

# The Eyes of Kidokwan

By Chief Master Robert J. Ott

In the Spring of 2006, I found myself standing on top of a small mountain located outside of Pusan, South Korea. I was surrounded by almost 100 people from all over the world attending the bi-annual World Han Min Jok Hapkido Federation Championship and Seminar. I felt their eyes staring through my dobok, right into my soul. I knew their minds were filled with questions, support, uncertainty and disbelief. The Grandmaster handed me the bow and pointed me in the correct direction. I already knew to pull the string back then let it go. As I set my hands in place and adjusted the arrow, I began to see all of the distractions closing in on me. I pulled the string back and shot the arrow only to hear very little applause and sounds of concern. Understandably so, I sensed fear and sadness from the onlookers, for not too often does a blind person attempt Korean archery.

In 1990, I became an innocent victim of a violent crime and as a result was left completely blind. At that time, I was the owner of the Traditional Martial Arts Institute in Somerdale, New Jersey. Much has happened since that day, but moving forward and overcoming this challenge has been my focus point.

As the Grandmaster stood there, I knew that he was offering me another chance to shoot that arrow. I stood there with a face of emptiness. In my mind, I was searching far from the place I needed to be. All of a sudden, a voice came to my mind and spirit. It was that of Grandmaster Goh Chae Teok. The voice said, "Jung shin tong il...one mind, single purpose!" It was refreshing and yet also needed. Then another voice came to my mind. It was Grandmaster Ji Han Jae. He said to me, "When you use your eyes you cannot see, however, when you begin to look through your third eye you can then see!" It all became so clear to me following those words. I reached my hands out respectfully to the Grandmaster who held the arrow. As I took the arrow and put it into place, I became very comfortable with my surroundings. I began to see the clear picture and felt content and certain. I then knew that it was okay if I missed this target, for that was not the focus

point. The focus point was being clear in my mind and sight. I pulled the string back and fired away. Following this there were loud cheers of happiness from my fellow martial artists. The arrow hit the target two inches from the red center. The strength, courage and indomitable spirit had come through again...

## Kidokwan

The name of the Korean martial art that I teach is called Kidokwan. It translates to "The family with the way of power." I titled my teachings this name not long after my blindness in the fall of 1990. The reason why I selected this set of words is based in the reality that if it was not for my family, fellow martial artists and good friends, I would not be alive today.

The system on the outside is based upon all of the Korean martial arts that I have studied, including: Tae Soo Do, Chung Do Kwan, WTF Tae Kwon Do, ITF Tae Kwon Do, Kuk Sool Won, Tae Kwon Do, Mun Moo Kwan, Sun Moo Kwan, Hapkido, Sin Moo Hapkido, and

A gunshot to the head took Master Ott's sight in 1990.\*



Chief Master Ott has trained in martial arts for 27 years.\*

come out of it. There is a good chance that there will be a faucet for hot water and one for cold water. There is a good chance that when you get out of a car in a parking lot you will be stepping up onto a curb before you enter the store. These are things that we deal with every day in the light or darkness. There are certainly no 100% guarantees that an action will have a certain outcome, but there are fairly good odds. Another way of looking at this is that if a hand goes to a hand then the wrist will be there as well. The simple concept began to bring me a new method of vision.

I began to use my mind and learn what I call touch to touch. This method is used in offense and defense in my teachings. When being blind, it can easily become a natural study. Once a hand touches me then I know where the rest of the body is for defensive purposes. One of the most important concepts that I bring into this study is the circle theory (Won Bup.) I have studied different theories throughout the years and the circle method that I am discussing now has its base in our surroundings. When teaching my students, I reinforce the realization that if the attacker is not within your circle then there is no reason to waste motion. Just like in free sparring when a practitioner is kicking and punching at the air, it is going to be quite easy to guess who first will be out of energy. However, in the teachings of touch to touch, the attacker is preferred to be in the circle. This enables the defender the ability to gain control via the touch.

In review, it is clear to predict that 99.9% of the time an opponent's shoulders are below his head, whether or not there is light or darkness in the room. This became the backbone of the touch to touch theory. In teaching Kidokwan, I stress to my practitioners the understanding of touch to touch so that in developing and improving the study of Kidokwan, one will know how to defend one's own self without it having to be a thought process.

