

British Shintaido Daienshu 2020



*Kagayaki
Calligraphy by Minagawa Sensei*

An Account of our Online Daienshu, 7–21 June 2020 "Kagayaki - Spark"

By Sally Sharpe

The daily practise of Aozora Taiso, demonstrated in a video by Giovanni Rossi during the week preceding the opening of the Daienshu, set the scene for a truly remarkable gathering – Daienshu 2020.

There was a tingling feeling in my heart as the first online meeting began on Sunday 7 June. It was a sense of anticipation; an excitement to be practising the deeply moving art of Shintaido with people from Europe, United States and UK. I think there will have been many people who were sceptical about practising in the medium of 'zoom'. I had wondered myself beforehand, but as soon as I saw both familiar and unfamiliar faces, there was already a tangible feeling of togetherness and inclusion. People so happy to reconnect with each other again. This, I think, was probably a general response to the long weeks endured in lockdown: I personally felt that I had become internalised to an unhealthy degree, so for me, practising Aozora Taiso had been hugely beneficial – opening up to the blue sky and the heavens, feeling it flow through my body, offering the energy outwards; experiencing the elemental forces of nature through the movements and within the body energised me out of lockdown inertia!!

The theme for the Daienshu was Kagayaki - "Spark". The image of the small spark that initiates a lighted match is a strong symbol to illustrate the amazing feeling of that first Sunday meeting and Keiko 1 led by Minagawa Sensei and Giovanni Rossi. Following on from Keiko 1, Monday 8 June began the daily Taimyo kata

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practice and the small groups. Each of the small groups was led by experienced instructors and developed the presented theme during the weekdays between the three Sunday Meetings. We are all privileged to receive their guidance, instruction and humanity; thank you Masashi and Gianni.

The lighted match lit the lantern that was to glow for the duration of the event and the spark also manifested in lightening streaks across the skies!!

The organising team, Ula, Peter, Charles, Viola and Terry did such an efficient job: extensive practical notes were emailed to all participants, whatsapp and facebook groups were set up, through which links were posted, time was kept and every participant felt supported and included. Our way was lighted by their lantern and huge thanks go to them for their compassionate virtual outstretched hands!

Minagawa Sensei and Giovanni Rossi led the deep foundation Masterclass Keikos and Conversation at the Sunday meetings, lighting the path for the week ahead. My sense was that the communal Dojo of those Sunday meetings was vast, deep and very enriching for all and each person absorbed the connection with reverence and gratitude.

Early each morning on weekdays was the Taimyo kata. The practice opened the day in all the varying styles of the its teachers, each offering their own unique energy. Practising in our own separate dojos we looked outwards via the screens and shared the collective beauty of the morning through birdsong, mist hanging over the fields, expanses of beautiful landscape, others' interior spaces.

The Small Groups presented further opportunity for practice with teachers from far and wide, twice and some days three times throughout the day. I felt there was a communal gratitude to the wonderful instructors who led us through Taimyo and the Small Groups Sessions – thank you to Ula, Charles, Nagako and Peter for your Taimyo, bringing us so gently into each day. Thank you to the Instructors of the Small Groups – Connie Borden, David Franklin, Charles Burns, Ula Chambers, Susan Lacroix, Nagako Cooper and Peter Furtado. Each took reference from the Sunday presentations of Masashi and Gianni, repeating some ideas, exploring the new and developing the familiar. These groups gave us focus and depth in our practice. There was even the application of partnering through “pinning the video” of the partner chosen for you by the instructors. I found this extraordinary in its connectedness and very surprising. I cannot say that it rivals real, face-to-face kumite but in the circumstances of the covid 19 pandemic, was mostly handled really successfully.

On the subject of the technical issues, it was apparent that everyone became accustomed to the medium: I noticed that we were all aware of the need to avoid talking simultaneously and so we naturally adopted a polite raising of the hand to speak and also the use of bowing to leave. Of course there was the inevitable background interference at times, but these were too few to be a problem and were given good grace! The notes on Zoom Dojo etiquette, how to pin the video, how to stabilise a poor internet connection etc very succinctly paved the way for the smooth-running of the technical aspect of our event which resulted in a truly respectful atmosphere.

I think that proof of the interconnectedness and inclusivity the sessions offered, was that everybody could work at their own level, whether new to Shintaido or with years of experience. Questions from new students were quickly resolved; booklets were sent out (thank you to Laurent Lacroix) and further explanation offered. We were all in our own small dojo screens but the golden thread of Shintaido was sparkling through us at every level.

Kagayaki was an inspiration to explore a new medium – this, the first Daienshu online.

The Spark kindled a glowing lamp that held us in its aura. We heard birdsong, witnessed rainbows, thunder and lightening and the breaking of the dawn in Connie's (lunchtime in UK) Keikos. Finally, on Midsummer's Day we met at daybreak for a spontaneous, unscripted Taimyo kata to welcome in the last day of our Daienshu,

further enriched later in the day by the last meeting and Keiko led by Minagawa Sensei and Giovanni Rossi which sealed-in the beauty of this arcane art. It was a remarkable two weeks of International gathering, connection and learning.

We didn't want it to end!

Sally Sharpe



Is the Virtual Dojo Here to Stay?

By Charles Burns

As lockdown #3 progresses many of us are simply waiting for things to get back to normal, longing for this Covid-induced nightmare to end and a return to keiko as it used to be.

I sympathise, but I don't agree.

A lot has changed over the last year; we've all learned new skills and developed new ways of living, working and communicating. My feeling (despite the evident devastation of my art, business and livelihood) is that much of this change has been for the better. For this reason, I don't want to return to keiko as it used to be.

