



## “Karate Ni Sente Nashi”

(There is no First Attack in Karate)

A few weeks ago, I was reacquainting myself with a long time friend during a weekend get together. We were talking about our families’ weekly schedules and I mentioned that my daughter and I spend a couple nights a week at karate. My friend, who’s always been a bit outspoken, surprised me by asking if I could beat up the other guys in our group. I told him that was tough to say because karate is a defensive art. At the time, I said this without thinking, but I have thought about this a lot both before and since the conversation.

I have had to use karate for real in two instances. In both instances I was completely defensive in posture, and in both instances I immediately and without thought applied my karate training and was able to subdue both attackers without injury to myself. I have also been in other fights, but if I in any way contributed to or failed to attempt to avoid the altercation, I did not apply my karate training. This was not a conscious decision, so I’m not exactly sure why. For years I had assumed it was a moral issue. By being at least partially to blame for the physical conflict, my subconscious prevented me from using techniques that could result in injury to the co-instigator. While I do not wish to underestimate having the moral advantage as a factor in a fight, it has occurred to me there was probably another and much simpler reason as well.

As karate-ka, we are not normally taught how to be the aggressor. Most forms of practice, with the possible exception of sparring and some katas, begin with a block or counter to an attack. Even katas that begin with a strike are in response to an attack. This means we spend only a fraction of our time training how to successfully initiate contact. This may appear to be an omission in karate training, but I suspect it has evolved for a reason.

There are two points in which individuals are most vulnerable. First is when they are unsuspecting or unaware of danger. However, attacking an unsuspecting victim goes against the very heart of Okinawan Karate, not to mention the laws of all fifty states. The second vulnerable instance is when an individual is attacking. This, I believe, is the essence of karate as a martial art.

In an altercation, an opponent would almost certainly be on his or her guard before any physical confrontation were to begin. It is very difficult to initiate an attack against a wary opponent, even an untrained opponent. Furthermore, it is even more difficult to initiate an attack against a wary opponent if the aim is to subdue without harming. On the other hand, if the opponent initiates contact, he or she is not concentrating on defending themselves, and an opening for a counter should occur. Once this opening presents itself, the karate-ka may chose the least lethal technique appropriate and necessary for his or her own protection

This is why I believe trying to avoid confrontation is such an integral part of karate. When facing an aggressor, a non-confrontational attitude should accomplish one of two results. Either the aggressor will relent finding an unwilling opponent or sense this attitude as weakness. By thinking the victim weak, the aggressor may underestimate his or her opponent. The first result avoids the physical confrontation entirely; the ultimate goal of karate. The second result gains the karate-ka an advantage that will assist in the successful subduing of the aggressor. This also allows the karate-ka to gain a moral advantage which would help to release any inhibitions in using their training

I have often heard the adage “*Karate Ni Sente Nashi*” (there is no first attack in karate). This saying certainly has a firm foundation in the martial arts for obvious moral reasons, but reflection shows that there may be a less obvious tactical benefit to this philosophy as well.

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