

THREE KEIKO HAIKU

January

Moonlight through the mist.
A ring of clear air travels
With me through the park.

March

Daffodils swaying.
Angular, obdurate oak
Shrouded in winter.

July

Clap of pigeon's wings;
Wind rustles in the beeches.
Time to go to work!
Peter Furtado

BOD Report

Our October meeting was a virtual meeting conducted on the telephone. A last minute break-in to one of our cars scuppered any chance of meeting face-to face!

As such we only dealt with urgent items. We reviewed some of the recent events, such as the Gower Bash which was a great success. We also did some forward planning to start to complete the 1997 calendar. Now is the time to get involved if you feel that there is a type of event that you would like us to consider for the future.

We also reviewed the SF publicity. We are planning to produce a small poster which local groups can use to publicize events/short courses/introductory sessions. The style of the poster will compliment the 'house style' as developed by the current card leaflet. It will have stunning imagery and a space for local information to be written or printed. If you have an image that you think should be considered please send a photocopy of it to Marcus or Patti.

In addition we are looking at ways that the card can be personalised by either stick on labels or ink-stamp to give details of local groups/contacts. Letterhead paper and envelope stickers are also well underway to help us all create a better impression when booking dojo and dealing with the Shintaido Foundation business.

Marcus Grant, 18th October 1996

Looking after the lookers after - Mentors

Sometime during one of the more recent AI meetings, discussion turned to the problems raised by having a relatively mobile teaching base. Instructors and assistants seem to move around fairly frequently, classes change venue and new teaching models seem to surface on a fairly regular basis. With so much change taking place in the way instruction is carried out, it was felt that beginning instructors or assistants sometimes needed a steady guiding hand to help them find a clear path to follow.

Someone raised the idea of instituting a system whereby beginning Assistants or even Instructors could turn for advice on their own personal keiko progress to a more experienced Instructor or practitioner, (a Mentor) and I was asked what my feelings would be about such a system.

Well, I thought about it a bit, and it struck me that it points up some interesting ways in which the Shintaido we practice here is and isn't like the Shintaido practised in Japan. I think it also illustrates how Shintaido itself differs in some respects from the more traditional systems of study in Japan.

In the Japanese Martial Arts (or in virtually any other Japanese Art for that matter) the usual, established means of transmission of knowledge is the apprentice system.

Stories abound of interesting and amusing exchanges between teacher and disciple, and the Senior/Junior relationship is one which many Japanese would see as the natural and indeed indispensable basis for serious study. In such a relationship both parties would be bound by a deep obligation to take care of the welfare of the other. In some cases the teacher would go as far as feeling obliged to look to assist the student with employment, housing, even a partner. In some ways the practise of sensei care gives us our biggest opportunity to approach the sense of closeness between teacher and student that underlies so much of traditional Japanese culture.

It has to be said that in the past some Japanese Shintaido practitioners have expressed misgivings as to whether non-Japanese can ever really understand Shintaido without the benefit of such a clearly established teacher/student system as exists even now in Japan. On the other hand it also has to be said that Aoki sensei has in the past expressed misgivings about whether the Japanese can ever really understand Shintaido while hampered by the existence of rigidly codified notions of what learning may involve (or words to that effect).

Aoki sensei has always cited the great Western composers, painters, dancers, dramatists and philosophers -classical and

modern- as being among his greatest inspirations. At the same time he clearly takes the most profound inspiration from Eastern and Asian thinkers of all ages. So the idea of Shintaido adopting a system whereby practitioners might turn for advice or guidance to someone other than their immediately senior instructor, (or assistant for that matter) may seem rather odd or alarming from a narrowly Japanese perspective, whereas for someone raised in the Western tradition nothing could seem more normal or sensible than the idea of a kind of shopping around to get the best deal (let's say suitable arrangement) for oneself.

So I suppose my feelings are that there are a whole load of cultural pros and cons associated with the form of Mentorship suggested, but that on the whole, I would say that the pros outweigh the cons.

Actually it happens that when I was a young(er) student of Shintaido in the late '70s in Japan, this idea of Mentorship was in fact launched to assist (mainly, I suspect, the foreign) aspiring instructors. My choice at that time of the Mentors available from the ranks of the original founder members of the Shintaido movement was one of the younger members; one Masashi Minagawa. It might be worth trying to get Minagawa sensei's feelings about the subject and how he felt it worked out with me! Choose well.

