
What hankido means to me

6th dan essay

Klaas Barends - 31 October 2015



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Introduction

The only source of knowledge is experience.

-Albert Einstein-

I started training in hapkido in 1987. The first few years I focused mostly on just learning a lot of techniques. In 1993 I tested for my first degree but I feel I only started to practice seriously from about 1995/96. Around that time I fell in love with hankido. A trip to Korea in the summer of 1997 was the first one of many to come. In that year I also received my second degree, followed by my third degree in 1999. In the mean time I became the head instructor of Chongmukwan and I started teaching in Amsterdam and Emmeloord as well. In the summer of 2002 I asked master Ko Baek-yong if it was okay if I would spend one year in Korea and devote my time to learning hankido. He agreed and in December 2003 I was on a plane to Korea again. One year of training in Korea became two years and in the summer of 2004 I became a fourth degree. In the following years many more trips to Korea followed and slowly I started teaching internationally as well. In 2009 I tested for my 5th dan and after that the international adventures really took off with seminars in the Germany, Finland, Turkey, Greece, Russia, Thailand, The United States and of course the Netherlands.

In 2015 my students and I opened a new gym and we saw organized a two week seminar for the World Hankimuye Federation. This year I also tested for my sixth degree and as part of that test I am writing this essay. In this essay I will first explain the three basic principles of hankido and some of the core concepts. In the second part of this essay I will give an overview of techniques taught and explain why and how to teach these. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

When I was young, I had to learn the fundamentals of basketball. You can have all the physical ability in the world, but you still have to know the fundamentals.

-Michael Jordan-

Samdaewolli

Three principles

In our style there are three guiding principles ('sam-dae-won-li'). The first principle is that of the circle, the second one of fluid motion and the third one harmony. The three principles are accompanied by three basic stepping exercises: jeon-hwan-beop, yeong-ryu-beop and sim-hwa-beop.

Circle

The first principle and the most basic one is the principle of the circle. In Hankido motions are circular in nature, even when they appear to be straight or square. A ball rolls easier than a cube, it is easier for a ball to deflect incoming forces than it is for a cube to do so. A circular force has the ability to grow faster and stronger after each turn, a straight motion can only see its power decrease.

When we see a situation in which two people are fighting each other as a sphere or circle, it is our goal to become the center of that sphere. By occupying the center of that sphere we gain control over the circular motion and its power. This means we also gain control over the situation. From this center point of control we can now unbalance the opponent and thus gain even more control over his movements.

Fluidity

Our actions should flow like water. Once we gain control over our opponent, we want to stay in control. To achieve this our motions should be continuous and in such a way that our opponent doesn't get the chance to regain his balance. We shouldn't obstruct our opponent's motion but guide it in such a way that we neutralize his force.

One way to make this possible is by 'putting a wave' in our techniques. We guide our opponent up and down as well as left and right putting him into a free fall to the point where we gain our ultimate goal, the submission of our opponent. Often this submission comes in the form of a joint lock, throw or counter strike.

Harmony

Harmony in a technique is obtained as result of the right application of the previous two principles. You feel how you connect to your opponent's power and how you should move to guide him. Usually it isn't hard to establish such a connection but it is hard to stay connected.

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

-Maya Angelou-

Three factors

In my opinion three other factors are needed to make a hankido work: technique, speed and power. I will try to explain what I mean by this.

Speed

When I say speed, I don't mean how fast you are. But you can imagine that someone who can run very fast, can also more easily get away from a dangerous situation. When I say speed, I actually mean timing. Knowing when to move and how fast or how slow you should move is important. True experience you learn how to move economically and efficiently.

Power

Just as with speed I am not talking about great muscle power. But again it is easy to understand that someone who is physically strong has a good chance of defending himself against a weaker opponent.

However most situations where self-defense is required will be where a stronger, bigger opponent attacks a weaker one. How can someone who is weaker still defend himself against a stronger person. One way is to use the right speed, by being faster as your opponent you can outrun him. The other factor is what we call 'soft power' or 'relaxed power'. We can compare it to hitting with a stick versus hitting with a whip. You can strike hard with a stick, but a stick can also easily break. With a whip you can hit just as hard as with a stick, but it is hard if not impossible to break the whip.

When we strike, our aim is to strike like a whip. Connecting all the joint you let your power flow through your body to release it with maximum power at the end.

