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USA SEIWA KAI NEWSLETTER

Dedicated to Traditional Goju Ryu Karatedo ISSUE 1: July 2013

Current and previous issues of the USA Seiwa Kai Newsletter can be found online at www.greatlakesseiwakai.com

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INAUGURAL ISSUE

This is the inaugural issue of the USA Seiwa Kai Newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to bring our Seiwa Kai Family closer together, but this is something that one person cannot do. We need articles, dojo news, and photos from instructors and students alike in order to make the USA Seiwa Kai Newsletter a success. If you have news, photos, or something to say about karatedo, please send it to the email address below.

Additionally, planned emailing dates are scheduled quarterly – January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1 each year. For inclusion in the USA Seiwa Kai Newsletter please send your articles, dojo news, and photos at least ten days prior to the scheduled date to Mark Cramer at greatlakesseiwakai@gmail.com

Finally, for the USA Seiwa Kai Newsletter to reach as many Seiwa Kai members and friends as possible please send me the email addresses of individuals or organization who have been inadvertently omitted from the emailing.

Issue 1: Dedicated to the Life and Teachings of Shuji Tasaki, Hanshi

By Des Tuck



When I first heard of Tasaki Shihan in 1970, the year I began training with Lipinski Shihan, I have to admit I hoped I would never meet him, let alone be his student. The stories I heard about his extraordinary ability and hardness were enough to make me want to avoid coming anywhere near him. At that time, he was still chief instructor in the Tokyo dojo of Gogen Yamaguchi Shihan.

The following year, Tasaki Shihan left the Yamaguchi organization and founded Seiwa Kai. I began training with Stuart Booth Shihan in late 1972 shortly after his return from 18 months of training with Tasaki Shihan. Booth Shihan had joined Seiwa Kai, and trained his students like a demon. The brutality of training under Tasaki Shihan must have left its mark on Booth Shihan, and for reasons I can't really explain, I became a Seiwa Kai member too, and soaked it up. For the first time in my life I received a taste of what really hard

physical training might be like under Tasaki Shihan, albeit vicariously.

We did things that nobody else in South Africa was doing at the time, including training on goldmine dumps and using a steel pole with a rope wound around it as a makiwara, instead of the traditional flat wooden board. The warm-up exercises were enough to discourage most people, and the ones who managed to keep up included bikers, ex-Congo mercenaries, rough street kids, and me. During training, Booth Shihan would relate stories about his training with Tasaki Shihan, whether it was during class or in the sauna afterwards. My mind's image of Tasaki

Shihan grew much larger than life when I heard the hair-raising anecdotes of his prowess and toughness.

After about three years of training with Booth Shihan, I returned to Lipinski Shihan's Yamaguchi group where I remained until 1989, when Lipinski Shihan himself joined Seiwa Kai. I went with him and in 1992 Vassie Naidoo Shihan and I formed Seiwa Kai USA. Shortly before that, I met Tasaki Shihan personally in London for the first time. I remember meeting him in a small bed and breakfast hotel where he was staying, and my first impression was consistent with everything that I had heard.

Before we went off to the training session that evening, Tasaki Shihan asked Fujiwara Shihan to demonstrate Sanchin kata in the tiny lobby of the hotel. Fujiwara Shihan immediately assumed the beginning position and then executed the first move, stepping into right Sanchin-dachi. Tasaki Shihan walked behind him and executed a kin-geri from behind to insure that Fujiwara Shihan's hips were angled properly forwards and his groin was protected by his thighs. It was a religious experience, not only for me but, judging from the expression of pain and shock on Fujiwara Shihan's face, for him too.

I dreaded the training that was to come, but to my surprise, Tasaki Shihan showed a sensitivity and insight which I didn't expect. On the other hand, he refused to tolerate people not paying attention to him, and was quick to express his anger when that happened. This was particularly true of higher grades, whom he expected to toe the line without compromise. At those times when I saw him berating high ranking practitioners as if they were school kids, I could only imagine what it must have been like to train at his Oshiage dojo, infamous for the rigor, and perhaps brutality of the hard training there.

Through the years, Tasaki Shihan showed me his kindness in many ways. On my first visit to Japan in 2001, he treated me like a son, and helped me immeasurably to transition into the beginnings of understanding what Japanese training was about. I approached my JKF Goju Kai 5th Dan grading at that time with trepidation and considerable pain because of osteoarthritis in my hips, but somehow he and Fujiwara Shihan managed to coax me through it and made me feel, and become, successful, with barely a word of English passing between us.

