

Tang Soo Do Karate Center

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Does Kata Have Any Value?



Much has been written over the years, both pro and con, about the value of kata. Some believe it is time consuming and totally unrealistic when it comes to actual combat. As for those that don't see any value in it, I must disagree with them. Sometimes we don't see value when we don't know what we are looking for.

Should a fighter have good balance, concentration, effective body mechanics? You bet. In addition to possibly having hidden techniques and preserving a history of a system, kata develops these and other attributes. These attributes include, but are not limited to, balance, body mechanics, attention to detail and concentration. These attributes are essential to learning and mastering any psycho-motor skill. It is a useful warm-up and makes repetitious practice more interesting and it can provide aerobic conditioning. Therefore, I believe practicing kata acts as basic conditioning and a foundation to learn any self defense techniques. It actually prepares the martial artist to acquire any number of psycho-motor skills. In the past, kata provided a way of hiding techniques from others. Unless you trained with a competent teacher, you often didn't learn the subtle and hidden techniques contained within the kata. Seeing someone like Sensei Oyata extract a hidden technique from a kata is totally amazing.

Why doesn't the law enforcement community or military use them? One big reason is time constraints and the other involves cost. The physical portion of defensive tactics in law enforcement and hand to hand combat in the military, in my opinion, is far too short. More emphasis is placed on the use of weapons, both non-

lethal and lethal. Also, I don't believe that the physical empty hand combat skills of the police or military are adequate for the most part. Lack of a good foundation in defensive tactics or hand to hand combat skills will usually force them to upgrade their response to a tool i.e. pepper, baton or lethal force. Being competent in hand to hand combat or defensive tactics requires more hours of training than either law enforcement agencies or the military want to commit. These time issues are usually cost related.

To execute any complex motor skill requires repeated practice. The body has to move in a way where the power of arms, body and legs (body mechanics) are coordinated and work together. Kata allows the practitioner to coordinate body mechanics in a general way that can be more easily applied to some other specific physical movement. However, practice of a specific movement is still required to become competent in that movement, this is referred to as "specificity of training." How many repetitions are required to master a technique so it can be performed under stress depends on which "expert" you listen to. Some suggest as little as 5,000 repetitions and some suggest far more. Frequent practice is also required to keep the technique sharp. Funny, this seems a little like "kata" practice.