



BALANCE AND POWER IN THE FIFTEENS

COMPARING THE TOMIKI AIKIDO 15 BASICS
WITH THE CHANG MOO KWAN 15 FIGHTING TECHNIQUES

BY: MATTHEW PAUL BOYD

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INTRODUCTION

A martial artist should be like a heaven's lake. This principle teaches us that a good martial artist, much like a thriving lake, receives from multiple sources while at the same time disperses outward to many other sources. In two of these sources, Chang Moo Kwan and Aikido, there are principle sets that have worked together in teaching both balance and power. Balance is seen in how we take it from our opponent while we maintain our own. Power is seen in using what our opponent has against him, while at the same using our entire body to multiply that power against him. The following will explore *The 15 Basics* in Aikido, as well as *The 15 Fighting Techniques* of Chang Moo Kwan to show how these two sets have worked in harmony to teach me how to best use balance and power in fighting and protecting myself. I will look at where these forms originated, why we still study them today, and how they are practical in real world situations. Finally, I will show how these two sets have been instrumental in my development as a martial artist, and what each of these sets has taught me on my journey.

THE AIKIDO FIFTEEN BASICS

First of all, in looking at *The 15 Basics* set of traditional Aikido, where did it originate, and how is it still relevant in martial arts and everyday life now? It is worth noting that for the sake of this paper, as well as anytime that Cheonjikido uses or teaches Aikido, what is being taught or referred to is the original Indigenous Aikido, passed down from Kenji Tomiki through Jack Mumpower and on to us. We do not practice or study the watered-down version of this art taught across the United States,

that clearly has no practical use and breaks down in any real-world scenario. The best way that I could learn the origin and purpose of this set was to seek out the only living man today with a direct connection to its history, Jack Mumpower.

The 15 Basics originated with Mr. Tomiki, who was the top student of Jigoro Kano, the founder of Judo. Kano sent Tomiki on a research mission to see if the art of Aikido and its principles could be incorporated and applied into the art of Judo. Kano determined these principles to be too dangerous and wanted the research to stop. Tomiki was already drawn in by the techniques and principles of Aikido and desired to know more. The particular training that had caught the attention of Tomiki was *Daito-ryu Aiki Jujutsu*, taught by Sokaku Takeda, considered to be the founder of all modern Jujutsu. Takeda decided to open up this teaching to the public, and Tomiki found this teaching through Morihei Ueshiba, who had received a master teaching certificate directly from Takeda. It was at this time that Tomiki, through Ueshiba, began to study the teachings of *Daito-ryu Aiki-jujutsu*. Tomiki learned over 2600 techniques and principles from Ueshiba and after years of learning, he found himself breaking down these techniques inside an eight by eight prison cell. He was captured during the Soviet invasion of Manchuria and spent two years in this cell. This is where *The 15 Basics* set, as we know it today, was born. After his release, Tomiki had the desire to take what Kano and Ueshiba had taught him and put it into a system in order to pass this knowledge down quickly to others. He had a desire, much like Kano, who developed Judo in order to test his skills in jujutsu, to test his own skills within a competition setting. Tomiki taught at Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan, and began teaching Aikido principles and techniques as a sport, since it had become illegal after WWII to teach

Aikido as a martial art. Tomiki's main goal was to prove his system would work, teaching new students through a systematic method. Jack Mumpower was the first proof that this system worked as he was able to quickly gain his black belt in the art. While Tomiki took Aikido into the sports arena, Ueshiba was developing his form of Aikido into a less martial, more spiritual art bringing a quiet division between the two. History would then repeat itself when Mr. Mumpower would focus on the martial side of Aikido while Tomiki remained in the sporting arena, causing a quiet division of their own.

Jack Mumpower came into contact with these principles while he was in the United States Air Force in Japan from 1958-1960. At this time, the US military participated in a military exchange with Japan and hired instructors to teach martial arts to military personnel. They hired and required top instructors from Judo, Karate, and Aikido. Mr. Tomiki, Senta Yamada, and Hideo Ohba were the instructors that Jack sat under and learned from. Mr. Ohba, the top student of Tomiki, stepped in for Senta Yamada after four or five months as he was sent away to Great Britain. Jack studied these arts and techniques for two and a half years, four nights a week so he could later teach these things in the States exactly as they were taught to him. Mr. Mumpower had a desire to preserve Aikido in its purest form, just as it had been taught to him by Mr. Tomiki himself. Mr. Tomiki passed away at the age of 79 in 1979, but Aikido, in its original form and techniques, thankfully did not die with him.

