

SHOTO NIJU KUN *Karate ni sente nashi*

By Master Teruyuki Okazaki

Literally translated, the principle, *Karate ni sente nashi* states, “In karate, never attack first.”

Master Funakoshi used the term “karate” in stating this principle because he was expressing this philosophy to karate students, but this principle – like all of his principles – applies to life in general. In other words, one could say, “In life, never attack first.” Technically, karate is a fighting art. It involves kicking, punching, and blocking. But this is only the physical aspect of karate.

What we are training to do, really, is to change ourselves on the inside, so that we know how to avoid violent situations.

Think of how when we train, the first move we make from the ready position is a block. Remember also that each kata begins with a blocking technique. There is a reason we always block first. It reinforces the philosophy of nonviolence and never attacking first.

Rather than participate in violence, it is always better to stop it, or avoid it. Rather than initiate a conflict, it is always better to be prepared to react to it, to end it.

Every student who has tournament experience in sparring will know that if you discover your opponent’s strategy, you can clearly follow his movements, and it is easy to win.

This is only possible if you clear your mind, and observe what *is*. This way, if there is an opening for an attack – because in tournament sparring, remember, you must consider yourself already “under attack” and ready to respond – you will see it, and you will be able to see your opportunity to stop your opponent.

If you practice this philosophy of never attacking first, then you have important first step in understanding *karate ni sente nashi*. You will be able to see opportunity when it is before you.

This principle reflects an essential aspect of karate. If you are a humble karate-ka and learn from your opponent, you can appreciate the meaning of *karate ni sente nashi*. Humility is always necessary for a clear mind.

Humility means “no ego,” for ego always clouds the mind. An “attacking” mindset is one in which the ego gets in the way. It clouds your mind, and blinds you to what is real.

We can see how this is true, through experience, during dojo training. As you execute the different techniques, do not detach them from their significance in real life. For example, if an opportunity in life arises, do not wait, but quickly take action before you lose your chance.

In addition to the premise of not attacking first, *karate ni sente nashi* is also about reaction, one’s ability to react to a situation. If you do not train diligently, regularly and to the best of your ability, you will never progress enough to grasp the essence of this important principle. You must not only be able to see what is around you, but you must be prepared at all times to react to it.

Adhering to this guidance will provide you with a method of training that will result in knowing your opponent, knowing yourself, seeing the situation clearly, and reacting quickly. If you are not humble, or have a big head, you can never understand the meaning of *karate ni sente nashi*, but it is there for everyone to pursue.