## Black on Black

While the martial art of Kidokwan was slowly but gradually developing and growing, I had to face certain realities in life. One of those was learning how to use the mobility cane. I, who thought there was plenty of patience in my ability to learn, surely could not find any at this time. The first issue that I faced was the fact that I can visualize what a traffic intersection looks like;

Han Min Jok Hapkido. Along with these numerous studies, I incorporated several philosophies into the system as well. These philosophies come from both my grandmasters and the many books that I have read throughout the years. All of this study and knowledge began to feel like natural human instinct.

However, I was missing the main part of this system: my ability to teach. In the beginning years of my blindness, I was uncertain in my abilities. For even though I was confident in my knowledge of my Korean martial arts, I still had questions in my ability to teach once again.

## Touch to Touch

One day, not too long after becoming blind, my good friend Grandmaster Kenneth P. MacKenzie came to visit me at my dojang. When he approached me, my hand went directly to his hand and shook it as I bowed in respect. Following this, Grandmaster MacKenzie said, "For you, Robert, it is action then thought in so many ways." I spent much time thinking of those words following his visit. One of our studies in Kidokwan is 'Thought then action and action then thought.' It is something that people do every day but do not recognize.

A light bulb flickered in my mind. The truth in life is that if there is a faucet then there is a good chance that water will come out of it. There is a good chance that there will be a faucet for hot water and one for cold water. There is a good chance that when you get out of a car in a parking lot you will be stepping up onto a curb before you enter the store. These are things that we deal with every day in the light or darkness. There are certainly no 100% guarantees that an action will have a certain outcome, but there are fairly good odds. Another way of looking at this is that if a hand goes to a hand then the wrist will be there as well. The simple concept began to bring me a new method of vision.

Chief Master Ott demonstrating Ji Pang Ee Sool with Master Rob Cohn.



thus, anxiety became another battle. On top of this, my training was at a school located in a city called Chester. This city is about 30 minutes south of Philadelphia and in my mind had only three good things about it: a school called Widener University, a large factory for Scott Toilet Paper, and a hospital called Crozer Chester Medical Center. Other than those attributes, the city did not have the safest neighborhoods. Recently being a victim of a violent crime and being blind, this place was not the most comfortable one to be learning how to better my mobility skills. But I chose this school because it was the closest.

The teacher who instructed me how to master the cane was also blind and he and I would travel together crossing intersections and taking buses to large shopping centers. I will admit that I was scared and had no desire to put myself in these situations. However, I knew that overcoming this fear was of most importance. Often I would walk into the street and trip off the curb before stopping and knowing the place where I was located. My instructor would always catch me and say, "You need to feel where you are walking." I did not always listen to those words.

One day I said to him, "What do you mean by saying that you need to feel where you are walking?"

He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Well, it is about time that you asked that question." From there we would walk and he would tell me to slow down and let him know when the building that was 15 feet from us ended and the sidewalk opened up to turn. At first, I thought it was impossible but, sure enough, I was wrong.

Amazingly, with a clear mind and a relaxed body I learned how to see the buildings in a miraculous way. It seemed like the blackness that surrounded me was a different shade of blackness for the building. The density of the blackness became a feeling that was far different than the opening of the street. From that point, my teacher showed me the same principles in numerous other ways. I began to see his hand in front of me waving back and forth; his hand was warmer and blacker than the other blackness. He showed me how to use it in hallways, open rooms, tight areas, and other spaces.

The most important lesson that I learned from this was the ability to know when a person is adjacent to my body. Needless to say, I found myself teaching martial arts one day and naturally applying it without even thinking about it. The amazing comfort it gave me to teach and demonstrate the techniques that I already knew in my mind, but feared doing due to my lack of vision, was appreciated. That particular school for the blind was the first place I

Master Ott teaches breaking at the School for the Blind in Gooding, Idaho.



One of Kidokwan's concepts is Won Bup or the circle theory.\*

held a seminar after my blindness. Today, I have incorporated this method into my everyday teachings, from blocking techniques to partner techniques with a weapon.

Because of black on black, today I find myself very visual in my day-to-day life. When I talk with a person, I not only look straight at his or her face, eye to eye, but I watch visual things and react to actions just as a sighted person. Often I inform my wife that she is standing in front of the TV blocking my view. The study of black on black has given me a level of comfort that allows me to relax when I walk and move. This, in return, has assisted me in regaining my thought to hard and soft theory. As my Grandmaster would always say, "Relax then strike...just like a whip!"

