



BAKER'S RED IRON DRAGON

# NUNCHAKU

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## BLACK BELT THESIS

**Sensei Eldridge Hawkins, Jr., 4th Degree**

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This document contains a brief overview of the Nunchaku, inclusive of its history and the basic knowledge necessary for the Nunchaku-ka to effectively train and grow as a student of the martial arts. Information contained herein, supplemented by personal video footage, comes from various cited sources and over 20 years of training experience under Master Harry Baker.

Over 20 years ago, I stood in the East Orange, New Jersey, dojo of then, Griffin's Iron Dragon Karate Academy, later renamed Baker's Red Iron Dragon, after my Kenpo teacher Master Harry Baker.<sup>1</sup> At that time, I asked him if I could learn how to use the Nunchucks. He proceeded to remove a pair of wooden Nunchucks from the wall where they hung, called me to the floor and instructed me to hook punch him at regular speed. Demonstrating Nunchaku self-defense, it was at that moment he gave me a very thorough education in the pain these weapons could inflict. He then stated *"if you want to learn how to use them, you must first learn how they feel,...it doesn't take much [to cause a lot of damage]."* This was my first experience/memory of Nunchaku training.

Now many years later he has issued a mandate that I come up with and break down 100 strikes and/or self defense moves prior to further demonstrating the more flashy or freestyle side of the Nunchaku art form to which I have become more partial. As a 4th degree black belt under his instruction, with a desire for higher levels of proficiency and understanding, I have accepted this challenge. Upon immediately beginning research to that end, I discovered that it was one of ED Parker's (father of American Kenpo) traditions to require his black belts write a thesis on a particular topic of relevance for promotion and create a form or Kata of their own. As such, for the joy of it, tradition, and documenting my quest for growth, this missive on the Nunchaku's history and potential applications has been produced.

As is widely accepted and acknowledged, movie star and legendary martial artist Bruce Lee was widely responsible for bringing the Nunchaku(s) also known as Nunchucks mainstream through motion pictures like Enter The Dragon. He undoubtedly sparked worldwide interest in a weapon that in truth had existed for many years. Factually, *"The history of the Nunchaku is interwoven with the Japanese domination of the natives of Okinawa (known then as the Ryuky Islands)...To prevent the rural population from uprising, the Japanese overlords dictated an order to confiscate all fighting weapons including kitchen utensils (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, p. 11)."* This caused the natives to be creative and seek out new ways to defend themselves with items that were seemingly not weapons but could be utilized for that purpose. *"Thus, the simple farm tool they used to thrash rice stalks was converted into what is known today as the Nunchaku (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, pp. 11-12)."*

These tools and others became very effective in standard self defense or more particularly the farmers defending themselves against ground soldiers or Samurai warriors on horseback. Ed Parker wrote that the effectiveness of the Nunchaku for these people came from the *"concentric circles and arcs"* that when sped up formed *"an invisible shield"* that defended against ground soldiers weapons. In present day we would refer to same as spinning the Nunchaku in a forward/backward roll, a figure 8 or other similar motion. These movements can and could easily create opportunities for striking an opponent. *"When these openings appeared, a slight change of wrist movement would conveniently alter the orbit of the circle, rapidly converting the Nunchaku from a defensive to offensive weapon (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, p. 16)."* In addition, the chain or cord connecting the sticks forming the Nunchaku or the sticks themselves could be used for blocking, striking, trapping or choking techniques. While there seems to be an endless combination of

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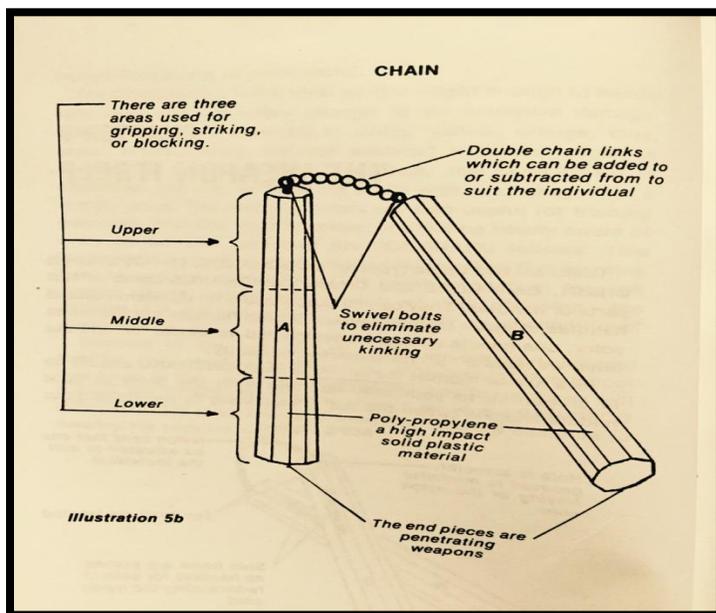
<sup>1</sup> Baker now an 8th Dan has trained under Grand Masters Kalalii Griffin & Ed Parker, Martial Arts Professor Ibrahim Sharif and Grandmaster Bernard Trusdale in Chinese Kenpo, Shito Ryu, Combat Ju-Jitsu and Shoto Kan.

varying techniques that continue to evolve over time through practical exercise and different martial arts disciplines, we owe the inception of this weapon and base concepts to the Okinawan villagers.

