Learning, Questioning and Sharing

by Bill Giller

I was promoted to godan in 1991 on a Saturday. After the promotional Mr. Yamakura taught and demonstrated katas and bunkai from Geki Sai Ichi through Suparunpai for about three and one-half hours. Mr. Sammons and I had the opportunity to ask questions about specific moves, timing, stances and rhythm. I did not want to lose these visual presentations of kata so I taped them. My goal was and is to perform the kata as we have been taught, share and look for multiple applications.

It has to do with kata performance, applications and observations. As we perform kata I believe that we all strive to do the best we can with the physical body we have, the mental fortitude we have, and the knowledge, information and training we have. After that we need to figure out some things for ourselves. For example, we are taught when we pivot in Saifa and land in our stance, we hammer fist to the head of our opponent. That's ok, but we could strike either the left or right collar bone, the face, chest or any other part of the body we get lucky enough to hit. We want to destroy our opponent any way that we can. As we move along the path we have much to learn, much to question, and much to share.

Below is a letter I wrote to three of my black belts in 2008. Mr. Tim Martin and Mr. Bruce Cornwall are godans and Mr. Tom Fox is a shodan in Go-ju Ryu. I wrote this letter to them after I found this old 1991 VHS tape stuffed in a box in my garage:

Dear Tim, Bruce and Tom,

Enclosed find a DVD of GoJu katas from Gekisai Ichi through Suparunpai. I had a VHS from the 1991 promotional in Bellingham, took it to CostCo and had them reproduce it on a DVD. I was worried that the VHS would stretch and lose its color. I have watched the DVD four times and each time I either have something reinforced for me or pick up some subtle nuance I missed. It is extremely instructive and rich in kata performance.

I want you each to have a copy. You all have the basic techniques and moving techniques which are the essence and building blocks of kata. Also you learned kata from me and I learned it from Mr. Sammons, Mr. Reuter, Mr. Yamaguchi, and Mr. Yamakura. They all taught me well and I pass on those techniques and bunkai explanations to you.

As you view the DVD, watch the kata not the person. Each of us understands the moves, but because of our size, strength and age, we perform to the best of our ability at that moment in time. We perform the kata as we know it and were taught. When you watch Duane or I, you can see Saifa, Seiunchin, Shisochin, Seipai and so on. How Duane performs it is to the best of his ability. How I perform it is to the best of my ability. The most important thing in kata to me is that we represent the moves as accurately as possible. We can explain to anyone what we are doing with a particular move, how it is applied in different situations, and we explore additional applications.

When we explore additional applications we must never forget the original meanings. There are fundamental moves that are strikes, blocks and kicks. We do not deviate from that. GoJu is full of grabbing, pulling, rotating, striking, blocking and kicking.

Bruce and I are participating in the promotional. And thank you Tim for assisting with bunkai applications. Interesting to watch standing and moving techniques. Towards the end of the DVD Mr. Yamakura is patient as he teaches and walks me through Kururunfa (remember this tape is from 1991!!). My first attempt at the kata. The really cool thing is to watch Mr. Yamakura perform it!!!

Also the same for Suparunpai. So enjoy this and use it as a tool to refresh your own kata. What I know about all three of you is that you always, always perform to the best of your ability. That's why you are where you are in the best traditions of Goju-ryu. Sincerely, Bill (aka Sensei Giller)! originally written 9/26/08.