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Kyu Study Guide

Presented By

Bujinkan Shinmyoken Dojo



This martial arts training guide is provided as an example of some of the training action points that we practice and explore in our martial arts classes.

It is not intended to replace in-class instruction, but rather as a tool to provide a reminder of exploration points for the kyu level lessons covered in class.

Kyu Study Guide Introduction

When entering the Bujinkan Shinmyoken Dojo you are immediately thrown into training without regard to “rank” or experience. Standing alongside both seniors and juniors we all practice the same lessons with no concept of “beginner” or “advanced”. Real life is like this, you find yourself in a situation, perhaps beyond your current ability, and you adapt and persevere. The “dojo” is a safe place to make mistakes because you are among friends who won’t judge you or continue punching and kicking you when you are down. Allow yourself to make these mistakes, learn, and grow. In many ways the dojo is one of the safest places in the world. Consider that well...

This training manual is written to assist you with your out of class progress while training at the dojo. It breaks down the fundamental skills that you need to become comfortable with at the kyu level while providing additional questions after each section or training to help you progress on your own. Think of them as giving you a gentle push in the right direction.

The core of our taijutsu training at the dojo follows a framework known as the tenchijin ryaku no maki- “the way of heaven, earth, and man. It is divided into three sections and this manual serves as a companion to the “ten” section for study.

At this place in your training your focus is about mastering yourself while learning how to use your body in a unified and complete manner, learning what you can do, and pushing beyond what you can’t do. Think of it as a self progress of discovery. As always questions are important as they lead to growth and both your teacher and dojo seniors are always around to help.

We all want to learn how to punch, lock, and throw our training partners around, and all that cool stuff, but ask yourself this- how can you do that cool stuff if you can’t even stop yourself from falling over or keeping in balance as you go through the motions. Before you can take another person’s balance and influence their movement, you have to be rock solid in your own movement. This is the difference between a black belt in the dojo and a green belt. Green signifies not a “beginner” but rather growth just like the color. Allow yourself to grow,

explore, and learn how to make your body work and move correctly, in time we'll get to that other stuff...

This Kyu study guide is a selection of taijutsu (unarmed) skills that have been broken down by a "need to know" format for each rank on the journey to black belt. Keep in mind that much like the paper this is written on, or should we say printed on, it is symbolic only. Each set of skills, each individual skill interacts with all the others to create ONE skill-efficient body movement when interacting with other people. We all need a place to start the learning process but don't get caught up in names, places, and the order of things. Focus on the training and not note taking or academic study- this guide has all that done for you. Spend as much time as you can physically training. Just as the human body is made up of components that works as a whole, these techniques are the basic components of our martial arts- keep this in mind as you journey through the ranks.

Junan Taiso “Stretching”

We all begin our martial arts journey at different points in our life and with a unique body situation. Age, experience, health, and possible past injuries are all a part of being a human being. Junan Taiso is the starting point with learning and then expanding your capability. Think of it as a health method for preventing injury and expanding that capacity over time.

Begin your stretching routine by loosening up- go for a walk or move around a bit. The idea is to get your blood flowing and start limbering up. From there start from the top and work your way down loosening up your major joints and pivot points- neck, shoulders, arms/wrists, hips, legs, knees, and ankles. Pay special attention to the joints that our techniques attack and work on keeping them loose and limber as this will help with you nagare (flow) later in training.

Throughout your training, and it will change over time and at different points, you want to keep track of where you are tense or not as limber- slowly work on these areas to increase your range of flexibility. Also, pay special attention to your hips, wrists, and shoulders as there are points often rotated/used in class.

After your stretching routine your body should be in a relaxed and warmed up state. Take a few seconds to exist in the moment and feel what your body is like in this state- natural relaxation is important to good taijutsu, and later as you practice in class/at home this is the state of body that you want to try and remain in.

Keep in mind that there is no “rush” to get limber! Over the course of your martial arts journey you will have months and years to slowly improve yourself!

“Balance”

Martial arts is all about manipulating balance- keeping yours and disrupting your attackers. How can you hope to defend yourself if your own balance is out of whack and you are falling over or tripping all the time? You need to be able to experience and control your balance throughout a wide range of motions on your way to understanding motion. Exercises that work and promote learning balance is the starting point. Everyday balance is different than the balance used in martial arts. Being able to shift your balance, maintain it as you interact with your training partner, and keep it while applying a technique is vastly different than getting up off the couch and not falling over.

