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Words From Obata-Kaiso

Shinkendo Kenkaku & Jinsei Shinkendo

KENKAKU (劍客) IS THE TERM FOR a specialist swordsman, one who uses the sword as one's livelihood. The role of Shinkendo kenkaku today is first to improve your own life through

training, and then improve the world around you. Shinkendo kenkaku must study the modern way of bushido and incorporate this knowledge along with the theories of swordsmanship into practical use in real life – this is Jinsei Shinkendo.

I have recently concluded the fall Honbu instructors seminar, as well as a seminar in Alsace, France. I will be going to Singapore in November for my first seminar there. As I travel around the world, I hear more and more students talk about Jinsei Shinkendo. In recent years, I believe students have begun to develop a deeper understanding of the meaning of Jinsei Shinkendo. *Jinsei Shinkendo* is a phrase I have coined, and it means that, through the study of Shinkendo, students can improve their lives. The ancient Japanese spirit, or *ko-seishin* (古精神), lies at the very foundation of Shinkendo, and abides within the mental and physical aspects of Shinkendo. First improve yourself through physical training, and develop yourself through mental training to cultivate your mind, energy, heart, and spirit. As the Shinkendo philosophy book will be coming out this year, I believe that more and more students will come to understand the meaning of Jinsei Shinkendo. Shinkendo is the way of the real sword, or the serious path; understand and use Jinsei Shinkendo to guide your life.



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Aikibujutsu & Aikidō

By The Honbu Dojo



Aikibujutsu & Aikido

The fundamental idea of Aikibujutsu is the same as that of Aikidō: to blend with and control an opponent's energy in order to subdue him with minimal effort and force, and causing minimal injury. Unlike in many modern competitive arts, winning or losing in competitions or focusing on strength and weakness is not the central idea of the aiki arts. However, since Aikibujutsu is a form of Japanese budō, the technique involved must be effective and realistic. In modern times, an aggressor will not attack with a sword but with punching and grappling. Therefore, attacking and blocking methods are taught that are practical in modern situations.



In training, safety is most important. Initially, one learns the basics of Aikidō, including *ukemi* (falling and receiving techniques), *osae waza* (control techniques), and *nage waza* (throwing techniques). In dōjō training, basics are repeated over and over again. The focus is first on soft and flowing techniques, so that students can learn how to

harmonize with their opponents and practice taking safe ukemi. In practice, however, these techniques will not be practical on the street. Therefore, once students can take safe ukemi and have sufficient stamina, they will proceed to learning Aikibujutsu, which incorporates aikijūjutsu and Edo *torimonojutsu* (samurai arresting techniques), which are more realistic and effective systems of technique. As students advance, they must thoroughly practice and

understand the theories embodied in the basics in order to use *henka* (variations) of techniques, which can be adapted and applied to various real situations. By applying these different variations and adjusting to the opponent's attack, the technique will take shape as true *goshin* (self-defense). In this way, Aikibujutsu is very practical and strong as *goshin jutsu* (self-defense technique) and *taiho jutsu* (arresting technique).



The Areas of Study of Aikibujutsu

Kōbō (attacking/blocking): Aikibujutsu incorporates basic striking, such as *tsuki* (punches) and *keri* (kicks), in addition to the more traditional *tegatana* ("hand-sword"). Unlike some arts, Aikibujutsu does not condone methods of bare-handed disarms against a swordsman, as these encourage extremely dangerous strategies or techniques that are unlikely to succeed against the versatility of sword technique.

Shutō uke (sword-hand block): When the opponent attacks with *tsuki* or a strike, one must block. There are various shutō uke techniques from jōdan, chūdan, and gedan, all of which segue into techniques of throwing, controlling, and pinning.

Temochi waza & Tehodoki (techniques and escapes against hand grabs): When an opponent grabs one's hand, one escapes the grasp and then moves into a technique. The six basic hand positions for tehodoki are *kagami* (mirror),



tekagami (hand-mirror), *ten* (heaven), *chi* (earth), *jun* (obverse), and *gyaku* (reverse). From *tehodoki*, the technique progresses into throwing, controlling, or pinning. For example, there are *tehodoki* movements that transition from *konohagaeshi* to *ikkajō*, from *gyaku konohagaeshi* to *ikkajō*, from *aikiage* to *ikkajō*, and so on.



