

The Reason for Triple Techniques in Kata

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Sitting at my computer, sippin' on a protein shake.

An e-mail pops up.

It went something like this [slightly edited]:

"Dear most handsomest Karate guy in the whole blogosphere,

I have been wondering for a long time why we do some kata techniques in sets of three (3). For example, in some kata you do three stepping blocks in a row, or sometimes three stepping punches in a row. It seems a bit unrealistic to me. A triple combination like this must surely be too long-winded and dangerous to ever work in a real confrontation. Right?

Looking forward to your reply. I love your website, truly admire your six pack abs and bought all your books. Twice.

/Anonymous"

Dear Anonymous.

First of all, may I suggest we use the term "moderately attractive" instead of "most handsomest" in all our future communication? As you know, Karate is all about being humble, and I don't want other bloggers to feel bad about their looks.

(Also, my six pack abs are actually eight, but who's counting?)

Now, over to your question.

This is an interesting one.

As anyone who's ever done a basic kata will surely have recognized, there exists a sort of unspoken numerology in the way kata is set up. I'm not only talking about the literary meaning of the kata names (i.e.: Seienchin = 72, Gojushiho = 54, Seisan = 13, Suparimpei = 108, Nijushiho = 24 etc.), but also in the various kinds of physical techniques, movements and combinations present in the form.

For instance, today's issue:

Triple techniques.

Without going too in-depth on the historical backdrop of the kata we're practicing today (and why you're [better off banging your head against the wall](#) rather than trying to [figure out certain kata's practical applications](#)), there are some things you need to know when it comes to *triple techniques* in Karate's kata.

What am I talking about?

Hear me out:

Predominant Side

Most people would agree that we need to practice techniques on both left and right side. Because, when we apply the movements in self-defense against a live opponent, the attack could come from any side, right?

Self-defense is chaotic, violent and it happens fast – so we need to be prepared for anything.

Right.

But! According to my government-level sources, 1 in 10 people are left handed.



So, since most of us (9 in 10) are *right handed*, it actually makes more sense to practice defending against a right-handed attack *one extra time* in our kata (for instance: right, left, right) making it three repetitions in total. In other words, we repeat some techniques an extra time based on the statistical fact that an opponent is more likely to attack us with his/her predominant side an extra time.

Makes sense?

That's what I thought.

(By the way, why do we even have a predominant side? Can't we just be born equally "good" on both sides? Perhaps we are? Why has evolution decided that we should be better on a certain side? And why did it choose the right side?)

"Holy" Numbers

Maybe we do some kata moves three times because the number is *extra amazing*?

Indeed, if you believe Asian folklore, especially Chinese, the number three is considered a true lucky number.

And that is important. Because a significant part of the original influence on Karate came from China.

But why the number three? Why not two, four, or sixty-nine?

Well, according to my secret connections in the Hong Kong underworld, if you pronounce "three" in Chinese you would say "saam". And if you say "life" in Chinese you would say "saang". In other words, they sound almost the same! And that's reportedly the reason to why 3 is a luck/happiness number throughout China and many other places in Asia.

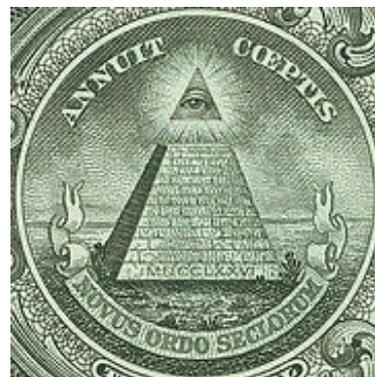
So yeah.

There's a reason you get three pieces of sushi.

Broken Rhythm

Maybe we do techniques in sets of three because we need to practice the concept of 'broken rhythm'?

I wouldn't be the first to suggest so.



The idea that our kata were actually created in order to transmit certain combative “principles” or “strategies” (rather than mere physical techniques) is getting pretty big these days.

So, what is the ‘broken rhythm’ principle, then?

It’s basically this: You execute the first technique... *brief pause*... second technique – and quickly the third technique! So, in theory, your adversary expects the three techniques to have the same rhythm, but since you switch it up you catch your opponent off-guard with the last move.

The principle of broken rhythm is important in Karate. So that might be one reason to why we practice it in kata like this, by having sets of threes.

The ‘broken rhythm’ theory was one of Bruce Lee’s favorite tactics too.

Pretty rad.

Linking bunkai

Lastly, here’s an idea:

Maybe we do triple kata techniques in some places simply because we want to link the numerous self-defense templates (bunkai) of the kata together in a more practical way? Maybe it’s just a structural, geometrical thing, you know?

Like glue.

I mean, if kata is to be considered a [mnemonic](#) vehicle for transmitting ancient techniques and teachings, it would certainly make sense to hold that “vehicle” together in some way. You need screws and bolts in all vehicles. So, doing a technique three times maybe is just that?

A simple way to establish a geometrical configuration necessary for the whole kata to function properly.

Maybe.

Since the original meaning of most kata movements are lost in the sands of time, we will sadly never really know for sure.

But...

What I do know is this: It all boils down to what your definition of “kata” is.

In my humble opinion; kicking, punching, striking or blocking – whether done in a triple, quadruple or single fashion – are no more kata than a knife, fork and spoon constitute dinner. I believe most kata techniques are simply aids, or tools, for understanding and imparting the principles that justify and govern a kata’s very existence.

Comprende?

In other words, your job is to eat the kata – one bite at a time.

Sure, it might be hard to *digest* sometimes.

But don’t worry. You’ll get there.



Just keep on chewing.

One bite at a time.

“Karate is an abyss and an enigma, grasped through deep thinking and careful understanding.”
– Miyagi Chojun (founder of Goju-ryu), 1933.