

Bobby Do
by Robert Smallwood

How many times have you been introduced to somebody as a "Black Belt" then suddenly get asked a dozen questions, all of which are really difficult to answer to a non-martial artist. How long does it take to become a black belt? What is the difference between karate and tae kwon do or kung fu? How many degrees of black belt are there? On and on! It is complicated to describe the work, sacrifice, dedication, pain and study that is required to become a black belt, no matter what the discipline. But then to try to explain the difference between becoming a black belt and being a black belt is almost impossible. I don't know the ratio of those who continue their study of the martial arts after attaining a black belt vs. those who simply become a black belt, but it has been my experience that only 20-30 % actually grow beyond their black belt test. The rest simply move on for a variety of reasons. I view the black belt achievement as the true beginning of a life long journey of spiritual and physical continuous improvement.

The Japanese have a word for continuous improvement; Kaizen! This concept has been used in the arena of manufacturing and is the philosophical difference between the American work ethic and that of the Japanese. Kaizen is not a Japanese concept it is the key to success for any organization, artist, athlete, professional, regardless what country or century we may speak of.

A true martial artist applies the concept of Kaizen to his (or her) study of the arts and to ones training, as well as all other aspects of ones life. This is the first step in being a black belt. The second step pertains to training. Training involves the selection and study of a particular art or style combined with general physical conditioning.

The selection of a style or styles requires a basic understanding of the differences among the thousands of styles in existence and an awareness of ones personal physical and mental attributes. One should select an art that best fits ones abilities. The trick here is to understand that ones abilities and attributes change over time. The goal is to continuously improve as a martial artist. Therefore, ones effectiveness as a fighter must improve with age while ones physical prowess naturally diminishes. This necessitates one of two strategies. Either one elects to stay with a single style and perfect the techniques indicative to that style or one studies a variety of styles and gleans from those styles the techniques and attributes which fits ones changing physical abilities. I have chosen the latter strategy.

Bruce Lee developed the art of Jeet Kune Do; the way of the intercepting fist. In essence he theorized that one should study many arts and take what is useful and discard the rest. The foundation for his art aligns with the strategy that I have adopted with one exception. The art of JKD does not use forms as a training tool. "Senseless routines that lead to know where!" Lee is quoted as saying. I would have agreed 5 or 6 years ago. I hated forms! One

must always keep in mind that Bruce died at the age of 33. One must also keep in mind that Bruce was a master of Wing Chun Kung Fu a style that utilizes forms like most traditional styles. So he already developed as a martial artist, using forms. The evolution of JKD occurred during Lee's peak athletic years, because of this his training was "balls to the wall" full contact with an emphasis on fighting attributes both mental and physical. The key word in the last sentence is "evolution". Bruce's art was evolving, it was not completed. Additionally one must question whether or not a 33 year old has the wisdom to be a true master despite his supreme technical skill. It is my theory that had Bruce lived he would not have been able to endure the agonizing training regimen without regular injury and fatigue. Eventually Bruce would have had to adopt a more user friendly system of training. I believe that Bruce would have gone full circle, as most masters do, and developed JKD forms!

Forms, done properly and regularly, improve technique, endurance, balance, power, speed, flexibility and agility without the pain and recovery required with full contact training. Forms provide a time tested means of continuous martial arts improvement for the aging practitioner. When one designs one's own forms one can incorporate many styles into one routine. A single form can represent as many styles as there techniques in the form. I don't know any form that is comprised totally of techniques that I would use in the street. I know between 20 and 30 forms and there are some that have no usable techniques, yet I practice them regularly. I still grow from these forms.

My style is Bobby Do! It is a combination of boxing, Tung Soo Do, Kenpo, Pentjak Silat, Kuntao, Tae Kwon Do and will grow along these lines with the addition of Gracie Jiu-Jitsu and Kali. I fully expect to continuously develop my art as I age. It will be my way, it will have forms, sparring, grappling, weapons, and be comprised of techniques that fit my body. Slam Bam thank you Mam fighting. I look forward to aging, God willing, and plan to be a true Master when I die.