

Theory of Circular Self Defense - Hapkido

Hapkido's Theory of Circular Self Defense by Scott Shaw

As a martial artist you are trained to continually develop and refine yourself defense skills. This training often times involves drills that will teach you how to defend yourself against the onslaught of the various attacks an adversary may launch against you. The defensive tactics that are generally taught, by many martial art systems, teach you how to defend yourself with forceful techniques once an opponent has already grabbed a hold of you or has unleashed an attack such as a kick or a punch. The problem with defending yourself at this late stage of an attack is that your opponent either already has a hold of you or he has already unleash his punch.

Once an opponent has a powerful hold on you it is much harder to free his grasp from you then if you encountered him before he has the opportunity to take a firm hold of you. Additionally, if your attacker has already begun to punch at you, that punch is in motion, it has power, velocity, and speed, which you can only hope to beat with a traditional block. The Korean martial art system of Hapkido teaches its practitioners that it is far better to defend yourself before your attacker has the opportunity to solidify his attack upon you. To achieve self defense, in the early stages of an attack, Hapkido uses its Theory of Circular Self Defense.

The Hapkido Theory of Circular Self Defense does not mean that you move your body in elaborate exaggerated circular movements. Instead, Circular Self Defense training is twofold; first of all, it teaches that the most important element in any confrontation is to define the range your opponent is attacking from. How far is he from you? With this knowledge the most appropriate and effective self defense measure may be put into place before your opponent has launched a successful attack upon you. Once this range is defined the second level of Hapkido Theory of Circular Self Defense can be put into place, that of moving in fluid circular motion.

The first step we will view is how to conclude the range of your opponent's attack. To accomplish this, the Hapkido practitioner utilizes the Three Concentric Circle Principal.

The Three Concentric Circle Principal has you visualize three circles of varying distances encompassing your body. The First or Primary Circle is approximately three feet around you, or the distance of your outstretched arms. If an opponent has substantiated an attack this close to you, immediate and aggressive self defense is necessary.

The Second Circle ranges from three to six feet around your body. At this level, your opponent needs to travel to you, to launch an effective attack. To travel this distance a certain amount of momentum is required. This momentum can be effectively used against him by deflecting his forward motion attack and using his expended energy to your own advantage.

If due to defensive circumstance you must travel to your opponent, crossing this Second Circle limit, you must do so in a balanced offensive posture. The Second Circle is in relatively close proximity to you. For this reason many martial artist attempt to overly stretch close-in fighting techniques to this three to six foot distance. This is a mistake. You should not attempt to stretch your close-in punching or kicking techniques, as this will leave you off balance.

If these initial techniques do not make successful contact with your attacker, he can use your lack of balance to his own advantage and strike you with a powerful attack. To this end, if you realize the necessity to move into his Second Circle location, you should do so by rapidly sliding your body in towards him, guided by your lead foot, and then, immediately encounter him with an appropriate powerful strike such as a Straight Punch followed by a joint lock and throw.

The Third or Tertiary Circle extends from six to nine feet around your body. If your opponent travels this distance to attack you, his oncoming motion is very obvious and appropriate defensive action can easily be prepared for and instigated. If, on the other hand, you decide it is in your best interest to travel this distance and encounter your opponent where he is located, then you must do so in the most efficient manner possible.

The only reason to travel this distance is if your opponent possesses a weapon such as a gun and his using it is inevitable. If this is the case, then such techniques as a Stepping or Jumping Side Kick are most effective. This is because of the fact that these offensive techniques close the distance between yourself and your opponent quickly and you arrive in an offensive posture.

The Three Concentric Circle Principal does not mean that you must maintain a stagnate positioning. What it does detail, however, is that these three circles move as your body moves. They are a method to accurately gauge the distance between your opponent and yourself and tell you when defensive tactic is most appropriate.

By first defining the distance from your attack opponent, you can enter into any confrontation prepared to successfully

defend yourself in the most appropriate manner. This area of Hapkido ideology is known as Range Effective Fighting. Once the range of your defensive posture is understood you then can successfully employ the second area of Hapkido Theory of Circular Self-Defense, that of Circular Movement.

Hapkido teaches that by training your body to move in natural patterns of circular motion you can effectively defeat an opponent's attack with minimal expended energy and without the potential of unnecessarily injuring yourself. It must be initially understood that Circular Defense never has you encounter an attack straight on. This is because of the fact that linear defensive techniques are forceful, awkward, and often times hold you locked into a single pattern of movement. This fact can be witnessed in the case of the forceful Forearm Block against a Straight Punch. This common traditional defensive technique, among Hard Style Martial Art Systems, witnesses you entering into a Front Stance with your blocking arm powerfully traveling upwards towards where the attacker's punch is expected to travel. If the pathway of his punch has been even slightly miscalculated or the attacker redirects his offensive assault, you will have expended excessive energy and your arm will be locked into forcefully moving in the defensive pattern you have instigated until it reaches its apex. While the aforementioned linear block is in progress, your opponent possesses the ability to strike at you with a secondary attack. If, on the other hand, you train your body to move in fluid circular motions, if your opponent redirects his attack, you can instantly adapt your defense to his movement as you will not be locked into a formal forceful blocking pattern.