Interestingly, reading the greater text surrounding that which was quoted in the previous section, one receives clarity in what should be the root of what is now commonly called freestyle Nunchaku performances. It is one thing to have the artistic skill to twirl or spin the Nunchaku in an attractive manner for show or display purposes and quite another to understand how to deploy those very same techniques/movements during a physical encounter to hit a target and devastate an attacker. I liken it to us teaching young children in our martial arts system the anatomy of the human body or the conduction system of the heart when they are young. It puts on a great show and always impresses many onlookers and parents, seeing kids of 5 -13 years of age having such knowledge and delivering same with a song and dance. However, it is not until they mature both in life and the martial arts that they are taught by Master Baker how to truly use that knowledge to strike in such a way as to disrupt/speed up/stop the heartbeat of an opponent, crippling him or using that information to heal oneself.

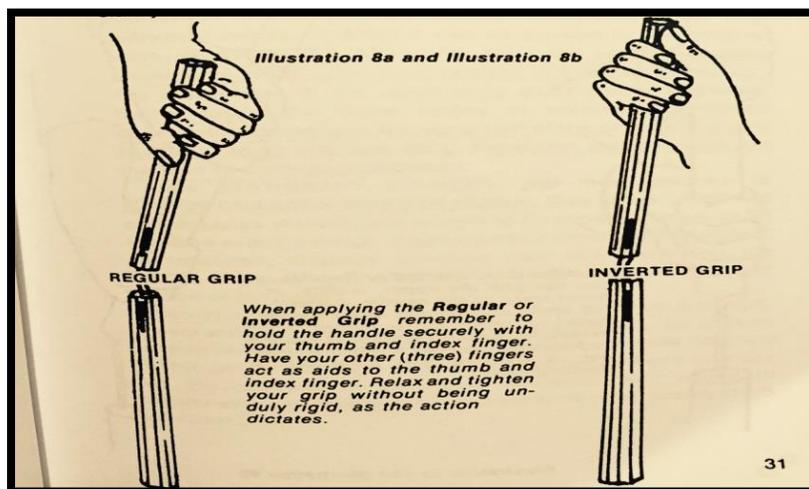
Consistent with the more lethal nature of Kenpo, Master Baker has always believed in training for real life scenarios and typically avoided competitions at all costs, especially those designed for showmanship instead of practical application of techniques. When growing up in the dojo, I heard him say many times, that if we train to stop fighting in a Kumite competition after a "point is scored", we might out of reflex do the same thing in the street to our own detriment. When it comes to life and death or real self defense, there is no referee, no time out, no bell, only you and your attacker. However, the truth of his philosophy notwithstanding, while freestyle competitions obviously are more about showmanship than combat effectiveness, they should still be grounded in the basics.

If used properly many of the root movements displayed in freestyle competitions can be utilized as strikes themselves or transitional movements to set up the next strike. I define freestyle, whether it is Karate/empty hand or weapons which are simply an extension of the hand, as something that is not exclusive to showmanship, but a practitioner possessing the ability to freely flow from one position or technique into another without hesitation, while being effective. Utilizing both circular and linear moves to this level of proficiency enables the martial arts student to maximize what Ed Parker called the "economy of motion." For that reason, proficiency assumed, the more manipulations of the Nunchaku one can learn, the more tools in the tool box one has to draw on in an encounter. Accordingly, we should seek out and embrace multiple forms of Nunchaku teachings and like anything else, utilize what works in any given situation and disregard the rest as needed.



How to hold the Nunchucks is a perfect example of how different instructors/systems preach different hand positions. Some instructors will proclaim one placement the correct way and superior to another, when in actuality they are all correct depending on the situation and immediate objective. But for now, it is enough to say that there are three basic areas to grip the Nunchaku: upper, middle and lower end.<sup>2</sup> Each of which can also be used for striking and blocking.

Notwithstanding where hands are placed on the Nunchaku (upper, middle lower), there are 2 basic grips commonly identified as regular and inverted depicted below.<sup>3</sup> In either case the majority of grip pressure should be exerted through the thumb and pointer finger. The other 3 fingers are there for support.



Also of note is that these weapons are generally crafted out of wood, plastic or a metal alloy and joined together by either a rope or chain. The length of the Nunchaku (stick portion) should be roughly the length of your forearm to the middle knuckle and chain length the width of the back of your hand or in the alternative, distance from the point of your middle knuckle to the tip of your middle finger. In either case, it should be of manageable size and length as to maneuver effectively. Other sizes may also be advisable to achieve specific goals such as but not limited to enhancing strikes or strengthening the wrists.