Start off by balancing on one leg and then slowly move on to leaning your upper body forward and backwards while keeping your back straight. Bend your base leg to help compensate- starting out, feel free to use your arms to help balance yourself.

From that try the same exercise with your eyes closed. Without your eyes to compensate for the equilibrium you are going to have to rely on the “feeling” of your leg/body in contact with the earth to adjust your balance. If you go off balance do your best to recover!

Feel comfortable with that? Move on to adding some height, perhaps balancing on a beam or bench. We all have a tendency to rely on our “eyes” for balance and as a martial artist you want to rely on your body feeling for balance as your eyes can deceive you depending on height/light.

Work on some of these balancing “games” along with stretching.

Hokojutsu “Walking”

Your feet are the connection to the ground and in this connection is the basis of taijutsu. Taijutsu is just walking- using your feet to place your body in the right moment and the right time, this in turn creates “luck”. Taijutsu is also all about using 100% of your body's momentum and efficiency being applied to the application.

When you are “walking” you want to make sure that your feet are pointing forward from your hips and that as you walk your toes point in the direction that you are walking. Also pay attention to your step and distribution of weight. You want your weight to always be floating and equally distributed between both your legs. You need to be centered with your balance so at any moment you can stop and change directions.

Practice this by just going for a walk paying attention to balance and proper foot/leg/hip alignment for the direction that you are going in. From there add in walking on uneven surfaces, up/down inclines and on slippery surfaces like ice. Use them to train to adapt the shift of your balance in a moments notice.

- Have you been keeping up with a daily stretching routine?
- Having identified less then limber/tight areas in your body have you been working on stretching them?
- Can you demonstrate a complete stretching routine that works the major joins and pivot points in taijutsu from head to toe?
- Can you balance on one leg for a minute or so and then shift to the other leg without falling over or loosing balance?
- Can you shift your upper body around while still balancing on one leg?
- Can you walk in correct alignment?
- Can you combine your balancing skills with your walking skills, shifting from walking to balancing on one leg and then back and forth?

Taihenjutsu Ukemi Gata

We can begin by thinking of taihenjutsu ukemi gata as rolling and landing correctly on the ground to protect the body. Learning how to fall and not get hurt is an important skill that you will learn, and need to master in training. From a “dojo” perspective good rolling is important so you do not get hurt in practice, and so that you can develop sufficient ukemi skills to be able to receive advanced training.

When talking about a self defense perspective, ukemi skills are important for blending and going with what your attacker throws at you. In this situation, your skills switch from survival to protection. Good ukemi also helps to develop fudoshin (immovable spirit) and helps to build courage. Being taken down and thrown around can be very scary, but if you know that you have the skills and confidence to land safely what is there to be afraid of?

In the beginning rolling should be practiced in an open area on a padded or carpeted area to allow you some leeway for mistakes. Later as your skill develops you will want to move on to “natural” ukemi by practicing outdoors and in different environments. Don't forget practicing ukemi in the dark or blindfolded for times when your sight may be removed.

Mae Gaeshi “Forward Overturn”

This is a forward overturn where you kneel down and overturn landing on your feet. As you vault over pay attention not to compress your head or spine on the ground.

Zenpo Kaiten “Forward Roll”

A forward roll on either the right or left side where you go over your shoulder and land back on your feet getting up. Your hands are used to help guide your direction and stabilize yourself.

Yoko Kaiten “Side Roll”

A side roll where you face to the side and roll over your shoulders across the top of your back.

Ushiro Kaiten "Back Roll"

Opposite of a front roll, where you roll backwards in reverse.

Zenpo Ukemi "Forward Breakfall"

Landing flat on your stomach taking a breakfall- be sure to face your head to the side to protect your face/teeth and pull yourself forward with your hands at the moment of impact to help lessen the fall.

Some general points to keep in mind when you are rolling:

Stay Compact: When rolling, moving smooth, tight, and compact is the key. Pay attention to your limbs, especially the legs, and make sure they are pulled in tight to your core. Besides making you a smaller target, it will help the roll go quicker and smoother without you having to expend any additional energy.

