



The Main Energy Transfers (Ki) in Karate

By
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Aknowledgements

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Introduction

The subject presented here is very broad, but it is of interest to all karatekas.

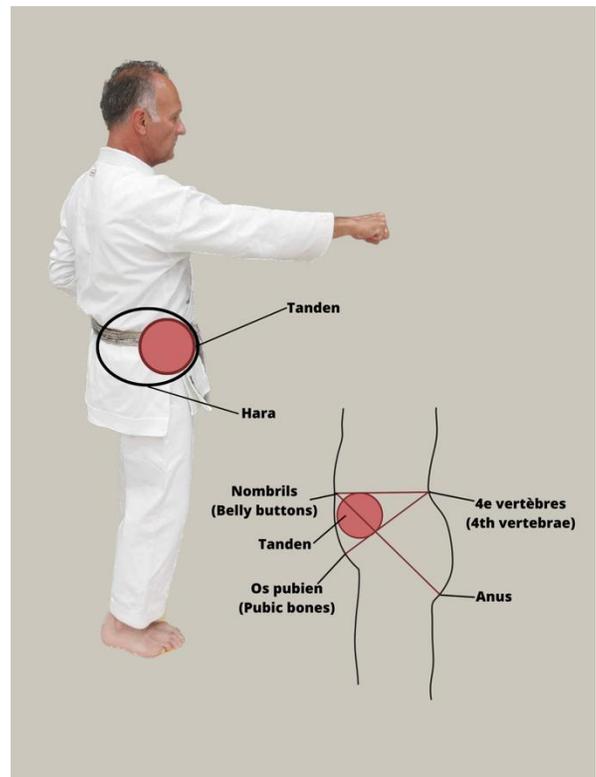
The human being has magnetic field composed of a positive pole and a negative pole (ying and yang). In martial arts, this energy is used by different means of transportation such as vibration, rotation, translation (horizontal and vertical). Its objective is to make the technique faster, more efficient, and more explosive in terms of power.

In this document, I will try to explain how to mobilize the whole body in these different energy transports so that the technique is more efficient. To achieve this, there are basic work and small exercises that allow us to understand what is happening with the unity of the upper and lower body at Tanden (Hara). We will discover together how to dissociate and associate the different units of the body, at specific times, to release the energy of the belly (Hara) and transfer it to the technique for greater efficiency.

What are Hara and Seika-Tanden?

The Hara, also called Onaka or Fukubu, is located in the abdominal region. Japanese tradition considers it to be the main source of man's vital energy (Ki). It is located a few centimeters below the navel and a little set back between it and the spine. It is the region of Kikai (the ocean of breath).

Seika-Tanden is the focal point of the Hara, which is considered in martial arts and Zen Buddhism as the starting point of the vital energy (Ki) of the human being. The Tanden is an intangible focal point. It forms the base of the real power and efficiency that any karateka, through mastery and personal work, can achieve.



Energy mobilization

This mobilization must be immediate. To achieve this, the abdominal muscles must be understretched to help the activation and synchronization of muscle chains. This is not natural to man. It is advisable to look for the sensation where there is this internal feeling, through slow work and possibly breathing exercises. This mobilization must be

put into action in an intense (efficiency) and brief (avoid energy waste) way. To do this, the various actions to be taken must follow the following order:

- Acceleration: brief and violent concentration designed to throw the attacking limb
- Relaxation: immediate relaxation of the muscles, which acts as a brake, to allow the limb to reach maximum speed,
- Final contraction: instantaneous, very brief action to shake the adversary who receives a large shock wave and perceives his own reaction force. It is in this final phase that the "Kime", a penetrating force, intervenes, and gives coherence to the technique (Todome Waza).

Here is a small exercise that allows us to bring the whole body into relaxation, because if the upper and lower body including the hips remain in a block, the energy of the center (Tanden) cannot flow freely. Place yourself in the shizen-tai position, with both feet anchored to the ground. You must create a tremor that starts from the pelvis and is transmitted to both units of the body, to create the situation (action), like a dog shaking off water.



