

**PAN-AMERICAN GOJU RYU KARATEDO  
SEIWAKAI NEWSLETTER**

**全米剛柔流空手道  
誠和会社内報**

**Dedicated to Traditional Goju Ryu Karatedo  
Issue 52: January/February 2022**

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**Kawase Hasui: *The Inokashira Benten Shrine in Snow***

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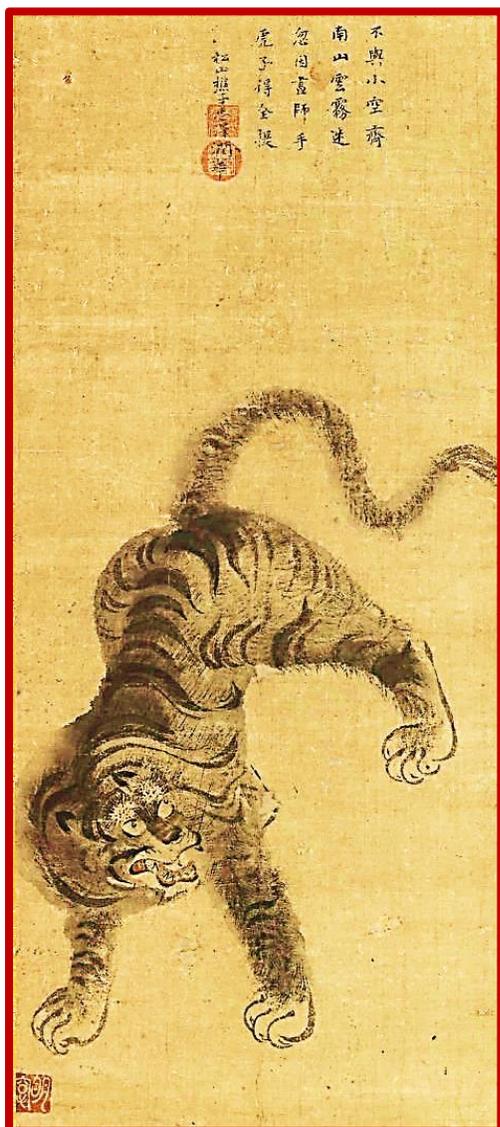
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## 2021 The year of the Tiger Akemashiteomedetōgozaimasu



Happy New Year, and welcome to the Year of the Tiger or more precisely, the Year of the Water Tiger.

There are twelve animal signs in the Japanese zodiac – rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and boar.

Additionally, there are five elements associated with each animal in the twelve-year cycle – metal, water, wood, fire, and earth. Consequently, your animal zodiac sign will occur every twelve years, while your specific animal/element zodiac sign will occur only once every 60 years.

If you were born in 1998, 1986, 1974, 1962, 1950, or 1938 this is your zodiac year in the 12-year cycle. If you were born in 1962, this is your birth-year of a lifetime; your animal/element zodiac sign has made its complete 60-year cycle.

It is worthy of noting that Fujiwara Hanshi was born in 1950, which is a year of the Metal Tiger. It is his year in the 12-year cycle.

In the Japanese zodiac, it is believed that all people who are born within any given calendar year share certain personality traits and attributes. If you are a Water Tiger and want to know your horoscope or are just curious, this information is readily available on the internet.

*Editor's Note: In the poem that at the top of the painting, the tiger is symbolic of someone who is traveling on the path toward enlightenment.*

*The recluse in a mountain cottage  
And the fabled tiger in the Southern Mountain  
Indulge themselves in hiding from the world.  
The tiger does not lose his way here.  
Suddenly, at the painter's hands,  
He attains complete existence.*



## Japanese New Year's Traditions

Japan adopted the Western (Gregorian) Calendar in 1873, and New Year's Day is celebrated on January 1<sup>st</sup> (as opposed to other Asian nations who celebrate the lunar New Year).



