



**Okinawan Goju Ryu Karate-Do Kenkyu Kai**

# **NYU-SURETA**

## **Summer ~2009**

### ***What Price Tradition?***

**By Hanshi O'Hara**

In early days of karate in America those who introduced the art to Americans were either Orientals who immigrated to our shores or those who, after World War II were returning servicemen who trained under those Asian Sensei who were willing to teach the occupying "gaijin".

We have come a long way since karate, as well as other so-called martial arts, were introduced to America. I say so-called martial arts because "civil" arts would better describe the various "Ryu" of karate.

All things evolve, and so it is with the classical systems of karate. It is early in the development of Okinawan styles that a certain eclecticism is obvious. These many styles of Chinese fighting arts are the source of material in the "koryu" of Okinawa. Our own style of Okinawan Goju Ryu has elements from the various "Hsing"

(kata) of White Crane, Tiger, Lion, Dog, etc.

Most fighting arts have origins in ancient societies around the world, but our Goju is mainly Chinese blended with the indigenous "Te" of Okinawa. The question might be raised, considering the foregoing statements, how can there be a "pure" fighting art? The logical answer to the question is, of course, there is purity only in one's dedication to teaching elements of the art that are of tried and true methods resulting in the transmission of an effective combat curriculum. The physical application with fitness training and body conditioning would seem to be paramount, yet, there are aspects which are considered more dear to the "purist".

Character and right reason trump the physicality of the art and there can be no more than physical education if the more esoteric, and yes, invaluable lessons are not taught. Herein we find the difficulty of

**maintaining an unadulterated system as proposed by the founding fathers. It is often erroneously thought that a good practitioner is a good teacher as well, but this is not the case. Good teachers are rare while good practitioners are myriad and great teachers come along rarely.**

**In order for there to be the many elements to maintain the integrity of any style, the teacher must display the same high quality characteristics he is teaching and, in order for this to be possible, he must have had a teacher with these virtues. In turn the students who remain with their teachers should digest that which has been imparted and pass it on to his students if he becomes a sensei and, for that matter anyone with whom he has contact. The ethos imparted in a classical system is universal and anybody can and everybody should be the better for the exposure. However, too many assume the position of dojo head with not even a semblance of the exposure, experience or training to be an instructor. This is not to say that a well-intentioned and well-trained student may not assume the responsibilities of a sensei. If he is singled out by his sensei as one who, under the guidance of a mentor, may be the only one who could assure that a dojo would continue to function, either temporarily or permanently, this could be an avenue to expand the efforts of a dedicated sensei.**

**The standards of any faithfully founded method of karate jutsu whose representatives hold to the tenets of those taught by the great masters should not be omitted. It is normal and beneficial to the art, on the other hand, that additions, variations and even minor modifications may be made, but only if material in question is thoroughly studied, tried and proven and then only with the complete approval of the highest authority in the organization. It is no easy task to follow the lessons of the Precepts of Okinawan Goju Ryu and even more difficult to follow the many lessons of life that are universally accepted as proper behavior and etiquette.**

**To capsulize the challenges for a traditional student and sensei, the following are charges each must accept:**

- 1. Do not change the kata unless historical evidence can show conclusively that it has been altered by someone in the earlier history of your style, or by your sensei to accommodate your body type.**
- 2. Teach first and foremost the importance of good character.**
- 3. Be a good example for your students and your community.**
- 4. Never allow your religious or political convictions to become a part of your teaching.**

5. You must always study all aspects of your art as well as other arts for historical purposes.
6. Engage in discourse with those whom you consider committed to any art combative in nature and philosophy of any kind, especially of antiquity.
7. Research in all areas related to your art and your teaching of that art.
8. Never allow hubris to creep into your being, no matter how successful or proficient you become.

In conclusion, it is very difficult to “toe the mark” in order to preserve and perpetuate our precious art of Okinawan Goju Ryu, but we must remember, there are very few endeavors in these modern times that can offer the benefits and satisfaction of dedication to what is considered one of the elite styles of karate.

So, what price tradition? High, but worth the sacrifice, as the rewards will find their way to you and will far outweigh any tribulations you encounter on your noble journey.

### ***Succession***

**By Steve Wilson**

During the past ten or fifteen years, succession planning has been a hot topic developed to insure that historical knowledge is not lost when a senior manager retires.

In Koryu (classical) martial arts there was a formal process of succession. Usually the head of the system selected a few of his most senior students to impart the Kakushi Waza (secret techniques) to.

