

The Gentle Art

When Jigaro Kano founded judo (Gentle Way) he eliminated the self-defense techniques against armed attackers. He further removed and barred the techniques based upon attacking the vital points of the body (ateimi-waza), and also moves that involved bending and twisting the joints, with the exception of arm locks. He in fact created a sporting concept that is quite far removed from its core base of jujutsu. Jujutsu is a method of hand-to-hand combat on the battlefield. The samurai used it if they were cornered and/ or lost their weapons, as a means of combat and self-defense. An enemy could attack with a tanto, sword, spear, or anything that could be used as a weapon, and the samurai had to be able to defend against it.

Much has been written about a samurai's skill with the sword, but what is not generally know is that a samurai was equally skilled in the martial arts of empty hands. Both aikido and judo owe their existence to jujutsu. Legend relates that it was a certain Hisamori Takenouchi who founded jujutsu in the early 1500's. He was a great samurai whose every waking moment was filled with training for the battlefield. The only empty hand combat methods that were around at this time were based on sumo techniques. Takenouchi had been part of a force that had been fighting against a rival daimyo over a feud about land and borders. He had accounted for himself well in the ensuing battle, striking down many of the enemy with lighting blows of his sword. But he was hit in the shoulder by a stray arrow. As night fell Takenouchi regained consciousness and could hear the whispered voices of battlefield jackals. These were the people that waited until a battle was over and both forces had departed and then would come out under the cover of darkness to rob the fallen of anything that may be of value. Weapons, armor, money, even the actual clothes worn by the samurai, stripped from their dead bodies. Quite often these jackals would come across a samurai that was only wounded and it was easier for them to plunge a dagger into them to avoid a struggle.

Takenouchi now heard the whispers getting closer, then hands were touching his body, trying to remove his armor and katana. Dropping his hand to his side he felt for his tanto and in a flash plunged it into the nearest looter. His scream put a fear beyond words into his comrades and they fled dropping their booty as they went. They knew that warrior spirits often haunted the battlefields, and their superstition was enough to allow Takenouchi to make good his escape. Half staggering, half crawling, the wounded samurai left the field where so many of his friends had died. He knew he had to be quick because the jackals would be back. He managed to get to the forest and conceal himself in the thick undergrowth before he passed out.

When he came to he found himself in a cot with animal skins covering him. His eyes opened and looking down on him was a man of about sixty. "Ah, you are awake my brave friend." said the old man. "Don't worry, you will live to fight another day. Your wound was in the flesh and I have managed to take out the arrowhead." With that the old man turned away and moved to pass him something. Takenouchi without thinking, for he was too weak to care, took from the old man a hot bowl of broth, sipping at first until it cooled, then taking great gulps. It was just what he had needed. He then slumped back into the cot and fell asleep. The following day Takenouchi, who now felt much better, learned that his benefactor was named Sato and that he was a yamabushi (warrior monk). The yamabushi, Takenouchi knew, were warriors that for some reason tired of life and had gone off to live in remote regions to study philosophy and Zen. Sato, he later found out, had been living in these particular foothills for over twenty years.

Within two weeks Takenouchi was fit and well, and each morning outside Sato's house he would practice his sword cuts to regain his skill. Sato would watch the warrior going through his paces, and commented that his shoulder was now almost like new again. In the evenings they would talk of bygone battles and techniques of warfare. Sato explained that constant warfare had led him to search for something more than death and killing. He had retired from his lord's service and gone off to contemplate the meaning of existence and his relationship with the rest of the world. After ten years he knew he wanted to live alone forever and never have to kill anyone again. The times, of course, being what they were there would always be a threat from robbers, bandits and anyone else who roamed the country looking to steal. So he had devised a fighting method to protect himself, but one which would not kill the adversary. He called this a "gentler way" of handling dangerous situations. Takenouchi was curious and asked Sato to show him his method of fighting. The old man said "Grab me in a hold that you feel I cannot escape from." Obeying, Takenouchi executed a stranglehold but within seconds he was sent flying backwards and landed in a heap on the ground. "Try harder!" Sato cried. Takenouchi came running in an attempt to knock the old man over. Instead, the samurai finished up in a clump of bushes. "This time" the old man said, "try to kill me." Takenouchi walked calmly over to Sato then hurled his whole body forwards to envelop the man in a vice like grip. Seconds later he was again picking himself up off the ground and wiping the dust off his kimono. "How is this possible?" asked Takenouchi. He was very perplexed that an old man had rendered him useless so easily. "My gentle way," announced Sato, "is based upon arresting techniques and using the energy and the strength of the opponent against him. I have wrestled with mountain bears and defeated them. But no one ever gets hurt unless I want them to."

For two years Takenouchi stayed with the old man and learned his mountain art of hand-to-hand fighting and throwing. Eventually, he felt it was time to leave and return to civilization. He thanked Sato for everything he had done for him and for teaching him his art of the gentle way. Once he had returned home, to the amazement of his friends and family who had thought him dead, he gave up the sword and concentrated on the gentle way of fighting that the old yamabushi had taught him. Years later, Takenouchi had devised an unarmed combat system inspired by Sato with further embellishments of his own. He named this system jujutsu or "gentle art".

This story was taken from the book *"Myths and Legends of the Martial Arts"*