

# Samurai News from Honbu



## April travels



ISF  
AB  
KTRR

Issue 0024

April 2004

### Kaiso's Corner

This month has been very busy for our organization. Many dojos are participating in demonstrations as the weather becomes warmer. This month I am travelling alot.

I recently conducted seminars for Howard Quick, our branch instructor in Australia, as well as for Paul and Yumiko who hosted clinics in Birmingham and Atlanta. In Alabama, Paul and Yumiko hosted a training session where I shot an Uzi, an MK3, a 9mm pistol, and even an old Winchester rifle. It was enjoyable and under a Police instructor, so nobody was accidentally killed.

Recently about 25 students and 5 teachers from a school visited Honbu for a demonstration. They were studying Japanese culture; I think they enjoyed it very much.

Lou D'Agostino, our New York instructor, visited to study more Aikibujutsu and Bo technique. Our Utah instructor Kurt Johnson will soon visit for a weekend seminar with Anita Tsuchiya. Also recently, Marlene and Jeff, instructors from Arizona, visited Honbu with some students to join Aikibuken and concentrate on Juppon and Bo techniques.

Lately, we have many new Honbu students. I'm happy to see the good energy and the quick learning ability of those who join our Federation.

Please keep good concentration in your training during this busy time!

~Toshishiro Obata



Saito san and Kaiso on "The Samurai" documentary set

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2** SHINKENDO IN SWITZERLAND
- 4** JUJITSU VS AIKIDO?
- 6** HUMBLED AGAIN
- 7** SWORD SHOW
- 8** FORGING A PATH TO FREEDOM
- 12** A WALK IN THE PARK

### NEWSLETTER STAFF

#### PUBLISHER

OBATA TOSHISHIRO KAISO

#### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

JAMES HUANG

#### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS (IN ARTICLE ORDER)

MARC SCHAFFNER

MIKE ESMAILZADEH

SHAWN FORRISTALL

MERLIN TOLSTYK

KURT JOHNSON / ANITA TSUCHIYA

MIKE SHU

*I would like to take a moment to express condolences to Peter Teymouraz who recently lost his father. Please send your good energy to him during this time. – T.O.*

## From the Newsroom

Well it's press time, and the keys are clacking away as fast as they can go. April has shot by like a dieter heading for the Krispy Kreme. So...apologies for the hasty formatting!

I find it really encouraging that a lot of articles are now coming from students as well as dojo leaders! Good stuff! Please keep it coming! Although actual technique instruction or high level concepts would probably be better left to the instructors, any personal insights, suggestions, or stories that you want to share regarding the arts are more than welcome! Humor is also acceptable, as long as it's not outright offensive in nature. You can send those articles to [news@shinkendo.com](mailto:news@shinkendo.com) and please format as .doc or .txt, NOT as pdf, which is hard to cut and paste from.

Demos have been very frequent lately. Recently, as Kaiso Obata mentioned, Shorecliffs Middle School came to visit the dojo, and were very entertained and informed by his demonstration and lecture. They got a chance to put their hands on all sorts of treasures that Sensei has collected over the years, ranging from musical instruments like a flute (is that a shakuhachi?) to weapons like a yawara-looking device that hooked around the fingers, most akin to Hollywood's brass knuckles. Nathan Scott Sensei coordinated with the school during their visit from San Clemente, CA.

Nathan Scott Sensei recently led a demo for Honbu at the Pasadena Cherry Blossom festival. For those who haven't seen the pics, you can catch them on Dennis Cheng's site at <http://aikido.dcheng.net/PasadenaCherryBlossom>



Nathan Scott Sensei's flying tatami!

Last but not least, we are exploring the possibility of having some regular video messages from Kaiso posted on the internet, perhaps in conjunction with his message from the newsletter. Please stay tuned- we'll announce it on the forum if and when it happens; I've posted a temporary page at <http://wongstein.com/shinkendo>

That's it from the newsroom, see you next month!

James Huang

## Shinkendo in Switzerland



Swiss-team with Sensei

By Marc Schaffner

Last October we had the honour to have Obata Kaiso over here to hold his 4<sup>th</sup> seminar in Switzerland. He was accompanied by Brent Hire Sensei, chief instructor for Europe. Over 30 participants from Switzerland, Germany and France took the opportunity to train with Obata. It was not only an opportunity to learn from his direct advice and from watching his technique, but also to experience the "spirit" of Shinkendo in its most original form. It gave an impression of how high the standards must be set at the Hombu Dojo in Los Angeles – not only regarding technique, but also in terms of seriousness and devotion to the training.

