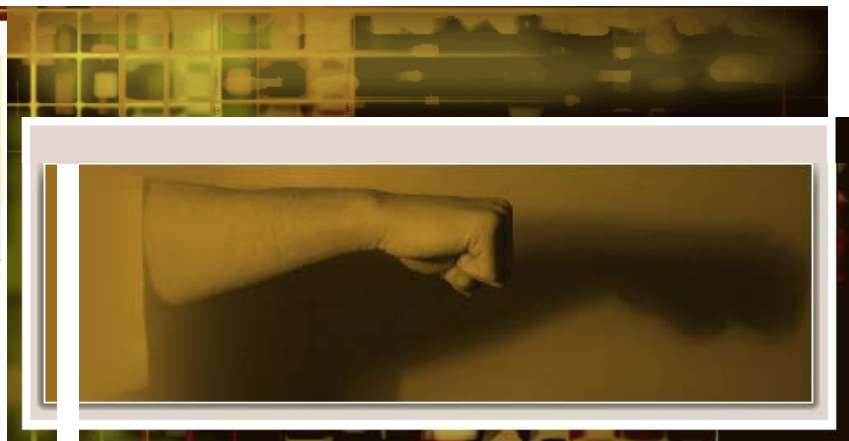


- WELCOME
- EDITORIAL
- OUR MISSION
- THE TEAM
- OUR SPONSORS
- FORUM
- INTERVIEWS
- ARTICLES
- BOOK REVIEWS
- DVD REVIEWS
- COURSE REPORTS
- WEBSITE REVIEWS
- TOURNAMENT REVIEWS
- TRIPS TO JAPAN
- INSTRUCTOR PROFILES
- BEGINNER'S GUIDE
- BEGINNER'S DIARIES
- LEARNING RESOURCES
- TEACHING RESOURCES
- INSTRUCTOR'S DIARIES
- SCIENTIFIC STUDY
- HISTORY OF SHOTOKAN
- SHOTOKAN KATA
- THE DOJO KUN
- THE NIJU KUN
- COMPETITION RULES
- KARATE TERMINOLOGY
- CALENDAR
- EQUIPMENT
- HOW TO SUBMIT MATERIAL
- COMING SOON
- CONTACT US
- MAILING LIST
- LINKS



Empty Hand - The Essence of Budo Karate by Kenei Mabuni

Last month I was sent a copy of the newly translated '*Empty Hand – The Essence of Budo Karate*' by Kenei Mabuni. The blurb on the back of this text reads '*the lifework of a grandmaster of karate*', and alone this is both alluring and utterly intriguing, but what you find inside is a real treasure, translated into English for us all to cherish and embrace. This is not merely a book about the man and his life, but about the journey he has taken over the last eight decades, the journey of karate-do.

Possibly only partially well known to some shotokan karateka, Kenei Mabuni is the son of Kenwa Mabuni – *founder of Shito Ryu*. Kenwa Mabuni, whilst being junior in age to Gichin Funakoshi of Shotokan, was highly regarded amongst not only his peers but his seniors also. It is a fact, I learned through reading this book, that Sensei Funakoshi sent his son to study kata under his junior – Kenwa Mabuni. Reinforcing the belief that Funakoshi Sensei had not wished for stylistic divides, it becomes clear that Funakoshi Sensei held the importance of kata close to his heart and encouraged his son to study from the very experienced Mabuni Sr.

This is a book dedicated to Budo. It is dedicated to the arduous and exhaustive journey the karateka embarks upon and inflicts upon himself. Like Budo, this book in many ways is very honest and simple, and within this simplicity we get to the core of the man, his beliefs and all he has learned throughout his life; a life dedicated to Karate-do.