Use Gravity: With ukemi you are trying to protect yourself from the ground by landing softly and smoothly- don't jump or throw yourself to the ground from a standing position. Kneel down first and lower yourself to the ground with your legs and arms first, then roll over.

Breathe: Don't lose sight of breathing naturally as you roll. Hitting the ground disrupts the natural flow of your lungs for a moment and it is easy to get out of breath. When you are rolling you are trying to be as relaxed as possible which leads to good form. Not breathing makes you tighten up and stiff.

When you are first learning the different rolls think of them as a form of yoga and junan taiso. Go extra slow paying attention to the points of your body that hit the ground and what you are feeling in your body after a few dozen rolls or so. Is there an area that is tight? Does your shoulder or knees hurt from grinding into the ground? Use the rolls as a method of feedback from your body to your mind and fix those points.

Listen to the sounds that your rolls make as you practice them- for the most part they should be "silent". If you hear yourself hitting the floor, grunting as you go over, and sliding as you get up imagine what that is doing to your body through the process.

From there the next layer to add on is being able to roll smoothly and in one complete motion as opposed to 1...2...3..., down...roll...get up. Your roll should look like a movie- a continually moving scene from start to end.

The final layer to add on is the ability to roll in any direction and from different heights and surfaces. Imagine standing facing forward and the eight points of the compass at your feet- pick a direction and roll. Practice your rolls from both a kneeling and standing position. Practice your rolls up and down a hill with different elevations. When you can roll smoothly and without injuring your body UP a hill you are ready. From there you will want to be able to roll from the various kamae (body positions) in the later kyu ranks.

- Can you roll smoothly and without hurting yourself to the front, side, and back?
- Can you do a dozen or so rolls without getting out of breath?
- Can you roll from both a seated and standing position?
- Can you roll from different elevations?
- Are you afraid of rolling?

Here we now move on to ukemi from the horizontal plane in 8th kyu to ukemi in the vertical plane. Ukemi exists in more than two and even three dimensions.

RyuSui “Flowing Water”

This is receiving ukemi as you and your training partner are locked together in kumiuchi. As you both fall you are flowing around their body like water so it does not crush you as you both land on the ground. Use your training partner like a giant soft pillow.

Shiho Tenchi Tobi “Leaping In All Directions Heaven & Earth”

Leaping in all directions is another way to clear your body out of the way of an attack. Leaping is faster than just stepping and is quicker than running for covering a burst of distance. Just like rolling, one practices leaping up, down, left, right, forward, and back. When leaping use your knees to absorb the impact of landing and keep your weight centered so you don't slip or shift on landing. Develop the ability to leap in different directions and stop on a dime in balance. Practice the different rolls after leaping.

Shoten No Jutsu “Running Up To Heaven”

This is the ability to run up a vertical surface. Beyond the practical ability to run up walls and fences without slowing down it offers a unique training method to control the force of direction in your body on a moments notice. In shoten no jutsu you run at the vertical object and then at the moment of impact switch your momentum from horizontal to vertical propelling you up the surface. In practice, for the first few dozen times be sure to go *extra* slow as you will still probably be smashing into the wall not having the change of direction down pat yet. In training start with a surface that is not 90 degrees vertical. Practice with objects at a slight incline and slowly work your way up in height.

Running up a vertical surface is also about understanding the nature of ukemi as you fall back to the ground. What happens when you reach the top of the object? You have to get down from the other side, using ukemi to lessen the impact of landing. Practice landing and rolling in the different directions after shoten no jutsu.

- In ryusui as you and your training partner are falling can you shift their weight so they are falling first and not on top of you?
- When you land from shiho tenchi tobi are you in balance?
- Can you perform the different rolls after landing from shiho tenchi tobi and shoten no jutsu?

Keeping with the theme of understanding how ones own body works and developing the tools to master it we move onto the study of kamae- postures of the body. Kamae are used to control distance, timing, and how it effects/reacts to your body along with protecting the weak spots on your body. Kamae are use to interact with your training partner to put you in a safe and strong position while putting them in a weak position.

