

# **TENSHO KATA DESCRIPTION AND BUNKAI** ©2002

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## **PRECURSOR**

Anytime anyone attempts to capsule something as tremendously important as kata there exist many opportunities to fail. There might be failure by the author who might neglect or forget to mention a key point, historical factoid, or other embellishment. The reader, who is responsible to do more than just glance at the words and often doesn't, who instead should try to live through the written words through much practice until a moment of understanding arrives.

When any one of these instances takes place, much will be missed in the message. Many of us claim to practice karate: some as a sport or sideline, and others for life. In my case, Goju Ryu has woven itself into my very fiber. So as we continue, let us attempt to do so together, with no pre-conceptions and as one and with purpose.

In reading and writing articles it is important to realize that the most basic parts and functionality of a kata is usually very dependant upon who taught the kata to whom and how it was taught and perceived during the learning process. Different teachers teach the same thing differently which may affect the focus of the kata and definitely will affect the accompanying bunkai.

Many have said that bunkai takes a series of moves (the kata) and maps out who will attack and what the kata will speak as a response to that attack. Some believe that kata is a series of techniques that are separate and that they don't have to follow a particular sequence or direction but are just mass of tools that you may use in any applicable situation. Others say that any block can be a strike and that any strike can also be performed as a block. I lean more towards the last two definitions because the heat of combat doesn't always offer us the luxury of a perfect world in which to perform our techniques. And bunkai is indeed about combat application is it not?

## **TENSHO COMMENTARY**

Tensho is a study in tense fluidity. The subtleties of this kata are like the wind and often escape me, but I will attempt to hold them together in one spot for today. While training during the traditional/mandatory Thursday night black belt class with my karate father Yamaguchi Gosei at the Hombu dojo in the Castro area of San Francisco I posed this question to him: What goes through your mind while you perform Tensho kata? His response was that the performance of Tensho kata could be compared to the rising or setting of the sun. As a sun rises, the air is still cool and the world is still. Movements are soft, all breathing and hand movements are light, airy and completely liquid. With each following move the energy and tension ramps up till at the very end you are performing at full go, fast and hard with Sanchin like breathing – burning like the sun. Or you can do the kata in reverse method.... Starting like a fireball and eventually slowing and cooling down

the movements to that of a starry sky. Doing the kata in this way can be very rewarding. Please note: Breathing follows and exists in a symbiotic relationship with the hand movements. One does not exist without the other. Also Note: On the double hand movements only take in half the air you can muster as the other half will be coming in with the following movement. Hands are to be rigid until dog block, then flow like water.

First I will describe the basic series of hand movements that will be repeated first with the left hand, then the right hand then both hands. Picture movie starts here (pictures follow in sequential numbers-missing numbers are just bad pics that were deleted).....Once you get to the bunkai section, there will be two assailants involved but they do not necessarily depict a two-attacker attack. This could be one attacker, it could be 6, 8 or more.

## INTRO TO MOVEMENTS

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To start come from a parallel stance with fists at the sides or sanchin dachi shizentai no kamae (whichever you are comfortable with) and step into a right sanchin, double yoko-uke (Sanchin Dachi Sanchin No Kamae) This is done with Ebuki breathing (Strong from diaphragm) and ending when move ends. Then without a breath, chamber the left hand preparing to begin your right hand movements. The right hand fist turns into a kakete and performs a palm down (parallel to the floor) kake uke movement that moves in an elliptical path (left to right) while remaining on that plane and ends up chambered at the right armpit. (at this point, both hands are chambered – the left in a fist palm up and the right- palm down) The right hand then follows the same path it just finished. This time in reverse and with palm up ( shuto like) ending up chambered to the right arm pit with palm up (second half of in breath occurs during this movement) and then immediately pushing palm forward (while breathing out) with fingers up and in a direction toward the middle of opponents forehead.

