



French Kangeiko 2014 Fort-Mahon

by Laurent Lacroix



I have only attended two Kangeikos previously, but they have become an essential part of my Shintaido year. The course I am following this year appears to require weekend presence when and only when British Shintaido events take place. So I was thrilled when Minagawa Sensei suggested my participation at the French Kangeiko at the end of January in lieu of the Douai Kangeiko. He was to be the guest Sensei.

The decision to participate was made even easier when I realised that it was taking place fairly near Calais, in Fort-Mahon north of the “Baie of the Somme” on a long beach famous for sand-yachting. But fear not to be able to cope physically manifested itself when I was invited to attend the two advanced Keikos, and was immediately translated into lower back pain and right hip discomfort.

The theme of the Kangeiko was “Mu, or emptiness for fulfilment of Being.” Exploring and maybe one day experiencing Mu is central to Shintaido and difficult to comprehend by logical Western minds. The aim is to let go of logic, categorisation, labels or “naming” as in the Tao-te-Ching, and duality (i.e. Yin/Yang) to comprehend fullness, freedom, the connection of everything and the nature of the connections. Or as Sogyal Rinpoche simply puts it:

Nothing has any inherent existence of its own when you really look at it, and this absence of independent existence is what we call “emptiness.” Think of a tree. When you think of a tree, you tend to think of a distinctly defined object; and on a certain level it is. But when you look more closely at the tree, you will see that ultimately it has no independent existence.

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When you contemplate it, you will find that it dissolves into an extremely subtle net of relationships that stretches across the universe. The rain that falls on its leaves, the wind that sways it, the soil that nourishes and sustains it, all the seasons and the weather, moonlight and starlight and sunlight—all form part of this tree.

... You will discover that everything in the universe helps to make the tree what it is; that it cannot at any moment be isolated from anything else; and that at every moment its nature is subtly changing. This is what we mean when we say things are empty, that they have no independent existence.

At the same time, Minagawa Sensei reminded us of the “beginner’s state of mind” which Shunryu Suzuki mentioned relating to Zen practice but which can be applied to our Shintaido practice:

The most difficult thing is to keep the beginner state of mind ... It is the real secret of all arts: always be a beginner. Be very attentive about it, it is the secret of all practices.

Keeping these in mind, Friday 31st was the day for the two advanced Keikos. We met at the beach in the morning. Though it was cold and windy, it was not raining. Nanou led the tenshin-juso and the jumping session which reviewed all the jumps known to Shintaido. The first Keiko then started with “Gauguin stepping” (we called it in England the eight-steps or wave steps) with musoken tsuki with collecting far behind and sending far in front to the horizon and the opposite direction, followed by the same exercise in kumite, and demonstration by each pair.

With the same stepping, we did Tenshingoso with one hand, facing the sea, then face to face, half of us being the wave. Then we did the same exercises with Bokuto, first behind Minagawa Sensei, then facing the sea with Ah/Eh, then Ee/Oh; then in kumite, the kumite Ee/Oh being Tsuki-hasso. We demonstrated by pairs, and finally we explored Tenshingoso kumite in canon with Bokuto.

At lunch I learnt that I would be sharing accommodations with Minagawa Sensei and Aki Sensei as Jean-Louis was ill and could not attend. The accommodation was in small chalets sleeping four or five people with two bedrooms, kitchen, and bathroom. I started to worry that I will not dare even to breath at night! Then I realised that it is was a golden opportunity and should make the most of it.

The afternoon Keiko started with another jumping session after tenshin-juso. Then renki kumite without and with moving. I was lucky to experience this kumite with Pierre Quettier. It was one of those kumite that will remain with me for ever, along with one I shared with Ula when I was an absolute beginner about 3 years ago. It is difficult to describe the experience, but Shintaido practice is all about these moments of “revelation” that occur from time to time. One has just to be ready and open to receive them. Then we feel a compulsion to share the experience within kumite with other practitioners. From kumite we moved to 3vs1, with the same “renki” spirit, the receiver doing kohan musoken, then receiving 2vs1 continuous tsuki, with “Muso ∞”, finally all the group together receiving in all directions. Then it was time to practice with Bokuto. First “Gauguin stepping”, with Tenshingoso facing the sea, then we reviewed a few kihons (kirikomi jodan, zenshin & kotai (front/back) / kirikomi jodan-chudan, zenshin & kotai / kirikomi jodan-chudan-gedan, zenshin & kotai). Kumite “tsuki-dai jodan” versus jodan-chudan; then gedan hanmi handachi followed. We then move to the kumite with “throat stopping” (high tsuki) and Jodan (as in the “Gauguin Tenshingoso), then we had to receive sideways offering one shoulder, and then in the back. Pairs demonstrations of these came after. Minagawa Sensei then introduced the 8 diamond cuts, which we practiced with and without moving, then as a Kumite with the receiver running very fast in “dai-jodan” but without moving (i.e. zombie dai-jodan with Bokuto). It was an opportunity to sink slowly into the wet sand.