Technique

Technique is what is necessary to guide your speed and power. Without proper technique, speed and power become useless or at least unguided. A beginning student often makes up his lack of technique with physical power and/or speed. Our aim is to grow our technique where we don't need to rely on physical strength and speed anymore. Good technique combined with excellent timing and soft power makes it possible to apply the three basic principles of circle, flow and harmony.

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.

-Benjamin Franklin-

How to teach?

When teaching the three techniques of the Three Principles I focus on teaching proper stepping first. In my opinion the techniques consist of a small front slide followed by two steps with a turn in the middle. Too often students just see the technique as two steps and forget about the turn. I believe that understanding of that turn is very important if you want to understand the techniques.

So when I teach the basic circle-step-technique (jeonhwanbeop) I tell students to make a step first, turn and then make a back step. In the first step the arms are raised to make block, during the turn the arms stay high. The arms are brought down when stepping back.

It is important to practice the circle-step-techniques often and with lots of repetitions. It is not uncommon to practice the step 100 times or even more in a row.

Flying is learning how to throw yourself at the ground and miss.

-Douglas Adams-

Falling

Falling is a form of self-protection

We practice falling techniques for several reasons. The first and foremost reason is to protect ourselves. It is easy to imagine how even when we are not in a self-defense situation it is important to know how to fall properly. The most important part of body we want to protect is our head.

Benefits

The benefits of learning how to fall properly are huge. It is a proven fact that practicing martial arts improves a person's physical condition, balance, agility and coordination. Even when people start practicing martial arts at an older age. By learning how to fall properly the chances of surviving a fall increase even more.

Dangers

Learning how to fall should be done properly. Don't rush it and don't do things you don't feel absolute sure about. We should never push a student to do things he or she isn't comfortable with. Take it slow and repeat often. By practicing your falls on a regular basis your body softens up and gets used to the loss of balance. This makes falling a more enjoyable experience. I can't emphasize how important it is to take it slow and stick to one level and only progress once a student is good enough to advance to the next level. Probably the most common injury in our type of martial arts is where students injure themselves by doing their falls wrong.

How to teach

There are two ways to fall; soft and hard. For every hard fall there is equivalent soft fall. We teach most techniques in five to six steps, the techniques getting more challenging with each step. Don't hurry students. Learning how to fall properly takes time. Our goal is to make people adequate at falling to a point where it is practical. We don't require people to do high jumping falls or tumbling techniques.

Important points to focus on are keeping the chin tucked to the chest and hitting the floor with the whole arm stretched in about a 45 degree angle from the body.

When rolling it is important to make the body as round as possible, this usually means making your body as small as possible as well. A good indicator of a good roll is the amount of noise being made when rolling. More noise indicates bad technique.

Mastering others is strength. Mastering yourself is true power.

-Lao Tzu-

Kicking

We distinguish between three kinds of kicks: stretching kicks, effective kicks and special kicks. There are several goals we try to accomplish when teaching kicks;

- Self defence
- Flexibility
- Body posture and agility

Self defence

First and foremost learning how to kick effectively greatly adds to your ability to defend yourself. This means that we should not just stick to kicking from a static posture against stationary targets. Defending yourself is a dynamic activity and kicking even more so. I will talk more about self defence later on in this paper and some kicking will be covered there as well.

Flexibility

Kicking increases your flexibility and with stretching you will improve your kicking ability. Proper stretching is important to avoid injuries. There are two stretching methods that can help you improve your kicks. Dynamic stretching is kicking in motion, static stretching is holding a stretch. Static stretches support dynamic stretches. The preferred way is to do dynamic stretches at the beginning of the class and static stretching exercises at the end of class.

A typical kicking class could look like this:

- rotating of the joints (rotate ankles, knees, hips, upper body, etc.)
- some aerobic exercises to warm up the body
- dynamic stretching exercises. Exercises like winging your leg up front, back and to the side. Practice rotating kicks like the inside and outside kick.
- The actual class in which kicking is taught.
- light aerobic exercises if necessary
- static stretches

Body posture and agility

These are the special kicks. They don't serve directly to improve your self defence skills but practicing techniques like jumping double kicks is good to develop one's agility. Also it is great fun, especially for the adolescent students.

How to teach?

