

**KARATE AS A CHARACTER
BUILDING SPORT**

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INTRODUCTION

During all my years of practicing karate I've highly respected my instructors, not only because of their knowledge or skill, but especially because of the way they carried themselves. A certain strength and pride combined with modesty becomes part of a person's character that has devotedly practiced karate for many years. The question I have always asked myself and which has now become the topic of this thesis is how and why this development of character has taken place, what part of the practice of karate makes this possible and also what exactly are these admirable character traits.

Part of the answer might lie in the fact that emphasis has always been placed on the five principles of karate called the Dojo Kun, namely (in short) character, sincerity, effort, etiquette and self control. These principles are one of the first things a karateka encounters entering a karate club. It forms an integral part of karate and is inseparable from the physical techniques one learns at the art of karate. That is also what differentiates karate from many other martial arts practices.

Another hint to the answer of this question might lie in the great truth of what Chet Holmes has said: *"You don't become an expert by doing four thousand things, but by doing one thing four thousand times."* Bruce Lee also said: *I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.* (see <http://www.malineage.com/ancient-wisdom>)

That is a general truth, but even more so with karate. It requires a very specific mindset to be able to overcome the so called boredom of doing the same thing over and over again. Only after many years of repeating the same movement for the four thousandth time something happens in the brain /

mind and one becomes aware of a joy deep inside oneself just by doing the movement and perfecting it. It is noticeable how a yellow belt karateka would sigh and pull faces having to do Heian shodan while a black belt karateka would gladly do so. What happened in the many years that passed between yellow and black belt? It remains an open question, but the fact is that there has been an attitude change and with that a change in character.

When confronted with the question why karate is an advisable sport for children, the answer is often that it helps the child with focus, self discipline and concentration, which has been proven to be true over and over again. It is noticeable that the main reason given is rarely to be able to keep up a good fight. The physical ability is secondary to the mental and emotional development.

It is obvious that a lot of emphasis has always been put on the development of the mind and character in karate. What follows is a look at this topic from different angles.

LITERATURE STUDY

Where it all started

The founder of the karate we practice today was the one who gave karate its philosophical flavor.

Gichin Funakoshi, the father of modern day karate, studied not only Karate but Chinese classics and Confucian dialectics, hence the more philosophical and spiritual approach to karate instead of a mere physical one. He was able to train under many of the best Okinawan Karate masters, among them Master Yasutsune Itosu, from whom I will quote later on. Many of his ideas originated from them.

Funakoshi's karate training became part of the physical education program at the Men's Normal School in Shuri and at the prefectural Daiichi Middle School. Because of his philosophical approach to Karate, the art quickly attracted the interest of intellectuals and educators.

In 1922 he wrote his *Ryukyu Kempo: Karate*, later re-issued as *Rentan Goshin Karate-jitsu* ("Strengthening of Willpower and Self-defense through Techniques of Karate"), the title again suggesting a philosophical approach.

The word "karate" means "empty hand art". Although the name suggests fighting without external weapons, Funakoshi again gave a deeper meaning. He explained the name "Kara" as meaning hollowness or unselfishness. Therefore the "emptiness" suggested by this ideogram refers to rendering oneself *empty or egoless*, to further development of spiritual insight. He stated that the actual meaning of his writings are as follows: "As a mirror's polished surface reflects whatever stands before it and a quiet valley carries even small sounds, so must the student of Karate-Do render of their mind

empty of selfishness and wickedness in an effort to react appropriately toward anything they might encounter. This is the meaning of *kara* or "empty" of Karate-Do." (Funakoshi, 2003). He later tried to clarify this slightly confusing statement by stating this: "True Karate-Do is this: That is daily life, one's mind and body be trained and developed in a spirit of humility; and that in critical times, one be devoted utterly to the cause of justice." (Funakoshi, 2003).

Gichin Funakoshi laid out a few principles that had to be followed to achieve the full understanding of Karate. I would like to summarise them as an effort, once again, to demonstrate his philosophical approach.

The first is about *focus*. Be aware of your opponent every second and never doubt the blow you decided to strike. If you fail to do so, you will be the one to fall.

The second principle is about *perseverance*. It is humanly impossible to master karate in a short period of time. One has to train many years with heart and soul before a true understanding and mastering of the techniques can be assimilated. Anko Itosu also said: "Karate cannot be learned in a short amount of time. A bull that walks very slowly will, in due time, travel a thousand miles. In like manner, if you study and practice earnestly each day, in three or four years you will understand what the core of Karate is about. Indeed, the very shape of your bones will change." (see <http://www.physicalarts.com/knowledge/general-interest/281-the-10-precepts-of-anko-itosu>)

"The third one is about being *modest*. Funakoshi's own words describes it so well: "A man who brags in booming tones or swaggers down the street as though he owned it will never earn true respect even though he may actually be very capable in karate or some other martial art. It is even more absurd to

hear the self-aggrandizing of one who is without capability. In karate it is usually the beginner who cannot resist the temptation to brag or show off; by doing so, he dishonours not only himself, but also his chosen art." (Funakoshi, G., 2003) But it doesn't mean that one should be weak, like Anko Itosu made clear with the words: "Your heart should be mighty and bold." (see <http://www.physicalarts.com/knowledge/general-interest/281-the-10-precepts-of-anko-itosu>).

