

Basic Sparring (Kihon Gumite)

Basic sparring is a method of practicing with an opponent, designed to develop defensive technique. In it you are kicked or punched on prearranged points. By this method, you gain experience in distancing and timing, which cannot be practiced in individual training. This type of practice is designed very practically, in order that you may attain the greatest effect with the minimum of strength, without wasting any effort.

These techniques are extremely valuable. The more you practice, the more you come to understand their immeasurable subtlety: they are as profound as Lao Tsue (1) saying "Softness controls strength."

Semi- free sparring (Ohyo Gumite)

Semi-free sparring is a method of practicing techniques applicable to actual free sparring. Essential points which you must practice with care both in basic and in semi-free are:

A. *Distancing (Maai)*

Distancing means always keeping the proper distance, neither too far apart nor too near. This is absolutely essential in free sparring and in matches.

When two opponents are too close that their hands, held in the ready position are nearly touching, they are incorrectly distanced, being too close. In such a case you can be easily surprised by a front kick, by having your hand grabbed, or being punched by your opponent, who need not even shift his body.

On the other hand, if your distance apart is too great, you cannot reach you opponent in one step, and so he will have no difficulty in avoiding your attack.

The proper distance therefore, is to be near enough to knock down the opponent by a half-step forward with the leading foot from the ready position, but far enough away to allow for maneuvering and body shifting.

B. *Body-shifting in defense*

As the attacking points and direction and method of attack are prearranged, as a defender one is liable to retreat before the opponent actually attacks. One is liable to take a passive attitude in retreating when the opponent advances from his ready position. But it is essential for the defender that he should always have firmly fixed in his mind the intention of attacking, of taking advantage of the other's unguarded movements even when retreating. After making a block one must be full of spirit and vitality for an immediate counter-attack. By practicing these exercises constantly and properly, one develops reflex actions the movements from defense to attack, to be used in free sparring and in matches.

When a beginner retreats, he is apt to withdraw in the same direction as the opponents blow; for example if he shifts his body to the left, he retreats to the left. But it is illogical to do so. If you retreat in a slightly different direction, and entice your opponent on, it is easier to ward off the next attack.

In body shifting beginners who shift only their feet and block only with their hands will lose their balance. It is important for either an attacker or a defender to shift the weight of the body as well as the feet.

C. *Serious of Purpose*

An attacker must always attack in earnest, with fighting spirit, really intending to knock down his opponent.

Practice must be performed in deadly earnest and seriousness. There should be no compromise. As long as beginners make an attack or block thinking of it as a mere exercise, they cannot learn the techniques properly.

First practice the actual techniques of attacking and blocking thoroughly until you have mastered them, and then always practice if you were actually fighting.

If your opponent blocks you half-heartily, strike at him hard, so that he learns that a defender should not be off his guard for a moment. It is only by such serious training that one can acquire the power and the technique which enable to take part in free sparring and matches.

D. Zanshin

Zanshin means keeping you alert. For example, if you knock your opponent down in a direct attack, you must not for a moment relax your attention. You must be always prepared to meet his next attack or unexpected counter-attack.

E. The Point to Keep your Eyes On

Miyamoto Musashi, an expert in Kendo (Japanese fencing) says, "Watch your opponent as if you were looking at a distance object." This means you must watch the whole of his body, not only his eyes.

It is essential that you should keep your eyes on your opponent, only when both of you are standing face to face, but also when you are blocking or when you are standing apart. It is also important to remember "Zanshin", to keep your mind alert.

1. Lao Tsue (also Tzu) Chinese Taoist Philosopher, c. 600 B.C.E.

Compiled from the book: **Karate-Do** by Tatsuo Suzuki- Chief Instructor of the Zen Nippon Karate Renmei