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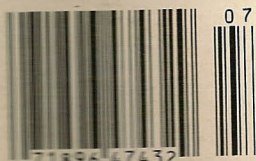
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THE CLUE TO TAI CHI CHUAN



DOES 1+1=INFINITY?

BUILDING BLOCKS OF JIJITSU

by George Kirby

Explaining this art is like opening a Pandora's Box. There are perhaps 30 to 50 basic kata, themselves relatively simple. But with the endless combinations and variations, is this an impossible task to master?

Having taught jujitsu for 15 years, including five days a week since 1976 in a Los Angeles junior high school, I have run across many of the complaints students have about learning a martial art. "It's boring." "We learned that last month." "It's always the same stuff." "Isn't there anything new?"

How does an instructor handle this problem? Of course it's quite easy to be defensive and say, "that's the way it is." Or, "if you don't like it, leave," and students *will* leave. Being defensive doesn't really solve any problems though and usually creates more.

Rather than going on the defensive when the issue is raised, it is much better to take advantage of the opportunity to give students insight. I'd like to think of this article in that sense.

Knowing an Art

Professor Jack Seki, my instructor for many years, always stressed what he called "knowing the art." He made the following three statements in various ways during my years of study under him.

1. If you don't *know* the techniques, they won't help you on the street. In a street situation, if you have to think of what moves you're going to make, it's already too late. Reactions must be automatic.

2. Speed won't help you if you don't *know* the technique. Speed has a definite advantage on the street. However, a fast and sloppy technique has a lesser chance of succeeding than one done a bit slower but correctly. Of course combining quality

and speed is even better, but I have never emphasized speed in my classes. I can't give my students speed. Once they really know a technique they can speed it up.

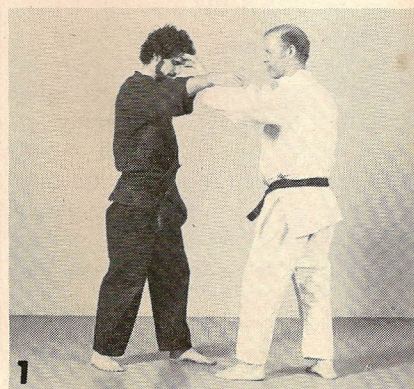
3. *Knowledge* gives you flexibility. This statement can be applied to any aspect of daily life, and it also applies to the martial arts. The more you *know* your art the more flexible you can be. Techniques can be suited to the situation, and responses to attacks can be varied, giving you greater and more effective control over your opponent. If a technique doesn't work you can go into something else. If the situation changes you can change. Flexibility of this kind only comes with knowledge.

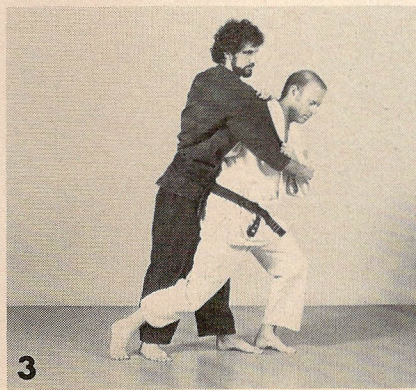
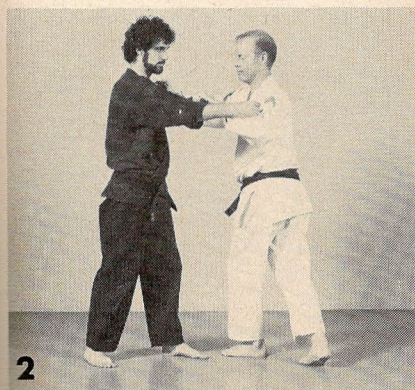
The problem is, knowing a martial art requires patience, repetition, understanding, experimentation, and evaluation. These five actions—or steps—are absolutely essential. This is also the order in which they must occur. One is an outgrowth of the other.

A person seriously studying a martial art must have patience. It takes many small steps to climb a mountain, and the steps must be in certain places. Learning is not a rapid do-it-once-know-it process. It requires being patient with yourself and allowing yourself to grow at your own rate.