Tony Hammick

Practising while pregnant

A personal view of Shintaido by Rachel Ganz

I'm now five and a half months pregnant, and do an excellent job of heavy breathing! I'm still up here in Edinburgh, still practising once a week with Debbie Evans on Tuesday mornings (even when it's just sitting in seiza for ten minutes), and teaching two women on Monday evenings. We sometimes practise in a local park, sometimes in my front room, and sometimes in my back garden.

Over the last five months, I've slowed down a lot. I treasure the remark of Tony Hammick's, that I paraphrase as "if you come to keiko and look far, practising with your eyes, that is keiko". As my body stills and says "No" to more things, it seems that my mind and spirit have opened. This Tuesday, I traipsed out at 7a.m. with my jo (a much appreciated gift from Masashi Minagawa). The sky was still dark, and as I warmed up (in woolly gloves and three tops), the silhouette of a tree and the sound of birds grew clearer against the navy sky. By the time that I started moving through the kata, the frosty football field in front of me seemed to reach to the distant Pentlands, and I was filled with joy.

I didn't care about the rightness of the movements, they flowed through me.

I gave up practising Buddhism a year and a half ago. At the time, I thought that Shintaido would supply the meditation practice. On Tuesday it did. I finished the keiko with jo-lifting, and saw the heavy clouds, loaded with snow, and saw the end of the jo connect to them, and knew that I was within the circle of life and the universe.

Later that day, the clouds opened, providing snow, slush and hail. It's a wonderful thing, this universe.

I don't know whether spiritual uplift comes from being alone, being pregnant, or just being alive. Does anyone else out there find Shintaido is not only more than exercise and more than martial art, but sometimes something totally different? Does it have anything to do with the physical high from all that jumping, or is the sheer pleasure I get from being totally not guilty about not doing any jumping at all just as good? I've finally learnt not to try and get it right all the time.

Rachel Ganz

Book Reviews

Tortuous but true!

a review of "Untying Knots" by Michael Thompson, General Instructor, USA

I'm sure I'm not the only one who's ever been in the position of gasping for breath at the end of a long eiko dai or willing my knees to move just that bit further whilst screaming internally at yet another round of jumping. At times like this it is not uncommon to curse the instructor doing the urging and groan, I bet they never had to do this!"

It seems that the truth is, they did, and in Michael Thompson's case far more and far more intensely than my generation of Shintaido practitioners. "Untying knots" is not only a very eye opening account of how keiko was practised in the "early days of Rakutenkai and the generation immediately following, but also an honest and brave recounting of sensei Thompson's inner turmoil and the process of unravelling the mental knots which kept him from finding his "true self." It is also among others a perspective on the history of Shintaido of America, and was published in time for their 20th anniversary celebrations in July this year.

With the inner struggle as a backdrop, (heavy motif rather than leitmotif) we see many of Shintaido's famous and infamous

characters coming onto the stage. We see them from a different perspective and in a different context. For me this allowed some insight into where people fit into Shintaido's history and what role they have played in its development. I could imagine them as they were before I first knew them - just regular practitioners learning the ropes.

However what really made the book very worthwhile for me is learning about the long term effect that the practice of keiko has on an individual's condition. I now see sumo practice in a new light and have learnt a little more about shoko with the bokuto. There are some beautiful vignettes of individuals passing by during keiko and the profound effect their practice had on the writer - Robert Breant weeping during Eiko, Etsuko Aoki (Aoki sensei's wife) pushing out her energy even though her body was tired...and others. The chapter on gorei is an encouraging reminder of another aspect of keiko and a must for instructors and those leading classes.

Risking a cliché, Michael Thompson's account is full of faith, hope and love. His enduring faith that Shintaido would change him and help him grow. The hope that Shintaido be accessible to everyone - beginning with himself, a gaijin (foreigner), non martial artist, and following on to the rest of us, from our many different backgrounds and physical abilities. And finally a love of the movement and the philosophy which inspired it.

