

GUEST SPEAKER

Finding Karate's Heart

Taking students through a demanding training camp during a heat wave gave Shotokan karate instructor Ryan van Leent a keener understanding of the principle 'mou ichido'. Here, he explains why the concept is key to success in karate, and in life.

Earlier this year, several of my students and I attended a weekend *gasshuku* (training camp), hosted by Shotokan Karate International Australia. With temperatures topping 35 degrees in the shade, humidity high and not so much as a fan in the training hall, the conditions were relentlessly hot and sticky. Nevertheless, training was energetic and everyone was keen to make the most of the opportunity

to learn from the world-class instructors teaching at the event. During the final session of the last day, I wiped away the sweat and took a moment to appreciate that every one of my students was still working hard, having maintained their enthusiasm throughout a tough weekend of training and seized the opportunity to participate in all of the activities on offer. I have always tried to instill in my students the spirit of

mou ichido, as passed along to me by Shotokan Karate International Federation (SKIF) founder Hirokazu Kanazawa Soke, and I am sure that this contributed to their ability to persevere in spite of the oppressive heat.

As anyone who has trained in Japan will know, *mou ichido* translates into English as 'one more time' — meaning, doing one more repetition, round or turn of whatever it is you're practising. But what is lost in this literal translation is the

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meaning that this final rep attempt must be performed correctly in order for it to also be the last time. Therefore, it's frequently the case that students will be asked to execute a technique 'one more time' many times over, until the instructor is satisfied with their performance. In fact, this is so common that I have even heard *mou ichido* referred to (only half jokingly) as the great Japanese lie!

Kanazawa Soke, 10th Dan, explains that when attempting something new, the student must continue practising until they end with success. Many times I have seen him stand beside a single student who is struggling, and personally coach that student until they are successful. I have never seen him give up on anyone, even if it means that the other hundred students have to repeat the exercise one more time another 10 times over. In so doing, I believe Soke is imparting a valuable life lesson — not just to never give up, but actually how to go about not giving up.

These days we have so many opportunities and options available to us that when the going gets tough, it is usually possible to find another path that appears easier, faster or more direct. But appearances can be deceiving, and the new path will likely come with its own set of challenges. More than this, there is often a cost associated with changing paths — a need to backtrack,

or an opportunity that will never be realised as a consequence of not seeing the original path through. For these reasons we would like to persevere, but the path ahead can be daunting and success might seem unachievable. In such circumstances it can help to try just one more time.

When we try one more time, we relieve ourselves of the pressure of what might happen way down the path and instead focus on taking just the next step. We try to correct whatever errors we might have made in our last attempt and try to do better on the next iteration. Knowing that that next iteration need not be the final attempt gives us the confidence we need to have a go. Add to this the support of an instructor, training partner or friend who we know is not going to give up on us, and we have all the ingredients required for success.

Mou ichido is, to me, the heart of karate-do — a lifelong pursuit of perfection in which we continually make mistakes, learn from them and try again. As we hone our skills with each attempt, our mistakes become smaller and our ability to self-correct is developed. The act of continually trying one more time makes us resilient, and the experience of ending with success imbues us with self-belief. Although we know we will never achieve perfection, that doesn't stop a true karateka from trying one more time. ■

Sensei Ryan van Leent, 5th Dan, began training in 1984 and teaches at the ACT Shotokan Karate International Australia (SKIA) dojo, under Hirokazu Kanazawa Soke's Shotokan Karate International Federation (SKIF). A Silver Development Coach with the Australian Sports Commission, he is also chairman of the SKIA Referees Council and a member of both the SKIA National Executive and the SKIF Yudansha-kai.



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