

気合

Kime

Kime (pronounced “key-may”), or *focus*, is one of the critical elements in karate, and is conceptually intertwined with almost every other aspect. It is a mental state in which your thinking is concentrated *entirely* on your opponent and his intersection with your technique. Achieving kime involves certain Zen techniques designed for that purpose, most notably *zanshin* and *mushin*. It is expressed in the *kiai* and also in the facial expression and (especially) the eyes of the performer. The *kiai* helps concentrate the maximum force at the moment of impact, whereas the face and eyes reflect the correct mental state for producing maximum quickness and minimum reaction time.

Kime and *kiai* work together, coordinating the entire body to deliver a technique that virtually detonates with destructive (to the opponent) ki energy at the moment of impact. In tournament kata competition this explosion of ki is expected to be quick and sharp, with “snap.” Wado-ryu and Shito-ryu katas in particular favor speed and lightness. The Naha-te group of katas, if performed as originally intended, are more continuous and flowing. However, even these today are broken up into short, snappy clusters of movements for tournament competition. Sharply timed, explosive kime is currently expected in almost every traditional Japanese kata.

Kime is also expressed in kata by a certain synchronization of movement such that all moving parts of the body freeze simultaneously. When stepping forward in the Taikyoku exercises, for example, the punches should reach their peak energy and freeze in the exact moment that the stepping foot hits the floor and freezes. This sort of synchronicity in kata demonstrates good kime, and shows that all parts of the body are involved in perfect coordination for delivering the technique.

In kata performance, the facial expression associated with kime is one aspect which the judges utilize in their assessment. Some performers are unsure about the kind of facial expression they should use during kata. Threatening? Angry? Snarling? Physically strained? No, all of these only demonstrate a lack of *mushin* and inner tranquility which the good Japanese warrior, schooled in Zen philosophy, takes with him into battle. The enemy’s head is sliced off in the blink of an eye, with no more expression than if a flower were casually being cut.

The highest-level national and world championships show that the blank, unstrained expression of inner Zen nothingness is what the judges clearly favor. It also tends to give the Oriental competitor something of an advantage, if he has been schooled from childhood in the mental techniques of Zen Buddhism and the cultural requirements for stoicism which are characteristic of Japan.

What traditional judges want to see in your eyes during kata performance is total concentration on each of your imaginary opponents in turn, while the rest of the world is totally shut out of your consciousness. What they want to see in your face is not brutality

or emotion or strain but the tranquility of the truly empty mind focused on its one task. Remember that karate is a martial *art*, and if killing an opponent in real life should become necessary, it should be done with the same dispassionate artistry and efficiency as in a perfect brushstroke executed in painting or calligraphy...with decisiveness and reverence.

In actual fighting, kime is also a sort of advance warning to your opponent that you know how to fight, are ready to fight, and are totally unafraid of him. “Staring down” someone is the way it is commonly phrased. Even among dogs and other animals, the focused stare into another’s eyes clearly says “I’m not afraid of you, and I’m ready to fight, if you dare.”

In Shuri-ryu karate you can practice your fighting kime in the exercise known as *kime dachi kumite*, or “focus stance sparring.” This is done with an opponent, while your feet and his are planted firmly in an unmoving fighting stance. From this position, facing each other at a fairly close distance, you both execute rapid strikes of all kinds on each other. You do not actually touch each other, but you focus your techniques a half inch or so from contact, and concentrate on achieving maximum kime and power at that point. (You can also kick but must return your foot to the exact spot it left.)

Whether in fighting or kata, kime is an essential component of karate. Work on it and develop it just as you would work on your kiai, your speed, your power, and every other aspect. Everything works together in karate; nothing can be ignored. Because of this, concentrating on developing good kime will make everything else easier as well.

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