

Developing instinctive self-defense responses through kata.

Problem-solving white paper
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Preface

Self-defense has become an overused and wildly exploited phrase used to market all manners of martial arts schools. This is because school owners need to provide some valid and logical reason for students to come. What better reason is there than the fundamental root of karate, SELF-DEFENSE?

The goal of this paper is to present a different approach to developing self-defense skills using the training methodologies found in old Okinawa Karate, namely Kata.

I have found that many practitioners view kata simply as something they do because the “masters” of old did it, or it is used as a physical exercise or a series of moves to be completed simply to satisfy the school's curriculum so that the student can be advanced in rank.

The vast majority of schools simply provide lip service, saying kata is the heart of karate, but in practicing their Kumite there's no kata. overwhelmingly, the Kata performances lack any essence or meaning and appear to be simply empty vessels.

My inquisitive, some would argue contrarian, nature has driven me to question the validity of kata training, specifically how it is used today. Kata is largely practiced without any real meaning in most schools today. If the katas are empty and devoid of meaning, how can schools claim to use kata to teach self-defense? This is the problem I see, and suspect others do, but due to the nature of the politics found within Karate, it is never brought up, as most don't want to rock the boat and jeopardize their future rank and standing. In other cases, the Karate-Ka never has truly questioned it. If the issue isn't brought up and addressed, how can solutions be developed? I not only want to bring it up, but also want to present an idea to address it and possibly create a discussion on the subject, but we will see how that goes.

Over the years, I've asked other karate-ka “what is the meaning of these moves in this kata?” Alternatively, I have asked “when you're doing this kata, what are you thinking?” Many times I am provided with a rudimentary bunkai or the canned answer “I do it this way because that's how I was taught.”

This white paper is my attempt to draw attention to the lack of actual, logical and useful, self-defense taught in most martial art schools. Furthermore, the paper is based primarily on my personal observations, experiences and conversations with others. More importantly, I want to present a solution for this issue that I hope I have presented well enough in this paper. I am hopeful that it provides a starting point from which others can build upon.

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Those who truly study karate have an interest in the art, or field, and can define it as they wish.

Due to my background and personality, I look at Karate as first a methodology to learn & maintain high readiness against a physical attack. Secondly, as a system to maintain strength, flexibility and mobility. I am not interested in studying karate as a “Do”, a way of enlightenment, it is simply about physicality and self-defense. Both my reasons support the other.

Simply practicing kata isn't nearly enough to understand how kata relates to self-defense. It comes down to a unique science of extracting the self-defense aspects from the kata and training those concepts. This is what has fascinated me about martial art, and continues to fuel my research, inquiries, experimentation and continued practice.

Everyone wants to look like Jackie Chan fighting off an attacker, they want the fancy movements. Truth is, self-defense is actually quite ugly. The fancy movements only teach us how to move our body. The goal in any self-defense situation is to survive and escape the encounter. Actual self defense movements are simply gross motor skills that are specific, quick and devastating. These gross motor skills must be developed and maintained. Kata is the primary tool to accomplish this task. Katas are the gifts given to us by the Okinawan's. What is lacking is how to use this wonderful tool to teach self-defense, learn and maintain self-defense skills in a logical manner.

We will explore the following at a relatively high level:

1. Using Kata for self-defense training.
2. How Traditional Dojo Kata differs from combative Kata.
3. At which point in the self defense situation does Kata begin?
4. How to train the body's natural instinctive responses using kata.

Lastly, there is no magic in learning self-defense. There are no super-secret martial art moves kept exclusively for high ranking seniors. When it comes to technique, we all use the same core foundation. Everyone's bodies work the same, we have the same arms and legs, joints, basic anatomy. The concept proposed herein can be applied to any existing martial art, not just Okinawan Karate-te.

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Introduction.