The vibration (Shin Do)

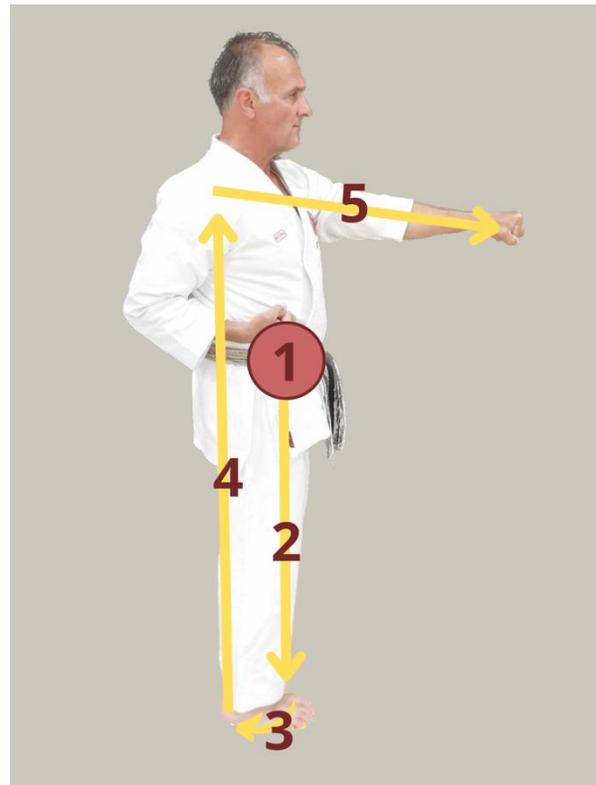
The first transport of energy that we see in karate, but that we know little about as a beginner, is vibration. Master Yaguchi, during an instructor class, defined it as a tremor (Shin Do) going from the abdominal center to the hips. He gave the example of an animal that came out of the water and created a tremor to shake off the water from its body.

The energy released by the Tanden is projected at the hip level, and then transfers to the knee and ankle joints, and finally to the feet anchored on the ground. At the same time, this anchor sends back the energy through the same path, passing through the different joints, to provide good acceleration and

adequate thrust for the desired technique.

The body and mind mobilize at a precise moment to put an end to the technique (Todome Waza).

We all know the basic choku-zuki in shizen-tai position. This technique must be produced by vibration (transport of energy) which all karateka try to reproduce.



1. We warm up by practicing it normally.



2. Then we can carry out an exaggerated move of the hips. By amplifying this vibration, this will allow us to better understand the movement of the hip. In shizen-tai position, put the left fist in front and the right fist at the hip. You create a slight backward movement of the right hip, as if you would like to put pressure on a spring, while remaining connected with the center (Tanden), and then release the pressure from the spring. This will allow the right fist to reach its objective, while well understanding the kinematic chain of energy circulation explained at the very beginning of this document.



