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Body Mechanics in Budo

Wado and TSYR Pentecost Seminar with Toby Threadgill (US) and Shuzo Imai (Germany) in Berlin from 7th to 9th June, 2014

110 participants met for the 2014 Wado and TSYR Pentecost Seminar in Berlin. The instructors were **Toby Threadgill** (Menkyo Kaiden, Takamura ha Shindo Yoshin ryu) and **Shuzo Imai** (8th Dan Wado ryu).

Wado ryu was founded by **Hironori Otsuka** (1892 – 1982) and rests on two pillars: Shindo Yoshin ryu and Okinawa karate. The historic link between Wado ryu and Shindo Yoshin ryu is still reflected in the techniques and core principles of SYR which Hironori Otsuka integrated into Wado ryu.

The purpose of the seminar was to convey to the participants that proper body mechanics¹ in budo is the pre-condition for developing speed and power on the basis of relaxation, resulting in effective techniques. Toby Threadgill and Shuzo Imai demonstrated impressively that this realization, which has also been confirmed by modern sports science, is inherent in budo in general and in TSYR and Wado ryu in particular.

The participants trained in two groups, alternating between Toby Threadgill and Shuzo Imai. The exercises and explanations of the two senseis were aligned with each another. The historic link between TSYR and Wado ryu thus became an accessible and tangible experience for the participants.

Proper body mechanics in budo

Toby Threadgill used various partner kata and selected Nairiki no Gyo kata to teach that a correctly aligned body (Chushin Tadasu), the difference between a connected and unconnected body, acting from a state of relaxation and using gravity (Tai Otoshi) are essential for good techniques. It is important in a fight to control and protect one's own center of gravity while disturbing that of the opponent. "The second he touches me he is out of balance"² Toby Threadgill emphasized in each partner kata which the participants did the basic principles of Ateimi, Kuzushi, Tsukuri and Kake which are the pre-conditions for successful action, for defeating the opponent.³

Shuzo Imai also placed a strong focus on correct body alignment (Chushin Tadasu) as the basis for acting from a state of relaxation and, consequently, for flexibility and speed. The participants first practiced this in basic techniques (Kihon) and then translated this in partner drills mainly into evasive techniques

1 Body mechanics: the field of physiology that studies muscular actions and the function of muscles in maintaining body posture. Mosby's Medical Dictionary, 8th edition. © 2009, Elsevier

2 Toby Threadgill, 2014 Wado and TSYR Pentecost Seminar in Berlin, 7th June, 2014

3 „Ateimi marks the beginning; it may be active or passive, mental (e. g., by exerting pressure on the opponent or by intimidating or frightening him) or physical (e. g., by striking or punching sensitive points on the opponent's body). The opponent is then unbalanced, that is Kuzushi is achieved. Tsukuri means getting the opponent in a position in which he is no longer able to act or defend himself. Kake signifies that the opponent is finally controlled, oneself is safe and has several options to counterattack." Christina Gutz: Below the Surface: Deeper Insights into Wado ryu and Shindo Yoshin ryu. Wado Seminar with Toby Threadgill (USA) and Robbie Smith (New Zealand) in Berlin on 22nd and 23rd February, 2014

(Taisabaki) in conjunction with the principles of Irimi, Kuzushi, Tsukuri and Kake – here often in the form of Nage.

The principles drive the art⁴

In their joint presentation, Toby Threadgill and Shuzo Imai expanded on the core principles which they taught in the training sessions.

Shuzo Imai emphasized the benefits of relaxation (Datsu Ryuku), i.e., movements are difficult to observe for the opponent and fast, smooth and powerful techniques become possible. Relaxation makes it also possible to develop a mental calm allowing effective and decisive action. What is more, it is possible at any age to be relaxed, make use of gravity and, thus, remain faithful to budo.

Toby Threadgill followed up to Shuzo Imai's presentation by underlining that the principles of Wado ryu karate and TSYR are the same. This is also illustrated by the translation of the term Jujutsu: Jujutsu refers to a flexible body and a flexible mind. It dates back to the samurai who had to be effective and flexible in combat. If they had expended their power and energy in a short time they would have met an untimely death on the battle field. We must therefore learn also in contemporary budo to relax and develop a reliable and safe feeling for our body structure, for the function of our skeleton and muscles.

Conversely, this means that the more tension the opponent has the easier it is to defeat him. Physical tension is often also an indication of mental tension, and expression of fear, paralysis, façade or nervousness. Relaxation, in turn, is not only a sign of mental calm and composure, but also the pre-condition for decisive action and makes it possible in a fight to take the initiative (Sente) and reach one's target directly (Kakugo). This notion of initiative shared by Shindo Yoshin ryu and Wado ryu was impressively demonstrated and taught by Toby Threadgill and Shuzo Imai.

Learning and understanding step by a step⁵

Shuzo Imai and Toby Threadgill also agreed that all this needs to be internalised if movements are to become smooth and natural and to be executed directly and immediately from the unconscious. This is a step-by-step process, requires time and also the willingness to learn by failing⁶. In this context, the right attitude was important both to Toby Threadgill and Shuzo Imai. Mindfulness (Zanshin) with respect to one's own person and environment.

4 Toby Threadgill, 2014 Wado and TSYR Wado Pentecost Seminar in Berlin, 8th June, 2014

5 Shuzo Imai referred to a Bujutsu saying: Shogo atsumarite Taigo to naru 小悟集まり手大悟に到る. You learn and understand step by step. This will eventually lead to insight and enlightenment.

6 The only way to learn is to fail: "In your failing you learn." Toby Threadgill, 2014 Wado and TSYR Pentecost Seminar in Berlin, 8th June, 2014

The participants had this mindfulness during the three-day course, which was reflected in the great willingness to learn, the open-mindedness and the spirit of cooperation.

2015 Wado Pentecost Seminar

We would like to invite everybody who is interested in martial arts to the 2015 Wado Pentecost Seminar in Berlin.