




Kill or Cure

The Martial Art/Healing



In a village in feudal Japan, a man falls from a rooftop, and the force of the landing causes him to stop breathing. A crowd gathers; they know the man is in trouble, but they are unsure what to do. Suddenly, a little old man pushes through the crowd, grabs the victim, gives a loud shout (*kiai*), and strikes him. The victim is instantly revived. Although the old man practices medicine, he is not a doctor. In fact, he is a person that few Westerners would expect to heal someone: a martial artist.

Hundreds of years ago in Japan, old men who had practiced martial arts all their lives were respected by the population in general, and their students in particular, for two distinctly different reasons. Obviously, people lived in awe of their ability to harm or kill others. A fact that is not commonly known, though, is that well-developed martial artists placed as much value on healing and resuscitation arts as they did on combative techniques. These arts, known as *katsu* or *kappo*, gave the practitioner the ability to restart someone's heart, resume breathing that had stopped or treat other injuries, such as nosebleeds and testicle blows. These tactics were a natural outgrowth of martial arts practice where the need to reverse techniques was commonplace. These abilities, coupled with bone-setting and other healing arts, earned the old martial artists as much, or more, respect as their martial abilities. →

Art Connection

Story and
inside photos
by Gary Lescak,
Kathy Lescak
and Jeff Todd

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The ability to take a person apart helps one better understand how to put a person back together. Kathy Lescak demonstrates a shoulder relocation technique on Jeff Todd.

The Connection

The connection between the healing arts and the martial arts is not merely one of association based upon practicality. It also exists because of fundamental commonalities; they are in many ways kindred spirits. As startling and unlikely as this may sound, once we examine some specific connections, we can see that their coexistence and complementary development have a natural flow.

Keep in mind, however, that we cannot truly convey the experiential nature of these two arts within an intellectual, conceptual construct; such constructs must all fall short simply by the definition of “art.” Also, understand that we are dealing with nebulous, enigmatic ideas originating in different cultures and different historical eras. A good conceptual framework for our comparison of similarities, therefore, is to use the mind/body/spirit paradigm, since both arts emphasize the interconnectedness of these three dimensions and train the practitioner in each.

Physical Similarities

In both healing arts and martial arts, the need for precise anatomical knowledge, with the ability to identify and pinpoint a specific spot on the body the size of a dime (or smaller), is fundamental to all advanced techniques.

In Japanese *sefhukujitsu* (a broad term that includes deep-tissue massage, specific massages for specific ailments, bone-setting and resuscitation techniques), there is a whole body of resuscitation techniques (*katsu* or *kappo*) to stimulate and start someone’s heart or breathing; many of these techniques involve percussive actions/striking/point stimulation. They are referred to as cure or kill (*kappo* or *sappo*) techniques. The reason for this is many of the points that are stimulated in the healing arts to start someone’s heart or breathing are the same points that are struck (stimulated) in the martial arts to stop someone’s heart or breathing (with obviously different focus, intent and stimulation methods). This is also true in the Chinese arts: many of the points stimulated in acupuncture to balance the body’s energy are the same points that martial artists strike to damage or disrupt that energy.

Another interesting commonality is the “feel” by which very skilled practitioners in both arts locate these points. As in any craft, the novice must first learn the rudiments and through constant application gain proficiency with the techniques; over time, the application of skills becomes second nature. Likewise,



Gary Lescak demonstrates an advanced striking technique to stop the heart.

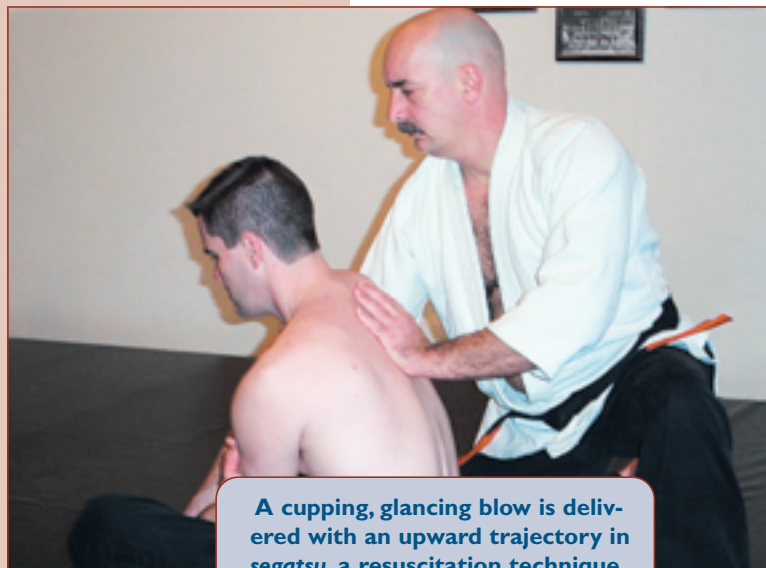
in both martial and healing arts, the beginning student is taught precise methods to measure the body, to locate specific areas and either strike or treat them. The long-term practitioner, though, is able to unerringly touch the precise point without hesitation and without even looking directly at the point.