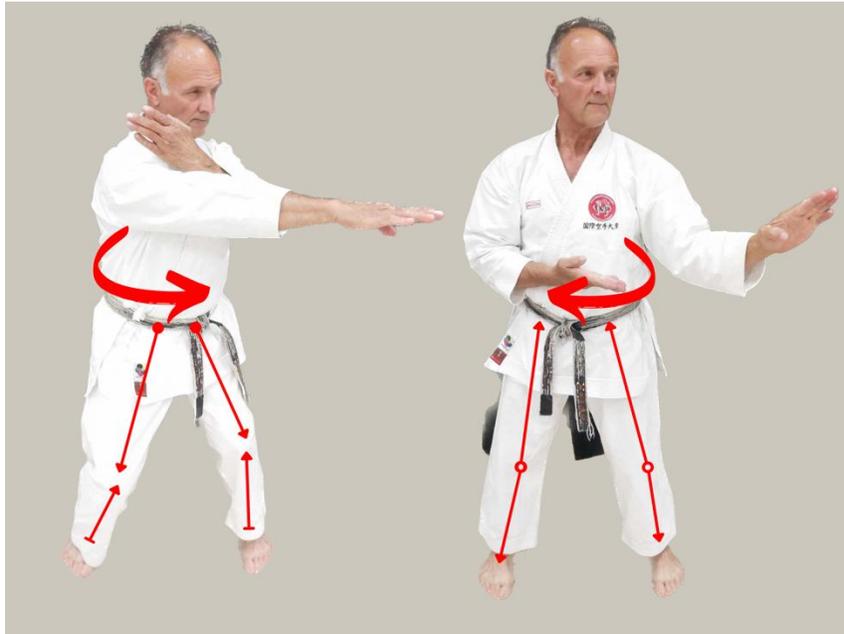
3. We can also go further in our efforts to understand the vibration of the hips.
 We do as described above and add a flexion of the knee on the hip side which
 will propel the punch.



4. Still in the shizen-tai position, we work the shuto-uke at 45 degrees while keeping the shizen-tai and without moving the feet on the ground. Then, we arm the right arm at 45 degrees to the left while bringing the right hip in the same direction (tighten the spring). Then, we return with the right hip to the starting position (release the spring), putting pressure with the feet on the ground.



5. Vibration from bottom to top. There is a more intense exercise to better understand what is happening with the pelvis. Still in the same starting position, we repeat arming the shuto uke. But there, with a downward flexion of both knees, we trigger the shuto uke with a greater amplitude of the vibration, going up by the push of the two legs coming from the ground.



We can find the same vibration in morote uke at the beginning of the Heian Sandan kata.



6. There are other vibration exercises that put pressure towards the ground (for example choku zuki downwards, osae uke in the Heian Godan kata or nukite uke in the Unsu kata).



There are many techniques in karate that use vibration as an energy transport. The goal of the exercise is to better understand the energy released by the Seika-Tanden which radiates throughout the body. Sometimes exaggerating the vibration movement can help us understand it better. To fully understand it, all this must happen through an internal sensation or feeling.

Question

Sit on a stool that swivels in all directions. Be very relaxed and keep your feet off the ground. Place your left fist in front and perform choku zuki with your right hip. When punching, in what direction will the hip vibrate? In the same direction or in the opposite direction?



Answer

It goes in the opposite direction, because the energy of the Seika-Tanden towards the hip has no support on the ground. This is why during our training, it is important to always have good support on the ground.



Hip Rotation (Kai Ten)

Another transport of energy used from the beginning of our training is the rotation of the hips, Shomen, Hanmi, and Gyaku hanmi.

First, the source of energy in the rotation of the hips is the same as that of the vibration which is explained at the beginning of this document but provided in a different way.

Hip rotation is not only used in karate, but also in several other sports such as throwing or hitting the ball in baseball, the drive in golf, the shot put, etc. The objective is to maximize the power and speed of the movement made.

There are decisive karate techniques (Kime Waza) which require very intense power produced by body movement. Rotation of the upper half of the body in conjunction with that of the hips is particularly important. We are led to turn the hips in a continuous and rapid movement while maintaining it at the same level. In karate, we say block with the hips and hit with the hips.



To begin, let's take the zenkutsu position

1. Start with orders from the brain,
2. The hikite works like an automotive starter,
3. The hips begin to rotate,
4. The torso rotates in a continuous movement at the same time,
5. The punching arm strikes the target energetically.

In the zenkutsu position, both feet must be well positioned on the ground, with the right width and length according to your own body shape. The distance between the two feet is measured from one heel to the other. This diagonal must be equal to twice the width of a shizen tai.

Initially, hip rotation training should involve a quick, wide movement. As we progress, the rotation should be fast, but on a smaller scale.