**The Ringing of Temple Bells (Joya no kane)** At the stroke of midnight on New Year's, Buddhist temples throughout Japan ring their bonsho (temple bells) 108 times. It is believed that this number represents the 108 human desires that result in the pain and suffering which is common to all humanity. The ringing of temple bells is a ritual meant to drive these negative desires away.

**Observing the First Sunrise of the New Year (Hatsuhinode):** Many people will awaken early in the morning to observe the first sunrise of the new year. Many others (like me) will remain in bed.

**Visiting a Shrine (Hatsumode):** One of the most traditional New Year's customs is the first shrine visit of the New Year. Usually, families visit a shrine together during the first few days of the new year. Together, they pay their respects and wish for a happy and healthy year.



**Surprise Bags (Fukubukuro):** Another New Year's Day tradition is to go out and buy fukubukuro. These surprise bags are sold at various prices and are purchased without knowing what's inside, but usually, the value of the items inside is worth more than the price of the bag was. However, it is the risk of not knowing what's inside that makes this tradition exciting. These bags quickly sell out.

**Deep Cleaning (Oosouji):** In Japanese culture, the new year must begin on a clean slate and every inch of the household is

cleaned, including places that remain untouched other times of the year.

**Writing Poetry (Haiku):** The writing of haiku that celebrate many of the firsts of the year is common. The first sunrise of the year, the first laughter or smile of the year, and the first dream of the year are common subjects in this tradition of New Year's Haiku.

**Performing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony:** It may surprise many of us to find out that one Japanese new year's tradition is the playing of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with its accompanying chorus. This national tradition dates back a century.



## **2021 – A Year to Remember**

**By Crystal Villagran**

As each new year passes, it's important to take a neutral stance and reflect upon what can be extracted from what took place throughout the 365 days that seemed to fly by. 2021 was a year to remember indeed. There are many points of view in which the year can be analyzed. As a dojo, we have endured change, remained grateful, kept our warrior spirit, and look forward in hope.

For most of 2021, Vassie Shihan taught strictly via Zoom. And although this was a great way to stay connected to our training, it is not a replacement for in-person training. Losing the Santa Monica dojo was difficult. However, he wanted to be certain our new home would be a fitting place for him to once again instruct and mentor. In Westwood, he found that place. This change would be fresh, new, and completely different from the previous location of 25 years. The change has been both endured and embraced.

With loss and change, comes gratitude. Both elements seem to force us to grasp what it feels like to miss what we once had. Being without a dojo was a great way to reflect upon what once was. As a student, I truly missed and developed a new appreciation for training in-person. Being in our new dojo home in Westwood, has been recharging and reprogramming. It's felt during class. Students show gratitude by the level of excitement expressed. The warrior spirit of karate always remained.

Part of practicing Goju-Ryu karate is maintaining the warrior spirit. Throughout the year, Shihan Vassie always led students on the positive path. At times, it seemed that finding a new dojo would never happen. The frustration was felt amongst the dojo members. But Shihan maintained his composure, calm, yet strong-willed. Even during construction and what seemed like pure chaos in the dojo, he kept on the warrior-spirit path of never giving up. He was the example that kept students hopeful during the most difficult times.

It's safe to say that going through almost an entire year of uncertainty can promote hopelessness to any person. However, being led by Shihan Vassie, Goju-Ryu Seiwa-Kai Karate of LA members have kept the spirit of hope alive. This hope is not just that we survive in a new location. This hope that we thrive. This hope is for the dojo to influence and promote wellness in the community. This hope is for helping people achieve fitness goals. This hope is for teaching self-defense to build confidence. This hope is for influencing children to stay on the positive path. This hope is for changing lives – one at a time.

As we reflect upon 2021, let us remember why we trained and lived. There are many manners in which we can choose to remember this past year. As a dojo, we are stronger and better than ever for change we've endured, the gratitude felt, the warrior spirit of karate kept, and the blazing, brilliant future of hope upon the horizon for the Pan American Hombu Dojo – Goju Ryu Seiwakai Karatedo of LA.