So why do we still use this set today, and is it still relevant in the training of a good martial artist? This set of techniques has been around for a very long time. It has been altered and adapted, but in its purest form is still important to our training even

today. There are four areas I want to consider when it comes to this set and its relevance today: striking, balance, power, and motion.

What is more fundamental in martial arts but to strike, strike, strike? When an opponent attacks, we strike to counter that attack. Any martial art you see or study will involve the basic strike. Out of the gates, the first three principles in *The 15 Basics*, are all strikes. The reason this set begins with these striking principles is to ingrain the importance of striking into the mind of the martial artist. It also is a way to help develop the instinct to counter your opponent's attack with a quick and undetected strike. Striking your attacker will take away his balance while helping to maintain your own. In taking his balance, this will open the door to finishing techniques.

Aikido is different from other martial arts in that the focus on power is always outward and never inward. How to understand this is to think of everything we do in Aikido as pushing outward. We never pull inward on any techniques or responses to our opponents. A simple illustration in this is the closed fist that is used in most martial arts. To close the fist is to bring your power inward and toward yourself. In Aikido, most of what we do involves the open hand. Whether it is striking, blocking, catching, or throwing, we perform most of these techniques with either an open hand, or at the very least, a pointed finger extended in a loose grip pushing our ki outward and away from us. This approach in fighting is very unnatural. The natural approach to fighting is to ball up with intensity and strike like a mad boxer. Aikido teaches something completely opposite - to empty the mind, relax, and push outward, making this something very difficult to master.

When it comes to balance in Aikido, pushing verses pulling extends our balance outward and toward our opponent verses pulling him into our balance. It is vitally important in a fight to use our opponent's balance against him. Pushing with whole body movement is the simplest way to take an attacker's balance. During a fight, It is important that we maintain our own balance when executing techniques, because one cannot be strong and off balance at the same time. In Aikido, we are taught to find an assailant's weak balance line. This weak balance point is where we train to focus our pushing motion on our opponent. The balance line is always found by drawing an imaginary line between our opponent's two big toes. The middle of this line will identify for you where the center line is, and where we can attack an opponent to take away his balance, and thus take away his power. This center line is also your greatest ally in keeping your own balance and power. When moving, responding, or attacking, always keep your whole body on your center line. One of the reasons for the belt knot on our ghi is to remind us where our center line is and from where all our movement and attacks should originate. The belt knot should lead all movements of the body in any technique or attack. While keeping the shoulders relaxed and down, we push forward with the hips and upper body to effect balanced and powerful motion.

The last area I want to consider when studying *The 15 Basics* is motion. When executing these fifteen principles, maintaining constant motion until our opponent is defeated is key. In order for Aikido to work, one must keep his opponent as well as himself in constant motion throughout the technique. Motion is very important as it will direct your power while taking away your opponent's. It will also help maintain balance,

while taking away balance from the attacker. If someone is struggling to find a technique, constant motion or movement will open the doors to reveal those techniques.

These Aikido principles may not look pretty on the streets in the heat of a battle. They are martial techniques that are meant to destroy an attacker quickly. We are simply training our minds and bodies to properly respond to an attack by ingraining in us the response to said attack. When caught off guard on the street by a would-be attacker, movement or motion will be our greatest weapon to avoid being hit, and will also allow our mind to catch up with our body and the attacker. If we can learn the techniques and principles, and then learn to always move, we will have our opponent in a technique without ever thinking about it. It will come naturally, and the initial movement is what will set that up.