In case you are hazy on Shintaido philosophy the final chapters give an excellent and very clear explanation of Aoki sensei's ideas of where Shintaido fits into the scheme of things. Michael also expresses and deals with some of the difficulties that we are currently facing in terms of explaining Shintaido to enquirers and the perceived current lack of interest in self-development /spiritual-development in the population at large. Teaching Shintaido and passing on its essence has never been an easy task, but as Michael Thompson's story shows, if we keep on persevering one or two individuals will come to appreciate its meaning. If many of us persevere then many people will discover what Shintaido is about.

"The body is not viewed as a metaphor to be deciphered but rather as the instrument of our awakening. ...Along with other groups and individuals who refuse to sleep the sleep of complacency and spiritual indolence, it (Shintaido) can serve to point a way"

If you haven't yet obtained a copy please do. This first edition unfortunately has its share of typos and some missing copy here and there. However this didn't really detract from my

enjoyment of the book and it really is worth the reading. As they say in the States "read and enjoy!"

Jeff Chambers

A Shintaido Chronicle

A review of "Untying Knots" by Michael Thompson

This book, the account of the Shintaido career of one of the most respected instructors, and Shintaido's best known humorist, begins as a conventional spiritual autobiography of the "I-once-was-a-sinner-and-now-I-am-saved" kind, though with surprisingly few lurid details about the former dissolute lifestyle.

But it proves far more interesting than that. And interesting not just to someone who has their own Shintaido path, or who has come across many of the personalities and conflicts that Thompson describes. Even someone only marginally interested in Shintaido could find much of a relevance in the story he relates.

It is the very honest tale of a man who slowly, painfully acknowledges and faces up to his deep lack of self-belief, and gradually overcomes it with the help of this movement system that we have come to love, and its extraordinary founder.

Thompson explains that he was, for Aoki sensei, an experiment, the first non-Japanese, non-martial artist to be made an instructor. This makes his keiko career so relevant to many of us in Britain today, few of whom have the high level experience of other martial arts that was common in the early days of Shintaido.

His struggle to find out how the Shintaido forms and his growing self-awareness could together give him the skills and strength to confidently meet even the most muscular of the "old-style" martial artists. The tales of his failures, and eventual successes, particularly in his Senior Instructor's exams, is more than a personal one, but is instructive for all of us. He is inspiring too, in his dedication and commitment. Even when things seemed infinitely depressing, he went on with his keiko, and fought his way through.

Further, this book is valuable for the insights it provides into Aoki sensei. Again, there are many of us in Britain today who have never been able to study in Japan, and for whom the founder of Shintaido is a somewhat awesome, distant figure; a man we have seen only occasionally at busy gasshuku's. With little chance to spend time with him, we have to rely on the anecdotes of those who have studied in Japan to appreciate many of his complex gifts.

Thompson was in Japan for several years, at the heyday of the "international set" then studying Shintaido in Tokyo, which

included Tony Hammick, Geoffrey Fitch, and Pierre Quettier. He has long been close to Aoki sensei, and gives many glimpses of his personality and powers.

The climax of the entire book is a private keiko at which Aoki sensei suggests to him that he should meet his child-self. This then transpires during a long eiko while Aoki sensei himself is asleep. The shamanistic overtones of this event, during which Thompson finally comes to terms with himself, are stressed, and we wonder yet again at the power of gorei and the hidden world which Shintaido opens up.

It is fascinating and important for all future students that these stories should be written down.

The book is a sincere presentation of a difficult journey. it is also an exposition of so many of the tensions at the heart of our movement: those between Japanese and Western ways, of course, and even more between the intellect and the anti-intellectualism of our body-art. it ends with a candid analysis of the problems of the Shintaido movement in the mid-1990's, and Thompson's prescriptions for the way forward.

For me, Thompson's thorough commitment to his path challenge each reader individually, and raises questions about the future of our movement. If Shintaido is to go forward into another generation, some of us must undergo keiko journeys as long, complex, and difficult as his own. For that to happen presupposes a keiko environment, somewhere in the world, where instructors welcome and make possible such commitment, and where other students gather to encourage one another through all the struggles they will face.

Such an environment obviously existed in Tokyo in the 1970's and early 1980's. Is it still possible, or has the time for such "heroic" keiko passed? If so, the chances of our system surviving for many decades must be diminished.

Peter Furtado

Internet News

E-mail Kumite

This exchange of ideas about kumite took place on the SF e-mail mailing list.

