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Intermediate Coach Examination

The Benefits of Judo Kata

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Understanding the Term “Kata”

Kata is defined as *“an exercise consisting of several of the specific movements of a martial art, esp. a pattern prescribed for defending oneself against attack”*.

Kata is not unique to judo—it is recognized as a valuable training drill in most Japanese martial arts. The founder of Judo, Jigaro Kano, developed Judo kata to demonstrate the fundamental principles of judo and to provide a type of training in which students could examine techniques under ideal circumstances.

For clarity, a comprehensive list of the kata practiced in judo follows, together with a summary description of each. Note that not all of these kata were created by Jigaro Kano or at the Kodokan, the list includes kata by Sensei Mifune (10th Dan), Sensei Abbe (9th Dan) and others.

- **Nage no Kata:** The kata of throws. Includes examples of hand, hip, leg, and sacrifice throws.
- **Katame no Kata:** The kata of grappling. Includes examples of holds, strangles, and chokes and joint locks.
- **Kime no Kata:** The kata of decision. This is the traditional judo self-defense kata. It includes both standing and kneeling defense against empty handed, knife, and sword attacks using strikes, chokes, joint locks, and throws.
- **Kodokan Goshinjutsu:** The modern Kodokan self-defense kata. It includes defense against empty hand, knife, stick (jo), and pistol attacks using strikes, joint locks, and throws.
- **Ju no Kata:** The kata of gentleness. It includes a number of attacks and defenses demonstrating the efficient redirection of force and movement.

- **Itsutsu no Kata:** The kata of five principles. This kata is intended for the demonstration and practice of body movement (tai sabaki) and for the application and redirection of energy as in nature.
- **Koshiki no Kata:** The ancient kata. This kata has its origins in Kito-ryu Jujutsu and demonstrates the techniques of fighting while wearing armor (kumiuchi), and is intended to illustrate the ancient origins of judo techniques.
- **Go no Sen no Kata:** The kata of counters. This kata includes counter throws for a number of common techniques.
- **Kaeshi Kata:** The kata of counters. This kata includes counter throws for a number of common techniques.
- **Go no Sen no Kata:** An alternative kata of counters.
- **Seiryoku Zenyo Kokumin Taiiku:** The national exercise based on the principles of maximum efficiency. This kata is atypical of judo in being a completely solo kata and comprises a variety of striking and kicking techniques.
- **Kodokan Joshi Goshin-Ho:** The Kodokan's women's self-defense kata. This kata includes a number of escapes from holds and grabs, some basic striking techniques, and one throw.
- **Renkoho:** The kata of arresting techniques. This kata includes a number of control and submission holds useful in restraining criminals.
- **Kimi Shiki:** The kata of decision. This kata emphasizes the use of body movement in responding to attacks and includes both kneeling and standing defenses against empty hand, knife, and sword attacks.
- **Shobu no Kata:** The kata of attack or contest.
- **Go no Kata:** The kata of force or blows. This kata includes a variety of striking techniques (atemi waza).

Benefits to the Art

The technical aspects of Judo came into full maturity in 1900 with the founding of the Kodokan Black Belt (Dan Grade) Holders Association (Kodokan Yudanshakai). On July 24, 1905, eighteen masters representing the leading Japanese jujitsu schools (ryus) gathered at the Butokukai Institute in Kyoto to join Kano's system, to agree upon the forms of Kodokan Judo and to continue the development of the technical forms of the sport.

Addressing the issue of injury, Professor Kano selected the best and most effective techniques from each jujitsu style, excluding all that were dangerous or potentially harmful. He then changed the training methods so that most of the moves could be done with full force to create a decisive victory without injury.


The major roadblock to the unification was that most martial arts masters wanted to ensure their secret life-threatening superior techniques were incorporated into judo and not be eliminated from existence. However, Jigoro Kano's Judo philosophy was to create a modern art with rule and safety features integrated so that it could someday be propagated throughout the world. Jigoro Kano convinced the unyielding masters by offering kata as a means of recognizing and maintaining certain dangerous techniques, thereby preserving their secret techniques and ultimately unifying the many jujitsu clans towards modern judo.

If we have a brief look at exactly what it is that the kata records, we will find that kata are not simply a record of techniques; rather each and every kata is designed to record the key principles and strategies of a complete art form

A kata is a method to record the martial art method; obviously it would not be possible to record every single technique, as the kata

would become impracticably long. It makes much more sense to record techniques that expressed the key principles of the art.