Then back to the lodging, with everybody arriving. We were 44 in total, so we had plenty of people to meet. The evening lecture was given by Minagawa Sensei. He wanted to illustrate Mu through his own experience rather than speaking about it. He chose to describe his Mu experience first as a partner in kumite with Aoki Sensei then through his classes with people with learning disabilities. The central message was one of humility and keeping beginner’s mind.



It was raining heavily Saturday morning, so the Keiko took place in the town sports hall. After tenshin-juso, another jumping session took place. I started to realise why they call the French “frogs”: they love to jump! By that time my legs started to complain. Masashi told me not to worry, that the third Keiko was the difficult one and things should get better afterwards. After introducing ourselves to each other, we formed a circle, holding hands, and moved forward towards each other with little steps with Um, then Ah backward opening the circle, the same without sound, then without holding hands. Hoten kokyu-ho followed. We then moved to the “Gauguin” exercise with long musoken tsuki, followed by wakame and renki kumite then with moving (Gauguin spirit — tsuki to kohan.) Then the Tenshingoso Gauguin exercise, facing each other in two groups, one side doing Tenshingoso the other simply receiving wave like.

For the afternoon Keiko, the weather was much improved, though hail decided to drench our tenshin-juso. It was very cold and windy, and having forgotten my gloves, I spend most of the Keiko preoccupied by my hands. We started with Tenshingoso, sei and dai, in a circle, then dai in pairs holding the waist, then in three changing the positions. Then Gauguin Tenshingoso with Bokuto was introduced, first only the 8 steps backwards and forward, and then 8 steps in all directions backwards or forward, simply holding the bokuto in the left hand, Minagawa Sensei indicating the chosen direction at the last second—an exercise in concentration.

Then we split into two facing groups and did the same but with tsuki, dai-jodan then jodan (forward-backward). The instructors demonstrated dai-jodan vs jodan, then jodan-chudan-gedan. Then we formed small groups each with one instructor, continuous attack of the instructor with dai-jodan, the instructor receiving with jodan-chudan kirikomi. Then everybody, one by one, attacked Minagawa Sensei. Finally there was “Gauguin” Tenshingoso with Bokuto by oneself, then with an instructor, then in kumite. Eiko dai towards Pierre was the last practice of the Keiko. Of course nobody stopped at Pierre but continued nearly to the end of the beach.

This was a very cold Keiko so I had to complain to Minagawa Sensei about the demonstrations and how difficult it was for those watching as the only thing one wanted to do was move to get warmer. I was reminded of the importance of the demonstrations both as a watcher and a demonstrator. Once again I felt that I should think a bit longer before speaking up.

After a well deserved warm shower, we had the evening, pre-dinner entertainment. This consisted of a singing aperitif well oiled with red and white wine and charcuterie. Nanou led us into singing together a few French

songs which I had to translate for Masashi. Then Michele Lanchec sang the “rire de Manon” from a musical that I do not know. This was followed by a Slovak song and finally a Japanese song interpreted by Masashi, Aki and Mieko.

Dinner was followed by a lecture given by Pierre Quettier about the 5 freedoms (5 levels of freedom), which we hope to publish for the Daeinshu. (*Editors Note: Article on Pierre’s talk at the BS Daienshu can be found to follow on page 6*). Briefly, the central thesis was a progression of freedom through 5 stages towards Mu. Pierre made a parallel with the Bokuto cut and the spirit embodied within it. From the simple cut to “kill” to the invitation to be killed: that is offering your body for the other’s blade to hit you. Pierre also reminded us that to improve our Shintaido practice, we have to look for experiences that could help finding Mu: he mentioned fasting as an example and maybe the Marathon monks but here surely I must be wrong.

Sunday morning we faced the “piece de resistance”: the Eiko challenge. At 7.30am everybody had the opportunity to do Eiko dai with Bokuto for 6 kilometres. Thinking about the 5 hours afternoon drive home, I decided against, but the challenge was taken by more than a few of us.

People who had done the challenge arrived at the Dojo with us in time to join the last Keiko, with its usual jumping session after the warm-up. By that time my jumping was rather static. This was followed by the “grand eiko dai with Bokuto.” Here fortunately we had a choice between a manageable distance marked by Serge Magne or a longer distance indicated by Anne-Gabrielle. We then reviewed the exercises we learned during the Saturday afternoon Keiko with a deepening of what I dared call the “Gauguin Tenshingosō”. We then practice a kumite with tsuki-dai-jodan attacking the partner back who responded with Jodan kirikomi. A small practice of the new “H” Bokuto kata took place. We finished the Keiko with Taimyo part I, facing the sea without stepping.