Kyu Kamae “Nine Postures To Control Distance & Timing”

Fudoza No Kamae “Immovable Seat”

This posture has you sitting on the floor with one leg tucked under the other. It is an immovable seat in that your center of gravity is directly aligned and stabilized. From here, being a seated posture, you can move in complete balance in any direction. Practice getting up and down in fudoza while in perfect balance through the entire range of movement.

Shizen No Kamae “Natural Posture”

Shizen has you sanding erect with your arms relaxed at your sides, your feet under your hips, and with a slight bend in your knees. From this position you are aware of the space around you and how close objects and people are. You want to be in complete balance so even though it appears that you are just standing there you can move in any direction at a moments notice.

Hira Ichimonji No Kamae “Flat Figure One Posture”

Stand with your arms stretched out to the side as far as you can while not locking them out as your feet are rooted to the ground. Practice moving “flat” in a 360 degree radius and while shifting form both legs to standing on a single leg.

Ichimonji No Kamae “Figure One Posture”

Lead hand extends to your training partner's heart while the rear hand is held in a fist at elbows height. Turn your body flat and shift it back.

Doko No Kamae "Angry Tiger Posture"

Lead hand extends as in ichimonji no kamae, rear hand is held up near your ear in boshiken. Being ready to strike with intention and actually striking are sometimes the same things. A gesture is often as the same as an action.

Hicho No Kamae "Flying Bird Posture"

Standing on one leg, arms like ichimonji. Raise the leg up and down as needed, even though we always practice standing on one leg.

Hoko No Kamae " Encircling Tiger Posture"

Projecting a sphere in front of you, elevating the arms to make you bigger or smaller as needed.

Kosei No Kamae "Power Of the Tiger Posture"

Attack and defense are the same.

Jumonji No Kamae "Figure Ten Posture"

Arms crossed in front held in boshiken, shoulders and legs squared off.

Kamae and gravity.

When practicing your postures you want to get as low as possible to the ground, really using your legs to lower your center of gravity while keeping your back straight and shoulders aligned. This is very important for training and self development. It will strengthen your legs, teach you about moving from the center, and if you can move smoothly from being so low in practice, when you have to stand up higher in a self defense situation you will be able to move that much quicker and smoother. If you can go low, going high is easy, if all you ever are is high, you will never be able to get low.

Practicing Kamae

The first way to practice kamae is to stand in place starting with shizen no kamae and then shift into one of the kamae and hold it for a few moments before returning to shizen no kamae. While you are in kamae pay attention to your height and balance and the locations of your limbs. Fine tune your posture and try to stay relaxed through the time holding the postures. Make a note of any sore or tense points in your body and work to loosen them up with junan taiso. Pay attention to your knees! Make sure they are in correct alignment and NOT extending past your feet or twisting in an odd manner in an attempt to get lower. Keep that back straight and those shoulders relaxed and even. Just standing in kamae is easy, standing in kamae *correctly* takes a bit of work...

Once you are comfortable with that, start walking around and shift into the different kamae adding movement to your practice. Shift into the kamae from different directions checking that your balance and posture stays correct as you move around. Think of it as a dance. Add to each kamae high, medium, and low- jodan, chudan, gedan.

The next layer to add on to your practice is walking around shifting into kamae before rolling and getting up in kamae. Integrate the lessons from 9th – 7th kyu into kamae. Practice with both your eyes open and closed.

- Can you perform all the rolls, shiho tenchi tobi, and shoten no jutsu from any of the kamae?
- When transitioning from one kamae to the next is it smooth and in balance?
- Can you close your eyes and still switch from one kamae to the other in balance?
- Are you low enough in each kamae and is your back straight?

San Shin No Kata “Forms Of The Three Hearts”

With the san shin no kata we have five solo exercises that are used to teach you how to move your body in correct alignment with minimal effort. At this point in your training the san shin is about teaching you how to generate power through unified body movement, taking advantage of the natural alignment of your skeleton and muscles.

When practicing the forms you want to move all of your body at the same time on both the right and left side. This means that as your feet and legs are moving, so are your arms. When your feet stop moving so do your arms, etc. You want to move away from using your arms and legs as separate limbs to using them all at the same time. While you are practicing you should be breathing normally while keeping your body relaxed and free from tension. You want to be able to go ten minutes or longer practicing one of the forms without getting tired, out of breath, or tense.

