



Interview with

Ricardo Fuchs Camani Sensei

Richard Fuchs Camani Sensei, Kyoshi 7th Dan of the Shorin-Ryu Matsubayashi School of Karate-do, representative in Spain of the Style at present directed by Yoshitaka Taira Sensei, has granted us the following interview which will enable us to know the Matsubayashi-Ryu line in our country.

¿Could you please tell us which were your first steps with Karate-do and how did you reach Matsubayashi-Ryu?

My first contact with Karate-do was with the Uechi-Ryu school in Argentina, I believe it was in 1968. I must have practiced this style during approximately 9 or 10 months. I then passed over to Matsubayashi-Ryu. In Argentina I practiced this style mainly with Shigehide Akamine Sensei until 1986, when I emigrated. From then on my direct Sensei was Master Shoshin Nagamine until he passed away (1997). As from then my Sensei was Soke Takayoshi Nagamine until his sudden and unexpected death on April 25, 2012. At present I report to the president of the World Matsubayashi-Ryu Association, Yoshitaka Taira Sensei, Hanshi 10th Dan.

I must point out that I continue maintaining a very close and fluid relationship with Akamine Sensei who, in my opinion, is the Sensei who most faithfully follows the legacy left by Master Shoshin Nagamine.

You studied with the founder of the style, Master Shoshin Nagamine. ¿What could you tell us regarding his personality?

Throughout my life, I could say that Master Shoshin Nagamine is one of the persons who left me the deepest impressions. He transmitted a great sense of equanimity and gave the impression of being able to instantly apprehend all what was going on around him. When teaching technique he was very meticulous but above all, the most important thing for him was the essence of what was transmitting thorough the technique. Within his grandiosity, the simplicity with which he treated us caused a real impact.

Beyond my words, a proof of his greatness is the fact that during March 1977 he was honoured and distinguished as LIVING TREASURE by the Government of Okinawa, distinction warranted by Japans Ministry of Culture and Education.

You also translated to Spanish "The Essence of Okinawan Karate-do" written by Master Shoshin Nagamine. ¿Which is in your opinion this essence?

Yes, I have translated to Spanish two of the books written by Master Shoshin Nagamine: "The Essence of Okinawan Karate-do" (3 editions already published) and "Tales of Okinawan Great Masters" (Not yet edited).

In his book, Master Nagamine synthesises the essence of Okinawan Karate-do in the phrase "Karate ni sente nashi" (there is no first attack in karate). Evidently, the phrase transmits a spirit of peace, of no aggression. It is important to consider that for this phrase to have real meaning, we must do away with intolerance and maximise our amplitude of criteria. By improving and exercising our mind and body (joining them intimately together) our aim is to achieve a practice coming from a state completely free of knots or bindings called "ku". For this to take place we say that "ku" must be free or "empty"; nothing exists in "ku" and at the same time everything emanates from it. It is like a mirror, all images are reflected on it whereas all it contains is a glass and a reflecting surface. This achievement goes together with a better comprehension of oneself as well of the world.

Under these considerations, the study of Karate-do is much more than physical training; it is a real way of life.

You travel through Spain, England, Germany and other European countries to teach the style. If a person or a group of students wished to practice with you ;How could they start?

In first place they would have to contact me to interchange information: In which place of Europe does he live, his relation with Karate-do and/or other martial arts, etc. If we agree, we would then have to consider possibilities of displacement and frequency to be able to develop the best possible instruction.

Considering that there are ever so many possibilities, it is impossible for me to provide a general rule. I am very flexible when considering the possibilities that could arrive. The only fundamental condition is that at all times the basic principles maintained and transmitted by the founder of our style, Master Shoshin Nagamine, are fully respected.

The Shotokan Style of Karate, one of the most practiced in the world, has its origins in Shorin-Ryu. If students of this style were interested in going back to these origins ;Could they join Matsubayashi-Ryu?

Of course, students of Shotokan or other schools of Karate, wishing to go back to the origins of Karate, could join Matsubayashi-Ryu,



Above, Master Shoshin Nagamine practicing Zazen
Below, Camani Sensei demonstrating "Kusanku" kata



at least under my point of view. If I restricted this possibility, I would not be giving a chance to those who wished to revive these origins, I would be limiting my own amplitude of criteria.

Shorin-Ryu Karate is well known by magazine readers in general but, ;Which are the main lines that gave birth to Shorin-Ryu?

