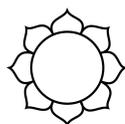


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Opening the Mirror



鏡開き *Kagami Biraki - Opening the Mirror*

Every January, which is about 4-5 more weeks until it is over, Karatekas partake in an annual tradition or “ritual” of sorts, which I humbly denote as practice, which is called or termed Kagami Baraki 鏡開き and means “Opening the Mirror.” This alludes or connotes for one to reflect a bit on one’s practice as a Karateka 空手家 (practitioner of Karatedō: Empty-Handed Way). The term also has its heritage or connections with “*Breaking the Mochi*” (*Kagami Mochi* 鏡餅), which is the traditional [Japanese New Year](#) お正月 decoration that literally means: *mirror rice cake*. But, for Karatekas, Kagami Baraki is a time to look inwardly, i.e., at oneself and one’s practice over that passing year. However, it does not mean for one to ruminate and thus, have stagnant or static mind about, but rather, for one to acknowledge how one is training in their chosen discipline, regardless of style, etc.; this is important, so that one grows and does not demonstrate monotonous tendencies and thus, impedes oneself in evolving or progressing in one’s development, which is physiologically as well as psychologically. These are two parts of the same thing, so in essence, there is no duality or two separate aspects: there is only one and that is oneself. Further, that is something that one learns via one’s practice/training, particularly in this annual self-renewing process of looking inwardly to ascertain or realize oneself, which in Buddhism is known as one’s True Nature or Original Face.

Empirically (firsthand knowledge via the physical or sensorial) one can easily relate this to one’s training or the physical aspect of one’s Karatedō. So, in the prior year that has just passed, one then looks at how one has trained, which includes the discipline that one is demonstrating, plus, the effort that one is putting into it as well as the consistency too. All of the aforesaid are imperatives to ascertain one’s past year of practice. Some people cannot train much and that is fine, especially when they put forth such the effort into a class when they do train; that begets that adage that it is not always quantity, but quality, in regards to one’s training. And this (quality) is more advantageous than one who trains a lot, but lacks the effort within one’s training/practice. From personal experience as a teacher, I enjoy the Gakuseis 学生 (students) that give all they have into their training, even if it is infrequent, per se, i.e., meaning they do not train every day, which is hard for most today and understandable since jobs are at the forefront of

everyone's life as well as if one is in matriculation or in a significant relationship (marriage, etc.). Hence my maxim that I say to my students and other Karatekas, "*Life gets in the way,*" and it does. But, for when one does train, however infrequently, if one gives oneself completely to it, then it is more profound than one who trains all the time, e.g., 5 days a week or more, and does not put the effort in as I have sadly seen at some schools; i.e., it was more of a hobby and to expound to others that "I take Karate." Not that those people are bad or need to be judged, no, rather, I make the point of how some do it (training) for a very different reason than others, such as Karatekas who train to better their life, which is known as Kaizen 改善 or the Betterment of oneself (the Change for Improvement). This goes hand-in hand with Kagami Baraki and rightfully so. If one does not perform or undergo a little bit of reflection, one cannot manifest a transcendence of oneself, which is for one to become more balance or Chūdō 中道 (The Middle Way) via being calm and also not judging or displaying discriminatory mind, but rather Equanimity (even-mind or lacking a biased perspective/duality).

Therefore, one has to train hard all the time, which does not mean beating others up and acting like a "beast" or sorts, but rather, one who trains as much as one can and whom puts forth the effort of everything that one has got; i.e., one leaves it all on the table, per se or does not hold back in one's training/practice. So, at the end of the year when one is partaking in Kagami Baraki within one's dōjō or at some dōjō, one again reflects and determines if one is lacking effort, consistency, and discipline. If so, then one should amend it, so that one performs to one's highest ability. A good example of lacking effort or being removed from one's training is upon finishing, one's dōgi is bone dry or relatively dry, i.e., no sweat, compared to one who exemplifies complete or total effort, in which one's dōgi is soaked through and stuck to oneself, because of sweat. That is the type of training that one should aspire to, not that one needs to manifest a Kumite 組手 (free-fighting) or pugilistic demeanor, i.e., one in which is quantified by hurting others or being feared within one's dōjō, but rather, one in which one sees a change in one's Waza 技 (techniques), such as Kihon 基本 (basics) and Kata 型 (series of forms) as well as being supportive of one's dōjō and overall Organizational events. Accordingly, if one Shikans 只管 or Just does it, or gives all that one's got within one's training, one will transcend oneself and

see and feel a growth and enlightenment in the sense of realizing that one has to be within the moment and actualize it, which is known in Buddhism as Genjōkōan or the Actualization of Reality. This allows one to see where one has been, which is over since it is the past, and possibly where one wishes to be, which is the future, and thus, not happening yet, so by default, one learns to live within the moment that is (Genjōkōan). Subsequently, one is reminded to live within the instant that is at hand or that one is within and reinforces that one needs to be cognizant of this mindset or perspective. That is the wonderful virtue of Kagami Baraki, because its essence underscores that one needs to not be in a rut or be in a repetitive nature of automatic pilot, per se.

