



Philosophy of the Week

Sensei John

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*Dedicated with gratitude to God,
my immediate and extended family,
and my Harmony By Karate family—
all of whom I love dearly.*



Contents

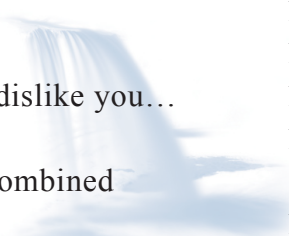
Biography of Sensei John ix

Foreword xi

Introduction xv

The Philosophies xvii

Lead by example	1
Respond softly before responding strongly	2
Sharing challenges deepens relationships	3
Being humble is not a weakness	4
Accept diversity	5
Do not let possessions determine	
Friendships	6
Listen, then speak	7
Teaching is self-improvement	8
What is meant to happen, will happen	9
Invest time in relationships	10
Relationships reflect us	11
Live simply	12
If it seems some people dislike you...	13
Face truth	14
Prayer and meditation, combined with action...	15



Expect nothing from people; gain everything	16
You cannot receive what you have have not given	17
Make every interaction as positive as possible	18
Focus and action define achievement	19
Conquering weaknesses improves strength	20
The most successful person has often had the most failures	21
Live in the moment	22
Forgiving is forgetting	23
Worrying about mistakes you have made only creates more mistakes	24
Helping others helps you	25
Keep your word	26
Impatience hinders self-improvement	27
Your thoughts create your world	28
Changing what you say changes what you think	29
Support others how they want to be supported	30
Help others by revealing their strengths	31
People who are different make a difference	32
Stand on the outside	33
Successful leaders treat followers equally	34

Real success is being content with where you are	35
Gain almost always comes with some loss	36
Self-pity is wasteful	37
Attachment to possessions is the loss of self	38
Unity conquers any challenge	39
Mastery is a perception	40
Work smarter, not harder	41
Speak your mind	42
There is a time to be silent	43
Every day you live is an opportunity	44
To love without need, is to love	45
Those who do not fear death, live life	46
People themselves must choose to change	47
If you want a friend, be a friend	48
Quench your spiritual thirst	49
You attract what you are	50
Through confusion comes enlightenment	51
Discover your own truth	52





Drawn by Michele Bielski

Sensei John is the owner and head teacher at the *Harmony By Karate* school in New York City. He began his martial arts training at the age of eight in order to be able to defend himself in the streets of Brooklyn. A black belt by age nineteen, he began teaching adults at Nassau Community College, and later developed a program for the children at the naval base next door—an experience that taught him the importance of patience and simplicity.

When he enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1984, he continued teaching martial arts to both civilians and military personnel, and also developed a martial arts dance act, which he performed nationwide. Upon honorable discharge in 1988, he continued performing, appearing on stage at Harlem's Apollo Theatre and on seventy-two episodes of *Club MTV*. It was at this time that he also moved on to open his own karate school in Ridgewood, New Jersey and started teaching at New York's Vertical Club.

In 1995, having found great satisfaction in helping to improve the lives of many of New York's "movers and shakers" through karate instruction, Sensei John applied to open a school in New York City's illustrious Reebok Sports Club/NY. After an intensive eight-month interview process, he was accepted on the basis of his answer to the inquiry regarding why he desired to teach there; he replied, "Because the members of your club are the leaders of society. If I want to make a positive impact on society, I need to teach them."

In 2001, Sensei John became the first American to teach at the Nippon Club, a prestigious Japanese social organization; his desire was to bridge the gap between U.S. and Japanese relations. He has made two trips to Japan for in-depth study of its culture and martial arts.

Throughout his career, Sensei John, with the support of family, students and friends, has won numerous karate tournaments, and has enjoyed a plethora of other accomplishments. His school has been featured in *Blackbelt Magazine*—as well as in many other publications, both domestic and international—and on *The National Body Challenge* series on the Discovery Health Channel. For three years, Sensei John spoke about his *Philosophy of the Week* every Friday morning on Z-100 radio, in order to reach out to New Yorkers. In addition, in 1997 he produced an event called *Universal Harmony Day*, which aimed to raise money and awareness to fight child abuse. In 2006, with the support of ABC Television, September 11th was declared an annual *Universal Harmony Day*—a holiday for giving and for celebrating humanity.

