

By **RODGER SHIMATSU**

# **FIGHTING SPIRIT**

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"TO USE A METAPHOR, karate is like a language which can be divided into two parts: the written and the spoken. When a child starts school he can speak his native tongue fluently, at least by the age of four or five years; however, he usually cannot read or write. Liken this to the karateka who has studied the basic exercises but does not yet have the coordination for a flowing kata or kumite."

To Fumio Demura karate is his language. Devoting more than two-thirds of his 30-year life to karate, Sensei Demura has been studying the martial arts for 22 years, covering kyudo, kendo, judo, the sai, nunchaku and . . . the list goes on.

"Learning the alphabet, linking letters to words and eventually tying these words into readable and writable sentences can be compared to the karateka who must learn the basics, then put all of these elements into fluid combination until eventually he can act upon his reflexes for a smooth kata or kumite."

A dedicated martial artist since his late teens, Demura was encouraged to take judo by his parents but prohibited to study karate because, as he puts it, "Karate had a very bad image at that time in Japan and my parents said 'No!' to that art. But when I was supposed to be at judo class, I was taking karate lessons anyway. It was almost two years before they discovered the switch and by that time I had my brown belt and was working toward my black."

Explaining the rigorous schedule he put himself through and his prodigal confrontation with his parents, Fumio became serious. "I studied kendo from after school till dinner, then grabbed some tea and rice around the corner from the dojo to be off for karate lessons. After several months of karate I began coming home with broken fingers and toes and with bruises on my arms and legs. Family friends who took judo said it was a strange form of judo that developed those injuries, but it was more than a year later until my parents confronted me and I had to tell the truth." By that time, Fumio's parents almost had to relent to their eldest son's wishes and the Demura family's number one son continued with his not-so-secret love to become the 1961 All-Japan Karate Champion.

Presently, more noted in the United States for the use of weapons such as the sai or nunchaku, Fumio is actually a spe-

cialist in kata because in his words, "You must master the kata in its basic form before incorporating any weapons. The kata are the same—just the weapons and hand motions differ."

### Diametrically Opposed Schools

A student of the shito ryu school of karate for 22 years and now a sensei for five dojos in the Santa Ana, California area, Demura Sensei says that at one time there were two distinct forms of karate in Okinawa. Itosu Sensei was the founder of the teki style which was noted for its quick movements and lateral kata (from side to side, used mainly with the back to the wall). This teki form believed in swift moving action similar to the way we practice karate today. The foremost advocate of the sanchin school, Higaona Sensei, promulgated the slower goju style. Goju kata practiced a forward and backward movement, in a sense placing it at least 90 degrees—if not diametrically—opposed to one another.

"The kata we get today comes essentially from these two. In fact, shito ryu, the school founded by Mr. Kenwa Mabuni, takes both styles and blends them into one.

"In ancient times, karateka believed they couldn't spar with one another because it was too dangerous. They believed they shouldn't compete. But to learn karate and the elements of kumite, they resorted to kata, or fighting an imaginary opponent. From this fighting within the mind, kata forms were systemized and stylized. These forms became very popular in Okinawa where many new kata were developed although some originally came from China. They eventually spread throughout Japan and then to the United States."

What do you look for in a good kata and why should you practice kata were two questions fired at Demura. His answer: "To me, any kata practice is fine, but some kata are awkward for tall people; others are difficult for the short. All kata has value, however, because the student is simply practicing the basics. Besides the calisthenic value, you can pick up all the defense and offensive techniques as well as develop coordination, timing and smooth transitions.

"If you study kata deeply, each movement can take on any of many meanings. Take any basic meaning from an elementary







# JI-IN

THE JI-IN KATA FORM comes originally from the Itosu style of karate. Master Itosu was the Okinawan forefather of shito ryu karate. He had three forms in that series: ji-in, ji-on and jit-te. Exact history and documentation of much of karate is vague; however, the "ji" prefacing each of the above mentioned words designates the kata were originally derived from China, relating either to a particular master, area, or monk. Fumio Demura chose to introduce the ji-in form because it is relatively unknown.

