



## A Block Is A Strike?

By Jerry Figgiani

In this article, I want to discuss Transitions; both as a means of understanding and unlocking the movement and techniques inside the kata and also as a means of evolving the way we incorporate our practice into our everyday life.

I approach each class and the way I integrate the lesson of that day by seeing the makeup of the group, reading the room and establishing a connection. This allows me to gauge the energy and focus of the room so as to establish the best flow for that session. This is also a system that I use in my seminars where I have a variety of students all with different levels of skill and ability.

I believe that it is very important to engage not only the advanced level Black Belts but the less experienced students as well and to identify the strengths and limitations of those attending. It is so important to recognize that no two people move the same way. There are so many variables to consider such as individual flexibility, strength, age, past or present injuries and levels of conditioning. After all, what we are really talking about is basic human movement. Looking at our practice in this way is in itself a transition of mindset; stepping out of the usual box and into a reframed view of motion.

Movement is a key term that I believe can help or hinder those who teach martial arts. Of course in class, particularly in mixed classes with less experienced students, each movement or technique has a name; chest block, head block and the like. However, I always stress the idea that none of these techniques are limited to the name that they carry or the function associated with them. Our bodies can only move in a certain way and as such it is so valuable to look at the use and usefulness of each movement in multiple applications. This is especially focal when executing and understanding the transitions in the kata. When looking at movement this way, it is often in the transition that the movement will reveal the application or technique.

In my earlier years of training it was often viewed as disrespectful to question the instructor regarding the efficacy of a technique. However, in truth I would often ask myself if a particular technique would actually be practical in a self-defense situation. With this in mind, I make sure to encourage my students ask questions about the practicality of a technique, to start a dialogue, think

through the technique and bring me the questions.

This transition in thinking became so evident to me when I started to re-evaluate the idea of sparring or the traditional way kata application was taught. In one of my seminars I asked one of my biggest and strongest students to execute a front snap kick and asked the group if anyone wanted to block that kick with a traditional down block.

Watching that student blast the focus pad brought strong feelings of doubt to anyone about whether or not a down block would be the effective choice. I later explained how performing the movement of the kata which resulted in a transition to a down block can be used to displace balance, escape from a grab, complete a throw or even at a more advanced level be used as a choke. The importance of knowing that a particular movement has multiple applications is a huge advantage to practitioners of all styles. There is a common phrase in karate that a block is a strike and a strike is a block, yet all too often a block is taught exclusively as a block and a strike is taught exclusively as a strike. The key element to take from this is that movement itself is the key. Applications inside the kata do not necessarily have to follow the patterns in the kata but the movement must be recognized in a realistic and practical way which will generally become more clear in the transition between movements.

My transition from student to teacher has been very rewarding. In particular, the philosophy of Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu has taught me to keep a white belt mentality while keeping the open mind created through Black Belt experience. 