When the Karate-ka (practitioner) advances past the novice level, he shouldn't look at Kata as multiple people, each patiently waiting their turn to attack. This is an elementary way to view Kata. To grow, you must eventually begin to look at Kata in a more advanced way.

I propose that kata should be considered 'snippets' of defensive combative reactionary movements, which originate from an unexpected attack, not from a consensual match, as is common in kumite (sparring).

Without getting too deep into the negatives of what Kata has become, I will simply say that most schools do not use Kata in the manner it was intended. Therefore, Karate as a Jitsu has been replaced with performance kata, it is an empty dance used merely for rank promotions & trophies. My goal is to hopefully persuade Karate-ka to reexamine how and why they practice Kata, particularly for self-defense.

The object of this paper is to present my view that Kata for self defense should be practiced differently than the "traditional" Dojo Kata. This is because traditional dojo kata is used to strengthen the body, develop breathing, be easy to teach in a group, work on precise placement of movements, and focus on kihon. Whereas self-defense based kata isn't concerned with conditioning the body, precise or elegant movements, and it definitely isn't concerned with impressing judges.

Self-defense Kata must:

- Begin with the startle response
- Reprogram the natural instinctive responses to visual or tactile input.
- Flow from position to position with continuous, uninterrupted movement.
- The application of kinetic power.
- Be short, quick, violent and decisive.

The scope of this paper will focus only on utilizing kata as a tool to develop and maintain self-defense skills. Particularly utilizing a specialized kata called Honto Kata, followed by a method to apply the Honto Kata to train self-defense. The Honto kata is the focus of this paper. The following pages will explain the difference between the Honto kata and the traditional kata.

There was time in Okinawa, where Karate was devised, that technique and application were taught, followed by Kata. Kata was there only to provide a vehicle to remember and practice the techniques. In the late 1800s, when Itosu and others started to train groups of students, the methodology was reversed. They began to focus exclusively on Kata and show some of the application. This was the turning point of Karate for self-defense, to Karate for enlightenment and exercise.¹

¹ Page 68. Okinawan Karate: A History of Styles and masters vol. 1 Shuri-te and shorin-ryu Christopher M. Clarke

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The Traditional Kata.

The traditional katas are those found in all major karate systems around the world, passed down through the ages from Okinawa. These kata are strictly adhered to, they are balanced with redundant movements, they generally always start and stop in the same spot, and they all follow a specific pattern called an embusen, otherwise known as a performance line.

These kata are the ones taught to the class, and everyone does the same kata when performing as a group. While training at OBI Karate, the more advanced students are encouraged to add their “personalities” to the kata. But even then, the core movement is the same, the only change is the expression of the movement.

These kata are practiced to strengthen the body utilizing Yoga like postures (stances), isolating precise movements, developing breathing, flexing and movements.

The moves are separated by count, one count one move, but as the class progresses, one count can include a series of consecutive moves, which allows the more advanced students to add their personalities.

Honto Kata.

The Honto Kata is the exact opposite of the Traditional Kata. The Honto Kata's intent is to reduce the Traditional (long) kata to its fundamental core, revealing the true intent and meaning of the Kata. Not only does this kata look different, it doesn't end in the same place. The karate-ka may end up facing a different direction when he is done. The Kata isn't concerned with overly technically correct movements, physical training, exact precision of movement, and there is no embusen. When working Honto Kata, we are interested *only in developing explosive movements with violent intent*.

To reduce the traditional kata to reveal its true intent, we have to apply the concept of First Principle thinking, removing all the unnecessary Kihon concepts & duplicated moves used to balance the kata. Kihon concepts are the moves that are considered the basic fundamentals, which may include blocks, kicks and various stances. Balancing within a Kata is the repetition of the same movement, generally in a series of three moving from the karate-ka's right side, changing to the left and then back to the right. Once these are all removed, what we are then left with are just a handful of movements. This is similar to applying the 80-20 rule to kata, understanding that roughly 20% of what makes up the kata is necessary to understanding the kata. 80% or more is simply exercise, filler or used for balancing for group training.