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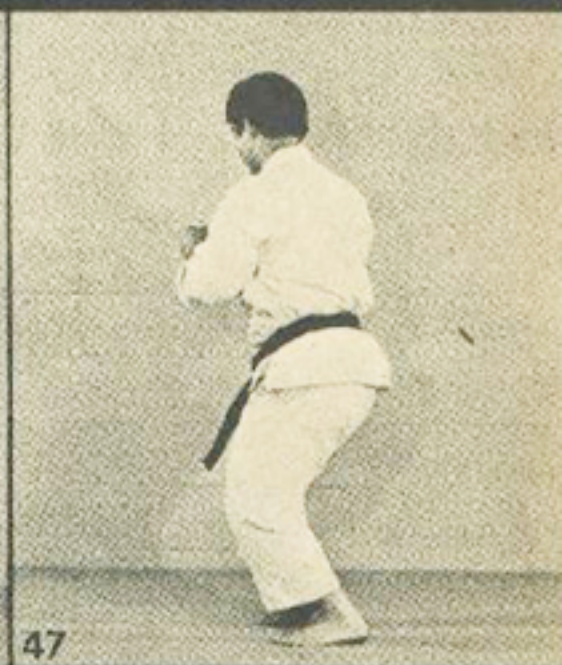
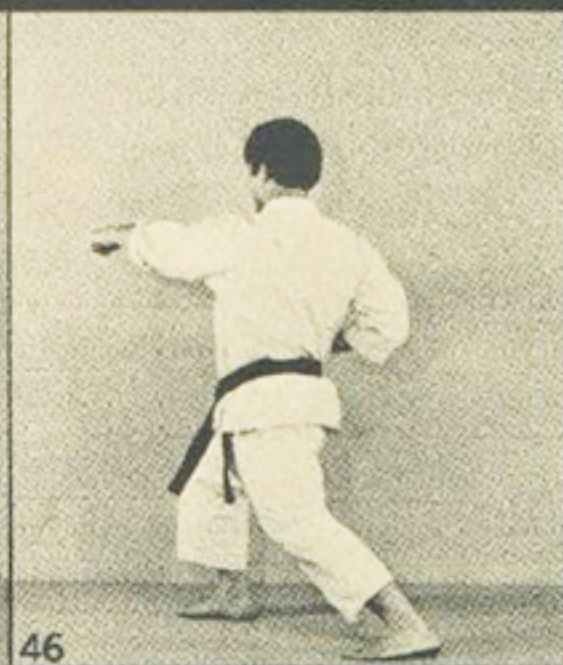


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kata movement and you'll see what I mean. The block and hammer strike in the *pinan nidan* kata (or *heian shodan* from shotokan school), for instance, are in themselves the same kata with just a change in names. The meaning of each movement takes on slightly different tones as different instructors interpret and teach the various kata. Originally, the *pinan nidan* had a block-block movement. Today in the *heian shodan*, it is thought of as a block-strike. In your mind, however, it could be any of many variations. Each movement, if you think hard and long enough, can become a counter or an offensive technique."

### Kakushite: The Hidden Hand

"In almost every kata there are elements that cannot be seen, which we call in Japanese *kakushite*, meaning 'the hidden hand'. These hidden techniques are forms that are done halfway, perhaps giving only a slight suggestion they might be there. When you contemplate on the separate kata movements, each move can have a variety of hidden uses. For a given fighting situation, from the same foot and body position, the kata can be taken to

its logical extreme, and with a slightly changed arm movement a block can turn into a strike, a strike can become a block. An infinite number of situations can be derived from the same kata. This is what we mean by *kakushite*.

"In karate's beginning, the great old masters' philosophy of teaching was 'show, don't tell'. Even after many years the shihan greats felt they could not divulge all their secrets and would pass the mystery of the hidden hand to only their best students. To the old masters, *kakushite* was for specially devised movements within the kata. Today, we like to think of almost every move having at least a dual meaning, if not more.

"A student can derive a calisthenic value from doing even funny kata or the unorthodox dances we sometimes see in tournaments today. From constant practice the student can develop what I like to call the *trinity* of kata. Any kata can do it for the student because in each kata are housed the basics. By repetition and practice, the fundamentals can be learned, especially the trinity: breathing-power-balance. After these three are mastered the finer points of control, coordination, speed,

## the HIDDEN HAND

"SHOW BUT DON'T TELL," seemed to be the old masters' philosophy about teaching kata in karate. Within almost every kata form, Fumio Demura says, there are half-explained movements which can actually carry a dual meaning. These unexplained secrets within the kata are called *kakushite* which can be translated as "the hidden hand." Taking a tangent from the original kata, Fumio demonstrates from picture No. 18 what you can do in your own mind when fighting the imaginary opponent. In the second to the last photo he returns to the original kata and continues on.



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focus, emphasis and distance can be made natural to the student's moves.

"Repetition is not the key to good kata, however. It's the concentration. The true karate student must blend the physical and mental. He must visualize the imaginary opponent and focus his whole mind into the kata. Without the mind aspect, kata will become just another exercise.

"But before kata, the student must learn the basics. Kata can then become an extension of the basics, going further into learning the combinations of more complicated techniques.

"In kata competition it is necessary to have mastered all the elements we've mentioned before which go into good kata: speed, coordination, breath control, balance, focus, emphasis and distance. But another important aspect arises on the competition floor. It is the feeling of communicating the *fighting spirit*. A competitor can never communicate this well if he does not continually visualize that imaginary opponent. The student must learn to transmit this feeling and from this get to know the distance and the timing of when to block and how to kick or

strike. It seems to me a competitor must establish a rapport with himself first. Then, and only then, can this feeling of realism be transferred to the judges or the audience.

"This is why I feel a student can learn the basics if he only studies and practices the kata. It's this feeling of realism he should be able to visualize and incorporate into his movements. With practice and concentration, the student should be able to pick up speed and coordination. Because kata is such an individual thing, I strongly feel kata is for everyone of every age. Only the young can compete. They are physically capable of taking the rigorous punishment of training for competition. But kata can be inspired at any age.

"Kumite and kata must be integral parts of one another. Karate is like a chain that can't be broken. Take all the parts of kumite and all the facets of kata, link them together with practice and meditation and you will achieve good karate."

Watching Fumio Demura execute his kata, one can easily see the 1961 All-Japan Karate Champion has mastered the language of karate fluently.

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