

Training in the Dark

Judo Solo

By

Sensei Mark McGee

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If you are fortunate enough to be part of a family training in martial arts, you won't have to do solo training. However, I recommend it as another way of understanding what we do in both the self defense and 'art' side of Yon Ch'uan (or whatever you practice).

Take solo training in Judo for example.

Gentle Art?



Grace Martial Arts Judo

Judo is called the ‘Gentle Art.’ It was the first martial art I studied as a child. It didn’t take long before I learned that ‘gentle’ did not necessarily mean *gentle*.

Falling (*ukemi waza*) is the second thing I remember learning in Judo class. The first was how to put on a Judo uniform (*gi*) and tie a belt (*obi*). After that first lesson, we learned how to fall correctly in several directions: backward, forward, left side, right side, roll out and roll up. Knowing how to fall properly would be very important for what would come next in our Judo training.

Many people are afraid of falling. Babies fall a lot, but older children, teens and adults can develop a fear of falling. Older people are especially afraid of falling because of the danger of breaking bones.

Here are some basics about *ukemi* training:

- Relax – tensing your muscles during a fall will make the landing harder and more painful .. relax your muscles and you'll find that falling is easier and less painful
- Don't reach for the mat – don't think about trying to reach the ground with your hand during a fall .. many people injure their hands, wrists, arms or shoulders during a fall because they reach for the ground and their hand/arm absorbs much of the weight of the body as it slams into the ground .. a good rule is to start slapping toward the ground as you fall rather than reaching for the ground .. that training will help you when someone throws you in class .. the timing for slapping almost always matches the time between the beginning of the throw and the landing .. you want your hand to slap the mat/ground a split second before your body land.

- Don't fall on bone as you train – this is a good time to learn not to fall on your head, neck, spine and other bony surfaces .. focus on landing on fleshy areas, not bony
- Spread the shock – work on landing evenly on fleshy areas of your body as you train .. rather than landing on one spot, work on spreading the landing over a wider area of your flesh
- Slap hard – a good slapping technique will be similar to a whipping motion that hits the surface and bounces off .. be sure your arm is relaxed rather than tense as you slap the mat/ground .. a relaxed arm will bounce easily and help to absorb more of the fall
- Slap near your body – a good slapping technique will help you absorb some of the shock from the fall .. slap at a 20-30 degree angle from the body .. slapping farther than 30 or 40 degrees from your body means your body will have to absorb more of the shock .. your slap on a mat or on the ground can mean the

difference between a pleasant and unpleasant experience

We (*Judoka*) began learning how to throw and be thrown. We learned how to grab each other's *gi* jacket and move through the basic steps of each throw: off-balancing (*kuzushi*), entering/setting up (*tsukuri*), and executing (*kake*). It was in the 'being-thrown' process that I learned Judo had a 'not-gentle' aspect. We hit the mat hard and often. The training in falling paid off because we were able to hit the mat at a high velocity without getting injured.

Solo Falling

Solo falling is easy to do, but it helps to have a soft surface for landing when you are new to *ukemi*. You can use an exercise mat (or two), an old mattress, or a gymnastics mat. We didn't have mats when I started training about 60 years ago and the wood floors of the dojo were a bit hard. Because the floors were hard, we worked hard to improve our falling skill. For solo training away from the *dojo* we found thick grass or soft sand at the beach helpful. Whichever you choose, make sure you learn how to fall properly.

Solo Throwing

There are lots of ways to drill your Judo throws alone. You can use a combination of straight-line throwing, circle throwing, zig-zag throwing and box throwing to improve your throwing skills.

Line Drills

Solo throw in a straight line right side, then left side. Once you run out of room, turn around and do the same throw right and left again. When you finish the first line, turn around and do the same thing with a different throw. Run through all the throws you know, if you have time.

If you are limited on the amount of time to train, do as many different throws as you can each time until you've run through all the throws at least once or twice a week. It's important to continue developing technique and muscle

memory while you wait for in-person training to begin again.