The fourth principle is about knowing oneself, about *self awareness* and about doing critical self reflection. One should try to see oneself as one truly is and always be open to learn from others.

The last principle is to abide by the rules of *ethics* in one's daily life, whether in public or private. Do what is right and honourable. Again to quote Funakoshi: "No one can attain perfection in karate-do until he finally comes to realize that it is, above all else, a faith, a way of life." (Funakoshi, 2003).

It is said that intuitive understanding cannot be taught, but is awakened in the karate student's mind after many years of dedicated training, discipline, and meditation. Traditionally, karate was taught as a "way of life. The main part of Funakoshi's teachings was kata combined with exercises and etiquette. Free fighting seemed to form little part of his teachings.

Gichin Funakoshi repeatedly pointed out that the first purpose in pursuing this art is the nurturing of a sublime spirit, a spirit of humility. Even the older practitioners placed stronger emphasis on the spiritual side of the art than on the techniques. It is said that in the training of body and spirit, above all else, one should treat his opponent courteously and with the proper etiquette. The quality necessary to accomplish this is self-control. Funakoshi stated that: "To become a victor, one must first overcome his own self" (see www.aibudo.com/history/shotokan/gichin.html).

It would be appropriate to end off this section with the 20 precepts or principles of Funakoshi that he discussed in his book: “The twenty guiding principles of karate”.

1. Never forget that karate begins and ends with respect (bow or Rei).

It is important to show respect in the form of Rei or bow, but it is much more than that. The Japanese think of Rei as being that which provides order, which separates man from animal.

2. There is no first attack in karate.

A karateka will NEVER instigate violence or perpetuate its development. Only, as a last resort, will a karateka use his skill to end a fight.

3. Karate fosters righteousness.

A karateka must always seek the side of justice and, if necessary, defend it. To witness injustice and do nothing is to show a lack of courage. Anko Itosu: “Never fight an enemy without good reason. If you encounter a criminal or a ruffian, don’t fight him if you can help it, but just block as you evade, stepping out of the way.”

(see <http://www.physicalarts.com/knowledge/general-interest/281-the-10-precepts-of-anko-itosu>)

4. First know yourself and then know others.

The chances of victory are much greater when you know yourself as well as your enemy.

5. Rather than physical technique, mental technique.

This principle is important because karate is not simply about performing techniques correctly (if it was, it would be a dance). Of greater importance to your ability is your attitude, your spirit and your awareness. You must have the attitude of perseverance, the spirit of strength and the awareness of focus. Train with intensity and feel what you are doing.

6. Let your mind roam freely (set your mind free).

You must release your mind from restriction and restraint. A free mind has the ability to roam and travel to wherever it wants to go. This freedom of movement will provide greater understanding of yourself and karate.

7. Inattention and neglect causes misfortune.

Careless preparation or negligence can result in mistakes being made with disastrous consequences. Take time to think about what you are doing and analyze yourself to eliminate these mistakes (in other words, self reflection).

8. Karate goes beyond the dojo.

The ultimate aim of karate is not simply to become a proficient martial artist. Karate cultivates our mind as well as our body. The values and lessons we learn in the dojo should be taken out into the outside world.

9. Karate is a life long pursuit.

Karate is an endless road of training and dedication. Nobody has ever reached the end of their training and nobody ever will. You must be prepared to train karate for the rest of your life, because that's how long it will take.

Funakoshi trained until the very end of his life.



10. Apply the way of karate to all things. Therein lays its beauty.

Karate teaches that in combat, a single blow can be fatal. If you approach all challenges in life with the same serious attitude, you will find that there is little you cannot overcome.

11. Karate is like boiling water: if you do not keep the flame high, it turns tepid.

You must continually and regularly train because if you do not, then like the pan of boiling water, your karate will go cold.

12. Do not think about winning; rather think about not losing.

To seek only to win is to ignore the true nature of karate. Those who wish only to win will become obsessed with this goal at the expense of all around them. Such a person will lose their humility and will seek any advantage at any cost. Instead, you should consider ensuring that you do not lose.

13. Respond in accordance to your opponent.

14. Wage the battle with natural strategy.

Number 13 and 14 have more or less the same message.

Bruce Lee was often quoted saying that you must act like water. Water has no form and can mould itself to any terrain. Like water, you must adjust and change to your opponent, be fluid and unpredictable. Avoid your opponent's strength and attack his weaknesses.

15. Regard your hands and feet as sharp swords.

A skilled and practiced fighter can fatally wound an opponent with a single blow from his hands and feet. Therefore, they are as deadly as a sword. Even an untrained man, fighting for his life, can deliver a powerful and deadly blow.

16. When you step beyond your own gate, you face a million enemies.

This means 'always be prepared'. It's not that everyone you meet is your enemy; rather everyone you meet could be a potential enemy. Similar to principle 7, carelessness can lead to serious consequences.

17. Learn various stances as a beginner but then rely on a natural posture.

One has to fully learn and understand the kamae stances before moving to natural postures.