I realise many of us will view such a statement with horror. However, looking back, I'm not the only one of us to have raised concerns about the way our Shintaido practice is structured. The main problem is that there are so few of us and we are so far apart. The quadrennial International events are a particular concern: I enjoy them immensely, but at what cost? I know the cost in ££s, to me personally, but has anybody ever counted the environmental cost of so much travel in CO2 emissions?

For an holistic body art, which purports to hold our relationship with nature and the world at its centre, Shintaido frequently shows surprisingly little respect for the planet.

An Unexpected Gift

What the novel Corona-virus has given us, rather unexpectedly, is access to a different way of doing things. This new way has actually been available to us for some time – the digital world is no longer in its infancy – but we've assiduously been ignoring it. Now, faced with the absolute impossibility of practicing together the way we always have, we finally did what human beings do best: we improvised to solve the problem.

In so doing we inadvertently solved the long-standing problem of distance as well.

So the question is, as the threat of disease abates (and it will abate, albeit more slowly than many would like), will we simply go back to our old ways? Will we once again think little of travelling half way around the world to spend a few days doing keiko with old friends? Or will we recognise that the world has changed for the better and embrace our unexpected gift?

Writing these words, I can hear many objections!

Is online keiko like the real keiko we know and love? Well, no it isn't.

Could it ever be like real keiko? Almost certainly not, but do bear in mind that this time last year, like most of us, I'd never even heard of Zoom. Doesn't that feel a long time ago? Many of us have been practicing Shintaido for twenty years or more (some of us a lot more) but few of us have more than a year's experience of Zoom. When it comes to online keiko, we're all beginners.

No, virtual keiko will never be like real-world, group keiko, but it will improve. I don't imagine Zoom is the last word in online conferencing; new and better platforms will arrive. The devices we use to connect will also change; as we gradually upgrade them they'll be replaced by items better suited to this new style of learning.

For the last eleven months I've been teaching two classes every week on Zoom. I've also been involved in organising and hosting British Shintaido's first major Zoom event (the two-week online daienshu of June 2020) and latterly in teaching and hosting our recent online kangeiko. All of this has given me a unique insight into the many problems – but also the opportunities – of working online.

Let me describe a few of each.

So Many Problems....

These are just some of the many problems we're all facing:

1. **How do I join?** Sadly, I did lose a few students to this first and most obvious problem. No matter how easy it seems to some, others simply can't figure out the technology. Then there are those odd, tech-savvy individuals who cannot process the idea of moving their body in front of a computer screen. It just feels too unnatural.
2. **How do I see my students?** As an instructor, teaching on Zoom initially leaves one feeling very disconnected. Are my students doing it properly? Worse still, might they injure themselves? This loss of control takes some getting used to.
3. **Can my students see me?** This is vital; however inspiring my instruction, no class will ever be better than the sound and vision my students receive. I learned very quickly the importance of good lighting and choosing the best position for my camera.
4. **How can we practice kumite?** This most intractable of all problems was the theme and focus of our recent kangeiko. During my first few months of teaching on Zoom I focussed on warm-up exercises and simple kata. But as lockdown #1 gave way to #2 (when did that happen?) And #3 we all began to grieve the lack of kumite.
5. **How much screen time can I stand?** This is a huge turn-off for many people. At a typical gasshuku we all happily spend three hours at a morning keiko, then after lunch go out and do it all again. Nobody can do that on Zoom. Personally speaking, I can't physically look at a screen for more than two hours without a break. This is why I teach twice a week. On Zoom, many short practice sessions work better than fewer, longer ones.

This last point was my first hint that some of these problems contain seeds of opportunity. That's because little-and-often has always been the best way for anybody to practice Shintaido.

All Shintaido instructors have experienced the problem of the keen student who fails to progress. The reason is usually because the student adopts a lots-and-occasionally approach to their practice. Typically, they throw everything into the long weekly class and then forget about Shintaido for the rest of the week. It's only when students begin to practice on their own, even if only for ten minutes a day, that their progress suddenly becomes both rapid and obvious.

...And a Few Opportunities

1. **Little-and-often.** Online keiko offers us the opportunity to meet up and practice with our keiko partners every day if we wish. During our daienshu event I spent two weeks doing just that! By the end I was asking myself a genuine and heartfelt question: why can't we all just live like this? It remains the case that I saw my Shintaido friends more often in 2020 than in any of the previous twenty years. That feels to me like a huge benefit.
2. **Global Reach.** The most obvious opportunity of online keiko is the reach it offers. Students from all over the world can join a class just as easily as those who live around the corner. For this reason both the recent online British Shintaido events were better attended than many previous real-world events. We welcomed practitioners from America, Europe and all over the UK.

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3. **Accessibility.** Another feature of those events was the variety of people who attended. Some of my new students joined both of them, even though I would never have expected them to travel the distance or pay the fees necessary to attend a residential event. Many who would normally find our events inaccessible, whether by reason of disability, cost or distance, can easily attend an online event.

So, given the self-evident problems, how can we make the best of these opportunities?

A New Space to Practice In

For me, the best way to approach this has been to think carefully about the nature of the virtual dojo.

Until recently I was conscious of two distinct types of dojo in my life.

