

IPPON MAGAZINE

ISSUE 10

PRINT - £4.30
DIGITAL - £2.50

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Back To Basics

by Ady Gray
6th Dan



“FINISHING BLOW”

Kihon or basics are practiced in many ways. They are of course for the development of safe and correct form as in the way of line work, but Kihon actually comes in many forms and ways of training. As well as the benefits of repetitious line work, Kihon can also be basic pad work or impact work. This is a way that Kihon must be trained for all karate-ka to check that the body alignment and timing is correct for the main reason of striking, punching and kicking technique. After all, this is the reason and purpose of these techniques “The finishing Blow”.

To understand even the most basic of techniques such as Gyaku Zuki or Oui Zuki students must hit a bag, pad or Makiwara (padded striking post). The line work or non-impact basic of these techniques is to throw the technique through the impact/contact part of the technique and to the completion of the punch with a 95% completed action so that a joint is never locked out 100%.

Incorrect teaching used in continuous training, will cause wear and tear on the joint, if not direct hyper tension. One of the reasons basics are trained to the end of the technique and not to the contact point is to form muscle memory or your default setting. When you make contact your muscle memory will therefore follow through and not pull the strike as in touch control.

In Kata, you often see the Bunkai (application) made to work at the end of a technique/s. This is actually the part of the application that doesn't work. The application works from the contact part of the technique and your muscle memory/default setting that has been developed through continual repetition practice, takes the contact part of application through to the follow through and full impact. Would your technique do the job? Bag work and impact work would give a clue.

An example of the correct part of impact is in making Manji uke (Double block with Downward sweep to the front, while the other arm executes rising Block to the front and then follows through to a Jodan inside block to the back). The contact part isn't the front hand and back hand blocking simultaneously an attack coming to the front and behind you at the same time. You often see this in competition Bunkai and the above application does not look right to me. The contact point is using the back hand to cover your head as in Age Uke (Upper block) whilst striking to the Groin with the front hand. You would then continue from that contact point through the follow through which in turn would give you the correct finishing posture of Manji Uke. (See image below)



After every technique you should always ask yourself, would that work? If not, don't do it or train correctly until the answer is yes. If it is an impact technique then use bags, pads or makiwara to give yourself belief and trust in your technique. Remember you should judge your punching, striking or kicking by how it feels to the recipient and not how it feels to you.

By having an understanding and confidence in your technique with an impact that you trust and believe in, you will have a better visual technique and Karate that is a lot more mature. This maturity of Karate needs to grow with the age of student. Lots of very good juniors/children perform their karate in a less mature way. This is perfectly fine as long as their karate matures with them as they grow older. I know a lot, and see a lot of older teenagers and people in their early 20's still using karate that they used when they were very young. This is poor development or simply just a lack of understanding of Karate. It doesn't happen in other sports. All sports people develop as they grow and change the way they perform and understand the game, but karate is generally lacking in this understanding. Maybe this is down to the lack of understanding, age and ability of a lot of instructors not being able to make the changes and maturing students as they grow. If you were taking your driving test and then pass, it doesn't mean that you are then ready to become a driving instructor. You are still at the beginning of your driving journey. Becoming a black belt is no different. Just because you've earned your black belt doesn't mean that you are ready to teach. You now have the acknowledgement that you understand what Karate is. It's the beginning of your new journey. It should be viewed as an exciting opportunity to really get started. Started in deepening your understanding and exploring how to strive for greatness in your own

technique and knowledge. This is maturing in your karate. This is you becoming the karate-ka you always wanted to be. The belt colour is for everyone else to see where you are, for you, it shouldn't be the belt, it should be the depth of your knowledge and your skill to adapt to anything and everything.

“Just because you’ve earned your black belt, doesn’t mean that you are ready to teach

A Quote that I recently read from Sensei Kagawa really sums up competition Karate for me:

“Sport Karate competitions still should have their base roots, the “finishing blow” concept and the art of self-defence. This point has been overlooked recently and needs to be re-established and reaffirmed within all sport organisations, to keep the correct spirit in such events.”