This seminar was special in two ways. Firstly the program was very interesting and contained many different aspects of Shinkendo, and secondly the atmosphere among the participants was very friendly. Students and senseis were trying to benefit from each other, the advanced students helping the beginners.

An international seminar is always good to compare oneself to the others and to discover one's flaws in technique, etiquette and attitude. There are small differences from dojo to dojo, so it is important to stay in contact with other Shinkendo members.  
*(cont'd on next page)*

*(“Shinkendo in Switzerland,” cont’d from previous page)*

During the seminar Obata Kaiso gave enough time to practice the exercises he demonstrated and took his time to correct individual students. Some things were new to a lot of the participants, for example some kata variations like Santen Ura or the Toyama Ryu kata. Obata Kaiso explained the history of this military style and taught the first two kata, Gunto Soho and Batto-Jutsu. The first and historically earlier one begins with left foot forward, which was quite uncommon for students who had never done it before. The second one, Batto-Jutsu, looks more familiar, since it begins with right foot forward and uses more kesa giri than shinchoku giri. Obata Kaiso recommended this second kata for demonstrations etc., but he said it was also important to know Gunto Soho. There were other difficult exercises, like ashi sabaki with whole steps instead of shuffle steps. Of course it was not possible to memorize everything, especially some tachiuchi forms, but it was exciting to learn so many new things. Obata Kaiso took notice to the most basic details, too. For example he stressed the hip movement while performing tsuki in the toyama Ryu kata.



October 2003 seminar in Effingen

The seminar included also the first Swiss Shinkendo kata championships. For the competitors it was a good experience to act in front of a big audience and to try not to get too nervous. All of them were a bit tense, so Obata Kaiso cheered them up by talking to them casually. Although Obata appears to be very strict in training – he forces you to give your best and to stay attentive all the time, not by shouting at you but simply with his presence – he turned out to be very gentle and humorous afterwards. He is a good storyteller, too. He can make you laugh with his accounts of the most normal things, for example how he visited some medieval castles in Switzerland or how he was surprised to find out that Swiss people drink hot wine. (Hot spiced wine is a European speciality for cold winter days).

Most of all, we want to thank Obata Kaiso for this excellent seminar. In coming to Switzerland he showed that he is not only the lofty head of a world-wide network, but that he also cares for the development of each national Shinkendo organisation. This gives us courage to go on and to do something for ourselves, for our dojo and for the Shinkendo community as a whole.

Shinkendo and Aikijutsu in Switzerland is only small at the moment. The main dojos are in Basel and Effingen, where chief instructor Josef Sturm Sensei trains with his students personally. Besides Shinkendo and Aikijutsu he teaches Toyama Ryu and occasionally some Tanto Jutsu. Three kenshuin assist him, a fourth one has his own dojo near the city of Chur. Every month the instructors meet for a special training which contains also didactic elements. It is also planned to build a demonstration team and to give monthly demonstrations at various schools and public events.

The Swiss-Shinkendo-Team is looking forward to meeting Obata Sensei this autumn in Germany and also our friends from all over Europe. [Ed: Marc Schaffner is a student of Josef Sturm Sensei, studying both Shinkendo and Aikibujutsu]

## Some Thoughts on Misconceptions When Comparing Jujitsu and Aikido

By Michael Esmailzadeh



In the years that I have been training in both arts I have encountered much prejudice toward each art by practitioners of the other. Most of this prejudice is based on an incomplete understanding of the other art and its training methods. I hold a Rokudan in Jujitsu and a Godan in Aikido and hope to use this article to shed some light on some of the more commonly held misconceptions.

About aikido I often hear, "Beautiful to watch, but a little too soft for self-defense. Pretty, but only an expert can make use of it." When practicing martial arts one has to constantly weigh having the techniques approximate real usage while minimizing injuries during training. Applying most techniques fully without consideration for the welfare of one's partner would decrease the number of students by half every time a technique is completed. This is obviously not the way to train. How does aikido address this question? Aikido training focuses on being in constant motion, while developing a strong sense of flow with and connection to one's training partner. In order to do this safely, most throws and locks project training partners out horizontally, so that they can roll. At beginning levels projecting partners straight down while staying in constant motion is likely to result in many injuries. Also having a partner roll and continue attacking allows the pair to perform more throws per class with no interruption in focus. This approach makes for hard cardiovascular training that also emphasizes being present at all times.

