

The JKD Training Process

It's been written that the essence of Jeet Kune Do is the ability to "fit in" with any type of opponent and express oneself without any restrictions in combat. The ultimate objective for a JKD practitioner is to have the ability to move their body and adapt to whatever type opponent happens to be in front of them, as well as punch and kick from any angle and at any given moment. In order to do this they must be able to relate their various kicks and strikes to an opponent as part of an intuitive arsenal, and develop the ability to strike from any distance, at every angle and with either hand to take advantage of the moment. The question then becomes, how can a person achieve such a lofty goal in an martial art in which there is no formulaic or set "blueprint" to follow, and which is built more upon guiding principles rather than specific, concretized techniques? The answer is by understanding what is referred to in JKD as the "training process." While Bruce Lee felt that there should be no such thing as a "fixed" system or method of fighting, he nevertheless believed that there is definitely a progressive approach to training. In his martial art notes he wrote, "... JKD does employ a systematic approach to training." In other words, there exists in JKD a definite progressive, systematic method to take a person from point A to point Z. But what is the nature of this training process? What direction or directions does it take? What is the end-point of the process? This article seeks to explore and answer these questions.

Process and Purpose

You cannot separate a process from its purpose. In JKD, the purpose of the training process is to develop and prepare the individual practitioner for the highest levels of performance in all of the various combative elements including kicking, striking, trapping, grappling, etc. In the same way you can't separate the process from the purpose, you cannot understand the value of the entire process by separating it from its parts, or separating the parts from the process. This is because the moment you separate the parts of a process, once you take the process apart, there is no longer a process. There's no movement. There's only this thing or that. It becomes like holding a single frame of film from a movie, or a single grain of sand from the beach. You don't have the movie. You don't have the beach. You have something static, lifeless.

Finally, to fully understand the role any piece of the process plays in the entire process, you need to see it as part of the whole, not as a thing in itself. As Lee wrote in his notes, "... there is no such thing as an effective segment of a totality." All of the various elements involved in the training process are interrelated and should be viewed as links of a chain that are joined together. Each individual link, while an integral part of the chain, is but a single part of a unified 'whole.' None is any more or less important than any of the others. Lack of understanding as to how the various elements are bound up into a single 'whole' makes it impossible to understand the essence of the training process and master the methods of its structuring and planning.

Elements of the Process

The JKD training process comprises all the learning methods and elements, including self-teaching by the individual, which are aimed at improving the practitioner's overall

abilities. Armed with the understanding that the better the process used, the better the results that should be achieved, it makes sense that the JKD practitioner should therefore organize their own training process with a lot of foresight. There are certain fundamental or "core" elements that should be included in any training process. These elements are:

1) Physical Conditioning - The body is the instrument you use in martial arts. It's the delivery system for all your techniques, actions, etc. Physical conditioning concentrates on building the essential prerequisites for high efficiency, and includes the acquisition and development of strength, flexibility, and endurance in order to cultivate a condition of total health and fitness.

2) Technique and Coordination Training - Good technique and a high level of coordination enable you to make economical and optimum use of your physical condition.

3) Tactical/Strategic Training - This training enables you to make optimum use of your physical condition and psychological capacity in responding effectively to an opponent's strengths and weaknesses, and in adapting or "fitting in" to any situation. Both technical and tactical training comprise a large part of the martial artist's overall training process, and are interconnected. The training of technique can be broken down into three phases, or stages of development. These stages are (1) Synchronization of Self, (2) Synchronization with Opponent, and (3) Application under Fighting Conditions.

Stage 1 - Synchronization of Self- The acquisition of skill is a primary consideration in the basic development of all martial artists. A martial artist has to know how to their tools. Every combative skill has its own technique, its own motion that needs to be developed and perfected. It must be learned first, the same way one learns any lesson, through consistent practice and repetition (not mindless, "robotic" repetition, however). So in Stage One the primary focus is on acquiring technical skills and becoming consistent in their performance. During this stage of training the martial artist works on synthesizing various techniques or weapons into their arsenal and developing such qualities as:

- a) **Correct Form** - Correct form in this case means the most efficient manner in which a motion can be used, and includes such things as proper body mechanics, non-telegraphic initiation, good balance, economical motion, proper follow-through, and good defensive coverage. As Lee stated in his notes, "In any physical movement there is always a most efficient and alive manner for each individual to accomplish the purpose of the performance, that is in regard to leverage, balance in movement, economical and efficient use of motion and energy. Through instinctive body feeling, each of us knows our most efficient and dynamic manner of achieving effective leverage, balance in motion, and economical use of energy."
- b) **Precision** - Precision refers to accuracy and the ability to place your weapon on a desired target. It does you no good to have a tremendously powerful hook kick if you're unable to hit the opponent with it.

c) **Rhythm** - In this regard, rhythm refers to developing the ability to combine various simple/ single movements into compound/ combination actions (such as a lead hook kick, lead backfist, rear straight punch combination), and put them together so that they flow naturally and with a sense of rhythm. At the same time the above qualities are being developed, the speed at which a technique or action is practiced should be progressively increased. This is what is meant by "synchronization of the whole." The idea is to learn the proper body mechanics and then take any motion or technique and "make it your own." Don't look for absolutely flawless technique, but rather concentrate on technique that is simple, mechanically sound, and individually suited to *you*. Stage One is of paramount importance in the overall training process as it's the foundation stone and sets the base for all future work. Inadequate preparation at this stage is a surefire prescription for future problems

