

# FROM THE GROUND UP:

## FLYING KICK BASICS



*Man has always envied a bird's freedom to soar effortlessly through the sky. Martial artists can share the experience of weightless flight when performing a special aspect of their art: the flying kick.*



By Alex and Annellen Simpkins, Ph.D.

When properly executed, a flying kick exemplifies a basic martial arts principle: power in motion. When coupled with a flying kick, other techniques are performed with a spring energy that seems to explode out of nowhere!

### TYPES OF FLYING KICKS

There are two types of basic flying kicks. Jumping kicks can be executed in place with a spring upwards followed by several mid-air kicks. The other type of flying kick covers more distance laterally. It usually begins with a running take-off which creates forward

momentum and adds force to the kick. Jumping or flying kicks are the most executed kicks. There are many variations of kicks, but essentially, front, side, roundhouse and back are the core of the basic kicks. Dual kicks can be performed in the air if there is enough speed and height.

A spin combined with a kick will add dramatic variations to basic Tae Kwon Do kicks. Jumping spinning back kick, spinning side kick, spinning roundhouse and spinning front kick are just a few examples combined with a spinning jump kick. Crescents can also be combined with spins. These kicks have special applications for sparring

which will be discussed later. Kicks can also follow a reverse spin to confuse or else establish an opening for the kick.

The flying kick can be broken down into several basic elements. When learning, practice the elements separately and gradually practice them together. This will help you to learn good habits from the very beginning. The approach, the take off, the kick itself, and the landing are all important to develop a smooth, safe, well-controlled and dynamic flying kick. Good body dynamics help to ensure this.



## PREPARATION

A mat or grassy area provide a good surface for jumping and flying kicks. It should be soft enough to cushion the landing but must not be too soft. A mat which is too soft does not allow a firm-footed or balanced landing. Thick crash mats can be used to practice a fall and roll after the kick, but they are seldom as necessary as one might think. Improvise an upright barrier, preferably a soft body shield or foam pad of some sort. For the first few attempts, the pad should be far lower than the expected jump. Once the practitioner is accustomed to the whole process, the barrier should be raised for more challenge. Another way of extending the challenge is laterally with several pads in a row.

## THE APPROACH

The approach to flying kicks builds forward momentum which will power straight line front, side, roundhouse and back kicks. This does not apply to standing jumping or spinning kicks. Begin the run to the barrier from no farther than ten feet. It is helpful to build momentum, but long runs do not enhance flying kick height. Once the barrier is reached, take off from one foot. Often, beginners



*When performing a flying side kick, keep the kicking foot parallel and the other leg up for protection. Experiment with different hand positions in order to be ready to deflect various counterattacks.*

will try to jump from both feet, like hurdling from a diving board, but this will not permit as much height. Practice with different distances for the take-off run.

## THE JUMP

To execute a flying kick, the practitioner must get height from the ground. This is achieved through adequate acceleration which will produce enough speed

to temporarily offset the effects of gravity. Some practitioners have a natural, instinctive sense for gaining height but for others, using the following principles can make the difference.

To begin a flying kick, first, sink to the knees. Next, push down against the ground, straightening the legs as the body is pushed upwards. As the acceleration upward begins to be felt as continuous motion, the knees should be lifted as high as possible in synchrony with the upward spring. A certain speed and momentum of the jump is gained.

Raised knees add control to the leg position and keep the groin covered for protection against a counter kick or punch. To coordinate the hands and feet, draw the arms in and extend them as the



*Far Left: When preparing for a flying or jumping kick, raise the knee. This prepares you for a strong airborne front kick. First practice the kick over a barrier then, (Left) add the kick.*



# FLYING KICK BASICS

knees bend. This will enhance the effectiveness of the jump. Jump with one knee raised to train for the flying front thrust kick. Inhale with the jump to help gain more height. The straight jump trains the martial artist to perform a flying front kick and flying roundhouse.

Once the straight front jump is under control, try a jump with both knees raised followed by a 90 degree pivot in the air so that the landing places the jumper sideways to the original take-off direction. This is useful preparation for flying side kick. Variations for advanced kickers involve complete 360 degree turns and double kick combinations, some simultaneous, some alternate motions.

A flying front kick is often the first kick learned. When beginning the technique, run for the approach and take-off from one foot. One knee is raised while the other leg kicks out in a front kick position over the barrier. The execution of a flying front kick is much like the standing front kick. The knee of the kicking leg is raised high, the foot is then thrust quickly toward the target and then brought back to the bent position. Remember to keep the foot flexed and the toes pulled back so that the ball of the foot can make contact. When the kick is finished, retract the leg instantly to be ready for landing or a second kick. The flying front kick can also be executed with the jumping leg. A different rhythm and flow is finished by this variation. Double front kicks evolve from this method quite naturally.