Law enforcement agencies are also beginning to recognize the effectiveness of this weapon and have created/utilized modified Nunchaku for that purpose. The Nunchaku as a blunt force weapon is superior to any similar device. As a retired police officer myself, academy trained in the ASP & PR-24 Batons, I can attest to the superiority of the Nunchaku in combat situations over the other aforementioned traditional police batons/nightsticks. Working in the patrol division for years and having had my share of physical confrontations, I found these police batons to be very heavy and limited in use/application by comparison. Considering the police tools tend to be longer, up to 40" in length and thusly heavier



<sup>2</sup> Chart "Illustration 5b" (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, p. 22)

<sup>3</sup> (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, p. 31)

compared to the 28"-34" Nunchaku which also has a chain allowing for far more movements, this is understandable.

In fact, according to the Police Defense Systems, Inc. website<sup>4</sup> over 200 police departments in the United States have traded in traditional blunt force weapons for the Nunchaku alternative, Orcutt Police Nunchaku (OPN III). Described as a *"non-lethal controlling device for law enforcement and corrections developed by Sergeant Kevin Orcutt<sup>5</sup>, Master Instructor, the OPN III and its certified training system was designed to stress CONTROL vs. IMPACT (Orcutt)."* This would include among other areas, a focus on trapping and compliance/control techniques that are applicable in close quarter combat. They are also ideal for use in removing individuals from protests via controlled wrist locks and maneuvering people into the handcuffing position.

Ed Parker also believed the Nunchaku superior to the traditional police stick weapons for 2 primary reasons. First, *"it can develop up to 1,600 foot pounds of energy per square inch by just using the dexterity of the wrist (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, p. 25)"*, where other instruments cannot. To understand the significance of this statistic it should be noted that writings indicate that it takes only 8 foot pounds of pressure per square inch to splinter the human skull. The methodology of generating more power involves creating more speed. More speed is created by tighter circular movements or as stated by Parker tightening the circumference of the arc. *In fact, speeds gained with the [Nunchaku] by merely snapping the wrist have been measured in excess of 200 miles per hour (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, p. 25)."*

Parker's second most important reason was the length and flexibility of the Nunchaku. Because of this flexibility *"the vital points on the anatomy of an assailant can be penetrated from virtually any angle. Objectives such as the elbows, kneecaps, jaw, face area, wrists or hands are easy targets. When the limbs of an assailant are put out of commission, he has no weapons to retaliate with or protect himself (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, p. 27)."* In addition, as was taught to me ever so clearly by my teacher Master Harry Baker in my first Nunchaku lesson previously mentioned, instant and severe pain has a way of making an attacker forget what he/she was trying to do and focus instead on their new found injury or discomfort.

Prior to discussing striking and target areas any further we must examine how to carry them, stances and how to draw them for use. First, I would be remiss if I did not state for the record that Nunchaku is illegal in some jurisdictions.<sup>6</sup> Practitioners should take care to learn the law and find out to what extent they can or

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.orcuttopn.com/>

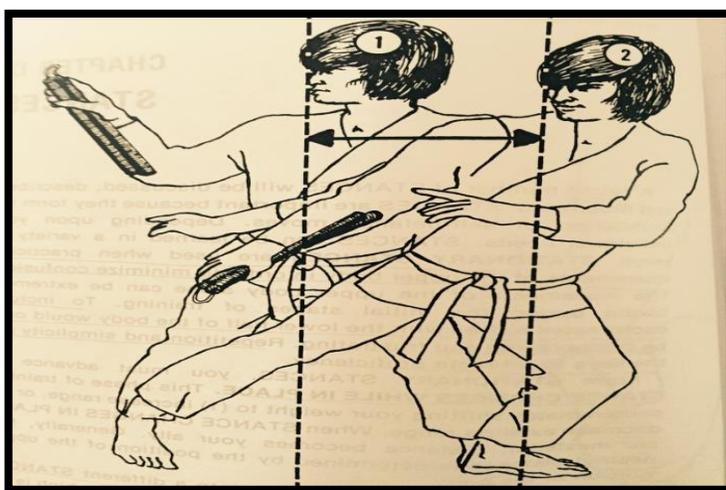
<sup>5</sup> "Kevin D. Orcutt is the inventor, developer and master instructor of the OPN. In addition to operating Orcutt Police Defensive Systems, Inc., Mr. Orcutt is currently a Sergeant with the Thornton Police Department in Colorado. A First Degree Black Belt in Jukado, Mr. Orcutt is recognized nationally for developing the OPN and its training system. He has appeared on *ABC World News Tonight*, *CBS This Morning*, *CNN*, *People Magazine*, *Law and Order* magazine, the Science Channel and *Westword* newspaper. In 1997, Mr. Orcutt was inducted into the 1997 World Martial Arts Hall of Fame and was granted their "Life Achievement" award. Since 1985, he has personally trained and certified over 1000 law enforcement and corrections officers with the OPN. (Orcutt)."

<sup>6</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nunchaku>

cannot be possessed. In some cases, there are no restrictions in others it is lawful so long as their active use in a particular scenario is deemed manifestly appropriate for that purpose, such as a karate demonstration. In other cases, it may be banned completely. Nonetheless there are a myriad of different ways to carry them, beginning with whether or not one chooses to do so in an open or concealed fashion. While the exact methods of carry are too numerous to describe in detail here, it suffices to say that the Nunchaku can be carried chain link up or down, at the front/back/side, fully/partially in the belt or not at all and simply in the hand. In choosing which way is best, the practitioner should consider the circumstances at that time. For example, where he is, combat or training situation, as well as the method of intended draw (direct vs cross) are all relevant. When considering the method of carry and draw, one must also consider the proper grip, be it regular or inverted, to find oneself in the best position to apply effective techniques.

