



# Media Spotlight

## MARTIAL ARTS & THE CHRISTIAN

A SPECIAL REPORT

by Albert James Dager

**M**artial 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."<sup>1</sup>

### 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.<sup>2</sup> 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*.<sup>3</sup> Common to all styles of karate is the use of a relatively small group of hand blows and kicking techniques.<sup>4</sup> Adherents claim that "Karate is the most violent method of weaponless self-defense known to man."<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

"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."<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup>

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."<sup>9</sup>

"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."<sup>10</sup>

"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."<sup>11</sup>

### 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

reveal to them their true motives. What is it that motivates a person to become attracted to martial arts in the first place?

Since the spiritual implications of these violent actions are withheld from the uninitiated, it's safe to assume that violence itself is the motivating factor.

Why does any child beg his parents to let him take martial arts lessons? Because he wants to learn "inner peace" and "self-control"? No. It's because he fantasizes using those skills to punch out others—usually those weaker than he.

His claim of a need to be able to defend himself is a cop-out. Once he learns his martial arts skills he will fairly hope someone will pick on him.

Initially, under the tutorage of an ethical martial arts instructor, he will be taught that his skills are never to be used except as a last resort to protect himself in a life-threatening situation. But that doesn't alter his motive for becoming involved in the first place. Nor will Zen meditation alter his sinful human nature.

According to testimonies of several Christians who were once involved in the martial arts, there are few among those actively seeking its destructive skills who don't relish bloodletting. There are few who would, in a crisis, seek a means of escape rather than confrontation.

How then can any Christian justify his involvement in martial arts?

He can't. Not even by claiming that such involvement is for exercise and to learn discipline. There are other methods by which these results may be obtained, methods not associated with harmful violence and false doctrine. And if nothing else, any Christian's involvement—even for only the physical conditioning—may cause others to become involved. And despite the stronger brother's insistence that one should engage only in the physical and not the Zen aspect of martial arts, if only one weaker brother stumbles, the stronger will have to answer to God.

The very nature of these violent forms of expression runs counter to God's Word. The Zen meditation provides a false "inner peace" that is at best a counterfeit of the peace only God can give. It merely masks the underlying anger and hatred inherent in every human heart, and promotes an ungodly self-righteousness.

There is only one source of true inner peace—the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). It's the peace of God which passes all understanding that empowers the Christian to love even his enemies, to do good to those that spitefully use him, and to turn the other cheek when confronted by one who hates him for his faith.

While there may be occasions when self-defense or the defense of others seems in order, it shouldn't be the Christian's lifestyle to practice for violence. Such concern for self-defense betrays the fear resident within one's heart, proving

his lack of faith in God to protect him.

We are not to live in fear, expending inordinate amounts of time and money preparing to defend ourselves against personal attack. This is especially true where we will be required to place trust in ourselves—rather than in God—by utilizing Zen meditation techniques.

True safety is not in our own ability to defend ourselves. "*The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*" (Hebrews 13:6).

This is not to say that we can never take steps to defend ourselves. Should we or our loved ones be attacked for any reason other than our faith we should trust God to make a way out as He sees fit, whether by physical retaliation or fleet feet. If we suffer for our faith we should seek God's power to remain strong enough in our convictions to suffer even unto death (Revelation 2:10). But the more we take precautions motivated by fear, the less we'll be able to stand in the face of physical threat.

We can choose between the inner peace provided by God's Spirit, or the false "peace" tinged with fear that marks the martial arts philosophy; and we can choose between the self-control developed by the Holy Spirit, or the self-control of Zen. The latter is no match for that of the Holy Spirit. For once the self-control of the martial arts student is exhausted, the result is the unleashing of the considerable rage that has been suppressed by nothing more than self-effort. And then where is the "peace" that once occupied his mind?

Whereas the Zen meditation of martial arts is utilized in an attempt to instill peace and self-control in one's mind, it can never instill these qualities genuinely in the human spirit. Only God's peace and self-control can be instilled in the spirit and only through true humility.

And while God calls us to humility, the martial arts cater to human pride. For even in gaining mastery over one's self through Zen, it is still recognized as an accomplishment of self. That self-pride then manifests itself through a desire to prove oneself superior. Thus the secret yearning in the heart of the martial arts student is for opportunities to test his skills, effected by placing himself in the position of inviting attack from others.

#### A SPREADING EVIL

The proliferation of karate schools in America continues at a rapid pace. Hundreds of thousands of Americans are studying karate alone, not to mention other forms of martial arts.

The military and many local law enforcement agencies have adopted martial arts as a means of improving performance in hand-to-hand conflict.

Schools and universities offer classes in martial arts.

The Y.M.C.A. long ago divested itself

of the Christian ethic upon which it was founded, and has for years offered courses in Yoga, martial arts, and other Eastern mystical practices.

Even some fundamental churches have provided demonstrations in martial arts in order to attract people to their programs.

"If Karate in the West continues to grow at anything like its recent rate, indications are that it will become a thoroughly integrated part of Western culture and . . . will be adapted by the occidental to suit his own particular physical and mental characteristics."<sup>12</sup>

#### BREAKING THE HOLD

As Eastern mystical philosophies continue to proliferate in our Western culture it remains for the Christian to stand firm in his faith, refusing to allow the enemy of his soul to dictate through mass appeal what should be the areas of influence in his life. Christian parents, especially, must guard their children against the appeal of violence that could lead them into the more dangerous areas of pagan religious practices. (Whenever anyone submits to Eastern mystical meditation techniques he is opening himself up to demonic activity.)

For those parents who have already allowed these influences to touch their children, and for those adults who have involved themselves in the martial arts, repentance and renunciation of their involvement is in order. They should not sell or give away any of the artifacts connected with the martial arts, whether trophies, garments, or anything used in their practices. Rather, they should burn them as a display of their complete dissociation with them, and as a means to expunge any demonic activity to which they may have been attached.

Parents may have a difficult time explaining to their children why they may no longer be involved, but prayer and fasting can help in seeking God's wisdom and the proper approach to undoing any damage already done. □

1. Bruce Tegner, *Karate: Beginner to Black Belt* (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1983) p. 1.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. Daeshik Kim and Tom W. Leland, *Karate And Personal Defense* (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Co., 1971), p. v.

6. *Karate: Beginner to Black Belt*, p. 3.

7. *Karate And Personal Defense*, p. 1.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Masatatsu Oyama, *Vital Karate* (Tokyo: Japan Publications Trading Co., Ltd., 1983), p. 8.

10. *Karate And Personal Defense*, p. 4.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

12. Steve Arniel and Bryan Dowler, *Modern Karate* (London: Kave & Ward, 1980), p. 1.



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