In 2008, Sensei John formed a partnership with African organization, *MaAfrika Tikkun*. He and his family personally hosted two young women from an impoverished South African community for over two months, providing them with the intensive physical and emotional training they would need to achieve their goal of returning home to open their own *Harmony By Karate* school. The school will provide a haven for the sick, abandoned, and abused children in their community, and Sensei John will remain their mentor from abroad. His goal is to continue to help improve society through his philosophies and martial arts teachings.

For more information on Sensei John and his school,
please visit www.HarmonyByKarate.com

Foreword

Karate is the study of self-defense. But what does it mean—exactly—to protect the self? The masses might suggest that it is to be able to punch faster, kick stronger, and break enemy flesh or bones more effortlessly, than the untrained fighter. More insightful responses might even recognize it as learning effectively to escape threatening situations or individuals without having to fight. But these definitions, while they address significant aspects of self-defense, do not begin to touch upon the heart of martial arts training. Much like the individual who enters the dojo on his or her first day of class seeking to shed blood, the answers above explore only the physicality of combat; they wrongly ignore the other kinds of energy that arise within a karateka when he or she is training or fighting—the invisible but powerful metaphysical realms of being: the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual.

To fail to realize that these things are in fact at the core, and not in the periphery, of protecting the self—and that physical ability develops only secondary to metaphysical strength—is to gravely misunderstand the meaning of self-defense. Any person who insists otherwise, is unaware; any martial artist who does so is, as a student, misguided and, as a role model, irresponsible.

My sensei, John Mirrione, has been the most

responsible of role models; he works tirelessly every day, brainstorming ways to bring our school's curriculum to higher and higher levels of integration of the physical and the metaphysical. Sensei John's original *Philosophy of the Week* methodology is only one example—but perhaps the best one—of his commitment to bring his students to a new, deeper level of training. His philosophies are not simply addendums to our physical lessons, nor are they intended for whimsical mind exercise; they are simple but profound truths meant to engage teachers and students in mind- and body-changing dialogue, which penetrates and eventually transforms our level of training and physical ability.

These truths, however, do not apply solely to martial artists, nor are their effects limited to our lives in the dojo. Their meanings, and the discussions they provoke, extend far into the world at large, deeply affecting our existence therein. After all, the dojo is truly a microcosm of the world: a group of people bound together in experiences of conflict and love, bondage and freedom, confusion and knowledge, pain and growth. Therefore, the same principles of respect, tolerance, kindness, and patience, apply both in training and in living daily. One of my favorite philosophies, for instance, is “Live by example.” Although this is especially imperative in the training environment, where one never knows at any given moment what kohai (less experienced student) may be following his or her lead, it is perhaps even more essential for all of us in society to learn to conduct ourselves in this way—to live in accordance with our greatest values, and to recognize ourselves in every moment as the constant teachers and leaders we all are.

As martial artists, what we practice in training, we always try to extend into our lives—otherwise, both our spiritual presence and physical ability in the dojo would be somewhat false. After all, one

cannot truly be a warrior in only one facet of life, for a warrior has the same heart no matter where he goes, or what he is doing. So, as you can see, the philosophies offered in this book are in no way limited to the martial artist. We humans are all warriors—and we all have the potential to love, to respect, to protect, to teach, and to grow as the true warrior does; we must only choose to do so.

At *Harmony By Karate*, our philosophical discussions at the close of each class bring us closer to each other, closer to ourselves, and closer to understanding the meaning of what exactly we are doing here in our craft—a sometimes elusive, but continually rewarding, light. I am so glad that Sensei John has chosen to share these philosophies with the rest of the world (martial artists and non-martial artists alike), and thereby to open a quite necessary public dialogue. Use these thoughts to facilitate your own inward treks; please talk about them, and please do so often. Understand Sensei John's explanations, create your own interpretations, and most importantly, live every day by what you know (and learn) to be true. Because whether we are aware of it or not, we are all role models; we are all teachers. Every day.

