



Pressure Points

Ki, or life-force energy, is a central concept in Oriental medicine. This energy is thought to flow along certain paths or *meridians* under the skin (which may or may not coincide with actual nerve pathways). Special points along these meridians are known to be especially sensitive, and have therefore been utilized as points to effect treatment by finger pressure (*acupressure* or *shiatsu*) or by the insertion of needles (*acupuncture*). In this way the Oriental physician adjusts the disrupted flow of *ki* energy which is thought to be the cause of pain, disease and organ malfunction in many cases. Oddly enough, it seems to work quite effectively, as our sensei has proven many times by relieving the pain of bumps, strains and minor injuries incurred by students in and out of class.

As with most medical knowledge, the concept of *ki* and acupuncture points can be used to help *or* to harm. When used *against* an opponent, the techniques are known as

kyusho-jitsu or pressure-point fighting. These techniques, inherited by Okinawan karate masters from their original Chinese kung-fu instructors centuries ago, were considered the most dangerous and most secret of all fighting techniques. Only a very few of an instructor's pupils (sometimes none!) were entrusted with this knowledge, nor was it passed on to the Japanese mainland when Okinawans began to teach karate there for the first time early this century. It has remained a little-known aspect of Okinawan karate, understood and taught by very few black-belt instructors today.

Fortunately our sensei is knowledgeable in this esoteric art because it was taught, to some extent, by Robert Trias, founder of the Shuri-ryu system. Consequently, references to it will occasionally be made in class; some background is provided here to help understand those remarks and comments. But don't expect any significant amount of instruction in pressure-point fighting at the color-belt stage. These techniques are very dangerous even to practice in the dojo, and are rightly reserved primarily for black-belt students. (Now you can begin to understand why people say that getting a black belt is in many ways just the *beginning* of a martial artist's training, rather than the end-point.)

There are over 600 identified acupuncture points on the human body, but only a relative few are utilized in pressure-point fighting. These are often places where a nerve or blood vessel passes over a bone or hard structure against which it can be trapped when struck. Your "crazy bone" in the elbow is the most commonly known point in everyday experience; people don't generally realize that they have vulnerable "crazy bones" all over their bodies!

Pressure points can be "activated" in a number of ways, most of which require a great deal of practice. Some are merely squeezed tightly with the fingertips, as during a wrist-grab. Others must be struck by a fore-knuckle fist or a spear-hand at a specific angle to the surface. And some can simply be punched, such as the knock-out point along the lower jaw line. The effect of activating two or three pressure points simultaneously can be remarkable, often causing instant paralysis or loss of consciousness (neurological shut-down). Activating only one can cause unconsciousness or merely numbness and loss of muscle control in an arm or leg, facilitating the application of a joint lock.

Practicing pressure point fighting is so dangerous that in most dojos strict rules are applied. Usually only 15 minutes a day are allowed for such practice; only one side of a practice partner's body can be struck on a given day (because hitting points on opposite sides amplifies the neurological impact markedly); and for some especially sensitive points the attacker is only allowed to tap lightly on the spot. Each technique must be learned along with the corresponding *shiatsu* "correction" technique for reversing the harmful effects.

It is interesting to note that, although the Okinawan masters passed on their *kyusho-jitsu* knowledge only rarely and with the greatest reluctance, the techniques are nevertheless "hidden" in many traditional kata. Without instruction in the *bunkai* or application, however, they go largely unnoticed by students and outside observers. George Dillman, one of the leading exponents of pressure-point fighting, wrote:

The information about pressure points is contained and revealed in kata. In the practice of kata, the location and inter-relationship of various points are rehearsed. Some of the kata movements represent the opponent's actions. Some show exactly the movement the defender makes, and some techniques

show, on the performer's body, the points to be struck on an attacker's body. This is why karate masters have always stressed the need for visualization during kata practice. And this is why the old masters took longer to perform a kata than the modern student. They were too busy practicing the full *meaning* of the form—not merely its physical expression—to hurry the movements.

This also explains why the early karate masters always insisted that kata (rather than sparring) was the heart of karate training.

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