

CIRCLE OF COMPOSITION

By Mathew Allan

The “Circle of Composition” is a method of training that was developed by General Choi Hong Hi. The concept was developed to learn individual techniques and to apply them to the varying aspects encountered within Taekwon-Do. The circle contains five specific areas, these are – Fundamental Movements, Patterns, Sparring, Conditioning and Self-Defense. These areas are based and derived from strong military ideals, which were staunchly upheld by General Choi Hong Hi. (McPhail, 2004). By looking at each individual section of the circle we can also incorporate other factors and components that help develop specific techniques related to Taekwon-Do.

At the beginning, is the true secret to the Circle of Composition, the learning of Fundamental Movements. These can be compared to an Individual Soldier’s basic training.

“There are more than 3,000 fundamental movements in Taekwon-Do, and General Choi was very proud of this. These movements are basic elements that can be likened to musical notes; when linked, they produce a harmonious result. These fundamental movements use all parts of the body and are performed in harmony with the Theory of Power of Taekwon-Do. The student will practice these movements regularly with the goal of mastering each one of them, defensive and attack movements alike, so that they will be available when needed” (ITF Website, 2004).

This is further emphasized in the way a class forms up even before a training session is commenced. By teaching the students the basic movements, they are able to develop a strong base with which to build on their skills. If students are not taught properly they will always struggle to overcome the harder movements later.

This can easily be compared to the foundations of a castle or fortress. If the foundations are strong, the castle will stand for a thousand years. If the foundations are weak, it will crumble and disappear with the time. As with the student, the foundation must be strong or they too will crumble in times of dire need. This fundamental learning needs to cover such things as Stances, Hand and Foot techniques, and the correct delivery of those techniques. The student must also be aware of the specific purpose for each technique. General Choi Hong Hi developed Taekwon-Do to be a complete martial art, attempting to

encompass every conceivable way in which both defense and offense may be conducted against an adversary or aggressor.

The concept of beginning with and learning fundamental movements is necessary because their development is crucial towards making further steps into the Circle of Composition. Initially a student is able to work by him or herself under guidance from an instructor. This is where the repetition of line work becomes very important, by continually going over and over the movements. Students will begin to develop at varying paces the ability to execute movements with a reasonable level of correctness. Line work is not only restricted to the Do Jang, it can also be practiced at home without any assistance.

Training at home is a key factor towards fortifying the student's base or foundation. Students will never have enough time to develop well if they rely purely on an average of two, 2-hour sessions a week. Taekwon-Do is not a twice a week thing it is an all the time thing, the culture that it defines demands it. Continuous practice will develop a student's mind to be able to react to a situation without thinking; it also comes naturally that it will reduce undue levels of stress or panic in times of self-defense.

Confidences in one's own ability will generally get you out of most situations and creates natural behaviors that say to unknown assailants "Stay away" within their subconscious. This is further enhanced by the fundamental movements being applied in the patterns, which follow as the next logical step in the Circle of Composition.

Patterns (platoon tactics in military speak) are the next area, which General Choi Hong Hi developed. He created a series of actions, which incorporate the fundamental movements. There are 24 patterns in total. The order in which patterns are learned reflect the ability of the student, Chon-Ji is the initial pattern learned by a 9th Gup or White Belt. Once again, the student is learning the movements by themselves under the guidance of an instructor, but each offensive or defensive technique is related to there being an imaginary opponent in front of the student.

"It is important that students use their imagination to visualize this opponent, to help focus the techniques to the correct area of the body" (Master Pablo Trajtenberg, 2004).

This way a student will commit their full power and focus to each technique as if they are defending themselves in a real life situation. If students apply this

philosophy to the way they approach their training, they will develop far better than those who tend to just go through the motions during a training session.

With the patterns causing students to move in all directions, the mechanics involved in delivering the techniques become very important. This is where 'Sine Wave' and the 'Theory of Power' can be incorporated. Sine Wave is the movement derived similarly from the way an ocean wave has a crest and a trough. It helps to develop more power in the way a technique is delivered and it also allows the pattern to be aesthetic to the eye. Its correct use by a practitioner allows them to fully utilize their body mass effectively and permits a greater control of individual body movements.

The high level of power generated while executing certain Taekwon-Do techniques cannot be attributed to physical training alone. The Theory of Power allows the student to apply the techniques taught with devastating energy. In a nut shell the faster you move while executing a technique, the more power you will generate at the point of impact. It releases the full potential of a student's body and does not rely on muscle size or strength to generate power. It is a symbiosis of ideas and concepts that every student must utilize if they wish to truly progress in Taekwon-Do.

Once students have learned a pattern and successfully completed a grading they are then able to learn a new pattern. For a student to learn a new pattern they are faced with learning new techniques (fundamental movements), which have to be learnt first. This will again give the student full understanding of the techniques being presented and their correct application before the pattern is taught in full. This process will continue throughout a student's career, the longer they train the more they will learn – always returning to the fundamental movements to mentally reinforce their muscular memory.

