

Shoto Niju Kun 19

Chikara no kyojaku tai no shinshuku waza no kankyu

Do not forget: (1) strength and weakness of power; (2) contraction and expansion of body; and (3) slowness and speed of techniques

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You must always remember these things are not only for karate techniques but also for everyday life. On the surface, this principle appears to refer only to karate techniques, but Master Funakoshi is teaching us more than that. To see how, let us look closely at each point.

Strength and weakness of power. Trying to make tension at all times is not natural. Master Funakoshi is telling us that power takes many forms. It does not only exist in muscular tension. Relaxation is very important to conserve energy. It is from relaxation that tension becomes powerful. In karate it is impossible to stay tense and perform techniques properly. Life is the same way. We must learn to understand the natural rhythm and timing that is in Nature. Then we will see all the different forms that power can take. We must always strive for balance.

Expansion and contraction of the body. The body must breathe, in and out, and we must realize that expansion and contraction are natural. One is not “better” than the other. In this aspect of

executing a karate technique, here we have yet another example of opposites being two sides of the same thing. Similarly, in life, human beings must be flexible, especially in relationships. Always thinking, “I’m right, you are wrong” does not make for good communication. We need to be able to admit our faults and realize that being right or wrong is not nearly as important as being a good person. Sometimes we should exert ourselves, other times we should recede. The important thing is to maintain that inner sense of balance, so that we know which action is appropriate in a given situation.

Lowness and speed of the technique. This involves understanding the importance of a strong foundation, timing and proper attitude. We have talked about all of these things before. With a low stance we create a strong foundation. In controlling the speed of a technique, we are aware of timing — or more simply, we are “aware.” The appropriate speed of a movement — that is, proper timing — can only be understood when we are clear-minded and aware. In life, when we clearly observe situations, then our resulting action is usually appropriate to that particular situation.

Master Funakoshi was very concerned with showing us that life must have balance — hard/soft, positive/negative, fast/slow. It is very important to stop thinking only about the physical techniques and think about developing your mind at the same time. This is called *shingi-ittai*, mind and body together. That is the essence of *budo*.