

Technique and Principle – An Indivisible Whole

by Chris Kent

The dictionary defines technique as: “*Any method or manner of accomplishing something... the method or procedure (with reference to practical or formal details) or way of using basic skills in rendering an artistic work or carrying out a mechanical operation.*” Techniques are the “what” and “how to do’s”. They are specific applications that fit specific circumstances. In Jeet Kune Do, techniques include such things as the proper fighting stance or ready position, the mechanics of a particular punch or kick, the various types of footwork used, etc.

Principle is defined as: *A fundamental truth, law, doctrine or motivating force upon which others are based.*” Principles are the “why to do’s.” They are the elements upon which techniques are built. In Jeet Kune Do, there are two types of principles; general and specific. General principles include such things as Simplicity, Directness, and Non-Classical. Specific principles include such things as Economy of Motion, Quick Recovery, and Good Defensive Coverage.

Techniques are actions that might work in one particular circumstance but not necessarily another. Principles, on the other hand, have universal application. Certain principles regarding such things as speed, power, balance, etc., are true regardless of what method or style of martial art a person practices.

In Jeet Kune Do, training should never be one-sided. The understanding of principles alone cannot lead you to mastery of the movements of the body and its limbs. Physical techniques do exist in JKD, and it is obvious that, like learning to paint, sculpt, or play music, a certain amount of technique is necessary. Technique teaches you coordination and the options open to you. But the underlying purpose of technique is to illustrate principles. Therefore, technique is a means to an end; not the end itself. One must master techniques; yet at the same time not become enslaved by them. What happens if a person only learns techniques? The answer is that they become what is referred to as “physically bound”. They just go around collecting more and more techniques. Ten different ways of doing this, sixteen ways of doing that. If a person learns only techniques, they’ve only got those techniques to fall back on should the need arise. They’ve got nowhere else to go.

Principles are self-evident, self-validating natural laws. They don’t change or shift. Principles point the way. If you understand them and use them then you won’t get lost, confused, or fooled in your training. When you learn or analyze a particular technique, you use the principles as your base. You ask yourself such questions as, “Is this a practical application of JKD principles?” – “Is it non-telegraphic?” – “Am I well-covered while doing this technique?” If you know the underlying principles, then you can literally “discover” techniques. By

understanding principles you can find your own way instead of being dependent on others for instruction or direction. What happens if a person learns only principles? They become “intellectually bound”. They get all tied up in various theories and concepts, etc. To theorize on something is fine, but if you cannot manifest it, what good is it? The only way you can be sure a principle works is to put it to the test. In his writings concerning swordsmanship, Takuan Soho, the renowned Zen monk, wrote:

“There is such a thing as training in principle, and such a thing as training in technique. If you do not train in technique, but only fill your heart with principle, your body and hands will not function. Even though you know principle, you must make yourself perfectly free in technique. And even though you may wield the sword that you carry with you well, if you are unclear on the deeper aspects of principle, you will likely fall short of proficiency. Technique and principle are just like the two wheels of a cart.”

Technique and principle make up an indivisible “whole”. The principles help guide you to find the technique, and the technique should be a practical illustration of those principles. So harmonize and unite both principle and technique in your training. Don’t run to one extreme or the other, or become “bound” by either one.