You can also video yourself practicing, then watch the videos to see how your skills improve.

Circle Drills

Another way to practice is to do the same throw left and right around a directional clock.

One example is to do a throw toward 12 o'clock followed by the same throw toward 6 o'clock .. back to 12, followed by 6 again. Then move the same throw toward 2 o'clock followed by the same throw toward 8 o'clock and back. Then move the same throw to 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock twice. Next, do the same throw toward 4 o'clock and 10 o'clock twice. Then do the same throw toward 5 o'clock and 11 o'clock.

Once you've finished one throw around the clock (circle), repeat the directional drill with different throws. Going through all the throws you know is a great physical workout.

Another drill is to start at the top of a circle and perform the throw counterclockwise so you begin throwing it from the right side. Go all the way around the circle until you're back to where you started. Then do the same throw clockwise. That way you're throwing from the left side. When you finish the clockwise drill, start again with a new throw going counterclockwise .. rinse and repeat with as many throws as you want.

Another solo drill with a circle or line is to do a throw right side, left side .. then do a different throw right side, left side. Go through all the throws you know, then start again from the first throw.

Zig-Zag Drills

Zig-zagging is throwing to the left corner, followed by throwing to the right corner. That allows you to do the same throw right side, then left side.

Imagine being in the middle of a clock when you start your throw. Throw toward 10pm, which is the left corner. Then throw toward 2pm, which is the right corner.

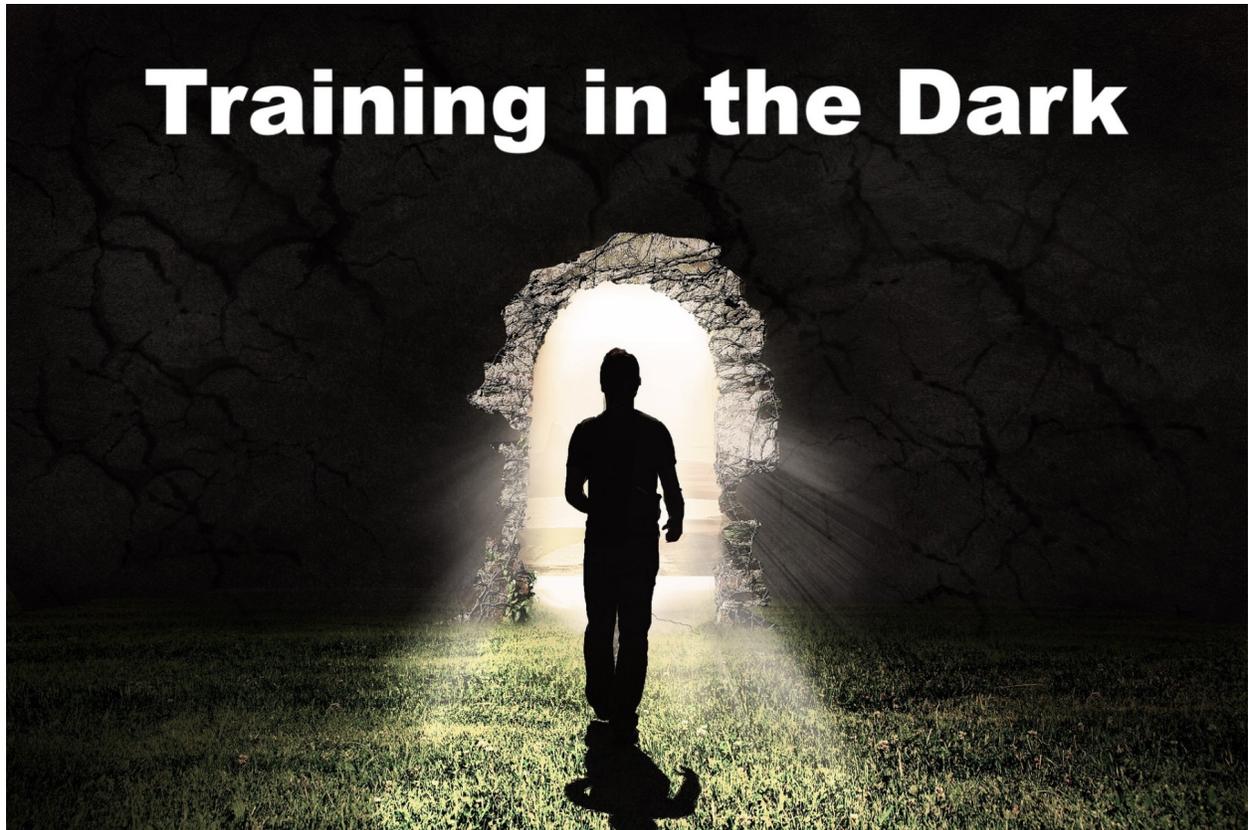
If you are training in a large room, backyard or other outside location, you can continue zig-zagging for a good distance before you have to turn around. If you are training in a small room, then zig-zag throw until you have to turn around and go in the opposite direction.

