

## An Ancient Chinese Parable

Hundreds of years ago in China, a desperate, homeless and hungry old man went to the house of a wealthy man and humbly asked for food. The servant who answered the door asked him in what way would they would be repaid. In desperation, the old man lied and said that he was a master calligrapher and could write very rare and difficult Chinese characters. Since this skill was a sign of a cultured person, the servant carried this news to the Master of the house who agreed to the old man's request and invited him in. The old man was given a room, was well-served and his needs were provided for.



In the morning, the old man was presented with paper, a calligraphy brush, the Masters ink stone box, and an ink grinding stick. At the time, calligraphy inks were made by laboriously rubbing a stone with a hardened ink grinding stick to generate a small amount of ink. The stone was hollowed out and the inner surface was angled to create an area for water to be rubbed on the stone with the stick. As the water slowly turned to ink it, ran down the angled surface of the stone to a hollowed out ink well.

Knowing how to write only one character, the number one, the old man began working the stone to make ink and wrote the number one on every sheet of paper that he was given. Every morning the servant would inquire about his progress. The old man would say that he was not finished and to bring more paper. This went on for weeks. During this time, the man hand-brushed many hundreds of sheets of paper.



The old man started to feel the suspicions of the servants and knew it was time for him to flee. In fear for his life, he sneaked over the garden wall, onto the road and began to run away as far as could. He knew when they discovered he was gone, they would begin searching for him and kill him if he were caught.

The old man ran and ran and began thinking he may have made it until he heard his name being shouted from a distance. He continued to run but the shouting got closer



and closer. Finally, exhausted, he sat down and awaited his fate. When the servants and guards caught up to him, he asked, "How will you kill me?" They told him that he had been invited back to the house as a special guest. He was motioned to get into an ornately decorated gama supported by two large poles on either side with bearers on each

end, front and back. A gama was commonly used to transport royalty and people of culture.

During the trip back to the house, the old man was very anxious, thinking he would be killed in the house. Upon arrival, he was invited in as special guest. His presence was requested by the Master. He was led in to a large, beautiful room where the Master sat in his chair at the head of the room. There was a chair placed on the floor directly in front of the Master where the old man was asked to sit. He did so nervously as the Master of the house began to speak. The Master graciously thanked the man for making him a custom, one-of-a-kind masterpiece. He said, "Its beauty shows the diligent energy, patience, focus, the time to make the ink and the work involved. It shows the spirit and power that it took to create it and that it radiates."

The Master prominently displayed the work in his house, thanked the old man again and showered him with gifts and money. The old man left very happy and resumed his travels contemplating the complexities of life.

The old man first began writing, he did so nervously and hastily, and it showed in what he wrote. During his many weeks of practicing this one character, he began to relax and committed himself to writing it to the best of his ability. He began to control his breathing and focus as he worked and his skill improved daily. By the time he fled, the one character that he wrote for so long had become perfect, a thing of beauty. The transition of the character from the time the man started until he stopped truly told a story of the evolution of his skill.

As in our training in Chayon Ryu, repetition and dedication over time will result in a thing of beauty.

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As told by Grandmaster Kim Soo at the 31<sup>st</sup>  
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