



Hello Everyone! We hope you are all well and in good spirits. Hopefully we are all managing to adjust to our new circumstances and to make the most of them. As the proverb goes, ***the only constant thing is change***. Although the changes being imposed on us right now are due to a bad thing, we can still use this as an opportunity to lead to improvement and to better things.

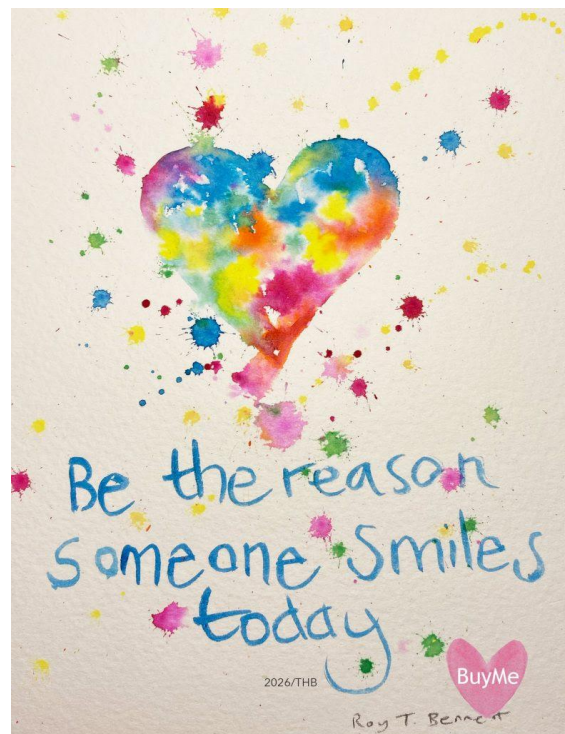
Thank you to everyone who has sent in photos – old ones that bring back happy memories and recent ones of how you are keeping busy and keeping up your karate. Here is one we thought might make you all smile – Bramble the Bonsai Boxer on her first trip to the dojo .....



With best wishes,  
*Chris & Barbí*  
26<sup>th</sup> April 2020



Last week the theme was *ensos*, specifically rainbow coloured ensos. This week we thought we would share some artwork by **Hazel McNab**, a Shropshire artist. She produces a range of beautiful paintings and prints. She also has a daily challenge of painting a heart-themed picture accompanied with an uplifting message. If you have not come across her hearts (and other artwork) before, it is worth looking at (<https://366hearts.com/>).



# BODY - MIND - SPIRIT

Karate aims to strengthen body, mind and spirit. Here are suggestions for each.

## BODY

### MOVEMENT IS MEDICINE.

Hopefully you are making progress with the exercises we have suggested so far. Never hesitate to contact us for advice or if you have any questions about how to do things correctly or take them to the next level.

It is important not to get stuck in a rut and keep doing the same exercises and the same routines. Apart from getting boring, it can also lead to and entrench bad habits and eventually we may fail to spot them and correct them. It is important to vary things and to try new things.

Here is a simple warm up/work out you can try:

1. **SKIPPING** – always a good way to start. **Vary your skips** – two-footed, alternate, hopping, boxer, crossover, double skips. Also **vary the speed** – sometimes skip at a steady pace and sometimes as fast as you can. There are some easy [interval timer apps](#) that you can use: do 30 seconds fast, 30 seconds slow. You might do this for 4 minutes and then build up to 8 or more. Once you are good at skipping you can add spice by giving yourself penalties every time you make a mistake e.g. 10 press ups or 20 alternates.
2. **JOG** - If you have a garden, jog around it and remember to **vary your footwork** – e.g. a lap jogging, a lap side-stepping, a lap cross-stepping, a lap with high knees, a lap kicking your heels up then repeat. While you jog you can punch down for a lap, then to the sides, then up high and finally out to the front. If you don't have a garden you will have to jog on the spot – you can still vary it with high knees, kicking your heels up, fast feet or doing two footed jumps forward and back, side to side, feet apart and together.
3. **JOINT ROTATIONS** - Once you are nicely out of breath, work through a joint-freeing sequence, circling the major joints: ankles, knees, hips, spine, shoulders, wrists, neck – just to make sure you are loosened off.
4. **SHADOW FIGHTING** – keeping a good defensive stance, visualise an opponent, move around to avoid their attacks and set up your counter-attacks. Keep it flowing. Avoid and counter using any techniques: front hand punch, reverse punch, backfist, front kick, mawashigeri, back kick, side kick, sweeps ... Begin with single techniques but aim to build up and develop your own combinations. **Remember perfect practice:** there may not be a physical opponent but you must be aware of keeping a good fighting distance, keeping

a guard at all times, moving out of the way of attacks and their counter-attacks to your counter-attacks, remember to use feints and not to be predictable. Again using an interval timer can help – for example you could do one minute of punches, one minute of kicks, one minute of just avoidance, one minute non-stop attacks, one minute of anything goes so you have **a total of 5 minutes continuous sparring**.

