

My favorite Kata is Bassai Dai

My daughter, Annemarie, was recently watching me practice karate at our home while preparing for my 2nd kyu test. At the time, I was focused on kata. In particular, I was running through all of the required kata for 2nd kyu rank - beginning with Heian Shodan and ending with Bassai Dai. I happened to be struggling a bit with hip rotation during Bassai Dai, when Annemarie said, "That's my favorite". I didn't contemplate on the matter, but rather quickly replied, "Mine too". In this paper, I'll try to rationalize why I was quick to subconsciously agree with Annemarie. In the most simplistic terms, it boils down to 3 things; being challenged, eliminating bad form, and vivid imagination of the opponent.

Let's start with the most obvious reason why Bassai Dai is my favorite kata; namely because I love to learn new things. Here, the requirement to satisfactorily execute this kata in order to pass 2nd kyu testing naturally forces me to learn and interpret the newly introduced techniques rooted within Bassai Dai. If you know anything about me at all, you know that I'm always working on learning new things. Having earned a Masters Degree in Engineering (MSES/MOT), followed by a Project Management Professional (PMP) certification, then a Masters Degree in Business Administration (MBA), and now a hopeful Shodan in the future – I'm always trying to expand what I know. It's in my blood, and it's what keeps me motivated. Not surprisingly, the new/unique movements are exactly what are so appealing to me.

The second reason for me being so fond of Bassai Dai is how challenging it is for me. If this kata were easy for me, I wouldn't be so interested. At present, hip rotation, hip vibration, and simply remembering when to be open vs. closed is a challenge for me. By way of summary, I've picked up some technique from previous training which has influenced my personal style. For better or worse, it is difficult to shake my old ways. Looking back, I've learned that my history with different martial art forms is both good and bad. In some situations, my previous training helps me while in others it clearly hurts me. I can easily see some advantages and disadvantages from the various building blocks from which I've been exposed, but it's much harder for me to determine when to draw upon them vs. when to apply a fundamental form. Indeed, I have been known to apply the strangest application of the most basic forms. I look to Sensei Hunt for guidance so that I may preserve and build upon the good tools that I've acquired over the years, and throw away the bad. Bassai Dai forces me to go back to basics, ignore previous influences, and develop proper hip rotation and constant switching between a disadvantageous position to an advantageous one.

The last reason for my selecting Bassai Dai is in my vivid interpretation of the kata. Whereas I struggle with the collective meaning of both Heian (Peaceful Mind) and Tekki (Horse Riding) kata, it's much easier for me to interpret the meaning of Bassai (To Penetrate a Fortress) from start to finish. The name alone makes it easier for me to open up my imagination and better see the opponents before me. Not only am I fighting, but I now have a purpose; namely to storm a castle and perhaps save a queen. I can easily imagine myself back in time, a few hundred years ago, climbing alongside a castle that is built alongside a mountain. As I move sideways and upward along the mountainside, repeated switching between defensive and offensive movements within a very confined space, my continued progress allows me ultimately penetrate through the fortress. In contrast to Heian and Tekki kata, it's really the end goal of penetrating the fortress that allows me to better imagine each opponent along the way.