Tedori waza & Torite: *Torite* refers to a technique or approach that is applied before the opponent attacks in order to make him easier to subdue, and is utilized by police officers and guardsmen as part of effective arresting methods.

In *taihōjutsu*, the goal is to defeat the aggressor while minimizing the damage inflicted upon him. Even during an arrest or self-defense, if one injures the aggressor by kicking or punching, which can quickly result in broken teeth or bones, the use of force can easily become excessive or unnecessary. To show consideration for the aggressor and limit the injuries inflicted upon him, it is best to control him so that he cannot move. Minimizing injury and the use of force during an arrest is considered the ideal execution of *taihōjutsu*. Kicking and punching are used only if they are necessary to supplement a technique.



Renzoku nagewaza (continuous throwing techniques): Through combining different throwing techniques in *renzoku nagewaza*, one gains stamina and learns to breathe correctly, and learns the natural movements of *ashisabaki* (footwork) and *taisabaki* (body movement).

Kaeshiwaza (reversal techniques): When the opponent attacks, one reverses the technique and applies a technique of one's own. These methods are taught to advanced students.



Bukiwaza (weapon techniques): In addition to empty-handed techniques, one learns *tantōjutsu* (knife technique), *bokutō waza* (wooden sword technique), *shumoku jutsu* (stick technique), *jōjutsu* (medium staff technique), and other weapons.

Seishin shugyō (spirit training): Equal in importance to the training of physical technique is the development of the mind and spirit. In Shinkendo, *Aikibujutsu*, and *Bōjutsu Tanrendō*, students study the philosophies of Kuyō Junikun, Hachidō, Goiku, and Meitō no Yōsō in order to cultivate and train the mind and spirit. *Seishin shugyō* is explained further in Modern Bushido (Obata, 2011).



The First Thing (Part I)

By Trevis Crane
Sojokan Dojo, Illinois



It's easy to think of the *tachiuchi* we perform as an exercise in harmonizing with our partner, or at least to view harmonization with our partner as one of the key lessons we're supposed to be practicing or learning. However, to think this would be at best missing an opportunity for *tachiuchi* (and by extension Shinkendo in general) to be much more than this, and outright wrong at worst.

But it's easy to think that harmonization is a central theme – most of us are well aware of Ueshiba-style Aikido and its central theme of blending with and redirecting your opponent's energy (harmonizing), and this is further emphasized when considered further in the context of what many people interpret Zen Buddhism to be about. The idea of harmonizing with your coworkers, neighbors, or people in general is widely considered a preferable approach as compared with a more direct approach. Or to put it another way, if we use the stereotypes of martial arts as stand-ins for modes of interaction between two people, then in our present society, Aikido is preferred over Karate. Blend with your fellow man, don't punch him. Seems reasonable, so why would I suggest this misses the point?

To answer that question, let me first say that we in the Midwest were very fortunate to be able to attend a seminar with Obata-kaiso recently in Chicago. The focus for the weekend was on *kihon waza*. He repeatedly stressed the need to strengthen one's *kihon* so that as we build upon it, the techniques remain strong and avoid sloppiness. There was another thread that wended its way through the weekend as well, and that was the idea of

communicating through our techniques. This is a very powerful idea and should be examined at great depth. If you stop reading now, I urge you to continue to consider the idea of communicating as central to our practice of Shinkendo.

Now, let's go back to using stereotypes of different martial arts as exemplars of different modes of communicating. At two ends of the spectrum we have what I've already mentioned, Aikido as harmonization, Karate as direct, perhaps brutal confrontation. *Nota bene* – I have no intent here to suggest that these styles are as one-dimensional as I'm going to portray them, but for pedagogical reasons it helps to think of them as such. Consider, then, that Aikido is one mode of communication and the practice of Aikido stresses this mode of communication above all others and seeks as its primary goal that the instinctual response to conflict be one of harmonization. Likewise, consider Karate as the opposite, suggesting that the best way to meet force is with force, again training to instill this response as instinctual, almost reflex-like. Then ask the question, is either approach always the right approach?





