

Bunkai - How Kata Can Be Practical - Kata Interpretation and Application

Breaking the stereo type

The purpose of this article to destroy the stereo type that Kata found in Traditional Martial Arts is completely useless and impractical. For years many non martial artists and martial artists alike claim that Kata practice is useless and archaic. The claims are, "*Nobody fights like that anymore*", or "*There is no grappling taught in Kata and all fights are fought in close quarters.*" I am one that will agree to the idea that; yes both of these claims are true if you believe that these techniques were meant to be executed literally. I will also admit that the dynamics of fighting has changed throughout history and time. I believe that most Kata is eyewash and archaic. I also believe that there are "*hidden techniques.*" I, like many others believe that there is simply more to our standard Kata than meets the eye. Many believe that the masters of the day, developed these drills with many of the most effective techniques hidden in plain sight. There are also many who believe that these techniques contain, "Mystical Death Touches" or deadly pressure point techniques. I am not completely confident in the "**Death Touch**" theory, but I am 100 percent sure that some very effective techniques are contained in the very bland Kata we practice today. When speaking of Kata and it's effectiveness or practicality; first open your self to the idea that it is possible that many of today's martial artists are in fact improperly trained and they are also in effect not aware of the very techniques that they practice through Kata.

The origin of Kata

Let's first go back to the origin of Kata in general. Centuries ago before the age of Kata, which we are familiar with today there were fighting sets. Chinese monks of Shaolin developed these "fighting sets" as drills to train themselves in the art of combat. Typically these were choreographed fights practiced by two individuals. These drills could also be practiced by one. These "fighting sets" were developed in order to aid the monks in achieving muscle memory. There were also "line sets". Line sets were practiced with large formations of monks and resembled a military drill. Little did those monks realize that their secret methods of training would evolve into today's Kata. The passing centuries brought Chinese immigrants to Japan and Korea and eventually Chinese fighting sets and forms were transitioned to rudimentary forms and Kata practiced in the early styles of Karate and Tae-Kyon the predecessor of Tae-Kwan-Do. Initially the Chinese versions had hidden strikes and manipulations to Acupoints or Acupuncture points used in early Chinese healing. Many Japanese styles including Kyo-Shin Karate and Ryu-Kyu Kempo still maintain the belief that these vital striking points are hidden in their forms. Although there have been many attempts by practitioners and enthusiasts to substantiate the claims of "mystical" Acupressure points having profound affects on the bodies bio mechanical and nervous system when struck or manipulated; there has been no real medical or scientific proof or documentation, showing truth to the claims and theories. There are others however; who practice what is known as "*Bunkai*" or interpretation of Kata by using knowledge of anatomy and bio mechanical movements.

Understanding bio mechanical movement

What is bio mechanical movement? Wikipedia defines it as; "*the application of mechanical principles to living organisms. This includes bioengineering, the research and analysis of the mechanics of living organisms and the application of engineering principles to and from biological systems. This research and analysis can be carried forth on multiple levels, from the molecular, wherein bio materials such as collagen and elastin are considered, all the way up to the tissue and organ level. Some simple applications of Newtonian mechanics can supply correct approximations on each level, but precise details demand the use of continuum mechanics.*" Wikipedia goes on to define further by stating, "*The study of biomechanics ranges from the inner workings of a cell to the movement and development of limbs, to the mechanical properties of soft tissue, and bones. Biomechanics as a sports science, kinesiology,*

applies the laws of mechanics and physics to human performance in order to gain a greater understanding of performance in athletic events through modeling, simulation, stimulation, gesticulation, mastication, and measurement." Bio mechanical movement applies to Martial Arts and Combat in the sense of sports science. Therefore, learning how to restrict, manipulate, control or destroy the movement of the human body is key in deciphering the practical use of Kata. By learning to harness the knowledge of anatomy and bio mechanics or kinesiology we can discard or bring value to the common interpretation of Kata in the literal translation.

Thinking defensively; knowing how and where you can be attacked

Besides knowing and understanding anatomy; we must also understand that there are only so many scenarios in which we may be attacked. Understand that there are only a certain number of angles in which to receive possible attacks. Knowing this you may also understand that everything else is simply a variation of the predisposed and identified angles. Once you identify the number of angles and possibilities for general direction and type of attack you can efficiently analyze the series of techniques in the prescribed Kata or Form. This is the point where you can begin to apply the laws of bio mechanics and your knowledge in the human anatomy.

Breaking the technique down

The first misconception that many martial artists make is to assume that each and every single technique is the "magical" technique to end the confrontation. The late Master Stan Hart, who was a direct student of Taieka- Syu-Oyata (*Senior most authority of Ryu-Kyu Kempo*) explained to his students that; instead of taking Kata techniques literally technique by technique, one should analyze more by series of techniques. Example and case point; if the prescribed Kata executes a left turn into a forward stance with a left hand low block followed by stepping forward with the right foot and punching with the right hand. The literal interpretation is impractical, because nobody fights like that. That series of movements if taken literally is against human nature. However if one examines the entire series of techniques through anatomy, bio mechanics and defensive or protective thinking; one might find that these movements are natural in executing a close quarters wrestling move called a "*whizzer*" and a typical hip throw takedown.

The step to the left and the low block is not really intended to be a block at all, but stepping into greet an attack while striking low. While stepping forward with the right leg, pulling the left (*low block*) hand into chamber position and executing a high punch with the right hand; what you are really doing is wrapping the opponents right arm with you (block) hand and instead of pulling your fist into chamber you are pulling the enemy's arm and body into you. The right leg stepping (*with C- Motion stepping as taught in all basic Kata*) is basically stepping through your opponents hips and setting him off balance. The right arm strike is not really a punch, but is significant in telling you that in order to complete the technique you must use that limb to assist in finishing the takedown; by driving forward with a strike or push. I use this as my case point example because this is a common series of techniques found in most martial arts. Notice there are no "*Fancy*" pressure points or acupoints used; simply leverage.

Practice the training sequence

Now that you have learned the basic fundamentals of interpreting Kata or applying Bunkai; you may want to practice your own interpretations. When interpreting or applying bunkai ask yourself, "What is my right hand doing?" "What is my left hand doing?" "What is each individual leg doing?" "What direction are you going?" Then ask yourself, "What is my start position and ending position?" Once you identify these factors you have then painted the silhouette of what defense or attack you are executing. From there your actual leverage points and striking targets become clear. Remember; stick to the rule that when attacking targets; attack targets that are proven to work. The evil Sensei John Kreese said it best in the (*Karate Kid*) when instructing his minions, "*If a man can't see he can't fight, If a man can't breathe he*

can't fight and if a man can't stand he can't fight." Also remember the rule that a block is a block, a strike is a strike, a throw is a throw. This simply means that a technique may provide any of these functions in the right context. Once you have found the correct interpretation for your sequence; you should practice it. Practice (*drill*) from different angles, multiple attackers, against weapons etc. etc. Drilling the technique will aid in developing reflex and muscle memory.

Andrew Curtiss is an Army veteran of 11 years. He is author of *Combat Application Techniques: Principles Of Destruction* (book on Knife and Hand to Hand Combat). Andrew is the former 1995 American Independent Karate Association Men's black belt champion in Kata, Sparring and Weapons. Andrew holds a 2nd degree black belt in Tae Kwan Do and Shurite Kenpo Karate. He is a former kickboxer and current professional Mixed Martial Arts fighter.

From the web site; <http://www.warriorpages.com/articles/BunkaiHowKataCanBePractical.html>