5. **KATA** – practice your kata. Aim to do it at least 5 times. *You don't have to do it the same way each time* - for example you could begin by doing it in a flowing 'tai chi' style to begin thinking about transitions and using whole-body movement. Then you could perform it '**isometrically**' where after each move you fix and tense your whole body and hold for 3-5 seconds. This is very strengthening and helps build your muscle memory for good posture and balance. You can then perform the kata as quickly as possible to highlight areas of weakness – if you have to stop and think of a move then than is a sequence requiring more practice! Then you could finish by performing it twice as though it is a grading. After the first time, identify something you could have done better and then correct it on the follow up performance. **Remember your kata bubble!**
6. **CARDIO** – if you are defending yourself, you have to be able to push yourself **and keep going even when you are exhausted**. You cannot afford to give up! So finishing with some challenging cardio work is a great way to end a session. A simple thing would be to do the **exercise challenge** (add a twist to make it harder e.g. do more reps or add 10 press ups between each exercise as we suggested in our earlier newsletter ...). Alternatively you can give yourself a **9 minute nightmare** e.g. 1 minute non-stop step-ups (using a stable chair for example) then 1 minute non-stop alternates/sit ups then one minute non-stop press ups – repeat three times.
7. **WARM DOWN** – it is important to warm down. Use the stretches we do in class.

## MIND

Just like our bodies, our brains need exercise too. Mental agility and acuity and memory retention are all improved with regular work outs and it really is a case of use it or lose it!

Here is a link to an item featured on the BBC on things you can do to help improve your memory. It was put together by a student at Sensei David Daniel's club in Bristol which is part of our Shukokai England association.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/ideas/videos/three-simple-tips-to-improve-your-memory/p089rtj6>

## SPIRIT

Last week focused on *bunkai*. This week let's focus on PADWORK. **Karate kids and cadets**, hopefully you will have a willing and helpful adult who will hold the pad for you. Older students may be lucky to have a training partner but if you don't you will have to be inventive. Here is one way you can set up your strike pad ....



Whether you have a partner or a tree (!) make sure your pad is set to the correct height and angle for you to practice your techniques **safely**. Make sure you have a good, non-slippery surface to stand on and that there are no obstacles that could cause injury. If you are working with a tree, remember that trees tend to stand their ground more solidly than human partners (!! ) and so there will be less 'give' when you apply your technique. Do not start with full force, build up to it to gauge resistance so you do not injure yourself.

Practice all your punches, kicks and other strikes including shuto, haito, empi waza (elbow techniques) and hiza waza (knee techniques).

Key Principles:

- ⇒ KAMAE - Begin and end in a good kamae
- ⇒ BODY WEIGHT – move into your technique to get your *body weight* behind it
- ⇒ IMPACT – ensure you strike with the correct part of your body for each technique e.g. ball of the foot for front kick/maegeri, insole or shin for mawashigeri, first two knuckles for punches etc.
- ⇒ X10, BOTH SIDES – practice on both sides. Younger students with soft skin should stick with sets of 10. Older students may want to begin with sets of 10 but you can build up to sets of 50 or more.

***Please send in your photos – we can use them to inspire and help each other!***



# KATA – KOSOKUN DAI

This kata was developed in Okinawa in the 1700s. The name 'Kosokun' (also sometimes pronounced 'Kushanku') refers to a Chinese military adviser who travelled to Okinawa in the 1700s at the request of the Okinawan emperor. Kosokun was a master of Kempo and was so highly regarded that Okinawa's top martial artist, Tode Sakugawa, went to train with him. When Kosokun died, Sakugawa developed Kosokun Dai to honour his teacher and also to record what Kosokun had taught him.

This is a very important kata with many open-handed movements reflecting White Crane kung fu influence on karate. It was central to the development of the Pinan/Heian katas.

Anko Itosu (considered one of the 'fathers' of modern karate) developed the five Heian katas from Kosokun Dai. He did this in order to take divide this kata into smaller units suitable for teaching in schools. They were first taught in Okinawan schools in 1895. By the 1920s karate was being taught in mainland Japanese schools and universities.

Here is a link to an instructional performance of Kosokun Dai performed at one of our sister dojos in Japan. Our version differs in a couple of small details but this is still an excellent training guide.

<https://safeshare.tv/x/4qb8X8ld-NM#>



Tode Sakugawa



Anko Itosu

## MERIT AWARDS for Karate Kids and Cadets

The first three merit awards we have looked at are **RESPECT**, **SPIRIT** and **PATIENCE**. This week we are introducing the **FOCUS** merit award. This is a challenging time for children especially – the usual structure of the day has disappeared and yet they are still expected to continue, for example, with their schoolwork and homework. It can be hard to remain focused without the usual routine, familiar school rules and expectations and also surrounded by all the distractions at home. The idea of the merit awards is that you read through the material together and use it in the way that suits your family best.

