



Media Spotlight

MARTIAL ARTS & THE CHRISTIAN

A SPECIAL REPORT

by Albert James Dager

Martial arts is a term that applies to all forms of combat training, whether the more popular oriental forms such as karate, aikido, judo, and jujitsu, or the Occidental or Western forms such as fencing, boxing, and archery. Most are traceable to ancient warfare techniques which have little or no tactical use against today's modern weapons. Empty hands, swords, and bows and arrows are no match against automatic weapons.

Yet in terms of street-fighting or personal self-defense against aggressors armed with nothing more than knives or clubs, an experienced martial arts student may stand a chance of survival. This is especially true of those schooled in the Oriental martial arts, the forms with which this study is concerned.

For a concise description of Oriental martial arts we quote world-class karate instructor Bruce Tegner in his book, *Karate: Beginner to Black Belt*.

"Though there are literally hundreds of styles of fighting and many more hundreds of substyles, all fighting methods can be classified according to their use of a fairly small group of basic techniques. They are: weaponless hand and foot blows, throwing and tripping techniques, immobilization and twisting of the joints, the use of 'found' weapons such as sticks or stones, or the use of crafted weapons. Some of the martial arts use a small number of techniques from several or all of the categories, combining the material in various ways to produce the various specialties."¹

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECT

Although physical in their outward expression, all the Oriental martial arts have at their root a philosophy antithetical to Christianity. A good example (due to its overwhelming popularity) is karate, from which most other modern martial arts forms have sprung.

Karate—literally "*empty hand*"—is a generic term encompassing the many styles of martial arts which primarily utilize hand and foot blows.² Among the Chinese styles are *kung fu*, or *gung fu*, *wu shu*, and *pa kua*. *Tai kwan do* and *hapkido* are among the Korean styles. Okinawa lays claim to *Okinawa-te*.³ Common to all styles of karate is the use of a relatively small group of hand blows and kicking techniques.⁴ Adherents claim that "Karate is the most violent method of weaponless self-defense known to man."⁵ Some have proposed that the only way to determine the "best" style of karate would be to

match players in a fight to the death.⁶

"Karate has a unique and unusual history. It was handed down centuries ago from Zen Master to Buddhist monk by word of mouth and always in strict secrecy. Even today everything done in karate can be traced back to some principle of Zen Buddhism."⁷

One of the most important figures in karate's history was an Indian Buddhist priest named Bodhidharma who, in the 6th century A.D. in China, synthesized karate techniques and Yoga meditation in order to unite mind, spirit, and body.

Bodhidharma taught meditation and Chinese Kempo, the direct forerunner of modern karate, at the Shaolin-ssu monastery. It was this religious connection with the ancient Shaolin style of Kempo upon which the Zen sect was founded.⁸

Although many, especially here in the United States, tend to disregard much of the Zen Buddhist philosophy in their training, some impact of that philosophy is made upon every student of the martial arts. This is because Zen meditation and yoga-like breathing exercises—whether for thirty seconds or for two hours before and after every practice session—are an integral part of the Oriental martial arts program. If one truly aspires to master the art of karate he cannot ignore the spiritual implications.

It has been stated by masters of karate that only ten percent of their ability to perform seemingly superhuman feats comes from physical power. The main source of their ability is spiritual.

"Always more vital to karate than technique or strength is the spiritual element that lets you move and act with complete freedom. In striving to enter the proper frame of mind Zen meditation is of great importance. . . . The man who wants to walk the way of karate cannot afford to neglect Zen and spiritual training."⁹

"Karate is a mental and moral exercise, indeed, almost a spiritual experience. In each practice session there is a concerted effort to unite mind, spirit and body just as Bodhidharma sought to do with Zen priests almost 2,000 years ago."¹⁰

"Karate is Zen—so says Master Oyama and many other karate masters. Zen is a school of Buddhism that has been called the Religion of Immediate Reality. The aim of Zen is to awaken the student to his true self and thus bring about a high degree of self knowledge through inward meditation. Zen students

seek peace of mind through an enlightened awakening of an intuitive wisdom which they feel is dormant now in all people. Zen meditation tries to achieve "no mindedness" which may be acquired by concentration and special breathing exercises which are taught to advanced karate students. Karate when combined with Zen meditation can appreciably assist the student's quest for peace of mind and equanimity in the face of conflict and tension."¹¹

EVANGELIZATION IN THE MEDIA

Because of their promise to instill unity of mind, spirit, and body for mastery over one's self as well as others, the Oriental martial arts have great appeal to the Western mind fraught with tension due to our materialistic, acquisitive society. Motion picture and television exploitation of these violent forms of expression has enhanced that appeal to a great degree.

But while the media have stimulated great interest in the martial arts, they have also distorted the limitations of martial arts techniques. Great leaps over high walls and onto elevated platforms are effected through the use of hidden trampolines. Sound effects enhance the impact of any blows. Through skillful editing of every frame of film or portion of video tape, the portrayal of superhuman achievements romanticizes and exaggerates the abilities of the martial arts masters beyond their genuine limits.

The interest of many young people has been piqued by media hype to the point where they have begun to emulate these screen characters, often with disastrous results. Even some experts in the martial arts have become concerned that the effect of media "overkill" has induced youngsters to practice such stunts which, without proper training, can be dangerous.

Another aspect of the martial arts glamorized by the media is the apparent paradox between "inner peace" and self-control, and the brutal mayhem displayed by media characters like Chuck Norris, the late Bruce Lee, and David Carradine of TV's *Kung Fu* fame. Their characters are those of basically "peaceable men." They don't seek violence. It just seems to come their way. And, of course, they're always ready for it.

But that much is true to life. For those who practice violence will consciously or subconsciously seek out opportunities to engage in violence. And this seeming paradox between "inner peace" and brutality cannot be fully comprehended without understanding the sinful nature of man. For despite all his claims of love for peace, in his heart man loves violence.

WHAT'S THE MOTIVE?

Christians who desire to become involved in the martial arts should first examine their hearts and ask God to