Hapkido's Circular Theory of Self Defense is a style and a pattern of movement. This understanding teaches that first you remove yourself from the path of an opponent's attack, then you deflect it, intercept it, and finally you disable your attacker from possessing the ability to attempt to injure you further. This strategy of defense is accomplished by training your body to move in fluid circular motion, following the path of least resistance. This defensive ideology, thereby, allows you to immediately follow one defensive technique with another and another until your opponent is completely disabled.

At the basis of Hapkido's Circular Theory of Defense is your moving out of the path of an attack. Moving from the path of an attack does not witness you rapidly retreating backwards or sloppily moving to one side in a linear fashion. This type of random movement leaves you ill-equipped to immediately follow up with further effective defensive techniques that will disable your opponent. This is due to the fact that by launching your body rapidly in a linear retreat, your body's own momentum locks you into one pattern of movement. Hapkido's Circular Theory of Self Defense, instead, sees you calculating the path of your opponent's attack, and then making only the minimal movement to remove yourself from the path of that attack. With this style of movement you do not have to substantially rebalance yourself, you use little energy, and you remain in a close proximity to your opponent where necessary counter attacks can easily and effectively be instigated.

The most elementary example of moving out of the way of an opponent's attack can be witnessed in the circular defense against the Straight Punch. In the case of the Straight Punch, which is targeted at your head, simply by pivoting on the ball of your lead foot and circularly moving your rear leg to a forty-five degree positioning from where it previously was, your head's positioning has shifted to the degree that the Straight Punch of your opponent will continue on its linear path and miss its target. With this you have achieved initial self defense without ever instigating a formal block.

As forceful linear attacks are often very powerful in their forward driving nature, Hapkido's Circular Theory of Self Defense teaches that deflective blocking techniques should be used in accordance with your removing yourself from the path of your opponent's attack. With this, you maintain control over the confrontation and your opponent does not possess the ability to unleash a secondary attack on you. This is due to the fact that by deflecting an attack, you can leave your arm in place, thus, holding his striking arm in check, as you instigate additional defensive techniques.

The most elementary circular deflective technique is the Frontal Circular Knife Hand Deflection. This block is performed by first forming your hand into a Knife Hand, bending your elbow, and locating your forearm in front of your body, parallel to the ground. To deflect the on-coming Straight Punching attack of your opponent, first pivot out of the path of his attack, (as previously described), as you do so simultaneously circularly guide your hand upwards across your body to a vertical positioning. The Straight Punch will have missed you, you will have deflected your opponent's arm, and you will be in control of the altercation.

With these two simple pivoting and deflection techniques as a basis, you not only protect your entire upper body from attack, but you deflect the on-coming punch of your opponent with little or no expended energy. In addition, by deflecting the attack, as opposed to forcefully blocking it, you do not risk the possibility of injuring yourself by meeting bone to bone in a traditional powerful intercepting blocking technique.

Hapkido's Circular Theory of Self Defense teaches that you must maintain control over the altercation and not allow your opponent to possess the ability to strike at you with a secondary attack once you have achieved initial self defense. Deflecting is never enough to emerge victorious from a confrontation.

The point to launch further self defense counter measures is the moment your opponent's attack has been deflected. This is due to the fact that in this rapidly fleeting moment, he is most vulnerable as his balance is somewhat misalign and his mind is recalculating what move to make next. Therefore, this is your ideal opportunity to launch a counter attack.

In the case of the previously described, Circular Deflection Defense against the Straight Punch, your next line of self defense could be as simple as immediately reaching in to your opponent's chin with your lead deflecting hand, as your other hand rapidly moves in and takes control of the back of his head. By immediately taking a powerful front and rear hold on his head and locking his neck unnaturally away from you, he can be effortlessly directed to the ground, where additional counter attack measures can be unleashed as necessary.

Many confrontations do not begin in this previously discussed First Circle distance. Often times an opponent will rush in towards you, crossing through the Third and Second Circle distances, in order to attack. In this style of forward driven attack, your opponent's intentions will become quite evident and you can use his own forward momentum against himself. For example if an opponent rushes in at you and is either preparing to extend his arms to shove you or to punch you, your first level of defense is to Side Step his forward motion. You then immediately deflect his out stretched arm, with a Forearm Circle Deflection. Your opponent, due to his own expended energy, will continue to travel forward with his own force of motion. At this point he will be vulnerable to counter attack.

Hapkido's Circular Theory of Self Defense is simple in its design and its application. It teaches that you simply encounter any attack by not encountering it at all. Instead, it is far better to step away from the path of force, deflect as necessary, and then counter attack with the most circularly easy technique so your opponent will not possess the ability to strike at you with a secondary attack.