



# **The Way of Kata**

**A Comprehensive Guide to  
Deciphering Martial Applications**

**LAWRENCE A. KANE AND  
KRIS WILDER**

## Praise for Lawrence A. Kane and Kris Wilder...

“The forms of a given system are the “books” which contain all relevant information about that system. Unfortunately, many of today’s martial arts enthusiasts are unable to read them. *The Way of Kata* will show you how to read your forms and extract the information which is concealed within them!

“This book is an absolute must for any serious practitioner of traditional karate, tae kwon do, or kung-fu. In my many years of practicing and teaching martial arts, I have never seen a text like this; a work which clearly outlines the theories and principles of interpreting forms. This book has been sorely needed by the martial arts community for generations.

“For those who think the practice of traditional form (kata) is worthless and has no value insofar as real combat is concerned, read this book! You’ll see your forms and your chosen martial art in a completely different light. This book will act as a torch to light the path which will lead you to the secrets of the traditional martial arts; information which has been hidden for many decades!

“Now if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got to get back to studying my forms...”

– *Philip Starr, Founder of Yiliquan;  
Inside Kung Fu Hall of Fame Member*

“For years, karateka have needed a manual to bridge the gap between their training and real violence. This book is a pioneering step in fulfilling that need. In so many real encounters, I would do something that I later recognized in my wife’s karate kata. Not once did any karate instructor, when explaining that move, come even close to what I had actually done. It left me feeling that karate, at its root, was devastatingly effective, but that as it is commonly taught it was little more than a joke. This book will help an intelligent karateka find the combat system inside the dojo dance.”

– *Sgt. Rory Miller, tactical team leader;  
Use of Force Policy and close quarters combat  
instructor for law enforcement officers.*

“I found this to be a comprehensive book that bridges the gap between form and application in a realistic, easy-to-read and easy-to-apply manner. It’s packed with profound insight into the true meaning of kata, while at the same time identifying street-worthy technique as well as valuable tips for sparring competition. This book is loaded with fascinating history, street fighting wisdom, sparring tips, insight into well-known kata, and invaluable quotes and tips from a host of martial arts masters. It will increase your knowledge of the depth and wisdom of forms, and in the process make you a better fighter.”

– *Loren Christensen (www.lwcbooks.com), 7th  
degree black belt, retired military and civilian  
police officer, author of 29 books on martial arts.*

“*The Way of Kata* demonstrates the practical uses of kata, relates the traditional and modern aspects of fighting, and brings meaningful information to today’s martial arts practitioners.”

– *Martina Sprague (www.modernfighter.com),  
author of five books on martial arts.*

“*The Way of Kata* is a thoughtful, thorough and informative analysis of the ‘hidden’ fighting applications of kata. This superb book is essential reading for all those who wish to understand the highly effective techniques, concepts and strategies that the kata were created to record!”

– *Iain Abernethy, (www.iainabernethy.com),  
author of 4 books on applied karate, a former UK  
national level kata judge, member of the Combat  
Hall of Fame, and the holder of a 5<sup>th</sup> Dan in  
applied karate from the British Combat  
Association (one of the world’s leading groups for  
close-quarter combat and practical martial arts).*



# **The Way of Kata**



Photo courtesy of Iain Abernethy, [www.iainabernathy.com](http://www.iainabernathy.com)

*KUSHANKU* THROW. EVEN THOUGH KARATE IS PRIMARILY A STRIKING ART, IT CONTAINS MANY GRAPPLING AND THROWING TECHNIQUES. HERE, IAIN ABERNETHY APPLIES A THROW FROM *KUSHANKU* (*KANKU-DAI*) *KATA*. THE RECIPIENT IS GARY HERBERT.

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All martial arts are, by their very definition, warlike and dangerous. Training should always be undertaken responsibly, ensuring every available precaution for the safety of all participants. No text, no matter how well written, can substitute for professional hands-on instruction. Consequently these materials should be used *for academic study only*.

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## **Dedication**

To Joey and Jackson, two of the smallest guys that make the biggest difference.





*SHISOCHIN* ELBOW STRIKE/FIST JAM. THIS IS A SIGNATURE MOVEMENT OF SHISOCHIN KATA WHEREIN THE PRESS BLOCK KEEPS THE OPPONENT'S FOLLOW-ON PUNCH FROM GETTING STARTED. BLOCKS PERFORMED THIS CLOSE TO AN OPPONENT'S BODY ARE VERY EFFECTIVE AT JAMMING AND DISRUPTING A PERSON'S TECHNIQUES.

