



SHIHAN KENNETH FUNAKOSHI 'PHILOSOPHY AS WELL AS TECHNIQUE

Q: Shihan, thank you for allowing us the privilege of conducting this interview for S.K.M. You are hosting your 11th International Karate Tournament in October '98. How is this tournament developing?

A: In this area of California, we have the largest traditional Shotokan tournament. Every year people look forward to the tournament because I think officiating is at a more professional level than they are used to at other tournaments. This tournament also gives the contestants a chance to see members from Europe and other countries of FSKA.

Q: How important are tournaments in Shotokan Karate?

A: In the past, there were no tournaments but now, ironically tournament is what has made, not only Shotokan but also every style of Karate popular. People like to be competitive and especially now, as there is talk about the Olympics Games accepting Karate as an Olympic Sport, people are motivated by training with the possibility of the Olympics in sight.

Q: with the Olympics in mind, how do you see Karate developing towards the next millennium?

A: I think it is going to get better. Every year there seems to be more tournaments and more people are training harder, getting better and practicing tournament techniques. However, sometimes I get concerned because the emphasis is too much on

tournaments rather than the old way of developing your character in Karate training. Therefore, there should be more or equal emphasis on the development of character as well as training for tournament purposes.

Q: Do you think that Shotokan will become more united in the future, and the different Shotokan factions will settle their differences?

A: Honestly, I do not think so. In fact, every year you see more and more splits within the same organization. Although there are people united together, II world organizations or like the WKF, they seem to be coming together for common purpose, but the comma purpose is mainly for tournament reason Although they have different styles, least they are coming together **an** cooperating with each other for a comm. goal, namely to get Karate into **to** Olympics.

Q: In terms of the splits that had taken place within Shotokan Karate how has that affected upon the spirit of the art?

A: Politics is the worst thing that a happen to Karate at the upper level. The students do not care about what happening in the political way. They just like to train hard an compete, but because the 'higher up have their political views or different they tend to put a lot of restrictions c what the students of the lower rank a do, which I think is bad for Karate.

Q: What are your feelings about the differences within kata, which have been introduced by different masters of Shotokan?

A: At one time, there used to be only one Shotokan, which used to be the JKA, and it was very easy for the instructors to standardize all the kata. For example, when you go to tournaments or when you train you were all the same except for a little bit of individual difference. However, now that you have different organizations or different Shotokan organizations every instructor has their own views of changing their techniques. I have my own views, but I will not change, for the sake of tradition as you can confuse students.

Q: What are your opinions on the different technical variations within Shotokan kata, which are being taught today by different associations?

A: On the differences in the kata and techniques, if everybody was under the one organization like before, then there would be only one way and that would be the right way. Now that you have different organizations, different people will think that there is a right way and a wrong way. There is no right way or wrong way, so to lessen the chances of confusion, for me, the main aim is to standardize everything in the one organization. There is not a right way or a wrong way as long as everybody does it one-way. Standardization is the most important thing.

Q: What are the differences between Shotokan Karate, which is practiced in Japan, the Far East, the Americas, (North and South) and in Europe?

A: I have travelled to Japan, United States and Europe and from what I see the Japanese tend to have discipline in training. They do more repetition towards the perfection of technique in kata, and for kumite, they tend to practice more on distancing, speed and timing. When it comes to the United States and the Europeans, because they are built differently, bigger and stronger they tend to be more physical. Likewise, Europeans are built differently so the kata movements are different. I have read articles stating that there should be different categories for Europeans and for the Japanese, because the Japanese seem to be always winning the kata. However, if you do not have any weight divisions in kumite, the Europeans have the advantage because they are bigger, and have a longer reach and are physically stronger. For karate to be accepted in the Olympics, like any contact sport, such as wrestling, boxing and Judo there must be weight divisions. That is one of the reasons why I have weight divisions in my teaching of philosophy and not just technique, tournament. That way you seem to attract more people because the smaller contestants do not want to go against the bigger ones. Therefore, like in boxing the big person of course has a longer reach and more power, so it could be unfair for the lighter fighter to go against a heavier fighter.

Q: Do you think that between, the East and West, that there is any difference philosophically, between the practitioners in Karate?