In later years when I attended numerous international seminars taught by Tasaki Shihan and Fujiwara Shihan, I came to really understand how special they both were, not only during the training but also when sightseeing, shopping, eating, drinking and all the other activities we engaged in together. Throughout these times, it was patently clear that the thing Tasaki Shihan loved most was to be with the students who revered him. This was his greatest joy, and it was a monumental privilege for me to have been able to be there and share in his joy so many times, even without our being able to speak much to each other.

Tasaki Shihan's sense of humor often caught me by surprise. One day, when I was eating a meal in Fujiwara Shihan's Ryokan, Tasaki Shihan was staring at my legs sticking out of my shorts. He said (translated for me) "You're too fat to practice karate."

My sense was that he really wanted to be understood by his students. I remember once at the end of a seminar he offered to answer any questions. Somebody asked him "What is the difference between training here and training in Japan?" He answered "In Japan, I am somebody, and here,

nobody knows me.” These were poignant and intensely human words from such a great man.

As his health began to fail him over the years, it was sad to see him, cigarette in hand, summoning his own end inhale by inhale. When I last saw him at the first Mexico JKF Goju Kai Seminar in November 2010, he was doubled over in pain most of the time, after having suffered a lower back injury when he fell off a bicycle. Yet he insisted on traveling internationally to see this new, eager group of students whom he had never met before, and between the grimaces of pain, you could see he was glad he made the trip.

I will treasure my memories of Tasaki Shihan, and know that the way to honor him is to remember what he taught me and to pass it on. His karate was the essence of sophisticated simplicity, an oxymoron but true about him nevertheless. We are all in his debt.

Spotlight on Joe Palminteri, Chicago Seiwa Kai’s Chief Instructor



Joe Palminteri in Japan 2012

I am 76 (born 10/15/1936) and have been an insurance agent with State Farm for the past 35 years; I have no plans on retiring. I get up at 4:30 and I’m at the gym by 5AM and work out 5 days a week. I teach karate two nights a week.

I started karate with Seiwa Kai around 2002 and had the opportunity to attend seminars with the best teachers – Shian Des Tuck, Shian Leo Lipinski, Shian Jim Pounds, Shian Vassie Naido, Shuji Tasaki and Shuji Fujiwara. These seminars in Japan, Canada, Mexico, Texas, Ohio, and Los Angeles gave me the opportunity to make so many friends in this amazing Seiwa Kai family.

The Chicago Seiwa Kai dojo’s student numbers fluctuate (like other dojo’s) from 20 / 25 down to 6 in the summer months. Most of our students are from low income families and are welcome to train at no cost or at what they can afford. We have classes on Tuesday and Thursday from 4:30 to 8PM at the Highwood Recreation center.

GOJU RYU KARATE DO SEIWA KAI – SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA Seminar and Grade Testing With Shihan Vassie Naidoo – Shichidan



Today, Saturday June 22, 2013, Shihan Vassie Naidoo held one of several yearly seminars, and grade testing sessions, for the local students. We had a number of participants, some eager to just train, and many others eager to pass to the next grade.

We started the day, at 10:00 hours, and trained hard until 12:00 hours. To commence, Shihan Vassie asked one of our young belts to get involved by getting in front of the class to do the warm-ups. We have trained with Shihan

Vassie for many years, and by now, we know that he likes to get his young students trained in being in front of the class, to be future teachers.

The seminar started to pick up the pace when we started to do Kata-based basic movements. Kata-based basic movements consists of taking a few (sometimes two to four) sequential Kata movements and repeatedly train them before continuing to the next sequence. Training these basic patterns are conducive to good Kata performance, be it punches, blocks, or stances, or any combination thereof.

After one hour of Kata-based basic exercises, we concentrated in the first three Katas of the Goju Ryu repertoire, namely Geiki-sai-dai-ichi, Geiki-sai-dai-ni- and Saifa. As we trained each of these Katas, repeatedly, we went over each and every one of the corresponding Bunkai so as to get an understanding of the meaning of each movement.



