

CHRIS KENT -- “LIBERATION”

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By Andrew Staton

Chris Kent is widely acknowledged as one of the world’s foremost authorities on Bruce Lee’s martial art, Jeet Kune Do, and has gained international recognition for his knowledge and leadership in perpetuating the art, training methods, and philosophy developed by Lee.

He has authored three of the highest-rated books on *Jeet Kune Do: The Encyclopedia of Jeet Kune Do*, *Jeet Kune Do – The Textbook*, and *Jeet Kune Do Kickboxing*. In addition, he has written for numerous martial art publications both nationally and internationally.

I met with Chris when he was still an instructor at the first Inosanto Academy in Marina Del Rey, California. Even then he was an exceptional teacher and one of the things that made him different was his long discussions with students about utilizing Bruce’s principles in daily life.

I am now pleased to announce that Chris has put all this information into his latest books: *LIBERATE YOURSELF – A Guide to Personal Freedom*, and the companion workbook and resource journal, *P.L.A.N. – Personal Liberation Action Notebook*. IN these, Chris shares the philosophy of self-actualization and personal liberation synthesized by the legendary martial artist, Bruce Lee, and takes them out of the martial art arena and into daily living.

To launch awareness of these books, I was able to secure an exclusive interview for *Martial Arts Illustrated* and get Chris to reveal the reasons why he thinks that these books will open up Jeet Kune Do to all who are interested in the works of Bruce Lee and how his principles can help everybody who opens their mind to what is being revealed to them.

MAI: Chris what inspired you to write these Books?

CK: As I said in the preface of book, when I first started training in JKD, like most other people I was primarily interested in the physical things that Bruce Lee did. Things like how he was able to swing a three hundred pound heavy bag and stop it dead in its tracks with a single kick, how to hit an opponent with a finger jab from ten feet away before they can even react. But as I continued training and my training progressed and I learned more and began to research more, I realized that there was so much more to Jeet Kune Do than just the physical component of the art. At the time, what made JKD different from the other martial arts out there was the underlying philosophical foundations upon which the art was built. And the central theme of this philosophy was self actualization and personal liberation -- liberation of body, liberation of mind, liberation of spirit through greater self-knowledge.

So that opened those doors to me and I began to investigate those in greater detail. The mental and spiritual aspects of JKD really struck a resonant chord within me and so I made it one of my goals to develop my knowledge and my understanding of these philosophical principles as much as I could.

As I did this I came to the realization that it was Bruce Lee's mind that informed everything he did with the martial art. It wasn't so much the other way around. It was the attitude with which he approached his training and his personal development. Those thought processes that he used were what allowed him to actualize his full potential, or at least his potential up until the time that he passed away, because honestly, I don't feel that he achieved his true potential because his life was cut short.

So again, as my training progressed I began to start looking at the broader application of these principles and this philosophy. One of the things that my teacher, Dan Inosanto always stressed to me from the time I started training was that what we learned in the gym, in the school while we were training had to be taken out and utilized in the world, in our daily living. That was one of the ultimate goals of Jeet Kune Do. Another thing that he always stressed to me, which he said Bruce used to relate to him, was that life is combat and should be dealt with accordingly. That if we understand combat we understand life. And I have to say that initially I thought that was kind of a dark or pessimistic way of looking at things. But as I developed as a martial artist I began to see exactly how true this analogy was once you truly understood it.

As you know, I've been involved with Jeet Kune Do for almost thirty nine years now, and I've met and trained with people who I feel are some of the greatest martial artists in the world. And I've had the opportunity to travel and teach, both across the United States and other countries around the world. And during that time I've come across all kinds of people who, when the discussion turns to Bruce Lee, will tell you things such as, "Man, Bruce Lee has changed my life.", "Bruce Lee inspired me to do such and such," etc., but when you ask them what it was about Lee that had such an effect upon them or affected such change, most of them cannot put it into words. That became part of the impetus of this book. We see and we hear a lot about how Bruce Lee changed the world, and I think that is truly great. What I am interested in and what my goal is through the writing of these books is to help individuals change their lives. To be able to share with people, through my years having grown up in the art, the various philosophical tenets that Bruce Lee utilized in his personal quest for self-actualization and personal liberation. To help people identify, understand and integrate those principles in their own life. And who knows, perhaps in so doing, like Lee, they may end up changing the world themselves.