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## Foreword

by Dr. Jeff Cooper

My karate teacher, John Roseberry (a pioneer of Okinawan martial arts in America—9<sup>th</sup> degree black belt in karate, 7<sup>th</sup> degree black belt in judo and 3<sup>rd</sup> degree black belt in aikido), used to say of *kata*, “*Kata* is our textbook.” He would similarly state, “It’s all in there.”

The problem for me was that although I could go through the motions of the *kata*, I apparently was having a difficult time “reading” the text. Through my association with Kris Wilder, Lawrence Kane, and others (e.g., Marcus Davila, Scott Schweitzer, Kelly Worden to name just a few) I have been taught how to read the textbook.

Although many people have learned to read, it is Mr.’s Wilder and Kane that have taken the time to put all the reading lessons together in one place. The authors of this book have taken their practice of traditional *Goju Ryu* karate and delved deeply for meaning to its strong emphasis on *kata*.

*“Why practice kata?”*

*“Is kata just dance?”*

*“How does kata enhance my ability to defend myself?”*

These are just a few of the questions posed regarding the practice of *kata*. This book presents concepts that can help any practitioner gain more meaning from form practice. Looking at the techniques presented in a form, one starts to extract the underlying tactics and, from them, to understand the strategies from which those tactics spring. Once those strategies are identified and understood, the *kata* of a system become rich in meaning and in usefulness as further tactics and techniques are extracted.

The gaining of the strategic and tactical concepts of one’s system is the reward of the approach put forward by Mr.’s Wilder and Kane. Modern defensive tactics systems and “reality-based” systems have largely excluded *kata*. This book offers students of systems that include form practice a guide to understanding the meaning of the forms. It provides guidance regarding the strategy and tactics within the forms. This book helps to bridge the gap between traditional, form-based martial arts and the modern, eclectic defensive systems, which do not choose to include or emphasize form training.

Readers from either side of that gap will reap gains from this book regarding the application of strategic and tactical thinking, training, and principles common to all the combative arts. Basically, it’s a damn good book.

– Jeffrey Cooper, MD

*Jeffrey Cooper, M.D., is a fellow of the American Academy of Emergency Medicine and a clinical instructor of emergency medicine. He has been involved in the martial arts for some 25 years, achieving the rank of yodan (4<sup>th</sup> degree black belt) in Goju Ryu karate. As tactical medical director of Toledo (Ohio) SWAT, he has received advanced training in hostage extraction, hand-to-hand combat, firearms, and knife fighting. Dr. Cooper is also a commander in the US Naval Reserve Medical Corps.*

## Foreword

by Iain Abernethy

There are many differing views on the value of *kata*. *Kata* is regarded by some as the very “soul” of the martial arts. By others, it is regarded as a complete waste of time. To my mind, both views have merit depending upon what is meant by *kata* and how it is approached.

One thing I think all martial artists can agree on is that the study of *kata* is definitely not a prerequisite for combative effectiveness. There are many highly effective martial arts that do not include *kata* on their curriculum. If *kata* training is not critical to developing fighting skill, why do so many “traditional systems” like karate make such a big deal about it?

To fully explore this question, we need to understand why *kata* were created in the first place. Someone somewhere must have firmly believed that *kata* served a useful purpose or it never would have come into being in the first place. Further, if *kata* was not useful, it certainly would not have lasted very long after its inception.

By way of example, let’s discuss the creation of the karate *kata Chinto* (renamed *Gankaku* in *Shotokan*). *Chinto kata* is named after a Chinese martial artist and sailor of the same name. During the 1800s, Chinto became shipwrecked on Okinawa and set up home in a cave. Finding himself stranded without resources, Chinto began to steal food and livestock from the locals at night in order to sustain himself. This unwelcome behavior was reported to the Okinawan king who sent Sokon Matsumura—his chief bodyguard and a legendary karate master in his own right—to deal with the situation.

Matsumura was a very skilled fighter who normally defeated his opponents with ease. When Matsumura confronted him, however, Chinto fought back with exceptional skill and Matsumura quickly found himself equally matched. Always keen to further enhance his formidable skills, Matsumura made a deal with Chinto; he would take care of him in exchange for instruction in Chinto’s fighting method. Upon Chinto’s return to China, Matsumura formulated a *kata*—named after the originator of the system it contained—to ensure Chinto’s methods were recorded and passed on to future generations. Many other *kata* were also developed by an individual’s students in order to record what they had been taught.

What has eventually become known as karate is in fact a mix of many different fighting systems (cross-training is nothing new). The past masters used *kata* as a means to record the lessons they had learnt from various individuals and fighting systems and to then pass those lessons on to others.

From the example of Chinto and Matsumura, we can see that *kata* were developed to ensure that the most effective methods of a particular individual or style



were not lost. *Kata* can therefore be defined as “a way to record and summarize the key combative techniques and principles of a fighting style.”

