

# Kase Interview (2001)

**Taiji Kase 9th Dan  
Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha  
(SRKH) interview by  
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magazine...**

***B.I.: Could you tell us how did you confront Karate after you got sick?***

**T.K.:** After I got over the worst part of my heart attack, I had a great surprise. The doctors told me I had accumulated a lot of liquid in my lungs. They did not know why, because according to them, this had to have happened over many years, and I should have noticed it, but I did not have any problems with my health. In terms of my recuperation, it is important to keep in mind Yoshitaka Funakoshi's experience. Even though he was sick and was spending most of his time in bed, at night he would put on his karate uniform and he was strong and dynamic as if nothing had ever happened.

That is the reason wh during my recovery, I used to think about it and I decided to accept the challenge to show that with karate you can overcome problems, including health problems. The doctors had told me that it would be better to stop practicing and teaching Karate and that I should abandon it completely. So while I was sick I also remembered the experience

***B.I.: Who were Karate Masters or Instructors from whom you received classes?***

**T.K.:** We were members of the Shotokan-Dojo and officially the Shihan (a high ranking master) was Funakoshi Gichin and the second Shihan Funakoshi Yoshitaka (his son). Another instructor from whom I received classes was Hironishi Genshin. But also in addition to that, we also attended classes at the Karate University. Once a week, in an official way, different instructors were invited, such as Funakoshi Gichin, Yoshitaka, Hironishi, Kawata, Okuyama, Hayashi, Uemura, Kubota and others.

Therefore, the education was not as generally understood, for we were influenced by several instructors. At least once a week we had an instructor invited to the University of Senshu.

***B.I.: You have spoken to us a lot about Sensei Okuyama Tadao, who we understand was, and still is, a very special person. Tell us about him and why you appreciate him so?***

Oh! And about the Dan exams at the end of the 2nd World War. Shimamura, Jotaru Takagi and I were the first ones to take the exams of Sandan (3rd Dan). This was the first exam in which we did Kumite among us. In this exam Motokuni Sugiura - presently Chief Instructor of JKA/World Federation - passed the Shodan (1st Dan).

***B.I.: Could you tell our readers why Yoshitaka had so much influence in the evolution of Shotokan Karate?***

**T.K.:** When I began practicing Karate, our Seniors told us that Sensei Funakoshi Gichin was the pioneer of Karate. But they also told us that the evolution, revolution and development of Karate was carried out by his son Yoshitaka. His Karate was faster, stronger and more dynamic. Sensei Yoshitaka searched for validity and efficiency. He wanted to know if the techniques really worked against the attacks. But what is really important to understand, is that the great development from Sensei Funakoshi Gichin's Karate, to the

of Sensei Egami, one of my other seniors from whom I received several classes. Sensei Egami was likewise very sick and had several surgeries, which among others caused him difficulty breathing. Nevertheless when he gave classes with his Assistant, Sensei Takagi, Egami recovered his breathing in a special way and then he used to say, "Ok, now I am going to teach you", and he would let them attack, he would apply defenses and counter attacks that were very fast and most of all powerful. That is why I decided to learn from my seniors and to test the same things. That is, even though I cannot always be well, I can maintain an explosive power for a short space of time and then later recuperate myself and soon successfully.

**T.K.** Well what Yoshitaka did was increase the distance little by little, maybe two or three metres, trying to do it in the same amount of time. This would then be more efficient, and that is where the importance of Fudo-Dachi position comes in.

When at war, the ancient Samurais gave great importance to the Ko-Waza movements (short distance techniques), in need of immediate action, since their lives were at stake at this distance. Later, when at peace, the space for the

**T.K.:** In order to speak about Sensei Okuyama, I will go back to the days when the five Shotokan Universities carried out their Dan Gradings together. In these exams Kata, Kihon and Kihon-Kumite were practiced and the Senior Instructors graded them. The applicants did Kumite with them, it was usual for one of the Seniors to do Kumite (combat) with the applicants. That was where Sensei Okuyama appeared. That moment as I recall, was really sensational, because he attacked with greater speed and force than any of the others. The applicants could not even react. There was no way to defend oneself from Sensei Okuyama, he was over you with his fist in your face before you knew what was happening. Everybody was amazed by his ability. When our seniors taught us Kata, they told us that when Yoshitaka Funakoshi did Kata, those who saw him felt a tremendous impression of impending danger. That was the way - they said - katas should be performed. The people watching must feel and notice something, feel the vibration of our inner force and determination. If the spectators do not feel anything, then the kata is not correctly performed, it is a "gymnastic" or "dancing" Kata.

***B.I.: You always talk to us***

karate practiced by Yoshitaka, was possible thanks to the O-Waza (long distance techniques) concept, with maximum speed and force. However, we must not linger on this point, as what is really important is to master the O-Waza in order to be able to be efficient in Ko-Waza (short distance technique).

Gichin Funakoshi even said that the Seite (when one arm defends and the other counter-attacks) is important, but more so is Hente (defense and counter-attack with the same arm) - Hente is directly related to the Ko-Waza practice. For this reason, it is especially important to understand the O-Waza concept and its history.

Let's imagine that the performance of a Tsuki (punch) at a distance of one metre took "X" time.

**T.K.:** Toate means to touch without physically touching. An example of how to begin controlling this capacity is: when we block the attacker vigorously, with a lot of energy, at the beginning of the attack, and continue doing so repeatedly many times, with a lot of concentration and the correct breathing, and then one of the times we do not block him, he feels as if we had and does not attack, he is doubtful. This would be an example of initiation to Toate, but there is a lot more and only a few like Sensei Egami or Yoshitaka

techniques was increased, giving more importance to O-Waza (long distance) as a training method. For example long distance techniques were used in Kendo, in order to develop and strengthen the body as in exercise. However, a good use of this training system helps prepare the muscles and after that practice Ko-Waza efficiently.