This is more difficult to do for beginners in jujitsu, since the partner is usually projected straight down and so often there is a break in focus during the time it takes most partners to get up. The positive side of the jujitsu approach is obvious. Projecting somebody straight down is more likely to harm an attacker.

When practicing aikido, locks are often applied utilizing circular motions that are large enough to allow the partner to respond in the way that allows them to avoid injury even when moving quickly. This also allows the pair to move in a way that emphasizes developing a refined sense of timing and distance when in motion early on in the training. In jujitsu tighter circles are often applied, which trains the tightness a lock needs to have so as not to be countered easily, but techniques are practiced much more stationery in the beginning so as to be done safely.

Oftentimes jujutsuka cite the large variety of techniques practiced as proof that their art is more applicable in self-defense situations. "How could an art that doesn't use chokes a groundwork be effective?" is a question I hear from time to time. While the large variety of techniques available to most jujutsuka gives the practitioners many choices and so it is obviously a strength, it is also a weakness. Sometimes it seems to me that in order to become truly proficient in the many types of techniques present in jujitsu would take many lifetimes. Aikido on the other hand specializes in the use of locks and throws. Its curriculum encompasses only about 20 techniques, which are applied from many different situations, so that it seems almost possible to learn them in one lifetime. The weaknesses of specialization are as stated above, while the strength of this approach is not immediately apparent to casual practitioners.



Comments by aikidoka about jujitsu or judo often are, "Looks effective, but brutal and stiff. Where is the art?" Aside from the fact that the above aikidoka believe the myth about of own system being less effective for combat, the comment also shows little understanding of the spiritual heart of jujitsu. Okazaki Sensei, the founder of Danzan Ryu jujitsu, in his esoteric principles talks much about the focus of jujitsu and judo being the development of the human spirit. Kano Sensei made this idea the cornerstone of Judo. It is ridiculous to think that techniques that employ a more stationery approach and tighter circles in the practice of its techniques lends itself any less to the development of the human spirit. Even competition in Judo, when approached right, gets one past the desire to win, to a feeling of camaraderie and compassion for other competitors, honorable conduct under duress, and moments of transcendence when two people

create one perfect technique. One of the main goals of most modern martial arts is to gain a greater understanding of conflict and fear in order to have a better sense of the self and one's place in the world. *(cont'd on next page)*  
*(Jujitsu and Aikido, cont'd from prev page)*



Yes, it can be harder to see such lofty ideals when watching a jujitsu practitioner choke somebody into submission. Yes, it is easy sometimes for practitioners to get stuck in only caring about fighting. Yet as many of the great teachers have stated through the centuries, it is the potential brutality of our techniques, including those used by aikidoka, and the understanding we gain of fear and conflict through their practice that allows us to refine our character. This approach is what separates our art form from other arts and makes us martial artists.

Both the aikido and jujitsu at their best produce practitioners that move fluidly, are beautiful to watch, and are proficient at applying their techniques combatively when needed. The different training methods merely emphasize a given aspect more or at a different point in the training. The values held and the ethics displayed by many of the practitioners of the two arts are more similar than not. It is easy to criticize an art based on the worst of its practitioners. All arts have places where practitioners can get stuck in their progress and so to presume that the worst of the art is the whole of it, or that knowledge gained during perhaps a couple of months or days of cross-training gives one real understanding is what perpetuates the misconceptions that practitioners of the two arts have of one another's styles. To me the two arts are but two different roads up the same mountain and the higher up the mountain I go the closer the roads seem.

*[Ed: Mike Esmailzadeh instructs Shinkendo and Aikibujutsu in his Oakland, CA dojo <http://www.suigetsukan.org> ]*



## Humbled Again

By Shawn Forristall

I was lucky enough to be able to make another pilgrimage to Honbu for additional personal training with Obata Kaiso March 4<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup>. I took two of my senior students, Kevin Appleton and Steve Kibler, and had the good fortune of having Sensei Randy Beard from Arkansas join us as well.

