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Chushin Tadasu and the interplay between posture and balance

Wado training course with Toby Threadgill (USA) and Bob Nash (USA) from February 25th – February 27th 2012 in Berlin

160 participants, including numerous guests from Finland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden, trained together for two days in Berlin under the direction of **Toby Threadgill** (Menkyo Kaiden, Takamura-Ha Shindo Yoshin Ryu Jujutsu) and **Bob Nash** (7. Dan JKF Wadokai). In addition, on Monday evening more than 20 blackbelts attended a special course for instructors led by Bob Nash. As in previous years, national and international contacts were established and maintained on the annual Berlin Wado training course.

It was a special honor and pleasure to welcome **Shuzo Imai** (8. Dan Wado Ryu) as a guest on the training course. Together with Toby Threadgill, Mr. Imai will lead the Wado Whitsun Training Course, which will take place from May 26th – May 28th 2012 in Berlin.

Wado Ryu was founded by **Hironori Otsuka** (1892 – 1982), a karate style with roots in both Shindo Yoshin Ryu (SYR) and Okinawa-Karate. The historical connection between Wado Ryu and Shindo Yoshin Ryu can still be found, e.g. in the principles of the SYR, which Hironori Otsuka has integrated into the Wado Ryu. The aim of the training course was to discover the heritage of Wado and to give a deeper understanding of the details in Wado Ryu.

The training

On both days the training began with a presentation by Toby Threadgill and Bob Nash illustrating the connection between SYR and Wado Ryu. After the presentation the participants were divided into two groups: one training under the direction of Bob Nash and the other under the direction of Toby Threadgill.

Chushin Tadasu: Maintaining of the body structure

Using the sword Toby Threadgill demonstrated convincingly that speed is more important than power. But speed of movement can only be developed if body and mind are well balanced. This balance in turn depends on a correct body posture, which enables effective muscular work. In the face of an attack, the body posture of the defender causes the attacker to not be able to feel the center of the defender. When contact occurs (Musubi) between the defender and the attacker, the defender immediately sends energy into the attacker. The attacker can then be brought off balance (Kuzushi), before he has a chance to realize he has been put in a state of Kuzushi.

Toby Threadgill also illustrated these basic principles using the SYR Nairiki Kata. With the demonstration of a second kata, the kata Banjaku, it was also clearly evident that the body structure enables a correct working of the muscles and through the use of one's own gravity center, the body is dropped downwards and thus the force of gravity is utilized (Tai Otoshi). It became clear here that control of one's body and mind and sensitivity, a "keen awareness", are the requirements for a successful engagement.¹

In one of the following exercises, the partners faced each other, holding their palms against each other. One of the partners attempted to off balance the other who is standing in a stationary position. The defender was able to absorb the attackers force and while staying in balance reflect the energy back into the point of origin all the while maintaining correct body posture. In order to develop this kind of highly developed sensitivity, it is imperative that the movement is efficiently transmitted from the body axis, the spine, and from a relaxed state.

¹ The correct use of the pelvis and the pelvic girdle is also essential for a good posture and technique.

Bob Nash then transferred these principles to the ido Kihon (moving basics), the Kata Naihanchi, Chinto, Seishan as well as to the partner exercise Kihon Kumite 9. His demonstration made the direct connection between Wado Ryu and SYR clear: the methods for generating energy are based on a relaxed and connected body structure. Hence, movement from the base can be transmitted through the bone structure and out through a contact point (with the partner). Muscle tension blocks the fluidity of this connection, hindering proper movement and the efficient transfer of energy. Only under those principles can the techniques be performed effectively. Bob Nash demonstrated why correct body posture and being 'rooted' is important from the start, the transition and the end of any given ido kihon for maximum power transfer to take place at impact.

The fight as an emergency

In their joint presentation Toby Threadgill and Bob Nash went back in history and made it clear that previous martial conflicts were a matter of life and death. Therefore, Toby Threadgill concluded that the core of the SYR is victory over the enemy.

He backed his statement by resisting a sword attack successfully with the comment: "I've got to maintain structure so he loses structure. ... You're cut before you know to lose the sword. ... One cut and it's gone."²

Bob Nash followed up on this added that, in principle, Wado is also about winning a deadly confrontation. The enemy must be defeated before he realizes it. On the basis of Kihon Kumite 1 and 9, he demonstrated the principles of the SYR in Wado: With the first block (Nagashi uke) in Kihon Kumite 9 the defender makes contact (Musubi) with the attacker and redirects the attack. Just as he makes contact in the block he can subtly connect to the opponent's center and root the attacker. And because the connection is so subtle, the attacker does not realize he has been rooted. So when the attacker then continues with the next attack he feels stuck. And this 'stuckness' allows the defender enough time to counter the attack with and finish off the opponent. The key to all of this is that this energy transfer from the defender to the attacker's center is happening without the attacker being aware that his center has been compromised.

Kata and the preservation of history³

The knowledge about the history and hence about the principles is imparted in, amongst others, the kata⁴. Toby Threadgill pointed out emphatically that the kata and the principles contained in them should not be changed under any circumstances. The purpose of the kata is the teaching of the principles. Toby Threadgill compared the kata with a dictionary, each partner has his function. Cooperation and attention to safety are important to be able to understand and perform the Kata properly.

Three versions of the kata can be distinguished:

1. Omote: The "surface" of a kata. This is not about the practical implementation, but about learning the principles.
2. Ura: The "deeper knowledge" that is hidden in the kata, which is only taught to selected highly graduate students. The Ura version is more based on the application.
3. Henka: The individual version of the kata. It is very realistic - up to the point of killing.

All three versions are included in a kata, based on the principles. Thus the reason for the existence of the Kata is the preservation of the history and the historical knowledge contained therein.

² Toby Threadgill: Wado training course in Berlin, 26.02.2012

³ "Kata – Formalized movements used as a method of training" Toby Threadgill: Takamura ha Shindo Yoshin Kai, Student Handbook. Evergreen, Colorado 2009, S. 185

⁴ It should be noted that in SYR a partner exercise is also called Kata.

In this context, it should be considered that Hironori Otsuka taught the principles, not the practical application of e.g. the Tantodori. Otsuka stylized the attacks with the knife, so the principles can be practiced without mutual injury.

A look into the past: the awarding of the licenses

The participants were granted a special look into the past with the awarding of the licenses (Shoden mokuroku) to Marco and Artur Pinto. In contrast to Wado Ryu, where it is possible to obtain a Dan degree (today 1st to 10th Dan, formerly 1st to 5th Dan), in the old Koryu schools teaching licenses are awarded. In SYR the three licenses reflect the three stages of teaching: 1. Shoden, 2. Chuden, 3. Joden. Toby Threadgill gave Marco Pinto and Artur their Shoden licenses: A scroll includes the curriculum for weapons, a second the curriculum for the Tai Jutsu. The scrolls were made and written by Toby Threadgill, the Menkyo Kaiden, as is traditional custom.

Chushin Tadasu and the interaction between attitude and acting in the world

Taken together, in this training course Toby Threadgill and Bob Nash demonstrated the connection between SYR and Wado Ryu by revealing the importance of common principles and how they are embedded in the heritage of SYR and Wado. Furthermore, Toby Threadgill explained the interaction between posture and balance to the participants. Ultimately, our inward and outward attitudes determine our actions not only in the dojo, but also in the world.

Reunion 2013

From February 23rd to February 25th 2013 Toby Threadgill and Bob Nash will be back in Berlin.

We cordially invite everyone to participate in this training course.