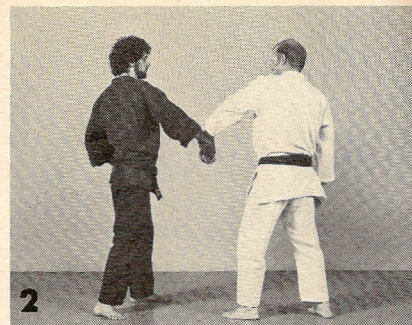
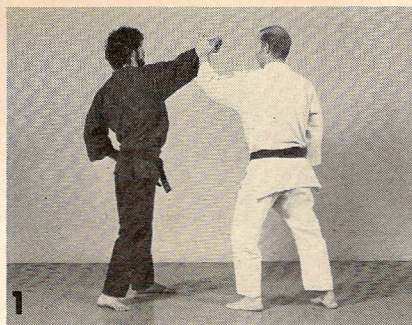
Repetition. To some people that's an awful word. "How many times do I have to repeat this move?" The best answer is probably, "forever." Repetition is that part of learning that sets the body movements down in your brain where they eventually will be-

In the basic tai-otoshi, as the dark clad attacker attempts to strike (1) the defender, the latter reaches under his foe's arm and seizes his gi (2) with both arms while moving his left leg in front of his right to prepare for a subsequent move. The defender then pivots (3) in, placing his right leg in front of the opponent's. As the defender snaps his right leg into the attacker's right to begin the momentum, he throws (4) the attacker to the ground.





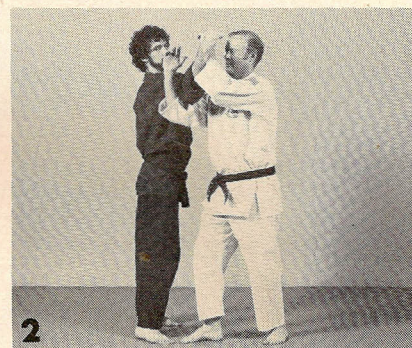
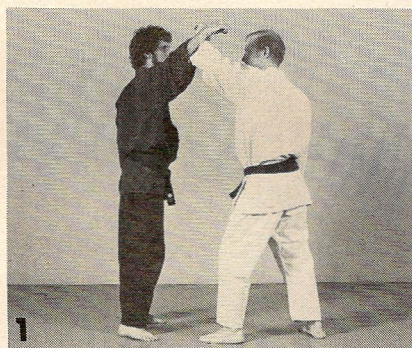
The basic tai-otoshi is now altered with the addition of a wristlock. Grabbing and twisting the wrist, the defender steps across again and pivots (1-3). With the wrist still locked, the defender gains momentum from both the wristlock and the tai-otoshi and hurls (4&5) his opponent to the ground. With the basic kata learned, students can try experimentation and thus add to the many variations.



In tai-otoshi with an arm-bar variation, the root moves of attack (1) and subsequent hold (2) by the defender are changed. Additionally, the defender holds (3) the attacker's right shoulder to allow room for the pivot. Yet again, with the attacker restricted, the defender leg blocks (4), snaps and throws (5). With so many combinations, the student may steer toward one that suits him best.



In the tai-otoshi with the added elbow lock, the defender blocks high (1) the attacker's assault and controls the attacker's arm (2) with his lower arms rather than his hands. The attacker pivots again (3) but this time more to the attacker's hip. Again blocking and snapping (4) with his leg, the defender brings the attacker (5) to the ground.



come automatic reactions. Only repetition can develop that.

If you have a good instructor, one who explains why techniques work the way they do, you can develop a more complete understanding of the art. This is a critical element. If you don't understand how and why techniques work, you can never gain real insight into your art or make any substantial connections between its physical, theoretical, and philosophical aspects.