We began our training on that Thursday night. Obviously any time you have the benefit of training in person with Obata Kaiso you want to show him how much you have progressed and how hard you have been training. This pressure along with the fatigue of traveling across the country that day and getting up at 4:30 am after not going to sleep until 2 am, made us all feel like a bunch of motor morons that night. At one point Kaiso look at me and said “migi hanmi”. I look at my training partners as if I had never heard that term before. I thought Kaiso was going to tell us to go back to Atlanta that night. Fortunately he took pity on us and recognized we were there in spirit but our minds were on overload.

We are an ambitious group and we requested 15 plus hours of training in Shinkendo, Aiki, and Bojutsu. For our aiki sections Obata Kaiso reviewed several drills to help us develop a strong foundation for Jiyu waza. I greatly enjoyed this material as I feel it will greatly help us in our never ending endeavor to grasp aikido / aikibujutsu. I was on the receiving end for the majority of the techniques that Obata Kaiso was trying to teach to us over the weekend. I am a large person, 6'2" and 235 #s, and I am always amazed how helpless I feel when Kaiso begins performing any number of controls or throws. I guess I am a little crazy, or brain damaged, but I really enjoy being beaten and twisted up like a pretzel.

For Bojutsu we reviewed much of our basic curriculum and then Kaiso again surprised us with a whole new group of basic blocks and strikes with sabaki which Kaiso explained as being much more “Japanese” as opposed to the other material which is more “Okinawan” / Ryuku Kubodo. This was very enjoyable as well. I really enjoy bojutsu as I feel it really amplifies things that I am doing well and poorly thus helping me greatly as a learning tool for Aiki and Shinkendo.

When we began our first Shinkendo section Kaiso told us to bring two bokutos. We all looked at each other a little perplexed until we realized that Kaiso was demonstrating double sword drills! Just when you think you are getting a small grasp on Shinkendo Kaiso introduces additional material. This material was challenging, using left hand to swing a sword felt incredibly foreign, but by the end of our weekend it began to feel much more comfortable. We also spent a good deal of time on covering Shinkendo basics such as tanren gata and tachi uchi. Training at Honbu is always humbling but when Yoko Sensei chased me off the floor doing ryusui because I couldn't keep up with her length it was especially an ego check. I am a good foot taller than Yoko Sensei and I felt like I was standing in cement compared to her. Thanks to her patience by the end of that session I knew much more about how to generate distance with basic movement.

Besides the great benefit of the physical training I always enjoy spending time with Kaiso and Mrs. Obata Sensei. They are very gracious hosts and always made our group feel very welcome and comfortable. I learn a great deal with each interaction by watching how Kaiso treats others and how much he wants to teach those who are willing to learn. After our final training session on Sunday Morning Kaiso stated he was very happy because he felt we “got” 85% of what he was trying to teach us. His percentage could be a little generous but I did feel I had learned more over this 4 day period than any other training session I can recall.

I would like to thank Kaiso again as well as Mrs. Obata Sensei, Yoko Sensei, Saito Sensei, and Nicholas Sensei for their instruction and hospitality as well. I look forward to my next visit to Honbu.

Sincerely,  
Shawn Forristall  
Atlanta Budokan [Ed: <http://www.atlantabudokan.com> ]



## A Trip to a Token Kai (sword show)

-By Merlin Tolstyk

This past February 13<sup>th</sup> through 15<sup>th</sup> in Tampa Bay, Florida the largest Japanese sword show on the east coast held. The show featured numerous blades both old and new, sword fittings as well as polishers, swordsmiths and just about everything else that one would need in regards to Japanese swords.

As someone who has been studying Shinkendo for almost two years I have had rather limited exposure to different swords. Yes, during our dojo's tameshigiri sessions I have seen and held my fellow students' shinkens, however, that's only about a dozen blades or so and as far as I know, all modern made. So attending the show seemed like the perfect opportunity to expand my understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of the weapon we all train so diligently to wield. And what an opportunity it was – at the show I held at least a hundred different swords from antique blades to WWII guntos to high end Japanese made modern blades.

The show featured a fine assortment of “papered” blades, that is blades that have been certified by the NBTHK as authentic and worthy of note. This certification, roughly the size and shape of a brochure is required to be kept with the blade at all times and most commonly was attached to the draw cord at the top of its sword bag. These were beautiful blades with absolutely amazing action on the hamon. You can read about or see pictures of a flame pattern in the hamon but when you see a proper example in person, it is absolutely breathtaking. Needless to say the price tags on the papered blades were quite breathtaking as well. Maybe some day....

