

[This is a translation of an article originally published in the Japanese publication JKFan, 2004/2 No. 13. There are many martial arts terms that are difficult to explain in layman's terms and many Japanese words and ideas that do not translate well into English. An additional explanation of terms and ideas has been added to this translation from direct conversation with Sensei Shiomi (as translated by Sensei Nomada).]

By Akira Shiomi

In combat at close quarters, a circle, *Muchimi*¹, and breathing will be set to one.

"Close-quarters combat techniques from which there is little distance to strike a person."

If *Goju-Ryu* karate can be characterized in a word, it might be described as the broadly-outlined circle made by *Sumi*² with a thick full calligraphy brush. I will describe some fundamental techniques which are the key characteristics of *Goju-Ryu* here.

1. Motion of a Circle.

Goju-Ryu karate might be thought of as the arc of the circle compared to a line. The arc of a circle is like an arched dome, it is strong against any external pressure applied, and much stronger than a straight line or a flat surface when placed under external pressure. The motion and operation of a circle in training is important in order to master the effective "connection between the waist and an arm" (that is, effectively combining the circular torquing motion of the waist with the moving of the arm). The best motion for generating power in martial arts is natural and not broken. In *Goju-Ryu* when the circle receives (e.g., blocks are made with a circling motion), and when there is no attack an attack is immediately made also using a circling motion. Thus, conceptually, in *Goju-Ryu* karate, the motion of a circle can respond to all combat situations.

2. Combat at Close Quarters

Goju-Ryu features many combat-at-close quarters techniques which are reflected in its *kumite* and *kata*. When talking about generating power in a straight line, in physics Power = mass x acceleration. Fundamentally, since humans are limited by their body mass, the only area where power can be increased is through increasing acceleration. However, where the distance for

¹ In Japanese *Muchimi* literally refers to sticky rice that can be pounded into a sticky paste. It is dense and heavy. When touched it sticks to you, and when you pull away it sticks to you. In *Goju-Ryu* karate *muchimi* refers to the heavy sticky movements used for blocking (eg., *kake uke*--hooking hand block) and attacking, and to the notion that you stay close to your opponent in blocking or attacking.

² India ink.

acceleration is short (as is the case where striking at close quarters), the amount of power that can be produced is thereby strictly limited. In order to generate more power, the pioneers of *Goju-Ryu* karate had to innovate to find other solutions to increase power beyond the limitations of basic straight-line physics. Therefore, for in-close combat, *Goju-Ryu* uses several other forces that combine into one instantaneous explosion of directed power.

Goju-Ryu uses the following forces together:

1. the inertial power of the body moving forward rapidly but stopping sharply (like the snap of a bull whip which concentrates the power of the strike into the small area at the tip of the whip)—the knee is bent forward to access this extra power of body inertia but the upper body remains straight with the hips being pushed forward first.
2. the power of the twisting torque of the hips is used, with the motion of the sinking body that also harnesses the strong opposing force of rising and thrusting up from the ground (“ground power”).
3. Such forces, however, are not enough. In addition, respiratory power is required which further harnesses the body’s internal power in tandem with releasing *ki* energy (learning proper breathing is thought to crucial to generating power in *Goju-Ryu*).

“Ki power is stored in the inside of the body and can be harnessed and released by training the mind.”

3. Abdominal Breathing

Typically people breath using the muscles of their upper chest, neck and shoulders. Most people tend to breathe in a slightly abnormal way, they tend to hold in their stomachs, make little use of their diaphragm³. This is not the most effective way to get the needed oxygen to our brain and muscles. If you watch babies or animals breathe, you will notice that they breathe with their whole bodies, their bellies rise and fall with each breath⁴. *Goju-Ryu* emphasizes abdominal breathing utilizing both the diaphragm and other stomach muscles.

³ The diaphragm is large muscle located between the chest and the abdomen (that separates the chest (thoracic) cavity from the abdomen). It is the main muscle of respiration. When it contracts it is forced downward causing the abdomen to expand. This causes a negative pressure within the chest forcing air into the lungs. The negative pressure also pulls blood into the chest improving the venous return to the heart.

⁴ For some reason, we stop doing this when we outgrow diapers.