And so practicing with conviction in one's Kihon, Kata, and Kumite, everyday that one trains, one sweats and will reap the benefits of training within that moment regardless of it being a regular class, special clinic, or the already mentioned annual traditional event; but, when one partakes in Kagami Baraki, one is with many other Karatekas partaking in it also, albeit, they can be from other styles or disciplines. That is inconsequential, but what is consequential is the training that everyone does together at this event, in which the dōjō is packed and everyone is kiai-ing loudly and the spirit is elevated within the dōjō. Added to that dynamic is or are the Senseis 先生 or Shihans 師範 that run this traditional event or training. They set the pace and guide everyone else, in which Gakuseis, as a result, reach new limits. Personally, I always enjoyed this tradition and miss it when I cannot partake in it for whatever reason. However, if I cannot, then I manifest it myself in my training, but it is more profound when among others. Nevertheless, typically in this tradition, all Geris 蹴 (kicks) and Tsukis 突き (punches) are done in the hundredths, which is to instill that one needs to push oneself beyond one's self-induced perceived limitations. Some ill-advised Karatekas sadly think that is it 'torture-ish' to do so many inconceivable kicks and punches, but that is precisely why it is done. Hence, the exaggerated numbers of Wazas are in place to push one past one's insular percepts and nothing more. Of course one cannot do thousands of Geris and Tuskis without having lactic acid build up and possible dehydration, depending upon if one is hydrated incorrectly beforehand, but again, all of those Wazas mixed in with calisthenics, Kata, and Kumite are there for transcendence via Shikan (Just to Do It or Just Doing It).

Additionally to renewing a vow to oneself to transcend one's training, do not omit that one also renews and actualizes that one needs to help others within the one's dōjō; i.e., Kōhais 後輩 (fellow students or junior ranks). What this means is to lead by example that demonstrates balanced qualities, such as humility, compassion, empathy, love, and acceptance (no judgement). These attributes of Gaksueis assist in a dōjō being balanced and unified without the Ego-laden proclivities abounding about or manifesting. Remember the symbolism of the term Kagami Baraki, in which underscores the reflection; thusly, all of one's Kōhais or Sempais or Senseis, are extensions (externals) of oneself and therefore, not separate from oneself. It also entails looking after or taking care of the dōjō, meaning the cleanliness of it, so that it is presentable in regards to it not being dirty with stuff strewn about. This is why many dōjōs are considered Temples, because of the reverence that is paid to it by its Gakuseis. And in Japan, the Desshi (disciples) 子 after the class is so-called over, grab small towels and get into a bent-over position, in which their read-ends are higher than their head and hands, and they run back and forth with a loud KIAI as they do so. Then after several trips back and forth, they dump their towels into a bucket to be washed. This is very traditional and only takes place at a handful of dōjōs, but it is a reinforcer to humility and transcendence, and in my humble opinion a wonderful virtue to exemplify. Plus, others see this and are compelled to help with the endeavor or veneration and renewal.

Implicitly (tacitly or understood without firsthand knowledge or experience), likewise, this is ostensible for one to know or perceive; all one has to do is reflect and see what, if any, progress that was made over that year of training/practice. So, if one sees that there has been little-to-no improvement, then one has not demonstrated Kaizen and thusly, needs to realize that one needs to put forth a more in-depth effort in one's training/practice. Moreover, to be able to manifest any type of growth, one needs to train hard and a lot. One will have to make the effort or sacrifice, so to speak, i.e., devalue the desires or values of hanging out and indulging in various 'escapist' endeavors, such as drinking or philandering, etc.; not that one cannot enjoy some spirits or the physicality of others, but that should not be the core of one's existence, when in fact, one should be trying always to improve oneself and that the aforesaid satiation of self-

indulgence is not how one achieves this former virtue, but rather, the latter dysfunctional one with its Egoistic roots. Needless to say, these are choices that one makes; i.e., whether one desires to impart Kaizen into one's life or wishes to continue to coast, or be less-than involved in one's training. And Kagami Baraki "challenges" or asks one, "So, how do you feel? How do you see yourself in regards to your training as a Karateka?" And if one is honest with oneself, then one will determine that one always needs Kaizen or Improvement. That is the key to Kagami Baraki; it is about instilling into one or reminding one that one never stops learning and in this case, renewing oneself by seeing one's reflection in the mirror and realizing that one needs to continue one's practice, which is why Karate is a Dō, like Budō (Martial Way), Kobudō (Old Martial Way), Aikidō (Unifying Way), etc.; i.e., it is a Way or Path or Road or Journey that one is on, which is one that is walked alone. The "mirror" reference is symbolic of seeing oneself as one truly is, which is very difficult to do since many people are not truthful about their own shortcomings or detrimental attributes. Hence, the value of training alongside others on this annual traditional of Karatekas. And in doing so, everyone manifests collectively as well as individually their own rationalizations in regards to their training/practice or growth/progression.

