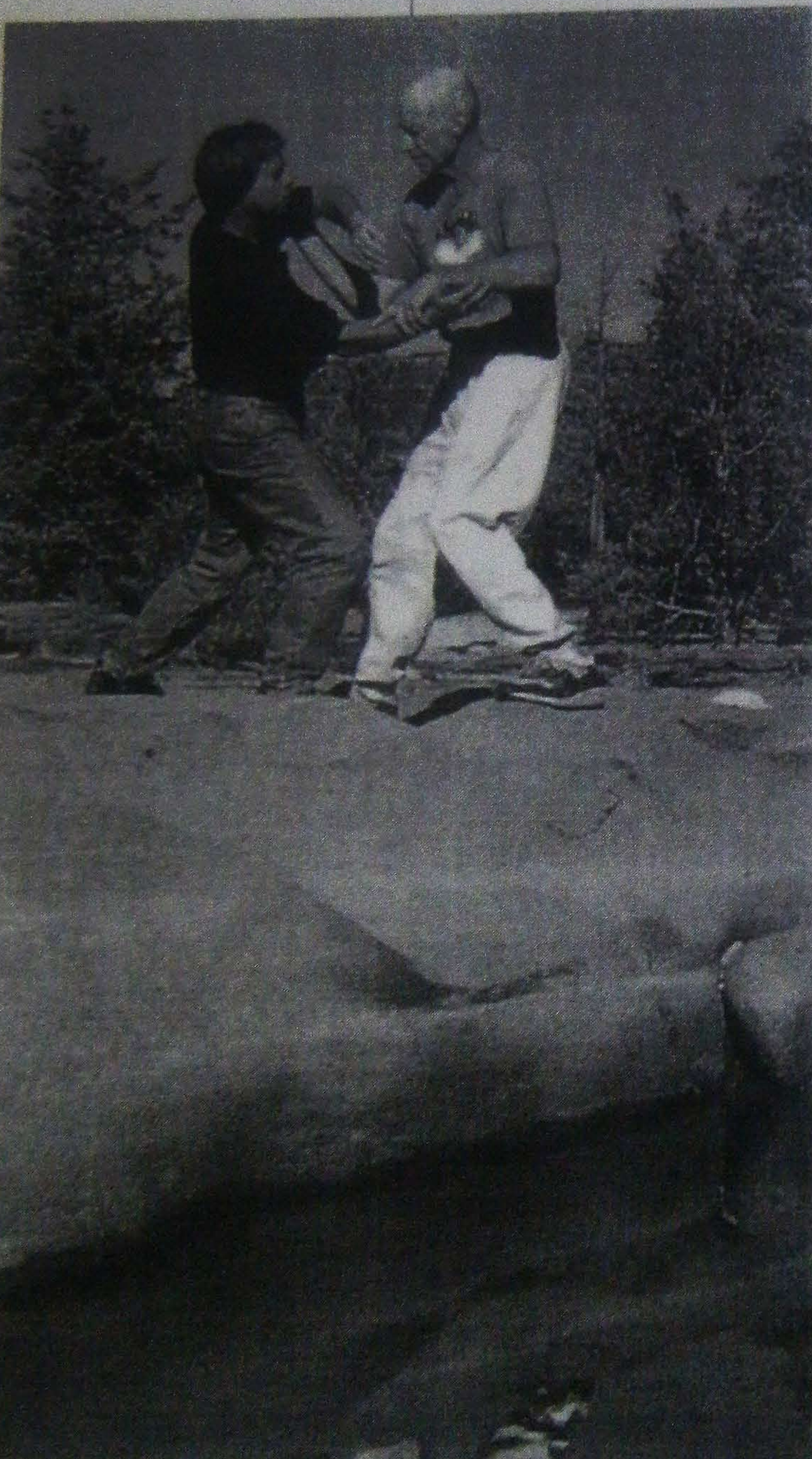


Fighting for balance

By Stuart Winer

Herman Kauz is 73 years old and walks with a cane. Setting his stick aside, he moves across the room with a curious lopsided gait to stand opposite a young man, the two separated by a few inches and as many decades. Resting their hands against each other they begin to practice "Pushing Hands," a form of the tai-chi martial art in which fighters attempt to disturb their opponent's balance without using force.



Try as he might, the younger man cannot better his opponent. Pushed and pulled off balance, he is forced to break his stance and catch himself before falling to the ground. Herman Kauz, fourth dan black belt in judo, second dan black belt in karate, and grand master in tai chi, may be old, but he is no pushover.

"Tai chi does not require strength or speed," says Kauz, who recently made his seventh trip to Israel to visit pupils who have continued to teach and practice the art here.