At 12:00 hours, we were lined-up and briefed on as to how the testing would take place. The kid's tests would start immediately, and the adult's tests would start at 14:00 hours, right after "puffing" ourselves up with a big lunch, however bad that idea might have been!

As is customary of Shihan Vassie's teaching approach, he insisted that

“Stances” would be looked at very closely in grading. Shihan Vassie’s attention to detail, second to none, would set the tone for hard testing processes. By then everyone was on “high-alert”!



At 14:00 hours, the adult’s testing started. The adult’s tests began with some basic exercise control demos, then the corresponding grade level Kata performances, and culminating with a sequence of sparring sessions.

It is important to note that, while everyone, including the kids, performed remarkably well, the main reason for some of the students not passing the tests were poorly executed stances. We had been forewarned by Shihan

Vassie that he would be looking very closely at how stances were performed. Another item of scrutiny, by Shihan Vassie, as he tested everyone, was the execution of kicks. Here again, Shihan Vassie had forewarned us that picking up the knees, balance, and proper execution of the requested kick would be looked at very closely.

Wrapping up the Seminar, we trained some more advanced Katas, namely Sesoshin and Sepai, for the last half hour, closing up at 16:30 hours.



Some of us went on to doing some of the customary (or ritualized) activities after a seminar such as going to the beach and dipping the legs in the frigid Santa Monica beach waters, eating hot-dogs with peanut butter, or pizza with ice-cream, and to wrap up such appetizing dinners, a heart-stopping triple shot “eye-of-the-tiger” Starbucks espresso that is sure to send a rippling earthquake-like wave starting at the cerebral cortex, working its way down the spinal cord to exit at the tail bone.

But What Supports the Iceberg?

By James Pounds Seiwakai of Texas -- Heijoshin Dojo



At a past Goju-Ryu training seminar here in the USA, our visiting head instructor, Seiichi Fujiwara Shihan, sized up the group and announced that we probably would not get past Gekkisai Dai Ni kata over the next three days. I remember thinking “Huh?” But then I began observing my fellow practitioners and I believe I understood his reasoning. It was obvious that many of the group were lacking basic skills.

Even an inordinate number of Yudansha seemed to have trouble with proper stances. Fujiwara Shihan understands that teaching advanced katas and applications to practitioners who are lacking strong basics is pointless. Without a foundation, blocking, striking, and kicking techniques are ineffectual and therefore useless in self-defense applications. Improper stances make hip rotational power, proper distancing, and balance nearly impossible, or worse, leave the karateka more vulnerable to counterattack. So...it was back to the drawing board.

But static repetition of basics is not enough to ingrain the ability to properly change stances under duress, when the karateka must quickly reposition the body into, out of, or at angles to the attacker and simultaneously deliver techniques capable of stopping a determined opponent. To be effective, repetition drills must be partner based, dynamic, and worked slowly at first, with speed of attack and response gradually increased over hundreds of repetitions, until they reach real-time speed. Additionally, the drills should be repeated with a variety of partners in order to teach proper maai (distancing) on an internal level.

I would also submit that these dynamic exercises be developed from kata bunkai oyo for several reasons:

- 1) If drawn from kata applications, we are working within a framework that is already imprinted on the practitioner on an internal level.
- 2) Understanding bunkai oyo imparts the true “flavor” of our martial style. What makes Goju-Ryu unique? What are the strengths that were distilled out over hundreds of years of reality testing – self-defense Darwinism, if you will – and were deemed important and effective enough to pass on within the experiential textbooks we call kata?
- 3) Understanding bunkai oyo and being able to effectively apply the techniques in real time dismantles the ignorant argument by some that kata is nothing more than dance.

- 4) Drawing our repetitive drills from the kata creates karateka strong in both kumite and in kata.

So long as they are practiced slowly at first and demonstrated correctly for modeling purposes, students do not have to be versed in a specific kata in order to work the applications in drills. The benefit is that when the time comes to learn a more advanced kata, the student is ahead of the learning curve because he or she has already been applying the kata moves. Cause catches up with effect. The light bulb comes on: “Oh, I already know this movement from our application-based drills.” Kata is then performed as it was originally intended when the karateka already has a memory imprint of how the techniques are effectively applied. The cart *can* come before the horse.

