

THE MARTIALIST: YEAR THREE CLOSER

well convinced that the JP Short Slugger is a very effective defensive tool.



Photo by Chris Zaccara



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If you want an impact weapon that packs more “oomph” than a kubaton and is easier to carry than a night stick or an Asp, you’ll be hard pressed to find a realistic tool that fits the bill better than the Short Slugger. ♠

* Check your local laws! Saps may be illegal. Don't carry prohibited weapons for any reason.

Loading and Unloading: The Key to Power Striking and Flow

By Phil Elmore

When I was studying Karate in college, I was taught for the first time the principle of using the hips to generate power. This was most obvious in performing the classic Karate reverse punch. As the punch corkscrews forward into a horizontal position, emphasizing the first two knuckles, the opposite arm comes back to chamber and the hips pop with the execution of the strike.



Photo by Phil Elmore

In the ensuing years, I started to dismiss my early Karate training, as other arts – whose use of the hips was more subtle and whose exposure of the body's center was much less pronounced (if not forbidden explicitly in principle) – began to occupy my attention. I started to think that my Karate training, while of benefit to me, was only *indirectly* so. I thought that what I'd learned would have to be (or had already been) *unlearned* as I progressed in my pursuit of practical self-defense and modern combatives.

THE MARTIALIST: YEAR THREE CLOSER

It was in the course of subsequent Chinese Gung Fu training that I finally understood, explicitly, how universally applicable is hip power in the mechanics of self-defense. The movement of the hips as you strike, bringing one side of the body forward while the other side comes back (pivoting around a central point running vertically down your centerline) is the secret to *loading and unloading*. It is this loading and unloading – making efficient use of this kinetic energy while striking repeated blows and positioning the body – that is the key to *flow* and *power* in self-defense.

When you efficiently load and unload, you deliver force using the structure of the body – ideally, off the rooted leg, traveling up through your body’s gates on that side. When you load, unload and reload, then unload again, you begin to flow. When you flow, you transition without hesitation from move to move, from technique to technique, erasing the distinction (and the pause) between each one. What’s more, each technique flows *naturally* into the next. The ending point of one technique becomes the starting point of the next. Nothing is forced and little is wasted. Instead of delivering a sequence of discrete techniques, you *keep moving* as you overwhelm your opponent, wasting no motion as you do so. Is the essence of modern combatives and the marriage of traditional technique with contemporary self-defense sensibilities.

Matthew Woodring Stover summed this up perfectly in, of all things a novel. In *Heroes Die*, he wrote, “Attack, attack, attack – come at your target from every possible direction and press until his

defenses overload. Never give him time to recover his balance: never give him time to counter.” I’ve never read a better encapsulation of combatives philosophy and I quote it here for that reason.

To achieve the flow that makes it possible to overwhelm your opponent, you must become comfortable with loading and unloading efficiently and repeatedly. Your hips are the key. They are the horizontal pivot point, through which your spine (the vertical pivot point) is conceptually fixed. When we move while fighting, we naturally stagger our feet (in most cases). At the very least, we bend our knees. Otherwise, we’d be standing stock-still with our knees locked and no balance at all. We also (usually subconsciously) bring one side of the body back as the other side moves forward.



Photo by Phil Elmore

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This is a motion as natural as walking – and it should be. Martial arts master and famed swordsman Miyamoto Musashi, in *The Book of Five Rings*, spoke of moving on the heels in executing footwork – not on the balls of the feet and certainly not on the toes. This is very intuitive, for it is the same way we walk: heel to toe.

Movement can be precise or it can be sloppy, but if it is not natural, it will never be as useful to you as the mechanics of your body's instinctive motion. In certain Chinese martial arts, footwork is executed from the heels and is extremely rooted and stable as a result. More abstractly, you should move in combatives (and in your life) at a natural, unaffected gait. If you don't feel natural fundamentally, even when working hard at something, you're doing it wrong.

Describing the motion sounds much more complicated than is actually executing the motion. Picture Elvis Presley swiveling his hips in your mind, if it helps. Bend your knees, stagger your stance, and then practice popping from one side to the other on your heels, shifting from a left stance to a right stance and back again. Your feet will be pointed at roughly 45 degrees to the right and end pointed roughly 45 degrees to the left, back and forth, switching from one side to other as you do so.