As a way to record techniques, drills, and principles, *kata* certainly works. Hundreds of years after Chinto finished teaching Matsumura his fighting method, we modern *karateka* have a record of the key points of Chinto’s teaching. However, over time *kata* has drifted away from being viewed as a record of highly potent fighting methods, to instead being generally considered as an athletic or aesthetic pursuit that has little relation to actual combat. Regardless of how *kata* may be perceived today, for *karateka* with an interest in the original civilian fighting system, *kata* provides a living link back to that system.

To practice karate as a pragmatic system, *kata* needs to be actively studied, as opposed to just “practiced.” Gichin Funakoshi (the founder of *Shotokan* karate) considered the practice of *kata* useless unless one learned how to apply it in actual self-defense situations (*Karate-do Kyohan*). I wholeheartedly agree with his sentiments. Without in-depth study of *bunkai* (*kata* application), *kata* practice loses all meaning. The information contained in this book will ensure that your *kata* practice has meaning and is relevant to real life situations.

*Kata* is a record of the fighting systems that combined to form karate; the original syllabus if you will. *Karateka* who ignore the lessons of *kata* inadvertently practice karate as a partial art. Without an understanding of *kata bunkai*, karate is a grossly inadequate and incomplete system. When modern day practitioners of any martial art choose not to bother with *kata*, they often do so in the name of realism. What they fail to appreciate is that by abandoning *kata* they have effectively abandoned the very syllabus of their original fighting system. Without *kata*, all that remains is a shell of the original martial art.

*Kata* has great value when correctly approached. It ensures that the martial art you practice is a workable system. That is where this superb book by Lawrence Kane and Kris Wilder proves so invaluable to pragmatically minded *budoka*. *The Way of Kata* will give you the vital information you need to approach *kata* in the ‘correct’ way and to practice your art as a functional, holistic, and pragmatic martial system. Enjoy!

– Iain Abernethy

*Iain Abernethy holds a godan (5<sup>th</sup> degree black belt) in applied karate from the British Combat Association, one of the world’s leading groups for close-quarter combat and practical martial arts. He is also a yodan (4<sup>th</sup> degree black belt) in Wado-Ryu*

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*SAIPAI* LEG HOOK/ELBOW STRIKE. IN THIS APPLICATION FROM *SAIPAI KATA*, KRIS SHIFTS IN SIMULTANEOUSLY STRIKING WITH HIS ELBOW AND HOOKING HIS OPPONENT'S LEG TO KNOCK LAWRENCE TO THE GROUND.

## Preface

*“I only expected to be in this country for three months; however, when I came to Spokane (Washington) and saw the deplorable level of Goju Ryu there, I took time and great pains to correct it. After six months—twice the length of time I had planned to stay—I realized that it would be easier to start from scratch than to fix the problems. It’s usually better to rebuild a house than to remodel it!*

*“The Goju Ryu that I saw when I finally visited dojos across the country was very poor, but I knew it wasn’t anybody’s fault. I understood there had been many teachers before, many bridges, and the messages often got crossed. There was such a gap between those practitioners and me! I didn’t want to make any instructor uncomfortable.*

*“My job first was to encourage people, not discourage them. I started correcting the basics and built the kata on them. Once we had some common ground, I could build on it. It was harder working with the instructors than with the beginners, because they had high rank and their pride prevented them from training with me in front of their students. And sometimes their students were better than they! But I understood the situation. So I gave them private instruction whenever I could, usually during breaks.”<sup>1</sup>*

– Teruo Chinen

When new martial artists begin their training, they find they have to relearn basic concepts like breathing, standing, and walking. They are taught how to breathe through their diaphragm rather than solely with their lungs, introduced to a variety of uncomfortable stances and foreign postures, and shown how to move in unusual new ways. Balance and coordination take on a new meaning. And that’s just the beginning.

Soon they are introduced to *kata*, the dancelike movements in which the ancient masters hid the secrets of their unique fighting systems. Almost all Asian martial systems have *kata* of one type or another, from arnis to kung fu, karate to judo, and taekwon do to tai chi. A *kata* is simply a pattern of movements containing a logical series of offensive and defensive techniques that are performed in a particular order. Its origins can be found in the nature of fighting, more than a thousand years of trial and error based on practical experience as well as keen observations about combat between animal and animal, between animal and man, and man-to-man.

According to Morio Higaonna,\* “The true meaning and spirit of karate are imbedded in *kata* and only by the practice of *kata* can we come to understand them.” Individuals who learn an art’s strategy and diligently practice its *kata* can learn real-world fighting applications that they may use to defend themselves.

