

# Shoto Niju Kun 1

By Teruyuki Okazaki

In a way – in a very important way – this principle gets to the very essence of what we are trying to accomplish as karate-ka, in both our daily training and the way we live our lives. The Japanese word *rei*, literally translated, means salute, salutation or bow. That is easy enough to understand. But if we are to understand the true meaning of *rei*, we must understand the meaning, the significance, of the bow.

When you bow to someone, keep in mind you are communicating to that person in a wordless action. I have travelled all over the world, and I have many experiences in different cultures, but one thing I have learned is that everyone is the same. Human beings are human beings. We come to learn this through communicating with one another. If, then, you are communicating to someone with a bow, in order to communicate clearly and effectively, you must bow properly, with proper form and proper feeling.

Think about it. If we learn another language, we learn how to pronounce words a certain way. If we're trying to learn how to speak Spanish, or French, we can't just say, "Oh, I'm an American, I don't want to pronounce French that way." If you say that, then you can't communicate. It is the same at the dojo, when we greet each other with a bow. We communicate in this way. So we must know how to bow properly.

To understand one another, we must communicate clearly. And if we do not understand each other, we cannot help one another. Our purpose for training is to improve ourselves as individuals, and we need help from others to accomplish this. We need help from our instructors, our *senpei* ... and our opponents, too. Opponents are like instructors. We learn from them in defeat. They point out to us the weaknesses in our technique.

In tournaments, especially during sparring, many of the contestants do not bow properly. I have said this many times before: *If you do not show courtesy, you're not a real martial artist.* As a martial artist, it is more important to constantly think of Master Funakoshi's principles – so you are thinking more of how to better yourself as a person – than it is to always think, "Oh, I want to get stronger," or, "I want to be a champion." As a human being, you get older. At some point in your life, physically, you reach your peak, and you cannot get any better. But karate is for a lifetime of training, because as a person, as a human being, you can always continue to grow. And by doing so, you can help other people do the same.

I am ashamed when I see those contestants in a tournament who have forgotten about *rei*. These individuals have forgotten the true meaning of karate. They have lowered themselves to the level of the animal. Their sole purpose for participating in the competition is to win the match, and that is wrong. Karate is technically a fighting art. However, if one looks at it only on the surface, without considering the underlying principals, it is merely an act fit for animals. Karate movies depicting our art as a form of ruthless fighting appeal to the animal instinct of man. We must separate and distinguish the human being – who has intellect and reasoning power – from the animal, which acts solely on instinct. Anyone or anything that you encounter in your daily living should be thought of as your instructor, because you can always learn something – in any situation. In the act of bowing, you are communicating to someone who can help you. And as I just said, we need to understand each other so we can help each other. When we show courtesies, it helps us to understand each other.

So what is it, then, that you want to communicate when you bow? Certainly, you want to express your respect for that person. Here is someone who is able and willing to help you. That person, then, deserves your respect. Bow properly to this person, with proper form and feeling, and you communicate to that person your respect. That person understands your respect, because you have communicated it clearly. I see students, and they have good techniques. But the students who think of Master Funakoshi's principles ... they are different. I can see it. When they bow to me, I can feel it. When you bow deeply, you should feel respect in your heart. When you bow to *senpai*, you are saying from your heart, "I need more help; I need more practice." What, then, does one say with a half-hearted bow?

So I'm saying that when we bow, when we show courtesy, we should feel something in our hearts. In one sense, it is an easy thing to understand, but in another way, it takes time. You have to learn this from experience. Sometimes people don't bow for religious reasons. Bowing is not a religious expression for a martial artist. It only means, "I need more practice." When your head is down, you are showing humility. In showing respect to your instructor, your *senpei*, your opponent, or the person you encounter in everyday life, you show to that person your willingness and desire to learn from him or her, and that person will respond. That person will help you. You are showing not only respect, but humility as well, and that, too, is very important. People who have many good friends are usually people who understand the principle of *rei*. With your head down, you experience humility, and when you are humble, you see more. You are more open to learn.

## Shoto Niju Kun 1



Calligraphy by Master  
Gichin Funakoshi

*Karate-do wa rei ni hajimari rei ni owaru koto o wasureruna.  
Karate begins with a bow and finishes with a bow.*

By Teruyuki Okazaki