



The Budō of Genwakai

I have spent more than 35 years studying Budō and Zen in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of Genwakai and its philosophy. The Genwakai philosophy is difficult to understand with certainty because Shihan Nangō's writings have not been translated into English. However, from what I have learned on my own studying Genwakai and my personal readings on Budō and Zen, I believe I have discovered the foundation of its philosophy.

The first concept to understand is that we are a "Satori" form of karate (not meant to be a sport or competitive game form). In Zen Buddhism "Satori" means enlightenment but it is not meant in the same context in Genwakai. In Genwakai, "Satori" takes on a different meaning that I will explain later.

My intent is to dispel the notion that Genwakai is dedicated to teaching someone how to fight. One may wonder why we use the body armor (bogu) when we engage in kumite (sparring). We do this to protect us from the possibility of serious injury because of the intensity of our techniques. It is true we use bogu for protection so we can apply our techniques without holding back. However, the act of kumite is not finding out how good we are at fighting, or to prepare us should the necessity ever arise. We use bogu because this is one of the ways to determine how far we have progressed in our state of kumite consciousness (see the 10 States of Kumite Consciousness at Genwakai.com).

If one has been a long-time student and has observed the act of bogu kumite, one sees that initiates generally begin with sloppy techniques and incorrect distancing (maai or mawai). One may say this is due to the student's apprehension and insecurity. Some may point out that to be a good fighter, one should engage in Kumite more often. Conventional wisdom may agree with this premise but there is something deeper here that is not immediately apparent.

The question I pose is "Why do students still falter, buckle, throw slow techniques, attack too close or too far and do not demonstrate all they have learned after spending many months developing good

solid techniques as they attempt to engage in kumite?” The reason is not how often they have engaged in kumite but the lack of time they have spent on refining the basic techniques. If they do kumite more, they simply become accustomed to each of the students in the dojo and will know what to expect. If they go out and do kumite with other dojo students or participate in public competitions they will not have the advantage of using bogu and without bogu a student will have to pull their techniques. In Genwakai we don't train to pull our techniques. We train to deliver a devastating, all-out technique each time. What if one doesn't pull their technique at the last second and injures someone? It's not until a student is well into the Black Belt rank that he is competent enough to pull techniques without diluting his Genwakai techniques. So this is not a good resolution.

The Theory of Progression is the Genwakai resolution to this issue. This theory states that a student first **learns the basic technique, polishes it until it is effective and finally applies the technique.** In many styles, applying the technique is done entirely too soon and this delays if not circumvents, the potential for a satisfactory end result. As one can see, the activity of kumite is not the end result but it is one of the steps to the end result. The end result is the **mastering of oneself.** This is the “Satori” of Genwakai and Martial Arts in general. How does delaying kumite and following the Theory of Progression enable a student to become a master of oneself? This can be accomplished through the act of meditation.

Meditation takes many forms and one of them is called active meditation (for example, long walks with a contemplative mind, jogging, yoga or any form of physical activity that requires mindful concentration). In Genwakai, the polishing process is active meditation. Doing repetitions of the same technique to improve it and make it perfect is the necessary ingredient. The act of observing each repetition, while cognizant of every nuance takes much concentration. The more one practices each technique, the deeper the understanding. Eventually, after many months of training, a technique becomes less demanding of one's attention as it improves and the mind opens (mushin, no-mind). With an open mind, one not only can feel each technique but also the stance, the feet, other body parts, balance, etc. This opening of the mind through active meditation is an integral part of attaining the Genwakai type of “Satori.”

Kata, not only constitutes a more intense form of active meditation which strengthens the openness of the mind but it also creates Tōkon (Fighting Spirit). Fighting Spirit can be defined as iron-willed intention. If one's intention is to perfect a kata one will practice it over and over. When will one reach the point of performing the kata perfectly? Occasionally it feels perfect. So now the goal is to be able to

perform it perfectly every time. When will that be accomplished? Probably never. Then what does one do, give up? Never! What is Fighting Spirit? Never, never, ever, giving up.

Fighting Spirit is especially important in kumite. On the most basic level, the body has a natural reaction to kumite called the “fight or flight” syndrome. In other words, one has a physical reaction to the prospect of competing against another person. One needs Fighting Spirit to overcome this natural instinct. The “fight or flight” syndrome is the root cause behind poor technique, poor strategy or lack of strategy and lack of confidence. Setting the right intention when going into kumite is extremely important and keeping an open mind leads to a positive outcome.

So now we have two ingredients of Satori. One is mushin, or openmindedness and the other is Tōkon, the iron willed intention of never giving up. The third ingredient is creativity.

Seiken Shukumine of Genseiryu (Nangō Tsugumasa Shihan’s former Sensei), professed the best strategy in kumite is to do the “unexpected.” What constitutes the unexpected? Once upon a time spinning kicks were unexpected and scored many points on the tournament circuit. The spinning back fist pioneered by Chuck Norris caught many opponents off guard in televised matches. Spinning techniques, requires one to turn their back on their opponent. Who, in their right mind, turns their back on their opponent? No one. Unless, it is part of creating an “unexpected” strategy.

So how does one come up with the “unexpected?” It is through the third ingredient, creativity. This is the most important, yet most difficult ingredient. How does one access creativity? Fighting Spirit allows one to be relaxed by overcoming the “Fight or Flight” syndrome and having an open mind allows creativity to flow.

Finding the avenue to creativity can only be proven in bogu kumite. Usually a preconceived strategy will work only once then it is no longer useful (spinning techniques for example are known techniques and no longer unexpected). Those who witness a preconceived strategy know what to look for and quickly develop counter strategies. To try to make strategy in advance will not produce the desired results and can only work for so long.

Creativity must produce a unique strategy at the moment of greatest need. It overpowers oneself and one’s opponent. Because of the intensity of the moment, one doesn’t realize what is done until it is over and then, consciousness returns to ask: “What just happened?” Every single encounter requires its

own specific creative response. That same strategy cannot be repeated again because it is the one and only correct response for that particular situation.

Artists, writers, business people, and martial artists, all seek the ability to capture creativity. Attempting to capture it will only make it more fleeting. One has to relax and open the mind to allow it to enter. Just like performing consistently perfect technique, creativity in Budō is equally difficult. Genwakai gives a prescription for how to find it.

My knowledge of Genwakai's philosophy has evolved to this level of understanding. I have combined my study of whatever little has been translated about Genwakai from Nangō's books with my own personal experiences, my years of intense training, the polishing of my techniques, and the application of them in bogu kumite. In my 39 years of study I have been faithful to the Genwakai approach to karate and have taught the purest form of its style. For me it is a never-ending journey in pointing out to all who have a passion for this style, the depth of thought which has evolved into the Budō of Genwakai America.

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