

Taekwon-Do and Movement

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Background

Over the years, while studying martial arts, I've been increasingly focused on how, or more importantly why we move in particular ways while performing a movement or sequence of movements.

In 1983 I started Taekwondo (WTF) in Upper Hutt. Taught by Mr Tai Enoka, receiving my 1st Dan black belt. After moving to the Kapiti coast and the local WTF club closing down I started Aikido, I studied this for around eight years. I was very happy with what I had learnt while training, but I missed the striking nature of other martial art so began looking for something else. A friend of mine told me about a Taekwon-Do club in the Kapiti coast. This is how I ended up learning International Taekwon-Do and now working towards my 3rd dan. Over the decades, and as I have grown from a small boy, teenager, an adult, and now also a father. I've learnt many things, and am always learning. Overall movement to me is my key focus.

Teaching movement

Without movement and fundamental movements, we wouldn't have a good solid system for self defence. I would like to talk about movement, my understanding of how it works, this is based on my experience over the last few decades.

Anyone studying Taekwon-do has heard about the theory of power, most students should have a clear understanding of this to appreciate and practice the art to its fullest. I heard just this year an explanation on this concept, from master Rimmer, which is very similar to mine own. I always ask students to show me how they skim rocks across a river? And then explain to process into basic steps.

How I break it down;

Relax thru the entire movement, any tension will prevent speed and power. I find most students think that contracting their muscles will generate the power they need, this results in the exact opposite.

Highlight the huge importance of knee spring and having a backwards motion. In show the student how I move all my weight onto one leg, from an L stance, keeping my arms bent and elbows down in a natural and relaxed position in a guarding block like manner, I then with sign wave / knee spring I shift into a walking stance (not a formal stance - this is a more relaxed version; bent legs), my throwing arm accelerates out to release the rock in my hand. The other hand moves towards my chest as my reaction force. The hand holding the stone needs to be relaxed so the I can throw the stone with as much speed as possible. By having both hands in a soft fist position I can ensure that I am completely relaxed. When you move from the first stance to the finishing stance, you must utilise your hips, engaging these will generate considerable power. Moving your hips first before you move your shoulders, arms, and legs will mean that you can move faster, and therefore, generate power from the whole body.

Talk to them about the use of breath to help during the movement, breathing in while initially moving and then sharply exhaling while you finish the movement; this will help with speed and will maximize your power to throw. Breathing is a whole topic in itself. Make sure the student exhales all the air; so they do not hyperventilate.

All of these components need to happen in one smooth fluid motion, no stopping at all. I use the throwing the stone so that I can explain the importance in rotating the hand, this motion will help focus the energy being generated to throw the stone with precision. Rotating the attacking or blocking tool, hands or feet, will help focus the energy to ensure your movement finishes with a sharp snap.

To conclude this explanation I talk about the hand throwing the stone, becoming their attacking tool, their fist; or more importantly the forefist. All that energy needs to be transferred to a small part of their body. Creating a force like that of a bullet, focused movement will cause more damage, then that same force applied with a baseball bat; for example. We also need to teach the importance of training the body to cope with using these techniques, otherwise, we can damage our tools during combat. We can't race a car on old retread tires and expect to last the entire race. The same applies to out body.

Movement & Secrets

If we take a look at the founders (General Choi Hong Hi) theory on movement, and it's secrets.

1) To study the theory of power thoroughly.

The theory of power is broken down into individual parts. As follows:

- **Reaction force:** Use your opponents mass and movement against them, thus adding more power to your blow. Also include your own reaction force, for example: pulling your non-punching hand to your hip (like your patterns) or back to a guarding position by your head (in a self defence situation).
- **Concentration:** This is when all the power you are generating in your attack defence is then used on the smallest part of your body, like your knife hand or forefist. This concentration should only be performed at the very last second of the movement, otherwise, you may become stiff and tense during the movement. this will have the opposite effect you desire.
- **Equilibrium:** An important part of power, especially with the dynamic nature of Taekwon-do, without balance, your movements will not be stable and power will diminish considerably.
- **Breath control:** A sharp exhaling of breath at the moment of impact and stopping the breath during the execution of a movement tense the abdomen to concentrate maximum effort on the delivery of the motion, this increases stamina for the student, and helps the student relax during the movement.
- **Mass:** The more weight you use during the movement will increase the power for the blow, so we should use as much of the body as we can, starting with the larger parts of the body. The hips should move first, followed by either your arms or legs. The hips are key for generating mass, moving this part of the body ensures that other factors are easier to utilize correctly. Like speed, balance, and reaction force.
- **Speed:** Is the most essential factor of force or power. Without it your movements will not have power. It is also important to think about acceleration in each movement, each movement starts slower, never stops till it reaches the target, and accelerates as it reaches it's intended target.

