

# Cultivating the Body as a 'Martial Instrument'

by Chris Kent

If I may be so bold, I'd like to start this article by purloining a line from the article Bruce Lee wrote for Black Belt magazine, entitled "Liberate Yourself From Classical Karate", *"Make this article relate to yourself, because, though it is on Jeet Kune Do, it is primarily concerned with the blossoming of a martial artist."*

Jeet Kune Do has often been referred to as "the art of expressing the human body in combat." As such, your body is the 'instrument' you use to express yourself with. The highest level in JKD is expressing the human body at will. And in order to be able to do that you must cultivate your 'martial instrument'. Every part of your body needs to be trained and developed so that when you need a particular tool you or wish to use a certain action you may call upon it and the desired results will unfold. When you want it, it's there. When you want to move, you are moving, when you want to punch or kick, you are punching or kicking, when you want to apply a choke or arm lock, you are applying it. You train yourself to become one with the motion or action.

When it comes to cultivating your body as a martial instrument, there are two primary areas of consideration. The first is "Non-technical" work. Non-technical work refers to any type of physical training that is not directly related to martial arts. This is training that deals with the three core tenets of physical fitness: strength, endurance, flexibility. The second is "Technical" work, and refers to training specifically related to martial arts, including such things as tool development, technique training, sparring, developing qualities and attributes such as speed power, and tactical skill development. This is the area that I am going to concentrate on in this article. The following elements are integral parts of cultivating your body as a martial instrument:

## **Ready Position (Fighting Stance)**

You need to develop a well-balanced, highly-mobile position of readiness that will allow you to explode instantaneously with your tools, as well as defend yourself against attacks coming at you from any angle.

## **Tool Cultivation**

In JKD, the various weapons you use, such as your hands, feet, elbows, knees, etc., are called the "tools of the trade." "Sharpening the tools" relates to learning how to use one's weapons with speed, power and precision. Each of your combative tools needs to be cultivated, maintained, and sharpened on a regular basis in order for it to function with optimum efficiency and effectiveness. To borrow another quote from Bruce Lee --

*“Look at any tool as a work of art. And make it a masterpiece. In order for a single tool to be a masterpiece it must have totality, speed, agility, power, flexibility and accuracy.”*

Grappling techniques such as locks, chokes, throws and takedowns could also be considered ‘tools’ and should therefore obviously be included as an integral part of one’s tool development.

### **Mobility Skills Cultivation**

Having fast, powerful tools at your disposal will not amount to much if you are unable reach an opponent with them. You need the ability to relay your tools with accuracy, speed, power to a moving target while moving yourself. Footwork functions as the transport system for all of your actions. They move you into position to execute your actions and allow you to evade an opponent’s attacks. Lee believed footwork and mobility skills to be one of the most vital ingredients in effective fighting, and wrote, *“Until you have the ability to move your body and adapt to whatever the object happens to be in front of you, as well as punch and kick from any angle, you still haven’t gotten your total efficiency.”*

### **Tactical Skill Cultivation**

Tactical skill development deals with developing your ability to appraise combative situations, process relevant information, and make appropriate decisions quickly and effectively. Tactical skill development could also include such things as developing your ability to adjust your timing, rhythm, speed, and distance to adapt and deal effectively with an opponent..

### **Attribute Cultivation**

This facet of cultivation focuses upon developing and/or enhancing qualities such that will enhance your performance, such as speed, agility, coordination, etc.

### **Mental Cultivation**

Deals with developing the proper mindset for combat which includes cultivating a fluid mental attitude and a “perceptive, pliable awareness.”

All of the elements listed above are interrelated and need to fit together synergistically together to make a unified “whole”. For example, you have to be able to summon your tools at will and coordinate them with other skills such as mobility, timing, speed, and accuracy.

### **Conclusion**

Cultivating your body as a martial instrument is about the process of preparing yourself for the highest levels of performance. How well you have cultivated your

instrument and how finely it is tuned will be a deciding factor in how well you can express yourself in combat. What kind of instrument are you expressing yourself with? Is it constructed of the finest quality materials and tuned to perfection? Or is it made with shoddy materials and poorly tuned? The decision is up to you --

Keep in mind that cultivating your martial instrument is an on-going, evolutionary process, one which is fluid, constantly changing and adjusting to fit the need of the individual. Every individual will need to develop their own way to reach their maximum potential. So look around, study, research, and use the principle of 'absorbing what is useful and rejecting what is useless.'

A final note of caution. When it comes to cultivating your body as a martial instrument, do not compare yourself with anyone else. The only meaningful comparison you can make is with yourself. While anatomically and physiologically we might all be the same, variations occur with regard to such things as an individual's age, their genetic pre-disposition, their degree of physical fitness when they start training, and their commitment to training, etc. You don't know what you can do until you do it. So don't look around at other people and compare yourself to them. It does nothing but waste your time and energy and has nothing to do with your own path. The level or skill of another is irrelevant to you because they are not YOU. Be your own story.