To discuss positioning, one must discuss stances. Most would agree that stationary stances are the best way for beginners to learn. When practicing it allows them to focus on the weapon without being distracted by other things. It may be advisable to practice standing in a comfortable natural stance, modified forward leaning stance, horse stance or cat stance depending on the technique so long as the student can remain stationary.

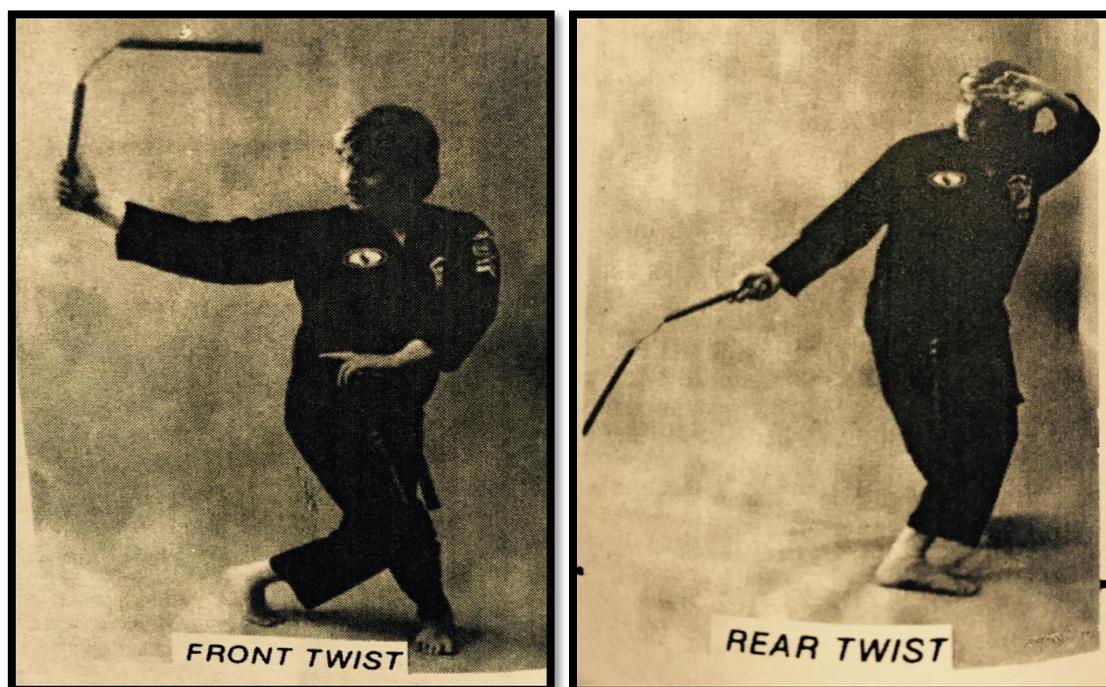
The next phase as taught in the Kenpo system is *stance changes while in place*. Shown below, here the feet would remain firmly planted where they are but the weight of the body is shifted in such a way to increase or decrease striking distance.<sup>7</sup> This is an important basic principal to remember because if done effectively it eliminates unnecessary movement, and can decrease range thusly increasing speed to target and power. Through physical practice in the Red Iron Dragon dojo under Baker's instruction, with an opponent, we learned firsthand that this and other stance changes can enable the practitioner to jam his opponent, thereby limiting the attacker's movements and ability to strike. Conversely, one might also avoid being hit by leaning backward and creating distance.