18. The kata must always be practiced correctly: real combat is another matter.

One has to appreciate the reason for kata and understand how it can improve your karate. However, real combat does not exist within a set frame work of certain moves. Real combat is ever changing and unpredictable. You must, therefore, adjust yourself to real combat when necessary.

19. Never forget your own strengths and weakness, the limitations of your body, and the relative quality of your techniques.

Karate is dynamic. The dynamism is what generates power, efficiency and effectiveness. If you perform your karate at a constant tempo and a constant strength, you will be ineffective.

20. Continuously polish your mind. Be constantly mindful, diligent and resourceful in your pursuit of the way.

Always seek to improve your karate and your life. Be aware of those around you, the impact they have and the effect you have on them. Never accept or believe that you have finished and that you understand everything. Push yourself to a level higher than you think you can ever achieve. This is the principle that encapsulates all nineteen.

(see www.aibudo.com/history/shotokan/gichin.html).

Meditation

In order to explain my train of thought, it is important to discuss meditation: the meaning as well as the results of practicing meditation on a regular basis.

I've been meditating a little more than a year now and the results are noticeable. Initially I wanted to write my thesis on the possible implementation of meditation in western karate, but after reading and thinking a lot about it, I have realized that karate in itself is a form of meditation.

This thought came as a revelation and also a relief, since many Westerners still find meditation foreign, scary and dangerous, which makes it fairly impossible to implement meditation in a karate class. Under the heading *Results and Discussion*, I will explain more clearly that through meditation the pure qualities of the spirit can be developed or rather rediscovered. I will also discuss why karate has similar qualities as meditation and that it implies that these same results of a purer spirit can be reached through practicing karate.

But let us look at what meditation really is and is not. Meditation is not an ineffable mystery or something magically transmitted by a guru from Tibet. It can be explained in terms of mental and physical processes that any psychologist or doctor would feel comfortable with. We can say that meditation is any technique that relaxes the body and gets the mind clear. A clear mind is not blank. On the contrary, it is a mind that sees clearly, with a certain emotional detachment.

Meditation is based on two skills: *focusing on a sensory object and passively watching other thoughts and sensations* (Harrison, 2007). It is the act of focusing your mind fully on one thing; of controlling your mind. It is the scattered mind that causes stress and fatigue. If one word describes meditation, it is "awareness". This means being awake while awake, or being attuned to what is happening in the moment, to be fully present, to not be

thinking about other things while busy with one thing. The ideal is to always be in a state of meditation; that is to be always fully aware or conscious about where you are; to be fully in the present moment.

The following two examples of meditation techniques can explain it. If you've burst out of the office with your mind in chaos, you'll need an obvious meditation object to calm you down. Pay attention to your footsteps counting them. In this way you only focus on one thing, your mind won't be scattered and after about a minute or two, you'll find you've stopped thinking about work and realize, "It's quite a nice day out here!"

Another example: focus on whatever sensation catches your attention in the moment. What makes this different from a stroll in the park is that you linger with each one until something else replaces it. You sink into the detail: the smell of the earth, the sight of birds fighting, a blast of wind in your ear, the crunch of gravel underfoot (Harrison, 2007). It's still a discipline, but with time it becomes easier and before you know it, you can control your previously scattered mind, control your emotions and become a much happier, fulfilled person.

"Meditation is a very healthy skill. It brings out our natural instinct for stillness and clarity. By meditating, we relearn a skill often lost since childhood: the ability to relax at will and return to inner balance. When we de-stress and slow down, we know who we are and what we feel, and how to act intelligently in a less-than-intelligent world." (Harrison, 2007). Meditation is tranquil. The secret is to weave the stillness and detachment of meditation into the turbulence of your day. By regularly practicing meditation, you'll gradually become aware of being still even in turmoil; stay calm when someone presses your buttons, have moments of clarity even in strong emotion and enjoy simple activities such as preparing a meal.

The bad news is that although meditation is simple, our minds are not. Our biggest challenge is our mental hyperactivity, of continually thinking about everything under the sun. "It is extremely hard to rest undistracted in the nature of mind, even for a moment, let alone to self-liberate a single thought or emotion as it rises. We often assume that simply because we understand something intellectually, - or think we do - we have actually realized it. This is a great delusion. It requires the maturity that only years of listening, contemplation, reflection, meditation, and sustained practice can ripen." (Rinpoche, 1993).

Some words directed at Westerners from Sogyal Rinpoche's book "*The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*":

"We are so addicted to looking outside ourselves that we have lost access to our inner being almost completely. We are terrified to look inward, because our culture has given us no idea of what we will find. We may even think that if we do, we will be in danger of madness. This is one of the last and most resourceful ploys of ego to prevent us from discovering our real nature.

So we make our lives so hectic that we eliminate the slightest risk of looking into ourselves. Even the idea of meditation can scare people. When they hear the words egoless or emptiness, they think that experiencing those states will be like being thrown out the door of a spaceship to float forever in a dark, chilling void. Nothing could be further from the truth. But in a world dedicated to distraction, silence and stillness terrify us; we protect ourselves from them with noise and frantic busyness.

Looking into the nature of our mind is the last thing we would dare to do."