These are reiterated in my stone skipping example. All of these are important when performing any movement in Taekwon-do, whether it is in our line work (known as fundamental movements), patterns (tactics), sparring, and defense. A student to be successful in any martial art, needs to understand these.

2) To understand the purpose and method of each movement clearly.

If the student doesn't understand why they are doing a particular movement, how are they to perform the movement with the right intention or feeling? To understand the movement and why we move a certain way will ensure the student carries themselves in the appropriate manner. An example of this is the palm pushing block in Hwa Rang. Although the movement is almost identical to the middle section punch, however, the student should 'feel' or have a different 'intent' while carrying out the pushing block. Another example of this is the double punch or two punches in fast motion. Those two movements should be performed with 'urgency' and not just done faster.

3) To bring the action of eyes, hands, feet & breath into one single coordinated action.

While we all read about this point, I think we need to teach this actively in our classes. From my experience, students find this hard to do, and generally don't do it extensively, even after years of experience.

- Your hands should work together, as a result the student will be able to move around in a more fluid motion. A common situation is when a student kicks or punches, without keeping their feet / stance stable. Or they are unable to recover from a technique they have just performed. We should teach students to use their knees to absorb impact and changes in direction. Having the sign wave / knee spring movement as part of the coordinated movement is key.
- Students should practise breathing with everything. Not just patterns and line work. It is common for students to make noises during these routines, but not do them when kicking bags, doing exercises (like situps), or even holding the bag for their partner. Students should be told that they need to breath, relax, and move smoothly (like our patterns / line work) while holding the pads / bags. When do you this without thinking you have achieved a huge milestone in your martial arts career.

4) To choose the appropriate attacking tool for each vital spot.

This rule given to us from our founder, is a simple one to understand. However, we need this movement to be natural and, when under pressure; should be an automatic reflex. Like breathing, we shouldn't need to think about how to, or how often we carry out this life giving operation! A student shouldn't need to think about striking the side of the neck with their knife-hand, or to poke the eye with a fingertip. Students should be taught self defence / fundamental movements / sparring to use these techniques! Without thinking about it. This is done with repeating the movement or sequence of movements over and over again. And then, under pressure (while being safe in the do-jang) to ensure that, if the needs arises, as students of Taekwon-Do, can handle themselves in real situations.

5) To become familiar with the correct angle and distance for attack and defence.

As mentioned in 4). Practise practise and more practise. We need to train so that we do understand our distances and angles, if we ever need to use them, under pressure, we can hit your opponent with speed and accuracy (without thinking about it). In addition to practising, all pre arranged movements in line work, patterns, and step sparring should be practised with trying to achieve 100% perfection. In a real life situation it would be a good day if we could achieve 10% perfection during the application of these life saving techniques.

6) Keep both the arms and legs bent slightly while movement is in motion.

We should move in a natural motion, moving with straight limbs in not natural. If you look at flying or jumping we move throughout this motion with our arms and legs bent (and relaxed).

7) All movements must begin with a backward motion with very few exceptions. However, once the movement is in motion it should not be stopped before reaching the target.

While we train it is important that we ensure that we do practise this motion. With actual combat, this motion will still occur, however, it is much smaller and faster with devastating results.

8) To create a Sine Wave during the movement by utilizing the knee spring properly.

As stated in 7), we should practise this motion while we train so that when we need to defend against an attack we instinctively use what we have learnt. When employing a sine wave we have to use the knee spring properly, bending the knee is what moves our body up and down as we move forward. Using the knee spring while our body is in motion allows our center of mass to travel along a curve, which by definition is another form of acceleration, which then helps us accelerate into a target. When using sine wave we drop our body downwards at the end of the technique which helps us use gravity to our advantage and keep our acceleration building until the point of impact.

