

## *The life of a karate master*



*Master Gichen Funakoshi (5<sup>th</sup> Dan)*

The karate master I am writing about is a man called Gichen Funakoshi; he is widely regarded as the “father of modern day karate”; he resembles the true nature of karate-do, practising karate as a way of life - Budo - that brings mind and body together.

Master Funakoshi was born in the Meiji restoration (1868) in the district of Yamakawa-cho in the royal capital of Shuri. Not long after he was born he was taken to live with his mothers parents where his grandfather taught him the four Chinese classics of the Confucian tradition, which were essential for the sons of the shizoku - the privileged class.

It was during his stay at his grandparents that Gichen Funakoshi attended school, where he met someone that would alter his life in a tremendous way, for one of his classmates was the son of Yasutsune Azato, who was one of Okinawa’s greatest experts in the art of karate. It was at the hands of this amazing man that Gichen Funakoshi received his first lesson in the art of karate. At that time the practice of karate was banned so training sessions had to take place in secret therefore karate was only practiced at night. Night after night he would practice kata as master Azato looked on, week after week and sometimes month after month until he had mastered it to master Azato’s satisfaction. Training was strict and he was never permitted to move on to the next kata until he convinced master Azato that he had fully understood the one he had been working on.

Master Azato lived quite a distance from Gichen Funakoshi’s grandparents house (where he was still living at the time) so every night he had to make the long lonely journey with only a dim lantern to light his way. It was during one of these nightly journeys to master Azato’s house, as he walked through Sakashita,

(between Naha and Shuri) that he stumbled upon a local pit viper known as Habu (in Okinawa). The viper glared angrily at him ready to strike; master Funakoshi swung his lantern slowly from side to side, keeping his eyes riveted on the eyes of the pit viper (metski). After some time the viper, still glaring at Funakoshi, slithered off into the darkness of a nearby potato field. Knowing the nasty habits of the pit viper (like every Okinawan does) he doubted that it would slither off so submissively without even attempting an attack, so he vigilantly entered the potato field in search of the viper. He soon came across those two glistening eyes of the viper and realised that it was indeed expecting him. The viper was waiting for master Funakoshi to spring the trap it had set for him, but fortunately the viper abandoned his attack and disappeared for good. Master Funakoshi had learned a valuable lesson that night: the Habu he encountered was familiar with the tactics of karate and when it slithered off into the potato field it was not running away but preparing to attack. As he continued his journey he thought to himself "Habu understands the true nature of karate. I believe that the lesson that master Funakoshi learned through that experience is that your gaze (metski) can diffuse a potentially volatile situation; your gaze can show your intent, ability and your confidence in martial arts.

After training Gichen Funakoshi, master Itosu (who was another teacher of Gichen Funakoshi and friend of master Azato) and master Azato would sit and theorise about karate. In doing so he learned a great deal about the art in its spiritual as well as its physical aspects.

In 1921 the ministry of education announced that a demonstration of ancient Japanese martial arts were to take place, where Gichin Funakoshi was asked to introduce the art of karate to the Japanese capital, to which of course he agreed. After a series of demonstrations were extremely successful he decided to relocate to Japan he realized that if he wanted to introduce karate to all the people in Japan then Tokyo was the best place to start. After receiving letters of encouragement from master Azato and master Itosu he moved into the Meisei Juku which was a dormitory for students from Okinawa, where he used the lecture hall as a dojo.

Around 1935, a nationwide committee of karate supporters solicited enough money for the very first karate dojo ever erected in Japan. In the spring of 1936 Gichen Funakoshi entered the new dojo for the first time and saw the sign board over the door bearing the name shoto-kan. This was the first shoto-kan school to be formed in Tokyo.

It was master Funakoshi who changed the name of karate to mean empty hand instead of china hand, as referred to in Okinawa the two words sound the same in Japanese but are written differently. It was his belief that using the term Chinese hand misled people into thinking that karate originated with Chinese boxing.

In 1955 he created the Japan Karate Association (JKA) where he was the chief instructor.

Master Funakoshi also published several books on karate including his autobiography entitled "Karate-do my way of life". He also constructed documents containing his philosophies of karate referred to as the nijū-kun

(twenty principles), these are the basis upon which all shoto-kan karateka must abide if not all karateka in general.

Master Gichen Funakoshi died in Tokyo, Japan on April the 26<sup>th</sup> 1957 a memorial was erected in memory to Gichen Funakoshi by the Shotokai at the Engaku-ji on December 1<sup>st</sup> 1968. The great monument features calligraphy by Funakoshi that reads “karate ni sente nashi (there is no first attack in karate) and karate wa kunshi no bugei (karate is the martial art of intelligent people)

Trough these famous words spoken by master Gichen Funakoshi it is easy to see how this great man helped to develop and encourage the true nature of karate-do through out the world.

**Below is the niju-kun as written by master Funakoshi.**

1. Karate-do begins and ends with rei  
空手道は礼に始まり礼に終る事を忘るな
2. There is no first strike in karate  
空手に先手なし
3. Karate stands on the side of justice  
空手は義の補け
4. First know yourself, then know others  
先づ自己を知れ而して他を知れ
5. Mentality over technique  
技術より心術
6. The mind must be set free  
心は放たん事を要す
7. Calamity springs from carelessness  
禍は懈怠に生ず
8. Karate goes beyond the dojo  
道場のみの空手と思ふな
9. Karate is a lifelong pursuit  
空手の修業は一生である
10. Apply the way of karate to all things. Therein lies its beauty  
凡ゆるものを空手化せよ其処に妙味あり

11. Karate is like boiling water; without heat, it returns to its tepid state  
空手は湯の如し絶えず熱度を与えざれば元の水に還る
12. Do not think of winning. Think, rather, of not losing  
勝つ考は持つな負けぬ考は必要
13. Make adjustments according to your opponent  
敵に因って轉化せよ
14. The outcome of a battle depends on how one handles emptiness and fullness (weakness and strength)  
戦は虚実の操縦如何に在り
15. Think of hands and feet as swords  
人の手足を劍と思へ
16. When you step beyond your own gate, you face a million enemies  
男子門を出づれば百万の敵あり
17. Kamae is for beginners; later, one stands in shizentai  
構は初心者には自然体
18. Perform kata exactly; actual combat is another matter  
形は正しく実戦は別物
19. Do not forget the employment of withdrawal of power, the extension or contraction of the body, the swift or leisurely application of technique  
力の強弱体の伸縮技の緩急を忘るな
20. Be constantly mindful, diligent, and resourceful, in your pursuit of the Way  
常に思念工夫せよ