

Kiotsuke: Attention, Join Spirits

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In many martial arts classes around the world instructors call their students to attention with the word Kiotsuke. Yet many have no idea what they are saying when the command is given. To most it only means 'come to attention'. But the term has a much deeper meaning than simply attention. As is so true of many of the terms which come out of the Japanese language, there is a deeper meaning which should be used to teach students more about the philosophical aspects of true martial arts training.

As students are called to attention, there should be an emphasis on awareness, which begins with their bodies. In Kiyojute Ryu Kempo Bugei schools, when the call Kiotsuke is given, students follow the instructor in bringing their feet together and holding their fists in front of them at Itten, one point, level. The eyes are focused straight ahead, not looking at any one particular thing, but trying to be aware of all levels of their vision. Seeing primarily and peripherally. When the command to bow is given, the eyes go down as the body bows at about a forty five degree angle. Eyes are allowed to look down since one is in a class with people of honor and respect. To keep the eyes forward, especially on ones instructor, is to show a lack of trust and respect for him/her. This would be especially frowned upon in Dojo in Japan and Okinawa. But the awareness upon the call of Kiotsuke goes beyond simply being aware of ones own body position.

The awareness must also go out to the other students and the instructors. Ki means spirit. It refers to ones own personal spirit, the spirit of life, and the Universal Spirit. Tsuke means to join or attach. Thus the command Kiotsuke means for all people in the Dojo to 'join their spirits' one to another and with the Universal Spirit. The beauty of the command is that it is an open statement which allows each person to respond according to their own feelings and religious beliefs. In many Kiyojute Ryu Kempo Bugei Dojo, there are those of many separate beliefs. At some national clinics, people of Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, beliefs have all gathered to train. At the command of Kiotsuke all put aside any differences to join in the brother/sisterhood of training in Kempo. As should be in all Dojo, students should become united in a oneness of common spiritual strength dedicated to learning and growing through training. When this is done then all students will learn faster and deeper. Instructors will find their own knowledge deepening as they apply not only their intellect to teaching their students but also their spirits. The closeness to the students will especially be rewarding to the instructor as a depth of love unites them in a bond of physical, mental, and spiritual growth.

This unity of spirit is also important in training for serious self defense in that it increases the students understanding of certain universal principles of combat. In example, the principle of gentleness referred to as Juho, is an extremely important principle of combat when dealing with a larger opponent. The principle of Ju basically means, pull when pushed and push when pulled. Thus if an attacker of larger size attacks a woman, she may pull his arm of advancement, positioning herself so that she may throw him over her hip using his own force to topple him. If necessary, and through a feeling of the united spirit the defender will feel this, an Atemi, body strike, may be applied just before the throw.

All of these feeling of awareness comes through the unity of spirit of those who are truly practicing the Kiotsuke charge given at the beginning of class.

An instructor can always tell when a student has joined in the spirit of the class by how well he/she is getting along with their partners. Every once in a while an instructor will notice a person who no one seems to want to work with. If the instructor will take close notice, he/she will generally find that the student is one who has not joined the others in the spiritual nature of the class unity. That person usually has a real chip on their shoulders and resists getting close to anybody. When two people work together in harmony, it helps them both learn more quickly because they end up helping each other through the movements and techniques. Instructors can teach the students better because they really listen to what he/she is saying.

Whenever a student begins to think they know more than their instructor, their ability to learn is severely restricted. Thus the unity between teacher and student is extremely important, in order for a student to really learn. Students must first imitate their instructors until they begin to understand the principle upon which the techniques are based. In the beginning a students may not understand why a technique is done the way it is. For example, many students do not understand why the reverse punch is taught twisting all the way from palm up to palm down. With all the misinformation being generated today, there are those who doubt the wisdom of practicing the reverse punch in the traditional way. But if the student will trust and respect his/her instructor, the student may find that there are real valid reasons to follow the old, traditional methods. Some of the real reasons that the reverse punch, in this circumstance referring to the twisting motion as the reason for the use of the term Gyaku Zuki, are as follows.