While each *kata* is supposed to be performed the same way every time, there are a plethora of applications, or *bunkai*, from every *kata*, movements that can be applied in a real fight. Some applications, especially simple, straightforward ones, are easier to decipher than others. Unfortunately, such applications are not always the best interpretation of a given movement, nor are they the most likely to succeed in actual combat. Anything less than the best is simply not good enough if your life is on the line.

*Kata* is not dance practice nor is it aerobic training.† It is the fundamental basis of a fighting art. Like a textbook, it contains all the applications you need to defend yourself in mortal combat. To get the most out of your martial art, you simply need to know how to “read” your *kata* like a book.

Ah, but that’s the rub isn’t it? How does one learn how to read the *kata* textbook? The answer to that question is, of course, contained herein. We wrote these materials to help you do just that.

The theory of deciphering applications from *kata* is called *kaisai*. Since it offers guidelines for unlocking the true meaning of each *kata* movement, *kaisai no genri* (the theory of *kaisai*) was once a great mystery revealed only to trusted disciples of the ancient masters in order to protect the secrets of their systems. Using the rules of *kaisai no genri*, practitioners can decipher the original intent of *kata* movements by logically analyzing each specific movement to find its *okuden waza* (hidden technique).

This book helps practitioners understand the strategy behind whatever martial art they have chosen to study so that they can utilize its tactics wisely. Our efforts will show you how to analyze your *kata* to determine the best applications for a given situation. The heart of these materials covers fifteen general principles for identifying effective techniques as well as twelve discrete rules for deciphering applications from *kata*.

\* Morio Higaonna, Hanshi (9th dan black belt), is the chief instructor of the International Okinawan Goju Ryu Karate-Do Federation (IOGKF)

† Though physical conditioning is certainly a side benefit of practicing it.

## **Acknowledgments**

We would like to express our sincere appreciation for Hiroo Ito's guidance and counseling. Thank you for sharing your vast knowledge with us. We would also like to recognize Mike Canonica, who modeled for our illustrations, along with Iain Abernethy, Loren Christensen, and Franco Sanguinetti who contributed photographs for this work. Special thanks as well to Lumina Photography ([www.LuminaPhotography.com](http://www.LuminaPhotography.com)), David Ripianzi, Tim Comrie, Ellie Sommer, and Laura Vanderpool who helped us with this project.



*KENSETSU GERI.* THIS JOINT KICK IS ESPECIALLY EFFECTIVE BECAUSE THE GRAB POSTS THE OPPONENT'S WEIGHT ON THE LEG KRIS IS ATTACKING WITH HIS KICK.

## Introduction

*“Despite a lack of complete understanding, one should not assume that the movements have no meaning or function. I advise performing the movements, thinking about them, and interpreting them in your own way, concentrating heart and soul. This is practice.”*

– Shigeru Egami

Following a time honored tradition of *kakidameshi* (dueling), *budoka* (martial artists) in ancient Okinawa routinely tested each other’s fighting skills through actual combat. Like the feudal *samurai* before or the Old West gunfighter that would follow, the more famous the practitioner, the more often he was challenged to combat by those seeking fame. Such fights were often to the death. Even when the loser survived, his degradation was so considerable that his humiliated relatives rarely considered revenge.

Such challenges even took the form of sudden ambush or sneak attacks. Consequently, while the masters of such arts had to ensure that their forms would work in actual combat, they jealously guarded the secrets of their style. In many cases they taught the secrets of deciphering their *kata* orally to a single student, a sole successor who promised never to reveal these *okuden waza*, or secret techniques, to the public.

In Japanese, martial arts understanding can be classified in two ways: *omote* and *ura waza*. *Omote* signifies the outer or surface training, while *ura waza* can be translated to denote the inner or subtle way. *Omote* is the most common and well understood. *Ura waza*, on the other hand, is the subtle details that make the obvious succeed. Practitioners who never learn these crucial details lack essential tools required to make the most of their martial art.