Before we can teach actual kicking we prepare the body by doing a lot of stretching kicks. At the beginner level students learn kicks like the heel high kick, inside kick and outside kick. After a few months of doing these kicks you can start teaching the basic kicks like instep kick, roundhouse kick and side kick. These kicks can be broken up into pieces. To improve balance kicks and kicking exercises can be practice with support (use the wall or a bar). From these basic kicks we move on to kicks like the sweep kick, outside heel kick, spinning kicks and 'exotic' kicks like the inside heel kick and slap kick.

Next on our list are the combination kicks and jumping kicks. With the combination kicks we focus on practical use of our kicking skills. Jumping kicks build agility and are good fun to practice.

It's what you learn after you know it all that counts.

-John Wooden-

Forms

We teach a set of five forms. These forms come from two Chinese styles, one being Shaolin and the other Long Fist. We teach these forms for several reasons, I would like to talk about three of those reasons:

1. To improve agility
2. To improve power
3. To learn energy management

Agility

The forms get increasingly more difficult. Lower stances, harder transitions and overall more complicated movements require more of a practitioners agility. Being able to sink into deeper stances and transition to the next stance requires more flexibility. To be able to do this in a fluent and natural way with moments of powerful explosive force requires greater control over your body. By practicing these forms you train your body and increase your agility. Practicing a form is stretching in motion.

Power

Performing a form means getting into the right the position and using your body in the optimal way to generate power. By focusing on these stances you train your body to move as optimal as possible. In the chapter about hwansangdobeop I will explain more about how you can build a better position.

Energy management

The forms teach you how to manage your energy in the most economic way. If you spill your energy in the beginning of the form, you might not reach the end. Economic use of your body's energy without compromising your technique becomes increasingly more difficult with the last forms. Of all the three points I believe that energy management is probably the most important one.

“The minute you get away from fundamentals – whether its proper technique, work ethic or mental preparation – the bottom can fall out of whatever you’re doing.”

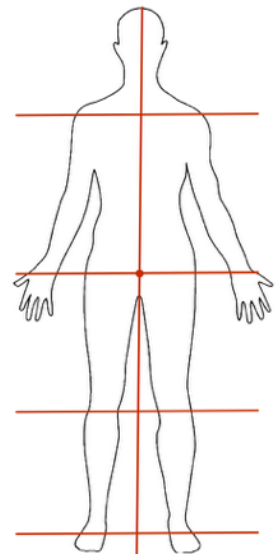
-Michael Jordan-

Hwansangdobeop

Hwansangdobeop (visualization techniques) are a method to practice self-defense without a partner. All twelve basis self-defense exercises are accompanied by two visualization techniques: *cheongibeop* and *jigibeop*. Cheongibeop (techniques of the sky) mimic the motions of the defender while jigibeop (techniques of the earth) mimic those of the attacker. The visualization techniques can be practiced both from a static posture as well as a dynamic movement.

Cheongibeop

When practicing cheongibeop you mainly focus on maintaining a good body structure. So what is a good body structure and what do we mean by ‘maintaining a good body structure’? The answer to the last question is the easiest; a good body structure is a balanced one from which we can execute our technique in the most effective way. This however gives us another question, what is balanced? To explain balance it is easiest to work with a few lines. In the picture you see the contour of a body with five lines. The vertical line is the center line. The horizontal lines from top to bottom are the shoulder line, hip line, knee line and base line. Where the center line and hip line cross each other you will find the body’s center of gravity, in Korean known as danjeon.



Center line

When your center line isn’t vertical, it means you will lean either to the side or front or back. The center line is also your line of attack. It is much easier to apply force forward along your center line than it is to do in any other direction.

The base

A wider base generally means better balance. However if the feet stay in one line with the upper part of the body, your balance is only good to resist impacts from the side. A push from the front or back will disturb your balance quite easily.