It was then time for lunch and the closing ceremony with its feedback session. It was an unforgettable weekend, full of laughter but also where very serious and important work took place. And every minute you felt personally supported by Minagawa Sensei. This experience will remain present for me for a long time. When I came back home Susan commented that something had changed in me. Well, I still have to realise it, also I know it is there somewhere. ■

Finally, I realised that I am very deeply French, French for ever.

All photographs courtesy of Laurent Lacroix

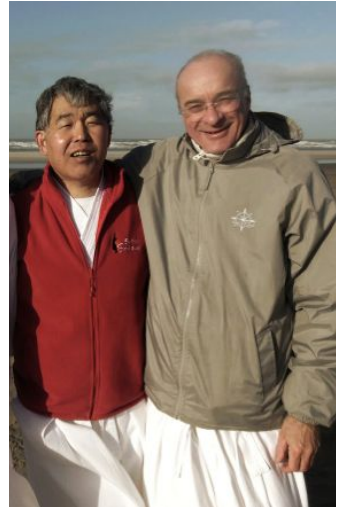


The Freedom to cut and Pierre Sensei's talk and memories of the Daienshu 2014

by Ula Chambers

I was delighted that we had invited Pierre Quettier as our guest Instructor for our Daienshu this year, and really enjoyed practising under his direction. In our discussion before the event, I had asked him to focus on Kirikomi and Kirioroshi in the keiko. This has been a favourite practice of mine since I started Shintaido over 30 years ago. The process of cutting and being cut had always felt very cleansing to me and I have enjoyed exploring genuine communication between my partners and myself over the years. It was Pierre's guidance around 30 years ago that helped me to understand this practice and I hoped that the current generation of Shintaido practitioners in the UK would also find an insight and understanding of Kiri through his gorei.

Experiencing a cut in keiko is fairly familiar to many of us, what is maybe not so familiar is experiencing transposing the "cut" in another context. Pierre's evening talk was to me like opening the doors of understanding to a different aspect of the keiko experience: Pierre introduced us to the idea of looking at how some concepts in keiko arise from in a much wider context and to thinking about how knowledge is transmitted between us. Idea of "Ba" is that information is channelled through human relations – person to person, immediate social structure (work, home, keiko, other group activity) and cultural expectations.



Pierre and Masashi at the French Kangeiko

In Shintaido we have 3 avenues to transmit "Ba".

Ba 1 - In keiko – there are symbolic techniques through which we learn. Keiko is a way of learning about Martial Arts culture but also and other concepts (spiritual life, art, personal development health and concepts unique to Shintaido) and also a way of learning many things about ourselves.

Ba 2 - What happens during keiko (our inter-actions with our partners and the group) changes what happens in our social life and vice versa, so the social area of doing keiko and the dojo itself becomes a learning space.

Ba 3 –Surrounding our keiko life, is the life of the predominant culture. Martial Arts keiko, and Shintaido keiko is connected to how people relate to each other in Japanese culture. It may be that if you are not aware of something that happens and is understood by everyone in the Japanese cultural space (because it is not your culture) you may also not learn it in the dojo. This is recognising that there may be a cultural gap in our understanding and therefore learning.

For instance, in the Japanese social/cultural space you are not supposed to ask things – you are supposed to watch and learn. In a Japanese dojo the Goreisha will not say or explain much – you are supposed to watch and have your own idea about what you saw and what is expected of you to do. This is very different from the verbal style of teaching in Western culture. We should be aware that there may be things that we miss learning because we have not developed the capacity to learn from looking.

These three levels of "Ba" work together - so, if something does not work in your own cultural context it may not work in the social dojo context. My own experience of this is that Sensei care can be a difficult concept for English people to grasp. In England the relationship between teacher and pupil is very different than that of traditional Master and student in Japan. We translate the expectation of what we are being asked to do into an English cultural understanding.

Therefore it is difficult to change our own social relationships because they are part of the culture we live in.

Pierre went on to talk about four concepts of building Martial Arts practice. He explained this in terms of sword practice/ kenjutsu, using the idea of cutting as an illustration.

The four concepts - These are things that we study in the dojo

1. To cut (someone) – it could be to save your own life, as a self-affirmation/to encourage self-confidence and courage.

2. To be cut – If you are cut, you can take off tension and your practice becomes stronger. We have to learn both. – in kumitachi we have to both cut and to accept our partners cut.

3. To let the cut happen – to allow the opponent to cut you. We have to offer some part of us so our partners can cut us, or enter into our space/consciousness.

4. To let my partner be cut by my sword. (Ula's comments) It is in fact not easy to be prepared to cut someone else, we are afraid of our relationship with them, of harming them, of being too strong. In keiko we have to learn to cut well and sincerely with honesty and love. A clean cut (or strong attack) allows our partner to respond.

Next Pierre spoke about four concepts of building social development, and looked at the notion of Freedom. The idea of freedom was very important to people growing up in 1960s society when Shintaido was born. Individuals, groups, countries were all striving for freedom during that time, and considering what it means to be free.

