



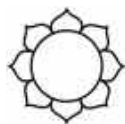
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PROMOTION TEST (PART ONE): KYŪS 級 OR MUDANSHA 無段者 (ONES WITHOUT DAN)

For Mudanshas or non-dan belts, e.g., Kyūs, promotion test is something that so many fear outright. Due to ruminations, abstract thoughts (non-reality), past and future concepts or stagnant perceptions (Miyamoto Musashi, a Ronin, learned via Takuan Sōhō, Buddhist Monk), and including worrisome scenarios that have not manifested, etc. Hence, a great lesson in Buddhism or Bushido, can be learned via one's Karatedo as a Karateka.

The aforementioned psychological 'events' or "thoughts" in one's mind are just that; they are just random thoughts, or "secretions in the brain" (Dōgen Zenji, Buddhist Monk). I.e., thoughts are natural, but when one catches them, holds onto them, gets enveloped or controlled by them, then one is demonstrating a stagnant mind and thus, caught in one's own self-inflicted trap that is CEREBRAL and not physical; that is why Karate is 90% mental as is LIFE.

This is how one develops neuroses, which then manifest into neuroticism, such as compulsion of all sorts. One gets caught up in something that has happened or something that is about to happen and therefore, gets stuck as a record skipping, over and over again on its turnstile. But that is not reality; it is secretions of/in the brain. And when one realizes that, by acknowledging it, then one can let it go of it like a leaf passing along a river's bed; it floats by without any possessiveness or action; it just is....

Thusly, when one is taking a test, one builds it up in one's mind, rather foolishly, and creates a movie that one can manifest into reality, but usually the movie conjured is not what actually transpires. So, the lesson in or from Buddhism is to be in the moment or Zen and relax and accept whatever happens and not see things as a duality or black and white or subject versus object, which is all discriminatory mind and therefore, self-attachment or ego-based, and that is not Karatedo; because the essence of Karatedo is for one to relinquish one's ego and one's self-attachment and demonstrate Mushin or Mind of No Mind or Mizu-no-Kokoro (Mind like Water).

So, at one's (Kyūs) promotion test, one learns to forget the past and future and is forced to be in the moment. That is why the Shinai (bamboo stick) is imperative in one's training; it is not about being hit so many times, it is about freeing one's mind, because when one is hit correctly, then one is truly in the moment and let's go of ego and just does or Shikans. I always considered the Shinai a Motivational Tool...It will keep one honest. No matter how tired one is, or no matter how one desires to give up, one hit and one is back into Zen. And that also happens during ones kumite aspect of one's test.

One's kumite is the essence of the test, not that the Kihon is slighted or lessor than anything, not at all, since Kihon is one's foundation and imperative; so suffice it to say, one's Kihon is then transcended via one's kumite, which is what Karatedo (Empty-Handed Way) represents. And in one's kumite, one is pushed beyond one's physical limits, so that one only can rely on one's mental strength. This is where Buddhism is at the forefront, because it is only

then when one's Original Face or True Nature is demonstrated or "found" or "seen" or more accurately, manifests and becomes Genjōkōan.

This is when one's become true Karatedo; this is when one looks within oneself without thinking or has Mind of No Mind and reacts in a true manifestation of one's inner being (Original Face). Even when one is knocked down or has the wind knocked out of one, one has to recompose oneself and move forth; i.e., the kumite aspect forces one to be Zen and in the moment, one cannot get through one's test in any other way. The only other way are phony tests in phony schools run by charlatans who are only about materialistic aspects, such as money, rank, title, power and stature, but I digress.

Needless to say, every test for every person is different or unique due to individuality and perception of the dharma (experience). And every advancing rank and its subsequent test becomes harder, per se physically, but that is due to one becoming stronger mentally and then physically. So, consequently one's test are "harder" in each succession, but looking or perceiving it in that way is demonstrating subject versus object via abstract (non-reality) labeling and thus, not Buddhism or being a Karateka in Karatedo.

Rather a *healthier* or more true perspective for one to demonstrate is to accept the "good" with the "bad," per se, or more aptly stated, do not see any dualities, see them as One and be forthcoming within the moment and manifest Genjōkōan or the actualization of one's reality. And in this manner, or consciousness, one can look inwardly for whatever strength that one needs to fulfill the requirements of one's test and that style's mandates. And as the rounds or kumite happens and pass, one is by happenstance, in the moment of each and every one of them. Manifesting and actualizing is the greatest lesson or reason or essence of one's promotion test. In other words, after one's test, one is not only stronger physically, but more imperatively mentally, due to one's volition put forth during one's exam. Afterward, one is more calm in one's life after this dharma (experience). One has learned to control one's thoughts and or secretions of one's brain and not become stagnant via rumination of what has just happens or about to happen/become.

