

by Bruce Lee

Bruce Lee's responses to letters about his article

FORGET ORGANIZED DESPAIR

It has been over two years since I began taking classical Kung Fu. After reading your two articles in Black Belt, especially the second part, I started to really think.

Our practice at the school consists of standing on the horse stance, practising classical forms and doing the two men set—or what your jeet kune do would call prearranged rhythmic sparring. The stress is on good posture, good energy utilization and good (classical) form. Having read your realistic articles, I begin to ask myself, "good for what?"

I can see now that all the cramming postures, swinging punches and pretty kicks are too classically involved. There is a world of difference between applying these movements with an obedient partner who cooperates and an actual opponent who is bent on destroying you. Without consistent practice in sparring, I find it practically impossible to adjust proper distance or exact timing with a live, non-classical opponent. I know this because I took some boxing a long time ago.

The reason I still continue to practice kung fu is because I figured our instructor was testing our patience. Though none of us ever saw him spar or engage in any fast exchange, I know my instructor must be good. After all, he is a professional and I appreciate the saying, "He who knows does not speak; he who speaks does not know." What do you think?

T.Y. Whang, of San Francisco, Calif.

Lao-Tzu is supposed to have said, "He who knows does not speak; he who speaks does not know." However, he himself wrote five thousand words to explain his doctrine.

Does the word "sailor" mean that a person can swim? And speaking of swimming, can you learn it by grinding your horse stance and performing idealistic land exercises?

What do I think? Forget about this "organized despair" you have accumulated and go back to your boxing. Hang a heavy bag in your basement and use your legs as you would your hands. Of course, practice as much sparring as you can. You have to get wet in order to learn to swim.

Bruce Lee

DOES NOT UNDERSTAND KATA

I'm sure I'm not alone in having "likes" and "dislikes" regarding some of your articles. Usually I simply grunt to myself at the articles I particularly dislike or don't agree with. This time, however, I just couldn't let an issue go by without comment. I'm speaking of "Kato's Gung Fu."

First the comment Bruce Lee made: "...to me a lot of this fancy stuff is not functional." ...is a line I've heard by 'phonies' who "studied" karate 5 or 6 months then, because they didn't have the patience or the intelligence, quit, opened their own dojo, put on a black belt and attempted to teach "karate."

Bruce Lee obviously does not understand kata. ...There are a hundred comments I'd like to make but these 6 will do for a start.

1. The dime and penny trick is just that! A trick that anyone after a little practice, can do. They don't have to have fast or slow reflexes, just practice.
2. The "powerfull punch" demonstration, where he punches his volunteer into a chair is a farce! Take the chair away and he'll only 'be pushed' a few feet (with or without the protection of the 2 inch glove). I've done this in demonstration...not to prove the power of it but to prove that a man standing in a "non-classical" stance is easily "punched" off balance. Had the man in the photos been standing in a classical karate stance, Mr. Lee wouldn't have been able to budge him! And...yes! I'll volunteer any time!!
3. Bruce Lee goes on ... "When someone grabs you, punch him!..." Apparently Mr. Lee thinks a karateist would perform a kata in response. I know what I'd do. But I'm wondering about Bruce Lee...would he leave a penny in the grabber's hand?
4. As for practising with "robots" the article states that Bruce Lee "works" on stuffed dummies...I wonder how fast and how varied their counter attacks are, and if they move around him quickly???
5. Karate's ultimate goal for techniques of self defence has always been simultaneous strikes or kicks with blocks. It is nothing new to karate. Anyone who has studied karate for awhile is well aware of this common fact.
6. As I see it, Bruce Lee is saying (and proving) that he doesn't like, believe in or understand...karate!!

Paul Arel, of the Glastonbury Karate club

I am commenting on classical Chinese Gung Gu and not Karate. If your particular style is not of the "fancy stuff" or crammed with "deadly" (in the sense of a corpse) techniques, you need not grunt and be upset.

I am not even a phony who studied karate for five or six months. In fact, I never did take karate. However, my assistants and I do have quite a few students from your circle taking with us.

Whatever you like is your privilege, but I do not teach classical forms because of my understanding of them. As I have pointed out, Jeet Kune Do is interested in feeling what IS and not "doing what was or what might be" ...in other words, the here and now, the direct experience with one's opponent, the two halves of the whole.

Forms create situations which do not yet exist, while what IS is a constantly moving, constantly undergoing a transformation...never fixed and always alive.

Take, for example, learning to slip a punch. Is there a classical form for that? Isn't slipping a punch a matter of relationship? It's a different relationship every time as some opponents are fast, some slow, some deceptive, and some awkward.

It's too bad that out of 100 comments you could make, you come up with only six.

1. That is exactly what is supposed to be, a stunt-of speed.

2. I have demonstrated my punch, with or without a chair, and many reputable gentlemen among your circle will tell you it is not a push. If one stands in a classical stance, he will not be thrown back as far...but it will definitely hurt more.

3. I don't know what you will do, but whatever you do, do it quick.

4. There is a difference between BEING a robot and pounding on a robot. If you read carefully, you know Jeet Kune Do values sparring with a live opponent. However, when one does not have a live partner, he can use these dummies to acquaint himself with the correct distance and exact timing of his punches and kicks. This is realistic synchronization of the self.

5. So it is a common fact that there are no passive blocks in your particular art too. That's good. I, too, am like you. I do not like to block passively with one hand, with the other on the hip, and then...and then...and then...