Sogyal Rinpoche, 1993

Interesting to note that there are at least 27 references to meditation in the Bible. Jesus and his followers and quite a few believers in God in the Old Testament meditated purely for clarity of mind and to come closer to understanding God and his Word, and in so doing become closer to being who God wanted us to be. Meditation is no worship, it is just a way of falling still, of relaxing and therefore of understanding things more clearly. It is a known fact that one concentrates better when in a relaxed state of mind. A few examples from the Bible to follow:

"Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all." (1 Timothy 4:15)

"Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the evening." (Genesis 24:63)

"This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success." (Joshua 1:8)

"...but his delight is in Yahweh's law. On his law he meditates day and night." (Psalms 1:2)

"...meditate in your own hearts upon your bed, and be still." (Psalms 4:4)
"Evening, and morning, and noon, I meditate, and make a noise, and He heareth my voice" (Psalms 55:17)

"...I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches."
(Psalms 63:6)

"I remember my music in the night, With my heart I meditate, and my spirit doth search diligently"(Psalms 77:6)

"Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him; meditate upon all his wondrous works." (Psalms 105:2)

"I will meditate on your precepts, and consider your ways." (Psalms 119:15)

"Though princes sit and slander me, your servant will meditate on your statutes." (Psalms 119:23)

"I reach out my hands for your commandments, which I love. I will meditate on your statutes." (Psalms 119:48)

"I have more understanding than all my teachers; for Thy testimonies are my meditation." (Psalms 119:99)

"I remember the days of old. I meditate on all your doings. I contemplate the work of your hands." (Psalms 143:5)

"For my palate shall meditate truth, and wickedness is an abomination to my lips." (Proverbs 8:7)

(see www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/1769-King-James-Bible-Introduction/)

It is clear that David meditated with the purpose of understanding God's laws better and to improve himself; his understanding and his way of life. Joshua also made it clear that by meditating on the Bible we will be

prosperous and successful. Meditation is about focusing your mind on something, in this case on God's word.

Maybe these Bible figures realized the following: "Just as a gardener cultivates his plot, keeping it free from weeds, and growing the flowers and fruits which he requires, so may a man tend the garden of his mind, weeding out all the wrong, useless, and impure thoughts, and cultivating towards perfection the flowers and fruits of right, useful and pure thoughts. By pursuing this process, a man sooner or later discovers that he is the master-gardener of his soul, the director of his life. He also reveals, within himself, the laws of thought, and understands, with ever increasing accuracy, how the thought-forces and mind-elements operate in the shaping of his character, circumstances, and destiny."(Philosophy Student notes, 2005). We are mostly unaware of what we are thinking. Meditation creates that awareness, enabling us to cultivate our thoughts, making them purer. With purer thought, purer acts follow naturally.

Defining character

To be able to measure whether karate is character forming, it is important to first look at what character really is. It is said that character encompasses the other four principles of karate. One meaning found in a dictionary (loosely translated) is: the spiritual and ethical or moral traits in a person. In order to get a more complete understanding of "character", I looked at various sources describing the qualities of the human spirit, the purest qualities a human being can possess.

Very often we hear our instructors motivating us to have more spirit. What is this spirit and how do we acquire it? The spirit in the dojo usually refers to the energy output and a positive attitude during a class, but spirit is much more than that.

Qualities of the human spirit

One of the best sources of information on the qualities of spirit is the Bible. Nobody could deny the purity of the qualities of the Holy Spirit.

To live this “spiritual” life, the believer must walk in the **Spirit** (1 John 1:5-9 cf. Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10), being filled with these qualities by means of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18 cf. Colossians 3:16).

Love (*agape*) denotes the love that is the essence of God. The chief ingredient of this kind of love is selflessness or self-sacrifice on behalf of the objects loved (John 3:16).

Joy (*chara*) means gladness, elation (1 Thessalonians 1:5-6).

Peace (*eirene*), this word is probably from the verb *eiro*. It means to join, or fasten together, and denotes the idea of harmony between individuals. Peace is also the well being of the believer. Peace banishes fear and worry (John 14:27).

Longsuffering (*makrothumia*), this word expresses steadfastness in the midst of adversity, ill treatment, or trouble. Longsuffering is the divinely given ability of forbearance and patient endurance when one is called upon to suffer in some kind of trial.

Gentleness (*chrestotes*), this word is the same as kindness. It refers to kindness exhibited toward others in the act of serving them.

Goodness (*agathosune*), from *agathos* meaning good, profitable, generous, upright, beneficent. This word indicates a willingness to aid those in need.

Faith (*pistis*), in the context of Galatians 5 the term is most likely referring to the “faithfulness” of a believer in relation to God. Of course, faithfulness could not exist without faith.

Meekness (*prautes*), this is the expression of mildness and reasonableness. It is antithetical to self-reliance and arrogance. It denotes humility and receptivity. It does not connote weakness or lack of courage.

Temperance (*egkrateia*), the Greek here is a compound word meaning “holding in” or “maintaining control.” Probably the best term to explain the idea is “self-control.” (Blackwelder, B.W., 1958, Wuest, K. S., 1971, Zondervan, 1970)

Another source says the following:

The greatest achievement is selflessness.

The greatest worth is self-mastery.

The greatest quality is seeking to serve others.

The greatest precept is continual awareness.

The greatest medicine is the emptiness of everything.

The greatest action is not conforming to the world’s ways.