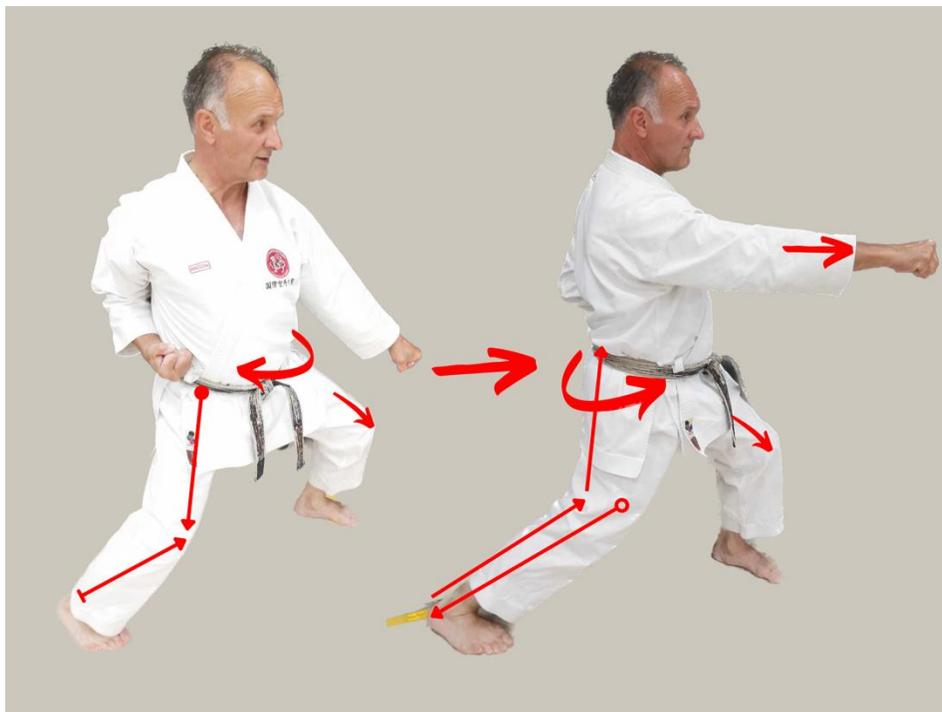
You bring the hip to the 45-degree hanmi position. Which means that you tighten the spring which creates tension on the rear ankle, but the latter must not move. The hips remain at the same level and the front knee be on the same line (no movement from left to right).



Then you release the spring which allows the gyaku zuki to come out and return the hips to the initial position. If the power concentrated in the tendon is used in the execution of karate techniques, the plexus and pelvis will be firmly supported by the thighs and the trunk by the spine. Feet are always well anchored to the ground.

Another way to better understand the feeling or sensation of hip rotation is by creating more amplitude with the pelvis by adding greater flexibility at the rear leg joint.

When we bring the hips to 45 degrees (hanmi), we slightly bend the knee of the back leg, while lowering the center of gravity slightly downward, without changing the position of the front knee. As a result, pressure is placed on the hip spring and at the same time on the knee, ankle and rear foot on the ground. When the spring is released, the thrust which comes from the ground and returns via the same path, makes the practitioners feel a more accentuated rotation at the level of the hips. After practicing such an exercise, the karateka can return to a faster, shorter rotation with a better understanding of how it happens.