The four concepts – relating to Freedom

1. To do what I want – This is what we initially think of as freedom, but it is only one stage (or an immature idea?)

2. To do what I don't want (freely) – being educated or socialised. As a young child we learn that doing what we don't want to do is required sometimes and brings us delayed benefits. (This can be illustrated in keiko terms in the following example - keiko forms (waza) are specific. We can't do them the way we may want to, or how it suits us, or any old how, as they will not have right effect and we will not be able to enter into a specific world or the experience that has been handed down to us through the forms. (E.g. in kata I should not add something of myself but I should take away something of myself) We learn both from kata (forms) AND also from the person who is teaching us. So we should do what our teacher says and not what we want to.

3. To not do what I want – This relates to being a prisoner of our life habits and finding the ability to free ourselves from them. E.g. Not to stop when our body is tired because we want to go beyond our limit, or deciding to do a fast when we like to eat. If you challenge yourself to shugyo (asceticism) you can discover some other aspects of yourself. In life there are many situations that we have to challenge this aspect.

4. To not do what I don't want – (not same as first concept) - its possible to get trapped in the other freedoms.. What is it that I want? This brings us back to normal life. (This last point was the most difficult to grasp and Pierre explained it thus: "As you grow your level in keiko, the more you increase the effort required to attain the next level, but at some point you have to come back to daily life.)

The concepts of cutting and freedom are dojo and social examples, but we can also use this format to think about other ideas. The next example Pierre gave was about leadership.

4 concepts of building up leadership. (This can be expressed in martial arts terms by using the word killing but can be used interchangeably with the word leading.)

1. To kill - in keiko if you are leading. As a leader what you say and decide has an influence on people's lives.

2. To be killed - You have to know and understand those you lead; their condition, their aspirations etc. You have to listen and make judgements according to what they are willing to do. So in a sense they lead you, or make you adjust (kill) your raw ideas because of their needs.

3. To allow killing - At some stage these people will grow and start making own decisions. As a leader you need to be prepared for this to happen.

4. To let them be killed - you have to allow people to take responsibility for themselves and each other to cut/be cut and grow. If you always remain in stage 1 you do not allow development or growth to happen.

To put it simply leading is: to be led, to allow leading and to allow being led.

Sogo to toitsu

To fully enter into kata (and not protect ourselves or personality)

To understand the culture fully and once understood to be able to re-define it into your own language or culture.



Gentle Shintaido Class Report

by Nagako Cooper

It has been just over 18 months since the Gentle Shintaido class started in Stroud. The group has been developing and growing, with 8 committed students from their mid 40's to mid 80's, deepening our connections with each other as well as to our own practice, and building a strong sense of community. It has been a great pleasure for me to facilitate the group, whose members bring such richness to our keiko from their own life experiences and who they are.

Here is a quote from Cynthia, who has been attending the class since the very beginning;

"The Shintaido class I have been going to that has been facilitated by Nagako has been very enjoyable. Her fine energy and her commitment and reverence to Shintaido shines through and is transmitted through to her pupils. I feel in the process it allows me to make a deeper connection to myself and through this expansion I am transformed and energized. Last year at the venue in Stroud we were able to practice outside in a beautiful field surrounded by trees. The freedom this gave us in the practice added a whole new dimension to the work. It is a great pleasure to be part of the group."

Last autumn I worked on a drama project in London for five weeks. I introduced the Seven Sounds of Love to the other actors who thought it was so beneficial that we did this as part of our warm up before each performance every day." Cynthia Whelan

The class has 3 main sections. First part is the Tenshin-juso-ho warm up, sometimes using chairs depending on the members' conditions, followed by massage in pairs.

Then with an official opening with Rei (bowing), we have a sharing time, which has been an important part of the class. The group creates a safe and intimate field with a strong sense of listening and acceptance, which supports a person who is sharing to open his/her heart, allowing them to express whatever feelings/emotions are authentic at that moment. I believe that this sharing time has been bringing depth and directions to our keiko, which I truly appreciate.

The last part is the main keiko. We have been mainly practicing Tenshin goso (Yoki tai/nurturing energy form) in variations, Wakame (seaweed exercise), Renki Kumite (kneading energy), Taimyo, 10 positions standing meditation, offering flowers walking meditation & the Seven Sounds of Love (a sequence of standing meditation created by Minagawa sensei). Again, chairs have been used depending on the conditions of the practitioners for all of the above practice. I have introduced walking Eiko and Diamond cuts and I'm now searching for ways to develop Eiko practice in this class context.

In April, we had our "Easter special outdoor keiko" in a beautiful garden under a huge cherry tree in Painswick, surrounded by the Cotswold hills, followed by "Hanami" picnic with tea and biscuits, which we all enjoyed very much.