Chi No Kata “Earth Form”

Shoshin No Kamae → Sanshitan Ken

Sui No Kata “Water Form”

Shoshin No Kamae → Jodan Uke → Omote Shuto

Ka No Kata “Fire Form”

Shoshin No Kamae → Jodan Uke → Ura Shuto

Fu No Kata “Wind Form”

Shoshin No Kamae → Gedan Uke → Boshiken

Ku No Kata “Void Form”

Shoshin No Kamae → Gedan Uke → Metsubishi → Geri

In practice sink your weight as low as possible, bend your knees, and keep your back straight and hips tucked under your spine as you go through the movements. Pay special attention to your knee as you step forward with the strikes- don't let your knee go past your toes and make sure your lead foot is facing in the direction you are delivering the strike.

This keeps the correct alignment of your knee and makes sure that all the striking power that you are generating is moving ahead in the same direction as your body. Also, pay close attention to the level of your head, if it is bobbing up and down as you move that means you are not moving on a steady plane, but rather, moving up and down as you move forward- hardly efficient movement.

At any moment somebody should be able to yell out "STOP" and you should be able to freeze in mid motion without falling over or losing your balance, obviously if you are, then you are not in balance.

The san shin no kata is also about breathing, naturally breathing as you perform your motions. Being able to continue breathing to supply oxygen during movement is important. If you can't even do it in relaxed practice, how is it going to happen in a self defense situation?

Finally you will want to practice the three versions of the san shin no kata:

Run through the sets the first time focusing on the movement of your joints, arms/legs and body. Think of it as a form of flexibility training. Next time through focus on delivering crisp and clean strikes and blocks in a relaxed manner, and finally for the third run though of sets deliver the strikes with goshinjutsu in mind.

- Can you practice chi no kata for ten minutes without getting out of breath or being tense in the shoulders or back?
- Are you moving on the correct angles as you receive with the jodan uke and then with the strike?
- Is your back straight and head level the entire time you are moving?

Kihon Happo Kosshi Sanpo “Basic Three Kosshi Methods”

These are three forms where we first start interacting with our training partner and where we learn how to generate power and movement to deliver a strike. Of course there are other lessons like getting off the angle of attack, receiving a punch, kamae, etc. the important thing to focus on for now is the footwork and how it moves your body to deliver a strike.

Ichimonji No Kata “Figure One Form”

You and your training partner begin in ichimonji no kamae as they throw a punch to your face. Shifting off the angle of attack you reply with jodan uke while stepping through their center line while delivering an omote shuto to uko.

Jumonji No Kata “Figure Ten Form”

Begin in jumonji no kata as your training partner throws a right punch. Shift away and off with jodan uke followed by boshiken to butsumetsu, and then metsubishi to create a break in the movement so you can return back to jumonji no kamae. Repeat the same on the opposite side.

Hicho No Kata “Flying Bird Form”

You begin in hicho no kata as your training partner attacks with a gedan fudoken to butsumetsu. Receive with gedan uke, geri to butsumetsu and then follow through with an ura shuto to uko.

Among other things these three forms teach you about generating striking power by stepping through the center line of the attack (ichimonji), shifting and rocking with the hips and knees (jumonji), and generating power through moving up and down (hicho). While receiving the attack with uke negashi and following up with a strike are important lessons, the “how” of how you generate the power is key.

Of course it goes without saying that you should be on balance throughout the entire sequence of movement, but you also need to have kamae present as you move. When you begin in kamae you make it impossible to be effectively attacked, as you receive the punch and follow up with the strike you need to remain in kamae so your training partner can't just reach out and punch you with their other fist.

- Are you really moving though the three points of the kata-centerline, knees/hips, and up/down to generate power in the strikes?
- Is your kamae low enough as you perform the exercise?
- As your training partner moves away from the receiving the strike are you still in kamae and aware with zanshin?

Kihon Happo Torite Goho “Basic Five Arm Twists”

We now move on to the second part of the kihon happo where your training partner grabs your lapel with his hand. In these lessons you apply a lock to take them down. Just like the kihon happo kosshi sanpo where you begin in kamae, you start these forms in shizen in balance when your training partner grabs you.

