



SHOTOKAN RYU KASE HA INSTRUCTORS ACADEMY

SRKHIA Newsletter 1/04

Dear karateka Ake Mashite o Medeto Gozaimasu,
The New Year 2004 is already here. A circle in life has again closed, a new one has started. A continuous movement in time, in space, which signifies life. Life is connected with movement, death is connected with standstill. What is important is that this movement should be always forward, always upward, always towards progress. Otherwise there is degradation, decadence; something that is not affiliated with budo. And the recipe to progress and to life is sincere and diligent practice, is strive for excellence. Through this type of practice you may discover yourself. Know your self before know others. Win over yourself before you win over others. Reach the higher levels in life and discover its true meanings. Practice, practice, practice.

Kase sensei illness: The good news is that Kase sensei left the hospital, in Paris to return at his home on December 20, 2003. He will continue his therapy at home. This is undoubtedly a good evolution; however he has to rest for some time before he will resume instruction. You may be kept informed by looking in Pascal Petrella's dojo site on SRKHIA www.shotokan-ryu-kase-ha.de (this is a new address, the old one being www.shotokan-ryu-kase-ha.karate-muellheim.de).

Budo Themes:

In every country and culture, the arrival of the New Year is associated with different customs and traditions to celebrate this significant event. All parts of society are influenced by these customs, so is the budo world. And it is more than obvious that budo traditions have been influenced by those of the Japanese society. Which are they? To which extent do they kept alive in the today's globalized world of fast everything?

Oshogatsu is the Japanese New Year. Literally it means "first moon". In the orient for centuries the lunar calendar was followed, so the first moon of the year was the beginning of it. Obviously the first moon was the beginning of the lunar year, or Chinese year as it is better known, which happens somewhere in the middle of January. Japan adopted the solar calendar in 1873 and since then the New Year celebration starts on January 1. However, in rural Japan, villagers continue to follow the lunar calendar and Oshogatsu is the Lunar New Year.

Oshogatsu is by far the biggest celebration of the year in Japan. It is a time for peace and resolution and its celebration lasts for five to six days. Everything associated with the New Year is symbolic of "firsts" of the New Year. Thus, the New Year gives a sense of renewal. In this context for martial arts practitioners a special training, keiko, is considered essential to renew the spirit. In many dojo oshogatsu training starts at

11pm on 31st December. It stops at midnight to welcome the New Year and continues till 1 or 2 am, followed by a party for dojo members and guests. Iaido practitioners may meet at 7am on 1st January, for the Hatsunuki (first draw of the year), outside a Shinto shrine (obviously in Japan), or at the dojo or at a park to perform their kata, at dawn, in the direction of the rising sun, thus renewing the spirit. These are some examples, certainly there are more.

Kagami Biraki literally means "Mirror Opening" (also known as the "Rice Cutting Ceremony"). It marks the end of the New Year's holiday season. It is said, that the tradition of Kagami Biraki began in the 15th century AD. It developed as a folk Shinto observation with a particular class (samurai) bent, without being a Shrine Shinto or Imperial Shinto, ceremony or tradition. It may be classified as "*nenchu gyoji*" "traditional observances repeated as a matter of custom in the same manner and style at the same point in the annual calendar" according to the Dictionary of Japanese Ethnography. It notes that these observances are usually undertaken by families, hamlets, ethnic bodies or social groups, which give them the force of obligation, and often appear at intersections of the agricultural calendar.

According to tradition, before the New Year, Kagami Mochi or rice cakes, were placed in front of the armory to honor and purify their weapons and armor. Women in samurai households also placed Kagami Mochi, or rice cakes, in front of the family Shinto shrine, with a central element being a small round mirror made of polished silver, iron, bronze or nickel. On the day of Kagami Biraki the men of Samurai households would gather to clean, shine and polish their weapons and armor. The rice cakes were broken apart and consumed by the family members.

What is the symbolism behind these?

The symbolism of armor and weapons was so powerful that even today links to these feudal images remain. Japanese households and martial arts dojos often display family armor (family kami), helmets or swords, or modern replica, displayed in the kamiza, the place of honor. In front of these relics, sticks of incense are burned to show honor and acknowledge heritage.

The symbolism of the mirror (along with the sword and the jewel) dates back to the original trilogy myth of the creation of Japan. The mirror enables people to see things as they are (good or bad) and thus represents fairness or justice. The mirror was also a symbol of the Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, a fierce spirit (the light face of god). For the members of Japanese feudal society, it also represented the soul or conscience, therefore it was considered important to keep mirrors clean because they reflected back on the viewer his own thoughts. Lastly it was thought to embody the spirits of departed ancestors (so strong was this belief that when a beloved family member was near death, a small metal mirror was often pressed close to the person's nostrils to capture their spirit. The mirror was then wrapped in silk and placed in a box inscribed with the name of the ancestor and they were held in high respect and honor).

The polishing of weapons and armor on Kagami Biraki was symbolic (from mirror polishing); a method to clarify thought and strengthen dedication to samurai's obligations and duty in the coming year. Thus Kagami Biraki is also known to some as "Armor Day." This concept continues even today. When a karate, judo or aikido sensei talks of self-polishing, of working on and perfecting the self and to reduce ego,

the concept goes back to the ancient concept of mirror polishing to keep the mind and resolve clear.

