

Standard Applications – part 3

This marks the third part of our exploration of Karate technique applications. We have already mentioned that the application must be physically possible and probable for the student, and we have looked at how the mental state of the student is affected by their experience and preparedness. With these two factors in mind, we will now look at some of the standard moves and how they relate to application at close range for self defence.

In 2001, Anthony Blades of the OCI forced me to write an article about gedan barai. In it I listed some 6 or 7 of the 100 applications that we use the low level block for. Apart from one person, all the calls I had about that article were complimentary and it opened the door for me to teach kata application seminars both here and abroad. We use gedan barai in so many different ways that I could write a book on it (except that someone else already has). Instead, let's look at some of the simple rules that govern our application:



- The distance must be such that there is a real danger of actual harm or the technique is not needed.
- The type of attack that we are facing must be such that it is plausible – martial arts style of attacks are unlikely.
- If our defence is necessary then it is *really* necessary. We are 100% committed to our safety and nullification of the attack.
- All techniques leave us better off than we would be without having done them, and they always negatively affect the attacker. We are never at status quo at the end of the technique.
- The action happens in the middle of the movement. By the end of the technique the attack(er) has been dealt with.
- Both arms are active. The “preparatory hand” is not a wasted movement, nor does it “make the other hand faster”. Our whole body is used to deliver the technique – it isn’t “an arm movement” but something that comes from the center.

What you will notice is that the above factors rule out kumite style movements. If the attacker is coming in maegeri just move away, don't block it. Don't step forward to block oizuki chudan.



An easy, initial gedan barai application takes the situation that an attacker has grabbed your wrist. This is one that we teach beginners on their first lesson, and one which children can do against an adult with the correct training. In this example it is your right wrist that has been grabbed by their left hand. This occurs because you have been having words and you have tried to leave. Instinctively, they have left their strong hand (usually the right) free to strike you while they have also (they subconsciously believe) restricted the use of your strong hand.

While it might be advisable to just punch the guy, maybe you just want his hand *off* of you. Perhaps you seek to show that you are not to be manhandled, perhaps the situation is just not that bad yet that you wish to shed blood by breaking his nose/jaw etc.



Simple movements are often difficult to do. Make *hikite* (returning hand) quickly with your right hand. The most common fault in practice is that students use their shoulder to make the move. This not only takes longer and makes inappropriate use of muscles, but also telegraphs your intention and is easier to resist. You should feel as though your elbow moves back first. It flies back and feels like it's going at 100 mph.

At the same time the other hand (your left) comes down on the attacker's wrist and redirects his arm across his body. This turns him momentarily, allowing you to strike if it was needed.

Now, we've separated out the movements for the photos to illustrate the parts, but the whole thing should happen at the same time. When teaching this application, it's vital that the parts are understood, though.

Tip: In training there is no need to get bruised doing this. In fact, if your forearms are getting wrecked then you are using strength instead of



technique. Lay off, the descending arm is used to redirect, not mash.

This, then, reveals a great number of targets, takes the attacker's other weapon away (cross body motor reaction) and lets us stay upright with our options open.

It also makes prime sense of the way that the technique is taught. If you go too high, it ceases to be gedan barai and ceases to release the wrist. Hikite must be withdrawn. The active arm must sweep downwards.



Now, a slightly (not much) more advanced version of this technique has the attacker grab the opposite wrist.

In this situation we have been seized by the opposite wrist (right arm to right arm, but it could just as easily have been left arm to left arm).

Again, the attacker is seeking to prevent us from leaving, and potentially, they will draw us into their mean hook punch.

If all we had learned was the shape of gedan barai, then that paradigm must be able to help us. The hikite motion becomes a turn-over of the attacker's wrist while it draws them towards you. (Tip: sometimes the attacker comes off of their grab. Don't worry about it, you're still free and they weren't that serious an attacker anyway!) Cross body motor reaction sends the threatening arm away, leaving you to complete the move that you know so well by stepping out into the attacker's elbow with your descending forearm. By latching on to the attacker's right wrist as you pull it back, you can rotate their arm so that their elbow faces upwards. The shock of impacting on the back of the elbow (just above, actually, on the triceps tendon/golgi receptor) is immense. And if you are in close enough,



you may find that your fist impacts against the attacker's head, too.