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There are only a few core blocks, even fewer stances, steps and kicks. All of our kata, and thus the entirety of self-defense, stem from these basic fundamental movements. Look at any kata, and it is evident that it is built of these few basic components.

The basic components can be boiled down to:

- Blocks: high, middle, low and cross.
- Stance: cat, horse, forward and ready stance.
- Kicks: reverse kick, front snap kick and side kick.

* One could argue there are many additional kicks, stances, strikes, but my goal isn't to list all the variations.

This same principle is true when applied to anything. Many components are used multiple times to assemble all manner of things.

Once we have distilled the kata to its minimal components, we can begin to reverse engineer the kata using these left over moves. The result will be an extremely short, intense & violent version of the original traditional kata.

Programming natural responses.

Humans are the only living creature I can think of, that when threatened doesn't have a natural instinctive & effective defensive response. Like other living creatures, we do have a startle response. However, it has become useless in situations where we must defend ourselves.

I have intentionally "startle" people around me, in the office, at home, or sometimes out while shopping or at parties. I wanted to see how people react to various stimuli, and overwhelmingly I witnessed the same core movement. Here I will simply call it the "Basic Startle Response" (BSR). The basic startle response I observed most often is the hands out to the side of the body, eyes wide open and staggering backwards. Everyone I tested manifested a BSR that would not be beneficial in protecting them from an attack or allow them any follow through. I am certain everyone I tested would have been overwhelmed had I tried to attack them in some way.

Kata can't be practiced in a bubble, you can't gain anything useful by simply going through the movements like a dance. It would be no different than a 1st grader reading a book out-loud, who is uncertain how to pronounce the words he is seeing. The result would be robotic, he may stutter and stammer. This is how an empty kata appears when no meaning is applied – it remains hollow.

meaning to the kata is simply the outward manifestation of the mental visualization of the karate-ka's kata as he lives it at that moment. Traditional Dojo kata isn't ideal for developing self-defense skills. The kata are too long, there are too many kihon movements that when analyzed simply make no sense.

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Instructors and leaders of the various Kans or Ryus will not distill the katas down to their basics, claiming this would violate some ancient karate dogma. In every other discipline, everything is questioned, broken down and reexamined, except for Karate and religion. Read into that what you will. When teaching, I have students only work on 3 or 4 moves from a given kata. Often times I ask “what are you thinking when you were doing those moves?”

How the brain factors in.

The brain doesn't know the difference between a good thought or a bad thought, it doesn't know the difference between what the eyes see and what the brain is “visualizing”, it treats all forms of input exactly the same.

Has something like this ever happened to you?

You are sleeping, dreaming that you are doing something, maybe something simple, like swinging a hammer, and you swung so hard that you missed the nail but you hit your finger, and in that very instance you woke up flinching to grab your finger? This is mental visualization, that one part of the brain conjured up and the other side told the body to react to it.

The same visualization is required in Kata. As you practice the Kata moves, you must visualize the attack and execute your instantaneous response, just as if it was happening!

In most dojos, the instructor will count out the kata: One, Two, Three. These numbers are not merely for you to simply execute the next position, they are there for you to react to something.

I was taught in 1981 by Will Haynie, a student of Kyoshi Noel Smith. I believe at the time he was either 2nd Dan or 3rd Dan, he was also one of Sensei Smith's top fighters. What he told me is what he learned from Sensei Smith.

Every time you hear the count, don't think “BLOCK”, “PUNCH”, “KICK” or “STEP”, instead visualize what is happening and then apply the move to what you are visualizing as quickly as possible and with as much physical precision as possible.

In using this technique, you are programming your flinch response. Your muscle memory is being trained to place your body, your arms, your feet and legs in a specific posture that can be called upon if needed in a real situation. The interesting part is that your brain will use the “posture” as a template to address the threat. If you practiced it well enough, your automatic flinch response will work, allowing you to flow to the next logical movement.