Aikido not only teaches striking, balance, power, and motion, it also promulgates how to use one's gaze during an attack. During a fight it is important to look past an opponent, never directly at his body or eyes. Gazing into the eyes of the opponent will serve as a major distraction and weaken response time and movement. Looking through him at the center of his upper body will allow you to see the attack as it begins. Even when our opponent is carrying a weapon, we should keep our focus through the middle. Never focus on the weapon, because it is merely an extension of the hand. A weapon is nothing over which to stress since all the principles taught in *The 15 Basics* can easily be applied to it. In most cases, a weapon will aid you in taking away your opponent's balance. Now that we have discussed what Aikido teaches us concerning striking, balance, power, and motion, let us look at some practical uses for this kata against real world attacks.

When looking into anything in martial arts, I am always curious as to how this will translate over into a real world situation. If something you study or learn has no real practical use, then you should stop studying it immediately. There is a lot in martial arts today that looks good on a mat, but would never work in the real world. Much of modern Aikido looks nothing like what was taught to Mr. Mumpower, and much of it would never work on the street. The techniques have been softened. What was once martial has become weak and geared more toward tournaments and competition. The worst thing we can do is train someone to be comfortable and confident in techniques or principles that will not work outside of a competition setting. That is not only irresponsible, it is dangerous.

Fortunately, with indigenous Aikido, the techniques housed in *The 15 Basics* will work in real world situations. In these principles, there are some things that must be remembered. A block is not always a block, and an attack is not always a strike. Sometimes we look at techniques and see a block, and that is always how we view it. But what we see in technique number 2 is a block used as a powerful and devastating strike. We also see that when we attack in these techniques, it does not always involve a strike. Numbers 4 through 15 in the set do not even involve striking, but simply use our opponent's balance and power against him to put him to the ground. Where I see this especially useful in a real world situation is how this approach allows us to get away from a dangerous situation quickly. In Aikido, if a fight goes longer than ten to fifteen seconds, we are doing something wrong. We are not training to fight someone by trading blows like a competition to see who can wear the other one down first. We fight to defend, and we fight to end.

Any of *The 15 Basics* can end a fight quickly. This set of techniques really focuses on movement. The more we learn how to move, the better we can protect ourselves. Movement opens the door for techniques and principles to walk on through. Where the sets will fail is when someone cannot get past thinking technique. We study this set so that when we are in a real world situation, we empty our minds and allow principles and movement to open doors to techniques. The goal is to be able to pull techniques out through the use of principle with no mind, which allows this set to come into play without ever thinking about it. I remember the first time in my training when I used a principle of the 15 and put my opponent down without even thinking about it. It was amazing how easily the technique came out during that attack! It was at this point in my training that the things I was studying were becoming instinctive and no longer locked inside a set. I believe that these techniques will become easier to apply the more they are practiced and studied. If we can learn to move and apply the techniques through principle when the door is opened, we will be a force for anyone that tries to attack. Because of all these things I have learned from *The 15 Basics* (striking, balance, power, motion, and practical application), I believe this is a valuable set that needs to be studied and applied. My desire is to see this set passed down to the next generation in its original intent.

THE CHANG MOO KWAN FIFTEEN FIGHTING TECHNIQUES

Switching our focus from Tomiki Aikido to Chang Moo Kwan, I will delve into “The 15 Fighting Techniques”, looking at how they came to be, why they should still be used and studied today, and how useful this set is on the streets. Just as I went to a direct

source, Mr. Mumpower, on *The 15 Basics* in Aikido, I will be going straight to the source, Jon Wiedenman, about *The 15 Fighting Techniques*. This set has been so helpful, as well as complementary to *The 15 Basics* in my training. My desire was to learn about where it originated and why it is still so useful today. So I will now examine its origin, and see how this set came into being.

