

# UNIVERSAL LESSONS

TRADITIONAL TANG SOO DO TEACHES ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF SELF-DEFENSE – EVEN IF YOU DON'T PRACTICE IT!

BY ROBERT W. YOUNG / PHOTOS BY ROBERT REIFF

SOMETIMES IT PAYS to examine an endeavor related to one you're intimately familiar with from the perspective of a newb. In Asia, it's referred to as "looking at something with a Zen mind." The reason I bring up the concept is this receptiveness to new ideas applies directly to martial arts training. Consider the following scenarios:

- Student A just got his yellow belt in *taekwondo*. One day at a seminar, he watches a *kenpo* practitioner punch and whispers to his *taekwondo*-practicing friend: "Look how he uses a vertical fist. Our horizontal fist is so much stronger.

And check out that stance; it's so low there's no way he can move fast."

- Student B earned his black belt several years ago. Since day one, he's been encouraged to view all the self-defense arts with a Zen mind. He watches as the same *kenpo* practitioner punches. He thinks: "That guy's fist is in a different position, but he started and stopped the technique exactly the same way I do. He also combined the punch with the same block I would have used. His follow-up sweep is one I've never seen before—I'm going to try that in class tomorrow."

With that second philoso-

phy in mind, this article will take advantage of my background in traditional *tang soo do* as taught by *Black Belt Hall of Fame* member C.S. Kim—which spans, precisely, zero hours of lessons—to examine two empty-hand self-defense techniques and two that use the short stick. My goal is twofold: to discern universal truths that mesh with my own martial arts training, thus reinforcing the notion that they're valid in combat, and to search for techniques and tactics I haven't seen before with the aim of integrating them into my arsenal. >>

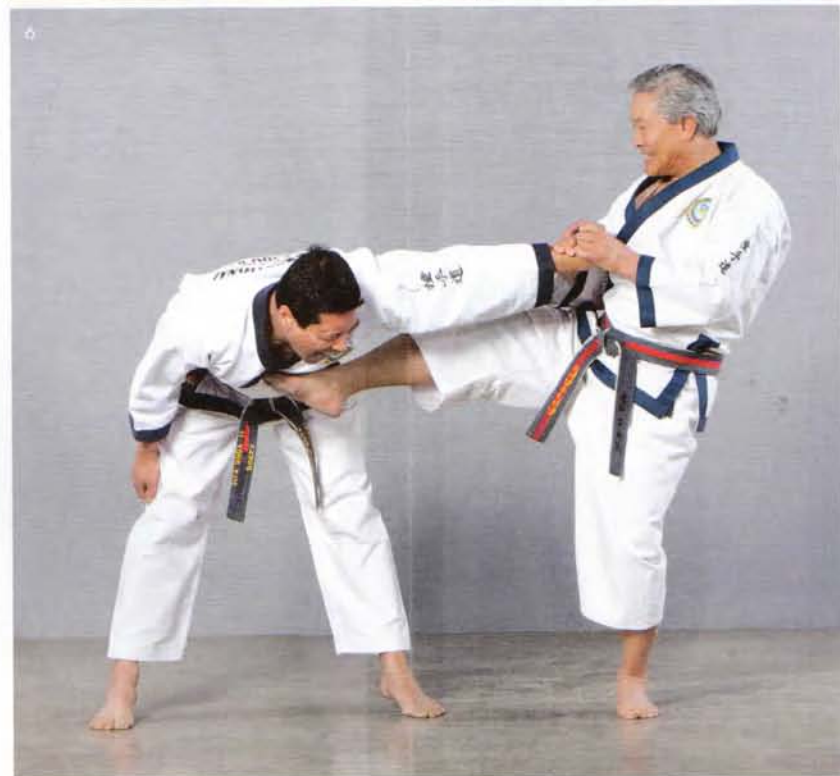


## AGAINST A WRIST GRAB FROM THE SIDE

**DESCRIPTION:** The opponent grabs C.S. Kim's right wrist (1). Kim chambers his right leg (2) and unleashes a downward-angled side kick aimed at the man's thigh or knee (3). While the opponent is in pain, Kim reorients his stance and rotates the man's hand (4). He breaks free from the hold and effects a wrist lock (5), then slams a front kick into his abdomen or face (6).

**UNIVERSAL LESSONS:** Use the closest weapon to attack the closest target. It's something *jeet kune do* practitioners know well because Bruce Lee advocated it.

- Kicking low is safer than kicking high. It's always true on the street and usually in competition. Reducing the time you remain standing on one leg is always a good thing.
- A joint lock works better when the opponent is dazed from a blow. Then he won't be focused on resisting.
- In a combination, it's best to switch targets and weapons. Don't send three punches into his gut; instead, kick his leg, lock his wrist and then kick his stomach. That way, he won't know what will hurt next.



## VALUE OF VIRTUE

In traditional *tang soo do*, the concept of virtue can be traced back to the origin of the name *moo duk kwan*. *Duk* means "virtue." It refers to the ideology of being respectful and good to not only one's enemies but also oneself. Virtue is not something we're born with; rather, it's learned through practice and training.

—C.S. Kim



## AGAINST A SHOULDER GRAB FROM THE SIDE

**DESCRIPTION:** Standing beside his victim, the attacker grabs C.S. Kim's shoulder in preparation for an attack (1). Kim raises his right arm (2) and wraps it around the opponent's arm to effect a standing shoulder lock (3). The tang soo do stylist finishes with a palm strike to the chin, which is executed while he maintains his hold on the trapped limb (4).

