

The Power of 3

By *Sensei Thomas Hartly*

In our world the number three has played an important part in our societies' beliefs, religions and arts. This number of three was considered in many cultures a highly admired symbol. For the Egyptians, 3 is the number of the cosmos that comprises three elements: sky, earth and "duat" (zone surrounding the intermediate worlds between the earth and celestial spirits). This was considered the perfect number according to the Chinese. In the *Bible* there are many uses of the number three. To be exact the number three is used 523 times in the *Bible*. Also the Buddhist monk's prayer beads (mala) are an exact amount of beads that is divisible by the number three. Within our style of Shuri Ryu the number three shows its importance numerous times and here are some examples:

3 categories of kata: mind, body, and spirit

3 defense postures: full face, half face, and side face

3 target levels: upper, middle, and lower

3 types of Kiai: before, during, and after

3 levels of blocking: wrist, just above elbow, and between elbow and armpit

3 Tai Kyoku forms: high block & punch, middle block & punch, and low block & punch

3 conflicts in Sanchin: birth, survival, and death

3 Nainanchi forms: Sho, Ni, and San

3 types of attack: go no sen, sen no sen, and sensen no sen

3 levels of breath: throat, stomach, and lower stomach (hara)

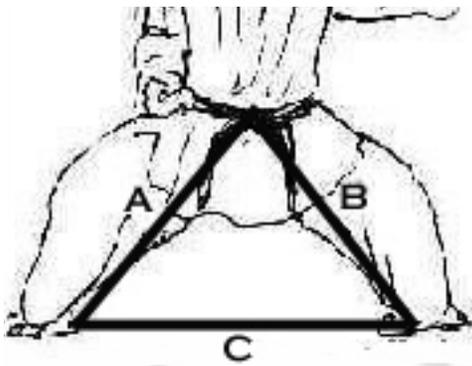
3 levels of bunkai: Omote, Ura and, Okuden

3 principles of Shuri punch: twisting, shifting forward, and down (sinking)

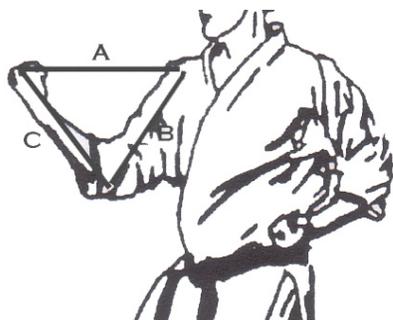
3 parts to a throw: Enter (Irimi), off balance (Kuzushi) and, Throw (nage)

There are many more that can be found in the Katas and other areas of Shuri Ryu. These I have listed are obvious examples of the number three. The basis of this paper is to show you some of the not so obvious examples. The ones I am talking about are the mathematical examples of the number three.

Let's take a quick review with some geometry. In geometry, an object with three equal sides is considered to be a triangle. An Isosceles triangle must have at least two congruent sides. An Equilateral triangle has exactly three congruent sides. It has been proven mathematically that a triangle is a symbol of strength. This is why the Egyptians built their pyramids in this design, and over these hundreds of years, the pyramids are still standing. So, you're probably thinking 'what does a triangle have to do with anything within the Shuri Ryu system.' There are three examples to discuss.



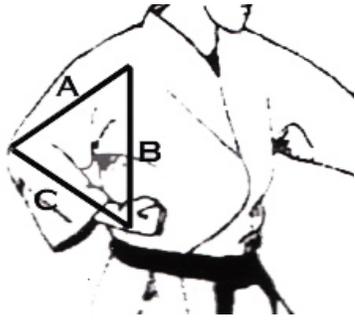
To begin with, the first example is the Kiba dachi. In training we work our Kiba stances wide to strengthening our legs. For our kiba to be considered a strong stance, it must be in the form of a triangle. To have your feet too wide in a kiba you can't effectively move your center with ease. If your feet are too close together then you are simply unbalanced with no foundation. Your kiba should be no less than a third of your body height and no wider than the length of your legs. So a person that is 6 feet tall should have a span of two feet between his kiba to be structurally strong. You might think that is too small, but if you take a fighting stance you will notice in that stance that your span between your two feet will be accurate for your height. So wide stances look great in tournaments but have no practicality in effectively allowing you to move easier with a strong foundation.



The next example is the middle block. This block should be an example of an equilateral triangle, meaning having exactly three equal sides. Blocking too far away from the body proves that structurally the block is not effective which is the same if you are blocking too close to the body and not optimizing the strength of the triangle. Notice the fist is on the same line as the shoulder, which creates our triangle. To strengthen this block you should also take out the slack. This is done at the completion of the block the wrist should pass the shoulder span slightly which will cause the wrist to pass the shoulder line and the elbow

will move in towards midline slightly. This will eliminate any slack left in the block. For this block to be effective it must also rely on the third triangle I will mention.

Finally, the last one is our chamber hand, which also plays an important part in the strength of our punches and our blocks. To punch effectively the opposite side of the punch also has to be strong. You can't simply throw out a punch or a block and leave your



opposite hand hanging by your side. There must be a yin and yang to our blocks and punches. Throwing out a block there must be an opposite reaction of the other hand snapping back to chamber. This opposite hand will also form an equilateral triangle. If this hand is not pulled back far enough into chamber then it will be ineffective to help strengthen your block or punch. To test your chamber

hand, simply take a forward stance and put out a middle punch with a weak chamber and have a person apply pressure to the front of your middle punch. You should notice you have trouble keeping your shoulder from giving way along with your elbow. Now apply a proper chamber and take the slack out by turning your wrist, making sure that the pinky is on a slightly higher plane than your thumb. Have the person repeat the pressure to the front of your middle punch. You should see a significant difference in strength and stability. The torque or turn of the wrist is a finishing touch to the triangle, which takes out any excess slack.

So, as you can see, the science of mathematics plays an important part in our art and helps us create strong stances, strong blocks, and effective punches. Mathematics is considered to be a science. A wrong calculation could be disastrous. This is also true with your karate. So, next time you're blocking and punching, remember your triangles and strengthen your karate.