

## The Path of Traditional Judo



Linda Yiannakis, M.S.

4<sup>th</sup> Dan - Traditional Kodokan Judo (USJJF), 4<sup>th</sup> Dan - Judo (USA Judo), 4<sup>th</sup> Dan - Jujutsu (USJJF)

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Traditional Judo is that practice of judo which reflects and adheres to the aims and principles of the art as Jigoro Kano presented them in his teachings and writings. Therein lies the problem for 21st century judoka who wish to practice in the old way. Judo has gone through many dramatic changes over the years since its introduction in 1882 and is now largely practiced as a sport. It is difficult to find a teacher, in the United States at least, who has received the core instruction of Kano's original judo to pass on to today's students. This dearth of specific instruction has given rise over time to various forms of what is called Classical Judo in this country, wherein ideas of traditional judo are often based upon much practice of omote kata (demonstration form) and the avoidance of competition. Neither of these notions reflects the program of Traditional Judo or serves to address in a complete way Kano's oft-stated intentions for his art.

Kano's judo was conceived as a three-part, interrelated educational system. He established *rentai-ho* for development of the body through training, *shobu-ho* for the development of contest skills, and *shushin-ho* for mental and moral development. (Draeger, 1997: 118)

The cultivation of a strong physical body (through *rentai-ho*) and the development of contest skills (through *shobu-ho*) together resulted in *kyogi judo*, or judo in the narrow sense. Kano intended that judo practitioners were also to go on to achieve a higher level of self-actualization through *shushin-ho* and thus achieve *kogi judo*, or judo in the wide sense. The cultivation of the self and spirit were to put practitioners on the road to Kano's ultimate aim of judo: the perfection of character for self and others.

The ultimate object of studying judo is to train and cultivate body and mind through practice in attack and defense, and by thus mastering the essentials of the art, to attain perfection of oneself and bring benefits to the world.

(Watson, 2008: xvi)

This quest is the purpose behind the practice of Traditional Judo, in contrast to the sport model which focuses primarily on striving in the competitive arena. While practitioners of Traditional Judo participate in shiai to test their skills, and sport judo players reap the benefits of character strengthening from a dedication to sport, each of these approaches retains its distinct objectives and methods of instruction and training.

Kano's ideals of judo are encapsulated in the 3 precepts of Judo: Seiryoku zenyo (Best use of energy); Jita kyoei (Prospering together); Jiko no kansei (Perfect yourself.)

How are these aims and ideals to be attained through the practice of a martial art? The complete answer is beyond the scope of this paper to address in full. However, the brief discussion here may convey an idea of the concepts of practice of Traditional Judo. Problems in translation, changes in language over time,

and cultural differences lead to distortions and misinterpretations of original intent in later and especially cross-cultural application. Thus, Traditional Judo places a great deal of emphasis on understanding concepts and principles in terms of the cultural context from which they arose.

Kano's Judo emphasizes principles: both the teaching of and the teaching by principles. When teaching by principles, techniques are seen as expression of principles. As such, a variety of disparate techniques may be presented in one lesson as a study in the same underlying principle. The focus is on the principle which they share and the way in which this manifests through different techniques. In this way, students are exposed to the connections and relationships among techniques through understanding of the principles which drive them. (Cunningham, S.R.: 1996)

The physical expression of the principles is the first lesson on the path to *kogi judo*. Kano's approach to teaching judo begins with the experience of hands-on practice of a principle in its most basic and visceral form - the physical operation of principle in technique execution. The kinesthetic understanding of the principle forms the basis for insight into higher (non-physical) applications of the principle, both in and out of the dojo. As an example, one may learn the meaning of *ju* as that of yielding and redirecting. *Ju* contains within it the concept of avoidance of a direct clash of force or wills in favor of the redirection of incoming energy to one's own purpose. Thus *ju* may be applied in situations both in and out of the dojo as a means of reducing contention without sacrificing one's position.

The *Gokyo no Waza* plays a central role in the road to *kogi judo*, especially through its illustrations of *seiryoku zenyo* and its greater applications to everyday life. (Yiannakis, L.: 2010) *Seiryoku zenyo* was identified by Kano as the governing principle of his art. Traditional Judo emphasizes bridging the operation of principles from the physical level to the wider context of philosophical application.

The practice of *kata* in Traditional Judo serves to illustrate and expand underlying principles. *Kata* is seen as a vehicle for the preservation of essential knowledge and as a resource, guide and source of extended application of principles. Lessons drawn from *kata* may be integrated into any appropriate teaching situation in the dojo. Examples from *kata* are to be addressed and practiced as part of mastering techniques and their applications. *Kata* is not seen as a set of forms peripheral to the real lessons of the *randori-waza*. It is not reserved for occasional practice *in toto* as a requirement for an examination for promotion. The *kata* illustrate uses, applications and strategies for techniques and so form living parts of lessons in the dojo. *Kata* is also referred to for its *ura* – its “underside” – the whole set of associated variants and applications which are connected to the *omote*, the “front” or demonstration form that we tend to think of as the *kata*. (Yiannakis, L.: 1998)

In the same way, the *goshin-waza* of Traditional Judo are not reserved for practice in *kata* only, but are brought into lessons as applications drawn from the *kata* and integrated with various *randori-waza* as appropriate. The program remains internally consistent due to the coherence of the underlying principles of *randori-* and *goshin-waza*. Clearly, distinctions are still made between techniques permitted in contest situations and those reserved for dojo practice, but all may be practiced together in a Traditional Judo dojo.

Thus, Traditional Judo is an art whose primary aim is self-actualization through the internalization of principles expressed and learned first through physical practice and then applied in daily life for the betterment of self and the benefit of society.

**About the author:**

Linda Yiannakis holds 4<sup>th</sup> degree black belts in judo and jujutsu. She has over 37 years experience in the martial arts, including Sport Judo, Traditional Judo, Takagi Ryu Kosenjo Bujutsu, Wa Shin Ryu Jujutsu and Shinkage Ryu Kenjutsu.

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