

Judo Ron-36- Beware of the power of Hidarikiki hito (left handed person)

Having suffered constant difficulties with his approaches and performing badly before left handed judokas, one of my students asked me why he could maneuver well with right handed persons and yet, when confronted with left handed judokas, he was confused, scared, and hesitant? My first answer was: "In order to apply the principle of Ju, you need to harmonize yourself with the movements of all kinds of opponents thus, try to know yourself better and apply yourself to the study of opponents."

This essay is meant to be a cursory study about the hidden powers that may be displayed by left handed judokas, to demystify their behaviors and to propose a practical approach to better understand them. This approach requires that you always do your best and enter into harmony with the opponent when performing efficient techniques during judo practices. Sensei Mifune, the famous 10th Dan has written in his book "Canon of Judo" that "*when trainee gets afraid of the opponent, he may become too cautious and stiffens up both spiritually and physically.*"ⁱ

Throughout history, being left handed was often associated with some negative social stigma. In many languages, including English, the word "right" also means "correct" or "proper." The right hand has mostly been associated with skill and performance: the Latin word for right-handed is *dexter*, as in dexterity. We also find the Spanish term *diestro* and the Italian's *destra*, which both mean "right-handed" and "skillful".

In so far as the significations associated with the left, we find more negative terms and colloquial expressions used to refer to a left-handed person, e.g. "southpaw" or "goofy". Some are just slang or jargon words such as the expression «Ciotóg» in relation to "ciotach" meaning "awkward". In the French language, «gauche» means "left" and is also a prevalent synonym of "maladroit", meaning "clumsy".

There are a few exceptions to this negative penchant such as *lloq'e* used to positively identify left-handers among the indigenous peoples of the Andes. Peoples of the Andes consider that left-handers possess special spiritual abilities, including magic and healing. It is reported that a Third Sapa Inca by the name Lloque Yupanqui was a left-hander, his name when reading it in the local dialect Quechua means «the glorified lefthander». Finally, we understand that in tantric Buddhism, the left hand is associated with wisdom.

In a more technical context, the word 'sinistra' may be used with reference to 'left-handed'. It derives from *sinestra*, a Latin word meaning 'left'. A left hander is therefore a person who prefers to make use of his left hand for activities that require fine motor skills; and it can be said that his easiness and talent are outstanding when the left hand is in use.

There are many people who demonstrate an ability to use either or both their hands with an equal amount of skill in the performance of identical tasks. We interpret this ability as a demonstration of ambidexterity. Certain tasks may be accomplished efficiently at times with the left or the right hand with equal ease.

In the past century, various scientific studies have been undertaken in an attempt to pinpoint the reason for some people having a predisposition towards using their left hands. The question of whether hand-use preference, referred to generally as handedness, is specified by biology/genetics, by cultural training, by pathological reasons such as birth stress, or by a combination of these etiologies has been addressed and the debate continues. At the forefront of the theories, we find that genetics is believed to have the greater part to play in determining a person's preference for use of his hands. (Genes called LRRTM1) However genetics is not the only cause of left handedness and scientists believe in the presence of certain non-inherent causes too.

It is believed that about 85-90% of the human population is right handed and this majority takes that superiority in number as a "fait accompli". Let us face it, today, we live in a 'right-handers' world. As a consequence, most objects and equipments have been tooled for their use. Most of the right-handers never had to struggle and adapt in the same way as the left hander, who for generations, had to make do with tools and equipments designed for others. Fortunately, in the last few years, there has been some increase in the production of tools and equipments for the use of the left handed person including computer mouse and touch pad.

Left hander's have had the intelligence, the energy and the discipline to adapt and survive. Although in a minority, historical facts revealed that people with a dominant left hand have become high achievers. This is mainly because their brains are structured to improve their abilities and the improved language centers found in their brain. Left handedness need not necessarily be passed on from parents to the other generations. Some scientific studies have associated certain personality types as having a predisposition towards left handedness, or even vice versa. i.e., left handed people may develop certain personality characteristics that will predispose them to realize some outstanding feat.