I would like to thank Sensei John for all his passion, skill, love, and most of all, for continually teaching me more than motion. Now you too hold in your hands the fruits of his teaching. Enjoy. Learn. Choose. Live. Whatever you do, go forward.

Faryn Sand
Harmony by Karate
Student and Instructor

I n t r o d u c t i o n

This book is the product of twenty-nine years of martial arts training and even more years of existing on this earth. The philosophies contained herein I have developed through interactions with my *Harmony By Karate* family, my immediate family and friends, my greatest teachers, myself, and with the world at large. Some of them, I believe, are unique, while others you may have heard before—albeit perhaps in a different way—spoken by various spiritual masters. The Teachers have been repeating and restating many of the same truths for centuries, and if some of my statements echo past philosophers or spiritual guides, it is because I share a consciousness with them. As I have said, however, each philosophy in this book has come to me through my own very personal interactions and experiences as both a student and a teacher here in this life. My deep hope is that those who read and seriously consider the content of this book shall begin to bring themselves to a higher state of consciousness, inner peace, and enjoyment of this beautiful life.

This book contains fifty-two philosophies: one for each week in the year. When reading and reviewing each one, keep in mind that it is philosophy and not fact. **I strive to live by these teachings, but I am far from perfect.** Whatever viewpoints you may


have while reading are your personal understandings; my interpretations are simply mine. You need to define your own truth while reading, contemplating, and discussing what is offered to you in the pages ahead. Keep in mind, though, that it is important to keep an open mind and heart while reading, for this will help you to continue to grow mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. And remember that this is only the first step; once you have begun to evolve yourself, then you can begin to spread this light to all those around you, they can begin to do the same, and there will soon emerge a wonderful contagion of consciousness.

The Philosophies



1

Lead by example



The best way to help others towards a goal
is actively to work towards that goal yourself;
the best way to teach others to act in a positive way
is to act positively.

Your example — whether you realize it or not —
strongly influences the behavior of everyone around you.

You must act with care and responsibility,
for in every moment many are following your lead.



2

Respond softly before responding strongly

You can never calm another person's anger
with your own.

Your first response in solving a problem
must come from a place of calmness.

Offer options for peace
before releasing words of conflict.



3

Sharing challenges deepens relationships

When you are brave enough to talk about your fears, you can find comfort. Listening to other's troubles can remind you that you are not alone, and in addition, you can learn from the advice you give. Sharing your troubles with others tells them that you trust them, and often shows them that they can trust you. Remember, though, that it is not shared feelings of anger and cynicism that bind people together in true friendship; it is the shared desire to rise and face our challenges with great inner strength. To help one another achieve that goal should always be the reason for sharing troubles.



4

Being humble is not a weakness; it is a great strength

People who are the most humble are
often the most secure with themselves.

Ego pushes us to prove our strength and ability:
we may brag, judge other people openly, and so on.

If we accept and value who we are, we feel
little need to prove ourselves or to criticize others.



5

Accept diversity

Accept, and even embrace, that others are different from you— that they have different cultures, religions, and points of view. If you are confident in yourself, you do not need to dominate; you recognize diversity as the spice of life, and as an opportunity to learn new things from other people. Accepting these differences is crucial— for your peace of mind, and for peace in the world.



6

Do not let possessions determine friendships

Do not make the mistake of choosing friends based on what they possess, or on what they can do for you. Be friends with people because of who they are. Friendship is about mutual support and the rich exchange of love, not about material advantage.



7

Listen, then speak

Listening is vital to good communication. One who most loves the sound of one's own words is foolish, for he or she learns very little from others, and contributes little of value to those in need of support. This kind of individual will find that, eventually, others will no longer listen to him or her either. So, listen first, then respond honestly; you will find that others teach you, trust you, and listen to you in kind.





Teaching is self-improvement



Teaching reinforces what you know, and also reveals how much you do not yet know. This creates a thirst for more knowledge, which drives you to teach more, creating a cycle of progress: always teaching and always learning.