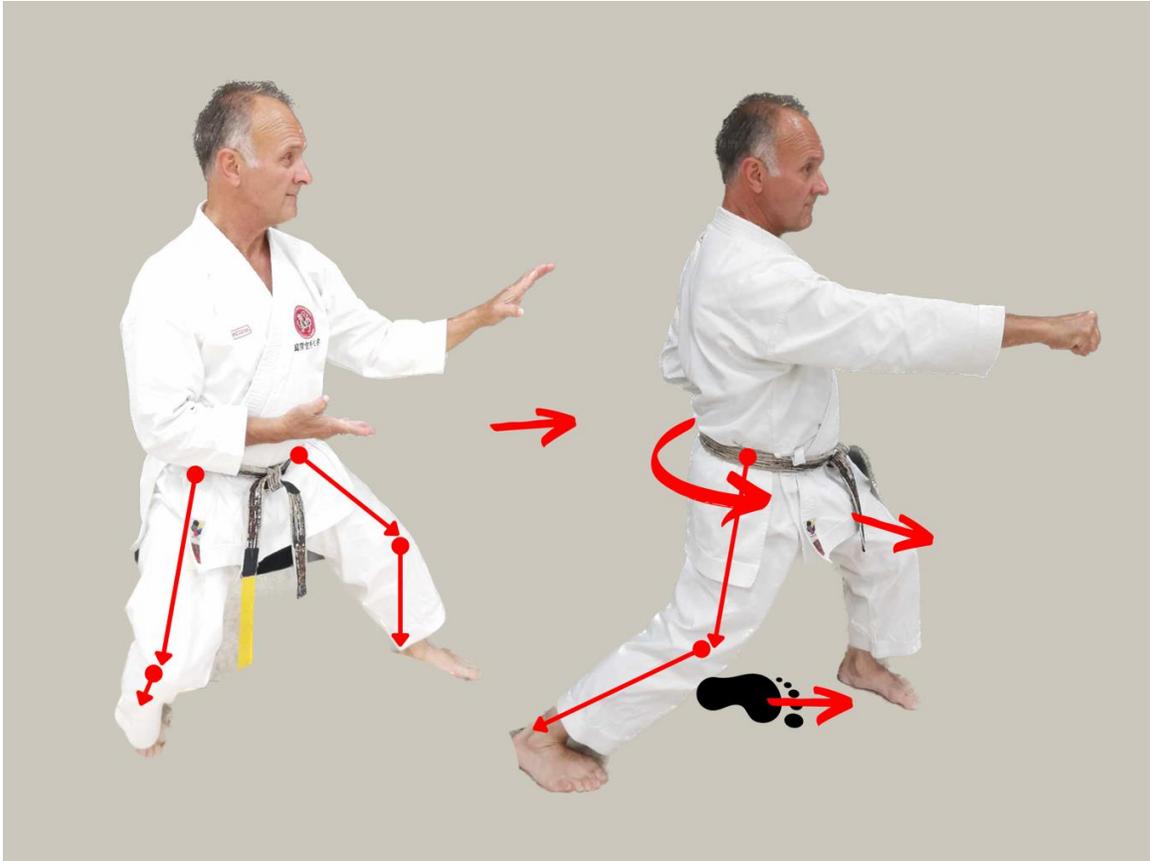


The hip rotation in gyaku hanmi, or 135 degrees, is like what I described above, but the spring is compressed in the opposite way either to block, attack or counterattack.



The more opposing tension there is on the hips (spring), the faster the explosion of the movement will be. All without forgetting the other elements which are associated with the rotation.

Hip rotation can also be practiced with much greater amplitude by moving from the back position (kokutsu dachi) to the front position, while being careful to pivot the back foot on the heel to ensure that the energy transport goes with the whole body in the same direction.