This may be a reason why you find many artists, musicians and sports geniuses that are left handed. You need to observe them carefully in order to note that they operate differently. It has been found that left handed people don't use sequential processing to process information like right handed people do. Instead, they tend to use visual stimulus for processing information. In fact, they seem to be great at multi tasking as they use a synthesis method of dividing information, and thus are able to frequently think out of the boxes and find a solution to a myriad of problems.

Regardless of some mechanical difficulties encountered by lefthanders, the situation is not alarming as their resourcefulness make them very adaptive. It is re-assuring to know that some of history's most important, influential and successful people were themselves left handed and amongst them we find: Leonardo Da Vinci; Michelangelo; Pablo Picasso; Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart; Ludwig Van Beethoven; Napoleon; Marie Curie and Albert Einstein. It is also interesting to note that several American presidents in the last 30 years were left-handed persons such as: Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, Gerald Ford and Barack Obama are left-handed. The list goes on.



Public photo of Saigo's monument in a Japanese park

In our own world of judo, every judoka knows about the left handed and powerful technique used by Shiro Saigo in 1886 (Yama Arashi) during the Tokyo Metropolitan police judo match that marked the superiority of the Kodokan over rival Jujutsu schools. Since then, we have had numerous world and international champions who favored the left handed attacks; just to illustrate our point: Yusushiro Yamashita frequently won with his left O Soto Gari and Kosei Inoue made good use of his Hidari Uchi Mata to become Olympic champion. We need to keep these as references to our subsequent discussion. Meanwhile, let us pursue our understanding of lefthanders.

It is of common knowledge that the human hand orientation process is starting in the womb. Clinical observations have revealed that during the developmental stages, when the left hand is predominantly held close to the mouth, there are chances that the fetus will develop a preference for the left hand when reaching the new borne stage.

There exists a Geschwind theory, named after the neurologist who proposed it that goes as follow: *“that variation in levels of testosterone associated with the development of the fetus during pregnancy shapes the development of the fetal brain. He revealed that “the testosterone suppresses the growth of the left cerebral hemisphere and so more neurons migrate to the right hemisphere resulting in the highly developed right hemisphere better suited to function as the center of language and handedness. The fetus is more likely to become left-handed, since the right hemisphere controls the left half of the body.”* ii

The choice of using either hand is call “hand dominance” and is the common term used to describe our preference with using the right or left hand in the performance of most tasks in our daily live. These tasks can range from holding utensils, some objects or equipments, grabbing and stacking blocks, to drawing and writing. As the brain matures and its functions begin to differentiate more, the hand dominance begins to emerge. Consistent hand dominance is known to be more apparent somewhere between two and three years of age and is usually fully completed by age 6 years. Another study revealed the influence of parents as such. *“Hand dominance is determined largely by genetics. Studies show that only 2% of children of right-handed parents are left-handed. On the other hand, 42% of children with left-handed parents are left-handed.”*iii

Several historical theories have attempted to link the left hander with the practice of using tools, shields and weapons over several centuries, but the proof has not been made with accurate precision. Psychologist such as Carl Jung once believed that we have a collective prejudice for the right hand because *of the* rightward movement of our writing. He suggested that: *“The right is ruled by conscious reason. The left is the side of the heart, the emotions, where one is affected by the unconscious.”*