One of the things that struck me while walking around was how different I was from most people there. As far as I could tell the overwhelming majority of attendees were sword collectors and not practitioners. It is hard to describe but when most people there handled the blades it was clear that they knew how to evaluate the blade but not really how to hold it. More time was spent examining the nuances and other little nits that are important to the look of the blade rather than the overall balance and feel of the weapon. The first question that popped into my mind was “would I want to take this sword into battle?” different from most people who were more concerned with the stats of the blade (when was it made, by who, etc.) Every time commented on a sword having one peg vs. two (as the majority did) I was met with mostly incredulous looks; not important to collectors at all but important to someone who wields the weapon. It would seem that being a practitioner really does give you a different perspective.

The most common item on display was, not surprisingly, guntos, World War II swords. Given that World War II was “only” about 65 years ago and that the guntos were, for the most part mass produced, most of the vendors had a selection on display. First thing that struck me was that for an item that was essentially “government issue” there was quite a bit of variation. In fact each one at the show was unique in one fashion or another.

While examining some guntos I learned something fairly interesting from one the collectors about blades lost during World War II. As you may know, during the war many of the officers who served took their family sword, remounted in military mounts, into the service. So not all officer swords were government issue, in fact a good portion were private blades brought into service, either the army or the navy. Japanese from more prominent families, the ones more likely to have truly historic blades, tended to serve in the Japanese Navy as it was the more prestigious branch of military service. So unfortunately many of these historic pieces were lost as they found their final resting place at the bottom of the sea rather than on a battlefield where they could be rescued.

The highlight of the show was a question and answer session with Swordsmith Mr. Yoshindo Yoshihara. Mr. Yoshihara was recently awarded the designation of Culturally Important Person by the Japanese government. This designation is one rank below the highest honor of Living National Treasure, and many believe he will achieve that honor within the next few years. Questions ranged from the very simple to the extremely complex. A few interesting things were said that I actually understood such as the specific temperature of water used to cool blades when being forged is not very important, room temperature water is sufficient and that becoming a swordsmith requires an apprenticeship for a minimum of five years followed by a period where the aspiring swordsmith's work is submitted and graded by the NBTHK. Only after the smith in training's work is deemed acceptable may he begin producing blades for sale.

As far as I know Japanese sword shows are held each year in both Florida and San Francisco and provide a good opportunity for students, especially newer ones like myself, to see a lot of what is out there from the good to the bad (an improperly polished blade is just dreadful to either look at or use and I got to see plenty of those!) and to meet other people in the ever so small sword community. We are lucky to have access to the tremendous amounts of sword knowledge from Kaiso and our senior instructors, however, swords can be like sunsets. They can be described to you at length but to truly appreciate them you actually have to see them yourself. *[ Ed: Merlin is a student at the Atlanta Budokan ]*

# Forging a Path to Freedom: A Utah Parable

Kurt Johnson & Anita Y. Tsuchiya

*Authors' note: The paintings that accompany this essay refer to a popular Zen metaphor for the stages to enlightenment most commonly referred to as the "Ten Oxherding Pictures." This particular set—considered the oldest known to exist in Japan—is attributed to Shūbun, a painter officially appointed by the Muromachi government during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. (Source: ZEN: Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings, Helmut Brinker and Hiroshi Kanazawa, 1996.)*



*Seeking the Ox*



*Finding Footprints*

It's always been the Johnson family tradition to hunt, fish and forage together in the great bounty we call the Rocky Mountain wilderness. As a third-generation descendant of Utah pioneers, Kurt Sensei feels that these activities are an expression of and homage to the Johnson clan's frontier roots. Hunting with black-powder firearms relies on the ability to master your skills and instincts rather than a clutter of high-tech gadgetry. From childhood, he has been trained to respect firearms as a powerful force for good (or evil) and to take with deadly sincerity the subject of wielding them.

So it was natural for young Kurt to be attracted to the martial traditions of other cultures. He sheepishly admits being fascinated as a teenager by the Kung Fu television series, and later by martial arts action flicks. (Heck, weren't we all?) In fact, his teenage crush evolved into a two-decade long dedicated study of Hapkido. But he still longed to find an Asian art devoted to the soul of the warrior—the sword.

Kurt Sensei discovered the work of Phil Hartsfield and sought out this master swordsmith in hopes that he could commission a Japanese-style blade with the kind of beauty that was more than skin deep. When Kurt Sensei mentioned his desire to train in a traditional sword art, Mr. Hartsfield generously referred him to two such masters.