Stage 2 - Synchronization with Opponent - Stage Two deals with transforming the performance factors that have been developed into new higher and more complex standards of performance. At this stage of training the primary emphasis is on refining the skills and coordination developed in the first stage and developing their availability in varying circumstances. The techniques or actions the martial artist has learned in stage one are now done under more combat-like conditions in which the practitioner has to regulate the cadence and distance to relate to or synchronize with an 'live' opponent. In Stage Two the practitioner also works on developing such qualities as:

a) **Timing** - Timing refers to the ability to seize an opportunity when it is either given or created. You may know how to punch and kick, and even have adequate speed and power, but without correct timing it is less than likely your blow will score.

b) **Distance** - Distance refers to maintaining the spatial relationship between *you* and an opponent in order to be in position to attack or counter the moment an opening appears. You may possess the ability to kick with lightning speed, but without a feeling for the proper distance it's more than likely your kick will not land.

Stage Three - Application Under Fighting Conditions - In Stage Three, situations similar to combat are simulated, and the martial artist works on applying the techniques and actions they've learned in combative conditions, against a non-cooperative opponent who is not only attempting to provoke errors *by* blocking or countering with timing and distance, but who is also attempting to hit *you*. The development of proper combative attitude and problem-solving abilities are stressed during this stage. Through combative training such as sparring, the practitioner develops their ability to compete to the best advantage against any type of opponent, to exhaust their strength and energy reserves with maximum economy and sense of purpose, and develop the mental qualities specific to fighting.

The final core element in the training process is:

4) Mental Training - Mental training is an essential yet oftentimes overlooked element in the training process. In this form of training, methods should be used which combine physical preparation with psychological preparation, and aid in developing such qualities as self-reliance, willpower, and perseverance. Mental training also includes the development of the martial artist's intellectual faculties, as well as improvement of training knowledge and principles and the ability to creatively apply such knowledge to their own training. It is here that the 'educated *eye*' and 'discerning mind' come into play. The JKD practitioner should develop the ability to break down techniques and motions into component parts so that their organizational structure may be understood, as well as put them back together to form a new whole.

Proper Sequence of Learning

In JKD, it doesn't matter if a person learns a hook kick before they learn a side kick, or a backfist before a hook punch (although Lee did advocate concentrating upon refining your lead side tools first). However, in the training process there is a proper learning sequence. How, for example, is it possible for a person to concentrate on the proper tactics and strategy they will use to defeat an opponent if they're busy thinking about their footwork and mobility skills, or worrying about whether their punch or kick is strong enough? Only when a person doesn't have to consciously be concerned with such things as their balance, movement abilities, etc., can they then concentrate on the more tactical elements of fighting. So a person needs a firm command of the basic skills such as their weapon *systems* and mobility skills in order to use tactics to the highest degree. As a JKD student you think while learning, and that's how it should be. However, in an actual combative situation there will be little or no time for thoughts. By then each action must be second nature to you. This "automaticity of response" is what you seek. Does this then mean that a person cannot develop tactical skills during the early stages of their development? No. On the contrary, in JKD, it's possible and sometimes desirable to kill two birds with one stone. For example, once a JKD practitioner has developed a basic understanding of the body mechanics of a lead straight punch, they can then practice using it against an opponent as he advances in order to develop their sense of timing.

Your Own Process

Training is to a great extent an individual matter. Performance is the sum of numerous factors, which can vary from individual to individual. Ultimately, however, it's the quality of the body-mind relationship that will determine how far you tap your full potential as a martial artist. In order for you to fulfill your potential, you need to approach training progressively, as a process. According to Dan Millman in his book, *Body Mind Mastery*, "Training is either conscious and systematic, or random and haphazard." He later adds, "If you feel something wrong but aren't able to pinpoint the specific problem, you'll struggle to improve by doing more of the same ... " There was nothing random or haphazard about Lee's training process. Nor should there be with your own. You should approach training in a scientific manner, which involves the following three steps:

1) Set Goals - The setting of goals is an important and integral part of the training process for two reasons. First, goals are necessary for direction. If you

don't have them, you might drift, stagnate or follow wrong paths in your training. Second, goals are useful for feedback purposes. They provide you with a reference point, and by comparing your current position with the reference point you can figure out what adjustments or corrections need to be made. Finally, remember that vague or poorly defined goals will lead to poor or sporadic results. So no matter how creative and intuitive you are, you should be clear as to what your objective or goal is.

2) Research the best ways to accomplish your goal(s) - Find the most efficient and effective methods to achieve your objective(s).

3) Implement the methods and record your progress - Keeping a record of your training in a daily training log or workout journal is invaluable in gauging your progress, identifying problem areas and modifying your training approach if and when necessary. Finally, there are several things to avoid in developing your training process. These include:

a) Vain repetition of someone else's imposed pattern. Don't do something just because someone else tells you to, or because they do it themselves.

b) Non-thinking, "robotic" repetition. Be 'mindful' in your own training.

c) Boredom - High levels of performance require consistent training. You should figure out different ways to train different things so that you won't get bored or stagnate.