When sparring, the arms should be in a guard position. Practice using several different arm positions to find some that are comfortable. Train to keep at least one hand ready to block during prac-

*Practice spinning crescents by putting the hand out as a target. This helps to develop accuracy and control of the kick.*



*The instructor helps to train the student to execute a flying side kick. Here, the student must jump over the barrier and then kick the padded stick.*

tice. This builds a habit to protect against a counterattack.

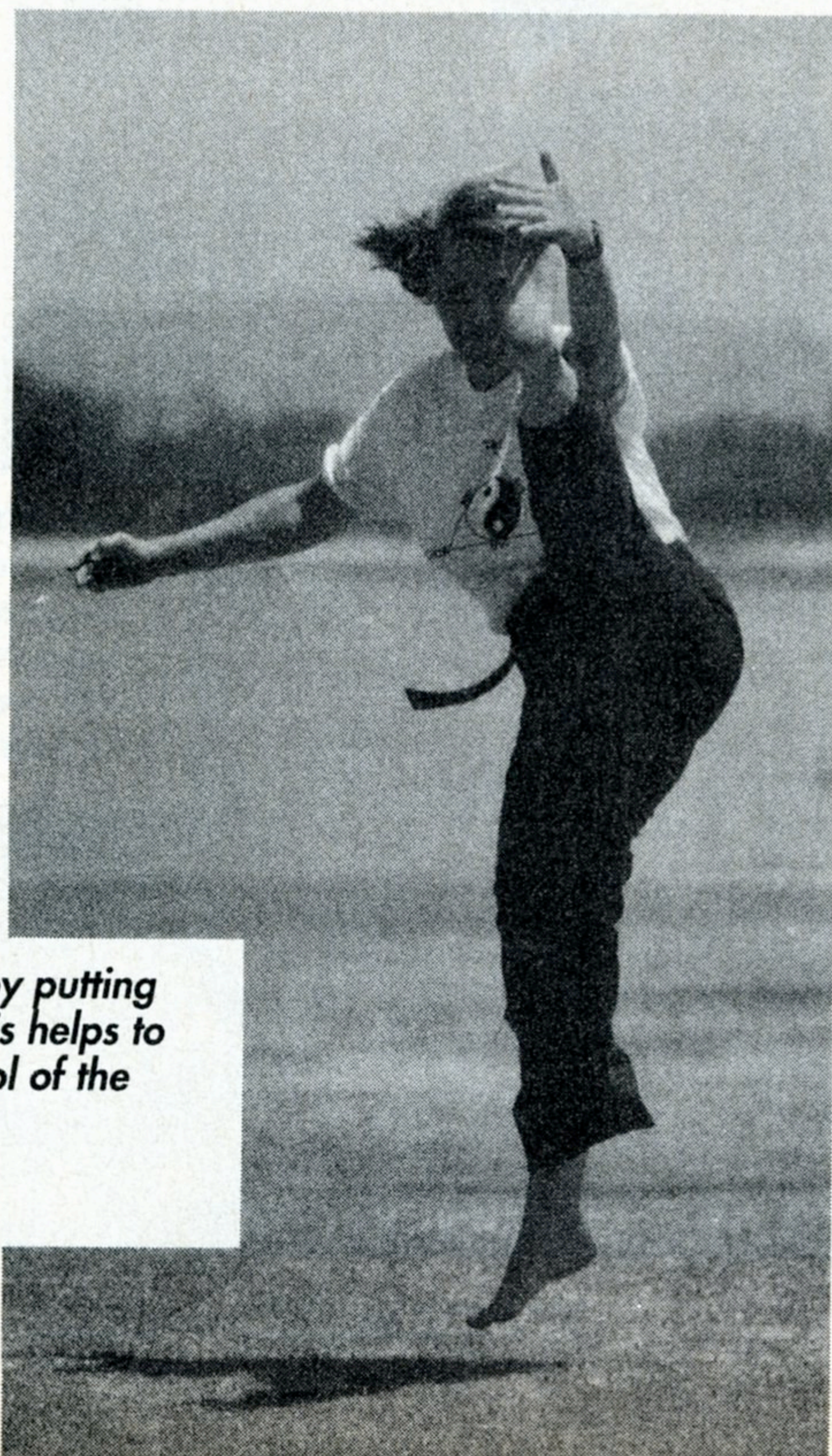
Forward momentum from the approach helps to power the kick, but the kick itself must be fast and powerful to make the technique effective. Power the kick with a strong thrust. Regular standing kick practice to develop speed and force in the kick will transfer to a more powerful flying kick.

