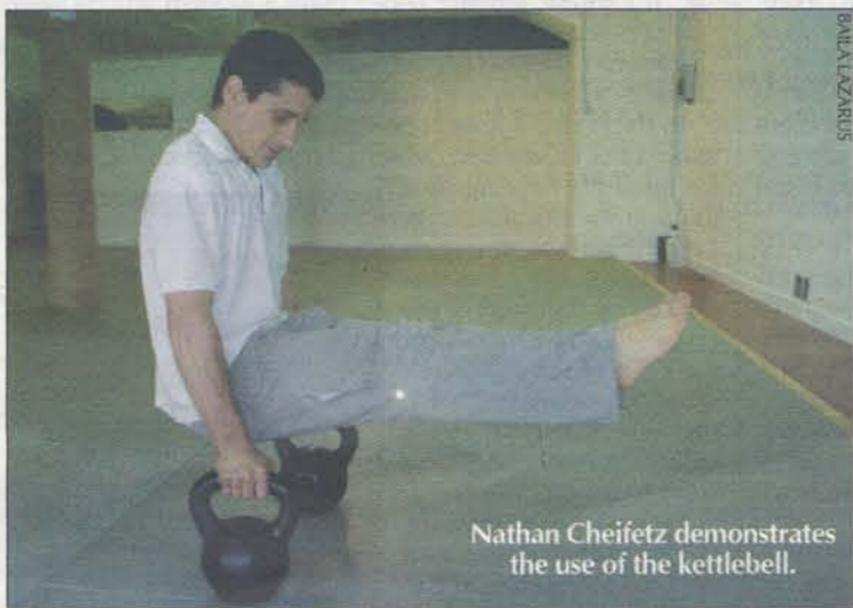


The next fitness fad?

BAILA LAZARUS



Nathan Cheifetz demonstrates the use of the kettlebell.

I wouldn't say I'm a fitness fanatic, but there is pretty much no fitness activity I haven't tried. From boot camp to Bikram Yoga to tae kwon do, if it will make me stronger and in better shape, and has even a small component of enjoyment to it, I'll try it. So, when the opportunity came along to try out what will no doubt become the next tae bo, zumba or TRX, I grabbed my gym bag and headed to Vancouver Mind Body Centre.

Opened just a few months on Fraser near King Edward, this dojo is where transplanted Israeli Natan Cheifetz teaches aikido, iaido and, more recently, kettlebells.

A *kettlebell* is an iron ball (imagine a cannon ball in size and weight) with a handle. They range in weight from five pounds for children's versions to 32 kilograms (72 pounds) for the serious addict and cost up to about \$150. As a fitness item, it could be called a differently shaped dumbbell, but, because of the shape, its integration in exercise routines is more complete.

"It requires you to use your whole body," Cheifetz explained as he took a break after a Sunday morning class. "The difference is the alignment of hand, arm and weight."

So, rather than target a specific area like your biceps, as a dumbbell would, using the kettlebell engages several areas. The "clean," for example, includes a squat to pick up the bell, engaging leg, stomach and back muscles, as well as movement of the shoulder, arm and wrist. The "Turkish get-up" has the participant lie on the floor and then get up while holding the kettlebell continuously over their head, which strengthens the arms, shoulders, stomach and back, while including a stretch for the torso and improving balance.

Cheifetz, who holds a third dan in aikido and fifth dan in iaido, was shown the kettlebell in a martial arts class and became certified under

the tutelage of Pavel Tatsulin, the Russian physical training instructor credited with bringing kettlebells to North America.

Cheifetz loves how easy the kettlebell is to learn and encourages people of any level of fitness or age to try them.

In the class that has just finished, there are male and female, young and old (age eight to 57), those with an athletic disposition and those with an apparent lack of physical activity in their life. The one similarity – they are all completing the exercises asked and they are all having a good time.

"Hold it up ... hold it ... don't cheat," Cheifetz is calling out to the class. "Don't compromise your back."

He continues, "Lock your knees ... 3-2-1 release!"

With encouragement, humor and a bit of chastising every now and then, Cheifetz conducts the class as a full fitness routine, with kettlebell exercises followed by stretching. Many of his students come from his aikido class.

Over the years of his own training, from going into the Israel Defence Forces to studying yoga or martial arts, Cheifetz has always looked for holistic ways of improving fitness and creating a "mind-body" connection.

"I thought something was always missing in the physical training," he said. "If you research the masters of the past, you'll see they have a well-rounded training."

Cheifetz added that, once you learn the basic techniques with a kettlebell, you can practise at home and begin to strengthen and tone, working out just five minutes before bedtime.

"You can come for 10 or 20 sessions and you won't need me after that," he said.

For more information on Cheifetz's studio, go to vancouvermindbody.com.

Baila Lazarus is a freelance writer and certified life coach.