

Maturation of Karate through Dan Ranks

Master Funakoshi established 5 Dan levels. JKA added 6th – 10th Dan as a means to recognize contributions of senior karateka to the advancement of karate-do.

Training up to Shodan places emphasis on karate basics. Developing a solid foundation of basic karate techniques through the study of kata, kihon, and various levels of kumite prepares karateka for advanced studies of karate.

1st and 2nd Dan should diligently study posture, connection, hikite, kime, and muscle contraction/relaxation.

3rd through 5th Dan should add to their studies the concepts of moving from the center, kankei kei, stable emotions, and proper breath control.

The results should be an ability to transfer the generation of power from hard/external to soft/internal - the goal being to develop maximum power with minimal effort.

Focus of 1st and 2nd Dan

Posture - correct posture allows techniques to be executed with minimal energy. Correct posture also helps maintain balance. Incorrect posture forces your body to compensate; resulting in “energy leaks”.

Connection/ground reaction forces - understanding of connection through proper stances enables one to control direction and level of power. Improper connection usually results in “top heavy” techniques.

Hikite - pulling hand increases range and speed of technique. Both sides of the body must be equally used through the center. The pulling side also helps contract the entire torso at impact – lack of this hikite feeling will place too much emphasis on the shoulder/arm of the striking side. The pulling side also helps mentally focus techniques to our center.

Kime - application of focused power combining muscle contraction, breathing, and inner feeling (spirit/ki) at the point and time of impact.

Muscle Contraction/Relaxation - relaxation of muscles as you move towards your target; contracting muscles at the point of impact.

Additional areas of focus for 3rd Dan and above

Moving from the center/inside moves first - spine becomes the organizer of movement. The spine anchors the large muscles executing the technique. Executing techniques from the spine also serves to connect all our body parts to the center. Developing this idea of moving from the center also requires an understanding of “tanden”. Tanden is a term used in karate to identify a location in the body consider to be the bodies center. Generally its location is considered to be three finger widths below the belly button. Think of the tanden as a marble sized center where breath is pulled in towards and action is initiated from.

Kankei kei - eyes and strong intention. The eyes guide us to the target – the more intense our focus the more intense our technique. Eyes reflect spirit.

Stable emotions - strong intention vs. overly excited. If we are overly excited we will contract muscles that will interfere with proper execution of technique.

Breathing - proper breathing enables delivery of proper technique. Breathing also controls the emotions and energizes the body. Use exhalation to relax.