

SRKHIA Newsletter 3/03

Dear karateka,

One year ago, in Glasgow, Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha Instructors Academy was officially opened its doors to the world. It comprised and continues to be, the materialization of a vision by certain people, to follow a certain way (michi) in the practice and development of karate. Since then a lot of water has been poured into the river. We have been developed in size but most importantly in quality. *Quality is the foremost principle in our organization.* Quality not only in technique, but primarily in character as the Dojo kun directs, "*Jinkaku kansei ni tsutomuru koto*" (exert oneself in the perfection of the character). It is through hard training and daily practice that we strengthen our spirit and we forge our character, in the same way the master swordsmith forges the perfect blade of a katana. With a slight difference, a katana requires certain time to be forged, our forging is a lifetime effort, achieved through diligent practice. Because "*the essence of karate is in practice*".

Budo Themes 'Osu!' | its meaning and use

The class bowed to the sensei. The familiar sound '**Osu!**' filled the air. But how many of them do really know what this expression means? Or do they simply repeat it in a mechanical fashion, ignoring its meaning and essence? What about us? Have you ever asked yourself what it means? Certainly everyone trained in a karate dojo, knows it or hear it spoken as an all-purpose expression of greeting and acknowledgement. But "**Osu!**" isn't so simple. It comes with a certain baggage attached to it, in the form of rules for appropriate use and pronunciation and most importantly in essence. I have a feeling that most people, using this word today, neither pronounce it correctly nor do they use it appropriately; most importantly they may ignore its deeper meaning and essence.

Regarding **the Origin of "Osu!"** two theories are prevailing.

The first one comes from Dr. Mizutani Osamu, a linguistics professor at the University of Nagoya and his work "**Japanese: The Spoken Language in Japanese Life**". He talks about an experiment with people in returning greetings. He has concluded that "**Osu**" is probably a contraction of the more formal expression "**Ohayo gozaimasu**" which means, very politely, "It is early", and is commonly used in Japan as "good morning". Mizutani considers that "Osu!" is a rough expression used by men toward other men, that it means "Hi ya!" in English. More specifically, **Ohayo** is a more familiar and intimate expression, used in a casual way towards friends and neighbours. **Ohayossu** or **ohayoosu** is a more athletic, male expression. You might hear it from a neighbour you don't know well, if you greet him while he is jogging past you. **Ossu** or **oosu** is a very tough, rough expression of masculinity. Used mainly by young people and others engaged in athletic activities together. It is generally aimed toward one's colleagues, not the coach, instructor, or other seniors. Attention; the expression is avoided by women, unless the particular culture of the athletic activity has become one in which the ladies use this word regularly. (Writers note: Men's and women's language usage differs more in Japanese than it does in English. There are distinct feminine and masculine expressions and the Japanese find it inappropriate for women and men to use each other's language.)

The other theory to the origins of this word has been taken from the kanji used to write the word in Japanese. The first kanji is the Japanese verb **osu** which means "*push*." It symbolizes the combat spirit, the importance of effort and the necessity to overcome all obstacles, push them aside and advance with a steady positive attitude. The second kanji is the Japanese verb **shinobu** which means "endure" or "hide." It refers to the notion of pain and expresses the idea of courage, the spirit of perseverance and the resistance to withdrawal.

押忍
OSSU

Just for the history, the expression firstly appeared in the Officers Academy of the Imperial Japanese Navy, in the early 20th century and later it became common among karate circles. This is emphasizing the rough masculine nature of the word. Remember also that Shotokan and the other karate styles in Japan as well, were developed somewhere in a period of militaristic up growing in Japan's history and practiced mainly in universities.

Just for notation, “**Onegaishimasu**” is another word that could be contracted into "Osu!". *Onegaishimasu* is a polite catch-all word that generally means "please" and sometimes "sorry." In many cases, in Japan, it is used instead of "Osu!"

The next thing now that we know what “**Osu**” means, is to ask ourselves: *Do you say it properly?* Listening to people you may have found three pronunciation options: **oossu**, **ossu**, and **ohsu**. Although there is no change in meaning, from one pronunciation to another, seems to be that only one is correct. **Oosssss!** That is how most Westerners say it - as if it rhymes with "book" and hiss at the end. I will resist the temptation to make a full analysis of the usage of the Japanese language. I will only say that the one pronounced correctly it sounds "**Oh-ss**" and rhymes with coast, toast, and most. Please note that, in Japanese, the **u** at the end of the word is silent and it is not necessarily pronounced at all. The Japanese actually do always pronounce it, but for a quarter beat. It is so slight in some people's speech, more noticeable in others, and not noticeable at all in the speech of many. It depends both on the accent of the Japanese in question and the Japanese pronunciation rules.