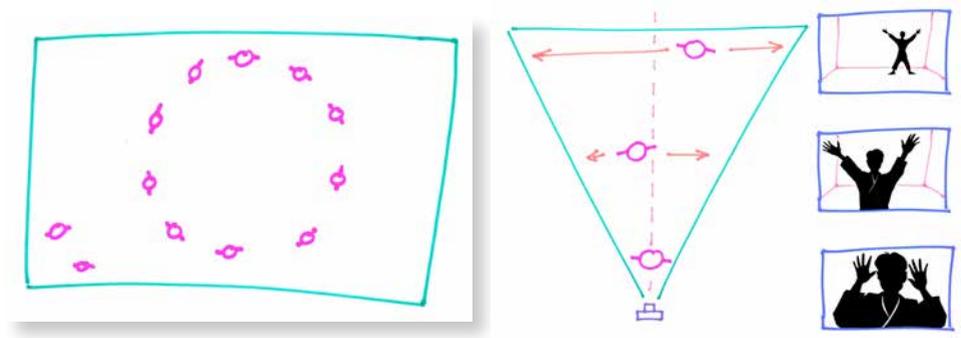
The first is what we all think of as a dojo: the rented hall or outdoor field where we gather to practice Shintaido. Whether we enter this dojo as an instructor, peer or student we all recognise the space as uniquely our own. The dojo we create when we meet is as much a spiritual as a physical space and we all feel at home there.

The second dojo is my own private practice space. Sometimes it's my studio, or the field at Clayfield Copse, but just as often it's the kitchen floor as I wait for the kettle to boil (much to Kazumi's annoyance). These are the spaces in which I lose myself, immersed in my own explorations of Shintaido meaning.

I've been practicing in these two dojos for over thirty years. But now, quite suddenly, there's a third type: the virtual dojo. At first sight my virtual dojo looks like an uncomfortable mix of the other two, an online invitation for others to join me in my private space. But look deeper and you'll see that this is a completely different space, it's a bizarre and totally unique dojo. It seems to have arrived in my life as if descended from outer space. Quirky, complex and challenging, it represents to me a totally new way to experience Shintaido.

To explain what I mean by this (being a visual thinker) I've created some drawings. The first is a simple representation of the first dojo, a rectangular space with a group of us gathering in a circle to practice Shintaido. This is the dojo we're all missing right now.

Dojo number two is similar, but with only me in it!

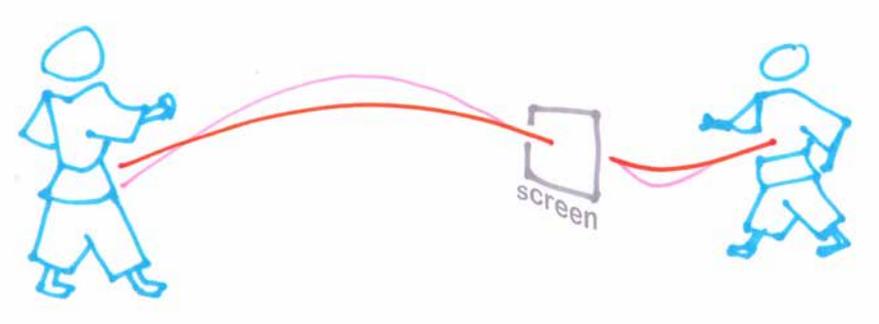


A traditional Shintaido dojo

The new virtual dojo

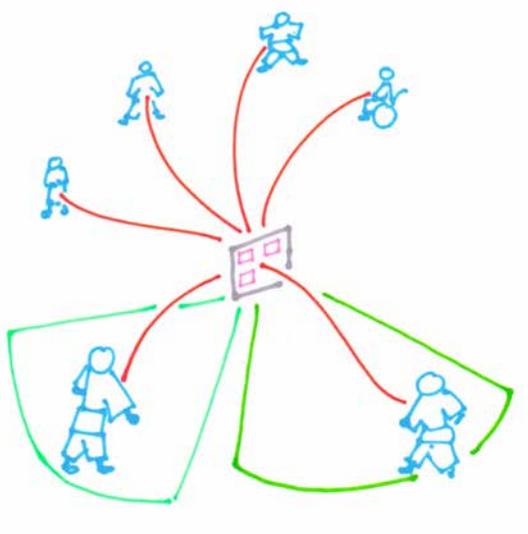
By contrast dojo number three, the virtual dojo is triangular rather than rectangular in nature. It operates like a funnel: open and roomy at the top but progressively more constricted as you near the bottom. The lowest, or narrowest part of the funnel is the camera lens. When positioned at the top, near the mouth of the funnel

you will appear distant on the screen but also have space to move around. You can move right and left as well as reach high above you, every move is visible to all. When approaching the screen you have progressively less and less space to move about in, but everybody can see you better.

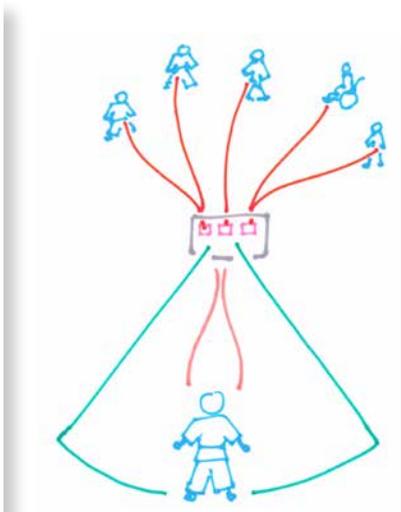


The kizuna (thread) style of kumite

David Franklin drew the first version of this sketch after the series of irimukae kumite exercises we practiced at the kangeiko. It shows the connection, or thread we were trying to create between us via the medium of Zoom. Pulling the thread brings your partner towards you, thus when they pull so are you drawn towards them.



Connecting to students in virtual keiko



Offering a student the chance to lead

Many people attending the event expressed surprise at how real this connection felt. This indicates to me some of the unexplored possibilities of the virtual dojo.

Teaching a class over Zoom is similarly about trying to make a connection through this foreign media. For the instructor it feels like many threads to pull on (or to be pulled) all at once. Yet each student sees just the instructor, they should feel like the instructor is leading the class only for them.