This knowledge allowed Kidokwan to enhance the philosophy of Wha Bup, meaning the principles of harmony. The reaction time in doing techniques increases in speed and relaxation with this method of training. Being able to see using black on black allows me to understand the third eye that Grandmaster Ji Han Jae taught me during my training. The third eye allows a person to see the vision of energy. This is the black on black that I have incorporated into the study of Kidokwan.



Kidokwan's touch on touch and black on black help teach martial arts to the visually impaired.\*

Having learned from many of the Grandmasters that I have studied under, discipline will lead to freedom and care. Nevertheless, a structure is needed to enable a human to develop and strengthen the body and the mind. In Kidokwan, students will learn codes, philosophies and principles as they progress in rank. By the time a Kidokwan Jeja or student has attained the rank of first-dan, he or she will have learned the following: the philosophy of Kido; the Hwarang Do O Kae; the Hwarang Do Kyo Hoon; and the meaning of Moosa.

Upon obtaining the rank of first-dan, the Moosa or martial artist of Kidokwan learns the following philosophy: "Jung Shin, Il Do, Ha Saeng, Pil Sung" or "Nothing is impossible, once you set your mind to it. With one mind, there will be certain victory." This philosophy is a combination of the 27 years of study in Korean arts along with the sharing of knowledge by Grandmaster Michael De Alba. Together with this, the black belts learn to master the spirit of Moodo.

- Hana, Choong: Patriotism, duty to one's country.
- Dool, Hyo: Filial piety, duty to one's parents.
- Set, Shin: Love and trust for each other.
- Net, Yeh: Show proper etiquette to seniors and juniors.

I learned the spirit of Moodo from Grandmaster In Sun Seo, the Chairman of the World Han Min Jok Hapkido Federation. His whole family has, without question, become a large part of the development of Kidokwan.

## Certain Victory

As General Macarthur said many years ago, "Some see it as a problem while I look at it as an opportunity." In so many ways that is how the martial art of Kidokwan was created and developed. The Kidokwan symbol represents its numerous philosophies and principles. Starting from the inside, we see the fist. The fist symbolizes and defines the power and the determination to overcome battles that life brings us. The surrounding of the fist is a place of peace that allows us to be content and tranquil. The four points of the diamond recognize the four methods of training that we do in Kidokwan. These are:

- Top point, Nae Gong: The way of Ki power training
- Left point, Shin Gong: The way of mental training
- Right point, Wae Gong: The way of body training
- Bottom point, Moogi Gong: The way of extensions of the body.

Even more so, my growth, blindness and ability to teach again has become a model for other instructors to learn the methods of teaching those who cannot see. Ignorance is one of the most common issues arising from an instructor teaching martial arts to a person who is blind. That word ignorance can vector in many directions, but for this it will be the ignorance of variety. It is easily forgotten that there are many different types of blindness. Meaning some can see a little while another may not see at all. Some may have once had eyesight while others may have never been sighted. This becomes a very large part of how a martial arts instructor teaches an individual who is blind. By learning and teaching my methods. Other instructors continue to be more comfortable in teaching people who are visually impaired or blind.

## The Internal Will of a Martial Artist



Surrounding the diamond are the Phoenix birds. The birds symbolize the fire that we all carry inside, yet within us there is also peace and harmony. Between the two Phoenix birds lies the figure of art that defines the constant cohesion of all things in the universe. This is better known as Um and Yang.

The entire symbol of Kidokwan shares the appreciation of life in a manner of description that evolves in the potentials of a human being. However, even with the understanding of this symbol of Kidokwan, it can never be utilized from one's own human spirit until he or she learns the importance of self-love. In today's world, self-love has been lost and is struggling to return with the hopes of the human being returning to the understanding of one's own self. Each time we travel and take a plane, it is often written on the directions of the air mask to first put it on yourself prior to helping the individual sitting adjacent to your seat. This statement goes far in many things in life. If one cannot self-love, then the ability to find positive human growth and the giving of knowledge, drive, lust, passion, and care will never be truly found.