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Flowing between movements.

At the heart of Karate is Kata. To perform the Kata, one must understand the moves, this is called bunkai. If Kata is the heart of karate, Bunkai is the sole of karate, and without it the Kata is empty, without any essence.

By understanding what the bunkai is for the various moves in the kata, we can visualize what our hands, feet and body should be doing. This is then brought to life in the presentation of the kata.

We must look at how we position the hands, are they opened or closed? Do they change between the start and the finish, from closed to opened? How do the wrists move from the start to finish? At which point do we go from “relaxed” to “flexed” and back to “relaxed”. The same applies to the feet, legs, arms, and particularly the torso. Throughout the entire movement, every part of your body is being utilized in the moment. It’s through the flow of the body that we transfer our body weight, creating power, utilizing kinetic energy. This power can be used against the aggressor.

- The feet and legs provide the foundation to anchor the body, while also generating the power.
- The torso to direct and control the power
- The arms to parry, punch, block, lock or grab to deliver the power.

Many consider a Kata good if it looks strong, and power is being applied throughout the entire Kata. This is a fundamental miss-conception when considering Kata for developing instinctive reactions for self-defense. Flexing throughout the entire kata provides isometric training, but it is actually counterproductive when trying to develop fast, continuous fluid like movements.

To flow from one movement to the next, we must consider when we start a new movement. This transition occurs at the precise moment when the preceding movement is completed. Do not confuse this with STOPPING, the next movement relies on the energy from the previous movement. If we stop and start, the energy is lost, there is no continuous flow. In addition, the practitioner will become exhausted easier due to the extra energy required to start again.

To move quickly, the muscles should be somewhat relaxed. If they are overly flexed, then the karate-ka is fighting against his own body, and he will be slowed down. At the point of connection between the karate-ka and his opponent, he flexes for just enough time to accomplish the desired effect. This is when he tenses his body, but only for a fraction of a second, only to return to the more relaxed state.

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When you are practicing Kata, being in a relaxed state

- Doesn't exert a toll on the body, resulting in muscle fatigue.
- Allows for quicker movements.
- Allows the Flex to deliver the desired effect.
- Allows the utilization and control of your body-weight, power or kinetic energy.

Kinetic energy is the energy your body possesses by virtue of being in motion.

The author touched on this in the previous section, as it is part of the flowing between moves section. In self-defense, the concept of delivering your kinetic energy to the aggressor is vital, and must be done in an instant, without hesitation or thought, by training the Basic Startle Response (BSR) to be fast (relaxed), hit hard (flexed) and return to the relaxed state to allow for the next logical movement.

In our training at OBI Karate School, Kyoshi Noel Smiths senior instructor and 7th Dan David Colaizzi regularly incorporate the use of both potential and kinetic energy and its application. The traditional kata is the playground for learning how to use kinetic power. Sensei Noel Smith refers to this same concept as body-weight, power.

It is vital that the victim, from a self-defense standpoint, engages his attacker with his potential energy. He must learn to go from zero to one hundred miles per hour, with the intent to intercept, disrupt and attack. This can only be effectively trained using combative honto kata, and honed in kumite.

Our Kata teaches us how to transition from one stance to another, while also executing other movements, such as BLOCK, KICK or PUNCH. How we step, and move our torso in conjunction with our hands and feet allows us to deliver our energy. We constantly repeat the phrase "Feet then hands", the foundation must be established before the connecting hand makes contact. Timing is essential, the hands shouldn't stop before the feet get in place, and the hands and hips should be timed to stop simultaneously at the point of impact (assuming a punch, grab or block). If the hands are ahead of the feet and you make contact with your opponent, there is high probability you will fall to the ground, or otherwise be at the receiving end of your opponent's counter attack.