In my opinion, whenever someone asks if something, anything, is “always” this or that, then you can categorically respond “no” – and the same is true here. Neither approach is always right, as the mode of communication or method for dealing with conflict that produces the optimal result will depend on the desired outcome, the people involved, the environment, and so on. And as they say, practice makes permanent, so

to train ad infinitum to achieve a single, reflex-like response to confrontation or stimuli in general is severely limiting. Suppose there are exactly two modes of communicating and you only practice using one. You have effectively limited yourself to being able to communicate half of what you may want or need to. Of course, there are many ways to communicate, so in practice, a single approach is extremely limiting, far more than just 50%.

So let's take the obvious step and train in many styles so that we are not limited to one category of response. Only this still misses the point. Now, instead of a single silo we have multiple silos. Fundamentally, our thinking must change in order to avoid this problem. To better understand the problem, I think it's worth introducing a phrase that many people will be familiar with – conditioned response. In the stereotypes of Aikido and Karate, the training seeks to condition a specific response. Conditioned responses that lead to a specific action are valuable but only insofar as they provide a response that is applicable in a given scenario. In the wrong scenario, they can be inappropriate or in some contexts dangerous. Much better, then, to practice in such a way that engenders the conditioned response of choosing. As an example, consider the targets we choose when performing a kiri-kaeshi. I recall a time when I was told by my senpai that the appropriate target for my kesa was the head. However, in the past couple years, Kaiso has repeatedly indicated that the appropriate target is the neck. This is largely for reasons of safety, as a loss of control will send the bokuto into the muscle of the neck versus the head, resulting in a reduced potential for severe injury.

To an outside observer, it might seem that the technique

has been watered down, opting for safety over efficacy. And if Shinkendoka allow their response to be conditioned by practice to be that of “strike the neck,” then the outside observer would be correct. However, choosing safety should in no way compromise the efficacy of the technique, as the practice we engage in should not as its goal have striking the neck. Instead, we should practice striking the target we pick. Thus whenever we perform kiri-kaeshi (for example), the end game should always be to pick a target and then strike that target. Thus, to modify the technique only requires that you pick a different target (neck, head, elbow, knee or anything in between). Thus the conditioned response is one characterized by intent versus habit. I refer to this concept as “being intentional,” and it is something that is very important within the context of Shinkendo as well as in our daily lives.



In the same way, when we think again about communicating, we should develop the habit of choosing the mode of communication, and the way in which we practice Shinkendo should strengthen this response. If we practice intentionally, then we can as easily harmonize, face force with force, or pick from a myriad of different modes of communication by simply choosing our target.

Lessons Learned & The Way Forward

By Mischa de Brouwer
Shinkendo Delft, Netherlands



With great pleasure, I have been able to attend eight sessions of Kaiso's Shinkendo seminars in England and the Netherlands in the first half of this past May. Kaiso taught the fundamental battoho set Ichi no Tachi to over a hundred European participants in Poland, England, and the Netherlands.

At the end of the seminar, I could clearly observe the result of a demanding schedule of almost 20 days of uninterrupted teaching. Tiredness and physical strain caused Kaiso to catch a fever, and he was not feeling well at the dojo.

Several breakfast discussions with Kaiso, as well as personal observations during the time that Kaiso spent in Europe from the end of April to mid-May, have led to the following list, which I would call "Lessons Learned for Seminar Organisers."

1. The organisers' wish to make maximum use of the opportunity of Kaiso's yearly visit has led to a very high density of working hours over the period of three weeks;
2. The different weather and climate conditions in the three countries, especially compared to California weather, and the varying and fluctuating air conditioning in the dojos, lead to higher susceptibility of catching a virus;
3. Irregular eating habits and different sleeping conditions compared to home reduce fitness and resistance to illness;

4. Increasingly strict air travel regulations add to a general feeling of discomfort.



The above observations should lead to special attention of seminar organisers on the following aspects:

1. In Europe, professionally, we expect in a three-week working period at least four days of rest (two weekends), spent on leisure activities distracting from work. When inviting Kaiso for an extended stay of two or three weeks, it is sensible to plan two days of rest after five days of training, and also not to plan classes on an air travel day.
2. Select the dojo location according to heating or air conditioning conditions. Extreme heat or cold should be avoided, and fresh air venting is preferred over irregular or uncontrollable air conditioning.
3. Kaiso would like to eat rice once a day if possible. This does not mean that Kaiso would like to eat Japanese food everyday (sometimes the quality of Japanese restaurants are not that good and are overpriced), but Chinese restaurants have rice as well, and also someone can easily make rice. Kaiso prefers fish over meat, lots of seasonal vegetables, and foods that are sautéed over fried. Make sure that his lunch and breakfast still contain sufficient energy to carry one through a long, intense working day. For dinner, try to minimise strange sauces and spices, and focus on the original flavour and texture of vegetables, meat and fish.

