

## Knowledge is not kept in one vessel

Karate as generally practiced today in essence came from Okinawa. It was originally a fusion of Chinese fighting arts and Okinawan Te which was the indigenous Okinawan fighting art. The old masters took their art to the Japanese mainland and from there it has been exported to the world post World War II. Karate is an evolving art. That is, it changes over time. Post 1950's karate became more sports orientated. Now there is a divide between those who engage in the sports karate and those who practice karate from a self defence perspective and incorporate karate jutsu (joint locks, grappling and throws etc).

The original "Old Okinawan Masters" had numerous teachers. Some of these original teachers even travelled back to China to learn from teachers on the Chinese mainland. Some exponents like Funakoshi Gichin Sensei were encouraged by their teacher to take classes from other teachers.

So why is it today that so many karate-ka still will not look beyond their own particular style or club for knowledge?

Many of course have only that club or style as a reference source and are happy to be spoon fed from the top down. Others are not permitted by their instructor or association to look elsewhere. If they do look elsewhere they will not be welcome back at that club. In both these two examples the knowledge is held as power over the student by the instructor or organization and the student never gets contrasting views, only one view or way of thinking.

Once you achieve Dan grades you should be open to ideas. You do not necessarily have to agree with other points of view but you should at least consider them.

This is where attending seminars held by various instructors is such a good thing. You can go along and look, participate in the class and consider what is being put forward and decide for yourself whether to keep that information or not. This is not being unfaithful to, or betraying your club or association, though some instructors and associations will see it that way.

This controlling attitude that is clearly evident in some instructors and associations says from their perspective that:

1. I know everything, how dare you go elsewhere.
2. If my student learns something from someone else, then they will know I do not know everything.
3. We control (manipulate) what the student will learn. We know best (knowledge is power).

If your instructor or association is that insecure and insists on having that much control over you in the Dan grades, then it might be a good thing for you to consider whether this attitude of theirs is a healthy one and maybe you might be better off somewhere else.

As the title of this article says “Knowledge is not kept in one vessel”. If knowledge were only kept in one vessel then there would have only ever been “One Old Okinawan Master” and we all would be practicing what he taught.

There are a number of ways your can improve your karate knowledge.

- Attend seminars.
- Join a reputable on line karate discussion forum.
- Read some of the very good karate books written by reputable researches and karate historians.
- Look at DVD’s produced by well known karate-ka.
- Cross train and incorporate that training into your karate. (To name but a few).

I am not saying run off and start following another instructor because he/she shows you something different to what your instructor or association has taught you. I am saying add that new knowledge, if it is worthwhile, wherever you find it, to your existing knowledge base. Sometimes that means we must change our view on something and sometimes it simply means we have a new way to achieve the same result by doing things differently.

By all means have the courtesy to tell your instructor that you are thinking of going to any particular seminar. He may even want to go with you. Discuss your thoughts and ideas in relation to karate with him/her. You may be pleasantly surprised, he/she may have been waiting for you do to just that for some time.

If all you have ever gotten from attending seminars to date is the same old kihon and kata then you need to be looking for a new seminar presenter.

I heard it said recently by another instructor’s student “why would you go to a seminar held by X. One of your own instructors was graded to that same Dan level before X. So therefore he would know more than X”.

Dan levels, now there is a trap. If a person stays with one organization for their entire karate career then obviously they will be at a higher Dan level than someone else who has trained in a number of different styles and disciplines and then this person joins the others style association. All of the other persons previous experience will not recognized of course by the majority of style associations. That would probably upset some higher Dan’s apple cart and cost the club or association grading fees (we can’t have that).

It may be that the long term club or association member has practiced gedan barai, oi tsuki/gyaku tsuki all of their karate career. Whilst doing this they may never have wondered or tried to work out what else that combination can be used for other than block punch. Of course that person may be a higher rank, but at the same time know considerably less than someone else who has researched and made a study of their karate. So Dan levels do not necessarily equate to knowledge. They can simply mean a person has been in one group for a long time and has passed the syllabus exams.

To grow in karate-do you must expand your karate knowledge base. Always be open to new ideas, you can always dismiss them, but you should at least consider them. Look again at the list of options above on how you can improve karate knowledge.

Avoid anyone who speaks or acts as if they or their teacher knows everything there is to know about karate. Karate-Do is an ongoing journey where there is always something new to learn or discover at every stage/level of your journey. Many good instructors know a great deal but nobody I have seen yet knows it all.

We should expose ourselves to new and different ways to look at the karate we practice. There are very good instructors from every style and they all have something to offer. Do not have tunnel vision because you are this style and the instructor presenting the seminar practises something else. Go along and see what you can learn.

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John Hackett  
Chief Instructor  
Authentic Shotokan Karate Australia  
[www.authenticshotokan.com](http://www.authenticshotokan.com)