
Protect, Break, Leave by Michael J. Hacker

Occasionally, one hears of the educational model 守破離 [shu-ha-ri] in the Japanese martial arts. Since I've heard many "interesting" translations and explanations of it over the years, I thought I'd toss my 2 yen into the collection plate for good measure.

shu 守 - protect; obey

In the beginning stages of learning, you must pay strict attention to what your teacher says and does. This is not the stage for creativity and exploration; you should observe your teacher's movement and listen to what he says, then copy his actions and words as exactly as possible. Protect and obey.

As your teacher starts requiring you more and more to solve your own problems and answer your own questions, you're likely getting close to passing into the next stage.

Other occurrences of this character include:

- お守り [o-mamori] amulet; charm
- 子守 [ko-mori] babysit (lit: child-protect)
- 守弘 [mori-hiro] male name (i.e. the late Saito Morihiro sensei)
- 留守番電話 [ru-su-ban-den-wa] telephone answering machine (lit: keep-protect-watch-electricity-talk)

ha 破 - tear; break

In this phase of your journey, you not only retain the responsibility for protecting the teachings handed down to you, but also the duty to tear down and break apart everything you've learned. This is when you start to explore possibilities that may not have been explicitly addressed in the lessons you had received up to this point.

Through experimentation, test what you've learned and become the instrument of your own growth.

Other occurrences of this character include:

- 道場破 [dōjō yaburi] dojo busting (lit: way-place-break)
- 破獄 [ha-goku] jailbreak (lit: break-prison)
- 型破 [kata-yaburi] unconventional (lit: form-break)

ri 離 - separate, leave

In this, the final stage, you leave the nest. You no longer require a teacher, because you are capable of being your own. You must continue to reflect on the old teachings (see "keiko" in my March 2006 article). Transcend the 型 [kata - form, shape] while still protecting it for future generations.

Continue to protect your inheritance. Continue to tear it apart.

Other occurrences of this character include:

- 離婚 [ri-kon] divorce (lit: separate-marriage)
- 長距離 [chō-kyō-ri] long-distance (lit: long-distance)
- 電離圈 [den-ri-ken] ionosphere (lit: electricity-separate-sphere)

Michael Hacker began his study of Aikidō in Japan in 1990, and has been very fortunate to get his hands on many skillful teachers in his short time on the tatami. His primary Budō influences are Donald Moriyama, Amano Shigeko, Saito Morihiro, C.E. Clark, and Stan Connor. He has also had limited exposure to Kōdōkan Jūdō, Mugai-ryū Iai-Hyōdō, Shōrin-ryū Kishaba-juku Karate, Hapkido, Tae Kwon Do, Tai Chi, and various Chinese martial arts. Among his other loves are songwriting, his Chet Atkins nylon-string, techno-geek stuff, his world famous Bad Budō video collection, studying languages, and Swan (if he knows what's good for him). Michael is a student at the Jiyushinkan in Tempe, Arizona.