

A KICK IN PRINT

Shihan Michael Berger pens
Master Class: Karate Kicking Techniques
by Norm Zareski

"A martial art should have... a philosophical or spiritual component." – Shihan Michael Berger

While he could not have known it at the time, Michael Berger's life script had already been written by the age of 7. Having grown up in Garden Grove with a keen interest in the "Kung Fu" television series, Berger says, "I really liked that show and everything it stood for." At the time there were no martial arts schools in his area so he developed an ancillary interest in boxing and wrestling.

After moving to Utah at age 13, he was eventually awarded a wrestling scholarship to the University of Utah and while majoring in English he developed a strong appreciation of the written word that would ultimately intersect with his life long dedication to the martial arts.

Because of his wrestling skills, Berger was invited to join a judo team, which was the step he needed to embark on a path into the rarified world of the Japanese martial arts.

Two years of teaching English in Japan after college presented the opportunity to immerse himself totally in the study of Japanese culture and karate, and the rest is history.

Now fluent in Japanese, Berger holds a fifth degree black belt and for the last few years he has regularly been teaching Shotokan Karate at Angels Gate Cultural Center in San Pedro. "I help integrate the lessons we learn in karate-do (the way of karate) into the lives of my students to help them succeed in other areas [like] academics," says Berger.

Each lesson begins with meditation because "it helps develop better focus – important in martial arts as well as everything we do in life."

He was drawn originally to San Pedro in 2003 by the Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation, which was looking to get better utilization out of the newly renovated Cabrillo Beach Bath House.

The people of San Pedro, says Berger, have a "special kind of character... they have a warrior spirit," and

adds, "I'm proud to be a part of Angels Gate."

Over the years Berger drew upon his reading and writing skills and he published a few articles in a variety of martial art magazines and "about a year and a half ago, a publisher called and wanted me to write a book," he comments.

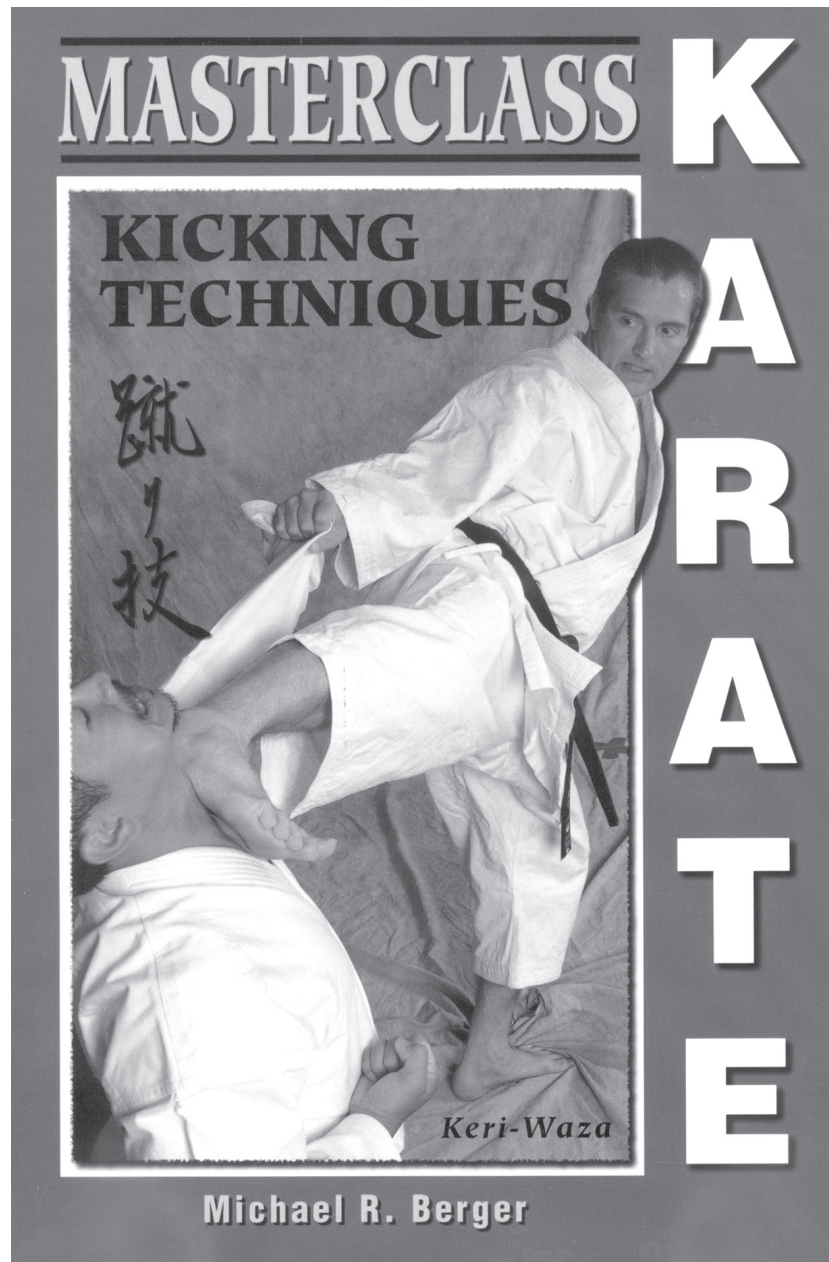
The result, *Master Class: Karate Kicking Techniques* was published in August 2007 by Empire Books and is now available in most of the major book retailers. There are many books on karate but this book is different Berger says, "because it's all about kicking... and there're not many [books] that are exclusively on kicking techniques."

Since these kicking techniques comprise about one-half of the practitioners' arsenal in karate, he relates that "the proper use of kicking techniques opens up a full array of possibilities in both offensive and defensive maneuvers."

"When the entire body can be used with equal ease, when the techniques flow fluidly, effortlessly and spontaneously, without the limitation of conscious thought, only then do we get a glimpse of understanding of the true nature of the art of Karate."

Berger presents his material from a very traditional perspective accompanied by a lot of photographs and detailed descriptions of the body mechanics involved. "Karate is a vehicle to refine and perfect your own character," he says, and he favors a traditional approach with "focus on precision of the execution and the body mechanics," and the perfection of the techniques which are "metaphorically about...refining the self." Since its publication three months ago the book has been well received by many in the martial arts fraternity.

After thirty years as a martial arts devotee, Berger is



clearly comfortable living in two worlds. He exists in the familiarity of a western culture but embraces a personal lifestyle rooted in eastern ideology. Since retiring from competitive martial arts about three years ago, Berger has been concentrating on teaching while also continuing to learn. "I'm back in grad school studying Chinese medicine," he says, and is also a dedicated practitioner of Zen Meditation.

His ultimate goal, it seems, is to integrate the mental and physical discipline of eastern philosophy, and to introduce and nurture these concepts with his students and patients in order to solidify the mind-body connection.

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Michael Berger teaches traditional Japanese style Shotokan Karate at Angels Gate Cultural Center (3601 S. Gaffey Street) on Tues and Thurs evenings. Classes for all level are held between 5:30p to 9p. For more information about Berger's classes, call (323) 842-0701 or log on to <http://www.angelsgateart.org/classes.html> or <http://www.wayoflifekarate.com>.