

On The Water Phase – Sensei Reeve Leaford - Mar 2018

Starting right back in 2010, I immediately had a preference for the water phase. At the time, we were under a different martial arts banner so it wasn't officially the water "phase", but there was still a water kata which was (and still is) one of my favourite techniques.

Water qualities include retreating and returning from an advantageous position, angle changes and softening strikes. In the same way the water in a pond ripples and then returns when a rock is thrown in, water techniques receive an attack very passively and defensively before flowing back in, having circumvented whatever force was applied to it. Water kata demonstrates this the most simply, and most of the lower-graded techniques are based entirely on this kata's footwork. Similar to mist, the power often comes from the twisting of the hips and the rotation of body, which often comes from swapping footwork.

Being on the contracting section of the wheel, water tends to draw your partner in while you retreat and then manipulate them as you return in towards them. As with all phases, the opposite feeling is evoked by the receiver i.e. a fiery feeling of forward movement is brought about by water's backward flow. Care must be taken then; if you return without having retreated to a position of strength, then you will not be able to overcome the attacker as they advance. This is why careful use of balance manipulation, softening strikes and wrist and shoulder rotations is important in controlling the structure of the uke, so that we keep ourselves as safe as possible.

I believe the study of water phase has helped me deal with confrontations before they even begin, applying the theories to everyday life to verbally and mentally prepare by withdrawing, analysing and then applying. This form of "mental taijutsu" is a natural extension of our martial art training and is something we aim to teach in the kids' class early on.