### FOCUS MERIT AWARD

**FOCUS = the ability to concentrate on a one specific thing or task and put all your effort into it.**

FOCUS is an essential skill – without it, learning other skills can be difficult, even impossible. We are not born with good focus and young children especially have short attention spans. FOCUS is a skill that we need to learn and practise. ***How well will you do at school (and later in life) if you can't or don't concentrate and try your best?***

Imagine a lioness stalking her prey. She is 'switched on' in every way: mind, body and spirit. Her mind is focused on her task, constantly assessing whether it is time to pounce. Her body is poised, ready for action. She is watching alertly, listening intently. She moves silently and strategically. When the time is right she will pounce and commit herself 100% to the chase.

In karate we develop FOCUS in three ways: mind, body and spirit.

**FOCUS of the mind** means *paying attention* and *not being distracted* nor allowing our thoughts to wander. FOCUS means **we don't just hear, we listen. We don't just see, we watch.** We are *receptive and alert* at all times and we *pay attention to details*. Our mind is 'Yoi'.

**FOCUS of the body** means *complete and correct physical control*. We don't just stand, we make *good stances* so we have strength and balance. We don't use our arms and legs haphazardly: we do *sharp, powerful techniques on target*. We don't move recklessly: we make the effort to be fast yet controlled so we do not injure our partners. We use '**Perfect Practice**'.

**FOCUS of spirit** means deciding to **do your best**. We don't give in to silly distractions or because something is difficult: we have the willpower to make a success of what we are doing.

**We use FOCUS to learn.** We are not born knowing lots of things – *we become knowledgeable and skillful by being good learners and the key to this is good FOCUS.*

This means:

- facing our sensei or teacher or parent when they are explaining something,
- actively watching what is being demonstrated,
- listening attentively, paying attention to detail and not being distracted,
- consciously deciding to learn and to practice.

**We apply FOCUS in order to do well.** In karate, if we do not FOCUS on our opponent we may not see them launch an attack and so we won't be able to defend ourselves. In training, if we do not FOCUS on our technique and our partner, not only will we not become better, we may hurt our partner or get hurt ourselves. When we are training FOCUS means:

- listening carefully to instructions and doing as we are asked,
- not letting our concentration or mind wander,
- staying alert, paying attention to proper distance, to targets, to proper technique,
- doing our best.

Learning to FOCUS isn't just for karate and the dojo. ***It is important for life in general:*** at school and at clubs, when playing for your team or learning e.g. a musical instrument. There examples of the importance of good FOCUS all around. What if someone is not focused and they are ... riding a bicycle along a road? ... crossing a busy road? ... a trapeze artist mid-flight? ... a surgeon operating? ... a dentist giving someone a filling? ....

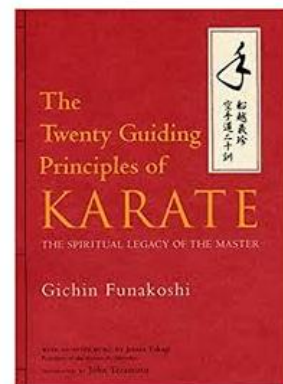
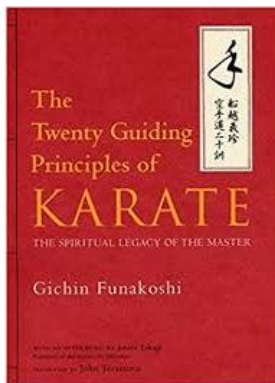
***You are going to have to practice your focus skills while you are doing your schoolwork at home. It can be hard to stay focused when you have to work on your own or follow online lessons. But you can do it! Remember – you have to earn your FOCUS merit award. Perhaps you can do this by making a special effort to do your best with your school work. Show that you can maintain concentration and ignore distractions. Prove that you can pay attention to the detail of what is said to you and that you take the trouble to do your best at the tasks set you.***

***Parents/Guardians – when you feel that your child has earned their merit award please let us know (eg by email) and we will award the certificate.***



## And finally .....

Gichin Funakoshi, student of Anko Itosu and another 'father' of modern karate famously said that "the ultimate aim of karate lies not in victory or defeat but in the perfection of the character of its participants". He provided guidance to karateka in the form of his twenty guiding principles of karate. A translation of and commentary on these guiding principles can be found in **"The Twenty Guiding Principles of Karate: the spiritual legacy of the master" with translation by John Teramoto**. It is a concise and thought-provoking book and well worth a read.



Younger students might prefer the Young Samurai series by Chris Bradford. Action packed and well researched. Let us know what you think!