Dae Woong Chung, who was Jon Wiedenman's first instructor for more than twenty-five years, introduced him to a myriad of techniques. Mr. Wiedenman was either eighteen or nineteen years of age while training for his upcoming black belt test. Chung, who was around twenty-nine or thirty years of age at the time, gave Mr. Wiedenman the task of coming up with fifteen techniques to demonstrate what Chang Moo Kwan was all about. These techniques that he was condensing into a set were very dear to Sun Koa Kim, Grandmaster Chung's teacher. Kim was also the best friend and direct student of one of our very own patriarchs, Nam Suk Lee. Grandmaster Chung passed down these techniques to Mr. Wiedenman right out of his own training with Mr. Kim. Mr. Wiedenman, being Chung's very first black belt student, was given the task of taking what was so dear to Mr. Kim, passing down through Chung, and compiling them into a set that could be passed down to others. As a result, Mr. Wiedenman compiled what we know today as *The 15 Fighting Techniques* for the completion of his black belt test. He was given no help, guidance, or advice on what to compile or use. It was solely on Jon Wiedenman to come up with this set and surprise Chung at his test. If Chung was satisfied, Mr. Wiedenman's black belt was certain. If he was not satisfied in the why and how Mr. Wiedenman came up with this set, it meant certain failure.

This set came to its completion in 1979. Mr. Wiedenman was told to surprise his teacher, and Chung would not even look at a single technique until the black belt test. Mr. Wiedenman had been competing in tournaments many years by this time and much of what he was using to win tournaments was what became the basics of this set. Chung wanted this set to represent his history with Chang Moo Kwan and Dae Woong Chung, and he wanted to see the dynamics of Taekwondo displayed as well. Mr. Wiedenman was observing forms he was using with Grandmaster Chung in class and was trying to match the progression stages within the set. At the end of the day, He displayed what he referred to as the “Grandmaster Chung Show” and received his black belt. This set was so impressive to Chung that it became an official set to train and teach; so much so, that if anyone attempted to alter or change the set, he was looked upon as an outsider. Now that we know where this set originated, we will look at why this set is still useful to us today.

These fifteen techniques are used even today, and there are many things that can be learned from them. There are four such things I have learned from studying this set of techniques: focus, breath control, balance, and ki. The set really is a blueprint for one to demonstrate and manipulate how he desires. The set is a great beginner to advanced stage development in one’s training; and therefore, it has remained very valid even to this day. It is a “walk before you can run” approach to training as things begin basically and move into more complexity as one navigates through these principles.

As this sequence of techniques advances, it gets more and more complex and difficult. The attacks go from punches to spinning punches, kicks to jumping kicks, and then to spinning and jumping kicks. Punches combine with kicks to teach and show a

wide range of attacks and attack points. Chung loved the spinning back fist and double crescent kicks in the set because this was a real challenge to the students. This set holds value today as it teaches one to stay controlled and balanced. I have never observed a white belt student properly execute the spinning crescent kick in this set. Upper rank students make these techniques look easy; but as I have seen in my own training, these advanced techniques take consistent practice. Only through practicing them over and over again have I been able to retain my balance and striking composure. This set is designed to present new challenges to the students as they progress in their abilities. The jumping kicks and spinning crescent kicks are used as a mental barrier to break through for students even today.

These techniques teach proper targeting precision, making it important to pay attention to the details of where and how the student is attacking his opponent. Punches, as well as kicks, have targets. When throwing a spinning back fist it is just as important to pay attention to how one's feet land as to the target he is striking. All of the little details in this set matter. When executing these movements, using the whole body in one's motion is very important. Putting one's whole body into a technique makes it even more powerful; however, it is important to be precise with targeting. A back fist thrown at random is powerful when it makes contact; but when it misses the opponent, it is difficult to regain one's own balance. This set focuses on precision in striking as well as multiple uses of hands and feet. This collection of techniques is like a tool box. It has several tools inside that can be pulled for a fight. The set, in general, translates very well into fighting. For that reason alone, it is still a good set to teach and be used in training. The question I would have for any student is, "Can you do the set and can you

execute the techniques effectively?” If he cannot, then there is no use. However, this set can very well be learned and executed by any student. If the student sees this set translate over into his fighting, and he sees it teaching him balance, then he has answered this question with a resounding “YES!” To be better at any martial arts, one must carry a full tool box with many tools to pull from and sharpen. *The 15 Fighting Techniques* should be in each good martial artist’s tool box. To quote Chung, “An empty can makes the most noise.” The more I learn, the less talking I need to do. Now that it is clear why this set is still taught today, even in the Cheonjikido dojo, it is important to look at practical uses of this kata in the real world. If techniques cannot translate into real world application, it should be thrown away immediately and one’s focus and energy should be on something else.