That is another reason why one's does all one's basics (Kihon) prior to the kumite; the idea is to wear or exhaust one down physically, so that that one has to rely on one's mentality or psyche; i.e., one's essence, True Nature or Original Face. This is where Buddhism abounds and rightfully so. The removal of one's ego is forced to manifest, and thus, one finds the Middle Way to move forward while being in the moment, because there is No Duality; there is just the moment or the NOW (i.e., the present).

Ostensible, the best tests are always cultivated by one's teacher (Senseis or Shihans) and also the Kōhais and Sempais/Senpais partaking in it; everyone makes the test, and that is the Ensō (No Beginning, No End). Everyone demonstrates Universality and Interconnectedness via the kumite and pushing and helping the Kyūs taking their tests. It is not about straight up

“hazing” or bullying, that is only the Mumyō (foolish) or Bacaneh (Stupid) and completely based in ego. Any true teacher will impede that type of person and moreover inflict severe repercussions on that person for having acting so. But that type of person doesn't exist in a true dōjō, because that is the antithesis of a true karateka and would have thusly been removed immediately unless that person would have realized their mistake and let go of their ego.

Promotion Test is nothing to fear. One should never allow what happened or what can happen to rule them; stagnant mind can get someone hurt or killed in a life or death situation. Hence, the reiterated importance of one's test. Again, it is not about the physical, rather, it is ALWAYS about the mental/cerebral aspect; so, one can find one's Original Face or True Nature: wakarimusa (understand)? One is never alone in Promotion Test; it is never about just One gakusei (student). It represents the dōjō, and ALL the deshis (disciples) of it that make it such! OSU!



ESSENCE OF PROMOTION TEST (PART TWO):

In a dōjō, the term “OSU” is used; it is a made-up Japanese (Nihongo Ga) word. It has “o” as the prefix, per se, and that means “push” and the “su” is the suffix, per se, which means to “endure”; so, combined it means many things, such as “I understand,” or “I will try harder,” or “I will make the effort,” or “I will persevere”; i.e., one will try one's hardest and persevere to do one's best.

But it is more commonly known as “Patience, Respect, and Appreciation. Karatekas also use it as “Hai” or “Yes” or “Okay,” etc., i.e., it has many different applications, but it's understood (wakarimusa) as all of the aforementioned.

This is a part of the mental training. To remind oneself that you are constantly in a state of learning and that is transcended as Zen and OSU! As is standing in Yoi Dachi or ready stance while one listens to one's instructor (Sensei/Shihan). One always desires to stay mentally sharp/awake, i.e., in the moment as one does when practicing Zazen or Mokushō (meditating).

Osu is also a way to greet fellow students (Kōhais) or disciples (deshis) or any higher rank, such as a Sempai/Senpai, or Sensei, Shihan, Kaicho, Kancho, Soshu, or Sosai. One also sends someone off or says goodbye with “OSU” as well! It is truly a universal word, which is great, because it encompasses the Ensō or No Beginning, No End aspect of Buddhism, Bushido and of course then Karatedo.

The power of this word is immense especially by true Karatekas. It has a different sound to it, due to its meaning to that very individual saying it. It can touch one's soul or spirit and can also charge one emotionally as well, depending on who and how it is being said or used. But the more imperative aspect of the word is what it represents. It humbles each one of us as Karatekas of Karatedo. It reminds us that we are one, albeit, that we are individual. It reminds us that we are all Interconnected and share Universality. It is the Ensō or the Om as well.

It is not a pious word or use of diction, rather, it is akin to the Buddha in one's altars or the Mālās or the Dōgi that one wears; i.e., it is a symbolical representation of one's practice and nothing more. That is the power of the word and the correlation to Buddhism and Bushido. It represents oneself and reminds one to look inwardly always over looking outwardly for answers or guidance. One is the key to one's happiness or recognizing one's True Nature or Original Face. And via Zazan (meditation) and practice of it and Karatedo, one again sees one's Original Face.

That is the power of Buddhism, Karatedō and the usage of the word "OSU." One who has the acquire great balance of Middle Way, has the most vociferous "OSU" upon entering or greeting. It is vibrant and cascades within the dōjō or abounds throughout everything and everyone. It is the spirit of Karatedo in a dōjō.

"OSU" is powerful, venerable and humbling. It demonstrates a spirit that is imperturbable, balanced, at peace, and benevolent. It reflects how one feels about oneself as well as how one feels about others too. It is the word of Universality/Interconnectedness for the Karatekas of Karatedo. It has No Beginning, No End. It is not biased and lacks Discriminatory Mind, or Comparison, i.e., ego or self-attachment. It is the Middle Way and Karatedo: OSU!



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