This concept of moving must be transferred from the traditional kata to the combative honto kata. Unlike the traditional kata, you will not have many attempts to make the movement work, you will only have the one instance. After which, you will have to execute the series again from the moment the startle response is called upon.

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The Startle Response.

The startle response is a largely unconscious defensive response to sudden or threatening stimuli. It's also known as "*limbic hijack*" is the physical and mental response to a sudden unexpected stimulus.

The goal of Karate is to reprogram your Startle Response to acts of physical violence, in such a way that your response is automatic and decisive.

It is highly unlikely you will have time to prepare for the attack, there will be no advanced notice. The perpetrator is in complete control. He gets to pick every aspect of the attack!

- When he will attack.
- How he will attack.
- Who he will attack.
- Where he will attack.

Most people I have tested over the years have startle response reactions that are inadequate to protect themselves from a physical assault. These are not scientific tests, but me taking opportunities to startle people & observe their reactions.

When startled, the general reaction was a high pitched shrill. The hands go up inline with their ears, slightly outside their shoulders, and they end up in a haphazard stance while stumbling backwards, almost falling.

What I found interesting is the speed at which the hands moved, even though the hand position served no value in protecting them. [More on this later]

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Applying Combative Honto Kata to train the Startle Response.

As touched on earlier, Honto Kata is the raw, short and violent version that can be extracted from any Kata. Here we will examine the Kata Pinan Shodan, from the Shorin-ryu Shorinkan system. It is a universal Kihon Kata found in numerous systems.

Instead of examining the traditional version, we shall examine the Honto version of this kata, using the First Principles² method of distilling the kata. When doing so, Pinan Shodan is reduced from 27 moves to a mere 4 moves.

The purpose of Honto Kata is to develop devastating, explosive movements utilizing the startle response (reactionary instinct) as the starting point for your Karate! To develop an effective startle response, it is important that we visualize our attacker when practicing Honto Kata.

Another way to consider utilizing the startle response in a self-defense situation is that you must disrupt the attack, attack the attacker, and go from defensive to offensive simultaneously.

Visualization

The brain is a complex organic computer that cannot distinguish between reality and imagination. This is vital when training to create instinctive self defense responses. The old saying “That which you think you do; that which you do you become” is due to the brain fulfilling its mission of manifesting what you want. This concept goes in other directions, but for this paper, we will focus on thinking and visualizing to reprogram our Startle Response template.

Visualizing has been recognized as an important tool in self-defense training

“Intensity is an important issue in karate training. To visualize that one is actually engaged on the battlefield during training does much to enhance progression.”

- Itosu Yasutsuune

First place yourself in the instance of being attacked, visualize the attacker swinging at you, see in your mind eye his forward step, see his shoulder pull back and start coming forward, see his arm coming towards you. Slowly execute the initial move in your combative honto kata, it is your counter to the attack. See your hands going forward, in front of your face, and into his face, see your arm intercept his punch, feel your body weight settling as it is driven into him upon contact. You can do this visualization anywhere, anytime – it’s like daydreaming, but you are retraining your startle response.

² <https://fs.blog/first-principles/>

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Think about anything else, just visualize everything about the attack. Your brain will do the rest – it's an amazing information processor. Eventually, the more you do this exercise, you may find yourself twitching involuntarily. It's your brain sending signals to your body to respond, that part of your brain isn't aware that the stimuli aren't real.

Next, use the same visualization you just ran through, this time execute your defensive reaction. Don't just visualize it, physically do it.

Repetition.

The process to develop the level of automatic response needed in self-defense is simple, it is not complex. We are trying to give new programming to our brain, it is designed to easily take in new information. So we only have to practice to ingrain the movements in conjunction with visualization to develop muscle memory.

First learn the basic moves step, throw up the arms, raise the elbows, push into the earth, direct your weight into your hands.

Do this slowly, all the while seeing your opponent throw that punch. Feel his anger, hear his breathing, imagine everything, let your brain have as much information as possible. The only thing you have to do is overlay the template. Walk through the moves slowly over and over again.