The primary book, *Liberate Yourself!* has been in the works for probably fifteen years at least. It's something I've always wanted to but one reason or another taken the time or got around to doing it. And finally the opportunity presented itself to be able to do it. Like I said, it's something I felt very strongly about, and I just saw that over the years there was one particular side of JKD, the physical component. A few comments here and there about "liberate yourself" and things like that, but nothing that was substantial or that people could

really sink their teeth into. And that was always my goal, to be able to take these ideas because I felt strongly about them and how beneficial they would be.

MAI: Who are you aiming the books at everyone or Martial Artists and why?

CK: Well, there's the main book, "Liberate Yourself! - A Guide to Personal Freedom" and there's the "P.L.A.N. - Personal Liberation Action Notebook" which works in conjunction with the main book. It's a workbook and resource journal that people can write in, search themselves, find answer to questions about themselves. That's specifically for them. The books are aimed anyone who is sincerely interested in self-development, personal growth, and possibly liberating themselves from anything that's holding them back or that they feel is holding them back or restricting them in some way. So the books are aimed at everybody; martial artists, musicians, writers, office workers, anybody who is interested in developing themselves and actualizing their own potential.

MAI: Presumable the title comes from Bruce Lee's original quote of "Liberate yourself from classical Karate" -- how much of the books are an evolution of the original Jeet Kune Do that Bruce came up with?

CK: Actually the title came from the quote on the book which is part of Bruce Lee's gravestone -- "Your inspiration continues to guide us toward our personal liberation." Again, liberate yourself, move toward your own personal liberation. That's where the title came from.

MAI: Is there material in your books which advise the reader to commit themselves to learning every time an opportunity presents itself in daily living?

CK: Yes. It offers guidelines, a fluid set of operating principles that an individual can use. So committing yourself to learning either something about yourself or about something else everyday, that should be a given. You know, you have the choice, you can either choose to progress or you can choose to stagnate and possibly regress. Situations that occur offer us opportunities for learning and personal growth.

MAI: Do the books give both the technical and philosophical aspects to daily Living and show structural framework that Bruce Lee built to facilitate his growth and development as both a martial artist and a person?

CK: It was, to use the analogy, it was like the Yin-Yang. Bruce's personal development came through utilizing the principles that are put forth in the book. Those principles helped facilitate his growth, not only as a martial artist, but also, and possibly more importantly, as he stated frequently, as a human being. These underlying or core principles gave him the attitude and the wherewithal to continue on his own path, as they will with anybody else. There is no central structural framework if you will, that's the great thing about it. A person can open the book and go to any subject or any chapter that they feel relates to them or relates to what they're going through at this particular time, or what they're dealing with. So there's a structural framework that isn't set or concretized.

MAI: Would you say Simplicity plays a big part in personal development and how do you explain that by asking questions and coming up with the answers is critical to understanding the JKD way of thinking and studying?

CK: I'm going to break this into two sections. The first is regarding simplicity and its role in personal development. Yes, I believe that simplifying things can allow us to achieve more. I can relate simplicity to the hacking away of the non-essentials or the un-essentials. In the same way that one does it in martial art, you can do it in your life. Are these things actually essential in your life, or non-essential? Do you need them or not need them? If you don't need them, why are you maintaining them at this particular time? And even in your approach to doing something. The idea in JKD that if you see something and it is being done it three moves to accomplish it, can the same result be achieved with two movements, or possibly one movement. So simplicity plays an integral part in personal development.

The second part of the question -- JKD has been referred to as a "problem-solving" art. The individual has to actively participate in solving problems and coming up with solutions otherwise they will never truly understand it. So having the critical mind, if you will, not simply an open mind that takes in anything that comes along, but a fluid, open yet critical mind to be able to look at things and ask questions such as "Why is it done this way?" -- "Is this the best way of doing it?", etc. are integral parts of an individual's personal growth.

MAI: How does directness help in everyday living?

CK: Directness can be looked at in several ways. Being honest, being forthright, to use the idea of honestly expressing yourself, which is one of the core tenets put forth in the book. Are you talking around in circles, are you honestly expressing what's going on or what you feel or think without having to deal with the fear of being misunderstood or miscommunication. The other way is going directly where it is you want to go or doing what you want to do without wasting time or getting sidetracked.