Teruo Chinen Sensei refers to this as concentrating on the ninety percent of the iceberg that is hidden beneath the water, not the ten percent that is visible. “It is the stronger part that no one sees that can sink a ship,” he would say. Somewhere along the way, we started to focus on the visible tip of the iceberg, and are missing the hidden mass that holds the tip afloat. Chinen also affirmed that in the “old days” Okinawa karateka were usually taught the applications before they learned the kata.

Training in this manner impacts depth of understanding and application of effective karate. Through dynamic drills based upon kata bunkai oyo, powerful stances and correct distancing are developed, which enhance hip power, resulting in stronger transfer of kinetic energy. The Goju-Ryu practitioner learns to *automatically* close distance, imbalance an opponent, and deliver knock-down power.

KARATE NI SENTE NASHI

空手に先手なし

THERE IS NO FIRST ATTACK IN KARATE

By Mark Cramer – Great Lakes Seiwa Kai



Kenwa Mabuni Executing the opening Block of a Kata

Every traditional Okinawan and Japanese kata begins with a block symbolizing the principle of *karate ni sente nashi* – there is no first attack in karate. This principle is the logical outgrowth of the Confucian belief that virtuous men avoid all direct conflict. Additionally, this concept was enumerated as the second of Mr. Gichin Funakoshi’s *Twenty Precepts*.¹ However, one might ask what this really means. Does it prohibit one from engaging in any type of attack unless one’s life is endangered? Does it require one to wait to be attacked before one can respond? Does it allow a

karate-ka to respond to an imminent threat prior to an actual physical assault, or does it mean something entirely different? In order to get a better understanding of this important precept, it would behoove us to research what some of the great masters of karatedo have said on the subject.

CHOJUN MIYAGI

In January of 1936 Mr. Chojun Miyagi bemoaned that the moral precept *karate ni sente nashi* had too often been ignored, and that the physical side of karate had too often been emphasized: “Although such maxims such as ‘karate ni sente nashi’ (in karate there is no first attack) existed, in reality this type of spiritual focus was paid little if any attention – the focus was on the physical. However, the methods and purpose of karate instruction have changed so that...the main objective today is the development of spiritual discipline, [and] I hope that the pursuit in this direction will continue.”ⁱⁱ

Whereas Mr. Miyagi neglected to explain precisely what *karate ni sente nashi* meant to him, he told us that he agrees with this moral concept and that he was pleased to see that it was being emphasized to a greater extent among karate teachers and practitioners. Moreover, it is implicit in Mr. Miyagi remarks that he placed karate’s moral values above karate’s physical attributes.

Mr. Eiichi Miyazato, who studied directly under Mr. Miyagi, explained his concept of *karate ni sente nashi*: “From time to time Rei [respect] is lost, mistakes are made, and lifetime regrets are often the result... Ancient Budo teaches that the fighting techniques are techniques used to escape... The wisest thing to do in a confrontational situation is to run away.”ⁱⁱⁱ As we can see, Mr. Miyazato goes beyond the concept *karate ni sente nashi* – there is no first attack in karate, and tells his students to avoid confrontations altogether. One could easily infer that Mr. Miyagi’s beliefs about *karate ni sente nashi* were likely to have been similar to the beliefs of his direct student, Eiichi Miyazato.

GICHIN FUNAKOSHI

Mr. Gichin Funakoshi, who we know was a Confucian scholar, was quite specific in his concept of *karate ni sente nashi* – there is no first attack in karate. Mr. Funakoshi always maintained that karate-do was to be used only as a last resort, and only in defense of human life. Mr. Funakoshi explained that “[I] performed a rite and pledged myself never to make use of my trained body for any illicit purpose.”^{iv}

An incident occurred after the second world conflict when Mr. Funakoshi was about eighty years old that would test his pledge to himself and to his concept of *karate ni sente nashi* – there is no first attack in karate. He had attended a poetry-reading party out of town and was returning to Tokyo late in the evening. In one hand he carried an umbrella to shield himself from the rain, and in the other hand he carried a satchel containing some books.^v Out of the shadows, “a black-clad figure sprang suddenly out from behind a telephone pole.”^{vi}

The assailant demanded “Untie your *furoshiki* [satchel] and let’s see what’s in it.”^{vii} Mr. Funakoshi resisted the thief’s demand and responded: “There is nothing in it of the slightest value.”^{viii} At this point, the thief grabbed Mr. Funakoshi’s umbrella and swung it at his head.