The greatest magic is transmuting the passions.

The greatest generosity is non-attachment.

The greatest goodness is a peaceful mind.

The greatest patience is humility.

The greatest effort is not concerned with results.

The greatest meditation is a mind that lets go.

The greatest wisdom is seeing through appearances.

(see *Atisha's* Buddhist quotes at <http://www.malineage.com/ancient-wisdom>).

A more modern and interesting source is Victor Frankl, who wrote much about the qualities of the spirit. He was a Jewish psychologist, who was in the Nazi concentration camp during World War II. He made valuable observations while he was there. He later developed *logo therapy*, a therapy used by psychologists, from the observations he made of human kind in the concentration camps. He believed that the human being is an entity consisting of body, mind and spirit. According to him the human spirit always remains healthy. The access to the healthy core may be blocked though. Attributes of the spirit are: responsibility, authenticity, creativity, choices, values, self-transcendence, self-detachment, humor, changing the attitude, love, courage, adaptability, awareness of morality, conscience, ideals and ideas, freedom, purpose of striving towards ideals, defiant power, imagination, taking of commitments, faith, learning from past experiences, uniqueness, hope (Frankl, 2006).

A few of Victor Frankl's quotes to follow:

On Choosing One's Attitude

Everything can be taken from a man but ...the last of the human freedoms - to choose "one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." (Frankl, 1963).

On Committing to Values and Goals

"Logotherapy...considers man as a being whose main concern consists in fulfilling a meaning and in actualizing values, rather than in the mere gratification and satisfaction of drives and instincts." (Frankl, 1963).

"What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for some goal worthy of him. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost, but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him." (Frankl, 1963).

On Discovering the Meaning of Life

"We can discover this meaning in life in three different ways: (1) by doing a deed; (2) by experiencing a value; and (3) by suffering." (Frankl, 1963).

Victor Frankl and Confucius had similar ideas concerning the qualities of the human spirit. This is relevant, since Funakoshi was also a follower of Confucius.

For Frankl, "*being human means being conscious and being responsible.*" Being responsible is central to human existence, it gives meaning to what human beings are and can be. This responsibility refers not only to that dimension of human existence in personal terms but to one's social responsibility toward others.

Confucius utilizes the term "obligation" to describe those qualities which ethically and morally guide human action. The three qualities are: wisdom, compassion and courage. According to Confucius, regardless of how these qualities are learned the result is the correct human action. (Kidd and Chih-Hsin Sun, 1985). It might even be possible that Funakoshi believed these three qualities could be taught through karate.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following are the main research questions that were drawn from the literature study and that served as a framework for the research methodology:

- a) What are characteristics of karate masters?
- b) What are the character forming qualities of karate as a discipline?
- c) What are the personal experiences of highly qualified karateka?

METHODOLOGY

In social and qualitative research, **triangulation** is often used to indicate that more than two methods are used in a study with a view to double (or triple) checking results. This is also called "cross examination".

The idea is that one can be more confident with a result if different methods lead to the same result. If an investigator uses only one method, the temptation is strong to believe in the findings. If an investigator uses two methods, the results may well clash. By using three methods to get at the answer to one question, the hope is that two of the three will produce similar answers, or if three clashing answers are produced, the investigator knows that the question needs to be reframed, methods reconsidered, or both.

Qualitative investigators may choose triangulation as a research strategy to assure completeness of findings or to confirm findings. Researchers might also choose triangulation to confirm findings and conclusions. Any single qualitative research strategy has its limitations. By combining different strategies, researchers confirm findings by overcoming the limitations of a single strategy. Uncovering the same information from more than one vantage point helps researchers describe how the findings occurred under

different circumstances and assists them to confirm the validity of the findings.

The methodology I have used followed a triangulation approach and can be summarized as follows:

1. Research methodology framework:
 - a) Characteristics of karate masters
 - b) Character forming qualities of karate as a discipline
 - c) Personal experiences of highly qualified karateka

2. Sources of data – critical reflections on:
 - a) Personal experiences and observations
 - b) Interviews with key informants
 - c) Literature

The questions I wanted to answer serve as the research methodology framework. In order to answer, analyze, discuss and confirm each one of those three questions I have used the above-mentioned three sources of data.

Characteristics of karate masters

Firstly the proof that karate has an effect on the *development of character* lies in the qualities exhibited by people who have done karate for many years (first question). It is therefore important to look at these people critically, to analyze their qualities in their everyday life. To get that information, I did

some research (literature study) on Funakoshi, since he was the one who started it all and has to be the one to set the example.

It is also difficult to describe what these admirable qualities are. In my literature study I have used several sources to get information on pure qualities of the spirit. To test or confirm these findings, I did interviews with practicing karateka and have asked them what their opinions are of their superiors; what qualities their instructors reveal in the dojo as well as in their everyday life.

I have personally done karate for nineteen years. Then, after a break of fourteen years, I started again three years ago. As a mature adult I look at karate differently and much more objectively. During my whole life as a karateka I have trained under well-known and respected instructors for whom I had the greatest respect. So, as a third method of confirmation, I have used my own observations as a source of information.

Character forming qualities of karate as a discipline

The second question about the *character forming qualities of karate* is a difficult one. After reading and contemplating a lot, it ends up being quite a philosophical study.