As you pop from left to right, you'll see that your shoulders come forward on one side and move back on the other. The torque of your hip movement as you move through the shift in stance generates tremendous power off the rear, rooted leg. If you strike while

pushing off from that rooted leg (not actually lifting it from the ground, but feeling the power generated through it), you can hit with great power while also using the whipping force of your hip snap.



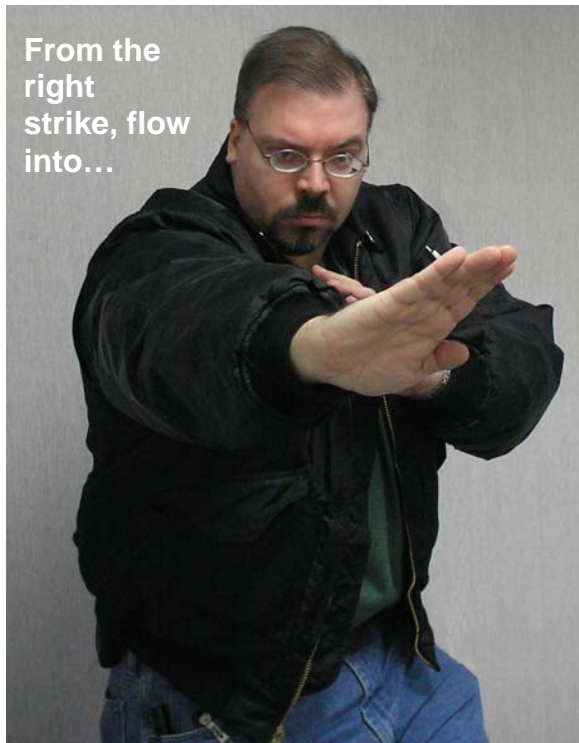
Photo by Phil Elmore



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A typical flow progression using this technique would start from a basic ready stance with, let's say, the left side forward and the right side back. This is a pretty basic hands-up ready stance. When you strike from this stance, the rear side comes forward as the previously forward side comes back, generating hip torque as you drive your strike into your opponent. Let's say the first strike is an edge of hand blow thrown horizontally at the throat.

THE MARTIALIST: YEAR THREE CLOSER



From the right strike, flow into...

Photo by Phil Elmore



...or even a full vertical punch.

Photo by Phil Elmore



...a left vertical strike...

Photo by Phil Elmore

From that position, you immediately reload and then unload by bringing the right hand back and the left arm, shoulder, and leg forward, your stance shifting and your body pivoting exactly opposite to the direction in which it pivoted for the first strike. You could, for example, deliver a vertical strike or finger jab or even a full-blown vertical punch as the left side comes forward.

From the left-side-forward position, you can immediately pivot again – the motion flowing as simply a continuation of the previous one, a constant flow of left-right-left-right as you move back and forth, shifting your legs left to right to left again (and so on).

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Photos by Phil Elmore



This could be a spear hand with the right immediately followed by a left elbow, as shown in the accompanying photos.

Loading and unloading – moving efficiently while flowing in combat – is that simple. When you have become comfortable striking repeatedly while transitioning from left to right in a basically stationary position, you can integrate more pronounced movement with the techniques, stepping laterally or diagonally as required (both forward and back). You can also integrate vicious low-line kicks using the same principle, either “jabbing” with your kicks from the lead leg (accompanying your hand strikes or following them up for emphasis) or stepping through kicks fired from the rear leg (essentially performing the stance shift by firing a kick and planting the kicking leg in the opposite stance).

To learn to do this and to do it well is to master Stover’s “attack, attack, attack” philosophy. It will facilitate almost everything you do in combatives and even weapons training, if you move as an integrated and efficient human being. ♠

The key to good technique is to keep your hands, feet, and hips straight and centered. If you are centered, you can move freely. The physical center is your belly; if your mind is set there as well, you are assured of victory in any endeavor.

- Morihei Ueshiba