## Student and Teacher

By Emily Mata

Member of Women's Advisory Committee

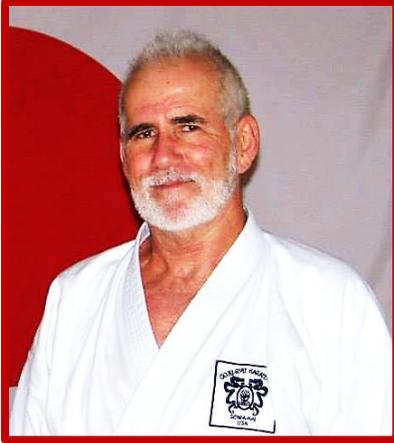
*Editor's Note: Last year, Mata Sensei started a karate club at Detroit College for Creative Studies where she is a senior. The following are her reflections and observations regarding this endeavor.*

In the beginning, I didn't want anyone to come to class. As a college student with little experience teaching inexperienced karateka, I was so afraid that my first impression wouldn't be sufficient, and that whatever I said and did would make my new students never want to return. Relief would flood over me when class would be halfway over, and nobody had showed up. It wasn't a lack of passion or a matter of disliking the act of instructing; it was my fear of teaching things incorrectly that was crippling.

Obviously, this mode of operation got boring very quickly. Practicing kata alone is something I can do without having started a karate club at my college. I reached a point where I considered ending the club and chalking it up to low participation, or a busy schedule, or any other number of excuses. In a last-ditch effort to continue, I threw aside my hesitations and fears and decided to simply do what I have always seen done. To fake it until I made it. Things only felt natural to me when I let go and simply let all of the teaching that had been given to me or that I had given to myself flow out. Twelve years of instruction, self-correction, and training is so much easier to share with others than what your anxieties tell you.

One observation that was continuous as I kept teaching my regular students was that I was giving tips, sharing stories, and correcting techniques exactly the way my Sensei does. I felt almost deceitful to my students, as if I were ripping off my Sensei's lessons and teaching them as if they were my own. Of course, that's nonsense, but you never think about how much someone else can change you until it comes time to share what they have given. To transfer this knowledge, all I had to do was change channels from student to teacher. As a teacher, I have also been learning more about myself and my karate from my students. In a way, they teach me too.

I found myself running class like I had always wanted it to be. The best preparation for being a teacher is being a student first. Then, of course, just trust in your training. You don't have to be the most qualified karateka to be a good teacher, you just have to love what you do (and have some pretty amazing instructors to look up to). I realized this, I taught like I always wanted to, and I became less afraid.



## **Commitment**

### **Jim Pounds, President, Seiwakai USA**

“Every day, you’re getting a little bit better or a little bit worse.”

I first heard this quote from Mark Victor Hansen, the international motivational speaker and co-editor of the Chicken Soup for the Soul book series. The first time I heard it, I remember thinking that I could coast along in the middle of those two directions when I didn’t feel like putting in the effort. Now I don’t think so.

Believe me, I’m not that astute about my own state of being, but I have students and I’m hyper-aware of their state of karate. The ones who practice get better. The ones who don’t get worse. They don’t stay in the same place. They regress. So, by observation, I must assume we are all probably the same.

This valuable lesson is true to every aspect of our lives, but for this article, I want to direct it toward several aspects of our karate lives – self-practice, group training, and training with our mentors. Mastery requires we spend time at all three.

Training by oneself is essential for growth and improvement. No one is pushing you, directing you, watching you. You are the master of your own universe and can decide just what needs work. What does need work may be different from your sensei’s perspective, but the important thing is that you are working on your karate. In karate training, getting better at one thing generally makes us better at all things, even though it may take a long time to realize the correlation. YOU get to decide what to work on. Do it regularly and you’ll discover a creativity emerging within. Your time of self-practice makes all other practice easier.