The physical conditioning for each experience is also extremely complementary, and the practice of each art actually enhances the ability of the practitioner while performing the other art. Specifically, in advanced striking in martial arts, a great deal of conditioning emphasis is placed upon development of connective tissue, such as tendons and ligaments; the Chinese say that one's power comes from the sinews. In advanced point hitting, the martial artist

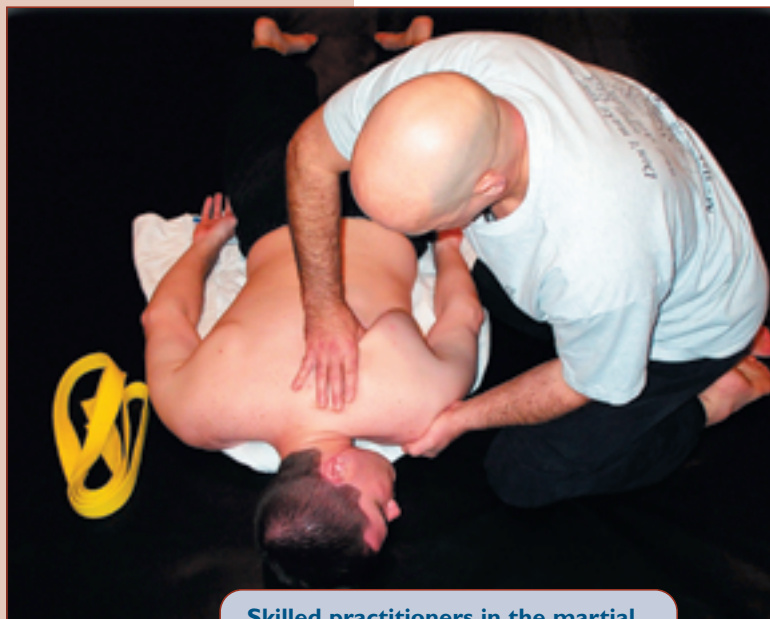
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oftentimes uses his fingertips and even a single digit; this all takes a tremendous amount of hand, wrist and forearm development. Such development mirrors what you need for and get from deep-tissue massage and acupressure.

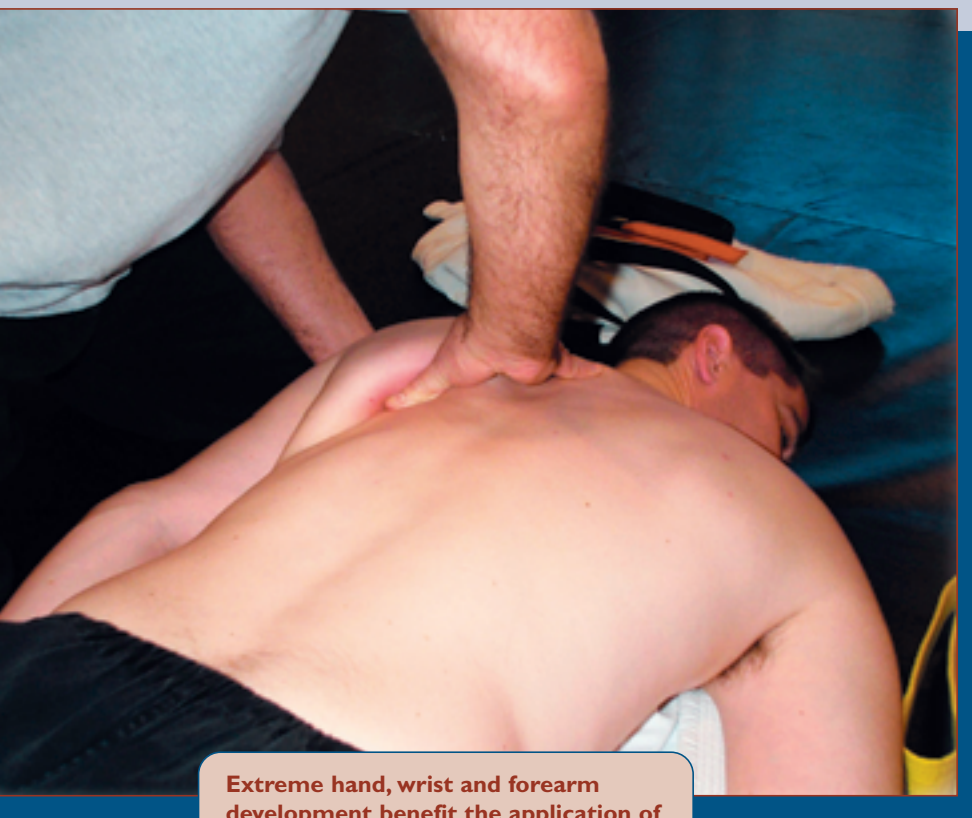
We can list other examples of this physical connection: the ability to analyze or "read" a person's physical build, posture, and gait; the development of hand strength for grabbing, kneading, gripping and ripping; techniques for using your body weight to full advantage; and many more. These are all concrete, fundamental, physical examples, but these may not be the most fascinating comparisons. For those, we turn to the realm of the mind and spirit.



