

SHOTOKAN RYU KASE HA INSTRUCTORS ACADEMY

SRKHIA Newsletter 6/03

Dear karateka,

In the last Newsletter I referred to the warrior's virtues, responsibility and honour, which should be developed through serious budo practice. But this brings to mind the next question; which are our moral obligations, if any? When someone refers on this subject, must be very careful. Through martial arts practice we attain certain abilities, especially in hand to hand combat, which we bring with us all the time, at home, in the street, in coffee shops, everywhere. Like the cowboys carried their guns in the old (and contemporary ?) Far West. And now, living in a world of televised violence, increased criminality and road rage... perfecting oneself in a martial art, which may be deadly, how does someone counterbalance that? How does someone manage to stay in the good side of the road? How does control the use of his weapons? Obviously through self-control and discipline, through cultivation of the mind. Heijoshin, a calm, compassionate spirit. Equanimity, composure, understanding. Heijoshin will allow you to see more than what's on the surface. With great power comes great responsibility. If the untrained is able to have power over life and death-what about the trained ones? How do we justify that potential? How do we regulate it? Responsibility and commitment are only the beginning. We overcome many obstacles in our training; we must continue to overcome more out of that training. Training does not stop beyond the dojo floor. Each moment, is a further lesson in a training cycle that comprises a lifetime goal. Our moral obligation, to ourselves and to society, is to improve daily. "Jinkaku kansei ni tsutomuru koto" (exert oneself in the perfection of the character). As budoka we must hold ourselves to a higher standard, always. We can be deadly, or we can be great. The choice is ours.

Budo Themes: 'Ryu', what it is?

Shotokan ryu, Goju ryu, Eishin ryu, Muso Shinden ryu, Ohara ryu, Ogasawara ryu and the list goes on, with the term "ryu" being the common denominator. But what exactly a "ryu" is? The easy answer is "style" or "school" or, in a more general sense "a certain way of doing something". Is it so simple? It seems that upon further reflection, -ryu, referred to martial arts, encompasses much more than just a "style" or "school".

Application of form is the hallmark of a ryu, however there is more than that. Firstly, the Japanese kanji read ryu or nagare in an alternative reading, means "to flow, flowing... system or school". In Japan, when -ryu is appended to a word as part of a school of art, it signifies a particular system or style of that art.

Most traditional Japanese martial arts started in the medieval era.

According to tradition the founder of a style experienced a kind of a

divine revelation, which inspired him in creating his style or school.

It is worthy to note that these experts, already having developed a vast arsenal of technical knowledge, through a study of martial methods and in most of the times, actual experience in battle, having exhausted and reached their limits in technical expertise, they consciously underwent shugyo, or rigorous training, that forged the unison of their mind, body and spirit.

Conducted in confinement, in the sacred ground of a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple, or in a hidden refuge in the wilderness or mountaintop, the essence of shugyo was to crack through the surface layer of the physical world to the awareness of the secrets of the spiritual universe. By exhausting daily awareness, the practitioner attains a new and enlightening insight. During this period of intense training, meditation, and fasting, the founder would have a revelation, which would give him the key to true mastery of his art. Just a simple phrase or very rudimentary technique(s), was the key that unlocked all the subsequent methods that the founder would develop. Therefore the revelation was tenshin shoden, or "knowledge inherited from the heavens", or muso, "pure heavenly knowledge". Note that this has not to do with martial arts only but with every form of art.

This pure knowledge, passed at the beginning to the first generation, should always flow back to the founder, if it is to remain pure. So, the term -ryu or nagare is "a flow back to the wellsprings of the style".

I want to clarify a must to be understood point. As westerners we believe that society is moving forward towards a better and a more glorious future. Knowledge and history is linear so life should always improve. This is not the case in Oriental culture. Time and knowledge are not necessarily linear, but it may be comprised by a repeating circle or a spiral of sorts, where certain themes repeat endlessly through centuries, just like the seasons repeat themselves through time.

According to Buddhist philosophy, Buddha had cut this spiral pattern, by attaining enlightenment. Life has entered a new age, mappo, in which the wisdom of our ancestors would decay, new innovations will not be necessarily better than the original teaching, everything after Buddha will be slightly less than Buddha, until the new Buddha will emerge. The world, especially when in a midst of war, seems heading for destruction (although Heraclitus says "war is the father of everything").

I hope you are still with me.

This concept of decay has relevance to what is a ryu. Martial arts who do not follow the founder's methods and concepts and they break the direct transmission (jikiden) of his guidance, they are heading to degradation. Innovation for the sake of "modernizing" or upgrading a ryu is considered to be degradation. That is why a ryu strives to maintain its defined characteristics, as postulated by its founder.

At the same time nothing may stay unchanged. Water lying still in the river stagnates. Ryu is a river that flows, in this case through time.

It is the prerogative of the soke of the ryu to redefine or upgrade a ryu's curriculum, provided they remain in the context of the inherent

philosophical and technical characteristics of the ryu.

