

Tai Otoshi – Using the power of the earth

Christina Gutz

Wado training course with Toby Threadgill (USA), Menkyo Kaiden, Takamura-Ha Shindo Yoshin Ryu Jujutsu and Bob Nash (USA), 7. Dan JKF Wadokai from February 26nd – February 28th 2011 in Berlin

200 participants, including numerous guests from England, Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands, Israel, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Serbia trained together for two days in Berlin under the direction of Toby Threadgill and Bob Nash. In addition, more than 25 blackbelts attended a special course for instructors led by Bob Nash on Monday evening. The large number of participants at this year's seminar illustrates the increasing popularity of the Berlin training course, where many national and international contacts can be established and existing ones strengthened.

Toby Threadgill leads Takamura-Ha Shindo Yoshin Ryu Jujutsu, one of only two legitimate lines in the world today. Shindo Yoshin Ryu (SYR) is a development of Yoshin Ryu which was founded by Yoshitoki Akiyama in the middle of the 16th century. The tradition of the Shindo Yoshin Ryu Jujutsu was founded by Matsuoka Katsunosuke (1836 - 1898) during the late Edo period.

Bob Nash is the founder of the Wado Guseikai USA, which stands within the tradition of Hironori Otsuka (1892 – 1982) and is connected with Wadokai Japan (Japan Karate-Do Federation) under the leadership of Dr Hideho Takagi, 8th dan JKF Wadokai.

Wado Ryu was founded by **Hironori Otsuka** (1892 – 1982) and its roots are in Okinawa-Karate and in Shindo Yoshin Ryu.

Toby Threadgill and Bob Nash seek to impart principles of Nihon Budo and SYR (Shindo Yoshin Ryu) in order to contribute to a better understanding of the Martial Arts in general and of the Wado-Karate in particular.

The Training

On both days the training began with a combined group session. During this collective training, Toby Threadgill and Bob Nash illustrated the technical legacy existing between Shindo Yoshin Ryu and Wado by showing that Hironori Otsuka transferred principles of the SYR to Wado ryu. Afterwards the participants were divided into two groups: one trained under the direction of Bob Nash and the other under Toby Threadgill.

Chushin Tadasu and Tai Otoshi

At the beginning of the training course Toby Threadgill explained that the Japanese budo were often mystified in Japan due to there being no orthodox pedagogy for the explanation of core principles. Using Shindo Yoshin Ryu, Toby Threadgill and Bob Nash demonstrated that the sensitivity for one's own body and awareness of correct posture are required to successfully perform techniques without resorting to an excessive use of force.

Maintaining correct posture by adhering to the principle of Chushin Tadasu is very important. With shoulders and spine aligned over the hip and with the hip bone aligned over the ankles, the body structure is sound. This allows minimal muscular power for movement. Toby Threadgill impressively demonstrated this principle by performing several of the TSYR (Takamura-Ha Shindo Yoshin Ryu) Nairiki kata. In the course of the training, participants were instructed in the proper execution and understanding of these seldom seen but important kata.

Toby Threadgill and Bob Nash demonstrated with their own bodies how well they were grounded (connected to earth) by having people push at them in order to unbalance them as they stood in either Naihanchi stance or on one foot. The harder people tried to push them over, the more grounded they became. At this point, Bob Nash drew the attention to the fact that Hironori Otsuka had learned the Nairiki Kata before he learned karate. When Otsuka Sensei later saw Naihanchi, he understood the meaning of this kata and based on this experience developed Yoko and Tate Seishan Dachi, both stances found only in Wado ryu. Consequently, both stances have a direct connection to the internal body dynamics of the Nairiki Kata, and thus to that of the SYR. More specifically, yoko seishan and tate seishan are modifications of the Naihanchi stance and the Naihanchi stance resembles many of the stances in the Nairiki kata. During the exercises that followed, concerning Nairiki and Naihanchi, Bob Nash and Toby Threadgill introduced another principle of the SYR: **Tai Otoshi** (body dropping). With the correct posture and stance it is possible to use the power of the earth by shifting the center of gravity to the ground and pulling your own body down. Additionally, it is important to work in a relaxed state and from the center of the body. Tai Otoshi is also part of the SYR Kata Yoizuki: dropping your body thereby adds power to your movement through its connection to the earth. This principle is reflected again in numerous Wado Kata and techniques, par example in Kihon Kumite 3 and 8, as well as in the opening move of Pinan Nidan and the part in Chinto.

Tai Otoshi and further principles

After transferring to partner exercises, Toby Threadgill stated that one should put their mind in order first and then control the partner. Using Ryote Dori (grasping both wrists) as a concrete example, Toby Threadgill demonstrated more principles of the SYR: **Irimi, Ju no Musubi, Go no Musubi, Kansetsu, and Kuzushi**. The defender transfers his energy from his centre forward to the attacker: Irimi. He establishes a connection with his hands to the body of the attacker: Ju no Musubi or Go n Musubi. He controls the attacker by locking his joints: Kansetsu. Subsequently he unbalances the attacker: Kuzushi. The throw is executed by dropping of the body weight: Tai Otoshi. It is important that the defender maintains correct body structure (Chushin Tadasu), works in a relaxed state, thereby developing sensitivity to his partners structure (Toby Threadgill compared it with touching silk). In this way the defender maintain flexible but effective control over the attacker.

The principles of the Shindo Yoshin Ryu in Wado

Bob Nash used the Kata Naihanchi and Seishan and also basic techniques to demonstrate that the principles of the SYR are inherent in the Wado, because the moves of Hironori Otsuka were influenced by the SYR, since he learned SYR first. This distinguishes Wado from other karate styles.

Standing in Naihanchi or yoko/tate seishan correctly allows the individual to be grounded so they can connect to the earth and utilize its energy. Consequently it makes any block or punch executed from yoko/tate seishan extremely powerful, more powerful than one would normally expect from such a position. During the Berlin training course, Toby Threadgill and Bob Nash successfully demonstrated the principles of Nihon Budo and SYR to the participants and sensitized them to the feeling of their own body. The participants came to understand that techniques can be performed softly without using excessive force by implementing these principles. The mystery of the Martial Arts was exposed and a better understanding of the Budo, and the Wado in particular was achieved.

Reunion 2012

On 25th and 26th February 2012 Toby Threadgill and Bob Nash will be back in Berlin. We are all cordially invited to attend this training course.