A cupping, glancing blow is delivered with an upward trajectory in *segatsu*, a resuscitation technique for a stopped heart, in the area of the sixth thoracic vertebrae.



Skilled practitioners in the martial arts and healing arts locate precise body points by feel.



Extreme hand, wrist and forearm development benefit the application of deep tissue massage and acupressure.

These techniques are about energy projection and disrupting an opponent's energy, sometimes without touching him.

The Mind/Spirit Links

Under the mind/body/spirit paradigm, the mind is the bridge between the spirit and the body. The spirit has to meet the body on the bridge called the mind for advanced practitioners of both arts to gain their unusual abilities in very esoteric areas. For our comparative purpose, our two main categories here revolve around perception/sensitivity to energy and projecting energy.

Martial arts training sensitizes one to an opponent's energy. The advanced martial artist can perceive the opening (*suki* in Japanese) or "find the gap," as the Chinese say; this intuitive perception enables him to enter and neutralize the opponent, often with the opponent's initial movement, sometimes before he ever moves. This is not about a physical opening and does not rely on physical cues; this is about a mental (focus/concentration) opening or a spiritual (energy/attachment) opening.

In the healing arts, this type of perception is fundamental to advanced diagnostic techniques, like reading the pulses in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), for

example. When we talk about TCM theory, treating the whole person begins by understanding energy blockages and deficiencies; the root of the physical problems are to be found in the mental and spiritual realm. The advanced practitioner has the ability to discern the specific problem because he has developed the intuitive perception necessary to connect with the client's mind and spirit.

Once this perception/sensitivity to energy is put into practice in either art, it is followed by energy manipulation of the subject by energy projection from the artist. This requires a mind/body/spirit connection by the practitioner that takes many years to develop.

In the martial arts, this takes the form of techniques like *kiai* (literally, spirit uniting shout) and *tora nirami* (tiger stare) in Japanese martial arts, and *dim mak* (point hitting) and *do ming dien mo* (delayed death touch) in Chinese martial arts. These techniques are about energy projection and disrupting an opponent's energy, sometimes without touching him.

In the healing arts, this energy manipulation and energy projection are what benefit the patient. It can take the form of energy exchange in massage techniques; the →

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aforementioned resuscitation techniques; and acupuncture, which manipulates the body's energy to enable it to heal itself. And, as in the martial arts, it can sometimes be done without physically touching the person, as in reiki, a type of energy massage.

Energy Exchange

Our attempt here has been to introduce you to the fundamental ties between the martial arts and healing arts, to convey introductory information about some very complex ideas and relationships. Although volumes could be written on this connection, you seldom see anything about this subject for several reasons: 1) it is complex and can be difficult to describe and to understand; 2) few people know both arts in depth well enough to discuss this connection; and 3) those that do are probably senior martial artists who are generally rather low-profile and secretive. One can acquire knowledge in the healing

arts without knowing its martial application, but in order to be a truly knowledgeable, senior martial artist, one cannot do it without the healing art knowledge.

In the story that opens this article, the old martial artist used his knowledge and intuition, developed over years of practice, to read the energy of another. He used his skill not to kill an opponent, but to cure a neighbor. We feel students and practitioners in each art would be well-served to explore the other art, to learn the intricacies of the energy exchange between individuals. As we tell people in both contexts, feeling is believing. **M&B**

Gary J. Lescak has studied and taught ju-jitsu since 1967 and is a certified restoration therapy instructor. Kathy Lescak, a shodan in ju-jitsu, is a certified restoration therapy instructor and certified acupuncturist; she is certified in subtle energy medicine and she practices reiki, accupressure, reflexology and cranialsacral massage. Jeff Todd is a martial artist and professor of writing at Georgia Southern University. For more information: www.mettermartialarts.com or www2.gasou.edu/facstaff/jtodd.