

Flare, Glare, and the Ready Stance

In the performance of traditional kata, the most overlooked items are the opening and ending ready stance.

I believe that more teachers emphasize the attitude of *zanshin* (continuing alertness) embodied in the *final* ready stance than emphasize the almost defiant attitude of the opening ready stance. At the end of the kata, many students mentally turn their attention down several notches after the final technique, sometimes even after the final *kiai* even if that yell comes several movements before the terminus of the form. Many teachers, recognizing this as a training problem, admonish their students to maintain their “readiness” for a few moments even after the final bow. The idea, of course, is to train the student to not think a fight is over just because the last visible opponent has been vanquished. There could be others. In other words, it’s not over until it’s over. Continuing alertness or readiness is symbolized by the upright and consciously controlled stance from which one bows.

So, logically, if a student would be ready for a fight *after* his fight appears to be over, shouldn’t that student be ready for a fight *before* the potential fight? The obviously unrealistic but symbolic ready stance from which a kata performer initially bows, and to which she returns after the bow, is the means by which she both demonstrates and practices preparation.

Each style has its variation of the appropriate ready stance: feet together with hands crossed, feet naturally apart with hands in fists, or some other variation including the extremes of horse stances and stomps. In Okinawan/Japanese/Korean karate, more involved preparatory movements may have descended from extensive Shaolin preparatory movements that, in some Chinese forms, are themselves almost as long as a short Okinawan kata. However, for most karate-ka, a Chinese form’s long dance of preparedness is no more a valid preparation than performing that short Okinawan kata would be. In other words, every form needs a short, concentrated ready stance.

The actual shape/sequence of the preparatory position is less important than these factors: (1) brevity, (2) attention, (3) flare and glare. Items 1 and 2 are self-explanatory. How about item number 3?

I wrote in a much earlier article called “Flare and Glare”:

I teach my students in *ippon kumite* to flare their nostrils and glare their eyes to produce, in their bodies, a feeling of intensity and determination that will affect their minds in a similar way.

In other words, just as in any other section of a kata, your body action affects your mental attitude. Your mental attitude, of course, will loop back to affect the quality your physical actions.

Stand upright, chest out, shoulders back, that is: look confident. Look straight ahead with the intensity you would feel if some bully on the other side of the room were threatening a less-than-athletic pre-teen just because the bully's undies were chaffing. Now flare your nostrils. This will lower the inner edges of your eyes, both creating a slight frown and shooting oxygen into your lungs. These are not the most conspicuous of physical movements. But they will result in your feeling a sort of inverse *zanshin*, that is, a state of alertness *before* the fight. And that is what a ready stance is all about.