A good understanding of the principles of judo infinitely is preferable to simply memorising many techniques. By recording the principles of combat upon which Judo rests, it is possible to record a vast amount of information in a relatively short kata.



Benefits to the Instructor

An important issue about kata is that the founder did not want kata to be purely a ceremony. In all his technical notes, the underlying idea is "take the ceremony out of kata." What this implies is that, while kata is an excellent manner by which to display or exhibit Judo, this should not become the fundamental purpose of kata. Kata properly applied belongs in the training of all Judoka; kata is a training method, a "tool," if you will at the disposal of the instructor.

Inherent in each technique of kata are "lessons" essential to an understanding of that technique, basic and variation factors which enhance the polished performance of the technique for randori and shiai. In direct practical terms for training, this means that kata can teach the reasons why a technique will succeed or fail in randori or shiai application.

The link between judo's past and future is embodied in the accurate teaching of kata for it is only in kata that the totality of judo has been preserved—especially the traditional and more dangerous self-defense techniques.

Kata provides the Judo instructor a benchmark for reference for every technique included in the varied forms, as each kata technique is executed in its purest form with uke attacking from the best possible position to maximize the effectiveness of that technique.

Furthermore, instructors should also not overlook the significance of forms as purely a part of general instruction: kata teaches movement, timing, and coordination. Kata was, and remains, the basis of judo, and provides the vehicle for perfecting many throws, holds, and other techniques in a finer way than individual technical instruction or general free-practice.

Benefits to the Judoka

Kata shows you ways to use techniques that you may not have thought of: it expands your mind and gives you new ideas.

Kano created and preserved (from source Jujutsu styles) kata techniques expressly to teach ideas that would not be readily apparent from doing randori and simple techniques alone. Randori is limited by safety and by the fact that it is a one on one 'skilled' contest in a controlled environment. Kata helps you to think about how you might apply techniques differently were you to use your skills in a non-randori situation, such as when strikes or weapons are involved, or when someone is pushing you (in randori no one will be foolish enough to just keep pushing you, but in a self defence situation, this may or will occur).

Kata is there to make us think outside the randori box, every real 'martial art' needs this kind of non-sport training.

Through repeated practice, the techniques of the various forms can be performed without thinking and, in the extreme, kata can unify mind, body and spirit—arguably the purest goal of a martial art.

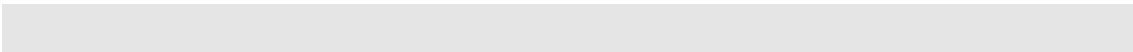
In their seminal text *Judo Formal Techniques* Otaki and Draeger state that:

“Sufficient kata study and practice impose a well-defined technical discipline on the judoist, one that is unattainable by only randori and contest methods. This discipline, instead of hampering the judoist, actually frees him from undue restrictions, liberates his bodily expression in movement, and teaches him economy of mental and physical energy. This process can only be understood through experience, and only through kata performance can judoists come to appreciate Judo in its fullest sense.”

It is certainly true that all judoka involved can derive a great deal of self-satisfaction from a high-quality kata performance and the associated focus, awareness, attention to detail, and self-discipline demanded.

Yasuhiro Yamashita, one of the greatest judoka of all time practices kata on a regular basis. Here's a Judoka an Olympic Champion, four-time World Champion, undefeated in 203 consecutive Judo matches, and he practices kata. He confirms that kata is one of the ways of ensuring his judo performance is the best possible. Also, when his techniques are not working precisely, he always goes back to practice kata religiously.

It is somewhat disappointing that kata is not utilized by many judoka in their judo learning and practice, and more so that certain Judo organizations promote judoka to very high ranks without the incorporation of varied kata into their grading syllabus. Maybe our medal tally at the last Olympics is representative of this shortfall, unlike our Japanese counterparts!



Summation

The method of kata training and the mindset employed by the Judoka are as important as the kata itself. If you only ever just 'go through the motions' while training Kata then it's hard to see how any benefit can be gained. The same could be said of half-hearted uchikomi or randori. If, however, you spend some time analysing and experimenting with the techniques and principles contained within the Kata then there is value within for all judoka whatever their primary focus.

An aspect of Kata which must also be mentioned is that it can be immensely pleasurable to perform as a discipline in itself. Performing it well requires surprising levels of focus, agility, strength and technical ability. Unsurprisingly these attributes are also essential for effective randori and shiai.

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