MAI: There is always a lot of talk about non-classical and that it permits freedom, personalized thinking, and modification how do you describe this in your book?

CK: If we relate that to traditional martial arts, in the classical trained systems you never questioned your Sifu, you did exactly what you were told to do, you didn't change things. If you did you got into trouble and were often ejected from the school or excommunicated. It was very tradition-based. And when it comes to our thinking, sometimes it's easy for people to be locked into tradition-based thinking. I think this way because my teacher thought this way, or my parents thought that way or my religion thinks that way. So this individual is not thinking for themselves they're simply staying on the track that's been put forth already by whoever it is. And sometimes it's fear that keeps them locked into that idea.

MAI: It is said that Bruce Lee set out to revolutionize fighting by developing a fighting method that was built on the cornerstones of non-classical, directness, and simplicity. However along the way, however, Jeet Kune Do became a revolutionary philosophy for

personal freedom. It became a process that lead to personal growth and development. Is this what these books are exposing?

CK: When one looks from a historical standpoint, initially, yes, Bruce Lee was looking at creating what he referred to as “the ultimate gung fu system” or the “ultimate martial art system.” And so he transitioned from Wing Chun to Jun Fan Gung Fu to eventually what became known as Jeet Kune Do. But as that philosophy continued to grow, and that’s why I think it’s important that you have to follow that evolution through to the end, it became about doing away with styles completely. Becoming a free and creative martial artist on your own and using the cornerstones of simplicity, directness, and non-classical as foundations. So yes, it moved from being an art to a philosophy if you will towards martial art. That is brought out in the book.

MAI: Would you say the books help us in learning, understanding, and using the valuable information and is a great way to move forward in our own journeys towards self-actualization.?

CK: The material is there in the book, it’s up to the individual to use it. Some individuals might just read it as a nice little book about philosophy or philosophical ideas and not want to take it any further. The choice is entirely up to the individual. The books can definitely help you understand the philosophical tenets, and one of the things I’ve tried to do is relate from a martial art context to a life context, giving examples from my life of having to deal with certain things, as well as examples from other people’s lives. So yes, it can help you, but again the only person who can use the material is the person reading the book.

MAI: Is it correct to say that the context and body of your books will help you understand and study and the way of Jeet Kune Do.? Which only serves as a vehicle for you to develop or achieve your full potential through creativity, independence, spontaneity, and a grasp of the real world?

CK: I definitely think the book could help anyone who is studying Jeet Kune Do because it helps them see the philosophical foundations that underpin the entire art. As I’ve said, for some people there are just the physical aspects of JKD, and I think that’s very limited. You know, it’s just all about physical technique, or maybe they’ll toss in one or two little anecdotes here and there. I think the book will help somebody improve their understanding of JKD because it would give them a clearer grasp on what Bruce Lee was attempting to move towards in it. And if they choose to use that material for their own personal growth and personal development, I think the books would be very beneficial.

MAI: Would you say that these books divulge what Jeet Kune Do is and how it is a prescription for personal growth and development?

CK: I think it would be incorrect, or a simplification to say that the book divulges what Jeet Kune Do is, because the book is not about the art and science of JKD. It’s about the central themes that go along with JKD. Themes such as personal development, individualization,

liberation from anything, be it mental or physical. So no, It's not about the physical aspects of JKD, and yet it is a book that shares with people some of the major factors in JKD.

MAI: in your belief is it right to say in the beginning, Bruce's path was leading him towards a revolutionary fighting method, but in the end a process was born?

CK: Yes, in the beginning, Bruce Lee's path was directed toward developing a revolutionary fighting method if you will -- the ultimate gung fu system. But realizing along that path that there is no cessation point, that it is a continual and on-going process. So while in the beginning Lee was trying to come up with something, but in the end it shifted into a much, much broader application. The principles went into his filmmaking, they went into all aspects of his life, in the same way that they should do for each of us.

MAI: How do these books help you grow as a person, and are they the ingredient you need as a powerful self change agent, and that change agent is the process that is called Jeet Kune Do.?

CK: The books can help an individual grow as a person as long as that individual is willing to do the work that's necessary to change themselves and bring about growth. The process is not called Jeet Kune Do. Jeet Kune Do is the name that was given to the particular martial art. You need to put a name to it, because it's a way of thinking, a way of feeling, a way of being. So no, it's not the change, it's not the process called Jeet Kune Do. It might sound flippant, but to use Lee's analogy, "It's just a name. Don't fuss over it." It's the material, it's not an art, it's a way of being.