Box Drills

Box throwing is line drill that includes hard turns to the left or right depending on the direction of the 'box.' It's similar to a circle drill except the turns are 90 degrees at the edge of the box instead of the smooth turning of the circle.

Enjoy!

The main thing is to have fun and hone your skills until you're able to train with your instructor or fellow students again. Be safe and enjoy your training.



Training in the Dark

Karate Solo

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Yon Ch'uan has elements of many types of martial arts: Judo, Karate, Kung Fu, Aikido, Jujutsu, T'ai Chi Ch'uan and Weapons. That's one of the reasons it takes a student of Yon Ch'uan longer to reach **Black Belt** than many other martial arts.

Whether you are training in Yon Ch'uan or another martial arts system, the current 'social distancing' that has separated students from each other and their instructors has brought us new challenges in our training. We are learning to **Train in the Dark**.

We move now from **solo training in Judo** to solo training in Karate.

Karate Preparation



Whether you train solo or in a class, it's important to prepare your body and mind.

Think of your body in three parts:

1. Top of head to top of chest
2. Top of chest to top of hips
3. Top of hips to bottom of feet

Think of your body in four parts:

1. Front
2. Back
3. Left side
4. Right side

Think of your body in five parts:

1. Head and neck
2. Shoulders and arms
3. Torso
4. Waist and hips

5. Legs and feet

Preparing your body for solo training begins by preparing each part of your body for the part it will play. There are lots of ways to do that, but here are some suggestions. You may already have a preparation program from your instructor, so be sure to follow that. For students of Yon Ch'uan, you'll find some great warmups on pages 9 & 10 of our [Black Belt Study Guide](#).

Stretching/Warming Up

Stretching is the process of warming up the body and all its parts. Stretching for Karate and martial arts should warm up all of the parts of the body that will be called upon during training. Think about what you do in Karate? What parts of your body do you use?

I recommend stretching and warming up the body in a progressive manner for 10-15 minutes. Think of it as a **step-up** process. You are taking your body from your normal coolness to the heat of training. The longer you plan to train the longer you should stretch and warm up. You can find a lot of great stretches online and in Karate and fitness/exercise books. If you also know stretching exercises from Judo, Kung Fu or other martial arts, use them as well.

Here are some ideas.

- Start with your feet. Sit on the floor or in a chair. Stretch your toes, feet and ankles forward, backward and in circles.
- Stretch your calves and knees. Bend your knees up and down. Circle your knees several times to the left, then several times to the right.

- Stretch your thighs and hips. Sit on the floor and stand for different stretches.
- Stretch your waist. Rotate left, rotate right, bend forward, bend back.
- Stretch your chest and back. Chest out, chest in, breathed deeply and slowly.
- When you get to your shoulders, stretch out.
- Stretch your shoulders, upper arms, elbows, forearms, wrists, hands and fingers – up, down, in circles.
- Stretch your neck, head and face. Slowly look up, look down, look left, look right – repeat.