This is how one afternoon in 1993, 30-year-old Kurt Johnson found himself standing inside a Buddhist Temple in downtown Hollywood for his first taste of the samurai arts. Despite his inability to speak Japanese, he quickly realized that he'd found his teacher, Obata Toshishiro Kaiso.



*Pursuing the Ox*

In fact, the biggest hurdle was the “commute” from Utah to California. Obata Kaiso offered that Kurt Sensei might train under one of his most senior students, Mike Esmailzadeh Kyoshi at his Suigetsukan school in the California Bay Area. Perhaps, Obata Kaiso suggested, this would help cut down on some of the cost of his studies?

So over the next several years, Kurt Sensei enrolled in Shinkendo’s distance-learning program—traveling to train with Mike Kyoshi. Whenever time and money would allow, Kurt would also journey to Southern California and train with Obata Kaiso.



*Catching the Ox*

Kurt Sensei recalls being temporarily transplanted from the high desert to spend his middle-school years in the heart of the city. Like every generation before him, young Kurt struggled to find the road to adulthood. Being a fresh-faced, farm boy who stood a full hand-and-a-half taller than his city-bred classmates certainly didn’t help much.

This time around, the 6’5” young man from the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains learned to wear hakama, sit in seiza, and count in Japanese. He practiced for hours on end, fascinated by the play between mind and body, sword and body, arms and legs—until the sword became an extension of his very being. Wielding this deadly force had become his vehicle for self-expression.



*Taming the Ox*

As time went on, the young man began to realize that all of the rigorous and strict

training was already familiar to him. The reiho, discipline and principles of the samurai seemed remarkably similar to the values transmitted by his own father and grandfather. The more he practiced and studied under his Shinkendo sensei, the more he was able to see the parallels between East and West. And most importantly, the more he came to understand his own sense of history and lineage.



*Returning Home, In Harmony*

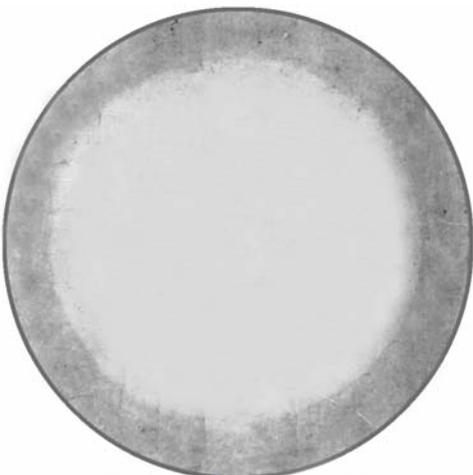
He looks back now in amusement and gratitude about how a teacher whose very language was a mystery could provide such profound insights to a young man seeking to find himself. Kurt Sensei reflects that one of the greatest gifts he received from his studies of Shinkendo (so far anyway!) has been a greater appreciation for his own martial heritage and traditions.



*Ox Forgotten*

He also began to see how the robust structure and non-verbal teachings of the martial arts would enable other young men and women to find the respect and confidence they so desperately craved. He'd always understood that it was his duty to teach. That this was the only way he could sincerely repay his own sensei Obata Kaiso and Mike Kyoshi, for all their years of generous guidance.

Kurt Sensei's teaching style is distinctly American. He is warm, highly approachable and actually becomes a bit embarrassed about being called a "master." That he cares for his students in a deeply personal way is self-evident. There are several young citizens working and living in Utah today, who have Kurt Sensei to thank for not ending up in an inmate's orange jumpsuit, or worse.



*Ox and Man ~ All as One*

Class discipline is expected and taught by personal example. He rarely raises his voice, except to bark out "ichi, ni, "san, etc." But you only have to see him in motion once to realize that he doesn't need false bravado or magic tricks to earn his students' respect. Consistent

with the kuyo junikun philosophy, Kurt Sensei believes rank promotions should measure the correct line of a student's spirit, as well as their hasuji.

In 18 years of teaching, Kurt Sensei has also discovered a delightful side benefit—that his own development continues in ways he could not have imagined. It is indeed, as Obata Kaiso states in his letter to instructors:

One does not graduate from budo—the path of budo is a lifelong endeavor. This is in fact what budo means.