MAI: This process called process of Jeet Kune Do in name, would you say it is a tool that will lead you towards personal liberation because it does not restrict you to doing things only certain ways. Although there is a structure to Jeet Kune Do, would you also say there's freedom within that structure?

CK: One of the fundamental tenets of JKD is "Using no way as way; Having no limitations as limitation." Well, what does "using no way as way" mean? Does an individual actually understand what that means and how do they apply that to what they're doing in their life, how they're living their life. We're back to the same idea we discussed earlier. This is not Jeet Kune Do. It is an integral part of the overall Jeet Kune Do, if you will, but it is not Jeet Kune Do. It is utilizing and applying the fundamental principles that Lee applied to his study of martial arts. The maintaining fluidity of thought and action, "be like water," what does that mean. Immersing yourself fully in the moment in whatever you're doing. I don't care if it's martial art training, playing a piano, reading a book, walking along a country road. Are you fully there in that moment or are you physically there but mentally somewhere else.

MAI: Whilst reading these books will there be a journey of growth and Jeet Kune Do will be a source of inspiration?

CK: There will only be a journey of growth if the individual decides to take the journey. They can read the book and sit in their living room and not do anything from now until

doomsday and that's exactly what it will just be, a book, not a repository of ideas or catalyst for thought and action. If they are a martial artist and they choose to follow the path of JKD then great. And if they follow some other path, that's great too. It's entirely up to the individual.

MAI: Can you explain that by acquiring knowledge, is not the objective, because knowledge alone is useless?

CK: One of the core tenets covered in the book is that it's not how much you know, but how much of what you know that you can apply. Putting your knowledge into action. While acquiring a knowledge base and a certain amount of knowledge is a prerequisite in anything you're doing or want to do, whether you're a doctor or a mechanic, etc., just having that knowledge by itself but not being able to apply it serves no purpose. It's simply sitting there doing nothing. So acquiring knowledge is one thing, applying that knowledge is another thing entirely.

MAI: Do the books show the reader how to apply their knowledge and what to do with the power gained in association with that knowledge. In other words, the knowledge becomes usable knowledge when you can actually apply the theory they have learnt?

CK: This relates to what we just discussed. People say "knowledge is power," but in reality "applied knowledge is power." Knowledge is potential power. Applying it is kinetic. So it only becomes useable when you can actually apply the material that you've learned. In martial arts, it's doesn't matter how many techniques you know. If you have belts or sashes, it doesn't matter how many belts you have or what colour they might be, if you cannot take the techniques and apply them as reflex action in a combative situation, then it doesn't mean anything.

MAI: Chris, in life, opportunities come along that can forever change your future. Many times these opportunities are squandered due to family, fear, friends, indecision, and other real and perceived obstacles. Life change requires moving outside your comfort zone and change also requires seizing the right opportunities. Do you think your books will help the reader seize these opportunity, and allow themselves to change their future for the better?

CK: I think the books will help an individual develop their capacity to recognize opportunities and be able to size-up those opportunities. Whether they choose to take those opportunities or be an individual thing. Life requires moving out of your comfort zone in anything. Change is very necessary. If a person can take the idea and possibly readjust their perception to see change as an integral and necessary part of life, and looking for the opportunities instead of just looking from a fear-based perspective such as "This change is going to be bad.", who knows it might be phenomenal or great change. The book will give them ideas on how they can recognize opportunities and then take advantage of them.

MAI: If the reader is ready or not to begin a lifelong journey into Jeet Kune Do and the powerful and transforming opportunity, Is it true to say that by reading your books they have

one step forward to understanding that the opportunity to learn more about Jeet Kune Do is there and embracing the mindset of lifelong learning is in their hands?.

CK: Yes, by looking at the material in the book, they do have one step or the potential of one step forward to understanding about it. But then again, if they don't take that step then they are not going to go anywhere. We've all heard the anecdote about "a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." That's true. But you have to take that first step. You can have your car packed and loaded, gassed up and ready to go, and never leave the driveway. You've got to take the step and move forward. Simply adopting the ideas put forth in the book is not going to help you in any way.