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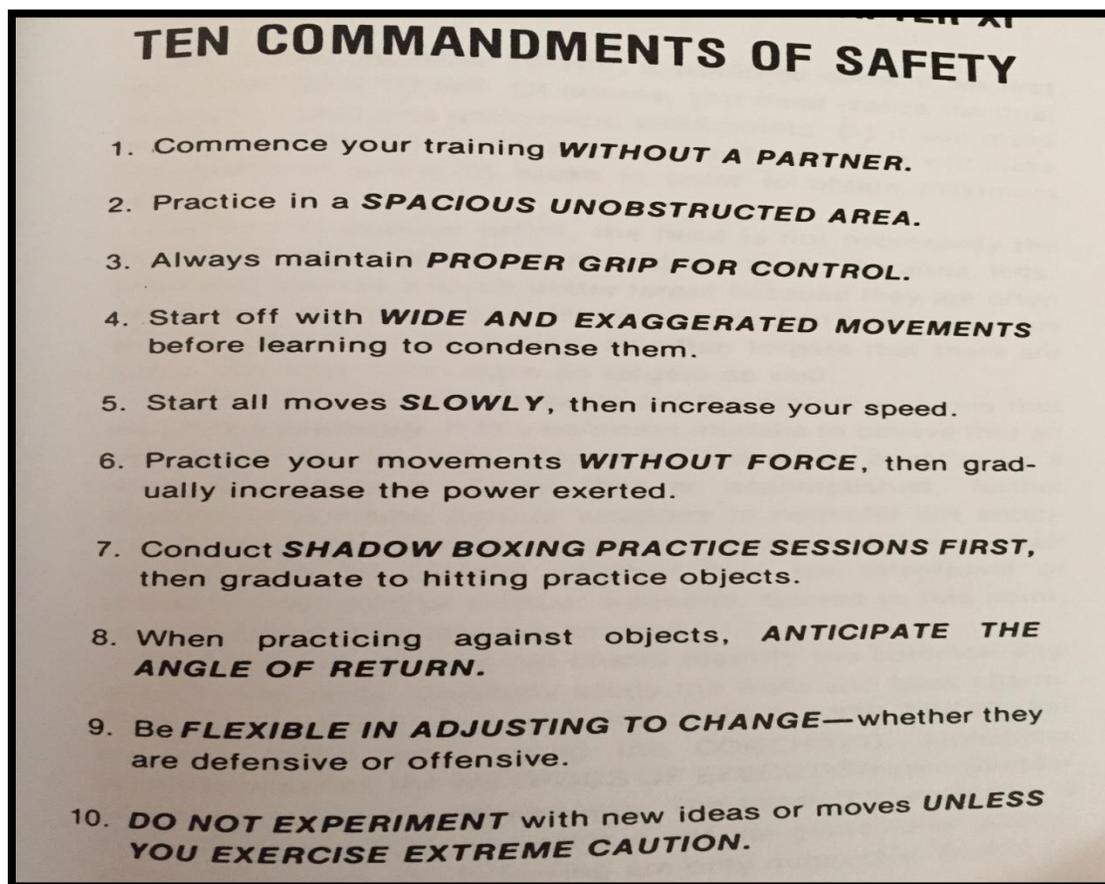
<sup>7</sup> (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, p. 34)

The final phase taught by Parker is practicing stances in motion. This final stage is where the fluidity of movement becomes key and the practitioner is seemingly able to freestyle from one technique to the next. It should be noted that every stance or spin of the Nunchaku is not necessarily done or held for long periods of time but simple transitional moments to set up or recover from a technique, which in Kenpo is and should be an action that is one in the same. A transitional stance example would be the front or rear twist stance (noted below) often used *"to advance or retreat without rotating the trunk of the body. As a stance change it can protect the groin, break a leg, or be used to check the action of your opponent"* (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, p. 40).



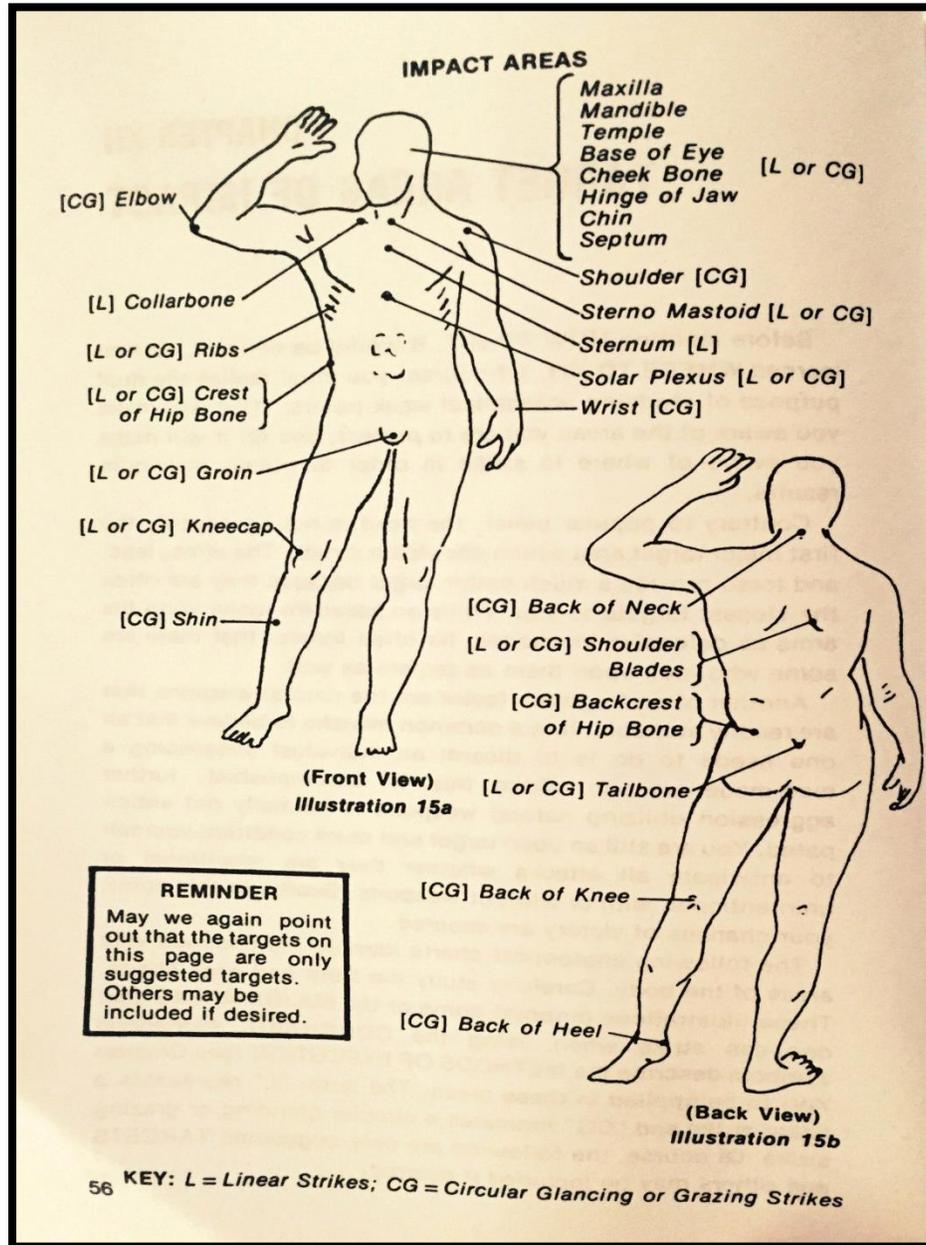
To enter the twist stance, it becomes necessary to move ones foot in a crossover motion. This, in addition to shuffle/drag steps and hopping are also examples of footwork that when properly timed with the movement of the Nunchaku can create many different instantaneous options for changes in distance, angles and adding power to strikes. To reinforce these concepts, Baker did something unique and introduced "classroom" physics into the Kenpo system in an effort to help us understand these fighting nuances. Over and over again, we would recite formulas like:  $Speed = \frac{Distance}{Time}$  or  $Force = Mass \times Acceleration$ . In addition, it was also Baker who taught us Parker's "Clock System" which was Kenpo symbolism meant to describe angles of attack and escape all around us mirroring the numbers on a circular clock. All of this underscored the fact that when in a confrontation it is important not to stand still and be able to move out of the way and circle your opponent as needed. Otherwise stated by Mater Baker, *"if a train is coming straight at you, get off the tracks."* In order to do this properly and coordinate foot work while wielding the Nunchaku against an attacker, much practice is required.