A: Definitely, I was born and raised in Hawaii, between Japan and the United States, so I have seen the east and the west differences. When I first went to Europe, I mentioned the developing of character and the dojo kun and they did not know what I was talking about. They saw Karate as strictly a sport, only at the physical level. Now I am slowly introducing the teachings of the philosophy of Gichin Funakoshi, and some of the people who have spiritual needs, I guess, seem to know what I am talking about. Then you still have people at a physical level who train only for competitions or tournaments but more and more people seem to understand that there was something missing in their Karate training. In addition, the philosophy and the dojo kun development of character seems to be catching on.

Q: With regard to the Irish fighting spirit, (being Irish myself) how would you describe your Irish members?

A: When the Irish first came to compete here two years ago, there were many comments made by the people here in California, that the Irish have good technique and a good fighting spirit. My experience in going to Ireland was that England, Germany, and all those are very important to Shihan Funakoshi (centre). People have big dojo's, or big population type cities, were the ones the top JKA instructors went to teach, mainly because they had the numbers over there. So Ireland like many other small countries were at a disadvantage by not getting a resident top notch JKA instructor, but through the years there have

been many good instructors coming to Ireland and to other small cities so in the long run I think it will even out, they'll catch on like any other place.

Q: Do you enjoy conducting seminars and grading in Ireland?

A: Yes. I did not realize my future would involve travelling so much around the world, but I enjoy teaching Karate and I like going to countries where they appreciate your teachings. For me it is not only technique but also the attitudes and the character of the country that I go to, so the culture is very important for me.

Q: Shihan, on our first meeting you discussed and emphasized loyalty from your students and from your senior instructors. Can you elaborate more on the loyalty and the character building of karateka?

A: This loyalty and character building is not something new. This was passed on from hundreds of years ago, before Karate became popular. This is what a samurai practiced from the old samurai class, his loyalty to his master or his shogun (Lord). Loyalty was very important and was the real issue between the samurai and the shogun. This element was passed down to the martial artist when the samurai class was over. They decided to keep the samurai characteristics alive as there was no samurai class and all the shoguns were united under one Emperor of Japan, so there was no more need for the samurai (or professional warrior). Japan wanted to keep the samurai spirit alive so they passed it down to the military of the Japanese, and loyalty to your Emperor and country was No.1. This in turn was passed down to the martial artist, and it really proves that loyalty is No.1, because now you see a lot of dojo's splitting up because there is no loyalty to their sensei's of the organization.

Q: What can practitioners of Karate learn from your teachings in terms of developing heir loyalty and discipline within their own organization, or to their own senior instructors?

A: There should be more emphasis on the dojo kun starting with Seek Perfection of Character and Be Faithful. Not enough time is spent on explaining what these actually mean. My weekly philosophy lectures are based a lot on the dojo kun, and some dojo's like I mentioned earlier in Europe, do not even know what dojo kun means. Gichin Funakoshi stressed philosophy and the dojo kun more than technique itself. Everybody can learn the physical level but at the spiritual level, it is very difficult.

Q: Continuing from loyalty, there is the issue of etiquette within Karate at present. Now do you feel these standards are being maintained?

A: Etiquette and courtesy is very important. Gichin Funakoshi stressed that without etiquette, respect and courtesy there is no dojo. You must have that, because it is respect for the rank, and you must stress rank in the dojo, as it is all based on rank.

Therefore, if you do not have any etiquette, which is respect for rank, you have no dojo. This comes under the dojo kun. Development of Character is vital and I find that in the modern or present younger generation, there are not enough of these spiritual elements. This is one of the problems of the present modern generation, worldwide.

Q: Moving on to spirituality within Karate, do you think Karate can offer people something to fill the spiritual void within their lives?

A: Definitely, because spirituality is not being taught at home where it is supposed to be taught; even courtesy and respect. Etiquette should be taught at home, but parents I feel are not spending the time. They try to push this Responsibility on to the teachers at school, and this is not the teacher's responsibility to teach them all these spiritual values. It is supposed to be taught at home and enforced at school and at the dojo. However, I see this happening where the parents expect the sensei to do all teaching and disciplining.

