

Kime and its Effect on Karate Training

Introduction:

There has been much debate over the years regarding what is 'kime', how it should be applied and whether it is effective or just an element of display.

I feel that there is a place for my interpretation of kime but not in the manner that I was first taught (or understood it).

So, What is Kime?:

It is often used to describe the tensing of the body at the point of impact, but therein lies one of the problems with it...

First of all, let's look at the meaning of the word;

"Kime is a noun for the verb "kimeru", which means "decide", "conclude", etc.

In martial arts it means "conclude with a decisive move", "follow-through."

(Source: Japanese Kendo Instructor via Chip Poirot - SRSI)

Next, we should consider the possible practical applications for this action. There seems little doubt that it is intended to mean that we make a decisive action, follow it through to completion. Where the debate comes in is whether it means tensing the body fully when completing the technique and for how long.

How Do We Apply It?

In my experience, there are a number of ways to apply what we are taught as kime, some are listed below with my opinion regarding practicality;

- On point of impact, lock out your stance and body, exhale and push downwards.
 - I agree with the push down and lockout in certain cases but question the duration.
 - The concept of tensing on point of impact is, IMO, incorrect as we need to shock the target by entry.
- Strike through the target and only tense up after impact.
 - This is nearer to my view of how it should be applied.
- Don't apply it, just drive through the target.

- o I like the concept of driving through the target and keeping the motion going until the attacker is under control, provided that the shoulder is kept low (in line with joint) when punching and that kicks are not over extended causing loss of balance.
- o This is also applied when using the 'heavy arm/leg' techniques.
- o It allows the body to work in a more natural position whereas tensing up sometimes forces the shoulders up, or upper body to stoop forward, etc.
- It is a useful technique to apply when blocking, assuming the block takes you into control over the attacker. Maybe more as a lock or break?

Evidence and Opinions:

It would seem that Nakayama has been labeled as the person to promote Kime and that much misinformation has arisen due to the difficulty in describing what kime really is.

There is also a theory that kime was introduced as a safety measure along with sun dome with a sport and aesthetics bias. This seems like a probable case as Nakayama was the man to commercialise Karate as a sport.

The concept of Kime is a Shotokan one and seems to be a fairly recent creation, hence my support for the theory regarding Nakayama. In other karate styles such as Shotokai this is not used.

The term Chinkuchi is also used in Okinawan karate and was known within Shotokan and as many elements of the old karate were changed or dropped, the same fate may have descended upon chinkuchi. It is possible that Kime was used to replace Chinkuchi when a more physical explanation was wanted in Shotokan than the more holistic meaning of Chinkuchi.

On the topic of Shotokai, the following extract from an interview with Mitsusuke Harada, head of Shotokai, adds more information to the debate;

J. de 'C:

SKM editor John Cheetham asked me to ask you this question... "in Shotokan the physical aspect of 'kime' is basically - total muscular contraction of the whole body, for one split second of time, upon impact, to deliver 'shock' through the target. We hear that in Shotokai there is no contraction - only relaxation. How would you describe the Shotokai difference in physical terms?"

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You mention that it is said there is no muscular contraction in Shotokai, only relaxation, but this is incorrect. We have contraction and expansion of the muscles but the joints must be relaxed! This relaxation of the joints allows free movement at the moment when the greatest effort is exerted by the muscles. As a result, a smooth, continuous but much more explosive action can be achieved from those muscles. As for Kime itself, this is very difficult to explain. The first time I heard the word Kime was in the first year I joined Waseda University We had to do 5 attacks - Gohon Kumite; on the 5th attack we had to defend and counter attack. The word 'Kime-te' was repeated, it meant to finish or conclude on the 5th attack.

After returning from my first Summer School I started my second term at university. At this time I heard the word 'Kime' again. Mr. Okuyama used the word Kime with us, but his idea was completely different to the previous explanation I had heard. Okuyama's idea of Kime was more about 'feeling', but at this time we could not understand what he meant. Then, in 1949 the JKA Kyokai was created and all the universities began to grade together on a twice-yearly basis. The word 'Kime' was used more and more, but each time, its interpretation varied depending on who was doing the examining that day. There was far too much ideology around the word 'Kime'. Later, when I began to practice with Egami, I asked him about Kime. Egami said that, 'We cannot see it as it is invisible to the eye, therefore it is all based on ideology.' To really know Kime one must hit another. I tried to hit Egami using the type of Kime I had previously been taught, but as I touched him I fell over. So, I tried again totally abandoning the concept of Kime I had been given; this time it was completely different! So, I believe Kime is complete nonsense, it is ideology and not realistic!

In the past I have broken wood using Uraken. This was done once more, with total abandonment of the Kime concept. Instead, just concentrating on how to throw my arm and fist at the wood to break it. You say in Shotokan the physical aspect of Kime is total muscular contraction, but this is not Shotokan, it is Nakayama's idea - JKA Kime! So, the problem of clarifying Kime is almost impossible because it is ideology and this varies greatly from person to person. As a result of my personal experiences, I want to completely forget about the idea of Kime.
(source: Eric Millar, SRSI)

There is also the opinion of Egami to consider. In his book about Shotokai, "The Heart of Karate-Do?" If I understood his writing, tensing the muscles is to be avoided because it actually slows the technique down, and thus reduces power. However, it seems to me that tensing the muscles is good for improving muscle tone and endurance. So, perhaps the idea is tense the muscles for exercise when hitting air and don't tense the muscles when hitting a surface. Your technique could be said to have kime either way since kime is not defined as an actual physical action.

(source: Georgios Kalomiros, SRSI)

Conclusion:

There appears to be some cases where kime is beneficial from an application point of view but it should not be seen as the only way to apply a technique and should not be seen as a core requirement of Shotokan. It is part of the JKA Shotokan but other associations may choose to teach technique application differently. Kime is not necessary for effective self defence techniques to be applied and a more relaxed 'follow through' or 'whiplash' action is more appropriate. The key must be to retain control of your body and that of the attacker and the speed of your chosen response or action is of paramount importance, kime unless extremely brief will slow you down and may be fatal if working with a violent and non compliant partner.

If it is applied, the body must be relaxed right through to the end of the technique. The final fraction of a second allows the body to tense into kime and immediately relax off again. There is possibly some benefit from a plyometric point of view in tensing before the exit but this seems more appropriate to the sport than in realistic combat.

(The comments contained herein are not intended as a statement of facts pertaining to the definition of Shotokan or a training guide for new students. They are a record of my opinions and reference to other influences on me.)