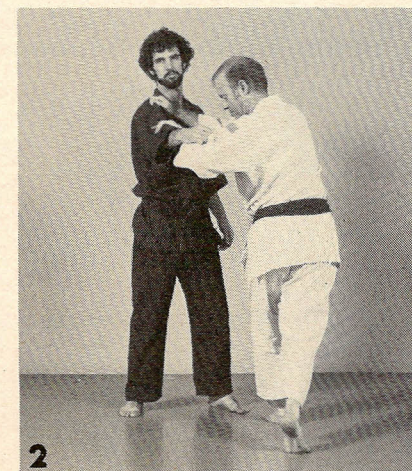
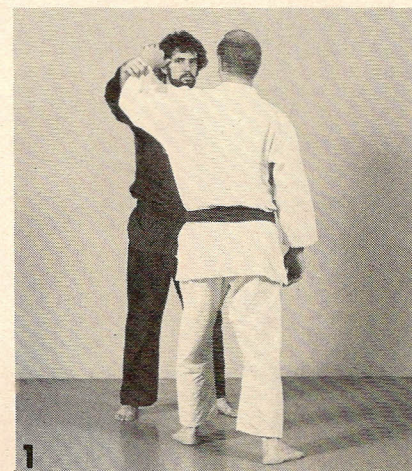
Not all instructors are capable or willing to give this information. Some feel explanation enhances learning. Others feel that allowing a student to "discover" the information through his own experience is more valuable. In either case acquiring an understanding of what you're doing is necessary if any real and continuous growth is going to take place.

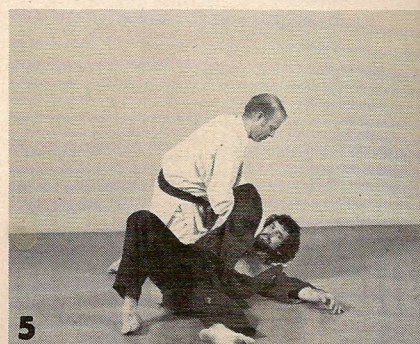
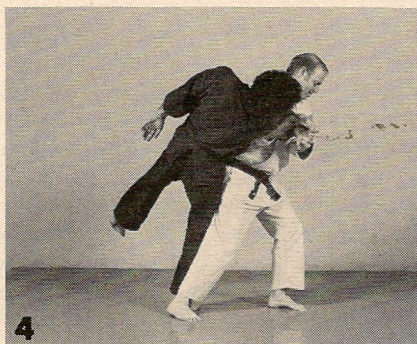
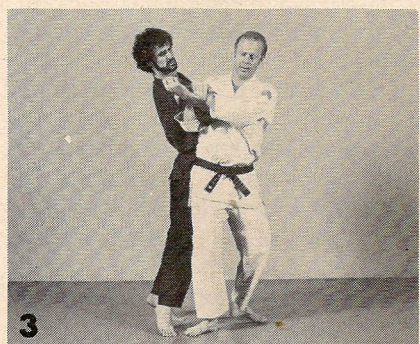
Experimentation is a logical next step. The student will take his knowledge and try to do things differently. It

may be because he thinks there is a better way to do a technique. Whether or not he really finds superior forms of various techniques is not as important at this stage as allowing the serious student to go through the process. Sometimes his ideas may not work out, and he will realize the tried-and-true method is best. Sometimes you as the instructor may learn something too.

Experimentation also allows the student to put techniques together in

Now the legs are used in variations from tai-otoshi with one knee. From a different angle one can see the block (1), sidestep (2), and the pivot, leg block and snap (3). However, as the defender throws his opponent (4) he falls to one knee, greatly increasing the momentum of the throw (5) rather than remaining on both feet. Personalizing techniques is one of the major objectives in jujitsu as a means of self-defense.





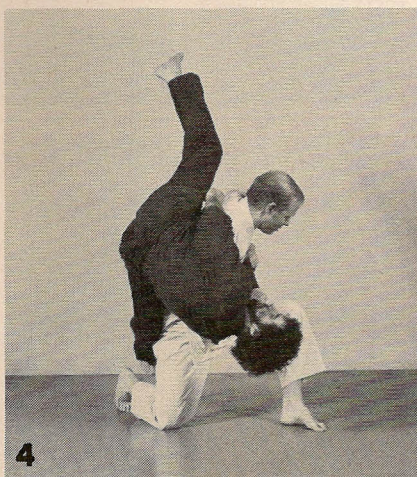
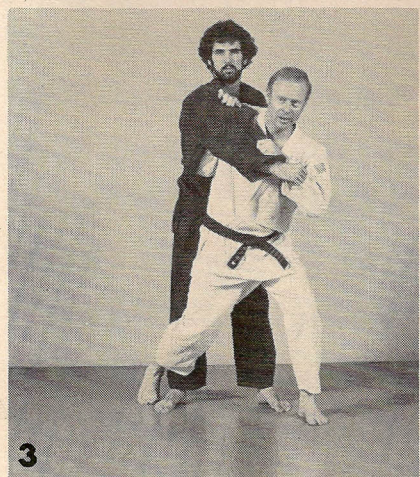
different combinations. Some combinations will work extremely well, and others won't. Again the process is more important than the result. The student will discover, hopefully with his instructor's support and guidance, that he can develop a system that works for him. The process also gives a student insight into his own abilities and limitations.