This book is broken down into two parts entitled '*Budo Karate*' and '*The spirit of Budo*'. Each part is then further broken down into sub-categories, which each includes several chapters. Through the beautiful scattering of short and direct chapters, we are exposed to the wide variety of issues such as '*The difference between Budo and Violence*', '*Karate as "Zen in Motion"*' and '*Criticizing Present-Day Budo*'. Each of these named above are examples of the subcategories that dominate the two parts of the book, and as you can see in the few examples I have provided, there is so much scope for this living Master to share his wisdom with us. Embedded within the teachings he offers here, he shares personal stories, and tales passed down to him to give us a full and poetic insight into the heart of budo.

In my youth, the concept of Budo played itself in my head as some artful expression, perhaps mystical in nature, representing the other-worldly powers of the Martial Arts. Immaturity thankfully gave way by my mid-teenage years, and what you find here in these pages talks nothing of magic or the mystical. Instead, it carves in stone so clearly, the reality and therefore simplicity of the Martial Arts. It illustrates that the objective travelled towards in the journey of the Martial Arts is to be able to defend yourself and to perfect your character and be a better human being. The absence of ego here in this book testifies to the journey Kenei Mabuni has travelled.

In karate, as in life, we as karateka and human beings are a product of our experiences. We are moulded, shaped by them. Self-defence, although so inherently connected with violence, is also about peace. It's this defence of self that restores peace to one's world. Karate therefore, when practiced as Budo, is about peace and harmony. It is understandable therefore that this book is so utterly focussed on the concept of peace and harmony both internally (*self*) and externally (*the world*). Chapters entitled '*Karate the spirit of respect*', '*Taking life, giving life*', and '*Victory without struggle*' explore in a variety of different ways

such an idea.

The book, apart from being so beautifully centred around Budo also gives us insight into the power and grace of Shito Ryu. We are given insight into the influences of other styles and people, the direction provided by Kenwa Mabuni and the characteristics of the style. From the perspective of someone hoping to gain insight into the Shito style, this is perfect. More than this however, the issues discussed and explored so sensitively are important for a broader understanding of Karate-Do. Examples of this can be found in the sections that deal so heavily with kata such as '*Understanding the Heian Sandan kata as fighting technique*', '*The Gojushiho kata, and how to cope with unexpected attacks*' and '*The kata Niipaipo and Haufa*'. As you can see from the text, and the photographic imagery within, the content is centred primarily within Shito approach to kata. Lessons are offered here however from a much broader perspective, and whether the kata is Shotokan, Wado Ryu or Shito Ryu, the heart of its teachings, when considered a part of Budo, is universal.

The book of course also brings karate into the modern world, a modern world not built on the ideal of Budo; but a world where sport karate is ever present. This is an issue he explores at length throughout the book, and one clearly that he feels passionately about.

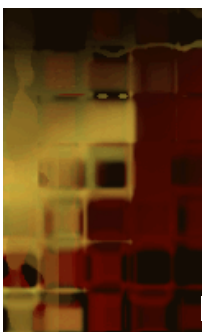
What we have here is a book that above all else in my opinion demonstrates a refreshing openness to all aspects of Karate and the Martial Arts. Across 225 pages, we have a man's lifetime given considerable study and contemplation. There's no space for personal glory or attention grabbing. There's no opportunity for him to 'wow' the world with tales of grandeur. Here is simply a text detailing one man's outlook on a Martial Art he has dedicated his life to, giving all aspects breadth and breathing space and articulate introspection.

Illustrated with a variety of photographs, interwoven into tales of old Samurai we explore Budo on all levels. We get a glimpse into its physicality, but also into the internal, with chapters that focus on breathing, arranging the soul and conflict and peace. No stone is unturned as he spills his understanding so generously.

If honest, this ordinarily would not be a book I would buy myself. This again perhaps illustrates my narrow mindedness, even when I consider myself so open minded, but when looking for books I look for the names I know. The Shotokan names. This book I can honestly say however will be one I will treasure and re-read for a lifetime.

Shotokan or not, this book will interest all Martial Artists interested in Budo. A treasure!!!

Shaun Banfield



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