Once you are comfortable with the speed, ramp it up a little. The same visualization, the same rudimentary movements, but a little faster, and continue by adding more speed and power. Ramp of the visualization too, your response is based on your opponents speed and timing.

As you progress through this series, your brain will quickly learn that this template is the ideal response, hand thrown up and out towards the attacker's face. Remember earlier, I said the biggest surprise was how quickly their hands got up, but usually to the side of their head? It is this flinch response we are adding to. But it doesn't stop with the hands, it's the legs, feet, body and head too! Particularly the head, the brain is programmed to protect itself.

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Your hands

This is a subject of much debate, one I do not plan to argue at this time. I will simply present my thought and application to how I practice both Traditional Kata and Combative Honto Kata.

Clenched closed fist results in a lot of muscle flex in the arm, and this creates resistance that the body must use energy to work against. Which if you are doing Traditional Dojo kata for physical exercise, this is practical, but if you are working towards self-defense, it is impractical.

When working Kata, Traditional Dojo and Honto, the hands are always open unless they are pulling, such as Hekite. Depending on the bunkai being visualized the fingers may be spread open or naturally relaxed, but also not flexed together unless executing a shuto or spear hand.

Startle Response and the hands

When we are surprised by an attacker, we want our hands shot directly into their face, with as much power as possible. The hands should be slightly cupped, striking with the base of both palms. To give a little added strength, overlap the left fingers on top of the right fingers.

[image of overlapped fingers]

It is possible that you may have been startled by an aggressor, and he hasn't yet attacked. The startle response should be similar to the triangle mentioned above. Instead of thrusting, your hands come together in front to protect your head. The palms should be out and fingertips almost touching, elbows down and in line with your body, in preparation to thrust or use the elbows to block.

The hands should not be made into fists unless punching!

Combative Honto Kata.

I learned about Honto Kata years ago, when Kyoshi Noel Smith gifted me a copy of **My Journey with the Grandmaster – Major Bill Hayes USMC(RET)**, among the many great ideas and insights provided was the idea of Honto Kata. In this book, and subsequent emails, he explained that by removing the balancing moves and never repeating the same move, we are left with a version of the kata that reflects its true meaning.

This concept has been expanded, applying First Principle thinking. Using this approach, we simplify the kata, break it down into its most basic elements, and reassemble them from the ground up with an emphasis on self-defense. Essentially, we are reverse engineering the kata. Naturally, because we are

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approaching the reassembly of the kata for self-defense, the startle response is our starting point, and everything flows from it.

Many will consider this concept profane, because they believe Kata should not be changed, altered or changed. Again, this is contrary to my way of thinking. If nothing changes, then there is not growth, only stagnation.

“There never have been any hard and fast rules regarding the various kata.”
– Gichin Funakoshi, *Karate-Do: My Way of Life*.

Pinan Shodan begins with a 90 degree turn to the left, as the right arm is moved up to the forehead, high block position. The left hand is brought into the middle block position, as illustrated in the first position.

It should be noted that Kyoshi Noel Smith (8th Dan) teaches this move as both hands punch out, fully extended at a 45 degree angle in front of the face, as if both hands are striking a target. The hands are then returned to the two block positions. This movement is more in line with the Combative Honto Version explained here.

The middle position illustrates the right hand being brought down to the middle of the forearm, followed by a punch with the left hand



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The combative honto version Pinan Shodan



The flinch response is used to drive both hands into the attacker's face, using both arms as guards against a "right / left punch". As the Kata suggests, we will step into the attacker, placing our left foot inline with his right foot. This brings us closer to the face, and allows us to absorb the first right hook.

In the middle image, our right hand immediately goes behind his head, rotating it slightly, setting it up for the final "punch" through, resulting in a devastating twist of the head, or a throw to the ground as shown in the kata.