With respect to the position work, Funakoshi's (senior) speciality was Kiba-Dachi (horse-riding stance).

Yoshitaka watched it and after some experiments created the Fudo-Dachi position, following his style of more explosive and long distance techniques. This is the reason for this new position, since these techniques performed from a front stance lose a lot of their efficiency. The same thing happens with the different types of movements. From Fudo-Dachi we can move and change our direction at maximum speed and stability, which is not the case with the others. A clear example of the aim for more distance and depth in the advance of a tsuki (punch), is the technical sequence of: "Fumi-Komi - Soe Ashi ; Gedan Tsuki - Soto Uke" of the Empi Kata.

***B.I.: When did you see Yoshitaka Funakoshi for the first time?***

***about the importance of breathing and the Hara in your classes. Could you tell us about it?***

T.K.: The importance of the Hara (about three centimetres above the navel) in Budo comes from two different sources. One is Zen meditation. In Zen they discovered that after the normal or chest breathing, in the lungs, the air could be lowered, while breathing, to the center of the body - to the Hara. This allowed a greater stability and ability to control the inside of the body. With this method the movements improved considerably. On the other hand there are the Samurais, some of them noticed that if instead of using the muscular strength of the shoulders, they used a point that was lower, meaning the Hara. They realized the techniques were more efficient and had greater possibilities of success.

Since Kendo, Ju-Jutsu, etc., already existed in Japan as Budo Arts, little by little this direction was followed in the Karate-Do, breathing the following way:

*You push the air towards the Hara, keep it compressed there and use that extra energy as a powerful force to perform the techniques. The correct breathing towards the Hara and the subsequent compression, allows the development of the powerful*

have studied this thoroughly. With respect to this angle of Toate, on a higher level, once he told us that long ago, some Budo masters or Samurais were capable of paralyzing small birds or bats without touching them. They simply concentrated on them, focusing them with their eyes, breath or kiai and paralyzed them long enough to be able to drive their spear into them...

***B.I.: What parts of the Budo practice would you like to emphasize?***

T.K.: One of the most important parts of the Budo Arts practice is the repeated technique or combination...But they must not be made random. For example, when somebody repeats a certain technique or movement many times - about 500, 1000 or 10,000 tsuki blows, he must look inwards and feel his sensations, because probably only two or three of the tsukis have been correct (speed, force, settlement), in short, efficient. And only these two or three tsukis are the important ones, the ones we must remember. Therefore, we must be very perceptive and be able to feel the moment when we have done it correctly, look inwards and impress that sensation in our mind and in our body. After that you must ask yourself: Why have I done it better this time than others? This is

T.K.: It was in 1944. Although the beginners class was usually taught by Sensei Hironishi, one day a different Sensei came in. I did not know him and when I asked who it was they told me he was Waka Sensei (the young Sensei), son of Gichin Funakoshi. In this class, Yoshitaka Sensei taught us how to kick Mae-geri slowly, and without lowering his leg to the floor, also how to do a yoko-geri, then withholding the yoko-geri, how to do a mawashi-geri. After that he said: "now I will show you how we do it normally" and gave three kicks that were so fast and strong, that I still remember seeing the white flash of the Karate Uniform pant and a noise that sounded like a storm. We were all very impressed.

*force that is essential for example in the Sanbon-Tsuki, Sandan-tsuki, or in the Hente (techniques carried out with the same arm). These could not be efficiently performed with the lung level breathing, nor with the muscular strength of the shoulders. Maximum efficiency is only possible with the powerful force generated by the breathing, the stabilizing and the compression of the Hara.*

***B.I.: You have sometimes spoken to us about some very important and unknown concepts, such as TOATE. Could you give us a simple explanation of it?***

THIS IS THE STEP FROM THE QUANTITATIVE (amount) to the qualitative (quality), this is what is really important in the process of learning - how to go from one level to another. Next time you practice that technique or any other, so you must try to recall the sensation, so that on future occasions you perform the techniques with it. This way, maybe doing it only 100 times, you can get two or three correctly. Therefore you go faster every time and can incorporate the correct sensation to more techniques. This is one of the keys to success. What is not sufficient is to work out the same exercise for 30, 40 or 50 years, thousands of times without noticing what is happening inside our body, not improving the quality of our techniques and counting only on the repetition. This is not enough, you have to see which has been the correct technique, how you have felt it and work with that sensation.

***B.I.: Do you believe that the Karate-Do, or the Budo have some mysterious elements, or that are only accessible to a few?***

T.K.: No, what happens is that in the practice of Budo you must cover a long distance. I believe I have reached it many times while on other occasions I think I am near but have not yet arrived. For this reason, anyone can progress in Budo, just as long as they follow the correct direction to go from one level to another. This is what really makes a difference between performers. What is really important is not the number of years you practice but the correct practice during those years. This is the only way to progress towards a superior Karate. When somebody asks me why we practice so many attack techniques, so frequently and

stronger each time, my answer is that when you experiment with the sensations, attacking and searching for more force, our defenses get stronger. When we manage to perform a stronger attack, we must ask ourselves if we would have been able to repel such a fast and powerful attack.

***B.I.: Finally, could you give us Karate artists some advice?***

T.K.: My advice for the pupils of Karate-Do is very simple. You must remember what Gichin Funakoshi said - "Karate Ni Senti Ashi" (There is no first attack in karate), and understand the idea, mentally as well as technically. You must do everything possible so that the attacker mentally understands that it is better for him not to attack, to feel it and accept this. This is the true meaning of the saying "Karate Ni Sente Ashi" - that the adversary does not begin attacking and so there is no fight.