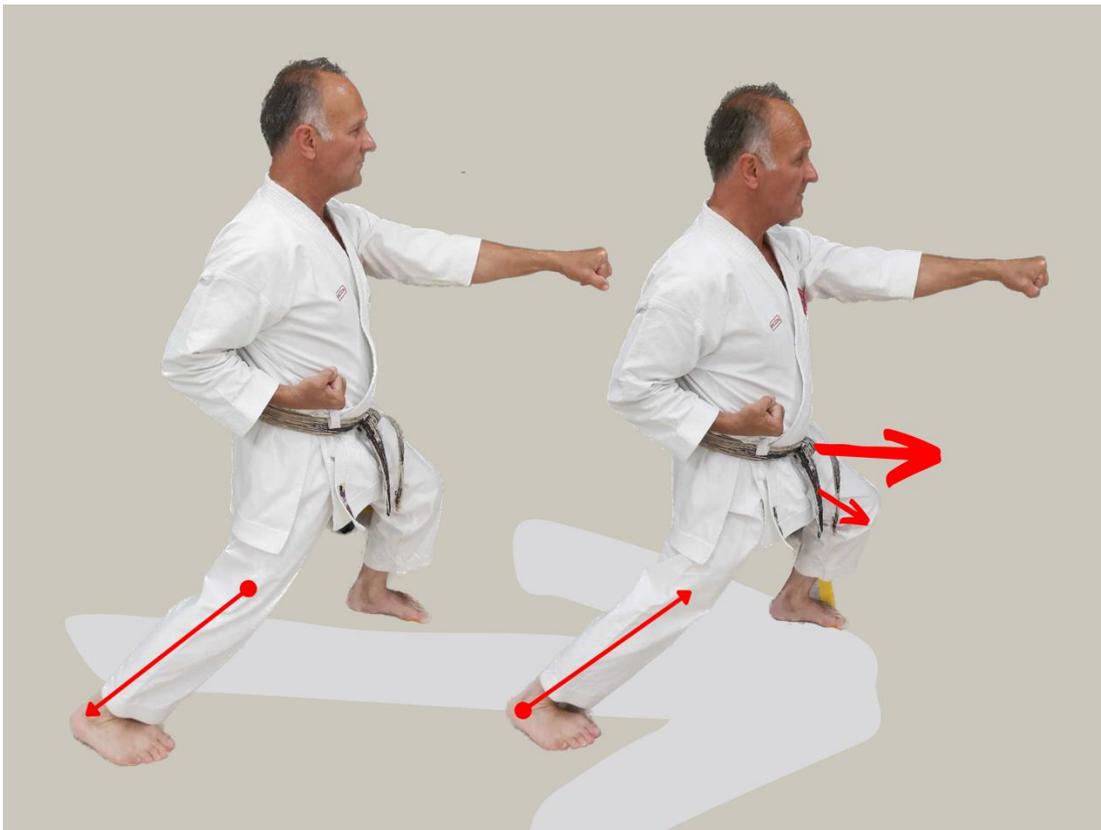
Here is another way to amplify the rotation of the hips to better understand what is happening (ex: shizen tai). The arms are placed in the starting position of the gedan barai, left fist beside the ear and right arm extended towards the left, bringing the right hip in the same direction while compressing the spring on the left side of the hip, all without moving the feet off the ground for now. We find ourselves closing the hips (contraction), then moving the left leg 90 degrees in zenkutsu to deploy the gedan barai with the maximum opening of the hip in the hanmi position (expansion).



Translation (Zen Shin or Kou Shin)

To begin this section, the concepts that were described in Vibration and Rotation follow each other in Translation.

