

## EASTER GASSHUKU

The next gasshuku will be held in Brighton the weekend before Easter- 4th/5th April (?). It is open to all practitioners, of any experience. It will be a Bo gasshuku.

Information out soon.

Contact Debbie Page or Ula Chambers.

## SPRING GASSHUKU

There will be a spring gasshuku in Japan in May, lead by Lee Seaman from the US.

This is a brief description from Lee Ordeman in Japan. "We'll spend 3 days for the main gasshuku on the Chiba Coast, about 2 hours from Tokyo, Kujukuri Hama, a traditional Shintaido keiko spot and a place Lee knows well from her days in Tokyo. The theme is, roughly translated, "open your heart and shine brightly," and has to do with openness to the sacred while giving and receiving and how we learn this through kumite.

Another theme of the gasshuku, or a related theme, is communication. We'll have a seminar for interested people about use of the internet and how it can help us communicate. We'll be posting e-mail to Shintaido friends around the world and updating the homepage with pictures and keiko reports and stuff.

## GASSHUKU 2000

The year 2000 celebration gasshuku will take place in Japan. There is an organiser, Keiko Sugimoto. More details later.

## Images beyond Speech

Reflections on life, death and Shintaido

Leading the Wednesday group in that wonderfully expansive dojo at Oldbury Court last summer, two things were striking. One was the closeness of death as several group members mothers or fathers died, and the second, the imminence of birth as my pregnancy bloomed. The week after my daughter's arrival, my partner became critically ill, and was briefly close to death. As summer faded into Autumn, on the other side of the globe, Minagawa sensei's father passed from this world.

I was very conscious over this time of the vulnerability of my Shintaido friends, but also of their great strength; their profound grief, but also their well earned satisfaction at comfort

and support given, and at pain and distress foreshortened. It has led me to reflect on some aspects of Shintaido and the circle of birth, life and death.

One reason I value Shintaido is that it offers a compendium of tools and techniques which can be studied from others or freely selected, to assist in life's crises and challenges. In early pregnancy, while awaiting ante-natal screening results I found that simple meditation in seiza, visualising my baby and I helped me to make sense of her emerging status and calmed my fearful heart. I know that Belinda believes that her Shintaido practice helped sustain her courageous support to her mother over the long years in which Liz lived with cancer. That back garden in Huddersfield was home to bokutoh and boh practice on visits North, and in Bristol, Belinda took comfort from our group.

My own father died unexpectedly a few years ago and I clearly remember how my personal Shintaido practice helped me withstand the shock, the anger and the grief. All my keiko diary says on the subject is "Dad got married again", and two weeks later "Dad has died". The pages are filled with references to boh practice, traditionally the anchor for my hitori-geiko, and although I no longer take part in Christian worship, a rousing hymn from my childhood speaks directly of my boh and its significance. It says "my faith it is an oaken staff, the travellers well loved aid, my faith it is an oaken staff, O let me on it lean" It feels safe, it feels solid, it has seen me through thick and thin.

In meditation, in individual practice, in group keiko, Shintaido can offer space for reflection, and a channel for expressing rage, joy, anxiety, love. We can use it to dissipate grief and to develop the determination we need to deal with long term illness and death. I have found that techniques of breathing and concentration such as we study are invaluable as death approaches, just as much as for impending birth. We also have access to some profound meditative techniques and challenge keikos which can help us garner the courage and stamina to face pain.

Apart from the toolbox of techniques, Shintaido offers a framework for achieving harmony in our own lives. this is known as "Ten Chi Jin" or to give it the full term "Ten Chi Hito Bito Ware Ittai" Put simply it suggests that we need to strike a balance between Heaven (whatever that means to us); Earth or Great Nature; our Inner Self; and Society (friends, family and wider community)

Sometimes when people are terminally ill and their life has still some way to go, they are able to wring every last ounce of vitality out of it, to savour the daily and the mundane, and experience them as precious. This was the case with my friend,

Benedict, who died of Aids a decade ago. At his requiem, the priest had this to say about him,

“his favourite song was from the film, *La Cage Aux Folles*. It says, “the best of times is now, so hold this moment fast, and live and love as hard as you know how, and make this moment last because the best of times is now” This could sound like a rather escapist song, a song about running away from life. But that was not the point. The point is that instead of moping about how things might have been different, instead of worrying about how we might have been different people, and not made various mistakes, we can celebrate the lives that we have, with their messes and confusions and ambiguities”

Shintaido offers us this opportunity too. We know that Shintaido practitioners wear white because in Japanese culture it signifies death. We go to each keiko prepared to die. If not in reality, then at least in terms of giving our all, committing ourselves and the leaving it all behind, ready to renew our practice afresh another day. An essential part of Shintaido is about learning to leave behind our hindrances, and our experiences, to become our natural selves and live life to the full.