Currently, there are 3 options of classes people can choose from in the Stroud area, - Gentle Shintaido class, Lightwave Shintaido Session A (1 hr session/ warm up and basic practice), and Session A & B (full 2 hrs session including advanced practice). It seems to work well for both the practitioners and also the development of each class. So far, a couple of practitioners from Gentle Shintaido class have tried and moved to Lightwave class, one started with Session A only, then moved to both sessions A & B.

Having said that, it is my aspiration and deepest hope that the practitioners can experience the same height and depth where Shintaido practice could take us, through gentler practice, regardless of age and/or physical strength.

"The Stronger you become, The Gentler you will be"

Autangel Shintaido *Introducing Shintaido to the autistic community*

by Charles Burns

Regular Taimyo readers will be familiar with my long-standing relationship with autism. First my son, then later myself, were both diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome (sometimes known as “high-functioning” autism) in 2001. Kazumi (my partner) then became very involved in learning about the condition and its implications for our family. In 2004 we all went to the Autscope conference for the first time. Autscope is a conference organised largely by and for adults on the autistic spectrum, with the aim of improving lives by exploring autistic issues and allowing fellow autistics to get to know each other and swap notes.

For me, this looked like an opportunity: realising the importance of Shintaido in my own struggle with autism I wondered if other delegates might be interested too.

Right from the start I felt there was a natural synergy between the aims of the conference and Shintaido. At Autscope much weight is given to creating what they call “autistic space”. This concept was introduced to us on arrival and reinforced throughout the conference. The idea is that an individual should feel free to be themselves and to act in whatever is, for them, a natural manner - no matter how odd or incongruous such behaviour might appear in the outside world. For individuals who have spent most of lives having their natural impulses “corrected” by others this can represent a real freedom. The only limits placed are that one’s behaviour should not be dangerous to others (or oneself) and that it should not interfere with others’ ability to take part in the conference or to enjoy similar freedoms.

New delegates react to this freedom in a number of different ways. The first, usually, is complete disbelief that such freedom is even possible. Secondly with an inability to use it, having been thoroughly conditioned by years of disapproval from family and peers. Finally they experiment, discovering for themselves what it means and the reduction in stress it brings. The result is that behaviour such as stimming (hand flapping or other repetitive movements) talking to oneself, rocking, or even motionless standing, are commonplace and quite unremarkable.

The similarities which struck me were twofold. Firstly that in Shintaido we also practice a lot of odd movements which we are all aware would seem eccentric if practiced outside the space of the dojo! At Autscope I was able to use autistic space to practice, for instance, *hitori wakame taiso* wherever and whenever I chose. Nobody remarked on it.

The second and more profound similarity was in the creation of the space itself, which seemed to signify a kind of “dojo for autistics”. I recalled my first ever Shintaido class when, after *rei* at the start of *keiko*, it was explained to us that the bow signified our entrance into the “dojo”: an abstract Shintaido space in which anything can and may happen. We were told that the dojo was the place to express our true selves and discover a more natural way of being. Like a new Autscope delegate I initially reacted to this information with a mixture of disbelief and confusion, but later came to appreciate the great freedom it conferred. Today whenever I enter a dojo I experience this freedom as a real joy; my body rejoices to enter again the beautiful and now familiar space of the dojo.

When teaching Shintaido at Autscope I explained that in Shintaido we also try to create a unique space and reinforced the idea that people were free to be themselves as long as their behaviour was not dangerous or limiting to others. I explained that I would be leading a series of exercises which they were free to follow and explore in any way they chose or, of course, not. The result was a series of annual *keiko* in which most people began by watching and then gradually joined in, until I had twenty or so students practicing *wakame taiso* or *renki kumite*.

I attended Autscope for a number of years, leading two *keiko* at each one, while Kazumi became increasingly involved in the organisation itself. Sadly our involvement came to an end some years ago as the management team became riven by petty personal conflicts and descended into chaos. Kazumi left along with many

others. The annual conference does still continue but much of the vision of the original members seems to have been lost.

A recent spin-off was that one of many friends we made there later created her own organisation called AutAngel. Based in Reading it has the aim of helping individuals obtain grants for projects designed to improve the lives of adults on the Autistic Spectrum, for whom there is a lamentable lack of provision. I talked to her about Shintaido and my feeling that I had discovered the ideal physical discipline for autistics to practice. In 2013 Autangel helped me make an application to the local council for funding which, to my complete amazement, was successful. Early this year we rented a space at the Quaker Centre in Reading (a large room with a vaulted ceiling and carpeted floor - not ideal but with a good feeling) and ran a series of free taster sessions. At the beginning of each I explained to visitors the concept of the dojo much as it had been explained to me thirty years ago, but phrasing it in terms of autistic space.

The taster sessions were a mixed success. Although the classes were aimed at adults we had relatively little interest from them, but were instead deluged with enquiries from parents of autistic children. At first we resisted these but later relented and allowed a few to attend on condition that a parent or carer also join in the class. Some children enjoyed the sessions while others did not, sitting at the side of the room and refusing to take part.