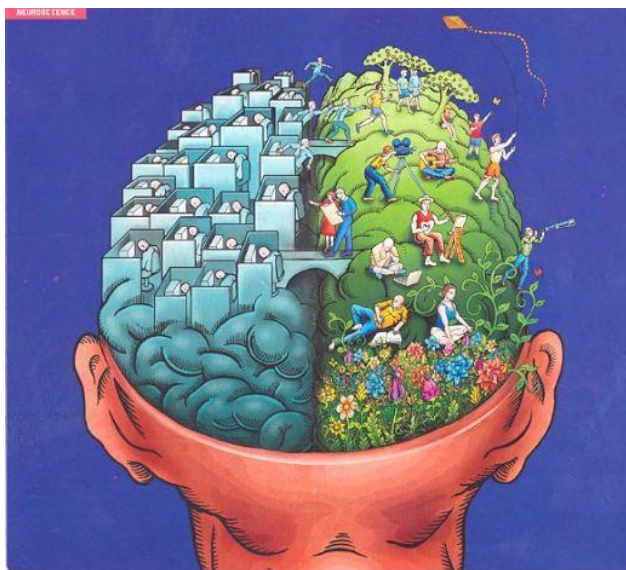
Long after Jung's statement, findings from modern sciences confirmed the different roles with regards to the two hemispheres of our brain e.g. the right hemisphere relates to the left side of the body is associated with imagination, non-linear and/or metaphorical thinking; it is the very essence fuelling the artistic and inspirational works. Hereunder is a summary of these functions:

Left Brain

- **Verbal** - the power of speech to describe things specifically
- **Analytical** - a one-step-at-a-time way of thinking, one plus one equal two
- **Symbolic** - signs to represent things, such as male and female stop or go
- **Rational, Logical, Linear** - making decisions based on facts which are available; reasoned arguments; logical progression of ideas.
- **Digital** - using numbers, as in arithmetic

Right Brain

- **Nonverbal** - body language; an awareness of things which cannot necessarily be articulated.
- **Synthetic** - collecting ideas, feelings and facts together to form a whole.
- **Intuitive** - sudden, inexplicable insights not necessarily resulting from any particular train of thought but springing fully-formed into consciousness; the 'hunch' of the outstanding detective; the problem solving dream.
- **Non-temporal** - no sense of time in terms of hours, minutes, days; often observed in situations where one is so involved in something that 'time flies'
- **Non-rational** - the ability to suspend belief; children display this facility when becoming totally immersed in imaginative games; and adults who respond wholeheartedly to films, music and poetry have also entered the non-rational world of fantasy
- **Spatial** - orientation in space; understanding how parts of a thing fit together to form a whole.



Representation of both brain hemispheres from Hubpage.com

In his book *Right-Hand, Left-Hand*, Chris McManus of the University College London argues that the proportion of left-handers is increasing and left-handed people as a group have historically produced an above-average quota of high achievers. He says that left-handed' brains are structured differently in a way that increases their range of abilities, and the genes that determine left-handedness also govern development of the language centers of the brain.

To re-emphasize the physical potential of left handed people, we turn to Dr. Pamela Bryden, a professor of kinesiology at Sir Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo whose experimental work found that lefties were definitely more flexible and adaptable when she measured their abilities to perform tasks with their non-dominant hand.

We now have an idea as to who the lefthanders are and how they came about. In the following section, we will try to tackle how we can recognize them on the tatamis and how we can better harmonize with them in order to be more efficient. Let us peruse the judo literature on the subject.

The Kodokan new Japanese English dictionary defines Hidarikiki on page 76 as a general term for a left- handed person, but the judo expression is also used to indicate a person skilled at using a left stance. The left natural posture known as hidari shizentai involves standing normally with the left foot forward.^{iv} Hereunder we note that during a twenty years interval in the early 1900's, that the founder of Judo, Jigoro Kano Sensei was much at ease performing his favorite technique on the left handed side.



Photos from Kodokan Archives

Notwithstanding that the left hander may be as skillful as the right handed person; you have to expect that he will have a tendency not to reveal his strength or his favorite Waza until the last minute. He is to be expected to remain more flexible and adaptable both in mind and body. You will have to face his determination, courage and vitality as you would with any good or outstanding opponent seeking excellence in his techniques therefore, you must not let go of your vigilance.

If we are thinking of nullifying the opponent's sources of power, we must begin to think, judge and act in accordance with what we can see and feel. Let us begin our discovery of the left hander at work, by reviewing the initial natural posture addressed as the Shizen Tai, and how we can recognize his displacements known as Tai sabaki and the ways he or she is about to grip the costume of the opponent referred to as Kumite.