In modern -do arts, as judo and kendo, formal kata were developed by committees, who attempted to be in line with the trend that things can always be improved with time and human ingenuity. Karatedo, retains its ryu systems, thus a Shito-ryu kusanku kata will be different from a Shotokan style kankudai or a Matsubayashi Shorin-ryu kusanku. However basic standardization has been developed with the implementation of the heian or pinan kata, designed by Itosu and redefined by Funakoshi. These kata, being developed in a scientific manner, are always open to redefinition and improvement. (we are all aware of the different variations in the kata). These innovations are not possible in classical ryu, since any changes would come through another divine revelation, or some very deep soul-searching, at the very least. And visits by divinities, of course, have always been rather rare.

If a ryu is a faction of a classical art, a -ha or ryuha is a faction of a faction; it is a variation of a ryu established by one of its outstanding disciples, who has not broken completely with the teachings of the ryu, but has developed a variation of it which, while being markedly different from the original line, yet retains the basic characteristics of the ryu. It creates then a different lineage than the original line, a tributary, if you will, of the main river. Thus, the Tani ha Shito ryu is the approach of Tani sensei to Shito ryu, while Shotokan ryu Kase ha is Kase sensei's approach to Shotokan karatedo. And we are all aware how Kase sensei is approaching his way, -ha, of Shotokan karate, while maintaining the principles of Yoshitaka Funakoshi and Funakoshi Gitsin.

There is something that needs to be pointed out here. I am not against innovation or cross training in different ryu or martial arts. Done in the proper way, cross-fertilization of technique is good for the growth of a modern do form. All great sensei has gone through this. Karatedo has benefited (although some may think differently) from the interchange of methods between different ryu; but it is disastrous when people with surface technical knowledge only, attempt to mix and match different methods in order to create their own "innovative" instantly "classical" style.

Innovation is necessary in a sport to further it as a sportive endeavor. But a ryu is not a sport, it is a tradition, and in order to maintain its integrity has to maintain contact with its origins. A classical ryu is not a classical ryu if innovation makes it totally unrecognizable. Many argue that classical "ryu" forms are irrelevant today. A "street wise" mix of sometimes unrelated techniques, they claim, comprises the contemporary approach to martial arts. This logic confronts the very reason a ryu has survived through time. The fact that a system or style has been extracted from "practical" contemporary situations, does not allow it to grow old. To the contrary a classical ryu is timeless, not timely. A ryu does not flow from the present, but from the past, through the present, and into the future. Like a river it flows from its source, carrying its load and leading us, through the present, into the future.

Reports I have not received any reports from seminars, courses or other activities. All of us are busy but to share impressions and information in general, strengthen our bond. So take some time and sent your report. In SRKHIA we have to share knowledge; that is ultimately what family means.

Recommended Courses:

You will find attached the information for the Academy's Gashuku for 2003, which will take place in Mullheim, Germany on 27th and 28th September 2003. Pascal Petrella has done a very good work in preparing the event. Mark your calendar and do your planning. Also note that Kase sensei will teach in Setubal, Portugal on 14-15 June, in Erfurt, Germany on 28-29 June and in Andorra on 23-27 July. If you are interested in kobudo / kobujutsu Dirk FIERET organizes a course with Dirk Heene and Julian Mead on 23-25 May in his dojo, Budoclub Fieret, in Terneuzen, Belgium. More information on these courses as well as in courses with other instructors, you may find in <http://www.kamikazeweb.com/events> www.kamikazeweb.com/events Please be reminded that information relevant to courses, by SRKHIA instructors, will be given 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, by e-mail, posters etc to large numbers of recipients. However I forward them to Frank Schubert for insertion in his Calendar of events in the above mentioned site.

Membership status:

Here comes the difficult times. You will find attached the latest membership update, based on payments records by 1st June 2003. Unfortunately a certain number of members have not yet fulfilled their financial obligations. As a result their membership status has become Dormant, meaning suspension from all Academy activities during 2003. I am very sorry about that but it is the only way ahead for someone who, after five months, many calls and personal warnings, has failed, not to say has neglected, to fulfil one of his two obligations towards the Academy (the other being training), in which he has voluntarily joined. If by the way you have paid but your status has become dormant, please contact me or our Treasurer Alan Armstrong (alan.armstrong@polyfilms.co.uk) for another check with bank. I would remind that the membership fee is 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 am still missing application forms from DE SCHAHT Eddy, from Belgium, ACHILLES Wilfred, from Germany, SWOREK Robert, RYBARCZYK Richard, from Poland, FERNANDEZ Felipe Hose from Portugal and WATT Richard, from UK/Scotland. From the above mentioned only Fernandez Felipe Hose had paid for 2003, so status of all others, is becoming dormant too, however I urgently need application forms.

I invite you to visit www.shotokanyukaseha.com <<http://www.shotokanyukaseha.com/>> , the very good site of our colleague Martin Rincon Fernandez, with a lot of information. Martin is putting a lot of effort in maintaining it. Also visit <<http://www.shotokan-ryu-kase-ha.karate-muellheim.de/>> www.shotokan-ryu-kase-ha.karate-muellheim.de, a new but very good site from Pascal Petrella and the Karate dojo Mullheim. Once more I am asking you to send me your contributions to our Newsletter, in any form, reports from various courses you have attended, inputs to the Budo themes , etc. This will make this Newsletter our Newsletter, not one man show.

Before closing I want to inform you that there will be no Newsletter in August. Stay strong and train hard till the next Newsletter will reach you.

Oss
Spiros G. Drossoulakis