

## My Karate Journey: The Wonder of KIAI!

The kiai is an essential element of martial arts training ... and, more importantly, SELF-DEVELOPMENT!!! Martial artists learn that the kiai, or yell, is a short burst of energy that, if executed correctly, magnifies the power and focus of a technique.

How do you KNOW if you are doing it correctly? Here's a quick self-test. Remember — it's an explosion of energy that lasts a split second. Our students yell out the letter "A," as in A, B, C. Okay, ready for the test? Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, feet slightly pointing outward and knees slightly bent. Your weight should be evenly distributed on both legs, your body upright and straight, and your head up and eyes forward. Press your thumb firmly into your solar plexus. When ready, let out a short and loud "A!!!" (Pretend you see someone stealing your brand-new bicycle!) If executed properly your thumb will feel your solar plexus tighten quickly and become rock-hard.

This tightening is called "kime," where the solar plexus and body muscles instantly harden to deliver the most effective and efficient blow. Kime is of equal importance if you are on the OTHER side of the blow. The kiai and kime also prepare your body to absorb and dissipate the impact of your opponent's strike. I often tell my students that if you are close enough to strike your opponent, your opponent is also close enough to strike YOU! So, the kiai/kime tandem serves TWO major purposes — offense AND defense!!

As you can imagine, the kiai can be a lifesaver! Most karate students start their training NOT to learn how to fight, but how to defend themselves. They are rarely the aggressor, much less a troublemaker. Their goal is to be prepared should trouble come looking for them! Although friendly and sociable, they are generally a bit introverted. You rarely would find them as the star of a social gathering or speaking in front of a crowd of people.

Sound familiar? IT SHOULD!!! A majority of people fall into this category — the silent majority! Here is where the wonder of kiai begins, and where many people experience a realization and "awakening" of their potential —AS I HAVE!!! Yes, ME! So, what is this "wonder," and how does it work?

Through my over 55 years in karate, I always knew that this art was responsible for me being able to get in front of a group of strangers and teach them something very technical. As most practitioners know, karate may start as a physical activity but soon

turns into an intense battle of mind and body. My job is to show the student how to strengthen BOTH!

Although grateful for the surprising benefits of increased self-confidence and focus karate had provided me, I was still curious as to which SPECIFIC element of karate gave me this much-needed boost. After MUCH contemplation, I am sure that I have found the answer — KIAI! How, you ask, can a yell make such a dramatic change in one's life? The importance and value of the kiai goes Much, MUCH deeper than a yell.

As mentioned, most HSK students are introverts. They do NOT like being in the spotlight or having to speak in front of people. The kiai is a simple yell. There is no right or wrong thing to say — just YELL!!! This very action sets a strong foundation for the rest of your development. I often tell my students that although the kiai is simply a yell, it is the key to helping them “find their voice!”

The kiai helped ME find MINE! Like many of you, I was quite introverted. Speaking in front of strangers and groups of people made me VERY uncomfortable. Karate, more specifically, KIAI helped me find my voice. Think about it. You start off by learning how to kiai. The kiai is but a yell, much like a grunt. It says nothing, yet it emits a definite feeling. The student, if sincere and serious in his/her training, continues with dedication and focus.

Soon that student is put in front of the class to count as cues for other students to punch and kick — just a simple “One, Two, Three...” or in Japanese, “Ichi, Ni, San...” They do this much like they execute a kiai — LOUD!! Now WORDS take the place of a yell. Before he/she knows it, the student is speaking to the training group and giving instructions to lead the stretching exercises or warm-up techniques. Eventually, they are able to take the class through much of the training, as my Senpais now do.

Oh, one more important point to keep in mind. You can be the best teacher in the world, but that gift is useless if no one can hear what you have to say. Hence, the importance of Projection. I tell my students that when they are in front of the class, they should speak to the person farthest away from them. This ensures that EVERYONE hears what is being said.

This slow and deliberate process takes the student step by step into feeling comfortable and confident being and speaking in front of people. Find your voice, and this gift will last a life-time! I found mine, and I REALLY like who I have become!!! This is the WONDER OF KIAI!!!

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