The rice used for the rice cakes (and consumed of course) had also a symbolic meaning for the Samurai. Farmers considered that rice had breath (actually breathing in the ground), thus introducing the concept of rice being "alive," (breathing in the field) and thus associated with a living deity (kami). On another level rice represented the very economic backbone of the samurai society. It was given to the samurai as a stipend in return for service and allegiance to his lord (or alternatively given control over land and peasants who produced rice). Note that in the feudal Japan wealth and power were not based on currency, but on control of land which produced agriculture. The round rice cakes, as the shape of mirrors, were used as an offering, in gratitude to the deities in the hope of receiving divine blessing and also as an offering to family spirits (and deceased family heroes).

For martial arts practitioners today the celebration of Kagami Biraki has no religious significance. It does, however, continue the old samurai tradition of kicking off the New Year. This old tradition was adopted into modern martial arts, since 1884 when Jigoro Kano (the founder of judo) instituted the custom at the Kodokan. Since then other Japanese arts, martial or not, have adopted the celebration that officially kicks off the New Year, a tradition of renewal, rededication and spirit. Kagami Biraki officially falls on January 11 but is held usually on the second Saturday or Sunday of January, as a date most convenient for all dojo participants. In Japan a big demonstration of traditional koryu is held at Budokan on that day.

Kagami biraki is a time when participants engage in a common endeavour and rededicate their spirit, effort and discipline toward goals, such as training. Celebration is very different in the various dojo. In most traditional dojos preparation for the New Year's season begins towards the end of the year, when dojo are cleaned, repairs made, mirrors shined and everything made tidy. In many dojo in Japan, Kagami Baraki starts with a long morning session of zazen (kneeling meditation), and includes visits to the dojo throughout the day by well-wishers, ex-students, and local celebrities. A special training, usually a tough one, is held at the end of which everyone demonstrates his kata. For non-local students this is usually the only opportunity in the year to receive a promotion. In some Okinawan Karate-do dojo, Kagami Biraki is highlighted by a special *"Two Year Training"* which composed by four to five hours of intense training, the length and severity symbolically representing the two year time span. The day ends with a long party attended by dojo members and honour guests from the community.

In recent years the *"Mirror Opening Ceremony"* has been reinterpreted from a different viewpoint, Zen. In an esoteric explanation, the mirror contains an old image, what one sees in the mirror is seen with old eyes. You see what you expect to see, something that conforms to your own self-image based on what you remember of yourself, thus connecting people with their past through the way they see their own image, which creates a false continual. Instead every moment holds potential for newness, another possibility for breaking with the old pattern, the pattern being just a mental restraint, something that binds us to the false self people call "me." By breaking the mirror one breaks the self-image that binds people to the past, so as to experience the now, the present.

Many dojos, particularly in Japan, retain the tradition of a purification ceremony (misogi). Salt is thrown throughout the dojo, as salt is a traditional symbol of purity, goodness and virtue (remember sumo) and then brushed away with pine boughs. This purification ritual is designed symbolically to drive out evil spirits so the match will be fair and honourable. Decorations are then frequently placed around the dojo. In old Japan they had great symbolism, but today most people just think of them as traditional holiday decorations. Certain koryu schools have special kata for that purpose, which are performed on that day, or other occasions as well.

Budo means tradition; so to keep with tradition is important to budo practice and transmission.

SRKHIA Shihankai is expanded:

Following a recent decision the SRKHIA Shihankai has been expanded. Fedyk Michaylo (or Mike, as he is better known), 6th dan, from England, will be the new Shihankai member. Therefore the Shihankai is composed by Kase T. sensei, Heene Dirk, 7dan, Belgium, Martin Jim, 6dan, UK/Scotland, Dimitrijevic Velibor, 6dan, Greece & Serbia-Montenegro, Fedyk Mike, 6dan, UK/England, Lecourt Pascal, 5dan, France and Petrella Pascal, 5dan, Germany. Mike all the success to your new responsibilities within the Academy.

Shoji Hiroshi sensei passed away:

We have been informed, with sadness, that Shoji Hiroshi sensei, 8th dan, passed away on November 1st, 2003. Shoji sensei was an important figure in karate world and had played an important role in the development of Shotokan karate. He started with the practice of karate at a young age and he was the winner of kata competition at the first All Japan Karatedo Championship Tournament, on October 28, 1957 in Tokyo. After the death of Nakayama sensei he took over for a couple of years the job of Chief Instructor of the JKA. Having the opportunity to train with Shoji sensei, I was impressed by the calmness of his personality and the vigorousness of his performance. Let's take a moment and pray for his soul.

Reports

I continue not receiving any reports from courses or other Academy activities. However I am taking this opportunity to remind you that sharing your experiences with other fellow members you strengthen the bonds among members and increase the visibility of the Academy. However I cannot miss this opportunity to talk to you briefly about my last martial art experience, which I think it will be of your interest.

