

KARATE-DO: THE STRENGTH OF THE WHEEL

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There exists, among many Dan Grades, a misunderstanding of what is expected when demonstrating for Gradings. The importance of both Kihon and, in particular, Kata is often underestimated, with many participants believing that a strong showing in Kumite will always carry them through. From a Karate-do point of view this would be the road to failure.

In my opinion, when preparing for a Grading, and when training for self development, the Karate-ka must treat Kihon, Kata and Kumite equally, taking into account the different training methods that must be applied and the amount of time that is required for each. I think most people would agree, that because of the high technical content of Kata, much more time must be applied to its perfection, than to say Free Sparring, which, by its very nature gives the Karate-ka much greater flexibility in both training and demonstration. Because of the difficulties associated with Kata Training many people are not prepared to put in the effort and the results are often obvious and also predictable.

Not enough people apply the “Four Spoke Wheel” approach to their Karate-do Development Plan, and can end up only being good at what comes natural and never reaching an acceptable skill level at what does not come natural.

The “Four Spoke Wheel” philosophy is quite simple and is as follows; Karate-do should be viewed as being a Four Spoke Wheel, with the different spokes being designated as Kihon, Kata, Kumite and Competition. If any one spoke is weaker than any of the others, it would result in the whole wheel being weak.

In a practical sense, Karate-do has a beginning and an end. Kihon (basic training), is the beginning for all Karate-ka and by its very nature is a means to an end. The skill levels you achieve, taking into account such things as, age, natural ability and flexibility, within your Kihon Training, will have a profound effect on the next stage of development, being Kata.

Kata (forms) Training in which I would include Gohon, Sanbon and Kihon Ippon Kumite is again a means to an end. The Kata that we do in Competition, or for that matter at any time has no real practical use against a real opponent. By practicing Kata, we can develop skills, which will enhance the more advanced aspects of our Karate-do training and bring us ever closer to a practical end.

The obvious question that now arises is, where does it all end? From a practical point of view, the end I see is Free Sparring (not point fighting), which for all intense and purposes is the Business End of Karate. Kihon and Kata training, and participation in Competition, must be the means to the end. From a philosophical point of view, Karate-do has no end, and Kata in particular, must become the focus of training and will continue to develop the person into later life, when they can no longer participate in Free Sparring.