One summers evening, in Oldbury Court, we had been stretching our legs and our lungs with Eiko, and Nature seemed irrevocably in and around us. Peter’s father was recently dead and Peter had a strong sense that his father was with us, in the rustle of the trees as well as the ground under our feet. This connects for me with Shintaido as abstract, as images, as a spiritual process. The practice of Tenshingoso is clearly circular, from a deep, dark, prenatal uhn, through an explosion into the world, growing, shaping, offering and finally subsiding back into eternity. Is this a metaphor, an explanation, a physical creed ? Does it remain an allegory forever, or does our repetition prepare us spiritually to encounter birth, life, death and beyond ?

Equally the practice of Eiko which has sometimes been interpreted as a Christian allegory (to love the Lord Thy God and thy Neighbour as Thyself) has an endpoint of infinity. Are we breaking through to eternity ? Does the power of tsuki have the same intent ?

I don’t have the answers to these questions, if there are answers. These are the fundamentals which theologians and philosophers grasp. Is there a God, and if so are we part of God ? In what sense is Tenso Heaven ? Are we reborn as a different energy form in the cosmos ? I have wondered endlessly about the significance, the meaning of the fundamental Shintaido

movements. Joseph Campbell provides a comment which I find helpful, he says

“significant images render insights beyond speech, beyond the kinds of meaning speech defines. And if they do not speak to you, that is because you are not ready for them and words will only serve to make you think you have understood, thus cutting you off altogether”

What I do know is that Shintaido offers a framework to support our lives, and to explore these fundamental issues. Or just to be.

Deborah Evans

Thanks to Minagawa Sensei, Peter Newland and Belinda French for allowing me to quote directly from their experience. Also to Michelle Snow and the others who make the Wednesday group what it is.

Footnotes:

1. Eiko - see the Shintaido book “Shintaido, the Body is a message of the Universe” by Shintaido’s founder Hiroyuki Aoki, 1992 version p 51, or 1982 version p49

2. Joseph Campbell “Myths to Live By” Souvenir Press 1972 p102

BRISTOL

Pictures of a meditation class run by Minagawa sensei recently

Regarding the fortnightly class run by Minagawa in Bristol for people with learning difficulties, the numbers are continually swelling. Could be the most popular Shintaido class in the UK! The said Shintaidoists are in need of keikogi, all sizes, second-hand, nearly new, new, or abandoned. Alternatively, financial donations to buy more gi would be highly acceptable.

Although I shall not be able to commute from London to Bristol on a regular basis to attend this class, I should be happy to coordinate collection or purchase, and subsequent delivery.

Contributions should be sent to me at:

15 Popham Gardens  
Lower Richmond Road  
Richmond  
Surrey  
TW9 4LJ

Tel: 0181 878 4630  
Email: ra3-voss@ wpg.uwe.ac.uk

Rosy Voss

Change of Address

Rosy Voss has moved to:  
15 Popham Gardens  
Lower Richmond Road  
Richmond  
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Email: ra3-voss@wpg.uwe.ac.uk

BRIGHTON

Kangeikolet.

We were very small in number, just Debbie, Sarah W, Peter Bougas and myself instructed by Tony. We went through what seemed like an immense amount of bokuto kumitachi in 2 and 1/2 hours, in the chilling breeze of Wild Park. It was wonderful to be out of doors.

It was also wonderful to realise that despite having assiduously and religiously gone out to do shoko every night for two weeks, that we would not be required to demonstrate this challenging practice during the keiko. The challenge however came from assimilating at least eight relatively new techniques during the one keiko. Personally I love bokuto practice, even though it was our jo which were being used in place of the normal boken. (This is so that our wrists wouldn't have too much strain put on them) and I was not disappointed to feel that deep concentration and connection with one's partner which makes this kind of practice so special to me.

We were taken through the new bokuto kumitachi programme, Tony assigning the new numbers (e.g. number 1, number 2 part one , number 2 part 2 etc.- I wish they could be given graphic names like the Bo programme.) It was almost like going back to the beginning - not so much beginners mind, but beginners left feet and wayward arms. I almost started wishing for the simplicity

of shoko! Some of the techniques I just couldn't get that time, despite Tony's careful and patient comparisons with Shintaido techniques. I see that here is the meat for many hours of hitori keiko with my imaginary partner.

It was good to see however that my partners seemed to be enjoying themselves and getting a handle on what was required, and we even managed several of those magic Kumite moments when the connections worked, the tensions were right, the timing was correct and the space just was. In those moment we all felt (I think, the others felt too) that we had worked something out and achieved something. After the keiko we drove to Tony and Debbie's house to share a light lunch and chat about keiko, life and our absent friends. I think we all carried in our practice the many other kangeiko experiences with many other shintaido friends and thought specially of the Bristol practitioners who were also out that day in the cold, seeing in the New Year.

The next gasshuku will be held in Brighton the weekend before Easter- 4th/5th April (?). It is open to all practitioners, of any experience. It will be a bo gasshuku. We hope to welcome as many people as possible from wherever they practice. Information will be going out soon about pricing and content etc. I hope people will put the date in their diary. Lets grow our energy through sharing.

Ula Chambers