Taster sessions led to a regular weekly class and it soon became clear that I had just one student! Happily the one student, who studied Aikido many years ago, is an exceptionally talented and enthusiastic one. She surprised me by joining BS and registering to attend the daienshu after just three sessions, so many of you have already met her.

Simultaneously one of the children went back to school after one of our taster sessions (she attends a specialist Asperger unit at a local Catholic primary school) and spent the whole day talking about this wonderful thing called Shintaido. This resulted in the school getting in touch with me and inviting me for an interview. The upshot is that I'll be doing a couple more taster sessions at the Asperger unit in July with a view to possibly starting a regular weekly session there in September.

The funding period for the Autangel Shintaido class has now ceased and, with only one student, is unlikely to resume. My one student and I are planning to continue with a series of weekly sessions over the summer in a playing field at Reading University, where she works. In September we shall either return to the Quaker Hall or perhaps seek to start again as a student club at the University itself.

I have a set up a local monthly newsletter to keep in touch with those who expressed an interest and keep them abreast of these various changes. In the meantime we welcome visitors from the wider Shintaido community. For now, classes take place outdoors on Wednesday evenings, 7 - 8.30pm, on the Whiteknights campus at Reading Uni.

If you would like to receive my newsletter please send a request to charles@shintaido.co.uk ■



A Celebration of 10 Years of Bath Bo Club

by Susan Lacroix

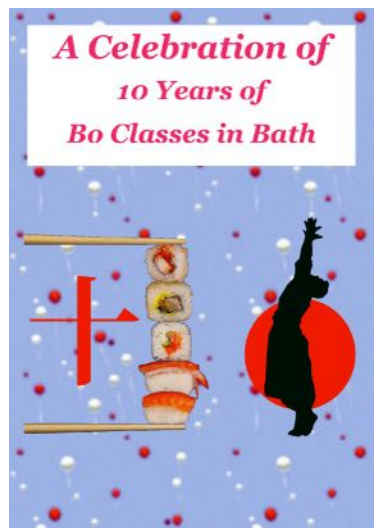
On 19th January, Bath Shintaido held a celebration party to mark the 10th Anniversary of Bath Shintaido Club. It was a reunion of current and former students held at the New Oriel Hall in Bath, the original venue for Masashi's Bo Class.

Here are some words spoken at the Tenth Anniversary Celebration....

Speaking for the Club, Susan first thanked Ruth Trevenna for her dedication and her hard work in establishing the club at the start. Without her they would not be there now. Not only did she set things up and maintain them, but her warmth and ability to make everyone feel welcome made a huge difference. Her own practice was inspiring.

Susan then thanked Pam for her constant support of both the club, Masashi and the students. All of us have been helped and supported by her, whether in keiko or otherwise, in going forward in shintaido. Not only does she attend every week without fail, even when she is often getting up for work only a few hours after the keiko, but she has also taken on much of Ruth's work, including the health and safety aspects and other onerous administrative tasks which, though not glamorous, have been essential for us to have a venue and classes.

Finally turning to Masashi, Susan noted that he is a fine cook, as everyone had discovered from the sushi he had brought along to the party; but he is also a fine cook of another kind since every week he has to prepare a meal of a different sort. This is made from a strange collection of 'ingredients': some young, fast and vigorous, others nearing their sell -by date, some stringy, some hard, others too soft, or shapeless, some resistant, some too strong tasting, others too insipid and so forth. Abandoning whatever 'menu plan' he might have prepared beforehand at a moment's notice, he works instead with what actually turns up that evening. Although some of these 'ingredients' may seem not to go together and they all need different cooking times and methods, somehow he manages to combine all of them plus something of himself too into something extraordinary which everyone can share. This is all mixed with a large pinch of playfulness to transform the energy of everyone present. Every week, patiently, faithfully and unstintingly, without ever seeming to be discouraged, Masashi 'cooks' us as he invites us into his keiko world and demonstrates the meaning of shintaido again and again. Susan offered thanks to Masashi for his dedication to Bath Shintaido and to the progress of his students.



Fun and Challenges in Kumite

by Andrew Stones

"Kumite" means literally "meeting hands" and is the term in Japanese martial arts which is commonly translated as "sparring".

There are many varieties of sparring or "meeting hands" in Shintaido, some of which originate in traditional karate, some of which originate in traditional weapons practice, and some of which come more from Tai Chi, and others such as Eiko kumite and wakame, which are unique to Shintaido. I originally studied hard style karate and also Aikido. My main karate teacher for many years was a hard-line traditional Buddhist, who believed that an essential part of the spiritual aspect of martial arts kumite was facing danger – learning to face, for example, with confidence, a mad screaming banshee running towards you full pelt with a tsuki that will knock you down unless you take action to counter. He believed and taught that the danger aspect of kumite built strong Buddhist spiritual warriors, and that this experience was fairly unique to martial arts. The only other physical activity I recall him comparing kumite with was rock climbing, because it also contained a comparable life-threatening-danger aspect.

