



Pivotal Points

By Jerry Figgiani


As with most people starting out on their journey in the martial arts, my perception at the beginning stage was just purely physical. I was drawn to the Kumite aspect of the art. Kata, to me, was just a bunch of moves pieced together to make the movements look good. I had no understanding of the principles, theories, concepts and the history of the Kata. As any beginner, I just accepted what was taught to me with no questions.

As I progressed in my studies, I went through a stage where I started questioning more. Especially, viewing the differences in the way a Kata looked compared to how we did Kumite in class. There was definitely a difference in the approach to both of these. When it came to the Kata I couldn't understand and grasp some of the concepts that were taught to me. I would always say to myself, "I would never use that in a situation to protect myself." The one commonality between the two would be the Kihon (the basics). If your basic techniques are not strong, you're going to have difficulties executing the movements. You will have a slim chance of being effective in a self-defense situation.

I truly believe martial arts systems were created and set up to evolve into the future. In the system that I study, Matsubayashi Ryu, I have witnessed many adjustments in the way a Kata was performed or even taught. In order to make karate effective for you, I believe this is what has to take place. I am not talking about changing the Kata, but making it more efficient for practitioners. It comes down to one thing and that is to understand the principles. Is this right or wrong? Who is to say? Let's imagine a 1940's football team playing against a team of today.

Today's team would have an advantage because of how the game has evolved. From the size and speed of the players, to the offensive and defensive set ups and as well as the play calling. And so it is true with the martial arts. Today's instructors are constantly looking for ways to make their techniques and approach more efficient.

One of the pivotal points, as I progressed in my studies, is when I started studying Judo under my sensei Joe Turchiano. At this stage I started questioning and seeking more answers. I found similarities in the movements within my Matsubayashi Kata. I was applying techniques that I could clearly see, as well as feel, the connection to my karate training. It was definitely an eye opener and got me on the path to exploring similarities between the two arts. Another pivotal point was my studies in the art of Koryu Uchinadi, under the direction of Hanshi Patrick McCarthy. His concepts and techniques, again, gave me a better perspective of how to look and understand the lessons from within the Kata.

It is important for a martial artist to evolve and recognize these pivotal points that appear during the course of their study. Pivotal points do not only relate to a physical technique, but they can shift your mental approach in the never ending lessons of the martial arts. 



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