Group training allows us to train with our peers in methods dictated by someone qualified to teach. Group training teaches us a lot about the dynamics of energy. It gives us role models and partners to train with. The group is our barometer for how we’re doing and how we stack up to others. It is important to have sensei who are like bonsai artists – always shaping us with their knowledge and with their unique perspective outside of us. They see what we can’t and know what we don’t. The group provides the energy and the partners while the sensei provides the direction. Both are necessary to make us a little bit better.

Training with our mentors is where the true depth of knowledge is transferred from master to student, not only techniques and applications, but also the philosophical ‘knowing’. We are being passed something valuable beyond words through the many years of experience of our senior sensei, masters, and Hanshi. In Zen practice, this is known as the transmission, in which the knowledge of the master is transferred to the student in an instant, transcendent manner.

This transference of knowledge and philosophy is beyond words or demonstration and is only acquired from being in the presence of the master. However, the ability to accept the transmission generally requires years of diligent practice and study before the student is even capable of accepting – or of even understanding the gift being presented.

Training with our mentors is a rare honor, the highest honor of course is the opportunity to train with Hanshi Fujiwara. Next would be the honor of training with Vassie Naidoo Shihan, and on down through our many capable Shihan. Be aware that you will walk away from these opportunities with something almost indescribable – an understanding beyond the obvious about an art you thought you knew.



Sadly, I'm always amazed at how easily we yudansha pass up these opportunities. The excuses are many:

- It's too expensive
- I'll have to use vacation time
- I don't like to fly
- I already know what we'll be covering
- I don't need to grade this year

Mohandas Gandhi said, "Action expresses priorities." If it is important, you will find a way. If it is not, there will always be an excuse.

I'll close by recalling a memorial article written by Sensei William Dometrich about his Sensei, Dr. Tsuyoshi Chitose, the founder of Chito-Ryu Karate. Sensei was lamenting about all the missed opportunities he had to train with his Hanshi, and now that Dr. Chitose was deceased, those missed opportunities could never be made up. He counted the number of times he did train with Dr. Chitose over the many years of their association, and it was a startlingly low number. It made me go back and count the number of times I was able to train with Sensei Tasaki or Sensei Lipinski and I was shocked. I invite you to do the same.

Our senior instructors are treasures and once they are gone, so is the knowledge, except for what was passed on. Ponder that next time you decide that getting to a training with Fujiwara Shihan or Naidoo Shihan is a huge inconvenience.

"The way. Who will pass it on straight and well?"  
Gichin Funakoshi – Founder of Shotokan Karate

# Toward a Deep Understanding of Kata Technique

## By Wayland Louie



***“If you are good at performing the kata but don’t have a deep understanding of how to use the techniques of the form, then your training is meaningless.”***

The Saturday, January 22 workout session was a class set aside at the Honbu Dojo in Los Angeles, California for the instruction of kata Seipai. Shihan Vassie Naidoo invited Dojo members to attend the morning workout, in order to learn the kata with a different focus. Sempai Gail Oblinger and I decided to travel the approximately 100 miles (161 km) to participate in this detailed workout.

The session started with a warmup period. After some running, stretching, pushups and abdominal work, a short period of basics and moving combinations was conducted. During this time, Shihan Vassie stressed the importance of doing basic moves correctly, whether standing or moving, singly or in combination and whether they were being done in the first set of 10 repetitions or the fourth set. Shihan Vassie reminded the students that these basics carry over to the same moves in kata, as well as in kumite. If the basics are not performed correctly, it will be reflected in poorly executed kata. Worse yet, it will also result in ineffective kumite performance.

Shihan Vassie began the kata Seipai instruction in a common style. The first three moves were performed by Shihan Vassie, then repeated by the students numerous times. In a change from the familiar progression to the next three moves, followed by the next set of moves and on in that manner until the finish, Shihan Vassie showed bunkai for the first three moves. Then the students paired off to practice the bunkai several times. That was followed by the students performing the first three moves again, usually with much better form and focus. After that, Shihan Vassie showed the next three moves, followed by an illustration of the bunkai, which was followed by practice of the bunkai.