However, all martial arts—or instructors—do not allow for experimentation. Some systems are rigid or

fixed, closed to variations or differences. While I do not wish to place a judgment on the validity of such a system, it does place severe restrictions on growth and it can prevent the student from growth in the art. On the other hand a closed system provides security for instructors and students alike. It provides specific boundaries within which very specific growth can occur. Goals become more clear, achievements more evident. Closed systems can also, of course, include

within their boundaries many very effective methods of self-defense.

Perhaps the most difficult part of knowing an art is the ability to evaluate what you know—evaluate objectively. Does a particular technique work well for you? Are your modifications realistic and effective? Do they merely look good or do they really work? Can other practitioners make the same techniques work for them? Are the techniques you've learned simple and effective, or have you



Further variations are seen with tai-otoshi falling to both knees. Again starting with the grab and subsequent step (1), the defender pivots in (2) and blocks with the leg. However, utilizing one of the many options available in jujitsu, rather than snapping the leg, the defender simply drops to both knees (3), thus altering the center of gravity for the subsequent throw (4&5).

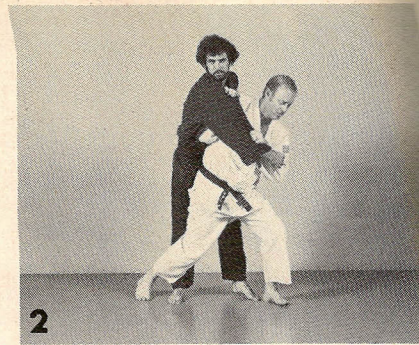
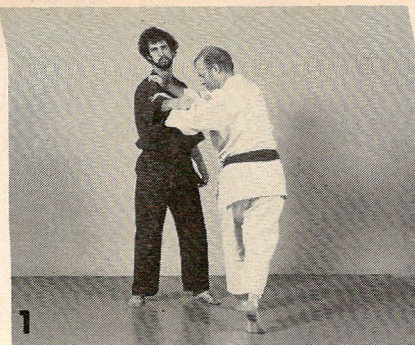
created a 27-move monster that has no real credibility?

Evaluating your acquisition of knowledge requires that you be honest with yourself. It requires that you be able to admit error to yourself and others. It means also that you must be willing to go back to step one and start over again if necessary.

The five steps (patience, repetition, understanding, experimentation and evaluation) form a circular or spiral pattern. One leads to the next, and the last (evaluation) brings you back to the first (patience). Knowing a martial art should be a continuous process, one that never ends.

Knowing Jujitsu

This five-step process is most evident in learning jujitsu, the "gentle art." Because of this, getting to *know* jujitsu is an art in itself. Jujitsu has



served as the parent art from which judo, aikido, some forms of karate (especially kenpo), kendo, and other martial arts developed (see June 1983, BLACK BELT). However this explanation is like opening Pandora's Box. Where does a jujitsu student start learning, and where does he stop?

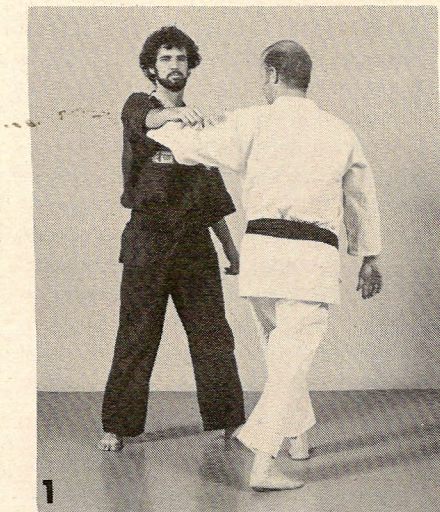
There are perhaps 30 to 50 basic kata in jujitsu, not including hits, kicks, strikes, nerve attacks or pressure points.

