.

Here are some practical applications of basing that you can look for. After knocking an opponent to the ground with a throw or foot sweep, use the ground as a base as you punch downward or drop your knee into his floating ribs. If you are near a wall push the opponent into the wall and follow up with a punch driven into the opponent perpendicularly to the wall, ensuring that all of the energy of the strike is conveyed into the target.

An unorthodox approach to basing is the double hit. The double hit allows you to get even more bang for your buck using stationary objects such as walls and floors. For example, if the wall behind the opponent is close, but the opponent is not yet touching it, you can drive your strike into the unsupported opponent, whose body will move in the direction of the strike. Any power that is lost in the initial hit can be reclaimed as the opponent impacts the wall (or other obstacle).

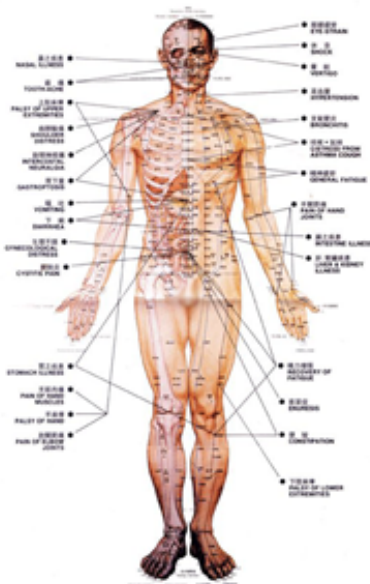
To further increase the effectiveness, imagine that your assailant is standing in front of the outside corner of a wall. If you hit him, his head will snap back into the corner of the wall, which concentrates all the force into the small surface area of the corner's ridge.

A Russian Sambo practitioner that I was fortunate to have trained with taught me a similar technique (by doing it to me) where he would throw me to the mat, and just as my body rebounded up off the ground, he would land *on me* with all of his body weight, smashing me back to earth. The result was an incredibly effective double impact that often left me breathless.



## Vital Point Striking

Vital point striking is an art unto itself. It can be an incredibly complex subject when taken to the extent of incorporating the multitude of acupressure points utilized in Oriental medicine. However, it can also be simplified to the principle of hitting the opponent where they will feel it most. Some parts of the body, typically the back and outer surfaces of the arms and legs, are less vulnerable than the softer inner surfaces of the arms, legs, and torso (belly). Vital point striking is essential for smaller people, especially women and children. A child can attempt to defend himself with a punch to an opponent's face, but will more likely succeed with a finger strike to the opponent's eyes. The second attack has a greater chance of debilitating the opponent, especially if the opponent is much larger than the defender, because the defender struck to a more vulnerable target. In the same regard, you will get greater results from punching someone in the solar plexus than the sternum, or chopping an opponent's neck instead of his collarbone. Striking to more vulnerable targets usually results in greater damage or pain to the opponent.



Some believe that vital point striking has been lost in large part due to the practice of sparring with padded gear. Padded gear effectively nullifies your ability to transfer your power precisely into a small, specific target, and so schools that focus primarily on point sparring for competition had little need to practice these techniques. However, in practical self-defense, reality based vital point striking is usually more effective than point sparring techniques.

Pressure is the total amount of force generated, divided by the unit area over which it is dispersed. A smaller striking surface will result in more pounds of pressure per square inch, so your aim should be to maximize your force while minimizing your striking area, resulting in maximum pressure being transferred into your target. For example, punching with the first two knuckles of your clenched fist allows you to hit harder than if you strike with the full front of your fist, and kicking with the ball of the foot results in a more powerful strike than striking with your instep (top of the foot).



## Chi Gerk

Chi gerk is the art of sticky legs, and it is related to the more familiar chi sao, or sticky hand principle of Wing Chun. The term “sticky” is meant to describe the action of maintaining cohesion with the opponent once you’ve made contact with him. Use your close proximity and your ability to check the attacker’s movements to prevent him from launching an effective counter attack, keeping you in control. Chi gerk techniques tie up your opponent’s legs with your legs, unbalancing him and leaving him vulnerable and unable to initiate an effective counter attack.