You then retrieve the hand (leaving palm facing opponent) turning it 90 degrees to the left and let it almost rest on your own forehead for a second. At this point you should look like your are doing some form of a rising block or salute with right elbow pointing off to the right and in line with your body's position. While breathing in, your right hand will then travel in a very large semi circle which starts at your forehead, travels extended till it almost hits your right leg and then it follows that contour till the right open hand ends up once again chambered under the right armpit: This time with fingers pointing in a downward direction. It then strikes palm forward toward the groin area, fingers still down as you let out the breath. Next you turn your hand into a dog block with thumb touching the ring finger as this hand blocks vertically (In the middle of the body, not off to the side and breathing in) and ending in a very tense position, fingers pointing downward- elbow one fist off of your rib cage-. You then turn that into a downward push block that goes no lower than your belt, breathing out on this move. The fingers of that hand then rotate to the left as you raise your hand to the same plane as your elbow- stretched as far to the left as it can go without actually moving your elbow to accommodate the move. Your thumb now rests on the middle finger (for tension and support). Keeping your forearm as tense as possible, the dog block moves left to right across the body ending when the arm can no

longer move any farther than the elbow will allow. Breathe in on this movement. Then while breathing out, the hand then opens to a palm heel strike that moves along the same path the hand just traveled ending when the arm can go no farther.(once again, as far as the elbow will permit without moving itself-note: there are allowances for the elbow to travel the length of the diameter of a golf ball in any direction from center. The center point for each elbow will never alter)

### **TENSHO KATA BUNKAI**

Tensho Bunkai: Step by Step. NOTE: These are pretty much my bunkai although any warrior could just as easily come up with the same movements.

BEGIN:

As you step from hudo dachi (parallel stance-fists at side) into a right Sanchin Dachi your hands extend palm out (right arm in front) first right then immediately left hand, in preparation for double yoko-uke opening block.

An attacker is moving directly at you throwing a right then left punch in succession. Defender opens attacker up with right palm heel to inside arm of attackers right punch and left palm heel to the inside arm of attackers left punch setting up the double yoko-uke where the first finger first knuckle of left hand strikes left bone of attackers jaw while right blocking hand either clears attacker's left arm or does nerve strike to the arm.(Depending on the current body position of attacker at that exact time) While attacker is reaching up to pull the jaw strike away (Time on target strike) the fist retracts taking assailant with it clearing him from the scene..

While this is taking place another attacker enters the sphere of defense from a right 45 degree angle throwing a right Age-Zuki (Jodan Zuki- rising punch.. you say POtAtO, I say POtaTO) the right hand closes off attacker with palm down/parallel to the floor kake-uke that travels in an elliptical pattern (1) then immediately after throws shuto to attacker's left side of head (temple, jaw, neck, nose, eyes-depending on CURRENT body position of attacker) which pulls back to release palm heel and/or 4 finger strike to attackers facial area. The attacker reaches up with one or both hands to pull fingers.hand from eye area and as they lock on the defender pulls his/her hand back toward his fore head with his palm still facing the attacker. The defender then rotates the right hand in a half circle movement which in turn traps the hand(s) of the attacker in a hand/wrist lock lifting them up on their toes. From this point it can be used as a come-along or as a quick move causing them to release your hand which then performs a knife hand pierce or palm heel strike into the attacker's stomach organ area.

The next attack is from the front again with the attacker going for the head throwing a right punch which is blocked up (or in/out) by a right crane beak/dog head block and then comes crashing straight down to the top of the solar plexus in a palm heel. At this point the right hand will either clear the attackers left arm/strike/shoulder with a horizontal crane beak block to the right and then come crashing into the attackers left ribs/Head/neck with a right palm heel.

We are now done with the first series of moves. Let us realize that all bunkai movement depends on the position of the attacker's body at the time of impact. Many believe that in a perfect world we can guide our attacker's bodies to the perfect position where a devastating move awaits them. The truth of the matter is the number of body positions a defender or attacker will end up in are countless. Add in the pitch of the battlefield and the various velocities of attack/defend and the momentum they create and you have a truly volatile situation at best. I believe that every attack will offer a limited but wonderful potential to devastate the instigator of that attack. It is our job then to live only in the microsecond-like moment and when the opening unveils itself, attack with all ferocity and conviction. Let's move on.