Mr. Funakoshi ducked under the strike and grabbed the man by his testicles. The thief loudly cried out; a police officer quickly appeared; and Mr. Funakoshi released his assailant into the custody of the police officer.^{ix}

However, Mr. Funakoshi relates how he felt guilty over the incident. “I had done what I constantly tell my students not to do: I took the offensive. I did not feel very proud of myself.”^x Mr. Funakoshi believed that he could have avoided the physical conflict altogether, and walked away while surrendering “nothing if the slightest value.” Instead, he chose a course which led to a conflict and which violated his concept of *karate ni sente nashi* – there is no first attack in karate.

Whereas some of us will perceive the elderly Mr. Funakoshi as being fully justified in defending himself and his property against a much younger would-be robber, he did not believe that his actions were justified at all. In his moral paradigm, he had been willing to risk the life of another human over “nothing of the slightest value” and that was something that he had pledged himself never to do. Certainly, Mr. Funakoshi embodied tremendous humility in his concept of *karate ni sente nashi*. However, there are other karate masters who do not believe that one has to go to such extremes to exemplify the principle of *karate ni sente nashi* – there is no first attack in karate.

KENWA MABUNI

Mr. Kenwa Mabuni trained with both Mr. Kanryo Higaonna and Mr. *Ankoh* Itosu, the teachers of both Mr. Miyagi and Mr. Funakoshi. He contends that there are two types of misunderstandings regarding the concept of *there is no first attack in karate*. The first misconception is held by those who minimize *karate ni sente nashi* and contend that “the opportunity for victory is seized by getting a jump on your enemy... Those who make such statements do not understand that the true spirit of Japanese budo means not to be bellicose.”^{xi} The second type of misconception comes from those who “do not see *karate ni sente nashi* as an attitude, but rather as a literal, behavioral rule to be followed rigidly... When absolutely necessary, when one is facing battle, it is an accepted truth of strategy that one should try to take *sensen no sen* [preemptive initiative] and forestall the enemy’s actions.”^{xii}

From Mr. Kenwa Mabuni’s statements, one can reason that he believes that both Mr. Kim and Mr. Funakoshi have taken the concept of *there is no first attack in karate* too rigidly and too literally. Mr. Mabuni reminds us that the essential meaning of budo is to stop conflict and to maintain peace. Consequently “when one is faced with someone who disrupts the peace or who will do one harm ...it only stands to reason that one should get the jump on the enemy and preempt his use of violence.”^{xiii} For Mr. Kenwa Mabuni, this is the true meaning of *there is no first attack in karate*.

KARATE NI SENTENASHI

All of the great masters of karate-do agree that the belligerent use of force is morally wrong and goes against the moral concept of *karate ni sente nashi*. Some of these masters believe that it is a literal rule and that initiating an attack violates the spirit and letter of *there is no first attack in*

karate. However other masters, such as Mr. Mabuni, believe that *karate ni sente nashi* means that when one's safety or the public order is threatened, one may use preemptive force to prevent harm and maintain the peace. Whichever philosophical stance the great karate masters have taken on the precept of *karate ni sente nashi* it has been a moral stance based on different but principled reasoning.

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- ⁱ Cook, Harry: *Cook, Harry: Shotokan Karate*, page 325
ⁱⁱ Higaonna, Morio: *The History of Karate*: pages 85-86
ⁱⁱⁱ Miyazato Eiichi: *Okinawan Den Goju Ryu Karate-do*: page 29
^{iv} Cook, Harry: *Shotokan Karate*: page 47
^v Funakoshi, Gichin: *Karate-do My Way of Life*: pages 110 - 111
^{vi} Funakoshi, Gichin: *Karate-do My Way of Life*: page 111
^{vii} Funakoshi, Gichin: *Karate-do My Way of Life*: page 112
^{viii} Funakoshi, Gichin: *Karate-do My Way of Life*: page 112
^{ix} Funakoshi, Gichin: *Karate-do My Way of Life*: page 112
^x Funakoshi, Gichin: *Karate-do My Way of Life*: page 112
^{xi} Tankosich, Mark *Classical Fighting Arts*; Issue 5: page 44
^{xii} Tankosich, Mark *Classical Fighting Arts*; Issue 5: page 44
^{xiii} Tankosich, Mark *Classical Fighting Arts*; Issue 5: page 44