The most common chi gerk techniques are variations of common footsweeps performed with the arch, instep, and heel. Lifting and pulling with the legs is also common, as seen in judo’s osoto-gari, kosoto-gari, ouchi-gari, and kouchi-gari reaping techniques.

Chi gerk techniques often utilize stances, like the forward stance and hook (dinh) stance, which allow you to simultaneously immobilize the opponent’s foot while you apply pressure to his knee. The forward stance is an example of an outward tension stance, and can be used to lock and hyperextend the opponent’s lead knee backwards. The hook stance is a classic inward tension stance, and can be used to buckle your opponent’s knee from the side or the rear. In both cases your lead foot needs to entwine the opponent’s lead foot in such a way that he can not move it easily, giving you the leverage to apply your technique.

The trick is to apply chi gerk techniques, as well as counter them when they are being done to you, while maintaining your alignment, structure, and ability to fight.



## Recycling

Bad guys, like wolves, tend to run in packs. If we are to make our kata applications realistic, we must continually train for a scenario involving multiple attackers. In a situation where you have several opponents, you will need to even out the odds by keeping them busy doing anything *but* attacking you. One common strategy used to contend with multiple opponents is to stack them, lining them up so that they can only come at you one at a time. Against two attackers this can be achieved through clever footwork, but when you are surrounded or fighting in tight quarters, clever footwork will not be enough. Recycling is the act of grabbing an opponent whom you have momentarily stunned, using him to shield you against other attackers, taking him down to create an obstacle, and/or creating a projectile by hurling him into the other opponents. Recycling is an excellent application for any turn in a kata, as any change in direction usually indicates engaging another opponent. Throwing one attacker into another is much like performing a judo throw as it can only be achieved by first unbalancing him. This is usually accomplished by striking the attacker prior to attempting to move him, then using your center to efficiently swing him around. Once you have him moving, his own mass becomes a weapon...your weapon. As the kata suggests, you may need to turn him 90, 180, or even 270 degrees before you release him, sending him crashing into his buddy (or perhaps into a wall or down a flight of stairs if no second opponent is available).

## Intensity

I think that the one most distinguishing factor in an effective performance, be it in kata, sparring, board breaking, self-defense, or whatever, is **intensity**. Without *intensity* a martial artist seems disconnected from his work, and any martial endeavor that he attempts to undertake will lack an essential ingredient. So, what exactly makes a performance “intense”? I think I am safe in saying that it begins with the eyes. A look of determination, of intention, of absolute seriousness will begin to spark the right tone throughout the entire body. The mind then focuses your will like a magnifying glass, visualizing, concentrating every fiber of your being to a single task. I have come to describe it as “flipping a switch” because that is how it feels to me. It’s not tense, as tension will slow your reaction time; it’s more a clearing of your mind while at the same time visualizing yourself completing your goal. One moment I can be lighthearted and laughing, but when it comes time to compete or perform, my whole demeanor changes, my intent focuses on whatever task is at hand. This intent can be seen through the eyes; it is where you begin to dominate your opponent, as if you are going to overcome him solely with your will.

When the mind is completely focused, the intensity will then begin to show physically through the body in your performance. Moves become quicker and stronger, with more focus, reflecting the intent of the performer. Without spirit and intensity, the martial arts are reduced to mere rote movements with little or no practical, effective application. In his epic film *Enter the Dragon*, Bruce Lee described intensity as “Emotional content...not anger. It is like a finger pointing to the moon. Do not look at the finger, or you will miss all the heavenly glory.” In this analogy, the physical performance is only the finger, pointing at the artful expression of the person inside.

Strive to perform with intensity, and through this small window begin to learn to LIVE as intensely as you practice, increasing the quality of your life experience and enriching the lives and experiences of others. It’s this quality that makes the martial arts unique as a vehicle for personal growth and continued evolution.