This in-depth examination of the moves drove home the point of focus within kata moves. Merely going through the physical motions without knowing the underlying reasons prevents understanding of the kime points necessary in the kata. As one of Shihan Gogen Yamaguchi's quotes says, "If you are good at performing the kata, but you don't have a deep understanding of how to use the techniques of the form, then your training is meaningless." As I reflected on how much my kata performance was changing, I noticed this quote on a picture hanging in the Honbu Dojo. It was quite a revelation to see that while Shihan Vassie was making our training more meaningful. Shihan Vassie has an innate ability to tailor training to be more impactful for his students.

Because of the concentration on each small section of the kata, we were only able to complete half of kata Seipai. The second part will be completed in a near-future class, after we have had time to work on what we learned this time and incorporate the lessons into our regimen. The high quality of this type of training and the high intensity of focus on the moves ensures I will return for that session.



## Women's Self-Defense Seminar

**WOMEN'S**  
**SELF-DEFENSE**  
**SEMINAR**

**Saturday**  
**3/12/2022**  
**10 am – 5 pm**

Hand to hand training of proven self defense and martial arts techniques used by law enforcement to teach you how to defend yourself against real world attacks.

**INSTRUCTORS**  
**Vassie Naidoo**  
8th Degree Karate Master  
**Robert DaLessio**  
Combat & Weapons Expert  
5th Degree Karate Master

**ENROLL TODAY!**

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Hosted by  
Goju-Ryu Seiwai-Kai  
Karate of LA

ENROLLHERE: <https://bit.ly/3Jx1UmN>

In this crucial time with the increase in violence in our communities, we want to help women learn how to protect themselves. Our Hands-On Women's Self Defense Seminar will teach you what to do if someone grabs you from the back, the front, or attacks with a knife.

Taught by Sensei Robert DaLessio and Shihan Vassie Naidoo.

Robert DaLessio is a 5th dan karate master and an expert on weapons. He will bring his experience in law enforcement tactics to show you practical hands-on training in self-defense.

Vassie Naidoo holds an 8th dan in Goju-Ryu Seiwai-Kai karate, one of only two people who hold this ranking in the world. He shows you how to use karate techniques such as punches, blocks, and kicks to defend yourself.

This class is designed for women of all ages. No karate experience is necessary. Please wear loose comfortable clothing and bring a bottle of water.

This seminar runs from 10:00 am - 5:00 pm with a 1-hour break for lunch.

# Seiwa Kai Around the Globe



## Goju Ryu Karatedo Seiwa Kai International



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Vice President: Satoru Takahashi



Vice President: Vassie Naidoo

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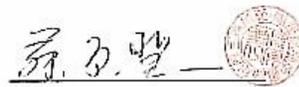
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All Japan Karate-Do Federation Goju Kai



Seiichi Fujiwara (President)

*“Lead them by political maneuvers, restrain them with punishments: the people will become cunning and shameless. Lead them by virtue, restrain them with ritual: they will develop a sense of shame and a sense of participation.” Confucius 孔子 (Koshi)*

# 2022 Seiwakai International Seminar and Shinsa Celebrating 50 years of Goju Ryu Karatedo Seiwakai



## From Fujiwara Hanshi

To all overseas Seiwakai members

I think everyone is doing well and devoting themselves to practicing karate. We would like to inform you that the schedule has been decided as follows. It's been two years since the event, so, I'm looking forward to resuming it.