The answer to the mystery lies mainly in the following question: which part of the art of karate has this effect on human development. In my literature study I have looked at meditation, since I know from personal experience that karate has similar traits as meditation. It was of course important to look at the five principles of karate. The fact that these five guidelines are an intricate part of karate already implies that there is more to karate than

blocks and punches. The interviewees had to give their own opinions on what they think the secret is to the question. My own opinion given here is of course subjective but also philosophical and very much based on my own experiences and knowledge.

Personal experiences of highly qualified karateka

To answer the third question on the personal experiences of highly qualified karateka, I mainly discussed the interviewees' own experiences; how karate has influenced their own lives. Doing this thesis forced me to reflect on my own life. Who would I have been without karate being such a big part of my life as a child and adult? My personal experiences and observations are yet again used as a source of data for confirmation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of karate masters

There is something about a karate master that is awe inspiring. It is difficult to describe in words what we perceive in them.

Reading about Gichin Funakoshi made me understand where it originates from. As a wise philosopher who had obviously done a lot of self reflection he emphasized the importance of being egoless. With the ego out of the way, one automatically lives these good qualities. It is the ego that covers the pure qualities of the spirit. Eckhart Tolle wrote: "Whatever behavior the ego manifests, the hidden motivating force is always the same: the need to stand out, be special, be in control: the need for power, for attention, for more."

(Tolle, 2006). From Funakoshi's writings and sayings it is clear that it is very important to him to be selfless / egoless, honorable and humble. He set the example of modesty by being too humble to write his autobiography until he was in his eighties.

My own experience with karate instructors (masters) was very positive. I would like to use one person as an example. It is an honor for me to write about my first instructor, Dries la Grange, who passed away many years ago. He had an unsurpassable passion for karate. We *trained* karate in the church hall during the week and on Sundays we *talked* about karate in front of the church hall after the sermon. His passion was contagious. He was the ultimate example; always friendly, caring, kind, loving, gentle, disciplined, modest, peaceful, honest, respectful, responsible, authentic, happy, courageous, committed, faithful, conscientious, purposeful, had a high morality and a very positive attitude. He was the manifestation of the five principles of karate: a man of impeccable *character*, always *sincere*, the perfect example of what it really means to put *effort* into something, the perfect gentleman (*etiquette*) and he never lost *self control*.

Only a strong person who knows himself, who is happy in his skin can make himself vulnerable by unconditionally loving others. The long list of character traits I have listed fit perfectly into the lists I have mentioned under characteristics of the pure spirit.

The experiences of the different karateka I had interviewed were very similar to mine. Johan de Wet (4th dan), described his lifelong instructor as being honest, respected, fair, humble and faithful. He has a huge admiration for him, because these qualities are always present in him, in the dojo as well as in his personal life. He portrays a certain energy of phenomenal strength combined with humility, qualities that are hugely admirable and worth

striving for. Johan also recognized these qualities in other karateka like Kanazawa and Kase.

Karien Jacobsz (6th dan), owner of her own karate club, says she admires instructors who look physically fit, who are physically very able, who are humble and egoless. To her opinion if an instructor has an ego, he misses the point of karate. She observes a powerful presence in her superiors; they portray a strong energy combined with modesty.

I have interviewed a few brown belt karateka and asked them what they admire in their instructors. They all mentioned the respect they have for them, for who they are as people in their everyday life, their caring and modesty combined with a deep, internal strength.

Character forming qualities of karate as a discipline

The importance of the spirit in the practice of karate is described in the poem below, which was used by Venter (2002):

Spirit

*Good technique wins over pure strength,
But the spirit dominates everything.*

*Karate is the spirit.
If the spirit is not right,
Then the karate cannot be right.
Before you study karate,*

You must first find your spirit

Japanese poem

While looking for the answer to the question about the character forming qualities of karate, I came across several answers. The following quote gives a good summary of karate as a way of life:

“Karate is a way of life, the purpose of which is to enable men and women to realize their full potential, both physical and spiritual. If the spiritual side of karate is ignored, its physical aspect is meaningless. The ultimate purpose of karate is to develop human character rather than merely strengthen human beings against physical enemies. Karate does promote confidence, courage, and other qualities. Karate properly viewed, is a way of perfecting your character.

Karate as the original martial art, through physical and spiritual training and discipline, makes the impossible possible, and helps one in pursuing the aim of life. Physical and psychological training are very demanding. Karate is a method of unifying body and spirit and making human life broader and deeper. Karate, like any other art, requires time.”

(see http://www.articlealley.com/article_129863_24.html?ktrack=kcplink)

It is a well known fact that karate has the qualities mentioned in the quote above. The question remains, why is that so? I've come across a website discussing the five principles (Dojo Kun) of karate. The fact that these five principles are emphasized in most dojos must be one reason why most karateka eventually acquire these qualities. Let's look at Sensei Tim Rosanelli's interpretation of the Dojo Kun. He is from the Maximum Impact Karate club located in Dublin, Pennsylvania.

“These five words are simplified English versions of the original Dojo Kun in Japanese that states the basic philosophy of karate according to our founder, Master Gichin Funakoshi.