In regard to actual striking, the twisting motion of the forearm adds those muscles to the strike, increasing the power. Whenever a punch is performed at long range, the twisting of the forearm is used to gain the extra couple of inches with full power. The secret of proper use of the twisting motion in striking has to do with Kime, focus. The rotation of the arm should stop when contact with the target is made, and the final penetration should then be directed inward. Finally, the practice of the Gyaku Zuki, with full rotation from palm up to palm down, is applicable to grappling skills, from jointlocks to throws. Many instructors who have not been properly taught will say that full rotation is not useful or traditional. But those who say this are those who have never been taught proper Maai, distancing, which will dictate the rotation of the arm in regard to strikes, and proper Okinawan grappling techniques, which make full use of forearm rotation.

All moves need to be practiced, imitating the movements of the instructor, so that the principle of motion may be mastered. Once the actual principle is understood, then in application, the student will learn how to apply it in regard to different attackers and according to their own body type, height, and abilities. In example, when two people practice the Shuto, knifehand, they usually are taught to strike at neck level. The idea is to strike the nerves in the neck while applying pressure to the Carotid artery. When practicing the form, the student imagines that the attacker is approximately their own height and strike so that they would be hitting the person just below the ear. However in actual application if a shorter person is applying the Shuto to a taller person they would have to reach up, while a taller person to a shorter person would have to reach down. Thus after learning by imitation, it is important that the student be instructed in adjusting the technique to their own physique and situation. Another example would be in regard to

Kyusho, vital point, striking. In a combat oriented martial art, as each technique is taught, a vital point is taught where the strike would be effective. In example, in the basic form of the Gyaku Zuki, reverse punch, the floating ribs are taught as a primary target, when one dodges to the outside. For a tall person, this would involve punching down, while for a shorter person, it might involve punching straight from the shoulder or slightly up. All of this advanced form of education in a Dojo comes from the unity of instructor and student.

When Kiotsuke is truly followed, and a unity of spirits occurs, then students are open to learning and teachers are excited to teach. In ancient times, when an instructor taught members of their own family, or clan, it was a closeness of relation that led to the unity of spirit. As times changed and instructors were employed to teach a Daimyo's warriors, it was duty to their lord that united instructors and students. In modern times as instructors began to teach the general public, a unity of love developed between teachers and students, with the instructors truly caring about the welfare of their students. An instructor who is genuine, loves his/her students, and seeks to impart to the students the important qualities of the martial arts life.

First of all, for the safety and security of the student, self defense. It is important that those who claim to teach self defense, rather than a sport, emphasize the aspects of awareness, avoidance, and response. Proper response can be anything from simply a block, to a complex combat response. When to do what is the most important lesson a martial arts instructor teaches his students. The second quality which needs to be taught is physical fitness. All too often people are taught self defense skills without the physical development to safely execute the skills. Many students have pulled muscles or twisted joints simply because the instructor did not teach them or emphasize Tai so, body movements, which are a proper warmup and preliminary training for using martial arts skills as physical fitness and health. The next quality of the martial arts lifestyle is mental awareness. This goes beyond merely being aware of dangers, but also involves perceiving all of reality. This allows a student to see the beauty of the world and the joy of life. In the cynical world of modern times, this is probably one of the most important gifts an instructor can give to his/her students.

This is one of the most important ways in which the martial arts make a positive influence on the world. For it is positive people who make the world a better place to live, and martial artists should be the most positive of people. And this brings us to the final quality of the martial arts, spiritual enlightenment. Since the beginning of the martial arts, where fighting skills merged with virtue, men of peace have practiced them in order to improve their relationship to God in whatever manner they believed.

According to legend, Buddhist monks under the influence of Bodhidharma, created the first true martial arts. Taoist monks adopted them and created the first Taoist martial art of Tai Chi. As the Chinese arts spread throughout the Orient they influenced the Bugei of both Japan and Okinawa, being adopted by Shintoist and later the Christians of Japan. Eventually the arts spread to other countries where men of peace and God practiced them and found spiritual strength in the practice. Today as all the different instructors of the martial arts call their schools to attention, it is hoped that they and their students will unite in spirit to become still better human beings, seeking development in self defense, physical fitness, mental awareness, and spiritual enlightenment. All it takes is a genuine love by both teachers and students for each other and the arts.