Kauz was born in Brooklyn in 1929 and joined the US Navy in 1946. While stationed in Hawaii he had his first exposure to judo and began practicing the sport in earnest.

After his discharge in 1950 he enrolled at the University of Chicago to study political science and found time to start the university's first judo club.

For the next 15 years Kauz spent time in locations around the Pacific including Hawaii, Tokyo, and the Mariana Islands south of the Philippines, always studying Oriental fighting arts. In 1954 and 1955 he was the Hawaiian all-weights karate champion, and remained undefeated, although today Kauz says he is not a great supporter of competitions.

"Competition in the martial arts was introduced as a test see how you can perform," he says. "By training for competition you don't get all of the picture. Training to win injects a bad element into the mix. Just to enjoy it, to practice for the enjoyment, that is what is important."

STUDYING IN Tokyo, in Japanese, says Kauz, was not a problem. The basic vocabulary that he needed for the training he soon picked up and beyond that he says that it was very much a matter of attitude.

"At first I would try to be more 'Bushido' [warrior] than the Japanese," he says. "But you will never be 100 percent Japanese, which is just as well because you are trying to transcend the culture."

It was during this time that he met Master Masatoshi Nakayama, senior instructor at the Japan Karate Association, regarded as the man who put karate on the international stage. Nakayama asked him to translate into English a book on karate that he had written. However, before he could begin working on it Kauz returned to Hawaii. Instead, he was put in contact with a Japanese businessman who was interested in completing the work.

The two worked on the book via correspondence whilst Kauz was teaching social studies in the navy as a civilian employee. The final product, called *Dynamic Karate*, is considered one of the classic works on the Japanese fighting art. Kauz himself has written several books on martial arts including *The Martial Spirit*, a meditative martial-arts book. In 1974 his book *The Tai Chi Handbook* sold over 100,000 copies.

Kauz is a paradox. A tall, broad-shouldered man, his speech is soft and measured, as are his actions. The hand that reaches for a glass of water does so with the unhurried pace that only seniors seem to master. Then he gestures to

emphasize a point, demonstrates a move, or tangles with an opponent. Not jerking actions, but rather rapid, flowing motions, his limbs and body flicking into position with extraordinary speed.

"When you are doing a martial art you have to be in the moment," says Kauz. "Especially when there are consequences for screwing up."

It was a judo injury in the 1950s that made Kauz switch from judo to karate, and the cane became necessary after a hip injury was aggravated by yoga exercises.

During the early Sixties Kauz began to feel the need for a more meditative form of the martial arts. At one stage he was interested in Zen Buddhism, but later became disillusioned.

"I didn't like all that sitting still and the whole temple business," he says.

In 1966 friends introduced him to tai-chi master Ma-ching and for the next three years Kauz studied tai chi, a meditative martial art characterized by its slow movements.

In 1970 Kauz began to teach martial arts for a living and since 1971 has focused exclusively on tai chi.

When asked about the popularity and spread of martial arts in Western countries Kauz's face turns solemn, his bright blue eyes staring hard into the middle distance. He exhales with a noise somewhere between a sigh and a grunt, the sound coming from deep inside him.

Then he winks and smiles. "That's what the Japanese do when they want to look like they are considering something hard."

"When one culture takes something from another it becomes something else; that always happens. What does the training in terms of the exchange between teacher and pupil have to do with a pub brawl? Martial arts is about achieving your aims by avoiding a fight."

Kauz is also unimpressed by the flood of movies that have cashed in on the martial-arts appeal.

"Movies have to be dramatic. They don't capture the training. You aren't supposed to use it outside. It doesn't lend itself to what you see in the movies," he says.

Kauz rises at six in the morning to practice tai-chi methods, a dance-like routine that exercises both the mind and the body. He also jogs, stretches, and spends an hour or two gardening before teaching his daily classes in tai chi.

Kauz tries to come to Israel every year to see how his students are doing.

"I get more respect here," he jokes. "Maybe they are a little more serious." Growing up in Brooklyn in the Thirties, Kauz got to know the local Jewish youths as well.

"The Jewish mothers used to tell their kids not to fight so the Jews were a pushover," he says. "But I think that learning to fight is necessary and good."

As for Israeli attitudes, they have not gone unnoticed.

"The driving is a little extreme, which often shows where you are at," he says.

Reflecting on a lifetime spent studying how to fight, Kauz is ascetic, philosophical, and pragmatic.

"To accord with the rhythms of life, not at the intellectual level, but beyond that, you have to feel it. It's a complicated business being alive."

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