Some headmasters’ awarded Menkyo Kaiden (license of transmission) to several seniors students, but only one student would receive the *densho*; handwritten scrolls that contain the most important principals, methodology, and technical information about the system. These handwritten scrolls would be signed by the headmaster and his personal seal would be stamped over his signature. The person who was issued the signed Densho was considered the successor.

In more modern times some systems use a special license or certificate that states the art is being passed on to the named successor and the headmaster again affixes his seal to it.

Usually the successor was the headmaster’s son. If the son could not train for some reason such as physical disabilities, the headmaster may adopt a senior male student who would take the headmaster’s name and would become his successor.

Although today there is not the formality previously involved in becoming a successor, it is still important that the head of each dojo think about and prepare the senior student that the head instructor feels

can best succeed him. Selecting a successor is not an easy task, as the person needs to have a high level of technical skill, good personal character, and be a good teacher. If the head of a dojo passes away before he has named a successor, the more senior student may or may not accede to the vacated role. In fact, when the headmaster passes away or retires there is often a major split amongst the senior students unless; 1) there is a specific student that is significantly more senior than the other students; 2) the senior student regularly teaches for the head of the dojo, 3) the head of the dojo has conveyed to the other senior students, his family, and in writing who he has chosen to take over the dojo upon his retirement or passing.

Even with all of these efforts, there will still be students that leave because their relationship was with their teacher. Also, students who have reached the level of 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> degree black belt may go out on their own when leadership changes because they are ready to do their own thing. Still, business has proven that there is less fragmentation and greater success when succession is planned and shared with the members.

If I pass away before my son Jacobi is ready, then Sensei Gabe is my successor. Sensei Philip, my senior student, is older than I am. Sensei Gabe shall then continue teaching and developing Jacobi until such time as

Jacobi is ready to assume the leadership role, if that is Jacobi's desire.

Why has the historical succession gone to a son? Think about how much time the son has with the headmaster. How many conversations they have had. How close they are. How much loyalty and love the son has for the headmaster. Generally, but not always, few if any students train as much as the headmaster's son is required to train. In short, the son spends more time on and off the floor with the headmaster than anyone else, thus, much more is imparted to him.

She is a daughter, but the same holds true for Sensei Tracie and Sensei. Few if any yudansha at Sensei's dojo train more than Sensei Tracie. Certainly none spend more time with Sensei. I think this is natural, expected, and understood.

I began this journey with Sensei in 1973. In the mid eighties I asked Sensei to join the GKK because I did not want to belong to any organization that he did not belong to and we had not belonged to an organization for many years. Then in 1990 I asked Sensei to meet Higaonna Sensei because again I did not want to be on this journey without my lifelong teacher. Then in 1995 Sensei formed the OGRKK and asked my Lindsay and Ventura dojo to support him. We have now been together over 36 years. We have grown

together from one dojo to six dojo. It is my hope that we continue to grow.

I cannot take over the teaching and operations of the Bakersfield Dojo when Sensei retires, but I intend to keep the OGRKK alive for as long as I am able to.

### *Ryuei-Ryu History,*

### *Kata & Influences*

By Dennis Pfendler

The art of Ryuei-Ryu originally a family style of the Nakaima family of Naha is based on Chinese Boxing and was passed on by Norisato Nakaima, who was born of wealthy parents in Kume, Okinawa. Norisato Nakaima at the age of 19 went to Fuchou China to study martial arts and was introduced to Ryu Ru Ko to learn Chinese Boxing. It is considered that it is the same Ryu Ru Ko that many years later may have taught Kanryo Higashionna but that belief is yet to be documented today. After seven (7) years of training, Norisato Nakaima received a certificate of graduation from the master.

Once back in Okinawa Norisato Nakaima taught his son Kencho Nakaima in secret, who then taught his son Kenko Nakaima, the now recognized founder of the Ryuei Ryu Karate and Kobudo Preservation Society. It wasn't until 1971, at the age of 60 that Kenko Nakaima took on a group of twenty schoolteachers as karate students and it was at this point

that the name "Ryuei Ryu" was first used to describe the art.

Most of what is written in English today is believed to be to a large degree inaccurate. It is believed that there are more Kata that are contained in the system. There are various areas of martial strategy and techniques, health and lifestyle practices that make the system more of a Chinese based art, and less of a "style" of Karate.

Even though it is believed to be more of a Chinese based art than a style of Karate, many of the Kata of Ryuei Ryu have the same name of a Kata of a particular style of Karate with the differences being one of personal emphasis, understanding or interpretation.