One of the oddities of online instruction is that, whether there are six or sixty student at an event, the experience for each is very similar. Once the class begins they hardly notice the others.

This can change, of course, if the instructor spotlights them as ask them to lead. Suddenly they take the stage at the centre of the event. Some of those attending the kangeiko briefly experienced this during our group kumite experiments.

Virtual Dojo Care

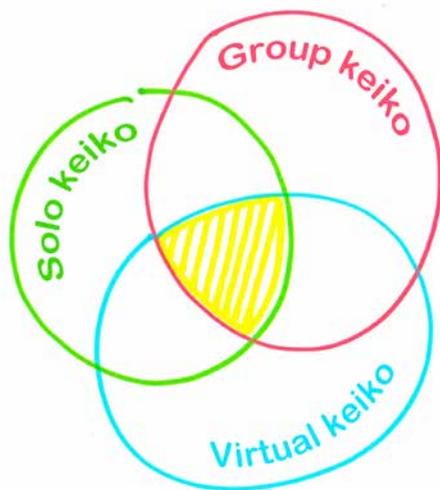
Having discovered the unexpected gift of the virtual dojo I'm anxious not to lose it. It feels to me like a valuable tool, a missing link between the worlds of the traditional martial-arts dojo and my private practice. Further, I think it's possible we've accidentally found a genuine third way, a new path for students of Shintaido to follow.

This is why I began this article by stating that I don't want our keiko to return to the way it used to be. I don't of course mean that I don't wish to experience group keiko again, but that I can envisage these three styles of keiko working together and complimenting each other.

We're used to the concepts of group and solo practice. There have always been people who practice more with a group than on their own, just as there have always been others who practice endlessly on their own but only rarely attend group events. Both routes are valid in the study of Shintaido.

Now, there may be a third group, those who rely primarily on virtual practice. Such individuals can study from instructors all over the world, whilst rarely, if ever attending a physical event. Augmented with their own solo practice this would also be a valid way to study Shintaido.

This is why I want us all to embrace our virtual dojo. We need to become familiar with this unfamiliar, alien space, not because it may replace the keiko we love, but because it can augment it and help Shintaido to grow. We need to each find our own virtual dojo and make it work. It will then become a valuable space where we can each learn from our Doshu, meet Shintaido friends or teach a new generation of online students. Perhaps, one day soon, we'll even be taking exams in a virtual dojo! Think of it as a third leg, one which will both support you and propel you forwards.



Three Dojos working together.

Creating a virtual dojo is not simply about mastering the technology, important though that is, it's mostly about creating the space. In Shintaido we've always chosen our dojo spaces with great care. We consider the size, location, cost and physical properties of the space. Having chosen it, we then clean and prepare it for each keiko. A virtual dojo needs to be chosen and prepared with a similar level of care. Don't just put your laptop in its usual place and log in for keiko. If you do, you may find the experience less than ideal. The space you choose needn't be huge, but it does need to be carefully considered, clean and free of clutter.

The first time you create a virtual dojo it may be quite a lot of work. It might feel like an unnecessary imposition in your life. However once you've found a space which works it will quickly become easier. Clearing my own virtual dojo is now a simple 10-minute routine which I go through before each keiko. This routine not only cleans the space, it also clears my mind.

So, whether you've loved or hated your experience of online Shintaido so far – or if you hate the idea so much you've yet to even try it – I would urge you to give it a go. Like me, you may find it opens up a surprising and creative new world. Even if not, it will give you the opportunity for kumite with some who do.

Charles Burns

Kizuna (thread)—online Kangeiko 2021

By Terry Bickers



Masashi's kanji and Charles's silhouette for the event.

The theme of this year's event was Kizuna, which translates into English as thread and in this context it referred to the connections and bonds between people. This theme was explored in different ways during keiko with participants being encouraged to imagine a line or thread connecting them with their partners.

In contrast to the usual British Shintaido Kangeiko we were fortunate this year in having several people from the USA and Europe being able to join us, including Haruyoshi Fugaku Ito sensei.

This article includes notes about the main event keikos, which were spread over two weekends, plus the additional activities that were available during the week of the event.

Sunday

Opening ceremony & Keiko 1- afternoon

Nagako Cooper welcomed participants as they arrived in the virtual space and participants were then given the opportunity to introduce themselves and say where they were based.

We practiced:

- Aozora-taiso
- Musubi-Dachi stepping
- Wakame-taiso

To begin Charles introduced Aozora-taiso movement combining this with Musubi-Dachi stepping. During Wakame-taiso Charles suggested that participants moved their hands towards different areas of their screens, and in doing so, direct their partner's movement, as they would in a face-to-face kumite. As a variation to this participants were encouraged to try using voice to direct their partner's movement.

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We used our bokken/wooden sticks in a kumite, cutting our partners using different angles, sometimes mirroring our partner's movement and sometimes having one person moving back while the other moved forward. This practice culminated with Charles asking us to imagine our partner's bokken/ sticks cutting into our own room/space, and visa versa, which helped to build a feeling of connection.

To finish Ula led the group in some 'cooling-down' exercises.

Monday to Friday

Daily Taimyo

This week was predominantly split into practicing Taimyo part 1 in the morning and Taimyo part 3 in the evening. During these sessions the people leading Taimyo added a little something, such as some information about the movement or a short warm up, sometimes focusing on one aspect of Taimyo before leading the main sequence. Marianne, one of the participants commented "each individual Shintaido teacher brings something of themselves into their teaching...it's not just the movement" and she liked this aspect, she said. Given that part of Shintaido philosophy is to encourage people to express themselves through Shintaido forms I felt that Marianne's observation was an interesting one and worthy of note.

During one post practice discussion another participant David Franklin sensei said that Taimyo kata could be practiced using a wider stance, if you wanted to make it a little more challenging for yourself.