For many years I tried to be fearless in kumite; tried to scream as loud as I could; tried to stare death in the eye each and every session – train as if my life depended on it. Many people say that death is the ultimate fear; that if we can conquer our fear of death, nothing else will ever be that scary. After many years of trying to train in martial arts like this, I noticed a curious thing: I really didn't feel that scared of death; in fact, as I looked back, I couldn't really remember a time when I'd ever been that scared of death. I mean hey, we're all going to die. I mean, all one can really do in this life time is the best one can. Can't do no more than that. We do the best we can, and then we die, we move on, to whatever's next, be that another incarnation, or a merging with universal oneness, according to what you may believe. Seemed pretty straightforward to me. And yet at the same time I noticed that I still had plenty of anxieties and fears in my day to day life – my ambivalence about death didn't eradicate them!

Then I listened to a different spiritual teacher who said something different. He suggested that in fact this idea of the fear of death being the ultimate fear was not necessarily true at all. He suggested that many people's pre-occupation with death and calamity and impending doom, was actually because it was easier for them; less scary for them to think about those things, than it was for them to contemplate the prospect of continuing survival and prosperity.

Perhaps this is analogous to the idea that for many of us, certain aspects of success, may be more scary than failure. The scary challenge is not that we're all going to die; the scary challenge may be that we're all going to carry on living (for many years at any rate) and being in relationship with each other; and we're going to have to learn how to deal with this! Is it really the scariest thing that my partner may die or leave me? Or is it really more of a challenging thought that I may wake up every morning for the rest of my life to friendly face and a kindly voice saying "Good morning! How are you today?" If I'm feeling shitty about myself, it may feel much more easy and tempting to skulk away and isolate myself in a corner somewhere, and if I'm on my own in life it's easier to do this. But with a friendly loving partner every morning it's much more tricky. In response to "How are you feeling today?" I have to then decide if I'm going to lie and say "fine", in which case I get to partially hide (only partially as my partner can probably sense something is wrong), or if I'm going to bite the bullet and say "Well, to tell you the truth I'm feeling a bit shitty about myself this morning". Heck, kumite already, and it's only 7 in the morning! Admitting I'm feeling shitty doesn't feel very budo-warrior-esque. Budo warriors don't really admit to anything much. And they rarely say anything, apart from the occasional "Eh!", "Ya!" and "To!". I feel I kind of did that one. I practiced looking death in the eye and screaming into the void. Now my scary challenge is to admit that I really am in on-going relationship with other human beings, and that's likely to carry on for quite some time, so I'd better learn how to deal with it!

So, if staring death in the face and screaming blood-curdling screams into the void are not the prime purposes of Shintaido kumite, then what are the prime purposes? Developing sensitivity and respect for another

human being? Healing? Loving? Progressing together in energy awareness? Yes, certainly all these things could have meaning here.

But what about the martial art aspect? What about the fact that plenty of the kumite's we practice still have a very martial content to them: someone is attacking; and another is receiving the attack. What's all that about?

Certainly a traditional budo man might say that part of what that's about is facing death and facing fear. But now-a-days I'm really not so sure any more. I'm coming to feel that perhaps all that facing-death/facing-fear stuff is over-blown in martial arts. I'm coming to feel that good budo kumite; good Shintaido kumite, is in many ways similar, parallel even, to a good game of tennis, or even a couple doing ball-room dancing together. The challenge is surely not about whether we're going to destroy each other or not. Hey, I think it's been fairly definitely established that we're not out to kill, maim or destroy each other in kumite. But we can challenge each other, in a friendly way. It's surely like two people having a game of tennis. If you and I are both pretty good at tennis and enjoy playing, and we're having a friendly game, for sure, we could play real easy; give each other really easy shots with no real challenges. But after a while surely that becomes a little boring; boringly easy. Challenge is fun. If we want to have more fun, we naturally want to give each other trickier shots to work with, not because we want to destroy each other, but because it's fun to challenge each other, and by raising our game to meet that challenge, we both get better; our mutual skill level rises, and that is also fun! So for me, energetic and exuberant kumite is not necessarily the same as inappropriately aggressive kumite. Inappropriately aggression is only when I have malicious intent, when I sincerely want to grind my partner into the ground and humiliate him or her. Energetic and exuberant kumite can be fine – just about the joy of mutually challenging each other to rise to greater levels of excellence. That's my sense of it anyhow. And also with Shintaido and all internal martial arts, I feel there's a great level of beauty in all the trainings. Harmonizing sensitively with another human being can be a very beautiful thing. So in that sense like two masterful ballroom dancers challenging each other to raise their levels of excellence to manifest more and more rarified levels of beauty and harmony. It's a wonderful thing!