While *kata* is the foundation of most Asian martial disciplines, numerous misunderstandings continue to prevail regarding the true intent of such forms. A common example is that many practitioners are led to believe that defensive techniques, called *uke* in Japanese, should be thought of as “blocks.” A more accurate translation of the word *uke* would be “receive,” a term implying active ownership. Once a practitioner owns an aggressor’s attack, he or she may redirect it as needed to put an end to the confrontation, often without even striking an “offensive” blow. Seen in this light, defensive postures can take on an entirely new meaning. You will learn more about this in chapter 4 where the rules of *kata* are outlined.\*

Traditional study of martial systems presumes the ability to perform techniques in actual combat. Sport and conditioning applications are more or less fringe bene-

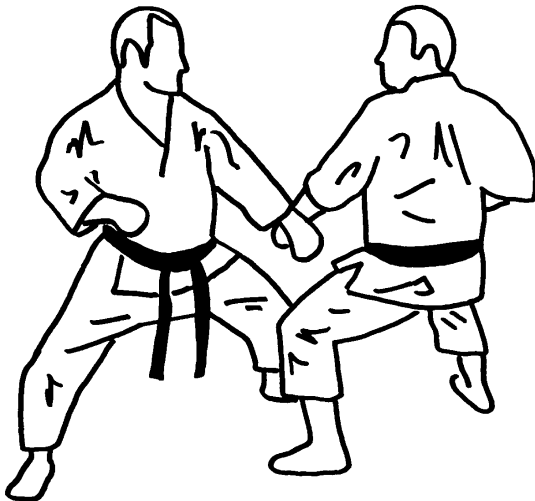
\* Please note that we will refer to these rules (chapter 4) and to a set of principles (chapter 3) from time to time prior to those chapters.



fits associated with such study. A student whose primary reason for studying a martial art is to get into shape might be better off pursuing aerobics, yoga, weightlifting, Jazzercise, Pilates, or similar activities. Such arts focus on the fitness aspects and are far less painful to learn. If you really want to gain the skills necessary to defend yourself, however, martial pursuits are the right path to take.

By the time you finish reading this book, you will have developed comprehensive knowledge needed to decipher the hidden meaning of your own *kata* and get the most out of your martial art. We would like to preview what you will learn with the following example:

In *seiyunchin kata*,\* a *Goju Ryu* karate form, there are two sections showing forward-moving *gedan uke* (down blocks) performed in *shiko dachi* (sumo or straddle stance). In one case the practitioner's right hand is in chamber (at his or her side)



SEIYUNCHIN KATA: BASIC SHIKO DACHI (SUMO STANCE) WITH GEDAN UKE (DOWN BLOCK). THE DEFENDER IS ON THE LEFT.

while the left hand executes the downward block. One might consider it somewhat odd to step forward in such a low, immovable stance while blocking downward.

The most commonly attributed application or *bunkai* for this movement would be a simple down block. Using *henka waza* (variation technique), the movement would more than likely be shown retreating rather than advancing as performed in the *kata*. This is because blocking while moving forward is somewhat counterintuitive (later on we'll discuss more about the fallacy of even considering defensive techniques "blocks" at all).

There is nothing wrong with this example. Indeed, it is a viable, if basic, technique. In almost every

case there is more than one "correct" interpretation for any movement in a *kata*. While this simple explanation may be correct, however, it falls far short of being all it could be.

A variety of principles and rules outlined in this book will help practitioners identify the *okuden waza* found in their *kata*. These secret techniques offer much more powerful interpretations of such movements. Let's face it, if all you do is block, a

\* Which translates as "pull off balance and fight."

determined opponent will continue to attack until he or she either lands enough solid blows to crush you, or you do something better than basic blocking to stop him or her. Logic dictates that the simplest interpretation of this sequence is, at best, sub-optimal.

Let's analyze this combination in more depth to figure out what this *kata's* inventor was really trying to tell us. Applying some of the rules and principles outlined later in this book illuminates our example:

- Moving forward implies offensive technique,\* so what we perceive as a down block must really be a strike.† Since we have selected a *Goju Ryu kata* as our example, it is important to note that this assertion also fits within *Goju Ryu's* overall strategy of closing distance with an opponent and disrupting him or her.‡ One way to validate that your interpretation of *kata* technique is suitable is to ensure that it fits within your system's overall strategy. In this case our enhanced interpretation passes that crucial test.
- The strength of *shiko dachi* is in uprooting an opponent.§ *Shiko dachi* is also the least mobile stance in karate (or any martial art for that matter). It must, therefore, imply close body contact to an opponent in order to crash and disrupt his or her balance. At proper range the *shiko dachi* stance alone affords us an opportunity to attack an opponent's legs with our feet and knees while closing the distance.
- Since the technique is performed in *shiko dachi*, the range shown in Figure 1 is really too far away, placing the practitioner at a distinct disadvantage. When the distance is closed up, the downward strike clearly aims for the groin (*kinteki*)—if you are on the inside or kidneys (*ushiro denko*) if you are on the outside—both of which are vital areas.||
- Since the right hand is closed and in chamber, the practitioner most likely has his or her opponent's arm captured and held within it.¶ This not only distracts the adversary, but helps keep him or her in place long enough to be hit, an important advantage with a relatively immobile stance.
- Because it is necessary to disrupt before striking,\*\* there is very likely an additional hidden application†† performed between the more obvious upward and downward movements of the *gedan uke*.‡‡ In this case that hidden application is most likely a concussive ear slap.
- Since the “block” is actually a strike,§§ the *kata* is in fact demonstrating a blow to the groin or possibly kidney. Either way, this causes physiological damage to a vital area—a core tenet of the *Goju Ryu* strategy.¶¶ Performed correctly, a solid blow to either of those vital areas can immediately end a fight.¶¶¶

\* See Rule 2—advancing implies attack.