The student can begin to train for a flying side by returning to the

approach drill. Once this is mastered, draw the knees close to the body, then thrust the kicking leg out towards the target in a side position; simultaneously, the foot of the other leg moves inward to the groin as the knee is raised. As one leg extends to kick with the foot, the other is retracted, knee bent, in the opposite direction to balance the extension of force. Some prefer to leave the other leg dangling somewhat instead of drawing it up.

There are no applications for both methods in sparring situations. Keep the kicking foot positioned parallel to ensure the heel or bottom of the foot is the striking point. It is important to tense the abdomen as the kick is extended to express force. As more control is gained, work on doing the kick with strength, focus and accuracy, as with all well-executed Tae Kwon Do techniques. Feedback from an observer or especially the instructor can help greatly in improving the technique and enhancing self-awareness.

A flying roundhouse can be practiced using the basic procedure for a front kick. A back kick is executed by turning a bit farther than the side kick—but remember, they are both advanced kicks. There are many variations and ways of performing these kicks. Practice the





flying roundhouse with just the knee first to get the best twist. Then forcefully thrust the leg around, finishing with the foot positioned parallel or slightly downward at the toes. Remember for a back kick, angle the foot so the toes point downward while flexing the foot towards the front of the calf. This reduces the target for the opponent to block.

### THE LANDING

To avoid injury from repeated kicks, a proper landing is necessary. Landings are executed either standing or with a falling roll to a standing position. This fall teaches the practitioner to be comfortable on the ground if he ever finds himself swept down. Ground skills can add a whole new dimension to sparring capabilities.

The basic landing is in a stance. Usually, a comfortable back stance works best. Bend the knees slightly and give a little; legs acting like shock absorbers. Never land straight legged. There should be tonicity in the muscles but not stiffness.

The landing begins by descending feet first, immediately bending to the knees (with control), dropping one knee and bending the arm to the floor and rolling. The roll is performed diagonally over one shoulder with legs bent. The body is rounded and head tucked down so that nothing bumps. (Additional information about rolling and falling techniques can be learned from judo.) The roll gives momentum so that the student can spring up into a balanced stance. Remember to land on the feet first.

### JUMPING KICKS

The martial artist performs jumping kicks as flying kicks except there is no running approach. These kicks need more spring energy and power in the legs. They can be very effective at close range. To begin the kick, take off from both feet, spring straight up, and lift the knees. As the knees come up, snap the front, side or roundhouse kick quickly.

The angular momentum of a spin can be added to the jump to

power a jumping spinning front, side, roundhouse or back kick. An advanced jumping spinning kick, the jumping spinning tornado is a combination of two crescent kicks with a spinning jump. Before adding the jump, it helps to gain control on the floor. The kick combination gets power from the circular motion of the body and leg as it spins around. The first inner crescent kick sets the body in a circular motion. The second kick comes halfway around the circle. The jump is added to the second crescent kick. As the smoothness of the two kicks develops, angular momentum combined with a jump gives a sensation of effortless flight.

### TRAINING

Weight training, when used as an adjunct, can be very helpful in building the required strength for flying kicks. Jumping squats with light dumbbells or a barbell, calf raises, partial squats, front squats and variations of these movements

*Continued on page 90*

NEW FROM TKD ENTERPRISES!

# I.T.F. & W.T.F. FORM BONANZA

## 48 FORMS FOR ONE LOW PRICE!!!

### World TKD Federation Poomse

*Esteemed Grandmaster Jung Soo Park performs Basic 1-2-3 step sparring; Palgwe 1-8; Taeguek 1-8; and all 9 WTF Black Belt Forms from Koryo to Il Yeo. The tapes are professionally produced and offer two views, shown simultaneously, of each movement (front and side). Grandmaster Park executes each form with precision and skill. Clear, concise narration describes each movement.*

W.T.F. Poomse Tape.....\$79.50



Master  
HEE IL CHO



Master  
JUNG SOO PARK



Please use  
order form  
on page 13.