Firstly: about the natural posture.

When confronted with a left hander, you may expect some unusual body movements. The initial natural posture will most likely take the form of the shizentai-hontai that will permit him to enter directly from the front and provide him with a maximum variety of opportunities for making use of circular movements without being detected. By adapting a swift and light posture, he will not reveal his tendencies until the last moment. When he feels stronger, he may resort to adopting the left natural posture or hidari shizentai, where you can recognize his placing of the left foot forward while still maintaining proper balance. At times, he may change his grip to facilitate his entries or alter the distance he has to cover before he can enter into a technique.

To neutralize him at the source, you need to devoid the opponent of an early opportunity to take the offensive. This can be accomplished with the use of a proper Kuzushi applied at either the left front corner (Hidari mae sumi), the rear corner (Hidari ato sumi) or to his side (Hidari Yoko), all three will force him to displace his weight from the center of his foot towards the outer edge or side of the foot thus rendering the front leg lighter and rendering him more vulnerable.

Secondly: about the displacement.

This is the in-between period called Tai-sabaki (body movement) where his entire body mass is on the move and where he needs to keep balance of his center of gravity and makes use of all the coordination possible to synchronize the motions of his hands, feet, and waist and keep them all aligned within the direction of least resistance. Such alignment is normally traced by an imaginary curved line linking his head with toes.

You have to be attentive to discover a broken form or a broken line produced by the opponent's movements. This failure in coordination can be seen through time-lapses occurring from the time taken for the identification of the opportunity, the intention to act and with the placement of the body at the right time and location. These precious gaps represent the moments of hesitation that can be turned to your favor. You can also profit from the delicate alignment of the body when the feet cross each other or when the lefthander becomes over extended. Sudden pressure exercised by the hands to pull-push or lift out of synchronization is another signal that indicates an opportunity to quickly counter the attack and turn the tide in your favor.

Thirdly: about the gripping.

The "Kumite" or the action of seizing the opponent's costume is the initial maneuver at the beginning of a match and prior to executing a technique. Here is where the lefthander is revealed most often. The placement of the right hand or left hand will show his preferences and distinguish the style of fighting that will follow.

Your responses to the kumikata (form of gripping) is fighting for dominance, staying neutral in order to observe or accepting the changing hands positions to better entice the opponent into your own strategy. Assuming constant control and dominance by force is not always rewarding in judo. Shortening the distance between players or extending the maneuvering zone for improved displacement is somewhat crucial. One is better to assume superiority by mastery of techniques and true craftsmanship in the application of strategies and tactics.

What you will need to do when fighting the lefthander, is to identify the hand that will initiate the leverage that will occasion the Kuzushi. High on the lapel or around the collar, the placement of the hand will show the preference. This is a first sign or indication of the provenance of the attack, and once identified, neutralization or correction will be mandatory before it becomes a threat. To counter the forthcoming offensive, you will to stay relaxed and attentive in order to capture subtle shifts in gripping fingers and body movements and then be ready to react with lightning speed.

As you train to counter the offensive moves of the opponent, you need to practice several forms of kumikata in relation with right and left handed grips as well as dealing with other asymmetrical forms that are in vogue from time to time in competition circles.

Conclusion

Regardless of the type of opponent you are facing, you should always strive to do your best and seek excellence in performance. The perfect technique giving you the most satisfaction is the one accomplish at the right time, in the right direction and without much effort or conscious thought. Always remember that judo is performed by judoka who can feel, judge and act according to the situation of the moment.

Have a good practice.

Ronald Désormeaux

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ⁱ Kyuzo Mifune, *Canon of Judo*, Seibundo-Shinkosha, Tokyo, 1963
<http://en.wikipedia.org/left.handedness>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://beinglefthanded.wordpress.com/>

^{iv} T.Kawamura,T.Daigo, Kodokan *New Japanese-English Dictionary of Judo, Kodokan*, 2000