Without entering into too many details, we could say that at present there are many different schools of Karate in Okinawa, the main original branches being two: Shurite and Nahate. The most important are five: three belong to Shorin-Ryu or Shurite and two to Shorei-Ryu or Nahate. Shorin-Ryu includes Kobayashi-Ryu (founded by Choshin Chibana), Matsubayashi-Ryu (founded by Shoshin Nagamine), and Sukunai Hayashi-Ryu (not very known and founded by Nabe Matsumura). Within Nahate the main styles are Goju-Ryu (created by Chojun Miyagi) and Uechi-Ryu (created by Kambun Uechi).

Then ;Is Matsubayashi-Ryu a variation of Shorin-Ryu or a style in itself?

As mentioned above, we could say that Matsubayashi-Ryu is the name given to one to the three branches of Shorin-Ryu and therefore it would be correct to name it Shorin-Ryu Matsubayashi. Master Shoshin Nagamine named his school of Karate in honour to two of the karate-ka who were the masters of his Sensei Chotoku Kyan and Choki Motobu. These Masters were Bushi Matsumura and Kosaku Matsumora. As a curiosity, under the literal point of view, Matsubayashi-Ryu means "School of the forest of pines".

;Which are the main characteristics of the style?

This style comes from Shuri and Tomari. It is related in some way to Kobayashi, but its movements and breathing system are different, being absolutely natural in Matsubayashi-Ryu. It is very important to be completely relaxed to maximise the speed of the techniques, putting special emphasis on the "kime" (energy coming from the "Hara" or lower abdomen). In the most advanced stages, after many years of practice, the techniques and the "kime" should emanate from our being without putting any thought on the techniques, on the "kime" on the "Hara". In other words, it all comes from the "Ku" (emptiness or "nothing") which is the deep meaning of "Kara" (Kara = empty). These characteristics were studied very deeply by Shoshin Nagamine Sensei.



Above, Camani Sensei with Master Shoshin Nagamine (founder of Matsubayashi-Ryu), year 1978.

Below, Master Shoshin Nagamine in a typical posture of "Kusanku" kata.



¿How should we practice makiwara?

The practice of makiwara enables us to improve our techniques as well as understand different means of attack. It also enables us to develop "atemi" (destructive power). In other words, through makiwara, we very much strengthen the parts of the body which transmit the impact force from for example the knuckles (of the index and major fingers) to the base/ground which supports our body. At the beginning, the way in which we practice makiwara is to try to concentrate all our energy in a focus or point of impact. With time, the focus, the makiwara and one become a unit.

¿Do you also practice tameshiwari in the style?

Only when we perform demonstrations. It enables the spectators to appreciate the power and concentration of the karate-ka achieved through practice in general and the makiwara in particular. The tameshiwari (breakage of different elements) in itself by no means represents any objective within the practice of Matsubayashi-Ryu.

¿Which is/are the most important Kata in the style?

All the kata are very important. In Matsubayashi-Ryu there are 18 kata and the first is just as important as the last one. As we advance in the number of kata, the degree of difficulty increases. The first (Fukyugata I, created by Shoshin Nagamine Sensei) comprises very basic techniques, whereas the last (Kusanku introduced in Okinawa in 1761) is the most advanced, difficult and magnificent of all kata, where the most complex defence and attack techniques are included.

Reinforcing our abovementioned spirit of peace and no-aggression included in "The Essence of Okinawan Karate-do" we could here point out that the first technique with which all of the 18 kata begin is always a defensive technique and never of attack.

¿How do you work out these kata?

Firstly the physical kata is learned which is put together by linking step by step techniques in movement. Our mental concentration in how to put each movement into practice is what we call "kufu". Obviously we learn one kata at a time without passing to the following before the karate-ka `masters` the one he is practicing. To `master` a kata means to have and transmit the sensation that



Master Shoshin Nagamine and his son Soke Takayoshi Nagamine.

the student controls for sure the complete sequence of the kata movements without losing at any point in time what we call the "Sanshin" (invisible thread that joins all the techniques of the kata right from the beginning to the end). Additionally, the "Sanshin" itself is considered a technique, in other words, the whole kata is one only technique, if we get lost, we have not performed the technique.

There also must be coincidence in position and orientation, i.e. the starting point and orientation of the karate-ka before performing the kata must coincide when the performance is concluded. In relation to the "way" (budo), the mastering of the physical kata will become our tool to enter higher levels. At the beginning the student will develop concentration and sensitivity; he will then try to join body and mind with the centre of expression in his "Hara" (lower abdomen).