9

What is meant to happen, will happen

When you “go with the flow,” you do not surrender control of your life. You surrender, rather, resistance to the lessons that life teaches — the gifts that, even if they are challenges, allow you to grow wiser, to evolve, and to obtain what is meant for you.





Invest time in relationships

Your relationships with others guide you and greatly help define your path. Devote quality time to all the positive relationships in your life; good connections of any kind are essential for your well-being on all levels.



11

Relationships reflect us

The people with whom you associate mirror what you think of yourself. Confusion or anger places you near people with those qualities. True happiness pulls joyful, confident, and kind people to you. Also, how you act towards other people is often a result of how you feel about yourself.

For example, when we are insecure, we tend to judge others; however, the more we value ourselves, the more we tend to see others' positive attributes clearly, and the deeper our relationships with them become.



12


Live simply

Avoid excess material possessions. Devote yourself passionately to a few things in life. When difficult situations arise, try not to get caught in complicated webs of thought and fear. Always follow your intuition, for it allows the greatest clarity of mind, heart, and soul.



13

If it seems that some dislike you, it is often because they want to be like you.



Unfortunately, sometimes people may act as if they dislike you because, at heart, they envy you.

Some may resent you for what you have, or who you are.

Respond by offering positive energy to those people to help them attain their goals, and this will weaken their jealousy.



14

Face truth

Facing the truth—in our own lives and in our history as a people—is one of life’s greatest challenges. But recognizing weakness, in yourself or in situations, is the first necessary step towards either accepting what you cannot change, or changing what you can. One who allows oneself clearly to see the truth is always happier, for such an individual is most honest with him or herself, and with others. This honesty leads to harmony. Confusion dissipates. Choices become easier. Life improves.



15

Prayer and meditation, combined with action, make anything possible

Tapping into your inner strength, connecting to the great forces that exist all around you (whatever you believe them to be)—and acting in harmony with what you discover—will surround you with a light that will endure in the greatest darkness.



16

Expect nothing from people, and gain everything

When others do not meet your expectations of them, you may often end up feeling unhappy. But it is not wise to feel deprived of something you never truly had, to feel loss for something others never willingly offered—this only causes pain. Accept people as they are.

When they do fill your cup by sharing or giving unconditionally, then you will have discovered true treasure, and you can feel deeply blessed and thankful.



17

You cannot receive
what you have not given

Generosity to others will turn the wheel of good fortune in your direction. Giving is getting. However, your intention must be genuinely to help others—otherwise, it is not true generosity.



18

Make every interaction as positive as possible

Try to make every contact, every word, and every gesture a positive one. This creates true connection with those you know and meet, and draws positive people to you. Even if someone else is being negative, try to counter it with positive energy (This is usually the most effective method.); If all else fails, then simply remove yourself from the situation.



19

Focus and action define achievement

Do not simply speak of your desires.

See your goal clearly.

Set your path wisely.

Walk the path!



20

Conquering weaknesses improves strength

No one is invincible or perfect. To be human is to have weaknesses. Make an effort to identify them, remove them, and to live the changes as best you can; you will then be mighty.



21

The most successful person has often had the most failures

Failure leads to success. The greatest achievement in life is to stand up again after falling. Persistently rising after loss draws you closer to success, knowledge, and evolution, and each time you fall, it becomes progressively easier to rise. If you maintain your inner strength, you can learn deeply from your mistakes and reach your full potential: walk upon the stones of failure in your path and you will cross a bridge over a strong river.





Live in the moment



Now is all there is. The past is gone.

The future that you plan for, or worry about, is not yet here.

By living in the present moment, you can forget failures,
forgive mistakes, and rid yourself of fears of repeating them.

To live well in the minutes, days, and years ahead,
focus on *now* in every moment.



23

Forgiving is forgetting

Again, live from this moment on. There is only now—
no one gets to a happy future by reliving a past
fraught with grudges, misunderstandings, and fears.

Live in the present with every human interaction
so that you can enjoy each moment, free of judgment.