Another piece of standard training is the rising block. When we move away from a swinging hook punch our reflexively raised hand will usually come into contact with the attacker's punching arm. This isn't a block; more like a "cover". With the idea of muchimi keeping us in contact with any limb that the attacker has offered us, we have a fraction of a second before the attacker throws his next attack.

Following a wave-like motion, we return to the attacker's limb with our body and slide our forearm up underneath their arm. The rising motion is a shearing force across the triceps tendon again. There will be damage to the attacker's elbow and shoulder, and their other arm is reflexively drawn away.

In practice, only ever take your training partner to their tip-toes. Any further results in harm. You've been given someone's trust and health to work with, don't abuse it.

This is a two-way action of leverage on the arm, and does not rely on strength, but rather on correct mechanics and the spinning/cutting nature of the rising arm.



Bringing the arm from outside to inside, we can see why Soto uke is considered an "outside" block. In this situation we have slipped or parried an attacker's right cross. They think they are a bit of a boxer. It could just as easily have been a left jab, with us moving to the "outside line" or "blind spot" on the other side.

Our hands continue to move as our body is brought into close proximity of their arm. We keep hold of the attacking limb with muchimi, and then, working from the outside to the inside we cut into their arm with our forearm, sending the attacker's other limb away with cross-body motor reaction.

Once again, our aim in practice has to be to perform the technique with skill, knowing that strength and bodyweight will do their part when needed. We look for the biggest affect upon our training partner form the smallest amount of effort on our part. You can perform the move with speed and power in basic training, in your kata, or in kumite (as long as you do not retain the attacker's hand with hikite). You can use power with pads, but not when you perform the whole move with a partner—you'd damage them. Really.



To finish off the pack, the reason why Uchi uke is an “inside” block is that it is best used from the inside of a swinging hook punch. Again, from that common attack, the hook punch, we may find ourselves moving away from the danger. We need to attach ourselves to that attacking limb and head for the same kind of entry into the attacker as we would with an age uke. Now, if the rising movement goes wrong, or if we are not confident to apply it in the first place, then returning our forearm to its “home” side of the body still leaves the attacker in a worse position than he had planned.

Remember, by doing anything other than getting hit you change the situation from what the attacker had planned to a whole new ball-game, buying you valuable seconds to get your head together enough to continue with retaliations (if necessary) that will consolidate your position and keep you safe.

Just for the sake of comparison, let's look at a more usual uchiuke use, and why it might not fit our requirements:



With Richard attacking, we can see that in order to use uchiuke as a block to his wrist, he is at a distance that makes it impossible for him to hit me. He could step forward, but I could step back, so we'll just analyse the arm positions. The “preparatory” position is unnecessary as it doesn't do anything except slow me down, and, if we have approximately the same arm speed, I'd have to start blocking before Richard starts punching!

Now, there's no crime in using uchiuke or any other technique as blocks for kumite, but kata bunkai based instructors must make it clear that the kumite version is an exercise in distance, timing, bravery, etc, whereas the full technique (with use of hikite) is there for the application of Karate and kata.

Feeling always run high when there is a perceived criticism of someone else's teaching. I am not defaming anything or saying that it doesn't have its use, just looking at the right time and place for each part of our art.

In the next part, we'll look at why you might look again at the turns in your kata.

John Burke is available to teach seminars at your dojo, which can be tailored to your requirements. Book now on 01626 360999. His books and dvds are available at www.karateacademy.co.uk and www.thebunkaiguy.com. Thanks to Richard Carrick for posing for the photos. All open-minded karate-ka are welcome at John's dojo in Devon.