

# The Black Belt Book of Life - Topic #22

## Perfect Speed.

In the journey of accomplishment  
the wise this adage heed —  
fast or slow is not of note,  
of note is *Perfect Speed*.

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*Impatience is wanting something to happen  
before the due time.*  
Saint Charan Singh  
[20th Century]

*To every thing there is a season,  
and a time to every purpose  
under the heaven.*  
[Bible: Ecclesiastes 3:1]

*You win battles by knowing the enemy's timing,  
and using a timing which the enemy does not expect.*  
Miyamoto Musashi  
[Famed Japanese Swordsmen-16th/17th Century]

In life, as it is in fighting, timing is everything. Once a fighter understands timing, the potential of his victories will soar, as reflected in the statement of Miyamoto Musashi, one of the greatest and most renowned swordsmen of his day and author of *The Book of Five Rings*, his flagship work on strategy, tactics, and philosophy.

Timing, however, must be perfect. Some timings may be very fast; others quite slow; still others erratic and broken. The essential thing in timing is to understand *perfect speed* which is *that*



*speed allowing perfect execution.* Whether the movement is defensive or offensive, the timing and speed must be perfect to fit the situation.

Imagine swinging a baseball bat as soon as the ball leaves the pitcher's hand; swinging a tennis racket after the ball has passed the end line; stopping your car at a green light; closing your mouth before the spoon gets there with the soup; studying for a test after the test has been given and worst of all, telling someone you love them after they've died. Bad timing, right? Now assume your timing is perfect and you swing the bat at the right time, knocking the ball out of the stadium; you hit the tennis ball for a down-the-line winner; you stop at a red light and continue through a green light, as you should; you open your mouth as the spoon gets there; study for the test before you take it, and most critically of all, you inform that special someone that you love them before they pass on. Good timing, yes? Of course. Fighting is timing; life is timing, and success in both fighting and life is a matter of perfect timing, perfect speed—executing whatever it is that needs doing at the exact time it needs to be done to insure success.

True story. As a beginning martial artist, I didn't know much about the technical aspects of fighting. I was taught to be tough, hang in there, do your best—all the normal encouragement phrases but nothing really technical, and certainly nothing about timing. As my fighting experience progressed throughout my karate journey, I got my rump kicked and head handed to me on a platter so many times I thought I had lost both at one time. My only fighting education during those days was in the school of hard knocks . . . hard kicks . . . hard punches . . . hard backfists and hard falls—all replete with bumps, bruises, cuts, broken bones and stitches. There seemed to be no end to the butt whoopin' I was receiving in those days, especially from Bob "Trucker" MacFarlane, a Black Belt buddy who used to clean my clock on a regular basis. I don't think I ever scored on him once. He was always kind about it and generous in his praise for me, but time and again he would tag me with one of his patented blazing fast backfists. His defenses were impenetrable. Thank goodness his control was immaculate. It should also be said that Bob MacFarlane was and is as great a gentlemen as he is a fighter. (RIP Trucker. Love you, buddy).

At one stretch in my learning process, I even had one hundred fighting techniques memorized in groups of twenty-five which I could recall in a few seconds, thinking that a large number of techniques was the answer. It wasn't. Eventually what I discovered in my learning-to-fight-by-getting-my-head-handed-to-me-on-a-silver-platter strategy was that I didn't need all those techniques. All I needed was to make my attacks at the right *time*. When I learned this, I was able



to reduce the number of techniques I was using from one hundred to a half-dozen! Truly. That's it. It was an amazing transition and became my greatest Ah-ha! moment in learning to fight. Miyamoto Musashi is absolutely right: *You win battles by knowing the enemy's timing, and using a timing which the enemy does not expect.*

Since martial arts is life, for us to be successful it's important we study the *timing* of life, the "when" of our actions. However, it's just as important to understand the "when not" to do something. Knowing *when not* to act is just as critical as knowing *when* to act. Attack or counter attack at the right time and victory is assured. Attack or counter attack at the wrong time and defeat is certain. The key in timing is to understand *perfect speed, that speed which allows us to execute perfectly.* And for those fighters who believe blinding speed is always the answer, the answer to that is that *the essential thing is not excessive speed, it is perfect speed.* When we understand this concept functionally, our fighting, as well as our life, will improve dramatically.

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