On December 19th, 2004 about 130 (about) iaidoka, my self included (as you may know I practice laido as well) were gathered in the ADEPS center in Brussels for the annual Nakakura Kendo and laido seminar. Following reiho and a short warming up period, the main part of that evening's class started. The sensei started with a enbu (demonstration) of ZNKR lai kata. In a swift manner he went on his knees in seiza, he executed torei, the sword salute, he put the katana in his obi and sat calmly. Then in a flowing motion he raised on his left knee, drawing his katana in a horizontal one handed cut, he slid his left knee forward in a semi kneeling tsugi ashi movement, to execute the final two handed vertical cut. He rose in one motion to carry on with chiburi (removing the blood from the blade) and performed noto (reseathing of the sword) while he returned his left knee on the floor. Sagawa Hakuo sensei continue his demonstration by performing six out of the twelve Seittei lai kata,

all in the same vigorous way, full of kime in every cut he made against his imaginary opponents. After he finished his demonstration iaidoka took over the job to repeat all kata and techniques again and again. On that night as well as the next two days (two hours on Friday, five on Saturday and two more on Sunday), Sagawa sensei remained in motion. He was either demonstrating and explaining techniques or he was moving around the 130 (about) practitioners to correct them as they performed. The only time he was not moving was when he, sitting in seiza, was giving instruction to his two 7dan assistants at the short breaks or was observing as they performed for the practitioners, their koryu waza. Nothing makes that so significant but the fact that Sagawa sensei, iaido 9dan hanshi, kendo 7dan, is 86 years old. Yes you have read well 86 years old. It was really unbelievable to look a man at his 86 years of age to move and perform, in every aspect, like a mid forties one. From simply walking to performance, from his muscular structure (which is kept at half his age condition, unbelievable), nothing was telling his real age. At the final demonstration he gave in front of an open audience at the end of the Kendo tournament, he was really incredible. I left the seminar deeply impressed, having seen the greatest, up to now, proof that budo is for life. And that age can be stopped through serious and diligent practice as well as health practices. That was, I think, the most important lesson from that seminar, which I believe is worthy to share with you.

Recommended Courses: As I have already told you Kase sensei will not held any courses till March 2004. At this moment I do not any other information on courses but the Academy's Gashuku for 2004, which will be held in Hasselt, Belgium on 5th and 6th June 2004.

Membership status:

Please be reminded of our obligation for the renewal of annual membership, as well as that the procedure for the acceptance of new members has been initiated. Both should be completed by 28th February 2004.

Firstly, the annual 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.

Secondly, new applications for membership should reach SRKHIA Secretariat and consequently be forwarded to Shihankai for approval, by 31st January so new members will have the appropriate time to fulfil their financial obligations.

Up to now the following applications for new members have been forwarded to Shihankai for approval: Achilles Wilfried, Germany; Winkelmanns Jens, Germany; Paul Sammy, UK/Scotland; Dupuch Jerome, France/ Ireland; Johansson Andreas, Sweden; Lindqvist Jörgen, Sweden; Samedy Sivathana, Cambodia. Please any new applicants should forward their forms to me by 31 January 2004.

Academy Dojo directory:

I have received certain responses to my proposal to create an Academy Dojo Directory, comprised by dojo where Shotokan ryu Kase ha is practiced. For those who have not acted yet, I would remind that what is needed is, to send me the following information: Dojo name, Dojocho (chief instructor, not necessarily a SRKHIA member), Dojo Sponsor (an Academy member who recommends this dojo, only in cases that Dojocho is not an Academy member), Country, City, Address, Point of Contact (POC), POC phone no, POC gsm, POC e- mail (optional).

This information will be filled accordingly and they will be provided, upon request, to members. Additionally every six months, May and October each year, a relevant list will be distributed with the Newsletter.

A more extended Dojo directory, to include dojo from all styles exists in our fellow member Frank Schubert's site www.kamikazeweb.com The exact address for the directory is <http://www.kamikazeweb.com/index.php?action=dojos&type=normal> You can search for a dojo depending on the country, state, city, postal code, style (ryu), following the line of (ryu ha) and / or name of the dojo instructor and you will obtain a dojo list with all interesting details including (where available) the dojo logo (image file) and a foto as well as of course all relevant contact details. By this way you can easily find a list of Shotokan ryu Kase ha dojo from worldwide selecting search criteria "Shotokan ryu" as Karate style and "Kase, Taiji" in the dropdown list for "Follows the line of ...", as well as dojo for other style and other ryu ha. You can publish directly a URL link to all dojo following sensei Kase with the following link: <http://www.kamikazeweb.com/dojos/eng/kase> This dojo list is still very young and obviously not complete but it's growing continuously.

All Newsletters may be found in Pascal Petrella's dojo site on SRKHIA www.shotokan-ryu-kase-ha.de (this is a new address, the old one being www.shotokan-ryu-kase-ha.karate-muellheim.de). The site includes also other useful Academy information.

Once more best wishes for a happy and prosperous New Year 2004. The next Newsletter will be edited in the first week in January 2004. Stay strong, train hard and enjoy life.

Oss

Spiros G. Drossoulakis