*Returning to the Source*



*Entering the City with Open Hands*



Front row (left-to-right): Jason Leafy, Kurt Johnson, Tim Bingham

Middle row: Mike Owen, Anita Tsuchiya, Jeff Smith

Back row: Nathan Allen, Rick Dalton, Marti Lewis, Shannon Bingham, Zach Owen

## A Walk in the Park

By Mike Shu

The Japanese Garden invited Matthew Lynch Sensei to demonstrate at their annual Spring Festival. Along for the ride were four Honbu students including James Huang, Stephen Fast, yours truly, and Saito Sensei of the Orange County Dojo. I was very excited about the idea of a more panoramic, 360-style presentation. Most participants came on the 24<sup>th</sup> to rehearse. I came at the arranged time of 2:00 PM but was alone in the parking lot until 2:20 when the parking guard pointed out that there were some people dressed like me in the park next to the garden. Sure enough, there was Matthew Lynch Sensei and his students already swinging away.

I ran down to join the crowd and told everybody we were able to actually go into the closed garden to practice. A pleasant surprise to Matthew Sensei as he was told the Garden was closed. All you had to do was sound important as you tell the guard you are performing the next day in order to get past. So after finishing up some tachi-uchi practice, we packed up and made the short trip to the parking lot of the Japanese Garden.

The garden was indeed a beautiful place. It was set right next to a water reclamation plant but there wasn't really any sign of it being so. Aside from the modern looking building on the side, the Japanese Garden looked very much like the ones in Kyoto. Ducks quacked, tiny waterfalls splashed and big koi caused ripples in the pond.

We arrived at the side road at the far end of the park which was to be our "stage". It was rather unorthodox, being a dirt road after all, but it sort of harkened back to the day when samurai would face off in such environments. As we went through the routines, dust blew up from our foot movements. It was quite a dramatic effect but when doing tachi-uchi hard and fast, one must remember to keep their mouths closed.

The performance of techniques was a great challenge on the gravel/dirt road. The momentum of large movements would cause practitioners to slide a little extra distance. "Good balance practice" as Matthew Sensei called it – I agree. After blocking out the performance and seeing what was possible in the limited space, we left for the evening to meet again 1:30 PM the next day.

A good number of park visitors were walking around when we arrived the next day. The sun was hot, but thankfully we had a nice resting spot in the shade where most of the "stage" was under. Our section of the road was cordoned off and there were already people standing at our borders watching us prepare. We must have attracted them with our lovely hakama.

The performance started right on time, most people stood in the shade but some unlucky spectators had to stand in the sun to get a good view. A good thirty or so people were watching us from various viewpoints, with a few more watching from the teahouse in the corner.

After bowing in, Matthew Sensei's students went through kamae, suburi, battoho, and basic tanrenkata. Under Matthew Sensei's wishes, some students used iaito for the techniques to make the "shinken" in Shinkendo more apparent. Stephen Fast took the stage with Matthew Sensei in Goho Battoho Santengiri. Then advanced kata were performed with James Huang and Saito Sensei performing Chuden Sei, me performing Chuden Do, and Matthew Sensei performing Goho Hoen.

Tachi-uchi was next up and two of Matthew's students <Names?> performed Ippon-Dachi. Then James and I came up to kick up some dust with Ippon-Dachi Advanced. Hopefully those who were downwind from us didn't get a face full of dust. We were followed by Matthew Sensei and Saito Sensei performing Juppon-Dachi, the James changing places with Saito Sensei to perform Juppon Omote.

Then it was time to do some Tameshigiri. I was first up to cut five targets in which I mostly did Toyama-Ryu's Rokuten-Giri. Then James came up to effortlessly cut his share of five targets. Saito Sensei was next and speedily did battoho cuts. Matthew Sensei was then the last up, showing his skills while doing kaeshi like clockwork.

Everybody then came out and bowed to the audience and concluded the demonstration. All throughout the demo, Matthew Sensei did a thorough commentary and threw in some humor in between the lines. Too bad we didn't have a microphone and speakers, Matthew Sensei must have had to really shout to get his voice to everybody.

After the demo we schmoozed with people asking questions and had some refreshments courtesy of the garden staff. It was indeed a great location to hold a demonstration. Next year we hope to hold a demo in The Japanese Garden once again. Hopefully we would have a stage set up in the future, as to avoid adding road dust to our diet.

[ Ed: For more photos you can check out <http://www.mashuudojo.com/photos.htm> ]