### 2022 Seiwakai Overseas Seminar

**Dates:** July 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup>

**Times:** 9:30 AM to 5:00 PM (including lunch break)

### July 9<sup>th</sup> Rest Day

**Dates:** July 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>

**Times:** 9:30 AM to 5:00 PM (including lunch break)

**Date:** July 12th

**Time:** 12th 9:00 AM to 10:00 AM

**Venue:** All training is at the Omagari Daikyoku Budokan

### 2022 Seiwakai Shinsa

**Date:** July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022,

**Time:** 10:00 AM

- Shodan to Godan

**Time:** 2:00 PM

- Rokudan to Hachidan

**Venue:** All events Daikyoku Budokan, Omagari, Japan

\* We are planning a party from 5:00 PM after the shinsa.

## 2022 JKF Goju Kai Overseas Seminar, Shinsa, and Competition



### Overseas Seminar

#### Registration

**Date:** July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022,

**Time:** 8:00 AM

#### Seminar:

**Date:** July 14, 2022,

**Time:** 9:30 AM to 5:00 PM (with lunch break)

**Date:** July 15<sup>th</sup>

**Time:** 9:00 AM to 12:00

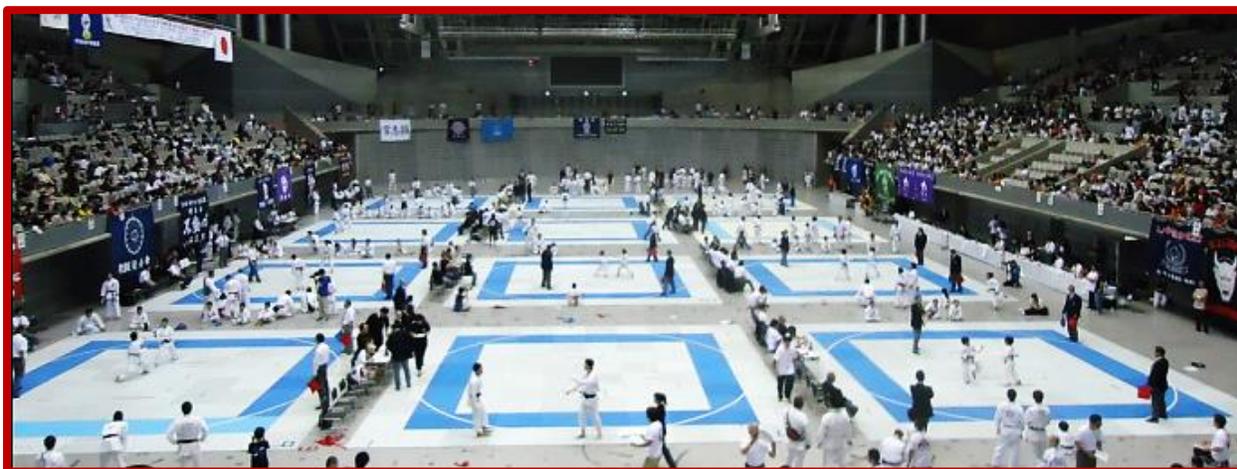
**Shinsa:** 1st to 5th dan and 6th to 8th dan

**Date:** July 15<sup>th</sup>

**Times:** announced the day before

**Venue:** Japan Karate Federation, Karate Dokaikan (Tokyo)

**The JKF Goju Kai party in Tokyo will be cancelled.**



## 2022 JKF Gojukai National Karatedo Championships

**Dates:** July 16-17, 2022

**Time:** Competition begins at 9:00 AM

**Venue:** Shin Budokan Yokohame, Japan

## Remembering Tasaki Hanshi in Photos From Rastislav Mraz

Tasaki Hanshi became the first All-Japan Goju Kai Kumite Champion in 1963. He was the premier student of Gogen Yamaguchi and an outstanding fighter. He was also a first-rate karate master, a world-wide Goju Ryu Karatedo icon, and the founder of Goju Ryu Karate Do Seiwakai International.

On the top left of this photo is Shuji Tasaki, 9th Dan Hanshi and at the bottom center is Goshi Yamaguchi, son of Gogen Yamaguchi.



This photo of Tasaki Hanshi with Rastislav Mraz is from a seminar in Lichtenstein.