Although I don't often feel motivated to practice Taimyo kata at 10pm in the evening I find that when I do I feel there are noticeable benefits, such as feeling more positive and relaxed. This week served as a reminder of the benefit of daily practice.

Partner work

Another feature of this week's event was informal partner work, for which each participant was assigned someone to 'buddy' with. The senseis suggested that we should try to meet up with our partner on Zoom during the week, with the aim of revising what we had learned during the first keiko. As well as practicing, this was also an opportunity to get to know another participant a little better, or have a bit of social time with someone already known to us.

Drop-in sessions

In addition to Taimyo sessions and partner work we were also invited to attend some of the regular weekly Shintaido Zoom classes currently running. Most of this week's regular local classes reviewed elements of Sunday's first keiko. It was good to visit the local classes and practice with some new people. It also was good to see Ito sensei visiting the local classes during the week to observe and take part.

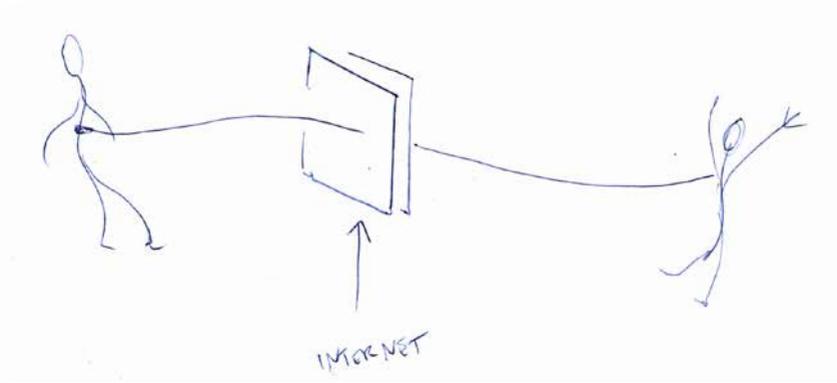
Saturday

Keiko 2- morning

We practiced:

- Irimi-mukae
- How to draw the sword correctly
- Tenso and Shoko practice
- Kumite—giving and receiving with partner

Ula led the group in Irimi-mukae first freehand and then with bokken/sticks. We practiced with synchronized style movement and sometimes mirroring our partner's movement. During this practice Ula asked participants to imagine a thread running through the screen linking us with our partner.



A drawing by David Franklin used to illustrate how our computers could still be an effective medium for kumite, in place of our usual close physical proximity.

Charles used a real Katana to show the participants what a bokken represents and to illustrate how and why we draw the sword in a certain way. As well as demonstrating drawing the sword Charles also showed us how to stand and hold our bokken/stick, opening to Tenso and pointing out to Shoko position.

Ula then led Tenso kumite with bokken/sticks, with one person cutting and the other receiving using Tenso and Shoko movement. Ula closed this session with calming down exercises, and to finish moving from Tenso to Kongou-i (diamond position from Taimyo) to Seiritsutai.

Keiko 3- afternoon

We practiced:

- Wakame- taiso
- Taimyo part 2
- Aozora-taiso with a paintbrush.
- Kiri- komi kihon
- Tenso kumite revision

In both Charles and Ula's keikos virtual 'breakout rooms' were used for kumite practice. This was a welcome addition to the event as it enabled participants to practice in pairs as they would during face-to-face kumite.

For the warm-up Charles led Wakame-taiso and then Taimyo part 2. He then introduced one-handed Aozora-taiso with stepping, followed by kumite practice using the same movements.

During the morning keiko Charles had asked participants to bring a paintbrush to this practice, which was intriguing. The paintbrush was introduced to the session to help us follow the lines of each movement of Aozora-taiso, using our imagination to paint our dojo space or the sky.

Ula introduced Kiri-komi kihon with open hands, using Dai-jodan and Jodan cuts. There was also revision of part of the morning practice, reaching up to Tenso and forward to Shoko position with our wooden swords/sticks, firstly on our own and then in a kumite. Then there was a whole group practice incorporating the movement of Taikimai exercise, imagining painting the sky with our bokken, sticks or paintbrushes.

Charles closed this session with a calming down exercises, plus opening to Tenso with our bokken/sticks, then moving to Kongo-ken (shooting energy forwards from our energy centre) and finally Seiritsutai.

Evening—Inaugural British Shintaido Lecture “Shintaido past, present and future”—by Peter Furtado

As part of this year's Kangeiko, British Shintaido introduced the first in a series of lectures. The subtitle of this lecture was “The Values and Vision of the Rakutenkai, 1960s-2020s”. In this lecture Peter described what had inspired the original group who worked with Aoki Sensei to create Shintaido and how that inspiration has been maintained over the years. This lecture included a visual accompaniment with lots of very interesting photographs and some vintage Shintaido video footage.

The lecture was followed by a question and answer/feedback session, during which many viewers commented on how much they had enjoyed Peter’s thought provoking lecture.

This lecture is now available on YouTube under the heading “*The Rakutenkai Mission 1960s to 2020s.*”

Sunday

Keiko 4- afternoon

We practiced:

- Taimyo part 2
- Wakame-taiso
- Aozora-taiso
- Aozora-taiso and Wakame-taiso combined
- Dai-jodan and jodan movement culminating with a continuous group kumite.

Ula led a warm-up, which included using our bokken/sticks for Taimyo part 2.

We then did Wakame-taiso with the whole group partnering with Charles and then in pairs in breakout rooms.