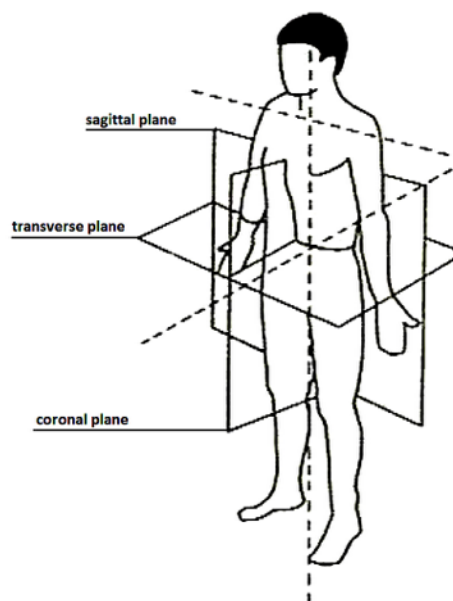
A wider stance might improve your balance but it also slows you down. A smaller base gives you less balance but it is easier to move. The way you place your feet also has a big influence on the strength of your stance. Feet that point outward immobilise your hips and make it impossible for you to generate power from your core.

This is a small base, it gives little balance and it is hard to withstand impact from any side. It is also hard to generate power from your core.



This is a normal or natural base. Your feet are placed shoulder width apart. This base

gives you a normal balance and is usually strong enough to withstand impact from the sides. Your hips have great mobility.



A wide base gives you even better balance, but you will be less agile. Your flexibility determines how well you can use your hips. If you make your stance even wider, it will be harder to move.



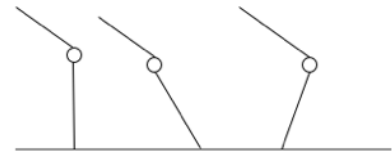
In this base your feet are wide apart and no longer in one line. This makes it easier to withstand impact from all directions. You should have no trouble to use your hips to generate power.

This is an example of a weak base. Because you place your feet pointing outward it becomes hard if not impossible to generate power from your core.



The knee line

The next line from the base up is the knee line. The knees are the joints in between your base and your core. This makes keeping them in the right position an important piece of your total body structure. In the picture on the right the knee is the round circle. With your knee in such a position that your lower leg can stand firmly on the ground, is obviously the better position. Keeping your lower leg exactly vertical isn't possible, but bending your knees too much is something that can be avoided. As a rule of thumb when a vertical line is drawn down from the knees, it should fall on the foot and not pass the toes.



Knees positions

Hip line

The hip joint can move in three directions. You can bend, tilt and turn your hips. Moving the body in the sagittal (bend), coronal (tilt) and transverse (rotate) plane. Someone is off balance when a hip is locked because it has been turned, tilted and bent. When the hip joint is only bent, tilted or rotated, the balance might be disturbed but it can also mean that the body has been placed in such a way that it can resist force or apply force from or to one direction. In Korean fold in your hip joint is called kwa. When practicing hwansangdobeop you should keep your kwa folded open.

Danjeon

I have said before that the point where hip line and center line meet is called danjeon in Korean. This point is your body's center point. When this point leans too much to one side of your body, it means your unbalance. So ultimately keeping your balance is all about stabilising your danjeon. At the same time you want to disrupt your opponent's danjeon.

Shoulder line

The shoulder line is usually an indicator that someone is off balance, but you will have to check the hip and base too. Just like the hip your shoulder can move in three ways; up/down, front/back and it can rotate. If you want to lock the joints in someone's arm, you must lock the shoulder first. The deltoid muscle in your shoulder is strong when your arms are stretched out in front of you. The more you move your arms back, the less

power you have in your deltoid muscles. Just like your hips have a kwa, your shoulder has a ko. Keep your ko open like you keep your kwa open.

Application

When practicing cheongibeop you should keep all this in mind. Stand up straight, widen your base, keep your hip line horizontal, don't move your arms back to a point where you would lose power. Keep your kwa folded open. Stay relaxed, don't tense your shoulders or hips. But that is not all. Hwansangdobeop is not a static exercise but a dynamic one. This means that every limb should move together and the motions should match each other. So the aim is to stay balance while in motion and to do this in a coordinated way. (I believe this is where hapkido got its name from).

Jigibeop

If the goal of cheongibeop is to build a good body structure the goal of jigibeop could be described as testing your body structure. In jigibeop you try to find the limit of your balance. Try to find the edge of where your body structure is just could enough to keep your balance. In some exercises we even tip ourselves over that edge and end the technique with a falling technique.

Jigibeop also teaches you how to stay safe when you are on the receiving end of a technique. In recent years I have also tried to come up with little adjustments to jigibeop so that I could learn how to use jigibeop to defend myself.

If I relax my body and keep the insights gained from practicing cheongibeop in mind I can find weaknesses in my opponents technique and position my own body in such a way that I can block his technique or take over the initiative.