Remember the lessons from the san shin no kata to use unified body movement to work with your training partner. As you apply the “lock” you are moving your feet. The power of the waza (technique) is not the lock, but rather the footwork powering it. Think of it this way, the applied lock is there to bind up your training partner’s body and take away their ability to move/step with it. As you move your feet it reaches a point where their balance is completely taken and they fall over, in falling over with the lock applied, their own body falling causes the damage to the joint- they are hurting themselves. Forget about trying to hurt people in martial arts, just let them hurt themselves, but this is a lesson for another time once you make it through this guide.

Omote Gyaku “Outside Wrist Twist”

Omote Gyaku Tsuki “Outside Wrist Twist From A Punch”

Ura Gyaku “Inside Wrist Twist”

Musha Dori “Warrior Capture”

Ganseki Nage “Throwing A Rock”

Taihenjutsu Mutodori Kata “Unarmed Sword Evasions”

In these three exercises your training partner attacks you with a sword (training appropriate and fully padded of course!) and you get out of the way using balance, kamae, and ukemi unified into one set of movements.

Not getting hit with the sword is only the first half of the movement, the second half is putting yourself in a place after the first cut so your training partner can't follow up with another and then another, etc.

You need to be able to control your body enough to put it in such a place that further attack is impossible. These are also exercises to learn distance and timing along with courage. Distance to be just outside the cut, timing to move as your partner does, and courage to just stand there and receive the attack as they swing down at your head.

When attacking your training partner begins in daijodan no kamae and attacks shomen giri with correct ma-ai.

Hira No Kamae “Flat posture”

Your training partner cuts and you move off flat to the side into hira no kamae followed by zenpo kaiten and coming up into ichimonji no kamae. Shifting into kamae (hira) takes you off the line of attack and put you in a position to be able to roll away to cover as much distance as possible so a second cut can't be just fired off. While it is important to practice both the right and left side (migi/hidari) moving to the weak side of the sword is preferred so as you are rolling away your training partner has to spend additional time adjusting his kamae if they even hope to try and cut at you. Depending on their body type and skill with the sword you may have to use shiho tenchi tobi mixed in after the kamae and before the zenpo kaiten to clear additional ground.

Ichimonji No Kamae "Figure One Posture"

From the cut your receive away in ichimonji no kamae and roll to the weak side of the sword. As this happens your training partner follows you going back up into daijodan for another shomen giri and right before they cut you rise up on one knee and boshiken to gorin.

While the lesson is done from zenpo kaiten it is also proper to practice the different rolls in response to the cut. Pay special attention to when you are rising up that you are guarding with your other hand so you don't get the hilt of the sword smashed into your face.

Jumonji No Kamae "Figure Ten Posture"

From jumonji no kamae. when your training partner cuts at you, you leap forward and to the side striking omote shuto to uko with strong shiho tenchi tobi.

- After you evade the first cut, can you use footwork to put yourself into a position where your training partner can not visually see you for a moment?
- If you get hit with the sword do you keep on going and finish out the technique or do you stop and start up again?
- Although practiced with a sword, how would things change against a spear? A knife? A punch?

Kentaiichiyo “The fist and the body are one” is an important concept when delivering a strike with your body. You don't want to rely on strength or speed to deliver a strike since your training partner might be bigger/fast then you. You can not control that variable so it is not a good concept to rely upon! By delivering your strike with your entire body behind and in alignment with it, the issues of size and speed on both sides is negated...

Match the weapon “ken” to the movement and apply it to the kyusho. It is important to not aim to strike the target, but actually aim to strike though and beyond it. You want to hit and keep moving.

Don't think of striking as a way of hurting or causing pain. What is pain? Relevant to the situation and person, some people don't feel any pain. Think of striking as a way to unbalance your training partner, if it causes pain that is a bonus of sorts. Even the softest of strikes can “hurt”.

While we are on the topic of striking let's take a look at right/left side. If you are right handed you are probably better at doing things with your right hand over your left. When striking your right hand might be quicker and stronger then the left, and this can be a disadvantage. With punching there can be no strong/weak hand, you have to be good with both since you never know which side you will need in the moment, or if one hand gets hurt, etc. This isn't as much problem with kicking since we tend to use both feet equally throughout the day.