9. To exhale briefly at the moment of each blow excepting a connecting motion.

We talk about exhaling while we perform a technique, so that we can generate more power. I think that we need to focus on breathing to generate our speed and endurance. During our classes, over time, I've noticed that students that don't breathe correctly during exercises or fundamental movements, struggle to keep up. Students need to understand how to breathe. I teach students to breathe for recovery also. To breathe in through the mouth, hold their breath (count to three), and exhale through the nose. This works better than recovering in a small heap, panting like a dog; and getting that tingly feeling.

Overtraining for combat

When we talk about movement, I think about our fundamental movements and patterns; and how they help us with our combat. More specifically around how we carry out our self defence / sparring. To practise our movements with an attitude to perfecting those movements, means that if we need to use them in a real world situation we can react without having to think about what we are doing.

Long stances and higher kicks help us perform well when faced with a real situation. If we train to do these types of movements in our patterns and line work, when we need to do more basic techniques, like kicking an opponent's leg, we can do so with precision and power. If a student can kick an opponents head while sparring in the do-jang, then kicking a leg / knee or groin it will be much easier.

The same can be applied to our hand techniques. By learning things like a double punch in fast motion with sine-wave etc. A student learns to deliver power, speed, control, and more. So when faced with using that technique, a student can shorten those movements, while applying the same principles. Like moving the hips, breathing, and using reaction force to slip the non punching hand back while the second punch is being delivered. Again fundamentally the same movement as our linework, just shorted, less pretty, but very effective in stopping an attack.

Stances

A walking stance, I feel is undervalued. A lot of our stances (in my opinion) are used only in patterns, and when we spar or are practising self defence, we throw that stuff out the window. From experience, the movements we have in our patterns. For example: shifting from an L-stance to a walking stance is a good example of what we should do when defending. Blocking an attack (punch) shifting into a rear foot stance, then shifting into walking stance with a front elbow strike is a good way to defend and attack. Moving between these stances will provide power and more importantly shifting away from another possible attack. While in our patterns and line work we have a perfect stance, straight legs, 1 ½ shoulder width length etc. When applying this technique in a non pre-arranged situation, we keep the stance in essence.

- We keep the full or half facing position. This allows us to use both legs and hands to dominate our opponent.

- The rear leg is facing forward (as in our walking stance - 25 degrees), this allows the student to move forward with speed and force, as the rear leg (like a boxer, or student of thai kickboxing, and of course, wing chun) is in a position to allow us to use the stored energy to make such movements. As for defending in a backwards motion. Our pattern movements teaches us to shift, or move one leg behind the other to create space.

An X-stance is using for movement sideways, covering distance, or the position we land in after jumping over something. When jumping into this stance, the student, must be taught to use knee spring. Knee spring will provide a fluid fast motion into the x stance, when landing with the strike, the student must keep a good position (half facing) and strike the target without over extending the arm. Common issues with this technique are:

- **Jumping to high;** which is far too slow (unless avoiding a low attack). As mentioned earlier, with knee spring you will have a slight raise before you drop down into the x stance with the strike providing maximum power. More importantly the jump and strike will be far more effective, as you will simply have more speed in the delivery.
- **Striking too early;** causing an unstable attack. You should be striking as your rear leg gets into position.
- **Jump into the x stance side facing.** Your body should move naturally into a half facing position while striking. For example: with a knife hand. The triangle being formed between your shoulders and hand means that the strike movement will be fast and focused. Any other extended movement is slower, weak, and prone to counter attack.
- **The feet while landing are not positioned in the right direction.** The students feet should also be pointing at a 45 degree position. This helps maintain a good half facing position when landing into the stance.
- **The student is bent over.** Your legs should be bent, to provide space for moving into the next position or stance. With enough bend you can keep your body in a straight position; which ensures that your attack or block is strong. With your legs not too crossed over, you can move in a more natural fluid motion to avoid another attack. The X-stance is a great stance in which you can spring up and at the same time dodge and do a flying kick, while creating space between you and the opponent.

Kicking Techniques

The front snap kick; this kick is the most underused technique, it is quick, a great way to set your opponent for other counter attacks, and is simple for a beginner to pick up. Its important that the kick (like the turning kick) is fluid and the correct motion is followed. The kicking leg must come off the floor into a bent position, with the knee pointing towards your target (use your knee as a sight; like a gun) unwind your leg till it is straight and has hit your intended target. Your foot / leg must then be retracted immediately to the bend knee position, and then move into the next position, this of course, can be another kick, or a few punches.