Being present will bring you much closer to all your relationships—
both with yourself and with others.



24

Worrying about mistakes you have made only creates more mistakes

To feel inadequate because you have made a mistake
opens the door for more mistakes.

Break the cycle: know that you can learn from your first mistake,
and that you can next time make the right choice;
then, you will.





Helping others helps you

When you do a good deed, for a friend or a stranger, you will feel more alive—more connected to others and to yourself. You will learn by helping others, and such acts of kindness are also repaid in many ways. However, remember that your actions will not truly help you unless your intention is truly to help others.



26

Keep your word

Following through on your commitments defines who you are.

If you say will do something, do it.

The trust that others place in you is not given lightly,

and you must cherish it as a gift.

To keep your word shows that you do,

and so allows others to trust you even more.

Also, it is more likely that others will keep their

promises to you as well.





Impatience hinders self-improvement

Some of us live quickly and want to fulfill our desires quickly as well. Though others may not always keep your pace, impatience can wear on your spirit. The key is to focus on and enhance the one thing you always can control: yourself.



28

Your thoughts create your world

Live every day with thoughts of your life, and of the world, as you would most like to experience it. As your thoughts motivate your actions, and your actions influence others around you, this helps to make that life, and that world, a reality.

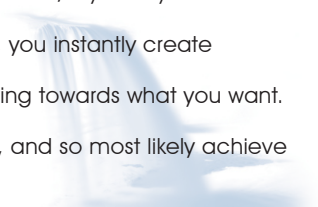


29

Changing what you say changes what you think

Words are thoughts that have a voice. Negative words have few good results and create negative thoughts that lead to more negative words, and so on. Likewise, positive words create more positive thoughts that lead to more positive words, and so on. So, just by changing our vocabulary, you can actually change your thoughts, emotions, and your reality.

For example: If you say *I can't do it*, you automatically create the negative thought that you do not have the ability to achieve what you desire. You then feel unhappy, and therefore do actually have difficulty fulfilling your wish. However, if you say instead *I can do anything*, even if it is difficult, you instantly create the positive thought that you are moving towards what you want. You then feel strong and empowered, and so most likely achieve what you desire.



30

Support others
how they want to be supported

Three rules for helping someone in trouble:

Listen.

Evaluate.

Offer what is needed—
not what you need to offer.



31

Help others by revealing their strengths

Other people may not see their capabilities as clearly as you can. When someone is experiencing difficulty or weakened confidence, you can offer no better gift than encouragement and positive reinforcement.



32

People who are different make a difference

The most successful people throughout history
have often been labeled “different,” “odd,” or “eccentric.”

Be yourself and accept yourself, even if you feel
you are different from many other people.

You are special.

Few are more able to make a difference
than those gifted with an unusual view of the world.



33

Stand on the outside

In your life, others may be untrue and cause you pain.

Step outside of everything for a moment.

If you view difficult situations from the outside,

as though they were not yours, you will be better

able calmly to see the truth, to understand it, and to deal with it.

You will notice that others with less ability to observe

will turn to you for advice.



34

Successful leaders treat followers as equals

True leaders are happy with their role, not because it gives them power over others, but because it allows them to help all achieve higher, common purposes based in love and acceptance. A balance of solid self-esteem and humbleness is the key to great leadership, for it enables fair and equal treatment of everyone.



35

Real success is being content with where you are

No one can ever have everything. Many have worked long and hard to “get it all”, only to learn that true satisfaction is not in winning the often stressful race to the finish, but the experience of a fulfilling journey. We can even come to be content in the face of our greatest challenges if we see them for what they are: opportunities for growth.



36

Gain almost always comes
with some loss

Opportunity often requires some form of sacrifice:
time, energy, or even health, for example.

Before you take action, determine the value
of what you will gain by what it may cost, and try to
figure out a way to create a balance between the two.



37

Self-pity is wasteful

Move forward and leave despair by the wayside.

Allow it to come, and then allow it to pass through you;

do not cling to it, for it is baggage that will waste your energy

and cause you unnecessary pain.