And albeit the cerebral aspect is important, if one thinks too much, then one is caught in the tethers of one's own mind; i.e., the brambles of doubt or questions, which usually end up as resulting excuses for stagnation or static mind. That is why too much reflection is taking the expression Kagami Baraki in an extremely literal way, which it is not meant to be. It is symbolic as stated before and based out of or from Buddhism, which uses many phrases that seem illogical to "free" oneself from one's own preconceived notions or biased perspectives. Some will discern from the expression or adage that one needs to physically look into a mirror and most often assume that one will see something exterior from oneself. Meaning that an answer or definition will be learned externally from oneself when in fact, the symbolic expression/tenet means to look inwardly as said earlier, because one can feel if one is training hard and pushing oneself compared to when one is not. And if one feels that they have good growth, so to speak, and has achieved a high level, per se, then one is not understanding what the maxim is meant to do for oneself. A good way to know how one is manifesting Kaizen via Kagami Baraki is if one thinks that one is progressing well or at a higher-than level juxtaposed to others. Whereas, if one feels that, then it is just Ego and an insular paradigm, because when one truly has transcended oneself

via Kaizen of Kagami Baraki, one will ALWAYS feel that something is lacking, hence, the reinforcement to improve. An excellent qualitative representation of that is when one is practicing Buddhism; for instance, after one has practiced for an amount of time, one will consequentially feel that one has achieved Kenshō 見性 (Enlightenment or Seeing the Nature or Essence of things: True Reality) or Nirvana निर्वाण (state of happiness or bliss) or Bodhicitta बोधिचित्त (Way Seeking Mind). This is a misnomer and delusion, because in anything that one does, if one feels that they have achieved a high level or is truly great at something, then one is, in reality, the farthest from it or its Truth. One always has to be feeling that one can aspire to do more and get better/improve: Kaizen. However, the aforesaid does not mean to impart a nihilistic attitude that is defeatist, meaning that one cannot achieve or progress, but that evolution or progression is always there since we are always changing from one moment to the next or more aptly stated that one changes within the moment that is within the moments that are a influx (motion). Furthermore, nor does it mean that if one has confidence within oneself, that then one is completely delusional, but rather it means that one can always push oneself to a more cultivated level than the one is presently at. So, having expressed that, being content or happy within oneself can be dangerous due to its false paradigms of oneself or one's supposed skill, etc., plus, it also lacks humility or being humble, which is what Karatedō is supposed to be about or impart to one; i.e., the removal of one's Ego. So, regardless of being confident, which is not "wrong" or "bad" (discriminatory mind via labeling) does allow one to actually do things and is the spring-board to Kaizen or Kagami Baraki. It is detrimental when one allows one's confidence via one's Ego to convince oneself that one is at a supreme level or better-than (comparison) others. This is something that some fighters do in any sport, i.e., when they win or knock someone out, they do jump up and down or demonstrate a boastful happiness for their achievement, when instead, they should see if the other person is okay and humbly shake their opponents hand or embrace them with a hug out of respect for oneself and them too. Unfortunately today, many fighters overall do not display the aforementioned humility, but instead go into a celebratory paradigms or demonstrations, which result in dances, screams, yells or yelps, and many times, posturing with animalistic grunts or howls.

Suffice it to say, it is understandable that one in that given situation is very happy about what oneself has accomplished, but that is just it; even though one has achieved, one does not need to posture, so that others know or see it, which is one seeking confirmations or affirmations externally from others; and therefore, sending accolades or praise towards one. Irrespectively, a good example of humility and a lack of Ego is National Hockey League's Hall of Famer, the great Defensemen, Bobby Orr of the Boston Bruins. When he scored goals or a goal, he never raised his hands as all the other hockey players did then and still do today or celebrated his achievement. He said that he felt "bad about scoring on them" and did not wish to offend or upset the goalie that he just scored on; So, it was out of respect and being humble that he chose to do or practice this virtue. Presently, there are some, although few Knockdown Karatekas that will bow their heads lower than their defeated opponents when saying "OSU!" when the fight is over. Anderson Silva with the MMA does this; he actually goes into Seiza 正座 (formal sitting position) and bows at his opponents feet. And I have seen some Knockdown fighters bend-over humbly with their heads lower than their fallen opponent's while shaking hands, which is another sign and reminder of respect as well as being/actualizing Kagami Baraki or a reflection of oneself. That is what the so-called mirror is in this adage/proverb: the reflection is of oneself. The realization is that the other who is perceived outside of oneself is actually oneself, because there is no duality or dichotomic reality (Subject versus Object). The reality is everyone is oneself and oneself is everyone: Kagami Baraki.

Accordingly, when partaking in this wonderful traditional annual event, Kagami Baraki, remind yourself to push yourself and train hard all the time; remember, it is your training and no one else's; i.e., you have to, as I profess, "Get lost in your training." So, in every class starting with the aforementioned event, transcend yourself in them and it will manifest in your life. Thusly, renew yourself via Sweating, Kiai-ing, Focusing, Dedicating, and Committing, everyday that you are alive, which is reinforced through your training/practice. Shikan Kagami Baraki 只管鏡開き!

OSU 押忍 and Namaste नमस्ते!

リベラ 先生 開帳

**~ Rivera Sensei
Kaichō**