### International TKD Federation Hyung

*World-renowned Grandmaster Hee Il Cho expertly demonstrates Tae Kwon Do Hyungs Chon Ji to Gwang Gae (1-10) and Ge Back to Tong Il (11-20) in two illustrative tapes. Each tape offers a detailed explanation of every technique, stance and movement in slow-motion and in full speed. The forms are the original hyungs created and developed by Gen. Choi, Hong Hi.*

I.T.F. Hyung Tape (1-10).....\$59.00  
I.T.F. Hyung Tape (11-20).....\$59.00

**EXCLUSIVE OFFER FROM  
TKD ENTERPRISES!**

Both I.T.F. Tapes (Hyungs 1-20)...\$79.50  
Both I.T.F. Tapes and  
W.T.F. Tape (3 tapes total)...\$149.50



# FLYING KICK BASICS

Continued from page 55

help to develop strength. Dynamic, moving lifts help to power the spring energy needed in flying kicks. Abdominal training is also important. Hanging knee-ups, twists with a light barbell or closet rod, side bends, leg extensions, pulley extensions or resistance training with a partner can help. A strong abdomen helps to pull the legs up for the kicks.

Gravity can also be a training partner. Run down a gentle slope and execute a flying kick. Take off at the top. The extra lift from the slope gives a longer time in the air to practice more complex kicks or to work on form.

A human partner can lift the kicker under the arms or at the waist just at the moment of take-off. This gives the kicker more time in the air and an opportunity to place the legs exactly in position and feel the correct posture.

## COMMON FAULTS

To strengthen weak points, analyze your kick. Areas to examine are the leap, the leg extension, foot position, body focus, breathing, torque of the waist, landing and roll-out.

A common fault in flying kicks is to lean down towards the kick before it is necessary, lowering the height reached in the jump. There is a downward acceleration brought about by the kick upward which can make the kicker's body crumple forward or else lean back out of sync. Stay straight, approximately at a 45 degree angle. Lean forward to focus as the full extension is approached. Timing is essential, not to lean too soon or too late, too much or too little is also of consequence.

Another common fault that lessens height is to jump while not simultaneously pushing down hard. Remember to push first, then spring with the upward motion, as the leg straightens: um-yang. Begin the jumping spring, then go with it and add to it.

## SPARRING

Flying kicks help in sparring, not only as a measure to deal with hand techniques, but also as a way to attack or counterattack momentum, overpowering the defender in a tidal wave of force. Flying kicks can be especially devastating if the practitioner can force the opponent to move back. Begin to rout the opponent by throwing two punches, followed by a kick such as the spinning crescent. As the opponent backs up, jump and execute the flying kick. Ensure the opponent cannot simply wait and counter because the moment of landing is a weak point.

One of the dangers inherent to the flying kick is that the kicker is committed to the attack. An alert opponent who correctly foresees the technique may step back or aside and wait for his chance to counter-punch, sweep or kick, so be prepared for possible sudden changes of situation. If you drive the opponent into retreat, the attacking momentum can quickly overwhelm him and maneuver him into a disadvantageous position.

Another use for a jumping kick is as counter. Turn away from the middle target punch, stepping out a 45 degree angle. Then, throw a jumping back hook kick. For an interesting variation, turn counter-clockwise and throw a front jumping kick with the right foot, using the momentum generated by the spin for extra snapping force. Similarly, when the knee is first lifted high, a downward hooking axe kick is executed. Then straighten the leg and lead downward with the heel to drop the axe on the opponent. These techniques should be done with discretion: the force exerted on the opponent is considerable and it can be difficult to avoid hard contact.

Careful set up for the flying kick will make it more likely to succeed. First, throw a roundhouse to the opponent's blocking arm, then immediately follow with a jumping, spinning back kick. The flying kick can also help set up the opponent for a final kick or punch. A series of punches will force the him into retreat. Follow this up with a flying side kick. Quickly exe-



**A second kick can gain extra power from the momentum from the first kick. Height for the kick is gotten from the acceleration and momentum.**

cute a roundhouse kick while the opponent is off-balance.

Flying kicks are also used for defense. A flying roundhouse counters the attacker's punch with great solidity. Front kick, and as the opponent steps down, leap and throw a flying roundhouse to the opening with the same foot. If the opponent anticipates and jams, trying to crowd the kicker, then use the turn of the roundhouse motion to evade and gain an angle to counter. The appropriate counter might be a second kick with the roundhouse foot, a hooking kick with the other leg, or a spinning back fist if the opponent successfully draws closer. If the opponent has retreated, the attacking momentum from the flying kick may overwhelm him and send him quickly into a disadvantageous position.

Remember that gravity brings the flying kicker down in a parabolic, depending on the forward and the upward acceleration. Each flying kick has an ideal angle and range of motion. Be sure to land well-protected or drop to a ground technique.

Jumping and flying kicks offer a double advantage to the Tae Kwon Doist: not only can they be effective tools in the fighting arsenal, but with the execution of these techniques the practitioner can soar the heights, and have a lot of fun getting there!