

On The Lightning Phase – Sensei Sylph Dominic Hawkins - Mar 2019

Studying a Martial Art can seem complex at first, with a seemingly endless and comprehensive syllabus, lots of different names, words, categories, rules, and so on.

Once you start to see the “forest for the trees”, and gain some perspective on the underlying themes and connection, you will find that there are a few basic qualities and principals which underlie a large portion of the study, and that most of the techniques will be interpretations or variations on these.

In Hoshinden, there are 12 fundamental Kata (patterns) and 12 advanced Kata.

The 12 basic patterns are taught at the White Belt level (the very beginning level) as slow, basic practice of moving, learning the principals at work and discovering how to work with a partner in classes.

The majority of the rest of the grading syllabus in Hoshinden is then full of “variations” on these basic Kata. Sometimes the techniques are clearly direct variations such as when a Kata involves a defence from a strike to the face, and then higher grade techniques involve the exact same style of defence, but from a grab/choke/wrist grab/etc..

Sometimes the techniques are less clearly direct variations, and will vary the use of the “principals” rather than directly copying the physical motions such as when a Kata involves confusing or tricking the other person by providing a “feint” or a false attack to hide a different intended strike or control.

The higher grade techniques could look completely different from the outside, but subtly the same tactics are employed, maybe using a hand to distract instead of a kick, or perhaps using a scary face instead of a hand, and so forth.

Lightning Phase study is a good example of this. The techniques rarely look similar to each other as we move from White belt to Black belt study, but the same theme is playing out again and again. Confusing, distracting, causing the opponent to focus somewhere other than where the actual strike/control/threat is or will come from.

This can seem hard to grasp at first, but you soon develop a knack for being able to distill what the underlying “themes” are in the feelings of movement and the ways that the techniques play out, and this will help you greatly in the higher grade study when you will need to think more on your feet and slow techniques turn to more free-form application with other high grade students.

The quality and characteristic feeling of Lightning Quality can be described with words such as:

Scary / distracting / at-a-loss / varying / changing / off-putting /
disconcerting / confusing / shocking / disastrous / leveraging

Lightning Phase qualities involve moving through physical space in confusing ways, not necessarily in obvious patterns. It teaches us about using the up and down 45* angles rather than just playing out techniques horizontally. We start to see more lunging and kneeling, drawing partners down and in as well as up

and out at angles. It uses its' shock and surprising tactics to cause the opponent to bring their focus back inside of their own body, checking on their own balance and structure, and then utilises that moment to make changes and attacks. In this way the techniques become "invisible". Not because of any magical powers, but because the other person's focus is busy, and they often miss seeing/feeling/noticing key changes by the defender.

Its' primary point of focus on the body (the main area of the body that it is seeking to manipulate directly/indirectly) is the Head / the mind.

We are reminded from classical Buddhism that off-balancing the mind often off-balances the body, but that the reverse is not necessarily true.

The ideas behind Lightning Phase qualities are far more psychological than physical, and while it teaches us physical motions and techniques that control the body and spine via the head, its' true value lies in learning how to confuse, trick, manipulate and cause doubt.

Martial Art cultures have many stories about these types of qualities, and they are often reflected in the stories of the old-wise teachers and the young-students.

One such story is of a young swordsman who ventures from town to town, demanding duels with the "greatest fighting in the town" only to leave them battered and move on, claiming a win. Eventually the young swordsman arrives a humble mountain town and demands that the town produce their greatest fighter. A wise old man steps forward and volunteers. The young swordsman laughs, pitying the old man who he is about to destroy.

The old man tells the young swordsman that he will duel him at dawn the next day, on the edge of the village farm.

The next day, at sunrise, the young swordsman arrives and is chest-puffed in his confidence. He waits for the wise old man to arrive. After many hours pass, and the sun is now overhead, the wise old man arrives to meet the young swordsman who is now red faced with anger, hands clenched and hot in rage. He slanders the old man and attacks him with a great strike. The wise old man, expecting the young swordsman to be lost in his own anger, unable to clearly see the world for what it is, pretends to receive the strike into his side, gripping his side and screaming in agony.

The young swordsman steps back and looks down at his side, only to see a dagger lodged into his abdomen. He stumbles backwards and collapses. The wise old man takes him home to his house in the village and nurses him back to health. They spend many weeks talking and conversing. The young swordsman becomes a part of the local village and stays on as one of their members. He begs the wise old man to take him on as a student, and the old man says that he will but only if the young swordsman can answer his question. He presents a riddle to the young swordsman. "How does one defeat an enemy in the greatest way?"

The young swordsman smiles and answers "By making him your friend".

Following the dualistic model of reality which all of the Phases follow, Lightning

Quality can be constructive and destructive relative to the circumstance of application, and it will either be Evoking and Exciting (Constructive Aspect) or Dissipating and Confusing (Destructive Aspect), both to the giver (Tori) or the receiver (Uke) of the technique.