The 15 Fighting Techniques does offer many real world uses when facing an attack. Any techniques or sets that stimulate one’s balance are going to be worthwhile training. I have found that this particular set has stimulated my balance more than anything. All the jumping, turning, and precision striking practiced over and over again has translated into much better balance in my training. In talking with Mr. Wiedenman, he informed me that he has used over one hundred eighty kick and punch combinations that have flowed from this set in real world confrontations, and these techniques have served him well. The set was designed to enhance balance so that while one is attacking with other techniques, he has more control. One examples is the double axe kick, seen as the spinning crescents in the set, that can be used to knock an object out of an opponent’s hand, and end the opponent with a brutal spinning back kick to the chest or head. Also, one can keep an opponent at a distance by using a double kick to

the chest when he is in the middle of multiple attackers. Those jumping kicks also come in handy when going over an attacker just put to the ground to connect with a second opponent. Training is often done with multiple attackers, and these techniques were designed with that in mind. To sum it up, these fighting techniques are practical because they work and have been proven to work. Having looked at *The Aikido 15 Basics* and Chang Moo Kwan's *15 Fighting Techniques*, I would like to conclude by bringing both of these sets together and sharing how they both have helped bring harmony in my training.

CONCLUSION

There is a long history in our dojo where Chang Mo Kwan and Aikido have been intertwined. This goes all the way back to Byung-in Yoon. His original style moniker of *Kwon Bop Kong Soo Do* is literally translated, "The way of fist law and empty hand." It is in these two sets that I find what I believe Byung was embracing even then; that is, a blending of hard and soft. When I look at our history and the ties between Aikido and Chang Moo Kwan, which began as *Kwon Bop Kong Soo Do*, it is no surprise that these two sets compliment each other so nicely.

These two sets are tools that I believe should be learned and cultivated together as a way to maintain our balance as well as our heritage. Each set of fifteen has its strong points and has greatly helped me to maintain as well as take balance. It is my belief that all I study of both Aikido and Chang Moo Kwan has a practical purpose and use. Training with multiple attackers in multiple types of situations really shows the need and help these have provided. There is no one right answer for the situations that I face or will face out there in the real world, but I have a "tool box" that is constantly

being added to and made better. Both sets of fifteen are tools in my tool box. They are there for me to pull from as needed. To make them better, to learn to use them together, and to know which ones to use in a given situation is essential. My training is done so that I never have to think about the technique or techniques I will use when put into a situation on the street.

These tools have taught me how to move and stay on balance. When you move, something will eventually open up. Movement is the key that opens up the technique doors. Because of these two sets, I have learned how to move better in my fighting and how to open many doors. These sets also have helped ingrain in me a very important principle in my training - to move like water. The outcome of this solid training leads me to be fluid, having no mind, and waiting for the opportunity to attack. Everything is grounded in Aikido, and then I am up in the air, spinning and jumping with *The 15 fighting techniques*. Being equipped with both of these sets has helped me to flow while being up in the air one minute with a Chang Moo Kwan principle, and then putting my opponent to the ground the next with an Aikido principle.

Each set has also been a way to test my abilities as each set grows in difficulty and execution as it moves along, helping me and other students to articulate from basic to advanced. To train in these is to become instinctive in them. On the streets, I never want my opponent to know my skill. Furthermore, I never want to reveal to him that I have any training, which is to my advantage. An idiot drops back into a karate fighting stance, revealing what he is and taking away the weapon of surprise. When we learn how to flow, we are becoming instinctive in our actions, which means we become more

dangerous as we have no need to reveal what we know until necessary. Instinct in fighting will help us learn to turn these tools on or off when needed.

All this would not mean anything to me if it were not for the great teachers that have gotten me to this point in my training. It is my belief that I have the best teachers in the world, helping me become the best martial artist I can be. My desire is to be faithful to these sets as they have been faithfully taught to me, and then to pass these things down to the next generation to help them see how these sets are so fundamental and are in complete harmony with each other. My desire as a teacher is to be able to demonstrate for other students how I have found balance and power in the *Fifteens*.