Bruce Lee

BASIC TECHNIQUES

I am training with a Chinese instructor who drills us again and again on basics—like side kicks, straight punching, etc. When we spar, we are to use only the chosen basic techniques, though sometimes we can use combinations and everything. Do you not think we need variety?

R.T. Smith of Oakland, California

The best techniques are the simple ones done correctly, and in Martial Arts, it is not how much you have learned, but how much you have absorbed in what you have learned.

As long as the basics are on meaningful means that will lead to the ultimate end of actual application in broken rhythm, they are never wasted. Efficient basics are like the strong foundation of a house. Of course, one must avoid basics that have the "aliveness" taken out of them and are "performed" in "rhythmic routines."

Have patience, my friend, I am sure your teacher knows what he is doing.

Bruce Lee

BEAT BRUCE LEE?

The reason for this letter is that there are rumours that a man in Connecticut by the name of Bruce Fleetwood is spreading around. He claims to have defeated Bruce Lee twice in public and many times in private sparring. I have never seen this person before, but I feel it would not be that easy to beat Bruce Lee. Also, I don't recall ever hearing of Bruce Lee competing in public.

Please give me your opinion about this this so I can set things straight with the karate people in Connecticut.

William J. Chung New York City

Who's he????

Bruce Lee

JEET KUNE DO AND WING CHUN

I enjoyed reading your articles on Bruce Lee. It is interesting to find out the achievements of one of my Wing Chun "brothers."

Today, Mr. Lee is the founder of a new style. Just a few years ago, he was only one of us. I am interested in finding out just how much Wing Chun he still remembers and how much of it is included in his style. From your second article on Mr. Lee I recognized the "sticking hands" exercise and the "tucked in elbow." Some of Mr. Lee's moves also remind me of a northern style I practices when I was small. If BLACK BELT is willing to find out some answers to my curiosity, I am sure that many other readers will come up with more interesting questions and comments. This is one way of finding out the nature of Gung Fu.

I wish to make a comment on Mr. Lee's philosophy. Zen is very old and many an aggressive style has faded away in it. (If, having learned the art, a punch is no longer a punch, I would prefer to stay as a student.)

Jack Ling

Bloomington, Ind.

I do not recall you as being one of us just a few years ago, for I left Hong Kong in the early part of 1959...nearly nine years ago. At any rate, "Brother Ling," since you are interested in my Jeet Kune Do, I shall venture to tell you about it.

First, however, I should like to comment on the last paragraph of your letter. I do not really care what your preference is, but I would like you to re-read the second article. It reads, "Now that I've understood the art, a punch is just like a punch..." You don't have to understand it, but read it carefully and, "Brother Ling," do empty your tea cup first so you can taste my tea. After all, the usefulness of a cup is in it's emptiness.

The foundation of Jeet Kune Do is very much like Wing Chun in that it advocates elbows in position, the center line and straight punching. Now there are three stages in the cultivation of Jeet Kune Do, each of them interrelated. The first stage is "sticking to the nucleus"; the second stage, "liberation from the nucleus"; the third stage, "returning to the original freedom."

Classically speaking, sticking to the nucleus is merely based on the interior/exterior straight line and rejects the curved line on the idea that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. True, the straight line is very efficient (depending on the circumstances, that is), but rejection of the curve will lead to separation from the whole and the totality will not be achieved when men stubbornly cling to one partial view of things. After all, a good martial artist should be able to strike and kick from all angles and, with either hands or legs, take advantage of the moment.

Therefore, straight punching in Wing Chun becomes a means to an end, but not the end itself, and it should be reinforced and supported by other compact angle punches and kicks as well, thus, as a whole, making one's style more flexible without confinement or limitation. Like western boxing, Jeet Kune Do is most fluid and the fluidity of movements lies in their interchangeability.

By combining the first and second stages we have the natural returning to original freedom, and that is, the absence of a standardized style, the notion of attaching to a method, or the idea of rejecting the straight or the curve. Any action that is based on a set, conditioned course is the action of choice and such action is not liberating and will create conflict

and resistance. After all, you can straight-punch a swinger and curve a straight puncher; sometimes the straight is useful, sometimes the curve, depending on the circumstances.

In the eyes of combat, there is no set course, but the totality of action, and in this totality there is nothing to choose and nothing better or worse. One can say that pivot of Jeet Kune Do passes through the centre where the curve and straight converge and, in the ultimate Jeet Kune Do is a circle without a circumference.

"In the landscape of spring, there is neither better nor worse.

The flowering branches grow naturally; some long, some short."

— A Zen saying.

Bruce Lee

STUNTS ARE NOT SKILL

Mr. Lee, Kung Fu is really something! Recently I witnessed with my own eyes a Chinese master break a chopstick by jamming it on his own throat. Furthermore, he picked up a hammer and hit himself all over. Later he told the audience this is Ch'i (Ki in Japanese). How long does it take to learn it?

Roland Lee San Francisco

What is this? Superman giving a demonstration? If so, why did he break the chopstick with his chin (excuse me, I mean his throat) himself? Why didn't he invite someone else to jam the chopstick on his throat? Again, why did this "performer" not invite someone to come out and smash him with the hammer—if the object is to show he can withstand pain(?)

If Gung Fu consists of the above, the end of this art is arriving. All the stunts and gimmicks the performer did in no way suggested his actual skill in this combative art. If I were you, I would concentrate on efficient techniques and their application in sparring.

Bruce Lee