

GKR KARATE JOURNEY

Blue Belt (5th Kyu)

BLUE BELT BLUES

As an instructor I have had many students (usually blue belts) approach me with the concern that they feel they are not getting anywhere in their karate. I usually smile and respond with "Don't worry, you've got the Blue Belt Blues". I smile because the more I study karate, the more I find that getting the blues can be a good thing!
Sensei Jason Smith, Essex, UK

So What Are They And Why Do They Happen?

When you're a white belt you've got a very steep learning curve as you struggle with the basic techniques and first kata. Then you arrive at yellow belt and now have the opportunity to spar (which is a whole new challenge altogether) plus there are the advanced basics to learn. Next is your orange belt and you're introduced to a completely different kata called 'Saifa'. All this has you trying to keep up with so much to learn. Once a student reaches green, blue and red belts their learning curve begins to flatten out as there is no longer a number of new techniques or katas to learn. Your focus now goes to yourself as opposed to what else you can learn, and with this, frustration may set in as you don't feel you're as good as you thought you were and you're not improving...thus comes the blues.

Why Are The Blues A Good Thing?

The most important part of dealing with the blues is... "Don't panic". Everyone experiences them as they are a natural part of your development. It's so sad when a student quits after getting the blues unaware that all the frustration really means is they are about to have a break through in their training. You see the blues are a sign that your karate is really developing. You get the blues because you have taken what you have learnt to a relatively high level. Yet, it is no longer about learning new techniques but a matter of refining what you have learnt before.

All This Requires A Karate-Ka To Change Their Mindset

When you get the blues for the first time it's a big mile stone because it means to advance you've got to start thinking more about your training and work out how you can push forward. And while your instructor can help you with this, meaning you don't have to go it alone, it is still a personal challenge. Training may not seem as exciting as you haven't new things to learn. But if you change your mindset, it can be even more exciting as the challenge comes in perfecting your technique. It takes persistence,

but when you make the change you will not only be a better karate-ka, but a better person as a result.

"We are always discouraged. It is "good" for a martial artist to be discouraged. It means their goals and expectations are still very high."

Kensho Furuya

You see in many ways, a blue belt is the midway point between white and black belt. And although moving to black belt is a continual progression, there comes a point where a student makes a major personal change. And the catalyst of this change taking place is frustration.



Much like a caterpillar going into a cocoon and coming out a butterfly, you will come out as a person on their way to black belt as it is this mindset of self-mastery that is required to achieve such a grade.

So What's The Cure?

Diagnosis is really the cure. Firstly talk to your instructor and other high grades about what you're experiencing. From there, my advice to those who are feeling frustrated with their training is simply recognise and understand that the blues are a natural phase of training. Perhaps get in an extra class each week, or do a double class. Practise more at home and give things that trouble you plenty of attention. Practise these techniques in front of a mirror so you can see the bad habits and cut them loose. Become excited about perfecting your karate.

» I like to think of the blues as a car spinning its wheels on the spot before taking off. The tyres finally take grip and the car accelerates off. If the driver were to take his/her foot off the pedal, the wheels stop spinning and the car goes nowhere. The moral of the story, like the driver, you must keep plugging away at your training because eventually the wheels will grip and you will experience rapid growth in your karate.