The original Dojo Kun stated five basic tenets of karate which were:

- Seek Perfection of Character (character)
- Be faithful (sincerity)
- Endeavor (effort)
- Respect Others (courtesy)
- Refrain from Violent Behavior (self control)

Character

Seek Perfection of Character is the ultimate goal of karate. Gichin Funakoshi stated it this way, "**The ultimate aim of the art of Karate lies not in victory or defeat, but in the perfection of the character of its participants.**" All the other principles of karate are based on seeking perfection of character ~ pursuing our highest objectives. To seek perfection of character, we must work from the inside out.

This principle also implies the idea of **Kaizen or Improving Constantly And Never-endingly** ~ The ultimate I CAN attitude. This means our karate training, like our life, is an ongoing process of personal growth and learning ~ a process that lasts a lifetime. We must set goals and as soon as we accomplish the goals, we must set our sights on bigger goals. In karate, you can only fail through quitting. As long as we continue to persist, learn, and grow, we succeed.

Sincerity

The translation means to be faithful in everything we do. We must be **true and sincere to other people and our obligations**. It also means to be faithful to ourselves by doing the best in everything we do.

By being faithful to ourselves and others, we build a feeling of trust and mutual respect. Sincerity basically means dealing honestly with our people and becoming the best person we can.

Effort

We must, as martial artists, try hard and give our best in everything we do whether it's training, a relationship, or work. Effort, or to endeavor, means **maintaining a Black Belt Attitude and giving 110% effort in everything we do**. Regardless of how we feel or the situations we experience, we must remain upbeat and positive and endeavor to turn every problem into an opportunity.

Self-Control

This is a reminder to remain calm, assertive. We must be in control of our mind, emotion, and actions at all times. We must work everyday to maintain our inner calmness and peaceful mind. Self-Control also means to **take responsibility for our actions and understanding that we directly influence our life results by our actions**. We also must look for peaceful resolutions and refrain from violent behavior in every situation.

Courtesy

Courtesy reminds us to respect others. Respecting others begins with the **Golden Rule – Do unto others as you would have others do unto you**. We need to learn to listen empathically and open our minds to the opinions of others. Also, treating people with respect is important because being disrespectful can create enemies. If you treat people with courtesy and respect, you will

more clearly see the world and enjoy your experiences.” (see <http://timrosanelli.blogspot.com>).

During a visit in Wynberg in Capetown, I have visited the Samurai karate club (Kimura Shukokai karate style) where I've interviewed a 20 yr old brown belt karateka, Chad. He explained to me that they have an extra class on etiquette every Friday afternoon where the karateka learn about the five Dojo Kun. They are not allowed to grade for their next belt if they do not display these qualities both at the dojo as well as at home. The parents are therefore also questioned before they can grade for the next belt. They use the following six criteria: balance (living a balanced life), focus (the ability to concentrate and listen in the class as well as at school), spirit (a positive attitude), discipline (regular attendance of the class), respect (having respect for young and old) and control (control of their emotions).

According to Johan de Wet the fact that you always have to be and act the same way in class forces you to leave your problems outside the dojo. That helps you develop stability or discipline in your behavior.

Karien Jacobsz said the Dojo Kun teaches you discipline. The movements as such (the perfection of them) develop concentration, focus, self control and eventually the ability to do good quality karate. The fact that you have achieved something valuable, something only attainable through hard work, gives you self confidence. Someone with a good self-esteem doesn't need to proof himself. Such a person is truly humble. Karate is almost like a spiritual practice.

She also mentioned an interesting fact that karate is one of very few sports that perfectly balance the left and right brain. A well-developed channel of communication develops between the two lobes after doing karate for more

than three years because of the complexity of the movements. All movements have to be executed with both right and left hands and feet. The fact that the karateka has to move in four different directions also plays an important role. The chances are good that someone with a well developed and balanced brain would probably live a well balanced life.

Karien also stated that a child can develop positive character traits through karate. On the other hand, if someone starts karate as an adult he would already have these qualities; he would have to be a disciplined, structured person already, otherwise he would not last. Someone who would want to do karate with the only goal in mind being a good fighter will rather choose mixed martial arts.

I agree with all the above statements, but I would like to add more. The bottom line is that the desirable character we are talking about is mostly egoless. Somewhere along the line the karateka has lost his ego. To quote Eckhart Tolle: “Those who are exceptionally good at what they do may be completely or largely free of ego while performing their work. They may not know it, but their work has become a spiritual practice.” (Tolle, 2006). It might have something to do with a good self esteem, like Karien has mentioned. A person who has done karate for a very long time will probably be very good at it. Being good at something frees one of the need to prove oneself and at the same time builds the self esteem. I have to add that karate is also a sport that always leaves room for improvement. Nobody is ever perfect at it. That fact is humbling in itself.

To elaborate more, nobody can do anything really well without focus. Doing karate is impossible without focus. Karate forces you to focus. The moment you lose focus, you either get punched or you forget your kata or your movement looks terrible. “For humans focusing is not a natural habit. The

human mind has too many cross thoughts and interruptions to be able to focus properly. Animals know how to focus, you would never see a dog eat and bark at the same time. When an animal prepares to catch his prey or prepares to attack, he is fully focused and nothing distracts him. The same focus must apply in the art of karate” (Gaston-Bellegarde, 2008).

