
STRONG ROOTS

By Lee Taylor

There is a beautiful wood in my home town which is an ancient motte and bailey mound, which gives fantastic views over the town. I walk my dog there most days and during the summer when the trees are full to bursting with lush green leaves, the view of the town is obscured. As I write this autumn is in full swing with winter fast approaching and I have been walking my dog in the Great British weather of wind and rain at this regular spot, and whilst walking I noticed something. The trees have shed their leaves, nothing new there it happens every autumn, and the great views of the town have appeared. Then I thought with autumn here and winter approaching, leaves have been shed, what do the trees have to protect them from the wind and rain and anything else Mother Nature will throw at them? Answer, strong deep roots. Whatever the weather during autumn and winter you know that by spring new shoots and leaves will appear and the trees will be back to their best, full branches of lush green leaves. That got me thinking even more. (which I don't normally do when walking the dog, just usually trying to stop him from eating or rolling in something nasty!) Martial artists nowadays have many branches to their art, some to become a complete fighter (to cover all ranges of fighting i.e. striking, throwing, grappling, groundwork etc) some to fill perceived gaps in their art (grappling and throwing in karate, which you realise was already there!!) and some just to train for trainings sake.

But having lots of branches full of lush green leaves sometimes obscures the whole picture and the fantastic views. (A bit of an Enter the Dragon moment, *'don't concentrate on the finger...'*) When the tree is at its most vulnerable with all types of weather changes to deal with, it is at its strongest relying on the roots that have been established over years of growth. Despite what Mother Nature throws at it the deep roots ensures its longevity. In fact it's the deep strong roots that allows it to have many branches.

Can martial artists of this day and age from whatever style or background and for whatever purpose they are training for, be truly honest with themselves and say the same of their core training, their foundation? Do we have strong roots in the art we have based ourselves in and give our lives too? Will our roots withstand the changes in weather, and maintain constant growth and reproduction? Can our roots allow us to see the fantastic views? Or have we become too reliant on having many branches forgetting to ensure the correct growth of our roots? Lots of metaphors there relating to nature and martial arts training! Whatever style you have chosen to train in it should have a strong core that allows the student to develop skills physically and mentally, ensuring the correct growth of the student over a period of time. This is applicable to whatever reason you chose to start training in the martial arts be it self-protection, competition, fitness, a life style change, whatever, the core of the art will establish strong roots in the student for future growth.

We all know that mixed martial arts and cross training has come to the fore front in recent years, and how it has taken the imagination of all practitioners. Though the idea of cross training (for the want of a better word) has been around for years, the most obvious being Bruce Lee, who was years ahead of his time in terms of taking what was useful from styles and adopting it, and in terms of how he trained. The concept can be traced back further into karate's history as the founder of Shito-Ryu karate Kenwa Mabuni, had 2 different instructors in Ankoh Itosu and Kanryo Higoanna plus a few others to develop his core art. Moving through time back to the present day, and currently the most renowned cross trainer in the martial art world being Guru Dan Inosanto. The common factor that links the named 3 is they definitely all had strong roots, a core to their arts and a deep foundation enabling them to grow, shed their leaves and re-grow consistently year after year, whatever changes in their training, environment, personal changes or just life, came their way. The legacy left by Bruce Lee and his philosophies on training do not need this article to justify them, and the impact he had on

the world and the way people trained. Kenwa Mabuni's Shito-Ryu Karate is one of the most popular styles currently being practised in various forms around the world today. The Shito-Ryu style and all its current forms has the most comprehensive kata list of the 4 major karate styles (which could be argued as a positive or negative point for another article) with Mabuni's style also giving growth to famous instructors such as Chojiro Tani, Shigeru Kimura and Haruyoshi Yamada, all taking the original strong foundation and growing from it. Guru Dan Inosanto needs no introduction as he leads by example influencing students worldwide with his philosophies on differing martial arts and how he still trains as a student himself.

I have only mentioned 3 martial artists, and could have easily listed many more modern day artists that are here in the UK, all of which share a common theme. All of those martial artists who are at the top of their game, whatever art it may be and for whatever reason they train for, will show a deep foundation with strong roots. It has allowed them to develop their art, in turn allowing them to further their art, and ensuring longevity to their art. There are too many to mention in this article and everyone will have their own opinion on who would make the list, so go check it for yourselves.

Take a look at the martial art you train in, and be completely honest with yourself and your training. Do you have strong roots, do you have a foundation that will allow you to grow continually year after year for whatever reason you choose to train for, or is your view obscured by too many branches? Are your roots deep enough to allow you to have many branches? As the Soke of Shito-Ryu Shukokai Karate Haruyoshi Yamada says "*Esoteric skills exist in basic technique*" which is a great way of saying whatever art you train in, and for whatever reason you choose to train for, your basics, your core foundation, your strong roots will have the answers.

These thoughts were running through my head (the dog got really bored!) as I stood in front of the oldest tree in my favourite wood, and quite possibly as old as the town itself, apparently planted in the 1700's. It is still here and will be way after I've finished my time on this globe and go to the great dojo in the sky, and it will still be here after many more generations, and after many more coming and going of martial art styles no doubt, so what's its' secret? Deep strong roots allowing growth year after year.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR...



Lee Taylor has been training in the traditional martial arts since childhood and currently holds the rank of 4th Dan Karate with the British Combat Karate Association, British Combat Association and the World Combat Association.

Lee started his karate training in Wado-Ryu karate and in 1999 he started training in Shito-Ryu Shukokai, working through the grades to gain the rank of 2nd Dan. He competed nationally and internationally in kata and kumite, and became the Squad Coach.

In 2005 Lee opened his first club in Presteigne, and in 2007 opened Rhayader and Llanidloes clubs, becoming a full time instructor and gained the rank of 3rd Dan. Lee has regularly trained with top instructors in the UK and abroad, and in 2011 established Lee Taylor Karate.

Lee endeavours to improve his skills, knowledge and understanding of martial arts particularly on the issue of self protection. He trains with the UK's leading authorities in practical application of karate and self protection, Peter Consterdine, Geoff Thompson (1st Dan in Geoff's RCS system) Iain Abernethy (qualified as an Instructor with Iain, and who graded Lee to 4th Dan) and Al Peasland (Affiliate Instructor with Al's group Complete Self Protection)

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