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Kumite and Randori: The Bridge between Kata Training and Freestyle Fighting

Wado and TSYR Seminar with Toby Threadgill (USA) and Kaki Kawano (Japan) in Berlin on 21st and 22nd February, 2015

125 participants, among these a group which came specifically for this course from Pakistan and guests from Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Spain, trained in Berlin for two days under the guidance of **Toby Threadgill (Menkyo Kaiden, Takamura ha Shindo Yoshin Ryu Jujutsu)** and **Kaki Kawano (5th Dan JKF Wado-Kai)**. This traditional Wado and TSYR seminar was another opportunity for national and international exchanges and for renewing friendships. It was an honour and a pleasure alike to also welcome Shuzo Imai (8th Dan Wado ryu) and Norma Foster (7th Dan JKF Wado-Kai) from Canada.

The Origin of Free-Fighting in Karate is Sword Work

Toby Threadgill initially explained that there was virtually no free-fighting in karate and in Okinawa before Hironori Ohtsuka founded Wado ryu. There were, indeed, jujutsu competitions based on free-fighting in Japan during the Edo period but it was Hironori Ohtsuka who developed the earliest methods of karate jiyu kumite from jujutsu randori and shiai and introduced free-fighting with a set of rules into karate. From the historical point of view, free-fighting came from the sword via jujutsu and kendo to karate¹. In relation to this, Toby Threadgill said that when he saw Kaki Kawano fighting he saw the principles of sword work. In the person of Kaki Kawano, an internationally experienced instructor and multiple kumite champion, e. g., winner of the All National Tournament (Budokan Tokyo), European Wado Championship (Sweden), All Australian Championship, and Wado World Cup (UK), trained the participants of the Berlin seminar.

Sente - Initiative and Attack, and Further Principles of Kata Training and Freestyle Fighting

Unlike Okinawa karate, where self-defense has priority, the Japanese martial arts and, thus, Wado ryu, are based on combat and martial confrontation. Sente means initiative. The mindset is also one of attacking: There are always two attackers who act, not one attacker and one defender. The timing of the attack is also important. A distinction is made here between Go No Sen (reactive timing), Sen No Sen (simultaneous timing) and Sen Sen No Sen (anticipating timing). TSYR and Wado ryu comprise even more basic principles than Sente. Taisabaki (evasive action), controlling the opponent, Maai (distance) and the correct angle of the attack. Toby Threadgill demonstrated this impressively by means of some sword kata, and Kaki Kawano used selected Wado ryu partner drills (e. g., Kihon kumite 1, 2, 7) which he translated into free-fighting techniques in his session.

¹ "Wado is the root from all freestyle fighting and it came from sword." Toby Threadgill, Wado and TSYR seminar 21st, 22nd February, 2015 in Berlin

In his well-structured training session on the first day, Kaki Kawano moved from Kihon to distance exercises with a partner where he explained the different types of Sente, correct Maai, Taisabaki, timing and reaction. These aspects were trained in groups of two, then three and, eventually, six. Kaki Kawano succeeded in relaxing and challenging the participants within a very short time in such a way that they were able to develop speed, reaction and timing with a high degree of motivation from a state of relaxation. On the second day, Sente and Taisabaki were combined with diversified footwork, always in conjunction with Irimi (moving in), baiting the opponent, for instance with a feint, and detecting and exploiting gaps in his guard. The session closed with fights with a referee: The targets were proper timing, speed, evasive action, unbalancing the opponent, applying the knowledge and skills gained from Kihon and Kihon kumite and, in the ideal case, reacting instinctively.

Toby Threadgill conveyed the meaning of and the differences between Go No Sen, Sen No Sen and Sen Sen No Sen to the participants with his impressive, precise demonstrations and the ensuing exercises. Fast and effective evasive moves were practised with, inter alia, the three basic TSYR Taisabaki techniques and combined with various counter attacks. Some of Toby Threadgill's central messages were: It is essential to keep one's own structure and retain the upper hand while unbalancing the opponent. "As long as I have my centre of gravity he can't control me. ... I want to connect him on my own terms."² While one is relaxed (Jujutsu means flexibility.) all types of timing are possible. Toby Threadgill also emphasized that confidence in one's techniques and the application of all principles are pre-requisites for success and this results, eventually, in freestyle fighting.

The Bridge between Kata Training and Freestyle Fighting

Toby Threadgill and Kaki Kawano conveyed to the participants that kata teaches the principles and techniques and that freestyle fighting is the exercise for this. They succeeded in explaining impressively the historic link between TSYR and Wado ryu in providing individual guidance to everybody despite the large number of participants. Thus, the training atmosphere was characterised by mutual respect, learning together and a high degree of attention.

We are looking forward to meeting again from February 06 to 07, 2016, and invite everybody interested in martial arts to attend again.

² Toby Threadgill, Wado and TSYR seminar 21st, 22nd February, 2015 in Berlin