Although this kata is quite simple, it is designed to be practiced with a different intent. When you are at the ready position, imagine your biggest nightmare taking a swing at you. Your job is to use your startle response, take an appropriate stance, and drive your hands into his face as quickly as possible. Use as much force, power and determination as possible when driving forward! **DO NOT HOLD BACK!** Your well-being depends on this initial move. This is your only opportunity to change the direction of the scenario. This is the response that can save you, it can not fail! Practice this move over and over again.

Repeat the drill many times over. Each time try to be a little quicker, harder & stronger. Imagine that nightmare of an attacker coming at you! He can be punching you, he can be attempting to grab you, he can be trying to put you in a bear hug. It doesn't matter what he is doing. Muster every ounce of fear, every drop of adrenaline, and drive your hands into his ugly face!

Every time you execute the flinch response, freeze and examine it. Did you feel balanced? Are your hands in the right place, in the right position? Did your hand get to the face in time? Did your feet get in place before your hands? Test it against a heavy bag, did you bounce off it or drive through it while maintaining your balance? Make the needed adjustments, don't just look at changes you have made, feel them overlay this feeling with the mental picture, then do it again and again.

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About the author

I earned my black belt in 2016 from Kyoshi Noel Smith, a direct student of Jodan Hanshi Shugoro Nakazato. This makes Sensei Smith a first generation student of Sensei Nakazato and a second generation of Chosen Chiban Sensei.

Sensei Noel Smith introduced me to karate in 1974 at the Karate School of Virginia Beach, later called Okinawan Budo Institute (OBI Karate), and continues to run this dojo to this day (2022). Like many others in martial arts, my studies were interrupted, but I always seemed to come back. In 1993, I earned my green belt at Sensei Smith's school. This is the equivalent level of many schools' first degree black belt. This is the level that ones learning goes from merely reciting katas and drills to analyzing and digging into the katas. Prior testing for 10 Kyu, brown belt, my situation changed, and I had to take a recess from my training. Eventually, I did return at a final time and continued as a student of Sensei Smiths. In 2021, I opened CoVa Karate School, and at its core are the ideas and concepts taught to me by Kyoshi Noel Smith.

It's equally important to say I wouldn't be the Karate-ka I am today, if it wasn't for those who helped me, and continue to help me everyday as I travel this path. Particularly my wife Kathy Schroeder and son Ethan Schroeder both encouraged, supported & have tolerated my obsession! A special thanks to Kyoshi Noel Smith, Senseis David Colaizzi & Glenn Graves, & Will Haynie, one of Sensei Smith's top students from the early 70's, as he helped set my appreciation of the art in 1981. It is said "that to teach is to learn again" and I have learned a lot when instructing others, particularly Vihn Dihn and Herрман Bayer in Kata and Kobudo. To both, I am grateful.

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Conclusion.

The reasons to learn Karate are numerous, and I say to each their own, pursue the art in the manner it accomplishes your goals. However, if the goal is to learn Karate to develop self-defense skills, it must be done in such a way as to develop your natural response.

The tool available to develop the needed self-defense skills is built into karate, it is called Kata. But the method to use Kata to transform the moves and concepts into viable reactions against physical assaults has become watered down to the point of meaningless dance movements that simply echo a distant idea. Many schools look at kata as a tool exclusively for promotion or competition, both in search of reward, such as a belt or trophy.

To utilize kata for self-defense, one has to break it down, visualize and be alive in the moment of executing the kata – you have to give it life and meaning.

To do so, we presented the idea of breaking Kata down using a method I was first introduced to by Sensei Bill Hayes in his book “My journey with a Grandmaster”. I expanded this a little further by presenting the idea of using first principle thinking to rearrange the remaining moves. The Honto Kata allows the karate-ka to focus on short, powerful and explosive movements – not prolonged and redundant movements as found in Traditional Kata. Regardless of the version the student is working on, traditional or honto, your mind and body must be in it, and this is what is missing in most Kata.

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