As we move forward into left Sanchin dachi the next attacker comes in from a left 45 degree angle (Off the front axis) throwing a right middle punch (they can throw a left as well if you want to work on closing them off but in opening them up offers a much more deadly series of counter-attack possibilities) This punch is blocked (or nerve strike to forearm) with left middle block. The attacker then throws a left strike which is brushed outside of your sphere but the palm of the same left hand as it prepares to perform kake strike (palm down now and parallel to the floor) to the attackers left side jaw/head area (no time on target this time) which recoils and strikes(TOT) the right side of the attackers head/jaw area with a shuto (palm up). This shuto then curls to the right around the neck enough to hook it into the elliptical return path and discard the attacker. As this occurs the next attacker enters again from the front throwing a right punch to the head (He obviously did not see what happened to his buddy when he threw a high right). Now comes some real fun! I find this exciting . Two combatants, caught in a real time gunslinger mode. They throw – you throw, and who ever gets there first wins the whole shooting match. I have experienced this in both dojo and the bar scene (I've had the misfortune to have participated in over 300 altercations during that nasty portion of my life working as a DJ/Bouncer-The Record: 300-Me 0-Them. I have since retired from that mess)

Anyhow,

You unload this left palm heel to the head/nose/ solar plexus in a crushing fashion. You clear that right hand/arm with the left circular movement and at the bottom of that movement slide your hand into a rising left crane strike to the face/throat area snapping their head back and clearing an area for a crushing collar bone attack down ( palm heel) you then take the same hand and crane strike the armpit joint area to position the attacker for a left lateral palm strike to the right side of their body (depending on where they land.....

Step forward into a right sanchin dachi preparing for double yoko uke. An attacker is coming forward toward you and as both of his hands reach out to grab your throat, you perform double yoko uke to the inside of his arms (nerve point) slightly opening his arms up. Following this with a straight ahead double inside out elliptical kake ukes which scrape across both of the attackers eyes, followed by double shutos to both sides of the attackers neck/jaw/head (TOT) much in the traditional knock-out fashion of Oyata. Which recoil to

a double front palm heel strike to the face area. At this point the attackers two arms are draping near or on your shoulders. You perform the double circular movement trapping the opponents two arms above the elbows and drawing them into you for a head butt which is followed by an extremely strong reinforced strike to the solar plexus while you are keeping them trapped at the elbow and possibly hyper-extending or dislocating elbow(s). (All of this happens on the inside). Next, the opponent's two arms are cleared in an upward direction and while his arms continue up, perform a double downward palm heel strike to the solar plexus/upper rib or heart area Pa-Kua style. Immediately strike the inside of the opponents two arms at nerve centers, creating an opening for a double palm heel strike to both sides of ribs and inward.

The next opponent musters a right age zuki strike to the head which you meet with your left hand on the inside of his right arm/hand as you set up to perform mawashi-uke. Your right hand parries his up and in a circular motion to your right, his left, which opens him up for a left hand palm strike to the side of his head/neck which is followed by a right palm heel to his side as you finish your first mawashi uke sequence.

The next opponent then swings wildly with his left which is received and parried off to your left with your left hand as you begin to perform the second mawashi-uke. This positions the opponent away and to his right for a double palm strike (finishing move of mawashi-uke) which strike his mid section and left rib cage simultaneously at a 45 degree angle. This type of attack will cause damage to internal organs as well as rib cage.

### **CLOSING THE KATA**

You perform one more right palm heel to the opponents face which he grabs/traps with his left hand. You reach and meet his hand with your right hand: your four fingers prying his thumb while placing your thumb on the nerve between his middle and ring fingers, using it as a fulcrum to pry his hand off of yours and setting up the wrist lock. Pass this hand off to your left hand and face his palm toward yours, sandwiching it between your left and right hand as you rotate your hands down (Osamu position) in a painful hand/wrist lock.

Bow out (Finish with a head butt while you finish the wrist lock if you desire- picture not shown) to end kata.

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