As we prepare to move into actual target areas/striking applications and practice that will be supplemented by video instruction in lieu of 100+ pictures, it is critical that safety is emphasized. Ed Parker has listed the "Ten Commandments of Safety" that are self explanatory, require no explanation and as such are shown below in their entirety (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, p. 53). However, I would add an 11th rule: When first starting, it is advisable to use foam-chuks instead of the wood or metal alloy for practicing until the proficiency level of the student increases.



When preparing to strike, it is only sensible that the martial artist knows his intended target lest he run the risk of being ineffective. This would be akin to the flashy karate-ka who makes a lot of noise, does fancy maneuvers by himself that look nice but has an inability to translate/adapt those very same movements to an actual combat situation because the foundation of knowledge was never there. As Master Baker once asked in short, drawing a comparison, what good is it to be able to spin a gun in your hand and do tricks like the Wild West cowboy movies if you can't shoot straight. Message being learn the basic technique applications, build the foundation and then worry about fancy showmanship. Otherwise one would be in essence just be swinging the Nunchaku wildly without precision or regard for what one is hitting, which is contrary to the teachings of Kenpo and the spirit of martial arts.

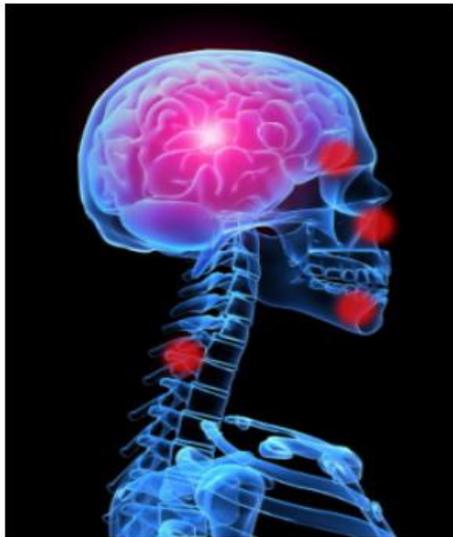
That being said, a chart of suggested impact areas for circular (glancing) and linear (direct) strikes, which are by no means exclusive are noted below.<sup>8</sup> Familiarization with the anatomy of the body as noted earlier in this document becomes helpful as we move beyond this point into practice and practical application. In order to pinpoint strikes and make them as effective as possible, this must be taught to the Nunchaku-ka.



<sup>8</sup> (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, p. 56)

Above the neck, it's possible to hit weak points and cause severe damages, and eventually death. Here are some weak points located above the neck:

- Temples: those are the skull's most fragile zones, that's also here that goes the maxillary nerve. A violent shock on these zones can fracture the skull, the brain is then directly hit, and death is quick to come. The maxillary nerve can also induce a K.O. if the shock is violently.



- Nose: a lateral strike on the nose can shatter the fragile cartilage that it's made of, a severe hemorrhage can occur, and then death if the bleeding is not quickly stopped. An upwards strike on the nose will displace the cartilage towards the inside of the skull, and should touch the brain, death is instantaneous.