4. When purchasing air travel, make sure the luggage amount and weight are covered sufficiently. Kaiso brings not only clothes, but also several dogi, bokuto, merchandise and materials such as books, and other private items (such as his beloved Sudoku books). If you have the financial resources to increase the comfort level of his air travel, then you should do so.



As a final remark, as we have read in a previous newsletter (Winter 2010), Kaiso has started to gradually implement the succession process. Kaiso encourages dojos to invite his son Yukishiro-soke to teach seminars if Kaiso is unavailable. In order to provide Kaiso some relief from the heavy seminar schedule, organisers could consider inviting Yukishiro-soke when Kaiso is unavailable or request Yukishiro-soke to go on his behalf.

The above list of observations can certainly be extended by the trained eyes and different points of view of other seminar organisers, and the list of points of attention can certainly be extended by more knowledgeable and creative organisers. So please be attentive in preparation of and during Kaiso's visit.

Shinkendo In My Life

By Ektoras Efstratios Bousoulas, Shinkendo Athens

“Shinkendo – The true/serious way of the sword.” That is the first line I read when I accidentally found the website of my Shinkendo sensei, G. Konstantine Laskaris. When I read that, I knew that my search for a martial art that could truly teach me all the aspects of the sword was finally coming to an end. As I scrolled down the website and continued reading, I had a profound sense of excitement and eagerness. I was going to become a Shinkendo student.

It was shortly after I became a member of the Shinkendo family that those feelings were confirmed. I was surrounded by incredible and kind fellow students that shared the same passion as I had to learn the sword, and a

sensei that was always ready and very happy to teach us Shinkendo, not only as a martial art, but also as a way of life – truly a profound experience for me.

As I began training and learning about Shinkendo, I realized slowly but surely that to learn Shinkendo I had to make it a way of life, not just in the dojo but with the rest of the world as well. It has to be included in my daily interactions and actions, the way I present myself, and in the way I can live in harmony with people and nature or, as Hachido instructs, Ji Ta Shizen. A true Shinkendoka isn't only concerned about honing his skills but his spirit as well.

Fast forward almost two years later. I've made a lot of friends and also have gotten to go to my first seminar, which took place in Poland during 2010. The seminar was a wonderful experience because I met and befriended Shinkendo students from all around the world that came to train, as well as had the opportunity to train with our founder, Obata Toshishiro-kaiso. I came to understand that going to seminars is really a special and rare occasion because you get to be instructed by Obata-kaiso, as he is the source of the knowledge students strive so hard to embody.



These things that I've written today are a summary of my experiences after almost two years of training in Shinkendo. I decided to write this since a couple of days ago we had exams for Shinkendo and Aikibujutsu, and I wanted to try and portray a little about how I feel and understand Shinkendo so far. I would like to say thank you to Obata-kaiso and my sensei, George Konstantine Laskaris, for giving me the opportunity to learn such a wonderful art, and also to my fellow students and friends who help me in the dojo every day. Thank you, everyone.

Thank you, Shinkendo.

The Start of My Shinkendo Journey

By Alex Spillane
Modern Samurai Dojo, New York

My introduction to the martial arts took place when I was about ten, when my father signed me up for Kyokushin karate, which I trained in for the better part of four years. Unfortunately, my training there came to an end due to my entering high school, moving, and general lack of time. But my interest in the martial arts remained and actually grew over time, especially my interest in samurai and Japanese swordsmanship. After I graduated high school, and with the freedom of time management that college granted me, I decided that it was time to re-enter the world of martial arts and pursue my dream of learning the way of the Japanese sword.