The karate term we can use here is *Zanchin* or alertness, which means perfect awareness, heightened sense of purpose, the perfect finish, intense focus and concentration, knowing what others don't know (Venter, 2002). Also the term *Kime* has to do with focus. “Kime does not only depend on a physical technique, but also on the mind. That means that the whole being mentally and physically hits the target. No energy should escape and a karate-ka should always be focused.” (Venter, 2002).

That is what karate has in common with meditation. In the East it is general practice to meditate in order to reach the optimal state of focus and awareness. Unfortunately the western perception of meditation is very negative, since it is wrongfully associated with religion. Just for the record I would like to quote Anko Itosu (1908): “Karate did not originate from the way of Buddhism or from the way of Confucianism.”

(see <http://www.physicalarts.com/knowledge/general-interest/281-the-10-precepts-of-anko-itosu>). It is no religion.

As I have discussed under Meditation, it is all about focus. Only focus brings you fully into the present. Eckhart Tolle says: “Realise deeply that the present moment is all you ever have.” (Tolle, 2005). It is only in the present (the NOW) where one can find true peace and happiness. The person, who has managed to be present most of the time, is a fully conscious person and someone without judgment. That is probably what we observe in a karate master.

Personal experiences of highly qualified karateka

It was noticeable how much the interviewees enjoyed this question. They were very passionate about the benefits of karate in their lives.

Johan de Wet recalled how he used to be a weakling. He didn't have any self confidence before starting with karate. He believed that the more he learned, the stronger he became as a person. Growing up in a much disciplined house, he easily fell into the disciplined way of doing in the dojo. He learned that by sticking to the rules, you stay out of trouble and you improve. In the same way structure and discipline in the life outside the dojo leads to success.

Perseverance is another thing he learned. By sticking to karate training for a very long time before you become a good karateka, teaches you to do the same in life. Again, perseverance leads to success. What he enjoyed was that you get rewarded for your perseverance by gradings and competitions. Successes build self esteem. Karate is a replica of life in general.

His instructor also had a huge influence on him by setting a wonderful example of self confidence combined with modesty. Today, as an instructor himself, he strives to continue the legacy. It is important for him to also set a good example.

Karien started karate at eight years of age and have been doing it ever since. She loves structure and believes karate fits perfectly into her personality. She doesn't know anymore whether it was karate making her develop discipline or whether she loves karate because she is disciplined. Karate is 100% part of her life. Karate is her way of life. She lives the five Dojo Kun since it is inseparable from her character. As an instructor who teaches a few classes everyday, she loves seeing the effect of karate on children with problems; how they develop into strong, able human beings.

Marianne, a brown belt karateka at the Samurai club in Wynberg started karate as an adult. Karate changed her dramatically. The biggest influence karate had on her life, was self control. She used to be exceptionally emotional. In the karate class she had to learn to control her emotions. Now she finds that she can do the same at home. Even her relationships have improved.

While I did karate during my school and university years and a few years after that as a teacher (as a young woman) I never even thought about the effect it had on my life. It never crossed my mind that the fact that I was always hugely disciplined in doing my work, I always did my best, always respected my teachers and friends, always controlled my emotions and behaviour, hardly ever disobeyed my superiors and that I was happy and content could have been caused by the fact that I did karate five times a week. It was only when I started again after a long break that I could look at karate more objectively. It was a pleasant experience recognising the wonderful nature of the sport.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I have eagerly used examples of karate masters who set the perfect example of being strong, controlled, disciplined, respectful and humble. With the same eagerness I have discussed the reasons why karate brought about these admirable qualities in the karateka. Unfortunately I have to admit that there are quite a few highly qualified karateka who do not set that perfect example, those whom Funakoshi described so well as a man who brags in booming tones or swaggers down the street as though he owned

it. A much more complicated and expanded study is necessary to be able to understand why some people get it and some not.

Intuitive understanding cannot be taught, but is awakened in the karate student's mind after many years of dedicated training, discipline, and meditation. Traditionally karate was taught as karate-do, a "way of life." "Do" is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese ideograph Tao (pronounced dow). Tao, or the "way" is the dominant idea in all Chinese philosophy. Funakoshi was also a follower of the Tao and must have had this beautiful philosophy in mind when he emphasized the importance of an egoless state.

The Tao Te Ching describes the best leader as follows: "The best leader is indistinguishable from the will of those who selected her.....whatever is done happens so naturally that no one presumes to take the credit!" (Tzu, 2002).

In a nutshell, I have concluded that the focus in the practice of karate is the most important aspect in forming the character of its participant. Focus forces one to be in the moment. To be able to focus properly, discipline is needed. That is where meditation and karate are similar. After years of focusing (meditating) one becomes more and more tranquil, losing undesirable habits and in doing so reveal more and more qualities of the pure spirit.

I would like to end with another quote from the Tao Te Ching: "Never to experience tranquility is to act blindly, a sure path to disaster. To know tranquility is to embrace all. To embrace all is to be just. Justice is the foundation for wholeness. Wholeness is the Great Integrity. The Great Integrity is the infinite fulfilling itself." (Tzu, 2002)

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