Kumite

We've been playing with the implications of kumite for a long time-- here are some of our recent thoughts. Please add your comments, reflections, etc.

L: Without actual experience of reality, we are at the mercy of our imaginations and projections.

J: The partner, as other, provides a resistance to test ideas and meditative states against, forcing ideas, insights, and meditative states to evolve in a history-producing context.

L: In the Enlightenment, when man was named "the measure of all things", freedom came to be identified with autonomy.

J: The associate that one practices with subverts the realm of pure ideas into historical (world) facts. The partner thus generates ex-status ideas and shifts perceptions. The free play of sensuous embodiment (perception and expression) produces ex-status - but ecstasy can be unpleasant as easily as pleasant.

L: Our world is in great need of effective love. But we don't know how to love people because we are trained to see them as boxes, masks, spear carriers.

J: The partner as other keeps what one finds in a fresh world (and brings back as treasure to the old) from being a chimera or a duplicity of the mind. The other prevents one from hiding behind a mask of "pure" ideas and concepts. Mapping usefulness of novel finds by changes in one's partner joins the commonplace and fresh domains together.

L: The underlying metaphor for partner work is eiko, which encourages us to recognize our connection with both God and the world.

J: While transcendence beyond the familiar categories involves promise (of a different future), evaluating treasure in terms of the social - that is, the partner - forces one to attain something beyond self-transcendence. Anaesthesia to the world is an unacceptable posture.

L: Our practice is a filter which removes complacency, shifting routine perceptions into new neural paths. The world becomes more uncomfortable and clearer.

J: Practice increases perceptions and sharpens expressions rather than generating value-free, dispassionate "knowledge". The passionate knowledge one gains from practice depends both on what one brings from the "old" milieu and on what one's partner-collaborator brings. Thus the passions mapped out are not self-enclosed individualistic nor eternal truth nor context neutral. Passionate knowledge does not exist independent of the practitioner nor of the partner.

L: To really participate in this knowledge, we must allow our partner to be in time, in flux. Passion moves; static passion is an oxymoron. Knowledge of this kind is like balancing on river logs - you have to keep moving if you want to keep breathing
John and Lee Seaman<lseaman@az.com>

Re: Kumite

John and Lee called to mind a quotation I saved some years before I did Shintaido, unfortunately without attribution:

"I want, not knowledge, but experience of the laws of things; to suffer them, not only to observe them. To apprehend with regard to the things I come across--the necessities of their being, what immutable law makes them what they are, their physics and chemistry and actuality, to feel it."

My hook for thinking of it was really just the first six words or so--obviously the authour is going more into the physical than the social world. Nonetheless, I've always found it productive to be clear on the distinction between knowledge, which tends or attempts to be timeless, and experience, which always has a 'when' component as surely as a 'who' and a 'where'.

I occasionally gnaw on the Christian concept of Eternal Life; I don't think it means we get to live forever, but maybe it means that we get to be alive while we're here, to live fully and passionately. A risky business, which must be why you keep hearing in the Bible, "Do not be afraid!"

Carolyn (Cambridge)

Re: Kumite

Bouncing off Carolyn's observation of living passionately in time:

The fire of passion: service and self-interest inflaming the everyday, as in making a roast from a phoenix. Partner work as presentational theatre (realistic theatre in a classic western sense) alternating with katas as re/presentational drama (mellowed dramas as in archetype, soap opera, and performed dance [Swan Lake / Ugly Duckling Kabuki]). Distribution of weight and energy constantly shift in partner work. If we use Fenyman's definition that a stable state exists after all the fast things have happened but before the slow ones do, then we never have a stable state in practice. Energy-koshi as a balance of changing tensions. We can't have a dualism between passion and technique.

John Seaman

To subscribe to the SF mailing list, send an e-mail request to:

shintaido@edobarn.demon.co.uk

Subscription is free and open to all.

Letters

From San Francisco.....

This morning I rode my bike from San Rafael to Larkspur in Marin County and took the ferry into San Francisco. I do this on Tuesdays and Thursdays; every time I travel by the ferry I go out to the bow and do kenko taiso. I've been doing this for three months since we moved up to San Rafael from San Francisco, and in all that time no one had ever asked me about Shintaido until this morning, when two people separately came out to inquire about what I was doing. They both thought it was Tai Chi.