**UNIVERSAL LESSONS:** Take what is offered. It's easier than struggling to get to a body part that's not so available. In this case, the opponent presents his arm, which Kim immediately seizes.

- If you bend a human limb in ways it's not intended to go, you inflict pain. It doesn't take much strength because ...
- You have more power when you torque a limb or joint you're holding close to your body. It's all about leverage.
- Use a soft weapon to attack a hard target. In this case, Kim uses his palm to hit his opponent's chin. That helps him avoid broken bones in his hand. In contrast, use a hard weapon to attack a soft target—for example, hit him in the stomach with your fist. >>

## TANG SOO DO JOURNEY

C.S. Kim wasn't particularly tough when he was young. Like millions of other kids around the world and plenty in Songtan, South Korea, he had problems with coordination and self-esteem. What made him different from his peers is he found a simple solution to his problems: the martial arts. He started judo and boxing when he was 10. Then he visited a tang soo do school run by Song Ki Kim and joined the next day.

"I loved it," Kim said. "We trained two or three hours a day for five days a week."

When he received his green belt, he thought he knew everything and stopped attending class. Three months later, he started up again because he missed it. He worried that his master would be angry about his absence, but the old man welcomed the lost sheep back into the fold. "I never quit again," Kim said.

Training was tough. "Before my master got a school, we practiced outside in the dirt," said Kim, who earned his black belt when he was 12. "If it rained, we couldn't practice. We didn't have any equipment, but sometimes we used a rice bag filled with sand as a punching bag."

He and his classmates spent most of their time doing kicks, punches, forms, one-step sparring and free sparring. Especially free sparring. "My master would have 20 people stand up, and each student would spar for five minutes with each person," he recalled.

The skills Kim worked to perfect then are identical to the ones he and his instructors teach now. "I don't believe in changing techniques," he said. "Modern instructors may create new styles, but what's going to be around in the future? The traditional martial arts. The world changes every day, but anything traditional should not. People need some stability in life, and traditional martial arts can provide that. As we grow old and die, traditional martial arts like tang soo do can last forever."

To help promote traditional tang soo do to a wider audience, Kim left Korea in 1972. He had an opportunity to relocate to Europe but elected to settle in the United States instead. In 1973 he appeared on his first magazine cover. In 1974 he organized his first tournament, which attracted 700 people. Now based in Monroeville, Pennsylvania, he admitted that his federation's teaching methods—but not its techniques—have been modified a little to better deal with students' busy schedules. Because of school activities and sports, children just can't invest as much time in their training, he said.

"But parents need to remember that martial arts can help academic studies," Kim added. "I tell students what my master told me: On one side you have education, and on the other side you have martial arts. It's the perfect balance."

—Robert W. Young

# THE CASE FOR CONTROL

Traditional *tang soo do* teaches that it's easy to hit your target but hard to come close without hitting it. It's like a cup of water: easy to drop but difficult to hold. You practice the hard thing to make the easy thing even easier. —C.S. Kim



## SHORT STICK VS. EMPTY HANDS

**DESCRIPTION:** Armed with a short stick, Y.D. Kim (left) faces his opponent (1). Because of the close range, he ensures that his weight is not all on his lead leg, which would effectively immobilize him. As the opponent cocks his arm for the haymaker (2), Kim leans backward and retracts his leg to get out of range (3). Once the punch has passed, Kim closes the gap and grabs his shoulder (4). He immediately yanks him down and drives the end of the stick into the back of the man's neck (5).

**UNIVERSAL LESSONS:** It's better to avoid a blow than to block it—when space allows, of course. Then it doesn't matter how powerful the strike is.

- Always stay mobile. Don't use a low stance in a situation in which you might need to move fast.
- When you strike downward, you take advantage of gravity.
- A smaller point of impact means a greater effect, especially with a weapon. In contrast, a swinging blow delivered with the same short stick probably wouldn't take out an attacker.
- When you're armed and your opponent isn't, it's usually best to wait until the last minute to counterattack. No doubt it's more defensible in court.



## SHORT STICK VS. EMPTY HANDS II

**DESCRIPTION:** With the weapon in his lead hand, parallel to his forearm, Y.D. Kim confronts the attacker (1). When the man punches, Kim lowers his stance for stability and blocks with the stick (2). He pivots on his supporting leg and drives a roundhouse kick into the opponent's torso while keeping hold of his arm (3). Kim then retracts his kicking leg and chambers his right elbow (4), after which he pulls the man toward him and down so he can drop an elbow strike on his spine (5).

**UNIVERSAL LESSONS:** Blocking with a hard object is superior to blocking with a soft object. It's even better when that object isn't part of your body.

- A weapon can be used for "offensive defense." Case in point: the short stick.
- Always attack the open side of your opponent's body. In this sequence, a kick to the back would have had little effect.
- The best follow-up attacks don't require you to reposition yourself after blocking.
- When you pull an opponent down, you gain access to targets you otherwise might not be able to reach—in this case, the lower back. And chances are he's not prepared to defend those targets. ✘

### About the author:

Robert W. Young is the executive editor of *Black Belt*. For more information about C.S. Kim, visit [InternationalTangSooDoFederation.com](http://InternationalTangSooDoFederation.com).



## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Tang soo do's philosophy for fighting and sparring teaches students to block a first strike whenever possible. Defense always comes before the counter-offense.

On the street, once an attacker realizes his victim knows how to protect himself, he'll have one last chance to call off his attack. The martial artist might be able to avoid the fight and develop a good relationship with the person who could have been his enemy. It's one final chance to resolve a conflict before it turns physical.

—C.S. Kim