† See Rule 8—there is no “block.”

‡ See Strategy of *Goju Ryu* in chapter 2 for more information.

§ See Principle 12—stances aren't just for kata.

|| See Principle 2—every technique should be able to end the fight immediately, and Rule 11—contour the body.

¶ See Rule 5—hand in chamber usually has something in it.

\*\* See Principle 3—strike to disrupt; disrupt to strike.

†† See Hidden Applications Between Kata Movements.

‡‡ Also see Rule 6—utilize the shortest distance to your opponent.

§§ See Rules 2 and 8.

¶¶ See Strategy of *Goju Ryu* in chapter 2. The strategy of almost every martial art includes striving for physiological damage to defeat an adversary.

¶¶¶ See Principle 2—every technique should be able to end the fight immediately.

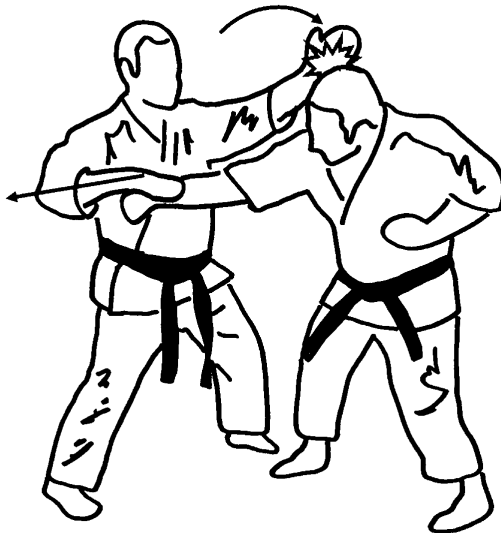
- Using a combination of rules and principles we have uncovered a much stronger set of techniques from what first appeared to be a simple block. Combined, these movements affect the opponent's legs and/or feet, groin or kidney, and head, working the whole body.\* As deciphered, they are indeed quite powerful, much more so than the most simple and commonly held interpretation would imply.

Here is how our newfound interpretation might look:

Now that we have whet your appetite, here is a summary of the major points covered in each chapter of this book:

**Chapter 1—Background Fundamentals.** A Japanese word meaning “formal exercise,” *kata* contain logical sequences of movements consisting of practical offensive and defensive techniques that are performed in a particular order. The ancient masters imbedded the secrets of their unique fighting systems in their *kata*. There are almost unlimited combat applications or *bunkai* hidden within each movement. Such applications can even be hidden *between* the movements of a *kata*.

While the basic movements of *kata* are widely known, advanced practical applications and sophisticated techniques frequently remain



SEIYUNCHIN KATA: TRANSITIONAL EAR SLAP (A HIDDEN TECHNIQUE NOT TRADITIONALLY SHOWN DURING PERFORMANCE OF THE KATA).



SEIYUNCHIN KATA: PROPER SHIKO DACHI (SUMO STANCE) WITH DOWN BLOCK/GROIN STRIKE.

\* See Principles of Enforcement in chapter 2.

hidden from the casual observer. Historically there was often a two-track system of martial arts instruction not only in Okinawa, but in Japan, China, and Korea as well. The outer circle of students learned basic fundamentals; unknowingly receiving modified *kata* where critical details or important principles were omitted. The inner circle that had gained a master's trust and respect, on the other hand, could be taught *okuden waza*, the secret applications of *kata*.

Even within this inner circle, the rules and principles for deciphering all of a system's *kata* frequently were taught to only a single student, the master's chosen successor, rather than to the group as a whole. Often this instruction was withheld until the master became quite old or very ill, shortly before his death. On occasion the master waited too long to pass along this vital knowledge and it was lost altogether.

In modern times *kata* was spread from Okinawa to the rest of the world, primarily by American GIs and Allied troops who learned karate during the occupation of Japan at the end of World War II. Although many *budo*\* masters were willing to teach the Westerners as a means to earn a living, most foreigners were not initiated into their inner circles. Further, even when instructors wished to share their secrets, language barriers often inhibited comprehensive communication.