As well as Patterns, there is the application of techniques into reality. A situation is established where the student must think instinctively, without hesitation to effectively defend him or herself. These situations breed self-confidence in the student and allow the development of strategy in combat and allow the true testing of what they have learned. The Circle of Composition now leads us to "Sparring", which can be compared to military field exercises in simulated combat conditions.

Sparring in TaeKwon-Do takes on many forms; there are 3, 2, and 1 step sparring, which are conducted, in a pre-arranged format. Three Step sparring can be done alone and also with a partner, 1 and 2 step require a partner. Again

the required level of this pre-arranged format depends on the student's belt level, which also indicates their level of skill. The fundamental movements practiced in line work and in patterns are now incorporated into sparring; students can now practice mastering distances, controlled stances, timing and the focus of techniques onto an animate target.

By working with a partner students are able to fully visualize the target areas of the body in order to correctly position their bodies for a specific technique (McPhail 2004).

The other format is 'Free Sparring', it is an un-arranged form. This is a more continuous form, where students can test their defensive and offensive techniques against their opponent. Now a student is forced to concentrate even harder as this form of sparring is not pre-arranged. An opponent may use any combination of techniques, which require a student to move their bodies in different ways to defend and attack. This is a more accurate test of how well a student can execute appropriate techniques in relation to the body position of the opponent. Sparring is possibly one of the most favored forms of training, as it is a culmination of all that the student has learned and allows them to get a feel for physical contact. It is this aspect of "physical contact" that leads us to the fourth part of the Circle.

Just as the Samurai sharpens and maintains his katana or blade, the Taekwon-Do practitioner must condition and maintain his or her striking or blocking tools.

Just as the Samurai continually practices and meditates to hone body and mind, so must the student of Taekwon-Do practice repetitively all they have learned. These two aspects are essential to Taekwon-Do practitioners everywhere or all is wasted.

"Developing one's body and mind is very important. Firstly there is the fitness side of training achieved through warm up exercises, bag work, line work and sparring. Then there is the conditioning of offensive and defensive tools, which harden bones to increase the destructive power of a technique" (McPhail, 2004).

One of the best examples of conditioning is the repetitive striking of a solid structure, whereby a student can begin to forge striking and blocking tools from living flesh and bone. With time and the continued striking of the structure with the appropriate tool, calcium deposits increase within the bone matrix and structure surrounding the impact area. This is a direct result of your body responding to stress in that zone and adapting to manage new levels of work. Callus's may form and nerve endings become accustomed to the level of contact

which helps your brain register lower levels of pain when perhaps doing destructions or needing to strike hard to defend yourself.

Flexibility is also integral to the physical development of the Taekwon-do practitioner. By continually stretching the muscles and tendons students can develop higher kicks as well as reduce the risk of injury. Stretching should be maintained on a regular basis, if you only stretch when you go to training sessions your flexibility might take a long time to develop and will never reach its full potential.

Developing a sharp mind is also critical, being able to deal with difficult situations in a calm, collective manner is very important. The quicker a student's reaction time, the easier it is to execute techniques correctly. This comes from continual and consistent training and many years of dedication. A student's endurance is also developed from within the mind, being able to push past pain thresholds during long periods of exercise. A Black Belt grading simulates this kind of condition where a student at times must use the mind to will the body to continue doing even though the muscles say they have had enough. When confronted with a real life experience, where a student may need to defend him or herself, a focused mind is a great asset.

We now move to the subject of Self-Defense, with fundamentals leant, movements repeated countless times in patterns, timing and co-ordination reached in sparring and tools forged and ready, can we now successfully defend ourselves?

Self-Defense (or actual combat) is the fundamental reason why some martial arts styles were originally developed.

“This stage (self defense) focuses on the complete application of a technique, taking it from sparring and applying it so it will work in a realistic situation” (McPhail, 2004).

If all the previous steps of learning have been completed to a very high level then the effectiveness of the technique should be good.

“If a student can not apply the technique correctly in this situation they may need to start all over again to evaluate where there technique is suffering. This sometimes may be a student's power, balance, or speed of reflexes” (McPhail, 2004).

“All Taekwon-Do techniques are to be used only for self-defense. They are not to be used for aggression, except in cases of grave immediate danger for the

practitioner or someone he must protect. Any other use would be considered assault. Because of safety concerns, the rules of competition prohibit the use of techniques using the elbow, knee, or head as well as attacks below the belt. However, these additional techniques may be needed in special circumstances, for example when defending against armed opponents, or from a sitting or prone position. Once mastered, the techniques will be available for use in genuinely dangerous situations. Taekwon-Do offers realistic, practical, and efficient techniques for good self-defense” (ITF Website, 2004).

By understanding all five areas of the Circle of Composition students will become better prepared, due to a full understanding of what TaeKwon-Do training is aiming to achieve. Nothing will ever replace hard work and that is what is required. General Choi Hong Hi developed this training method for a reason, if you have never applied your training in such a way you are possibly missing out on your full potential. As students, the learning will always continue, to say you know everything is a false statement. There are challenges at all levels weather you are a student, an instructor or a master.

Remember that even though each individual’s involvement in TaeKwon-Do varies and everyone’s journey may differ. By striving to advance our own skills we are able to encourage the development of others.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."
-Proverbs 27:17

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