

Mastery in traditional Japanese martial arts

In traditional Japanese martial arts extraordinary technical skills can be acquired through years and years of hard training, in search of perfection of movements and mental concentration. A good practitioner, however, does not necessarily achieve mastery, which in the various martial disciplines is achieved after having acquired high-level technical skills and after having undertaken a process of exploring one's own mental and energetic dimension, to discover what lies beyond the technique and beyond the physical dimension of art. Mastery is not expressed only with the body, but above all through the vital energy that arises from the condition of an open, calm and empty mind.

In order to achieve mastery in traditional Japanese martial arts and therefore also in karate-do, it is necessary to acquire a state of stable and unperturbed peace of mind, and this is the indispensable condition for the techniques learned to become extremely effective. For the physical technique we know how to train; for the mental condition, however, the way to follow is less clear. Training to change the body is not easy, but it is even more difficult to change our mental states, change our needs and moods, eliminate our aggression, govern our emotions and reactions.

As the masters say: a black belt 1st dan practitioner has a good technical background, but his condition is comparable to that of an ordinary person who buys a new katana with a good sharp blade, but who is not yet able to use it effectively. To make sword techniques truly effective, as well as karate techniques, it is necessary to empty the mind, free it from the tensions and conflicts that confuse it by altering reality. The empty mind guides the body in action with clarity and determination, skills that are essential to face the chaos of combat or any other extreme difficulty.

Only the mental dimension of calm will allow the body to move with spontaneity and naturalness and with fluid and essential gestures, making them adhere to the opponent's movements, his body and his spirit. When we are able to move together with our opponent, "become" our opponent, we shall also discover that we can "return" to the sender all his tension and aggression, or cancel it by guiding it towards its dispersion, dissolving it. Therefore creating, in this case, also a destabilizing effect in the aggressor's fighting spirit.

But how can we acquire these skills? How can we remain calm in the face of an attack or any extreme difficulty? First of all, it is necessary to free ourselves from our fears and uncertainties, which generate tensions in us and consequently inadequate reactions: excessive or insufficient. Under these conditions, when we face a problem, we are an integral part of that problem; because we have created it, or because we are not in the mental condition to solve it. It is therefore only by facing and overcoming our inner conflicts that we will be able to resolve the difficulties that surround us and that come our way. The more unsolved problems we have inside, the more difficulties we will encounter outside.

If we are truly convinced that our inner conflicts are our real weakness, the real obstacle to be eliminated, because they do not allow us to achieve the effectiveness of our actions, then we will be in the right conditions to take the road to overcome them. If this need in us grows over time, then the need to free ourselves from the things in us that we do not like, and that make our life a constant conflict, will increase ever more. This new condition will lead us to take the road to Heiho (the way of inner peace).

Heiho is a long and gradual process that, through the conscious observation of our daily behaviors, will allow us to focus on everything that creates states of discomfort in us. It is a process that day after day helps us to identify and dissolve those internal tensions that arise from the relationship with ourselves and with others.

On this journey, every state of tension for us begins to take on a new form and to be experienced as a precious opportunity to practice dissolving it in the shortest possible time. If, for example, in the face of a verbal aggression by someone we get used to carefully observing what happens inside us, we would realize that we can try to reduce our tension through slow and deep breathing techniques, or through body relaxation techniques; all this strictly "live", during the verbal confrontation.

Once the "duel" is over, it is important to continue to observe what is left inside us, how much tension is still held and not completely dissolved. It is important to continue the relaxation exercise until the anxiety state is completely eliminated. This phase following the fight can have a more or less long duration, but with constant training it will gradually decrease and we will be able to release tensions in an increasingly shorter time: in a few days, in a few hours, in a few minutes, in a few seconds, until this process has put us in a position to absorb all the aggressor's tension and dissolve it instantly, in real time, making it flow without remaining even for a second inside us; we will then have become a place where tension passes and does not stagnate.

In a real fight we cannot allow external or internal interference to settle inside us, because we would be disturbed and our action would be confused, not very determined and inadequate. The calm mind absorbs interferences and transforms them into reusable energy during the action: we can return it to the sender as a bounce, or absorb and dissolve it instantly like a tsuki blow against a feather.

As to learn physical techniques, also to acquire clarity of mind and an assertive and resolute spirit, it is necessary to train incessantly with targeted exercises: both to "silence" the mind by putting it at rest, and to increase our sensitivity in perceiving ourselves and the others and also to learn how to circulate energy. This extraordinary journey begins by consciously observing our behaviors, our thoughts, our images, our fears, our moods, our reactions, emotions and feelings.

It is a fascinating journey into the dimension of energy, which passes through the condition of the "here and now": the present moment lived intensely. It is a careful and patient process of observation of the infinitely small and of the immense greatness of the universe. It is a method (*dozen*: meditation in movement) to understand through the movements of our body and the silence of the mind, how infinitely small we are in the universe and how immensely great we can be in small things.

In my opinion this is the path that a master of traditional Japanese martial arts and therefore also of Egami Karate-do should undertake, to understand where human aggression comes from and how to cure it, how to calm the states of mind such as anger, resentment, hatred, fear and learning to sublimate them and transform them into understanding and kindness. Practicing Egami Karatedo means being strong and determined, but not aggressive; gentle, but not weak; humble, but not submissive; proud, but not arrogant. It means learning to take care of the other through *yawara kumite* (gentle kumite), to dissolve the tensions and resistances of the other, eliminating one's own first.

The master is one who continues to explore and deepen the discipline day after day while transferring his knowledge and experience to his students, helping them to avoid mistakes and accompanying them towards *Heiho*, towards a better life. A master of the Egami Karate-do teaches the discipline with his own daily example, inside and outside the dojo and will be able to transfer to his students only what he knows. It is easy to talk about *Heiho*, harmony and calm mind, it is another thing to transfer their essence, mood, nature and the sensations they provide. This transmission can only take place through example, the master is able to energetically transfer only what he is at that precise moment.

If the master is not in a state of calm mind and harmony, he will not be able to transfer calm and harmony to the student. Any feelings, such as love or hate, are not transmitted through words, gestures or facial expressions, but only through energetic magnetism.

For the master, all students are a precious source of inspiration and each of them is a vehicle with which it is possible to improve understanding of the Way of *Heiho*.

Heiho is the goal of Egami Karate-do, it is the overcoming of conflicts, a return to origins, a rebirth in a new relationship of harmony with oneself, with others and with the universe.