- Jaws: a lateral strike in the jaws causes a violent movement of the head, causing the brain to move inside the skull and hit the head bones. As a function of the violence of the impact, damages can range from simple dizziness to instant K.O..

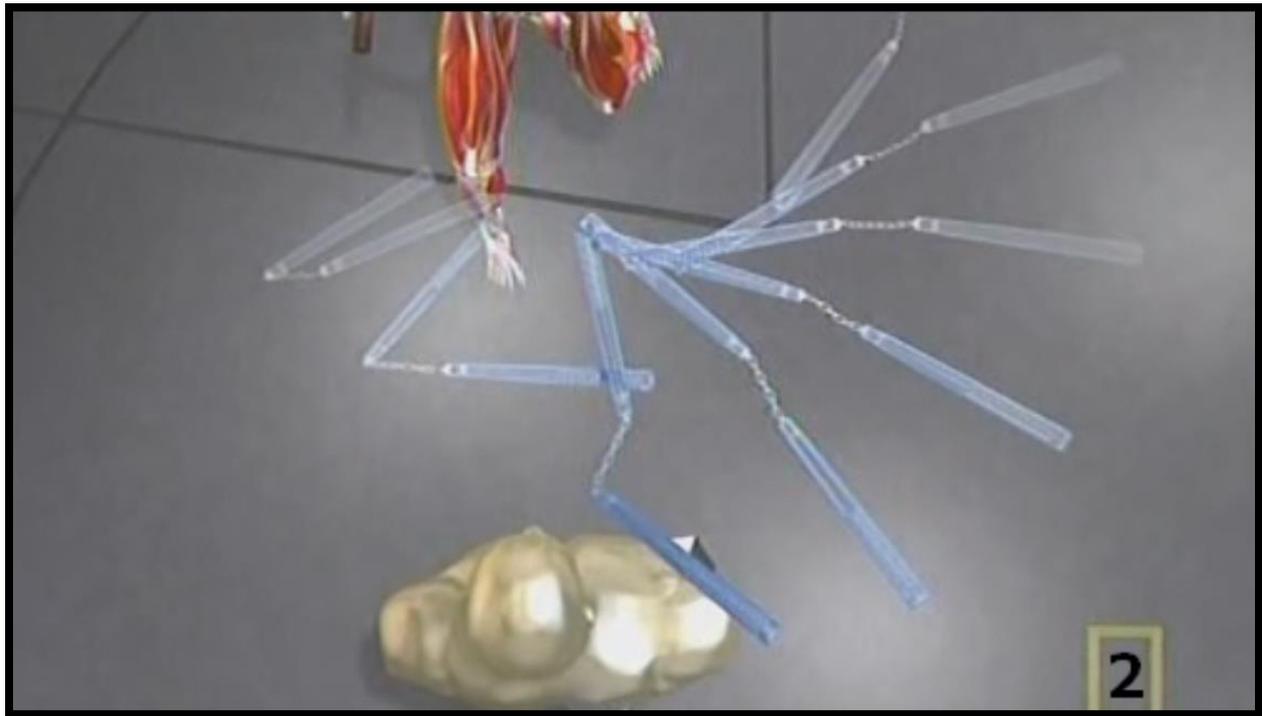
- Nape: the spine being an important nerve center, a hit on the nape can lead to instant K.O.. A too powerful shock can paralyze or kill.

Of course, a lot of experience is necessary to succeed hitting those zones in a fight situation. During training as well as during competition, a Nunchaku artist avoids hitting the head, to avoid any risk of lethal hit.

Through actual video or self defense instruction it should be explained in simple detail as is noted in the chart above<sup>9</sup>, the damage that can result from striking these areas be it pain, unconsciousness, death,

<sup>9</sup> Head chart is found <http://www.nunchaku-sfw.com/index.php?tab=dossiers&page=science&lang=en>

paralysis, broken bones etc. Additionally, when swinging hard the practitioner need be wary of causing himself injury.



Slight modification of the swinging technique is necessary to minimize the bounce back of Nunchaku, as shown above, from striking oneself.<sup>10</sup>

The practitioner should take care to use the appropriate level of force that the situation requires. Having been a police officer certified under the authority of the New Jersey Police Training Commission, I know firsthand, the laws of NJ which have very strict use of force guidelines for law enforcement, as do most states. Often these laws or guidelines require the officer utilize the minimal force necessary to stop the threat. In some states civilians, unlike police officers, have a duty to retreat from danger when possible. For example, if someone is verbally threatening an individual absent any other show of force, thereby allowing the practitioner time to walk away from the actor, it would normally be considered legally inappropriate to strike him/her in the head with the Nunchaku. Same could unnecessarily cause serious bodily injury or death.