Today in my life as a man who has overcome many challenges and found certain victory, I can only trace this appreciation to learning how important it is to love one's own self. This is certain victory through strength, courage and indomitable spirit. This is a demonstration of self-belief and confidence that is in desperate need today.

As I write this, I find it hard to imagine how I lost everything in my life, hit the bottom, found a purpose, stood back up and am now the President/CEO of Certain Victory Food Services, a company that has an average of over 500 employees who feed the third largest U.S. Army Fort in the country. Along with that, I am titled a husband as well as a father to two beautiful children. After completing my biography entitled *Certain Victory*, I began to realize the light that this darkness created. Often I say to my students when teaching Kidokwan, "Seeing is believing, but always realize that without believing we would never be seeing!" **TKD**



Muk Yuhm (meditation) in Yucatan, Mexico

## Flowering Warrior

—A poem by Robert J. Ott

When the wind and the cold air cuts through the skin  
While the endless surrounding of blackness encompasses our existence in life  
We must then learn to see the true light.

For in life no one can take away our lust, passions, drives and dreams.

Nor can they take away the strength, courage and indomitable spirit that we all carry inside.

Ultimately the love of life and others will persevere through all of the challenging journeys that are faced.

In all we hold that of a Flowering Warrior who will never surrender.

To read more on Chief Master Ott previously featured in *TaeKwonDo Times*, visit [taekwondotimes.com](http://taekwondotimes.com).

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Chief Master Robert J. Ott has studied and taught martial arts for over 25 years—both while sighted and blind. A successful businessman, he speaks at seminars regarding certification and personal empowerment. He also has written the autobiography *Certain Victory*, available in hardcover, audio with 9 CDs and 1 DVD, and e-book for the visually impaired. For more information on Kidokwan, Chief Master Robert Ott, his appearance at the Global Sin Moo Hapkido Conference in San Francisco (July 18 & 19), or to buy his book, please visit [certainvictory.com](http://certainvictory.com).

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I would also like to give my appreciation to all of my family, friends, photographers, co-writer, narrator, and loved ones for the support and heart that they have given to me.

\*Photos by Laura Smulktsis



FLOWERING WARRIOR ENTERPRISES AND THE WORLD  
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# Certain Victory

THE BIOGRAPHY OF A CHIEF MASTER WHO DEMONSTRATES  
THE ABILITY TO TURN FROM VICTIM TO SURVIVOR!



Photos courtesy of Laura Smulktsis of Legacy Photography



Blind martial artist Robert J. Ott, also known as the "Flowering Warrior", is a 6th Dan Black Belt, Regional Director of the World Sin Moo Hapkido Federation under Grand Master Kenneth P. MacKenzie, recognized by the World Han Min Jok Hapkido Federation, voted World Martial Artist Man of the Year by the WMF in 1994 and Washington State Director of the NKMAA. In addition, Robert held the title of Senior Chief Instructor under Grand Master Goh Chae Teok while he was instructing at one of the largest Korean martial art schools on the east coast titled the Dragon Gym."

Robert's story of strength, courage and indomitable spirit is available in hard cover, audio and eBook formats. Buy them now at [certainvictory.com](http://certainvictory.com)



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"Master Ott is a living legend in our martial art community.

He conquered physical challenge through his iron will and discipline that he learned from martial arts training. Today, he is a successful CEO of one of the best food companies in the U.S., and he also reached the level of Master in martial arts skills. All of our fellow martial artists admire his accomplishments and his example to overcome obstacles and turn them into victories in life."

Founder and President of the world Han Mu Do Association, Grand Master Dr. He-Young Kimm

"You are the embodiment of the modern day Farang. You truly are a modern flowering knight, and you lead by example."

Farang Mu Sul Founder Grand Master Michael De Alba

"Robert Ott is a beacon of light not only for those who cannot see but also for all who face the challenges of life. He has used the "Pil Sung" principle of martial arts to become a success in business and to show to the world that blindness does not constitute a lack of vision."

TKDT Editor and Advertising Director Carol Davis Hart

"After reading the book, I was moved by your courage, sheer determination, and strength of heart. Thank you so much for sharing the story of "Certain Victory" with me. You have my utmost admiration Sir."

NKMAA President Grand Master Rudy Timmerman

For information on school/instructor certification, seminars, workshops and motivational speaking, please contact Robert J. Ott at [www.certainvictory.com](http://www.certainvictory.com)