Then we revised Aozora-taiso with different applications such as ‘freehand’ and using bokken/ sticks. Charles pointed out that Aozora-taiso is fundamentally the same movement as Tenshingoso. Then we did a kumite with one person doing Aozora-taiso while the other person received, using Wakame movement. This section of the keiko culminated with everyone doing Aozora-taiso kumite with bokken/ sticks.

Ula led the last part of this keiko, firstly by introducing Dai-jodan movements using bokken/ sticks and then leading the group in concentrated indoor Eiko movement. Jodan cutting movement followed this and finally a free group kumite using any of the movements we had learned during the event.

Closing ceremony

At the closing ceremony people spoke about how they felt the event had gone and the consensus was that it had been a great success in spite of some of the limitations of practicing over the Internet. Many people commented that they had experienced a strong sense of connection from taking part in the event.

Conclusion

One impression of this event is that the instructors certainly explored the limits what is possible on Zoom. I felt that both the whole group kumites with the senseis and the partner work in breakout rooms worked very well.

I imagine that creating continuity and cohesion at a face-to-face Shintaido event can be a challenge, let alone a virtual one. I feel that the senseis inventiveness and thoughtful planning made for a very special online event.



Zoom keiko!
Photo: courtesy of Charlotte Stace.

Glossary of some Japanese (Shintaido) terms used in the text:

- **Aozora-taiso:** “Ah” & “Oh” movements of Tenshingoso; “blue sky” exercise
- **Bokken, Bokuto:** wooden practice sword
- **Eiko—“glory”:** a fundamental form in Shintaido
- **Gasshuku:** training event; gathering
- **Gorei—instruction:** counting, conducting, or leading a class
- **Irimukae:** entering and receiving
- **Katana:** traditional Japanese sword
- **Keiko—practice:** a Shintaido class
- **Kihon:** fundamental techniques
- **Kiri-komi:** cutting to the front; cutting beyond, cutting by pushing
- **Mumite:** partner exercise
- **Musubi-dachi—“attention stance”:** feet turned out slightly but heels close together or touching
- **Sensei:** teacher
- **Seiritsutai:** natural standing position
- **Shoko—“witnessing light”:** reaching out for the infinite horizon
- **Taikimai:** “dancing with heaven”
- **Tenso—“heavenly phenomenon” or “highest aspiration”:** the “Ah” movement from Tenshingoso
- **Wakame-taiso:** “seaweed exercise”

Participants’ Feedback on Kangeiko “Kizuna”

By Nagako Cooper

- ‘I really enjoyed the event.
 I think the month of pre-event practise sessions helped to hone presentation, both visual and audio, and also test the break out rooms. I think these sessions also helped to plan and deliver the content at a manageable rate allowing all participants to understand and keep up with the teaching.
- The teaching was clear, imaginative and fun.
 The daily Taimyo kept us connected and the pair work was enjoyable. It felt really good to do so much one to one kumite with the instructor via the screen.

- I think the break out rooms were very successful and I really felt I had met my partners. It was exciting waiting to see whose face would pop up on the screen. Cutting really worked as the sword truly seemed to come through the screen.
- Peter's talk was fascinating. Too much to follow at the pace it was presented. There was not only the content to listen to but also so much to watch and take in. I am looking forward to hearing it again when I can pause and absorb what is being said. What a treasure to have such a talented historian in our midst.
- While this may not be the ideal way to do keiko, at this time it was a real boost to morale. It felt lovely to be connected, either through keiko, Taimyo or tea room.
- It was great to have so many people join from other countries and also newcomers who probably would not have joined if it hadn't been via zoom.
- Thank you for all the hard work the organisers put in, learning all the skills of delivering via zoom. I think it was a very successful event.' (Pam Minagawa)
- 'The event was well organized. It was evident the instructor had been well thought out and planned. Charles teaches very clearly and step by step. I learned it is possible to do kumite via ZOOM. I also appreciated the frequent use of the breakout rooms—successful. The Taimyo throughout the week was also beneficial. I appreciated the opportunity to study with other instructors. The lecture by Peter was excellent, well organized and complete. I am glad it has been re-recorded for better audio. Looking forward to seeing the release of the video. It will be something to have archived for many generations of learners.' (Connie Borden)
- 'I agree with what everyone else has said about the organisation, preparation, and well thought out and fun keiko. As I said in the closing ceremony, the whole event made me realise how creative BS has been, perforce, in the last 12 months and how much this has enriched Shintaido overall, and will help it grow and change forth better. Thanks everyone and well done. All I want to add is that, for me personally, the 2 minute breakouts were too short. And they often finished just as we were getting somewhere. This was especially so when doing kumite with newer members. Three or four minutes might be better next time.' (Peter Furtado)

Nagako Cooper 

"Since We Last Met"— A Poem

By Geoff Warr

Dear All,

In signing up for this year's Kangeiko, my mind has been refilled with memories of us being together last January. So here is the follow up.

SINCE WE LAST MET

It was less than a year ago
 And it feels like its more than a world away
 It was the time just before the plague
 When we could still see each other face-to-face
 When we could hold and hug each other.
 Cry on each other's shoulders
 Be, right there, for and with each other.

Back then
We wept over scenes of burning bush fires
Of devastating floods
And we feared for our future.
We shivered, but still we took solace
In the fleeting reality
Of being together
A bunch of warm people
Bodies and souls
Hearts and minds
Seeking and finding the sinuous bonds
Of our shared humanity.

And then

The pandemic emerged from the wings
To take centre stage, and throw the world
Into a turmoil – as yet known only in nightmares.

In the midst of this madness
We might just realise
Could just recognise that we have
A solemn duty of hope.

Now, we can all see the mountains
And we can tell what is needed to move them.

Some hope?
Yes
Some hope.