Q: Shihan, in your instruction you also mentioned you do a philosophy class, how do you see your students developing through these philosophy classes?

A: Thursday night is when I have my advanced kata training and a philosophy class after. I also have kids on Thursday night, which is my biggest attendance. In fact, many of my students that cannot train on my regular Thursday class for the advanced students make a point of coming to attend the philosophy classes. They say they look forward to those classes. I don't know of any other dojo's that give philosophy classes on a regular basis, and it does fill in a lot of empty spaces and questions that they have about Karate training, because the physical part of Karate training will last you only a few years compared to the spiritual side that will last you a lifetime.

Q: Have your students ever mentioned to you about how the spirit of Karate has affected their lives outside of the dojo?

A: Yes, all the time. The parents tell me that they have seen changes in their children at home and at school, and sometimes the parents come and see me to help with discipline problems with their kids and I do talk to them. I give a lecture to the kids during a class and I zero in on the students that need those lectures, so the parents are very happy about that.

Q: Shihan, what do you feel you are contributing to Shotokan Karate?

A: There are many good Shotokan instructors teaching at the technical level and there are good books and videos out now, but I still feel that I stress the dojo kun and the spiritual value more than most dojo's. I have not seen the other dojo's, but I feel that

according to the feedback I get from my other students who have come from different dojo's, we put more stress on spirituality and character developing. Therefore, I feel I am contributing to, or more so continuing the works of Gichin Funakoshi.

Q: Do you feel at present that Shotokan is as popular as it was in the 1970's, or is there a shift in terms of popularity away from Shotokan Karate?

A: I think Shotokan is more popular now, especially in Europe, because of all the years of developing. It is just that the other styles have greater numbers. Shotokan numbers are increasing, but the other styles have come in and taken their share of the market.

Q: In terms of your vision for your organization, what do you see for the future?

A: I moved from Hawaii 11 years ago just to teach at my dojo here in the United States, but for the past 5 years I have been travelling to Europe and I have been lucky enough to see a great increase in the membership of FSKA. Every year I seemed to be getting more inquiries and applications to join FSKA. I can only see it growing larger every year.

Q: What do you think has contributed to this growth in the organization?

A: I think it is partly because of my philosophy teachings but mostly, I would say because of technique. Many of the members or sensei's that have transferred over to my organization have said that they seem to have a lot of basic training before and they were ready for more advanced type training. I have not seen or been to other seminars by other organizations but I just go by what my students tell me, which is that they seem to like my advanced type training.

Q: to deviate slightly, what are your opinions on the introduction of other martial arts within Shotokan, that other masters have brought in, for example Tai Chi, etc?

A: I think it is a good thing because most pure traditional stylists especially Shotokan, feel that Shotokan is all you need, but if you go back a little bit, Gichin Funakoshi trained in different styles in Okinawa to come up with Shotokan, mainly two different styles of Okinawa Karate. I myself have a Kempo background and a Judo background. I feel that has made my Shotokan Karate much better, because when I used to compete against other Shotokan stylists (very good stylists), it was my Judo and Kempo that gave me an advantage, so I think other styles like Tai Chi, would be an advantage to know.

Q: Shihan, you mentioned that you travel a great deal. What is it like meeting different cultures?

A: Whenever I travel to a country, I try to find out what kind of people they are, and I find it easy to come to terms with the different culture or etiquette. I am a Japanese or Asian, but really Okinawan, born and raised in Hawaii, an American citizen who moved to California, and now I am a Californian, so I am flexible, I can adjust to whatever culture I go to.

Q: Your student from Ireland, David O'Riordan has gone to Florida to teach at one of your affiliated dojo's. Do you consider this good to gain experience at an international teaching level?

A: Definitely, I myself when I used to train, I went to Japan to train and compete, and I still remember those years for gaining experience. It is the same as tournament, if you fight in the same tournament in the same region year after year, it is not as good as if you go out of the area and compete with other contestants from different countries. Therefore, for anybody that can get experience travelling out of the area, I think it is a very good advantage.

Oss! Shihan.

Thank you very much for giving your time for this interview for SKM