Hoken Juroppo Ken

Kikakuken “Demon Fist”

Shukiken “Hand Wake Up Fist”

Fudoken “Immovable Fist”

Kitenken (Shuto) “Up/Down Strike First”

Shishinken “Finger Needle Fist”

Shitanken (Sanshitanken) “Finger Tip Fist”

Shakoken “Claw First”

Shitoken (Boshiken) "Finger Sword Fist"

Shikenken "Chisel Fist"

Koppoken "Bone Knack Fist"

Happaken "Eight Leaves Fist"

Sokuyakuken "Stomping Foot Fist"

Sokkiken "Waking Up Leg Fist"

Sokugyakuken "Toe Reverse Fist"

Taiken "Body Fist"

Kiken "Spirit Fist"

- Can you hit a moving target?
- Are your kicks as good as your punches?
- When you get hit, what do you notice more- the pain of the strike or the effect it has on displacing your body?

Additional Training Points To Keep In Mind Through The Kyu Ranks

There are always two sides of study with the lessons in the dojo- an “ura” part and of course an “omote” part. The ura part are lessons that you can physically see and experience- rolling, postures, punching, kicking. When these are being shown in a class it is obvious that they are being shown. The omote is the part of training that is not always obvious but it exists in each lesson that is being shown. Sometimes the teacher will make mention of it, more often then not little will be said, as it is just understood. Some of these concepts are covered here as both a reminder, but also as a guide as to what to look for in each lesson, and as a way of branching out and going back over the kyu outline looking for each concept in each of the movements.

Being able to see what is hidden is known as “budo eyes”. A teacher does the student a disservice if they hand everything to them on a gilded platter and spell everything out. This lulls the student into relying on the teacher as opposed to themselves. Being able to see what is being presented and see/discover the hidden lessons contained inside is what training is all about. This is kyojutsu, knowing truth from falsehood. Taiden, kuden, and shinden are all parts of learning.

Angle Of Attack

One of the most important lessons that you can learn and the first “thing” to do is to get off the line of an attack. When a punch, kick, stab, etc. is coming your way, use your footwork to get your entire body out of the way of the attack while placing you in a position where you can’t be attacked again. Always get out of the way, work to make this your first response to everything.

- Is there a difference to being attacked with a punch or a grab?
- Is there a difference to between being punched or shot at?

Goshinjutsu “Self Defense Mindset”

It goes without saying that not being in the situation is the best option, and failing that running away is next. Technique, waza, skills, are all about creating openings so you can escape. Even if you are more skilled, every second you spend “fighting” increases the chance that you will be hurt or killed.

That said the will to fight, a fighting spirit, is essential to foster and nurture, being ready to be called upon in a moment's notice. This spirit is simply cultivated through hard training and sacrifice. Accepting what can and will happen, yet moving through and beyond it is the first step.

While the focus of your kyu studies is learning about solid taijutsu movement and how your own body relates to it, it is also important to remember that we are studying martial arts. From 9th kyu to 1st kyu the ability to defend yourself to the point of creating an opening so you can escape is also required.

Wherever you currently find yourself in training, take the following lesson and practice how you can apply it using the skills found in the ten ryaku no maki.

As human beings we all come in different sizes- some taller, shorter, bigger, and smaller. Genetics, diet, exercise, and will all help to shape the limits of our bodies. What is a vulnerable place on one person has no effect on another. While practice over time will allow you to pinpoint weaknesses in a person regardless of who or what they are, there are certain points on every person that can be effected in the same way.

Right now I might be very sensitive in my ribs, getting punched there might break them and push the air out of my lungs. On the other hand, if I bulk up, develop my muscles in that area, and condition my mind to ignore pain, then striking them there will do nothing.

With the eyes, ears, groin, knees, and the tops of the feet we are all the same and there is now exercise or way to strengthen them beyond what they are. From a self defense perspective these are the areas that we want to exploit to create an opening.

- Practice delivering the strikes from the different kamae.
- Practice ukemi and while standing up deliver the different strikes.
- How can moving into the different kamae expose these weak points for both attacker and defender?