Geoff Warr



British Shintaido Online Daienshu

By Sandra Bengtsson

Around May 1st, Connie mentioned to me that there was going to be a British Shintaido Online Daienshu June 7th-21st. The format was Sunday keiko with Minagawa and Gianni, during the week personal Taimyo kata and several keiko in small groups, each led by an instructor. As my first international event was a British Shintaido Daienshu in 1989, I thought why not?

As I do prior to every event, I began my plan to reduce my involvement in the gasshuku. I had limited expectations about Zoom keiko; the keiko times were earlier than advertised; I couldn't practice during the

week because I was back to work—all variations on my usual pre-gasshuku angst. In fact, I said to Jim Sterling prior to this event, “if Gianni teaches stepping, I’m going to ask for a refund!”

The first Sunday keiko came and it was really something. Minagawa & Gianni taught as they always had: warm-ups, tachi jumps, eiko dai, tenso, shoko, daijodan kirioroshi, taikimai and azora taiso, finishing with self-care. Some movement was open hand, some with bokuto.

They weren’t teaching as they always had, but what was happening was gasshuku keiko. The teaching method was familiar: sensei demonstrate, sensei and students perform the movement one time together, and then students practice individually while sensei encouraged, corrected and supported.

Afterwards was the discussion: heart-felt, a bit too long, with extensive “thank yous” and clapping. A real post- gasshuku discussion!

Next came Sunday 6/14. Again, many of the elements of the first keiko, progressing to stepping practice and then to expansive movement. And no, I didn’t want a refund. It was amazing! In a very small space Gianni taught hangetsu stepping practice, tenshingoso dai, tsuki to many levels, leading to tsuki moving freely. In my small living room, I was transported.

And for the last keiko, Minagawa began the keiko with Diamond Eight movement. Then as Gianni taught the balance of the class, he presented (a new to me) sword kihon using portions Diamond Eight movements. I was so excited to be offered new movements to practice and learn!

After class, we had a final discussion, complete with a group photo – “the more things change, the more they stay the same.”

To assess these approaches, I look at both the teacher and student perspectives. Most importantly from the Daienshu, it was extremely successful because the sensei did not limit themselves when presenting the classes through Zoom. This was critical. As a student, I had a more positive and enriching experience when I concentrated on receiving the teaching as it was presented, and did not focus on how it was different from gorei I had received before. In both cases, the Zoom filter was removed. Just when I forgot about “Beginner’s Mind” it came to the forefront again.

Sandra Bengtsson 

Examination report and success!

By Ula Chambers

BS had planned to hold examinations up to Nidan in May 2020 at the BS Daienshu. The event and exams were cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Nevertheless, it was possible to hold an in person, socially distanced and Master class style examination session on 4th October. The examination session took place at the home of Susan and Laurent Lacroix who had generously prepared a space with plenty of room and had planned out how examinations could safely take place. There were two examination candidates, Paul Buck and Masahiro Minagawa from Bath Shintaido Club, who were challenging Shodan



Examinors and Examinees

Kenjutsu. As well as examiners Minagawa sensei and Ula Chambers sensei, the small audience of Susan and Pam Minagawa watched from a gallery above. The session was recorded from the Shomen and from an oblique angle, so that examiners and examinees could have a record of the performance. There was also a



Pictures taken during Minagawa Sensei's Master Class

computer positioned to allow a small audience via Zoom to watch the final demonstration.

We were pioneering some new examination adaptations—face mask wearing during the master class and social distancing. After a review of examination curriculum one by one, with Minagawa sensei advising candidates on their form, there was a 10 minute chance for them to practice individually in the exam room. The examination then began with the examiners desk was distanced enough to allow for free demonstration of the Shodan Kenjutsu kata—Diamond 8 Sei and Shoden no kata. After deliberations the examiners were pleased to announce that both candidates, Paul Buck and Masahiro Minagawa, were successful and are now Shodan Kenjutsu. Congratulations to them on their results!



Paul Buck on the left and Masahiro Minagawa on the right during the demonstration transmitted via Zoom

Diamond 8 Sei and Dai Comparison.

By Ula Chambers

Minagawa sensei was invited by the Quebec Shintaido group to co-teach at an online event in October 2020. The specific request was to explain the differences between Diamond 8 Sei and Dai. In preparation for this event Minagawa sensei produced a table to clarify key points and differences between the two forms of the kata.

Diamond 8 Sei and Dai Comparison Table—September 2020

Based on notes from QSD Zoom Workshop September 2020.

Written by Masashi Minagawa edited by Robert Kedoin, Pierre Quettier, Ula Chambers.

	Diamond eight (Sei)	Diamond eight (Dai)
Foundations	Eikō Sei / Tenshingosō Sei	Eikō Dai / Tenshingosō Dai / Wakame
Sword	Bokutō or Bokken	Bokken
Dimension	2-dimensional	3-dimensional
Posture	Seiritsu Tai, Kaiho Tai	Yoki Tai, Ryudō Tai (flowing body: combines Yoki, Seiritsu, Kaiho and Jigo Tai)
Eye Focus	Front	Around
Mental Focus	Self/ inner peace	Self and Nature (space), 360-degree awareness of everything
Cutting movement	Straight lines	Curved flow
Angle of Sword	Reset after each movement	Movements naturally flow one after the other
Connexions	Clear angles	Curved flow
Breathing	One breath for each cut	One breath for one flow
Opening from Battō to Tensō	Rather “flat” but include ten chi jin	3-dimensional
Transitioning Kongo-ken to Seichu-ken	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sink straight down 2. From lower tanden do a straight tsuki (Seichu-ken) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sinking down in Wakame mode (Iri Mukae, like absorbing a Bō you tossed into the air) 2. From lower Tanden, open your Mei-mon (Life gate) 3. Feel the energy flow coming from behind (your past), through you and into the future. 4. Follow that wave into Seichu-ken
Transitioning Seichu-ken to Chudan	From tsuki (Seichu-ken) bring the sword down diagonally to the left/right as if drawing a line. Prepare for chudan.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keeping bokken at the same level, move your eyes to look behind you 2. Follow in Hasso (or Koku-ken) to make a loop to Chudan
Tenshin-ken	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check your Ten-Chi-Jin connection 2. Cut down quietly 	Cut down with full commitment with kiai (not forgetting Tenso)
Transitioning to second side	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Slight Shoko then Kongo-ken in Hachiji-dachi 2. Proceed to “closing from Kongo-ken” below. 3. Begin again (left or right start) 	From Kongo-ken, go to Seichu-ken (remember Iri Mukae)
Closing from Kongo-ken	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Zanshin movement (gedan barai) 2. Notō 3. Musubi-dachi (Close stance) 	Directly to Notō