However, at times it may be permissible to exert a higher level of force than is being exacted upon you by an attacker. If one is physically attacked, the practitioner need not fight back with empty hands, (s)he may be justified in escalating to mechanical force via Nunchaku, striking as needed using "perceptually" the minimal force necessary to stop the threat. That acceptable level of force will likely depend both on the laws of the jurisdiction in question, the known skill level of the practitioner and the threat level faced. It is urged that individuals research the laws as needed, utilizing the services of an attorney if appropriate. As a starting point, I advise looking up the "Use of Force Continuum" or the "State Attorney General Use of Force

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.nunchaku-sfw.com/index.php?tab=dossiers&page=science&lang=en>

Guidelines" for the state in question.<sup>11</sup> The bottom line is, use common sense and be cautious not to cross the line from being a potential victim who successfully defended oneself, to the aggressor facing criminal charges for taking it too far.

Due in part to all of the aforementioned, it is extremely important to learn as many techniques or strikes as possible and utilize the appropriate level of force not just to protect oneself physically but legally. As has been said in many circles, "*it is better to be judged by 12 than carried by 6*" so we must do what we must to survive an encounter, while being mindful of what court actions may come next. With that said, to learn as many movements as possible, it is sometimes necessary to look outside of one martial arts system for different ways of doing things.

While weapons have always been a byproduct of traditional martial arts disciplines, systems surrounding individualized weapons do exist. While I would not consider learning how to use only one weapon absent all of the other areas of martial arts well rounded training, I would consider it an opportunity for specialized education in a particular area.

In 1984 a Dutch Individual from Amstelveen founded the martial art system Nunchaku-do.<sup>12</sup> In time the system grew and *'because the sport Nunchaku-do crosses the Dutch borders, the World Nunchaku Association (WNA) was established on March 14th 1996 (World Nunchaku Association, p. Web. Home).'*" While the organization has no presence currently in the United States it has gained considerable traction in other parts of the world. The organizational website boasts clubs in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Brazil, England and Russia. Because of the international nature of the organization and the desire to maintain consistent standards of promotion, the entire system, complete with instructional videos and promotional requirements is posted on the website for all to study. Black Belt exams are seemingly conducted on location every 6 months before an international degree committee.<sup>13</sup>

Upon review, there are several different techniques or manipulations of the Nunchaku presented. All covering 4 different disciplines: kumite, Nunchaku-do kata (forms), Nunchaku-jutsu (nunchaku applications for self-defense), and freestyle (a non formal, creative demonstration accompanied by music). Many of these are not shown explicitly in Ed Parkers Guide to The Nunchaku. Conversely, many of the Kenpo techniques are not shown or required for advancement in the Nunchaku-do system, yet there is still significant overlap in some areas. In addition, it should also be noted that there also exists the American Style Nunchaku Federation<sup>14</sup> (founded by Grand Master Michael Burke) which enables the student to quickly amass a core set of skills to earn certified rank and be tournament ready as well as the North American Nunchaku Association which can provide other access points for training/knowledge too.<sup>15</sup>

Effective techniques regardless of style will make for effective self defense, provided one understands how to apply them and practices to the proper level of proficiency. *"Like any given word, once you have*

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.state.nj.us/lps/dcj/agguide/useforce.htm>

<http://www.nij.gov/topics/law-enforcement/officer-safety/use-of-force/Pages/continuum.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.nunchakubackend.org/e/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.nunchakubackend.org/e/examination-requirements/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.asnfederation.com/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.totalnunchaku.com/>

*learned how to pronounce, spell, or write it, the next step is to define it. With meaning and definition, a word can be properly used in a sentence. Likewise, moves are combinations of alpha bets of motions that form words of motion. Once they are ingrained, definition must be learned for you to apply them in a fighting sentence (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, p. 129)."*

When doing so in a combat situation the practitioner must also remember the basic Kenpo principal of matter and motion; *defined as "the concept that [just like matter]... motion (physical moves) can also be applied in a solid, liquid, and gaseous state (Parker, Ed Parker's Encyclopedia of Kenpo, 1992)."* As such, in the words of my teacher Master Baker, when fighting, we must learn to *"be like the water."* In short meaning that at times we may have to strike or move fluidly with our attacker, be present all around him like mist or fog, and sometimes we just need to hit hard like Ice.

When all is said and done, Ed Parker himself said we should take the time to learn all possible methods. *"Learning all of them will increase your vocabulary of motion. Increasing your vocabulary of motion enhances your total storehouse or reservoir of knowledge (Parker, Ed Parker's Guide To The Nunchaku, 2006, p. 69)."* Understanding the wisdom of this message and the mandate of my teacher to produce a 100 strikes/movements or variations, I have sought the knowledge from the WNA system to compliment our own. This new system combined with the core Kenpo teachings inclusive of preparatory cocking positions, methods/angles of execution, catches and more, will form the basis of answering my teacher's call and providing the blended techniques and future growth to be physically demonstrated beyond this point.<sup>i</sup>

*Practitioners should be reminded, mastering weapons can be a challenge, but we must always remember our Kenpo motto; To fall seven times, is to rise eight times; never give up on your journey through life; and always strive for excellence in everything you do.*

*OSS!!!*



Sensei Eldridge Hawkins, Jr., 4th Dan  
Chinese Kenpo - Kung Fu

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<sup>i</sup> The 100 plus strikes are temporarily viewable at the following YouTube link: <http://youtu.be/iDXOtUImofY>