As a rough, masculine expression (in Japanese) "Osu!" should be used very carefully, especially towards Japanese. When someone uses it, should follow the appropriate usage conventions, which will prevent from *osu-alcoholism*, and will allow every karate club to continue to use the term in a more accurate imitation of Japanese karate culture. "**Osu!**" is primarily a greeting. It is used toward other people, not toward an empty room when you bow. You don't say it out before you perform a kata or yell it at judges in a tournament. You could potentially use it to mean "*Roger*" or "*Let's go!*" It is never a question and does not mean "*I understand.*" "**Osu!**" is a rough masculine word, definitely associated with athletic activities, not just the martial arts and mostly used by men toward other men or boys and generally not directed at women, unless they belong to previous mentioned exceptions. Women who use the word are few, to include female karateka or athletic teams. And of course I have heard it being used on board Japanese warships in the above mentioned way. Importantly Japanese always use polite speech when addressing outward, away from their in-group and plain speech toward the in-group. So, when "Osu!" is used toward another person at the dojo, indicates that the two of you are comrades.

There are plenty of times when you should not use "Osu!" toward other people. Those rules are pretty simple, but there are quite a few of them. To simplify things, “Osu” neither means "Yes" nor "I understand", although sometimes it is used that way. "*Hai*" or "*Onegaishimasu*" deems more appropriate. You don't use "*Osu!*" toward women, since women in Japan, being addressed by men, should be treated in a certain polite way. Not toward strangers also. "*Osu!*" is an in-group expression, so it is appropriate to use it toward your own group of friends, and inappropriate to use it toward those you have a more distant, polite relationship.

"**Osu!**" is a unique expression. Using it inappropriately is not a crime against humanity, however it should be used in a full understanding of its meaning and essence and must not be thrown or spoken lightly. Last but not least, “Osu” is important in building the “**Esprit de Corps**”. *Esprit de Corps* is the feeling you get when you know that you are part of a good team. In a good team you respect and trust each other, you know you will all sacrifice for the others if and when needed, therefore you work well and efficiently together. It is the Holy Grail in team sports and the military. If a team leader can build *l'esprit de corps* into his team, it will never fail and chances of success improve dramatically. "**Osu!**" has become such in the karate community. It is used by practitioners to feel the esprit de corps and to express masculinity, aggressiveness, assertiveness, and enthusiasm.

So next time you say it, do it in a proper and mature way.

Reports

There are no reports or other similar information but the column is here to remind you that it is ready to host your notes from the latest seminar you have attended.

Recommended Courses:

On the last moment (literally on the print) I received the latest version of courses by T. Kase sensei in 2003, which I attach for your information. An another course will take place on 4,5 and 6 April 2003, in Asti, Italy (near Torino) by **VELIBOR DIMITRIJEVIC**, 6DAN. The program includes four sessions, Friday 19-21, Saturday10 -12 and 17-19 and Sunday10-12. The cost for all sessions is

50 Euro and for one session 15Euro. Information may be obtained by e-mail giorgio.formigari@tin.it Phone, Mr.Neri Baglione + 39348756122Mr. Milos Jovanovic + 393476362214 Specific information on these courses as well as in courses with different instructors, you may find in www.kamikazeweb.com/events Please be reminded that information relevant to courses, by SRKHIA instructors, will be provided every month, in the same way, provided you have informed me accordingly. I apologize but, due to certain technical difficulties that I have encountered, I am not able, for the time being, to distribute posters etc to large numbers of recipients by e-mail. However I forward them to Frank Schubert for insertion in his Calendar of events in the above mentioned site. By the way, if you have not visited the new site of www.kamikazeweb.com , do it now; it is excellent.

Membership status:

You find attached the latest Academy membership list. Please note that many people, either already members or new applicants, have not fixed their financial obligations. I do not want now to do specific reference but if you find yourself late in that situation, do so as soon as possible. I remind you that the membership fee has been increased to 60 Euro or 36 British pounds. Payments may be done, either by bank transfer to our account: Natwest Bank Ltd, Cheltenham Branch, 31 Promenade, Cheltenham, GL50 1LH, UK, Sort Code 60-05-16, Account number 16412087, Beneficiary Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha Instructors Academy (**attention, in this case you transfer only British pounds**), or by a bank cheque or international money order, made payable to Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha Instructors Academy and posted to our Treasurer, Alan Armstrong, 19 Jubilee Drive, Bredon, Tewkesbury, GL20 7QJ, England, preferably by registered mail (**attention, cheques could be either 36 British pounds or 60 euros, whichever is more convenient to members**). You must not forget to mention the name(s) and the year.

I have another observation concerning membership. I am still missing application forms from certain members, namely DE SCHAHT Eddy, from Belgium, ACHILLES Wilfred, from Germany, SWOREK Robert, RYBARCZYK Richard, from Poland, and WATT Richard, from UK/Scotland. An application form is absolutely necessary for membership and failure to do so will result in non acceptance as member, despite any payments already made. Therefore I am asking from these friends, as well from those who can convey them the message, is to submit the application form as soon as possible.

Stay strong and train hard till the first weekend of April 2003, when the next Newsletter will arrive.

Oss
Spiros G. D rossoulakis