Fudoshin: “Immovable Heart”

This ability to keep going is so important in the martial arts and in your own training. As long as you keep moving you are alive, the moment you stop, you are dead. In the safety of the dojo you want to cultivate good lasting habits so that is what comes out in spirit should you ever have to defend yourself. When you practice, if you do something wrong, or get hit, keep going and finish out the technique each and every time. DON'T stop and do it over, EVER! The message you are cultivating is that when something goes wrong, stop what you are doing. In a situation things will go wrong, so you want to keep going.

The very act of showing up each week for class develops fudoshin.

“Flow”

“Flow” is the lifeblood of taijutsu. If you have good flow you are that much closer to good taijutsu. Good flow comes from moving in a relaxed manner and with as few movements as needed to accomplish the task. As you practice, if you are finding that you just can't get it, take a step back and try to relax for a moment. Pay attention to any tension in your body and work it away with some junan taiso. Take a few breaths, calm down and give it another go. Nagare doesn't mean fast, it means smooth.

Zanshin: “Awareness”

The dojo is actually probably one of the safest places in the world. In such a place you are learning how to protect and take care of your body while your fellow students and teacher look out for your well being and safety. The dojo is the time and place to make mistakes, and to be made aware of their corrections so when you exit the dojo and enter the “real world” you won’t make those mistakes. Zanshin “awareness” exists on many levels.

When training at the dojo how aware are you of the other students around you? Even knowing 100% that they are not going to attack you, you still have to be aware of more than just the interaction between you and your current training partner. What if another student falls over and into your training area. Weapons often come loose in the hand and go flying. You need to be both aware of the here and now where you are training, but also have an awareness of what could happen- so if it does happen you won’t be taken by surprise.

Another common mistake made during training is when the technique is over. For example, lets say I’m practicing defending myself from a punch. In the dojo, because I’m trying to learn a specific lesson there is often only one punch to which I apply x action. Even though I know it is a training exercise and that there will be only one punch, I need to keep my awareness up just incase another punch is thrown. You never want to get into the habit that “all is safe now”.

- When you are hit and are moving away from the impact do you try to recover as quickly as possible and shift into kamae?
- When you take your training partner down and the technique is over do you just move away, or do you move away in kamae?
- Do you ever turn your back to your training partner?

Ma-ai: “Distance & Timing”

Distance is an extension of your body and how it interacts with your training partner. Just as we are all different in shape and height, the correct distance for one is not the same for another. Understanding distance allows you to adjust your movement in harmony with your training partner. At the kyu level there are three distances to understand.

The first distance has you and your training partner far enough away that they can't reach you unless they take a few steps forward. This is the best distance to be at since if they want to attack you they have to close, and that gives you lots of time to run.

The second distance has you and your training partner one step away from each other. With this distance you can be attacked with your partner taking a single step, but this still gives you time to move to escape.

The third and final distance is when your training partner is up so close that they can hit or grab you without taking a step. This is not a good distance to be at since they can attack with speed and little notice.

The length of your legs, your training partner, clothes, shoes, terrain, and weapons all contract and expand distance and you need to adjust on the fly for each variable.

- As you practice your kamae can you see how they influence distance by expanding and contracting it?
- How does shiho tenchi tobi, and ukemi lengthen and close the distance?
- If you are on balance how can you adjust for distance compared to if you are off balance?

Kazushi “Balance”

A recurring theme throughout this guide has been about maintaining your own balance as you move through the different lessons. On the opposite side of that as you become comfortable with the lessons, you need to start thinking about how your movement can unbalance your training partner. Kamae, ukemi, etc. all interact with what your training partner is trying to do, and extending them a little further or taking them a bit off angle will unbalance them. From experience you should know how hard it is to do something when you are off balance, so if your training partner is off balance how can they continue to try and attack you?

- When your training partner attacks how do the different kamae that you cycle through unbalance them?
- If you find yourself out of balance , what are the quickest ways to shift your balance back?
- How can you prevent your training partner from regaining their balance?

About The Dojo:

Located in Westchester, New York, the Bujinkan Shinmyoken Dojo is a practice group dedicated to the study of Dr. Hatsumi's Bujinkan martial arts. As students and friends we come together to train and perfect ourselves. Training times, articles, and class information can be found at our web site:

Web Site: www.shinmyoken.com

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