



KAZOKU

Just Your Imagination

By Jerry Figgiani

The essence of Okinawan Karate is kata. These forms passed down from legendary karate masters of the past have much value to the practitioners of karate today. Understanding the form and functions of the kata is key to one's development in the art of karate. On my recent trip to Okinawa (July, 2015), one of the topics I wanted to discuss with Sensei Takeshi Tamaki, (head of the International Shogen Ryu Karatedo Kyokai and the most senior practitioner out of the Shoshin Nagamine dojo) was kata bunkai.

Bunkai is the analysis and study of the movements within the kata—the application of the techniques. It is an important part in the study of one's kata. Still today, there are many schools which grade their students on the kata alone and there is no mention of the word bunkai or application. Kata is not just studying the pattern but the study of the form and function within the kata itself. One of the points Tamaki Sensei made was that in order to take your kata to a higher level and have an understanding, “you need to use your imagination.” The katas were handed down to us, but it is up to us to look into and discover how we can use these movements from within. When looking at the movements from within, we can use the analogy of two people looking out a window. What do they see? One may see the blue skies, beautiful landscape and birds flying through the air while the other may see cars parked on the street, people walking by and garbage cans. It's the same view out the window with many different scenes. This is what people have to realize about bunkai. Is it a block or is it a throw? Is it a block or is it a lock? We need to open our minds in order to have the kata give us something back. This is where our imagination has to come into play. We have to see things beyond the ways in which they first appear. People sometimes don't do enough to understand kata. Recently one of my students said a particular person didn't want to train with me because I teach kata. He said no one fights with their hand drawn back in the pocket. This is clearly a lack of understanding on the student's part and is indicative of his elementary level.



There are many reasons why the hand is in the pocket if we study kata correctly, such as adding velocity to a strike, controlling one's opponent or simply displacing their balance. Tamaki Sensei also said, “It is important you make karate your own.” Yes, we do follow the kata and its guidelines and principles but the movement within has to be movement you feel comfortable when applying certain techniques. We have to understand that no two people move the same way. Regardless of speed, power and limitations, your karate has to be yours.

Just a little tip on understanding your kata better....use your imagination, and look beyond what you originally thought was the movement. 

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