One thing you want to accomplish in warming up is to slowly increase your heart rate and respiration. Lifting your hands above your heart during warm up will help accomplish that as will lifting your knees to your hips and higher. You can accomplish that with both knee lifts and squats.

Once your body is warmed up you are ready to begin your training.

Karate Training

I recommend some kind of daily martial arts training. Definitely do your stretching. That's good for all of us no matter our age or physical condition. If you were working toward testing for a new belt rank before classes were cancelled, keep working on what you need to know for testing. We will get back to training together and staying in shape now and on top of what you need to know for your next test will help immensely.

We are teaching classes online now and continuing to emphasize basic and belt rank training. If you are able to do that with your instructor, it will help you be ready to test when classes meet again in the near future.

One other note about training is to stay hydrated. I like to add essential amino acids to water a couple of hours before training, then sip the amino water throughout the workout. It helps with hydration and essential micro-nutrition during training.

Here are some of the basics for solo training –

Blocking

After you finish stretching, run through your basic blocks standing and stepping.

Stand with your feet about shoulder width apart and do all of your blocks left side and right side 10 times. Then move into a back stance and do all of your blocks left side and right side 10 times. Next, step forward and backward with all your blocks 10 times (e.g. 10 times stepping forward

and 10 times stepping backward, then do the next block in the same way).

Striking

Run through your strikes standing and stepping.

Stand with your feet about shoulder width apart and do all of your strikes left side and right side 10 times. Then move into a back stance and do all of your strikes left side and right side 10 times. Next, step forward and backward with all your strikes 10 times (e.g. 10 times stepping forward and 10 times stepping backward, then do the next strike in the same way).

Kicking

Run through your kicks standing and stepping.

Stand with your feet about shoulder width apart and do all of your kicks left side and right side 10 times. Then move into a back stance and do all of your kicks left side and right side 10 times. Next, step forward and backward with all your kicks 10 times (e.g. 10 times stepping forward and 10 times stepping backward, then do the next kick in the same way).

You can vary the drills by stepping to the corners instead of moving straight forward and backward. It's your solo training, so have fun!

Depending on how many blocks, strikes and kicks you know, the drill could take you 20-30 minutes. That's a great workout!

Katas

If you have time, start with your basic Katas and move up to intermediate and advanced forms. If you don't have much time to train in Kata, then do as many as you can each time you train. If you can train multiple times during the week, you should be able to cover all of your forms each week.

Weapons

If you have time, spend 10-15 minutes training with each weapon you know. Run through your weapon basic drills to stay sharp with those. Basics will always be your friend if you have to use Karate (empty-hand or weapons) for self defense. If you know weapons forms, run through those as you have time. Be sure to train in every weapon and weapons form at least once each week.

Cool Down

Be sure to spend some time cooling down after your workout. Cooling down is the process of going from the heat of training to the cool of finishing. Cooling down is a **step-down** process. You want your heart, lungs, muscles and joints to slowly go from high gear to low gear over a period of 10-15 minutes. A good rule of thumb is to give yourself as much time to cool down as you did to warm up.

If you have room in your house, yard or neighborhood, walk briskly for about 3-5 minutes. Then spend several minutes doing standing and floor stretching. Any kind of slow stretching is helpful. T'ai Chi has been my personal go-to cool-down exercise for more than 20 years. I also use Judo and Okinawan Karate stretching for cool down. If you have learned some Animal Style stretching, those are also helpful.

A good cool-down routine will help your heart and lungs, muscles and joints relax and be ready for what's next in your day.

In-Person Classes

We don't know how long 'social distancing' will continue, but the day is coming when you'll be able to train with your teacher or students again. We trust God in all things and want to be ready for both self and faith defense.