

ITOSU'S TEN PRECEPTS OF KARATE

In October of 1908, Anko Itosu, a student of Sokon Matsumura and a teacher of the Shuri-te tradition of Okinawan karate, often referred to as the *Father of Modern Karate*, wrote a letter to draw the attention of the Japanese Ministries of Education and War. Not only was this letter very influential in the spread of karate, but it communicated a spirit of martial arts eclecticism, acknowledging value in both *Shorin-ryu* (i.e. Shuri-te), Itosu's own tradition, and *Shorei-ryu* (i.e. Naha-te), and its opening statement is clear historical proof from an original source that karate is not Buddhist neither was it tied in its historical development to manmade religion. For these and other reasons, this letter, in its entirety, is worthy of translation and reproduction. And any serious practitioner of martial arts, regardless of preferred style, would do well to heed its contents:

Karate did not develop from Buddhism or Confucianism. In the past the Shorin-ryu school [i.e. Shuri-te] and the Shorei-ryu [Naha-te] school were brought to Okinawa from China. Both of these schools have strong points, which I will now mention before there are too many changes:

1. *Karate is not merely practiced for your own benefit; it can be used to protect one's family or master. It is not intended to be used against a single assailant but instead as a way of avoiding a fight should one be confronted by a villain or ruffian.*
2. *The purpose of karate is to make the muscles and bones hard as rock and to use the hands and legs as spears. If children were to begin training in Tang Te [i.e. "China hand" later termed karate or "empty hand"] while in elementary school, then they will be well suited for military service. Remember the words attributed to the Duke of Wellington after he defeated Napoleon: "The Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton."*
3. *Karate cannot be quickly learned. Like a slow moving bull, it eventually travels a thousand miles. If one trains diligently every day, then in three or four years one will come to understand karate. Those who train in this fashion will discover karate.*
4. *In karate, training of the hands and feet are important, so one must be thoroughly trained on the makiwara. In order to do this, drop your shoulders, open your lungs, take hold of your strength, grip the floor with your feet, and sink your energy into your lower abdomen. Practice using each arm one to two hundred times each day.*
5. *When one practices the stances of Tang Te [i.e. karate], be sure to keep your back straight, lower your shoulders, put strength in your legs, stand firmly, and drop your energy into your lower abdomen.*
6. *Practice each of the techniques of karate repeatedly, the use of which is passed by word of mouth. Learn the explanations well, and decide when and in what manner to apply them when needed. Enter, counter, release is the rule of releasing hand (torite).*
7. *You must decide if karate is for your health or to aid your duty.*
8. *When you train, do so as if on the battlefield. Your eyes should glare, shoulders drop, and body harden. You should always train with intensity and spirit, and in this way you will naturally be ready.*

9. *One must not overtrain; this will cause you to lose the energy in your lower abdomen and will be harmful to your body. Your face and eyes will turn red. Train wisely.*
10. *In the past, masters of karate have enjoyed long lives. Karate aids in developing the bones and muscles. It helps the digestion as well as the circulation. If karate should be introduced beginning in the elementary schools, then we will produce many men each capable of defeating ten assailants. I further believe this can be done by having all students at the Okinawa Teachers' College practice karate. In this way, after graduation, they can teach at the elementary schools at which they have been taught. I believe this will be a great benefit to our nation and our military. It is my hope you will seriously consider my suggestion.*

Anko Itosu, October 1908