Since the belly originally swells with abdominal breathing, this must be controlled since such movement in *Bushido* (i.e., combat situations) can telegraph your weakest moment to opponents (i.e., when you are breathing in). Therefore, pressure is applied to the belly by tensing the both the diaphragm and the general muscles in the stomach area. This type of isometric training has the general beneficial health effect of tending to massage the organs (such as the intestines and stomach) resulting in the stagnant blood being forced from the organs and being replaced by a fresh supply of oxygen-rich blood from the heart. It is key to understanding *Sanchin* and *Tenshou* that the abdominal breathing practiced has this (and ordinary breathing does not have this) effect.

Goju-Ryu has two *kata* that are training *katas* for breathing that are intended to train for this kind of healthy longer breathing technique: *Sanchin* and *Tenshou*. *Sanchin* and *Tenshou* are a type of training *kata* and are referred to as the “*heishu*” (literally means “closed hand”—even though *Tenshou* uses the open hand) *kata* of *Goju-Ryu*. All other *Goju-Ryu kata* are not intended to be training *kata* but to show technique and are referred to as “*kaishu*” (literally means “open hand”) *kata*.

In *Bushido* a shorter breath is desirable when attacking to release explosive power. However, long breathes are used when performing *Sanchin* and breathing is natural. Training for the use of a long breath stabilizes mind and body (promoting good health generally) whereas a short breath raises energy for the explosive release of power when fighting. To practice all the time using the shorter breath used for fighting might be very harmful for your long-term health.

When inhaling in *Sanchin*, the mind must be used to also bring *ki* in through the *Jo Tanden*⁵, which is taken down to the point in the pit of stomach know as the *Tanden*⁶. *Sanchin* is valuable for learning how to create and direct *ki* for purposes of combat. It is like learning how to charge a battery whose stored energy can be instantaneously discharged upon striking an opponent. The *ki* energy taken into and stored in the *Tanden* is compressed until finally it is released in an explosion and directed at the target. *Goju-Ryu* fighting is like the operation of a combustion engine: on the intake stroke you bring in air and fuel supply (*ki*), and combine it with several other forces for an explosive energy stroke that generates power for combat.

When *ki* is released in this manner, it is like flipping a switch that instantaneously redirects *ki* from the *Tanden* to the target in a way that energizes the rapid rotation of each interlocking

⁵ The area located in the middle of the between and slightly above the eyes.

⁶ Refers specifically to the physical center of gravity located in the abdomen three finger widths below and two finger widths behind the navel.

bodily joint as well, and sinks the body (lowering the centre of gravity) and uses “ground power” (i.e, the power of lowering your centre of gravity and rising up pushing off the ground). This is performed with the breathing method described above. In order to master such a technique, *Sanchin* and *Tenshou* training are needed. For this reason, it is said that *Goju-Ryu* starts with *Sanchin* and finishes with *Sanchin*. Particularly, it is said that *Sanchin* synchronizes "the body; breathing, and the mind". It is important not to forget that it is the *heishu* which promotes and supports the emotional, and tough physical strength characteristic of serious *Goju-Ryu* practitioners.⁷

Sensei Akira Shiomi was born March 25, 1934, in Kyoto, Japan. He studied karate in high school for two years. Subsequently, he began training in Goju-Ryu karate (at the same time he wrote his Ritsumeikan University entrance exams). After graduation, in 1961, Sensei Shiomi was engaged as karate instructor at Ritsumeikan University. He had played an active role from 1981 to 1991 as All-Japan Karatedo Federation's National Team Coach. He has served as a Japan Karatedo Federation Central Technical Committee member for ten years subsequently. Sensei Shiomi also served as the Vice Chairman of Japan Karatedo Federation Goju-kai, and is the head of the screening committee. He now is Vice President and Senior Technical Advisor of the Japan Karatedo Federation Goju-kai. He holds the rank of 8th Dan (8th-grade) from Japan Karatedo Federation Goju-kai.

⁷ In conversation, Sensei Shiomi also said the object of *Sanchin* are to: (1) develop “eye power” by learning to focus in the distance with widened eyes and to create power from the *Jo Tanden* you have to have your eyes wide open; (2) to develop “muscle power” through isometric training; (3) to develop “proper breathing technique and power”; and (4) to develop “mind power” to learn to direct *ki*, to develop proper fighting spirit so your mind is not frightened when you enter combat.