Later on, as *budo* was opened-up to society at large, it frequently was taught to schoolchildren. Many dangerous techniques were hidden from these practitioners simply because they were not mature enough to handle them responsibly. Consequently, much of what made it to the outside world was intermediate-level martial arts, devoid of principles and rules necessary to understand and employ hidden techniques.

**Chapter 2—Strategy and Tactics.** A deep understanding of strategy and tactics is a necessary prerequisite for comprehending and properly deciphering *kata*. Strategy is a plan of action. In martial arts as in war, it is what you do to prepare for engagement with an enemy long before the fight begins. Tactics, on the other hand, are expedient means of achieving an end, in this case defeating an adversary. Tactics are selected during the heat of battle.

Like a house without a solid foundation, tactics without strategy will ultimately fail. If the strategic foundation is strong, on the other hand, appropriate tactics can be employed automatically without conscious thought, instantly reacting to most any situation. In actual combat, understanding and adhering to your strategy may mean the difference between victory and defeat. History is strewn with the corpses of those who forgot this essential lesson.

In *Goju Ryu* karate, for example, the essential strategy is to close distance, imbalance, and use physiological damage to incapacitate an opponent. Looking at its core *kata*, an easy way to ascertain the tactics of an art form, you will find that they include about 70 percent hand techniques, 20 percent foot techniques, 5 percent throws, and

\* Martial ways or arts.

5 percent groundwork. While everything is included therein, karate is primarily a striking art. Every useful martial art is built around a strategic framework.

In a real fight, decisions must be made in an instant. To survive, practitioners must be engaged in the moment of now. Responses take the form of a “decision stick,” rather than a decision tree. They are uncomplicated and straightforward, relying less on what an opponent does than on what the practitioner’s strategy requires him or her to do.

**Chapter 3—Principles.** The following fifteen principles are necessary for analyzing *kata*. They form the strategic framework within which practitioners can identify valid interpretations of *bunkai*,\* *henka waza*,† and even *okuden waza*‡ in the *kata* they practice:

1. There is more than one proper interpretation of any movement.
2. Every technique should be able to end the fight immediately.
3. Strike to disrupt; disrupt to strike.
4. Nerve strikes are “extra credit.”
5. Work with the adrenaline rush, not against it.
6. Techniques must work at full speed and power.
7. It must work on an “unwilling” partner.
8. Strive to understand why it works.
9. Deception is not real.
10. If you are not there, you cannot get hit.
11. Cross the T to escape.
12. Stances aren’t just for *kata*.
13. Don’t forget to breathe.
14. Use both hands.
15. A lock or hold is not a primary fighting technique.

**Chapter 4—Rules.** Although there are numerous “correct” interpretations for each movement of every *kata*, techniques are typically stylized with their actual applications obscured. The work to uncover hidden applications in *kata* is called *kaisai* in Japanese. Since it offers guidelines for unlocking the secrets of each *kata*, *kaisai no genri*§ was once a great mystery revealed only to trusted disciples of the ancient masters in order to protect the secrets of their system.

Using the principles of *kaisai no genri* practitioners can decipher the original intent of *kata* techniques by logically analyzing each specific movement to find its hidden meaning. The first three conventions are called *shuyo san gensoko*, meaning “main” or “basic” rules. Rules 4 through 12 are called *hosoku joko*, which translates as supplementary or advanced rules:

\* Applications.

† Variation techniques.

‡ Hidden or secret techniques.

§ The theory of *kaisai*.

1. Do not be deceived by the *enbusen* rule.
2. Advancing techniques imply attack, while retreating techniques imply defense.
3. There is only one enemy at a time.
4. Every movement in *kata* has martial meaning/significance and can be used in a real fight.
5. A hand returning to chamber usually has something in it.
6. Utilize the shortest distance to your opponent.
7. Control an opponent's head and you control the opponent.
8. There is no "block."
9. *Kata* demonstrates the proper angles.
10. Touching your own body in *kata* indicates touching your opponent.
11. Contour the body—strike hard to soft and soft to hard.
12. There is no pause.

**Chapter 5—Physics, Physiology, and Other Considerations.** Every movement in *kata* has practical self-defense applications. If one accurately strikes or grabs an attacker's vital area, he or she can elicit pain, temporary paralysis, dislocation or hyperextension of a joint, knockout, or possibly even death. Whoever lands the first solid blow to a vital area during a real fight will undoubtedly be victorious. In combat, speed and accuracy are paramount.

Part of what makes practitioners fast, is the ability to react in a non-diagnostic manner. They do not think—they simply do. In the old days, traditional practitioners would spend many years learning a single *kata*. Although many of the ancient masters learned only two or three *kata*, each contained a fully effective and comprehensive fighting system providing everything they really needed to know. They would study these *kata* in great depth, learning all the subtle nuances and internalizing the movements until they became second nature. Applications could be launched instantly without conscious thought.

