Mr. Yamakura Visits Gaithersburg, MD.

by Zak Zakland

On April 18-20, the annual Ten Shin Ichi Ryu (TSIR) seminar was held in Gaithersburg, Md, with instructors Doshu Shintaku (TSIR) and Yamakura Hanshi. Unlike previous years where a number of different martial arts schools and styles were featured, this year only TSIR and GKK were represented. There were about 30 students: 20-25 from Mr. Shintaku’s group and 6 of us from the Ambler Dojo of Mr. Yamakura’s GKK. It was a unique opportunity for “cross-pollination” and cross-cultural harmony, which no doubt would have pleased our founder Mr. Miyagi.

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The two instructors have a long history together – they met in college (Kyoto University) in Japan in the ‘60’s, which Mr. Yamakura described as “a way to avoid working for another 4 years”. Since then, they have stayed friends and professional colleagues.Mr.Shintaku studied Goju and aikido and his TSIR style captures elements of each art. Mr. Shintaku began this annual seminar several years ago, choosing a variety of internationally-respected mar- tial arts instructors. At dinner a couple of years ago, I asked Mr. Shintaku how he chose the instructors to invite. He said he wanted people who were masters but at least as important, people who embodied the values of the “old masters” — humility, character-building, compassion for others. Mr. Yamakura has been a partner in this effort. This year’s seminar featured a full workout day on Saturday and a half-day Sunday. The two master instructors would alternate 1 or 2-hour sessions, so TSIR and GKK students could develop their own style’s techniques and also experience the other’s. Some highlights of the workouts:

- Mr. Yamakura led a two-person kumite drill that started slowly and gradually increased in intensity and difficulty. In Shiko dachi, partners faced each other in combat range. First, one person punched — just reaching the gi — and the other received without blocking. Then, blocking was added. Next, each partner punched simultaneously. The intensity and number of punches was increased until each side punched 5 times, full out, with control.
- Mr. Shintaku demonstrated the use of ki and soft techniques in receiving attacks and countering. There were punching, kicking and grabbing attacks. In each case the uke would “go with the flow”, or unite with the attacker’s energy, or break up the attacker’s mental concentration. We watched him knock down attackers with what seemed to be a touch as light as a feather.
- Each master had senior students demonstrate kata. I remember one very impressive sword kata performed by a student who was awarded Yon Dan. I had the honor of demonstrating Sanchin kata.
- We all celebrated with a Mexican banquet Saturday evening. (The local Japanese restaurant could not accommodate all of us). I enjoyed conversation with the TSIR contingents from Boulder (Shotokan) and Kansas City (Tae Kwon Do).

The spirit of collegiality and mutual respect was very strong. It seemed people left their egos at the door. A good thing!

What struck me this time — I’ve been attending these seminars most every year — was the concept of generating and managing ki is at the core of both Mr. Yamakura’s and Mr. Shintaku’s training systems. We who have been mentally trained in the West often find ki elusive to understand, and even more difficult to master. I’ve realized enough to know there is a lifetime of learning ahead!

It was a great honor to learn from Mr. Shintaku and Mr. Yamakura, and to receive the warm hospitality of Melanie Shintaku.