The following questions and comments are recorded from that workshop, where Minagawa sensei elucidates further his ideas about these forms.

At the start of Diamond 8 (Sei or Dai) , when you go up to Tenso/ Tencho-I , think of the image of catching the sword falling from the sky/heavens. This comes from same technique in Catch Boh—tossing the Boh into the sky and catching it. I taught children this way as they like to play this game and to catch the sword. They reach higher and higher, then once they are holding the sword with both hands they carefully lower it into the diamond position.

The space between or proximity of the palms in Tencho-I and Kongo-I is like the sun and moon. The Sun is expressed by more open space between palms; the moon more closed space between palms. Diamond Eight brings these two concepts together. Sun and moon together = brightness. Minagawa sensei explained that he put a lot of essence into this part of the kata.

From kongo-ken/ Kongo-i (Diamond posture) to Seichuken is a continuous movement—lower your elbows gradually till you reach your centre and from there, push forward.

Q: What is the meaning of keeping your eyes looking forward in Diamond eight Sei ?

MM A: The objective is important. It is a performance to the Divine. Imagine you have to demonstrate in front of one's Master Teacher. You show your teacher 'everything' about yourself, your whole essence; it is "no fighting mode". Diamond 8 Sei is your ceremony, your celebration of your life in front of the shomen. There is more freedom, so use all your senses. It is like one point meditation. Focus on one spot—your body will know the answer. The body becomes a diamond; your mind is still.

Q: What is the movement in Diamond 8 Sei, after Seichuken before chudan kiri harai?

MM A: This is a transition movement drawing down to gedan on the first side it is not meant to be an additional cut, just the direction of the sword moving between Seichuken and chudan kiriharai. In Diamond 8 Dai the transition uses the movement of Hasso, or Kokuken to prepare for chudan kiri harai cut.

Q: What is the meaning of "Ryudo tai" in the comparison table when describing Diamond 8 Dai.

MM A: Diamond 8 Dai is like kotodama – all one big flow – like Eiko dai flowing to wakame. The movement doesn't always have to be Kaihotai. If you go faster and harder it is easy to become unbalanced. Start slowly and during the development of the kata a natural flow will come – everything will crystalise and you will become a diamond. This is the meaning of "Ryudo tai".

Also Ryudo tai describes a changing flow between the expression of the movements: Yoki-tai (soft), Kaihotai (open), Jigo-tai (concentrated) and Seiritsu-tai (unified) depending on the situation. Your movement is constantly flowing and changing, and, as in kotodama* where there are different sounds in between each main sound, in Diamond 8 dai, there are many changes of flow between the movements.

(*) Ito sensei had been teaching voice work and kotodama based on Tenshingoso during the workshop

Q: Can you explain what you meant when talking about ice crystals in relation to Diamond 8?

MM A: There are different methods of making ice - crystal ice and ice cubes. For Crystal ice (used in ice sculpture) the water flows upwards and is frozen as it flows up. This way all the impurities stay down and the ice is clear. Ice cubes on the other hand are frozen from the outside inwards. Any impurities stay inside. Therefore it is important, when practicing Diamond 8 kata, to ground ourselves, to relax and let go. Let the impurities stay down. In each moment, empty oneself. Be calm, all anger is gone.

Examination Results

On 4th March 2021, Autism Hounslow Shintaido held an inaugural local exam session during the regular online weekly Zoom class.

Examiners: Charles Burns, and Nagako Cooper

Shintaido

Rita Hill	Shintaido nyumon-ka
Roseann Connolly	Shintaido nyumon-ka
Salman Khan	Shintaido nyumon-ka
Sam Chaffey	Shintaido nyumon-ka

Please Visit www.shintaido.co.uk for further details

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British Shintaido diary 2021

Sunday 7th March 2021 10—11.30am	BSC Zoom Keiko
Sunday 21st March 2021 2.00—3.30pm	BSC Zoom Keiko
Friday 25th to Sunday 27th June 2021	BS Daienshu 2021

Current Online Classes (March 2021)

- **Monday:** 7.30am Morning Taimyo (30 mins) Jackie Calderwood
- **Tuesday:** 11.00am HAS Kenjustu (45 mins) Charles Burn
5.30pm Gentle chair-based practice (irregular, 60 mins) Susan Lacroix
- **Thursday:** 10.00am Shintaido (60 mins) Susan Lacroix
11.00am HAS Freehand Shintaido (45 mins) Charles Burns
- **Friday:** 7.30am Morning Taimyo (30 mins) Jackie Calderwood
10.20am Shintaido (50 mins) Naagko Cooper
4.00pm Spirit of the Sword (75mins) Peter Furtado

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Taimyo Next Issue — Autumn 2021. Thank you to all who contributed articles. Please send further articles, pictures and ideas to newsletter@shintaido.co.uk