The Point: Thirty - Eight/Twelve

By Bill Handrin "Always two there are, no more, no less: a master and an apprentice".-- Yoda

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So it starts again. "What's the real reason for this movement?", he chides. His obsession begins and continues until I find a logical answer. Only then can I take the dojo dust mop, poke the little man back into his corner and resume my work outs with full enthusiasm.

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"Never give the student a wrong answer", he says, "The black belt does not signify omnipotence, just the completion of an apprenticeship. The journeyman is not yet a master. To give a wrong explanation for something causes problems. You create doubt in a student. And doubt kills desire." He needn't remind me. Been there, done that, too often

Pulling the hand back into hiki te adds power to the punch. Uh oh, the little man is scurrying about again. This time he is surly. He didn't like that statement. He knows better. The heavy bag has shown the both of us differently. He finally quiets down when I tell him it's most likely a grab and pull. "Logical", he says. What better way to control an opponent than to grab his lead hand? Now pull and hit. Most people have shirt sleeves, so it most likely originated as a method of controlling the opponent. "Logical" is what he says when I give an acceptable answer. The gremlin leaves me alone ....for now.

The twist of the wrist during tsuki acts like the rifling in a gun barrel to keep the punch straight. He's red faced now. "Did you ever hear anything so silly?", he bellows. The problem with my imaginary friend is he is all questions. Never does he help with an answer. Just nag, nag, nag. "Sorry", I tell him. Despite forty years of contemplation, I still do not have a scientific answer for the twist. I told him I read the Chinese believe the twist creates a vortex of sorts which sucks the target toward the fist. He reminds me that the Chinese were fond of opium. What a little smart ass! We have discussed this one a great deal and have gotten nowhere. I tell him it is part of the Asian arts and he will just have to accept it. He says I will someday break my wrist and maybe I should accept that. "You should tape your medical insurance card to your forehead before each workout", he adds. Touché.

A strong stance adds power. We went back and forth for years about stance until we agreed it was basically useful to keep the feet from sliding out after completing a technique and little else. But, at least we reached a common ground. He almost succeeded in talking me out of karate on that point. If I couldn't come to some logical reason for perfecting stance, he threatened to leave forever - a hollow threat if there ever was one. If I hadn't slipped on the ice one day I might have never seen stance's usefulness. I appreciate his guidance and all, but sometimes I just want to get lost in the flow of training, not to analyze each and every step. Science and Zen seem to be at odds. Moving mindlessly through the kata and kihon, just the sound of a heartbeat and the slide of feet on the floor, is serene. A chance to shut down thinking for awhile and just take a stroll. Maybe I could buy a bag of gremlin treats at Wal-Mart and toss one at him whenever he starts my way. I owe a great deal to the gremlin. He forces understanding, like the child who keeps asking: "Why?" I could ignore him or ask him to be quiet, but I would stagnate. Without him, I would stop learning. But, he says I am missing the point. "We have come a long way", he reminds me, when he sees my patience wearing thin. "Remember the savate thing?" That's where someone wrote the hand positions in Le Boxe Francais were for counterbalancing during kicks. A more likely answer was they are a carryover from when the French sailors used the ship's rigging to keep their balance on wet ship decks. The rigging gave the savateur a handhold on a rocking ship's deck.. "What about the Northern Chinese favoring kicking?" No, it wasn't because the Northerners had strong legs from living in a rocky terrain or all those other reasons we heard. It is cold in Northern China. You just can't punch through a heavy coat, but kicking the legs will do nicely. So simple - when you think about it. Most solutions are. "Occam's razor", he rasps. His questions taught me how environment influenced different arts. "Close your eyes and place yourself where the warrior once stood. Stand with him in the woods or on the beach or in the forest. See what he saw. Now look at what you are practicing and see why he chose to preserve these movements in kata." "Bunkai means to examine", he reminds me, "so don't get upset when I question. You're here to learn aren't you?" "Yes, but also to enjoy," I remind him. "Whiner", he says, "maybe you should get a set of leotards and take up Pilates." And so it goes. His point is after awhile one must fend for

himself. Dependence on a teacher makes you a perpetual beginner. This is his method - to toss questions and have me return logical answers. Otherwise the student never surpasses the master. And the reason he gets downright testy at times is I sometimes forget this most important lesson. He's asked several times about his nickname. I tell him he must discover that for himself. Sometimes, it's nice when the shoe is on the other foot. He has tried all sorts of numerical equations, codes, even Biblical references. Such ego. But, to his credit, he has never given up.Someday, I may tell him....it's his pants size. Logical.