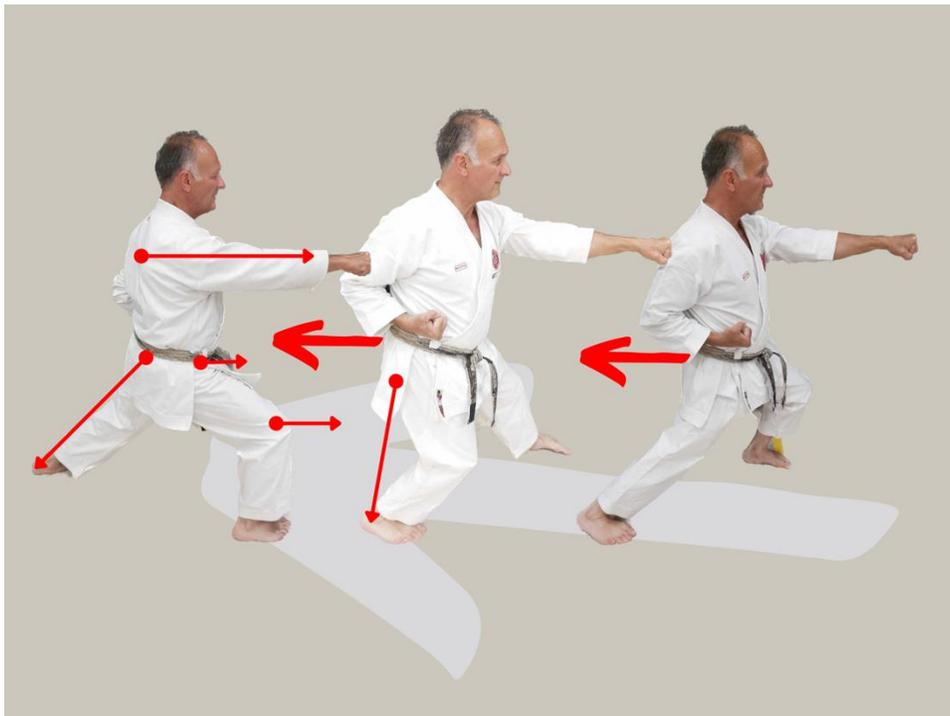
First, from the zenkutsu position, if you want to move forward in this position, it is important to push the hips forward. This movement is as important as the rotation in providing the required forward power. In this movement, we place the supporting leg forward. The back leg and upper body are brought forward. At this point, the supporting leg is pushed back and down with great force to engage the hips and body forward.



This is not the same as taking a step forward. The driving force comes from the powerful push of the supporting leg, which causes the rear leg to become lighter for its forward movement. Most of the body weight is directly above the hips, which carry the body forward. The greater this reaction, the faster the body advances.

When moving, you must prevent the center of gravity from rising on the support leg, because the level must remain the same throughout the movement.

Now, what about the backward translation. First, the supporting leg will be the one behind. You must keep the heel of the back foot firmly on the ground, the hips and gluteal muscles must move backwards and come closer to the heel of the supporting leg. All while keeping the center of gravity at the same height. As a result, the weight of the front leg is released, which allows faster movement.



From the kokutsu position, going forward, the weight of the body is on the back leg at 70%, while keeping the center of gravity at the same height. The rear leg creates a thrust for the axis of the body on the point of support which is the front leg. Then, the reaction described in the translation of zenkutsu occurs.

