So, You Want To Learn Kata?

by Jim Bridenbaugh

So you want to learn kata? Well, this may be of help - or not. Let's think of kata in a different venue, such as art, music or language. For this writing, I will use the venue of language.

If you are in the process of learning a new language, you go through various steps and avenues before you are fluent and you often have "stumbling blocks" that sloooow you down. And so it goes with kata.

In Japanese language study you start with words such as nan, ji, ima, etc. You practice these until it is habit, then move to phrases; Ima nanji desuka?, Dozo yukkuri hanashite kudasai. Once you have mastered these you are ready to combine them into prearranged conversation; Ohayoo gozaimasu. Ohayoo. Ogenki desuka? Genki desu.
In kata it is basics such as ude uke, seiken zuki, etc., or prearranged moves, which may or may not be taken from the kata. You work and study these and other combinations, then put them into different situations and acts, which in the beginning may mean nothing to you.

Now you are ready to start understanding the complexities and essence of that which you are learning. Kata is learned as the part and the whole, just like language. You take the language you are learning and apply it to the big picture of conversation with the populace; learning the slang and proper terminology of the society. Kata is the same, you use it more and more in the classes you attend, learning flow, power, focus, etc., and you expand it to competition and bunkai.

Don't forget, we started with the language being foreign to us, as is kata. We don't learn language fluency in a year or less and move on to another language as we do in kata. We learn the pattern and therefore believe we "know" the kata.

I will stop here and let you have fun digesting my thoughts.