The whole motion must be quick and relaxed, insure that you do not stop during the movement. The front snap kick, like the turning kick, is a smashing kick and intended to hit the softer part of the body. The intention is that it will too internal damage. Unlike the back or side piecing kicks, which is designed break bones or joints.

The turning kick; much like our front kick, it just travels a different path, and is designed to hit perpendicular to the vital spot. The target will be at the front or side front, good for hitting targets that a side facing. The foot rotates as it hits, and travels in a circular motion. Like most of our hand and foot techniques, the tool will rotate; thru creating our destructive power. The key movement for this wonderful kick is to use your power house (the core and hips). Move this area first and your leg will follow, ensure that your hips open up, to do this your stationary foot should be at a 75 degree angle. Flexible students often kick high, but lack the understanding on why / how we kick to get speed and power.

The piercing side kick; (one of my favorite kicks) is a great technique. Used like a boxes jab, a very useful movement for keeping opponents away, to bust through defences, and to break bones. The movement of the kick is similar to our punch. The foot must travel from the floor to the target in a straight line; and the foot sword must rotate to cause maximum damage.

To perform a good side piercing kick we must learn and understand what a bending ready stance is, more specifically a bending ready stance A. This is the intermediate position for a sidekick. Too often students turn their body to far over, and their knee is pushed to the side. This means the tool doesn't rotate, and the movement is a push as the stationary rear foot is already turned out to an angle greater than 45 degrees. So when the kick is performed there is little movement with the hip.

Just recently I found this youtube clip from Master Win Bos which explains what I'm trying to do explain, teach, and practise.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsIRqSKMdXk&feature=share&list=PL1qbhXvNSrIPWLiVyl4CEmGbrpNsXZIWA>

It shows how we should be doing our side piercing kicks. By keeping the knee higher and not dropping it means you get a good straight kick. Ensure that your leg travels thru a natural position, which is like our bending ready stance, your base leg's foot position should be pointing to the 45 degree angle (side front) and as you straighten your leg, you open your hips moving your stationary leg to a 75 degree position. Ensure that the foot travels in a straight line, as the leg travels out, you turn out of the hips, means that the foot sword rotates when traveling to hit the target.

The back piercing kick; also has some common movement problems that most students follow. By using and teaching the back piercing kick via its intermediate position, bending ready stance B, it will help students to not lift the knee to the side. Keeping the knees together and kicking out backwards also helps us keep the foot position in the correct 45 degree position, and so that the foot travels in a straight line (like our side kick).

With all of our kicking techniques, it is important during each movement that we have our hands aid the movement and are kept in a position that helps us protect our body, or is ready to counter with another move. Our patterns often state to keep the hands in the previous position during the kick. It is important we do this to train our body to not drop the hands. On that note: the same goes when doing hand techniques; do not drop your hands! Like all of our fundamental movements they help train us to have good technique and habits during actual combat. We want our students to keep up our hand techniques while kicking. If we drop our hands we cannot protect our body or face, and counter attacks will take much longer to execute.

Summary

Being a student of any martial art requires a lifetime of dedication, as one always has something to learn; either in the form of a technique, or from a personal interaction with a peer or student. It is a very personal journey but is also shared with many along the way.

Please teach your students their fundamental movements and patterns as much as possible. They will thank you in the long run. By practising these techniques we teach coordination, concentration, improve fitness, muscle memory to perform the techniques for self defence.

Please remember:

- Understand the movements and purpose of the techniques.
- Understand how we should move given a situation, how to move to counter attack and what attacking tool to use given the circumstances.
- Strive for perfection so that in a real world situation, our techniques will be clean simple and strong. If we don't practise in this manner, our techniques will not work at all when we need them the most.
- We should always practise with meaning.
- Relax between each movement; be light on your feet. Keeping your body relaxed and keeping your arms and leg bent slightly will aid your movement.
- Move your core first your arms and/or legs will follow, faster; and with more power.
- Train to our extremes. If a weight lifter can lift 3 times their own weight, picking up something lighter will be childs play. So if we train to our extremes; like kicking a someone's moving head, kicking someones groin or knee will be much easier.