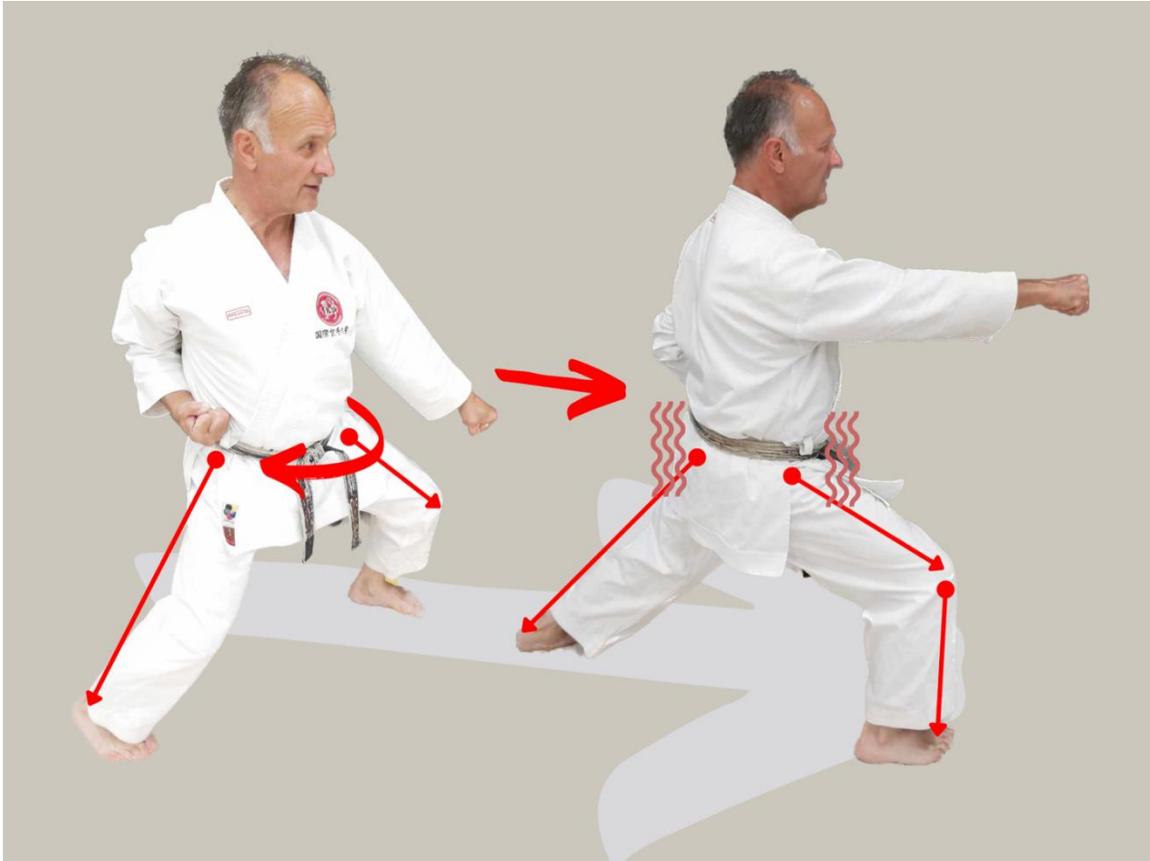


The opposite movement is to move backward from the kokutsu position. First, the supporting leg is 70% on the back foot. With the rotation of the hips and a pivot of the rear foot which is done on the sole of the foot, we bring the axis of the body and its

weight even more on the heel of the rear leg. This allows the front leg to move faster while being lighter.



Here is another exercise to understand translation. Move in zenkutsu, from the hips in hanmi position (45 degrees). Initially, the support leg is forward, and the movement of the axis is done in the same way as explained above from hanmi. When moving, there is a half-rotation of the hips. Then, the translation begins, and everything ends with a vibration of the hips in the oi-zuki by using the support the rear leg on the ground.



“In Budo, as the samurai experts said, the cutting effect of the katana came from the support of the rear leg, especially the heel of the foot. Focusing on the heel was much more important than thinking about the katana. Here, we do the same. When doing Zuki, don't think about the fist but the heel. This is where the power comes from. Thinking only about the arm is superficial. To develop power efficiency, think about contact with the ground. Kime must be created through the posture, from the Hara to the feet” – Master Taiji Kase

Conclusion

In conclusion, my goal was to provide a greater basic understanding of the different energy transports in karate. All while making a slight stop, with more personal work within you to achieve a better feeling or sensation of the hips and the whole body. After several years of training, over 45 years, through this exercise, I realize that my understanding of the body with regards to karate is limited. Even with so many years of experience, once again, going back to basics to deepen my approach was essential.

Sources used:

- Shuseki Shihan Frank Woon-A-Tai (from various workshops)
- Best Karate
- Dynamic Karate
- Encyclopédie des arts martiaux
- Sensei Rick Hotton workshop and YouTube
- Shihan Scott Langley (YouTube)
- Shihan Tatsuya Naka (YouTube) et Kuro-Obi World
- Shihan Mikio Yahara (YouTube)
- And also, various instructors of the I'AKJQ and IKD that I met at various training sessions