The most important aspect within the practice of kata is the development of "Hara". Master Shoshin Nagamine always said: "Karate-do starts and ends with kata".

The objective is to slowly advance in the way which leads the karate-ka to psycho physic transcendence ("Shugyo") with a pure flow of energy without intervention of the senses.

Another peculiarity of Matsubayashi-Ryu is the non existence of competitions. ¿What could you say in this sense?

Matsubayashi-Ryu is not a sport or a technique; it is a way to help the human being to enrich his potentialities. The sports try to develop to the maximum possible extent the physical aspect with high levels of concentration and emotional control. Without pretending to be better or worse, the fact of following a "way" (budo) implies involving all aspects of the personality. The problem is not to develop a better physical coordination, or to be able to defend oneself against a sudden attack or to develop reflexes to the maximum possible extent, but rather to try to coordinate different levels of the human being. If we follow a way (budo), to master a technique it is necessary to govern ourselves by joining absolutely mind and body in one only being. If we consider it under another point of view, we could say that the objective is not to perform a technique with maximum speed on the basis of physical training but with time and practice for all our being to become the technique itself. For this reason, if anyone had interest in following the "way", he/she could have a try without age limits nor innate physical abilities or other conditions which could exist if our aim is to become the best in a tournament.

¿Does free kumite exist? ¿How do you practice it?

Yes it exists, but it requires great maturity to be able to practice it. It is oneself who is tested with another, not against another. No particular intentions should exist; the objective is not to win or to be better than the one confronting us. The objective is to deliver all our being to the particular situations. The same as the practice of kata at high levels, it requires great self-perfection.

¿During his last years, did Shoshin Nagamine Sensei also include the practice of Zen or Zazen in the training?

Very much so. During his last years he tried to deeply interrelate the practice of Karate-do with Zen. In this sense, his philosophy could be synthesized in the phrase "Ken Zen Ichi Nyo" which could be translated as Karate and Zen are united in the same path/"way". In this sense, at a certain time of a few days of the week, only zazen was practiced in his Dojo. The discipline was open to all public, i.e. was not restricted to only Karate-do students. Additionally, he many times ended his Matsubayashi-Ryu Karate-do classes with a short practice of Zazen.

Do you practice Kobudo in Matsubayashi-Ryu?

Yes we practice it, but only as a complement, without being a fundamental objective within our training. It must be pointed out that although being a complement, while we practice it, we must never lose the essence of what we transmit through the technique. We maintain the same basic positions and all its practice must contribute to develop "Hara" in exactly the same way we do when we practice the martial art without weapons (Karate-do).

To be able to contact you ¿Could you give us an address, a web page or e-mail?

Of course, my web page is www.karatezenesp.wordpress.com

It is also possible to enter this page by looking for Matsubayashi Spain in Google.

In this page you can find my e-mail: rwcamani@gmail.com

How would you describe a typical Matsubayashi-Ryu lesson?

Before starting, we try to put our minds in

blank for a moment, without thoughts. This represents a transition between the outer world and the practice we are about to begin. The objective is to concentrate all our physical and psychic energies in it. We then offer our respect to Master Shoshin Nagamine (founder of the school), to the Dojo and to the Sensei who will conduct the lesson. We then perform warming up and stretching exercises, to then pass over to arm and leg specific techniques so as to completely prepare our body before we concentrate on the practice of basic technique (Kihon) and Kata. Depending on the day, we dedicate the rest of the lesson to "Kote" (strengthening of forearms), "makiwara", "Ippon kumite" (pre-established confrontation) or strengthening/reinforcing particular aspects. We end with stretching and elasticity exercises as performed at the beginning of the class to finally perform greetings similar to those with which we began the lesson.

You travelled to Okinawa to train with the Master ¿Would it be mandatory for a student of traditional karate to do this visit, even if it were only once in his life?

The fundamental basis of the style settled by Shoshin Nagamine Sensei is the same for all Matsubayashi-Ryu representatives in the world. I believe that the fact of visiting another Sensei of the same school will always be an enriching



Camani Sensei with the "Bo".

experience inasmuch as the way in which these basic principles are transmitted depends on the personality of each Sensei. I do not believe that the visit to the Hombu Dojo could be considered as absolutely essential, but yes a very important experience to consolidate the basis and instruction transmitted by ones own Sensei ■

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