Example; Sanchin, Sansciru, Seiyunchin, Seisan, Kururunfa, Niseishi, Pachu, Kencho, Ohan, Heiku, Paiku, Paiho, Anan 1 and Anan 2.

It is documented that Ryu Ru Ko did influence (teach) Kenri Nakaima and it is documented that Ryu Ru Ko was a personal bodyguard to the Chinese Emperor during the Qing Dynasty. It is also believed that this may be the same Ryu Ru Ko that taught Kanryo Higashionna in later years, but it has not been documented to date.

### References:

1. "Ryuei-Ryu at wonder-okinawa.jp". Okinawa Prefectural Government.
2. "History of Okinawa Ryuei Ryu". Okinawa Ryuei Ryu Karate Kobudo Kai.

## ***Karate and/or Kobudo***

**By Steve Wilson**

**Many karate schools teach kobudo separately from kobudo. Some karate teachers strongly feel that kobudo should be part of the whole system or art being taught. So for instance when a student tests for a Green belt he should also have to know the basics and one kata for the bo. Their next grading they would be required to know the basics and one kata for the Tonfa. The next grading they would be required to know the basics and one kata for the Sai, etc.**

**“If” a dojo or organization’s goal is to preserve traditional Okinawan martial arts that are not limited to the empty hand arts, then a structure such as the above example makes sense. If, on the other hand, the goal is to preserve the weapon and empty hand arts of Okinawa then the dojo or organization may require students to learn both, but instead of being a separate art, kobudo is taught in conjunction with karate.**

**It is my opinion that practicing with weapons improves ones karate and vice-versa. Doing both takes longer and is more difficult but the benefits may be worth it.**

**Kobudo develops and conditions the wrists and forearms. Practicing kobudo also improves ones understanding of distance (if you don’t believe this to be true, put a 6 foot bo in your hand and do something). In addition, kobudo develops more coordination than karate alone develops. So why doesn’t every dojo require kobudo?**

**Combining the two systems “greatly” increases the curriculum and the time needed to teach the curriculum. It also increases cost to the students as weapons are expensive. Goju Ryu has 13 kata. Add even one weapon kata for each of the main weapons and the number of kata the student would need to learn increases to 23 as there are ten common weapons in kobudo.**

**Still, I feel that it benefits black belts to learn and experience the bo, just because the empty hand arts were formulated in part, to defend against opponents who carried weapons.**

***Summer is almost over; get outside and train while you still can!***

## **Gokui – Hidden Techniques**

**By Steve Wilson**

**What are the Gokui of Goju Ryu and how does one learn them?**

**Some basic examples of Gokui include:**

- **The fist wrap with thumb on top in Saifa, representing squeezing the opponents pressure point to assist in freeing the grasp.**
- **The augmented block in Seiyunchin which is actually a strike using the hand that is reinforcing the block.**
- **Toe kick in Sesan attacking the vital point between the anus and the testicles.**
- **Nakadaka ippon ken in Suparinpei.**
- **Sticking to the opponent found throughout the system.**
- **Sinking, using gravity to ones advantage such as in Shiko or using gravity to punch.**
- **Trapping the opponent's forward foot with Sanchin dachi and pressing causing the opponent to fall.**
- **Kakie or Hiki Uke which is and looks like a block but leads to hidden techniques involving squeezing the arteries.**

**The above are some quick varied examples. Studying the Bubishi will assist in learning the Gokui. Studying pressure points will assist in learning other Gokui. Training, time, practice, and instruction are also how the Gokui are discovered and imparted.**

**All of the Gokui in the system can be found within the kata. Practicing the kata and bunkai will lead to discovery and understanding.**

**Kata is the book or key ingredient in karate. The core principals of the art are found within the kata. The Gokui of the system are found within the kata. In addition to these benefits, kata teaches us to utilize the techniques taught within the system. Kata teaches angles, breath, combinations, various methods of stepping, turning, sinking, rising, body power, speed, balance, and many other attributes. Kata is also where the Gokui are contained awaiting discovery.**

### ***Congratulations Sensei Tracie***

**Sensei Tracie of Hombu dojo won the kumite Grand Championship at the USKA World Championships this month, held in New Orleans. She also took second in kata, first in Koshiki, and she was on a team that won the team kumite championships. She also earned 1<sup>st</sup> in continuous fighting, 1<sup>st</sup> in ippon kumite and 1<sup>st</sup> in 5 point kumite. Way to represent, we are all proud of you.**