Threat responses work like rungs on a ladder. The lowest rung, or base foundation, is built upon our natural neurological reactions, taking advantage of hard-wired fight or flight responses. Tactics and strategy, the next higher rungs in ascending order, must work synergistically with the body's natural physiological reactions. Control is the highest form of response. By control we mean adapting strategy and choosing tactics as appropriate for a given situation. The ancient masters took such things into consideration as they built their *kata*. In deciphering applications, we must understand them as well.

The best self-defense, of course, is avoiding a fight altogether. Even if a person legitimately uses force in order to escape an imminent and unavoidable danger, he

or she will still have to live with the physiological and psychological results of doing so. Further, he or she must be prepared to face the very real prospect of subsequent litigation by the defeated opponent and/or the government. A good understanding of the characteristics of violence and insight into the criminal mind can help practitioners avoid dangerous confrontations.

Once a conflict occurs, however, you must do everything you can to end it quickly. You have to be at least as ruthless and violent as your attacker(s). Unlike sparring in the *dojo*, vital areas are most certainly not off limits. They are the only targets that matter, required knowledge for survival.

**Chapter 6—Process.** The simplest interpretation of most any *kata* sequence is bound to be sub-optimal. When practitioners adopt the principles, rules, and strategic guidelines we have outlined in this book, they will have the power to get the most out of their martial art. Using a technique called cooperative performance, *budoka* can work with others in their *dojo* to experiment with their own *kata*, identify what they believe are hidden applications, and ascertain whether or not they will work in a self-defense situation.

Although a practitioner may be able to perform a *kata* and understand its various applications and hidden techniques, he or she may still not want to rely on it in actual combat. Everyone is better at some things than others. It is essential that practitioners understand how to personalize techniques, instinctively applying applications for which they have a natural affinity during a life or death struggle.

**Chapter 7—Kata Examples.** This chapter uses *kata* from *Goju Ryu* to demonstrate how all of the previous material comes together. Using our examples, you will have a leg up in deciphering the secrets of your own martial art and will be able to analyze your own *kata* in a similar fashion.

# The Principles for Understanding Kata were Largely Unknown - Until Now

“This book is an absolute must for any serious practitioner of traditional karate, tae kwon do, or kung-fu.” — Philip Starr, Inside Kung Fu Hall of Fame Member; Founder of Yiliquan

“For years, *karateka* have needed a manual to bridge the gap between their training and real violence. This book is a pioneering step in fulfilling that need.” — Sgt. Rory Miller, tactical team leader; close quarters combat instructor

“This superb book is essential reading for all those who wish to understand the highly effective techniques, concepts and strategies that the kata were created to record!” — Iain Abernathy, British Combat Association Hall of Fame Member

“This comprehensive book bridges the gap between form and application in a realistic, easy-to-read and easy-to-apply manner.” — Loren Christensen, 7th degree black belt; author

“Demonstrates the practical uses of *kata*, relates the traditional and modern aspects of fighting, and brings meaningful information to today’s martial artists.” — Martina Sprague, martial arts instructor; author

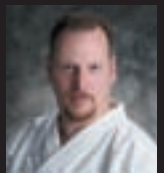
The ancient masters developed *kata*, or “formal exercises,” as fault-tolerant methods to preserve their unique, combat-proven fighting systems. Unfortunately, they deployed a two-track system of instruction where an ‘outer circle’ of students unknowingly received modified forms with critical details or important principles omitted. Only the select ‘inner circle’ that had gained a master’s trust and respect would be taught *okuden waza*, the powerful hidden applications of *kata*.

The theory of deciphering *kata* applications (*kaisai no genri*) was once a great mystery revealed only to trusted disciples of the ancient masters in order to protect the secrets of their systems. Even today, while the basic movements of *kata* are widely known, advanced practical applications and sophisticated techniques frequently remain hidden from the casual observer. The principles and rules for understanding *kata* are largely unknown.

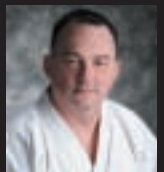
This groundbreaking book unveils these methods, not only teaching you how to analyze your *kata* to understand what it is trying to tell you, but also helping you to utilize your fighting techniques more effectively—both in self-defense and in tournament applications.

- Fifteen general principles to identify effective techniques
- Twelve discrete rules for deciphering martial applications
- Comprehensive insights into *kata* history, strategy and tactics
- Vital physiological considerations
- Well-organized materials for easy reference and comprehensive understanding

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