

To AJKA-International  
AJKA-I of PA  
Instructor Trainee's Report #35

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Sensei Funakoshi presented fifteen kata as the foundation of the Shotokan style karate. Additions to this list now has Shotokan karate-ka practicing twenty-six forms of kata.<sup>1</sup> The essence of karate-do lies in practice and training of kata.

Kata may be described as "theorems of self defense." The kata of karate-do are logical arrangements of blocking, punching, striking and kicking techniques in set sequences. Kata training is an integral part of karate-do. It develops the necessary ability in the karate-ka to move skillfully and smoothly in all directions executing attacks and defenses against to or more imaginary opponents.

One of the most amazing concepts of karate is that you can train anywhere and anytime. The size of the room or the location is meaningless. So long as the karate-ka has some space he/she can practice karate and kata. This is one of many significant differences between karate and other sports – while you maybe able to practice your kata in your kitchen you could never practice your jump shot.

Kata can be divided into two categories: *Shorei* and *Shorin* kata. In *Shorei* kata these are suitable for physical development, especially muscle and bone strengthening. These kata require composure for their performance and exhibit strength and dignity when preformed. Contrary, *Shorin* kata are suitable for building fast reflexes and rapid movements.

Diligent practice of kata enables the karate-ka eventually to grasp the deeper aspect of karate-do. Proper performance of kata is looked upon by some as being a form of moving meditation.<sup>2</sup> During the entire execution of kata, which may last 50 seconds to three minutes, the mind, body and spirit should be totally focused.

Sensei Nakayama wrote in his Best Karate series, "Training in kata is spiritual as well as Physical. In his performance of kata, the karate-ka should exhibit boldness and confidence, but also humility, gentleness and a sense of decorum thus integrating mind and body in a singular discipline."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An interesting point is made by Seseni Nakayama when he describes kata he says that there are "about 50 kata ('formal exercises') are practiced at the present time, some having been passed down from generation to generation, others being developed fairly recently." - this makes me think that since we are only practicing 26 kata are we missing half the concepts?

<sup>2</sup> Nicol, C.W. Moving Zen: Karate As A Way to Gentleness. New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1975

<sup>3</sup> Nakayama, Masatoshi. Best Karate Series: Gankaku, Jion, p.12. Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1979.

As Sensei Funakoshi often reminded his students. “The spirit of karate is lost without courtesy.”<sup>4</sup> An expression of this courtesy is the bow at the beginning and the end of each kata. The stance that we bow from in all Shotokan kata is *musubi-dachi*, with the arms relaxed. Hands slightly touching the thighs and the eyes focused straight ahead. See image to the right for *musubi-dachi* stance<sup>5</sup>.



Every kata begins with a blocking technique and has a specific number of movements to be performed in a set order. The movements vary in their complexity depending on the kata, which group it is located in for which rank level. Nothing in the kata is superfluous – every single movement in the kata has a specific purpose and often it is the in between movements that really matter.

Sensei Nakayama stated:

Mastery of kata is a prerequisite for advancement through kyu and dan.... The effects of practice are cumulative. Train everyday, even if it is only for a few minutes....never rush through the movements. Always be aware of the correct timing of each movement. If a particular kata proves difficult, give it more attention and always keep in mind the relationship between kata practice and kumite.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> Musubi-dachi is one of the most important stances in Shotokan. This is the position from which we bow to a partner in kumite, when you enter the dojo, showing complete respect to the dojo and the sensei. This stance is imperative and although very simple, it is often taught incorrectly with many inexperienced karate-ka make the mistake of bowing from heisoku-dachi.

<sup>6</sup> Nakayama, Masatoshi. Best Karate Series: Gojushiho Dai, Gojushiho Sho, Meikyo, p.13. Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1979.

Kata and kumite are complementary training methods. In kata, one applies the kihon techniques into his kata which forms the bunkai. However, in kumite one applies the techniques with a partner to work on timing, control power and speed. One must remember that, while kumite is a useful application of the fundamentals learned through kata, it is not a substitute for kata.

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