In order to develop a better understanding of both the simplicity and the complexity of jujitsu, it is necessary to explain the difference between *kata* and *waza* in the art. A jujitsu kata is a specific form of throw, takedown, come-along hold, submission, and so on. A *waza* is a specific technique (series of moves) that may combine the basic forms along with hits, strikes, kicks, nerve attacks and

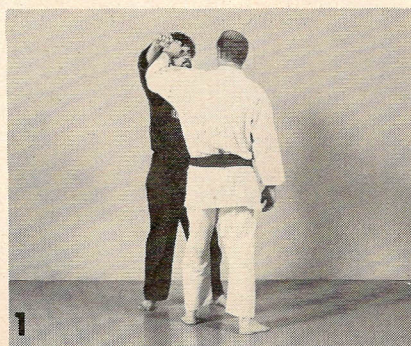
modifications of basic forms. The basic kata do not include doing the basic forms from the left side, left-handed, reverse position (such as using a basic hip throw, *koshi-nage*, to throw an opponent backward so he'll land face down) or modifications to the basic kata. The kata themselves are relatively simple; the combinations and variations are endless. Sounds like an impossible task to master—but it really isn't.

If the jujitsuka follows the five steps mentioned earlier, he can develop a logical sequence of meaningful learning. Through patience and repetition he will develop a feeling for forms and techniques, both of which are necessary to perfect the physical aspect of the art. If the student has an instructor who can explain how and why techniques work, then he can develop understanding.

Here tai-otoshi is amended with a hair grab. With the grab, side step (1) and leg block (2) completed, the defender reaches around (3) and grabs the attacker's hair. Pulling his head down (4), he snaps and throws (5). Note how tai-otoshi is altered, providing countless new techniques from the same basic throw.



Illustrated is tai-otoshi with a floating drop throw termination. The sequence starts with the block (1), step (2) and pivot, and the leg block (3). However, the defender (4) now throws his body to his right, and with a winding momentum, brings the attacker (5) to the floor.





The student will learn how techniques feel when they're executed properly. This knowledge will in turn help develop the necessary instinct to determine if techniques are working properly in a street situation. If a technique isn't working properly, he can change it without any conscious effort. He will also discover in throws where and how his attacker will land.

In doing this he will develop control. If you can sense that a technique is working properly, you are controlling your attacker. If you know how and where your attacker will end up after you're done with him, you are controlling your attacker.

Once these areas have been developed, a knowledgeable jujitsu student will, by the very nature of the art, begin experimenting. He will combine kata and rearrange waza to form a more flexible system suited to his

own physical capabilities. Personalizing techniques is one of the major objectives in jujitsu as a means of self-defense.

This personalizing—or "knowing"—process can be overwhelming in itself because of the infinite number of jujitsu combinations and variations. There is always the danger that the student will become so engrossed in finding new combinations that he will lose contact with the basics which gave him the knowledge and flexibility to discover the combinations and variations. There is the danger that the jujitsuka may become so specialized that the original "system" is no longer a part of his practical knowledge.

To cope with such a problem, it is always good to remember the five steps of learning. As a student progresses with his instructor's help,

combining techniques and reordering sequences, there is an occasional feeling of excitement and accomplishment when he enthusiastically calls his teacher to his side and says, "Gee sensei, I just made up a new technique!"

Is it possible for students to come up with new techniques? In some rigid martial arts it may not be possible. Jujitsu however is an open and flexible art. A new technique is quite possible. More power to the student who invents it! ❧

Part II of "The Building Blocks of Jujitsu" follows next month. For a more complete explanation of the art, including circle theory and its practical, theoretical and philosophical aspects, refer to Jujitsu: Basic Techniques of the Gentle Art, by George Kirby, Ohara Publications, Inc., 1983.