Cheongibeop teaches you what a strong balanced position is from which you can execute a technique with your optimal force. Jigibeop teaches you what the limits of your balance are and thus what the limit of your strength is.

Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy.

-Sun Tzu-

The greatest remedy for anger is delay.

-Thomas Paine-

Self-defence

Everything we have talked about so far serves a purpose; to improve our self-defence skills. In the previous chapter we learned about maintaining our balance, our base, our center of gravity (danjeon) and how to move our limbs. How to apply all this knowledge in a practical way.

Strategy

Before we can talk about technique, we need to talk about strategy. Let me state first that I will only talk about a defensive strategy here where both people are unarmed. I also want to make it clear that this strategy is not the only strategy. It is however the strategy that is most obvious in all hankido self defence techniques. I believe it is important to teach our students about strategy. They should know what their approach to a situation should be if they ever get in trouble. The first step should be to keep your distance. We work with the concept of safe distance where both opponents are one arms length out of reach. From this distance it is impossible to harm your opponent directly. You will have to make at least one step to get close enough. This gives us, as the defenders, time to react to actions of our opponent. When the opponent attacks, we prefer to step out of his line of attack to the outside. When step out of his force line, but at the same time we prefer to keep our force line pointed at him. When we are forced to step to the inside of the attack, we will usually try to move the opponent in such a way that we end up on the outside.

From this position we will try to connect with our opponent's force and use it to break his body structure. Once we have established a situation in which we have control over our opponent we can then choose to lead him, control him or counter attack him.

To practice all this, you only need one technique: jeonhwanbeop. Jeonhwan is often translated from Korean to English a circle. Beop means method. I have found however that the meaning of jeonhwan goes deeper than just circle. One of the other translations of jeonhwan is conversion. We can ask ourselves; what is being converted when we practice jeonhwanbeop?

We convert our position to one which is better. We convert our opponent's position and body structure to bad ones. We usually convert our base, from smaller to wider. A lot more answers are possible. Finding answers means digging deeper into the meaning of jeonhwanbeop and why we should practice it so often.

Converting base

We have already talked about base, but how should you use your base to your advantage? If a dangerous situation arises, it is wise not to have a small base. When you are in a safe distance and need to be able to respond fast, assume a natural stance. If you and your opponent are close and make contact, assume a wide base.

When your base is good, you can sometimes ignore the three rules about keeping your hip in balance. In a mountain climbing stance for example you kwa can be closed, because your power is directed in one direction only.

Control zone

I have already explained that we want to stay on the outside, but why is that? The simple answer is: to stay out of the control zone. So what is the control zone? I already talked a little bit about the deltoid muscle in the shoulder, this muscle has a lot of power to the point where you move it about 45 degrees out. Inside the arms is your control zone. Your attack line runs straight through the control zone, in this direction you can easily apply your power. Outside the control zone however you lose your strength. So when you are on the outside of your opponent's control zone, but keep him inside yours, you have an obvious advantage.



Deltoid muscle

Teaching

Teaching all of the above in one coherent system of self defense can be quite a challenge. However the twelve basic self defense techniques of hankido have proven to be an excellent tool.

In our way of teaching there is a lot of emphasis on disturbing the opponent's body structure, unbalancing him, controlling him and eventually finish the technique. Often students want to rush to the last part of that sequence, so we have to teach them to be patient. There are quite a few 'patience points' in a technique. The 'patience points' often occur where we have unbalanced the opponent in one direction and are going to lead him to a place where his body is leaning in another direction.

Take technique number one for example, gwanjeolgibeop, in the first move we put the opponent in a position where his body (ie. hips) are rotate, tilted and bent backward but after that we lead the opponent round and he ends up in a position where he is still rotated and tilted but now leaning forwards. When transitions like this occur in a technique these are usually the points where extra attention is acquired. A technique like number six, mokgamabeop, can be executed without transitions, but a technique like number nine, jungpaltubeop, has several transitions like this.

In the beginning students usually muscle their way through these points or just try to use faster motions. Their lack of technical ability is compensated with more power and/or more speed.

Teaching how to take the balance of the opponent isn't that difficult, but how to keep your opponent off-balance to the end is something that take a long time to master. We can try to give our students more insight by trying to explain the body mechanics, and I believe this is very important as well, however the answer to all our questions can be found in "many practice".