I've stopped worrying about the small class size here. We pulled off a big gasshuku with an enthusiastic core group. As Jesus said, "Even when two or three are gathered together, there am I..." Some of the most renowned Buddhist monks had only a few followers. Their attitude was to be thankful that those few had found the Way. We do have several classes going, and eventually any oddball characters who need Shintaido will find us.

Anyway, random rumblings from "the cool grey city of Love."

Stephen Billias

.....and Denmark

Hello

My name is Carsten Mller. I practise Ki Aikido in Copenhagen, Denmark. A few years ago I met Shintaido in Brussels and found it very interresting and fun to do. Could you connect me with someone who eventually could conduct a workshop here in Denmark some time in the future? I don't have e-mail, but can be reached at:

Carsten Mller
Rosenvngets Alle 7A
2100 Kbenhavn
Denmark
Thank you
Carsten Mller

"Do-ing the Do-In"

Some thoughts about the role of the Internet in Shintaido

"Well!"

I thought as I read the "Internet News" section in our last Newsletter, "Well... some things are better transmitted in the old-fashioned ways".

I was reading the notes I had made on the do-in sequence, and reading them as a newcomer might.

"Our old system of gorei works best".

This is where a person who is qualified to teach or transmit something to others shares their knowledge by demonstrating to others, helping to adjust a movement, or encouraging where necessary.

As I read the description of do-in, Okada sensei's very memorable keiko came to mind. Admittedly some of us straggled with some of the positions, but through careful demonstration, practical assistance, and strong concentration, Okada sensei was able to achieve a profound sense of calm in the room, and, in my body and mind at least, some sense of clarity and unity which was unusual for me then.

My notes of the sequence are, I'm afraid, only partial. I guess the result would be the same if we tried to write step by step instructions on how to fold a hakama or how to do tenshingoso.

At this point Rachel descended on me from Edinburgh, and this letter suddenly became a point of discussion, editing and joint composition, so from now on it's "we" rather than "I".
(Deborah Evans)

After seeing the do-in notes printed in the SF Newsletter, we discussed whether it was appropriate or desirable to put them on the internet. They can be read by anyone in the world, with no experience of Shintaido, and no knowledge of the history from which the movements come. People could, theoretically, damage themselves by mis-understanding them.

When you see a sequence of written instructions, the spirit is lost. The instruction can be a point of "recollecting in tranquillity" something you have already experienced. But if they are your first point of contact, there is none of the protective care that we receive from the sensei passing on the movements. Instead we bring in our minds, working out mental patterns and attempting to translate them into physical movements.

Is it possible to learn Shintaido from a book? Without a human being standing with, and guiding you? Perhaps it is, but the book must be far more informative than a series of notes taken partly as reminders. One of the great joys and agonies of Shintaido is the human contact, the sharing with society. Attempting to pass information directly over the internet brings in so many questions about people, communication, respect, and space.... that we decided to leave it for the moment.

We'll replace that page on the web site with interesting Shintaido photos or articles instead. Contributions to Rachel please!

Meanwhile, to anyone who once knew the do-in routine and can't remember it, or would like to learn it afresh, both of us are

very happy to pass our knowledge on in person (a special bonus to anyone who goes up to Edinburgh to learn it!)

Deborah Evans & Rachel Ganz

Addendum

Working on my own in Edinburgh, I appreciate all the things that people have written down about Shintaido. I also notice, when I come to a keiko with real live touchable people (as opposed to real-live-but-not-within-reach keiko with Debbie) all the things that I haven't been able to capture. the sense of ma (distance), wa(harmony) and ku (emptiness). More than that, I have struggled hugely with myself, and with technique, but that's all.

There are no hugs in books. There is no resentment, anger, bitterness or joy. No sudden pain, or the sudden wellings of tenderness that spring up between the most disparate people who have been though keiko together.

Over the time that we've been doing long-distance keiko together, we have both become better at transmitting things over the 'phone, although it has often meant holding the bo in one hand, the 'phone in the other, and careering wildly around the sitting room! If I have been able to attend a workshop, I can pass new sequences on to Rachel, and have found that it is invaluable to have kept a keiko record. So often I have forgotten the details, and my keiko book has helped us out.

Writing things down is wonderful, especially when Debbie does all the work, and I get most of the benefit!)

D.E. & R.G.