

YOU'RE THE VOICE: DEVELOPING A KILLER KIHAP!

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I see a lot of students in the dojang who seem either reticent or unable to express themselves through a kihap. A number of students and parents talk (or giggle) about how loud and scary my kihap is, and some ask me how I do it. To me, it has always just felt like an expression of who I am.

I think understanding the kihap also **extends outside the dojang** - I see a lot of people who seem to be unable to express themselves very well in general, or who hold their voice back.

There are lots of people who talk so softly in meetings you can't understand what they are saying or who baulk at confrontation. Some people don't say what's on their mind when they know they really need to speak up, or people who may see an injustice, like someone at school or work who is being bullied, but worry about stepping forward and standing up for what is right.

All of this got me to thinking about kihap and voice, how they are related and how they can be developed.



The kihap is fundamental in martial arts from all cultures.

The concept is derived from the term ki in Korean (also qi or chi in Chinese), which means **life force, life energy, or spirit(ual) energy**.

How would you go about teaching someone to express or improve their kihap?

Well, for starters, there's a lot of research on voice and it's easy enough to find a teacher who can show you how to **project your voice from your diaphragm**, rather than just your vocal chords.

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Singers need this, but for martial arts and a truly effective kihap, I believe it takes something more.

As kihap is about life force or spiritual energy, then learning to express this involves both **developing your life force** in the first place, as well as finding out **how to fully express it**, and having the **courage to do so**.

And this, I think, is something some women, some men, and a lot of kids have trouble with.

Can you even develop life force or spiritual energy?

I say yes you can, because I know I've developed what is in me over my lifetime to date, and it's still developing.

Amongst other things, my life energy has developed through overcoming issues in my life, focusing on self-development, trying new things that stretch my comfort zone and give me a sense of achievement as I learn, facing my fears, and most definitely the journey I've taken through taekwondo and martial arts.

To build life force and spiritual energy, you have to learn to recognise what energises you and builds that reservoir of energy inside, and what drains you of energy. And I reckon kids and adults can both do that.

It's about focusing on what things bring you joy, satisfaction, and leaves you **feeling more energised** than when you started.

And it's about learning what zaps that energy (and where that's something you can't stop doing or avoid, then re-framing it so it's a positive experience, like thinking with gratitude about the opportunity and what it teaches you).

For some people, this starts with baby steps, little ways to build their confidence and step outside their comfort zone, for others, they may be ready to take huge strides.



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For me, it is the **totally focused, outward, and courageous, vocalised expression of all that energy inside**, pushed from deep within, through the diaphragm and then the very small hole of the vocal chords, to explode out into the world with all the oomph I can muster at the time, directed at just one target.

(Parents, maybe think about the times you make your kids do something that just isn't their thing, and try to observe how they resist it or how much it zaps their energy, this is taking away a lesson they can learn from doing what excites and fulfils them, whether it's your dream for their life or not.

I'm a parent, and I've struggled a long time with that – but I love the joy now of seeing my kids express **who they truly are**, not who I think they should be).

When we start to become proficient in developing and retaining our energy, having been encouraged to find and follow it, then we can finally start to learn how to focus and express it. That's where the kihap comes in.

My life force has built so much over time by learning to tune into energy in me, that some days it feels like a sun inside me, bursting at the seams whenever it can. And my kihap is just a natural expression of that inner energy.

On the mat, I'm just gathering up all that life energy and pushing it at whatever is in front of me (real or visualised – yes it works if I picture someone attacking me, even better if an opponent on the mat is actually grabbing me or there's a piece of wood in front of me that is begging to be broken!).

Expressing your inner life energy also requires **courage**. You need to not worry about what others will think.

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People giggle or glare at me when I'm loud, but if I'm truly expressing what's inside me, with focus and intent, then who is to judge that.

Be courageous, and don't stress about others opinions when you are being yourself.

In training - I hope to develop a kihap that can stop a person in their tracks, and send them packing, without me ever having to lift a finger.

In life – I hope to continue to focus on **energy flow** in my body, and if something fills me with energy, then “oh YES!”, I do a whole lot more of it.

I called this article “You're the voice” because I don't think developing a kihap is just about breathing and projecting from the diaphragm. I think **you are the kihap and the kihap is you.**

When you kihap, it is your inner self you are having the courage to express.

And without knowing your inner life force, knowing yourself, giving yourself the chance to truly understand and appreciate what juices you up, there is no kihap – nurture your life force, have courage, and your kihap will find its way out!

You're the voice, look after yourself, **do what energises you**, take baby steps and slowly make them into strides, and then have the courage to let yourself loose, and trust me, nothing will be able to stand in your way!

And if you are a parent, help your kid to learn about what gives them juice in their life, what builds their energy, help them reflect on that, and help them identify what zaps their energy too and how to manage that, preferably by example.