After almost a year of research on Japanese swordsmanship, seeing what was out there, seeing what there was to learn and looking for a reputable school, my research mostly on the Internet, I came across the International Shinkendo Federation. After reading almost everything there was to read on the website, I set out to find a dojo hopefully near me so I could see Shinkendo firsthand. I found Modern Samurai Dojo, the only licensed Shinkendo dojo in the Northeast, located fortunately enough a mere bus ride away from my house, and it almost seemed too good to be true. But once I got there, I met Sensei Lou, who further enlightened me on the principles and practices of Shinkendo and allowed me to watch a class. The best way I can describe the experience of watching the class was the fact that, during the entire class, I hardly blinked – I didn't want to miss a single thing, and my body tingled with excitement. I couldn't wait to start!

I started my training with Lou-sensei the very next class! Due to the unavailability of the other Shinkendoka at Modern Samurai at the time, I was the only student taking Shinkendo for most of the classes during the week, so for the first few months of my training I had the unexpected benefit of having one-on-one classes with Sensei Lou and also having the benefit of having Sensei Michael Mason and Sensei Dave Mancuso, who also trained under Sensei Lou, train with me and help teach me when they came to the dojo. My learning experience at Modern Samurai is nothing short of exceptional: the straightforwardness of Shinkendo and the way Lou-sensei breaks down every exercise and technique makes everything easy to absorb and understand. The only thing I could think of and still think of now is that I've absolutely made the right choice in learning Shinkendo.

As my training started, I picked up both of Kaiso's books, and the best way I could describe it is that they hardly left my side. I would read them in my free time from cover to cover multiple times, using them to help me practice when I wasn't at the dojo. And every time I read them, I picked up on something I had previously missed or something I could have a better understanding of or improve on. My mind was a sponge to both everything in the book and everything I was learning in the dojo. It's amazing everything that Shinkendo encompasses in its curriculum, so much so that even with my thirst to learn I had to start taking notes to make sure everything I was learning stayed sharp and correct. It helped me incredibly, and before I knew it, Sensei Lou said I was ready to take my first trip out to Honbu Dojo! I was beside myself with excitement and quite nervous as well. But I soon made the arrangements to visit Honbu on my next available week free. Once I got there, and after making my proper introductions to Kaiso and the students at Honbu, I began my week of training under Kaiso. If I could describe it in one word, it would be "intense" – the new things I learned were amazing, and the assistance with improving the things I already knew was very personal and precise. It was overall a great experience training at Honbu, and before I knew it, my week was over, and sad as I was to see it end, I was excited to get back and share all that I had learned! And I did just that.

As my training progressed at Modern Samurai, it also expanded to the point where I was learning how to not only execute the techniques but how to translate them to other students, and even the beginnings of how to teach the more basic exercises, and before I knew it I was helping Sensei Lou teach newer students and helping lead classes! It was a whole new area of learning for me, which I was more than willing to jump into, and in the coming months I was learning more and more how to better demonstrate and verbally explain exercises and helping sensei lead classes more and more often. Before I knew it, it was time for my second trip to Honbu. While still being slightly nervous once again, my excitement overpowered my nervousness. And with Mike-sensei at this time training at Honbu permanently, there was another person to help me better understand everything I was taking in. I also had the pleasure of meeting Yukishiro-nidai soke and having the honor of a full two-hour private lesson with him. For the whole two hours of my personal lesson, my eyes and mind were opened to a metaphorical five-course meal of

knowledge, new perspectives, and new ways to improve my own training and the training of my fellow dojo-mates back home. Everything I learned was so precise and broken down in the most straightforward way possible. I literally went to bed every night trying to wrap my mind around all that I had learned that day, and it still gives me more to think about even now that I'm home.

Shinkendo truly encompasses everything I was looking for in swordsmanship. It is more than just technique, more than just a sword or footwork or cutting; it is the practical view of swordsmanship in technique, principle, and philosophy, and many of the things I have learned in

Shinkendo I have been able to apply in many different aspects of my life, including the way I carry myself as a person and everything I have to do in my life, whether it be school, home responsibilities, or a job. I am truly grateful to everyone that I have met and who have helped and continue to help me on my journey down the path of Shinkendo. Shinkendo is life and life is Shinkendo – Jinsei Shinkendo!