I still think fondly of my old Buddhist karate teacher. He was a bit of a rascal, and very much caught in an old-school hard-line approach to keiko and life. But he had a good heart, and could be very inspiring. I remember one of the stories he used to tell us was the story of a famous Japanese karate master by the name of Masutatsu Oyama who, in the 1950's was filmed wrestling a live adult bull. Oyama literally chopped off one of the bull's horns with a Shuto (knife hand) and then killed the beast with his bare hands. Sensei would tell us this story, and then finish by adding "But you guys should see the other film!" "What other film, sensei?" "The film about the true Buddhist karate master and the bull!" "What happens in that one?" "There's a dead bull lying in a field... And the Buddhist karate master walks up to it... and kiai's "Osu!!!"... and the bull jumps up and runs off!" We all laughed. Of course there is no such film (not to my knowledge, anyhow). But his story touched a deep sentiment in all of us: the desire to practice kumite not just to face death, but to celebrate life, perhaps even to bring life. Life-giving kumite. Kumite as a celebration of working together in partnership, to create joyous excellence and elegance, fun and beauty, love and harmony, in an on-going stable and loving keiko community....for me that's what it feels it can be about anyhow... ■

British Shintaido Examination Report

BS & Guest examiners:

Masashi Minagawa
Ula Chambers
Pierre Quettire
David Franklin

Examinations took place at the BS Daienshu in Douai Abbey. Congratulations to all those who took part.

Here are the results.

Shintaido

Laurent Lacroix	Joshu
Susan Lacroix	Joshu
Matt Vandre	Joshu

Karate

Andrew Stones	2 kyu
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Bojutsu

Andrew Stones	3 kyu
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Programme, Contacts & Classes

2014-2015 Programme

See www.shintaido.co.uk for further details

13-14 Sept 2014	BS Summer Workshop, Gower Peninsular, South Wales Contact: Andrew Stones - bhagavad23@hotmail.com
3-4 Jan 2015	BS Kangeiko at Douai Abbey, near Reading
29-31 May 2015	Daienshu at Douai Abbey, near Reading Contact: Charles Burns - charles@shintaido.co.uk

Contacts

Chairman	Charles Burns	0118 9476808	charles@shintaido.co.uk
Treasurer	Peter Furtado	01865 251234	pfurtado1543@gmail.com
Co-ordinator	Pam Minagawa	0117 9570897	pam@shintaido.co.uk
BSC Chair	Ula Chambers	01273 390541	ula.chambers@ntlworld.com
BSC Co-ordinator	Carina Hamilton	01252 728078	carina_jamie@onetel.com
Newsletter	Emi Argent	07906 506804	newsletter@shintaido.co.uk
Merchandising	Laurent Lacroix		
Equipment	Miles Bennett		bath.shintaido@gmail.com
Exam Co-ordinator*	Laurent Lacroix		
	Nagako Cooper	07906 586674	coopernagako@hotmail.com

Local Contacts:

Bath	Pam Minagawa	0117 9570897	pam@shintaido.co.uk
Brighton	Ula Chambers	01273 390541	ula.chambers@ntlworld.com
Bristol	Katrina Horne	07969 167838	katrina@shintaido.co.uk
Farnham	Carina Hamilton	01252 728078	carina_jamie@onetel.com
Nailsworth	Nagako Cooper	07906 586674	coopernagako@hotmail.com
Oxford	Peter Furtado	01865 251234	pfurtado1543@gmail.com
Ramsgate	Geoff Warr	01843 583483	gandmwarr@btinternet.com
Reading	Charles Burns	0118 9476808	charles@shintaido.co.uk
Stroud	Nagako Cooper	07906 586674	coopernagako@hotmail.com

Regular Classes

Classes led by current BS instructors or assistants. Shintaido classes and their venues may change, so please check before attending an unfamiliar class

Monday	Reading, St Barnabas Church Hall Ramsgate, Contact Geoff Warr.	1.00 - 3.00pm evenings	Bojutsu Shintaido or Tai Chi
Tuesday	Bath, University of Bath.	8.00 - 9.30pm	Bath Bojutsu Club
Wednesday	Bristol, Dancespace, Bridewell Street	7.45 - 9.15pm	Shintaido
Thursday	Bristol, Greenway Centre.	10.30 - 11.30am	Shintaido for people with Learning Difficulties
	Stroud, Old Town Hall	10.30 - 11.30am	Gentle Shintaido
	Brighton, Hollingbury Methodist Church.	8.00 - 10.00pm	Shintaido
Friday	Eastington Community Centre, Gos	1.45 - 3.45pm	'Lightwaves' Class
	Reading, Clayfield Copse playing fields	7.30 - 8.30am	Shintaido/Bo tutorial

Weekends

Specialist classes with any BS Instructor. Available by appointment.

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Taimyo Next Issue - Winter 2014. Thank you to all who contributed articles. Please send further articles, pictures and ideas to newsletter@shintaido.co.uk