

What Kata means to me

I have chosen to focus this essay on “any aspect of Karate” towards Kata as in my mind Kata is the most important aspect of karate. Kata collects the ideas formed in kihon (these ideas include form, technique and discipline) and expresses them in a way such that more complex ideas, including breathing, awareness and timing are allowed to grow and develop. However, Kata is not as physically demanding as other aspects of karate which call upon the same complex ideas, such as Kumite. In my mind there are three unique scenarios, all of which demand close inspection of kata, and all of which shed light on different areas of Kata’s wide range of technicality. These three scenarios are: focusing on kata for gradings; focusing on kata for competitions; and focusing on the Bunkai of Kata.

Firstly, the experience of focusing on a set of Kata for a grading is a very important part of the entire experience of Karate. As I have progressed through the grades, my arsenal of Kata required for the next grade has increased and changed. As a result I feel as though going back to early Kata such as Hian Shodan is not a chore, but a boost of nostalgia. Progressing through the grades and getting more and more kata under my belt has not only helped improve my attention span, but also my physical memory as committing numerous complex sequences to muscle memory is arguably quite healthy for you, both physically and mentally. Not only this, but I think that you are never done learning a Kata, no matter what grade you are, there is always more to learn and contemplate. Going over Kata always presents an opportunity for self-improvement.

Secondly, the unique experience of preparing just a small number of Kata to be shown off at a competition by focusing and honing them to near perfection really brings out the personality of the chosen Kata. Competitions allow for personal choice, personal expression, and the question of which Kata you like, and which you don’t. Instead of being told which Kata to do and how to do them, for the first time you can pick, choose and make decisions about which Kata to do and how best to perform them. This involves making choices with timing, emphasis and focus. Competitions really allow you to develop your own personal interpretation of Kata.

Another great thing about competitions is being able to witness the wide variety in how different clubs approach the same Kata. The differences can vary from so small that you almost miss them, to so large that you struggle to recognise the Kata itself. These differences between clubs and, by extension, senseis is largely due to the next topic in this essay.

Thirdly, Bunkai. Bunkai is the expression of opinion and creativity in a Kata, often contrasting with the very rigid, uniform and disciplined nature of Karate. Bunkai allows for a more than ever personal relationship with a Kata by adding your own impression to the Kata's already vibrant personality. Bunkai is my favourite part of kata as it can lead to interesting discussions about what a Kata means to each individual person.

To conclude, there is a lot to enjoy about Kata as it appeals to a wide range of people. Personally, my favourite Kata is Gankaku due to its flow and timing. There are parts of Gankaku that can be held in suspense and done slowly and parts which are explosive and require a lot of speed and precision. It is a very varied and interesting Kata. The experiences of preparing your Kata for a grading, for a competition, or for Bunkai are so different that they can appeal to almost everyone who does Karate. In fact, I don't think I've ever heard anyone say that they don't like doing Kata.