38

Attachment to possessions is the loss of self

Material possessions do not ever fill

the emptiness we may feel within ourselves.

A poor individual with wisdom and compassion for others

is richer than a wealthy but selfish individual

who shares nothing of value.

True fulfillment can only come from within.



39

Unity conquers any challenge

Teamwork and camaraderie—for a common, positive goal—is one of life's greatest gifts. Few forces can stand for long against sustained, passionate teamwork aimed to improve lives or drive progress.



40

Mastery is a perception

Mastery of any given talent is a perception that may vary among different groups of people. A master may be deemed as such in one part of the world, but not in another. For example, if you were to take your talents to another culture, you may be humbled to learn that you are not seen to have the same mastery there. Or, on the other hand, you may be uplifted to learn that there you are highly praised for talents that your own culture or group of peers had not acknowledged. Because such views can change, even from person to person, do not depend on others' perceptions of you to define your own feelings of self-worth.



41

Work smarter, not harder

The most successful and content creatures (and businessmen and athletes) are able to achieve a great deal using as little energy as possible. If you plan your process clearly and act wisely, you can do more using less energy. Then you can use what energy remains to enhance your spirit, your life, and to heighten your sense of inner peace.



42

Speak your mind

Some situations require tact, diplomacy, and negotiation. Others need candor. Sometimes, you must heighten your voice to be heard, or to compel others to take proper action. Just remember always to speak from a place of honesty, and not anger.



43

There is a time to be silent

What you say to others in anger may be remembered forever. If in a particular moment you cannot respond softly and rationally, find the strength to be silent. Eventually you must express your emotions—otherwise they will weaken your body, mind, and spirit; but wait until you are able to speak calmly, rationally, and honestly. This will save you from later regret, and is also very likely to earn you a more positive and understanding response from the other person.



44

Every day you live is an opportunity

Every day is a window to make things better,
to change or improve yourself.

There is much you can control in your daily life
if you can just identify it.

You can then make wise changes each day,
creating new opportunities to reach
your highest goals.



45

To love without need, is to love

Looking for love outside of yourself weakens the love you have to offer. When you feel you need another's love to complete yourself, it is difficult truly to love others. You must first accept, know, and love who you are—only then can you choose to love another because you want to, rather than because you need something from that person. Only then can you love fully, and so truly be loved.



46

Those who do not fear death, live life

Living in fear of bodily death is to be always dying spiritually. Spiritual death may even sometimes lead to physical death in severe cases. If you choose both to accept the notion of death fearlessly, and to live courageously, you will enjoy life to the fullest.





People themselves must choose to change

You cannot help someone who does not want to change.

You can only try to open that person's mind.

In the end, the person himself or herself

must choose to be willing, and then to embrace change.

You have no control over this process;

you can only plant the seed.



48

If you want a friend, be a friend

True friendship is rewarded with true friendship.

Be yourself what you most desire from another.



49

Quench your spiritual thirst

There are many belief systems in the world.

They compete for hearts and minds.

One rule rings true: put your trust in a positive belief system that is suitable for you and that teaches kindness and respect.

True happiness begins within and grows through compassion, meditation, wisdom, and acceptance.



50

You attract what you are

Like attracts like. You receive the same energy you exude. If you feel and offer positive energy to the world around you, you will attract positive people and positive situations; if you feel and offer negative energy to the world around you, you will attract negative people and negative situations. Also, remember that it is not only what you say, but also what you think, that creates your energy and your daily experiences.



51

Through confusion comes enlightenment

To feel confused or lost is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, it is this feeling of a lack of knowledge that drives us forward, since as humans we all want to understand things.

Confusion is a powerful state of mind that inspires us to ask questions we otherwise might not have asked; it is often in our times of deepest confusion and darkness that we ask the biggest questions, find the deepest answers, and reach the greatest light.



52

Discover your own truth

Learning from others is a beautiful process and is vital for our personal growth—mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. However, the greatest lesson is sometimes the one you teach yourself. Discover your own truth; create your Philosophy of the Week:



