



## **Be Like Water** Shintaido International Gashuku 2012 San Francisco

by Andrew Stones



I very much enjoyed attending the recent 2012 International Shintaido gashuku in San Francisco, the theme of which was entitled "Be Like Water".

### **Impressions of Aoki sensei...Water and Light...**

It was a great pleasure to meet and experience Aoki sensei, the founder of Shintaido, for the very first time. He is a very unusual chap. The first thing one notices about him is how young he looks. Though already a septuagenarian, he could easily pass for someone in his fifties. The second thing is his walk. He kind of strides, with a swiftness of someone pushing through something, as if constantly striding against a strong wind with great purpose. When alone he seemed to often bare that "pained" look; gritted teeth and down-turned corners of mouth, that many Japanese men bare (I remember Okada sensei having the same), but when in company he's all smiles. Indeed, he's definitely one of the most smiley Japanese martial artists I've ever met. There's very little of the samurai gruffness in evidence. He's a fun guy – extremely affable. Another thing I'd comment on is his edginess. He's fun, and he's also edgy. Not very still. Well, perhaps "edgy" is too strong a word; perhaps a better word would be "mercurial" – always moving. It's not a heavy feeling, it's very light, like shimmering mercury. It feels full of lightness and fun. Quite child-like actually. As he watched the first class led by Jim Sterling, it was almost like he was like a little boy who couldn't settle; he seemed to be eternally looking

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for bits of sticks and twigs to practice sword-cutting with. Him and his grandson Kento were the same in this regard. Youthful, fun, smiley, constantly moving, purposeful...this is how he first seemed.

Then after Jim's class, Aoki started doing kumite, or playing (I couldn't tell which) with various high grades: Charles, David, Gianni. It was now that I saw the next very prominent and impressive characteristic: Aoki's amazing speed. I hadn't necessarily been expecting this. I mean, I'd seen him on video demonstrating swift martial moves, but what with his age, and his current emphasis on meditation, gentleness, yokitai (soft, relaxed, yin), and mellow types of practise, I'd thought perhaps he'd have toned his martial edge down. Not so. Lightning bolts emitted from him as he felled his playmates with sudden explosive kiai's (spirited shouts). It looked like great fun...

So my first impression of Aoki sensei was that he seemed very much like a river; a river of light; constantly moving; fluidic. His presence seemed to light people up. People seemed to start smiling and laughing around him, and becoming more energetic and filled with ki...

### Be like water – relationship...

The theme of the gashuku was "Be like water...". Water represents many things to me: Water can be the element that links things together in connection, like when you dissolve two things in water. It's the element that can bring things together in harmonious relationship; on the human level it's sometimes represented as the element of empathy and emotion, a symbol of feelings; it also can be seen as the element of movement and flow and responsiveness; and the element of healing.

Water is the element of relationship; two things coming into connection. For me, one great coming together which I saw in this international gashuku was the relationship of two great consciousnesses: the samurai consciousness of Japan, with its exquisite discipline, artistry and spirituality; and the California consciousness; the flower-power consciousness of the west coast of America, with its freedom, expressiveness and love, and indeed its own artistry and spirituality. I suppose Shintaido has always held these two consciousnesses, to a certain extent, ever since its inception. I've always loved both: the deep connection to nature combined with a beautiful loving artistic attention to detail expressed in Japanese culture; and the free, accepting, open-minded joyousness of west-coast USA. In his assessment of the grading during the Gashuku, Aoki sensei commented that the Japanese practitioners looked like careful craftsmen (and women) seeking to perfect their craft; the Americans on the other hand, he said primarily looked like they were having great fun and enjoying themselves. Perhaps the two nationalities are still expressing these two polarities of consciousness to a certain extent even now. But over-all a splendid convergence, a coming together in friendship of these two polarities, to create the whole that is Shintaido.

Another great coming together in this gashuku was the coming together of Aoki sensei with representatives of the whole of the international Shintaido community. I'm sure this is always a great boost for International Shintaido, and I'm sure we all appreciated it.

Another coming together was of course the coming together of old friends and the making of new friends; the re-establishment of deep bonds and fellowship in the International Shintaido community.

### Be like Water...Tsunami

This might seem an odd thing to talk about next, but it was such an intense experience for me, and I'm sure for many of us – in incredibly dramatic, intense, harrowing and at the same time deeply impressive DVD that Aoki sensei played us on the very first evening (the Tuesday evening) of the Gashuku: a DVD all about Aoki sensei's work with the areas of devastation caused by the Tsunami, tidal wave, that hit Japan last year. I guess "Tsunami" is another "water" theme, though I imagine not one originally envisaged by the gashuku organizers! Aoki sensei explained that he and his wife had both felt a deep desire to help the people and areas that were so traumatized and devastated, but had not been exactly sure how to best to be of service, so initially they simply visited the areas (as soon as they were allowed) to take a look. Apart from the awful physical devastation, Aoki sensei felt a palpable fear in the air, even though no one was around. As he sensed into this, he realised that it was coming from troubled souls – the souls who had lost their lives so suddenly,

and who had not been able to be grieved fully, nor helped on their journey in the afterlife. What could he do to help? He decided to utilize that which he knew best – martial arts – not as a means of fighting, but as a sacred ritual, a sacred offering, to honour the souls of the dead, and help bring them peace. So here was this incredibly harrowing DVD, yet at the same time incredibly touching, with scene after scene of these areas of utter devastation, completely mangled, wiped-out communities. Desolate, wind-swept, empty of life, destroyed, deserted... apart from one solitary figure, Aoki sensei, with his sword, doing sword kenbu in the wind. And it just seemed to go on, and on, and on. We're used to "sound bite" packages of information on the news. "Oh, another devastation in such-and-such an area of the world? How tragic; what's being done about it? Ok, good, now let's move on..." The aim of news programmes is to inform but not overly upset; not dwell on things too long; not let them really sink in....not this DVD...it cut to the bone... At the end, I think we all felt a level of heart-felt connection with Japan and with the Tsunami disaster that we'd not felt before. And indeed, a connection with Aoki sensei's amazing sword work...

The following evening we were treated, at Ito sensei's request, to talks from both Mr and Mrs Aoki describing in more detail their healing reparative work. Shintaido people had been regularly giving movement classes and massage therapy to survivors, and Mrs Aoki herself had been teaching flower arrangement which greatly lifted their spirits. She had also talked with them; asked them how they felt about what happened to them, despite the fact that she had been specifically advised by government representatives not to ask them about it, for fear of upsetting them. On the contrary they had felt enormously relieved to have someone ask them directly about their experience and get a chance to tell their stories at last. So Water here as the healing power of connection, of relationship, of empathic understanding.

Aoki sensei spoke of how, exactly, doing sword kenbu can bring peace to the souls of the dead; what that really means, how it works. He also spoke emotionally about a particular time in his kenbu when he found himself talking spontaneously, inwardly, to the souls and reassuring them that those left behind would be taken care of, and that everything would be ok; and how, with this message, as he spoke it, he felt a sense of ease at last, in the energy around him. So Water again as healing empathy, understanding, and indeed the power of connection – the power of Aoki sensei's sword to connect this world with the world beyond... certainly deep stuff to be thrown into on a Tuesday evening!



### Be like Water... a flowing Gashuku...

And so, the gashuku continued... and what a lovely event it was! Gentle keiko's, intense yet fun, flowed softly in the balmy California breeze; yokitai themes emerged and were elucidated; new relationships forged; old ones strengthened. For super-keen ones, and those doing their gradings on Thursday, there were extra keiko's including various midnight exploits. The atmosphere was really great – that perfect balance of seriousness and fun; relaxation and intent; discipline, yet independence. It was like, there was discipline, but not an imposed discipline. People were given the freedom to be as disciplined or relaxed as they liked; to sense for themselves what was best for them; what was most healing and beneficial. And this, I felt, created a really....grown-up... kind of feeling. As if we all respected each other as grown ups, and respected our own abilities to sense for ourselves what we needed, and also to ask for help if we needed it too. Really lovely.



### Be like Water...Britannia...

At the risk of being accused of being patriotic, I must mention some key players from team GB: Charles was a veritable super-hero, attending more keiko's than I knew were in existence. ("Where's Charles?" "He's doing keiko" "But there isn't any keiko now" "That doesn't seem to deter him"). His heroics paid off, and he was one of the very few entrants who actually succeeded in one of his gradings! I found his kumibo with David Franklin mesmerizing. Congratulations Charles!

I must also mention Ula who actually set the tone of the whole gashuku with her lovely warm up to the very first keiko. Gentle, humorous, water-based; she set the ball rolling in a lovely way.

Meanwhile, Masashi sensei was like healing balm. If you could bottle him, I'd buy some. The other two masters, Aoki and Ito, for me, were like two polarities; I'm not sure how to describe them, but they were definitely like polarities. And Masashi sensei was like the healing water that could connect to both, could be with both, and could help link the two with gentleness. Well, that's how it seemed to me anyway. I feel that the whole gashuku was in a sense held, in Masashi's gentleness; and a very significant and profound holding it was too; though I imagine he'd just shrug and smile.

### Be like Water...outpouring

In this atmosphere of grown-up-ness, of mutual respect and safety, it seemed natural then, that people would start to feel safe and at liberty to communicate and interact. And as the week progressed, it seemed to me that speaking, indeed outpouring stuff which needed to be said, even on occasion intensely emotional stuff, was also becoming a theme of this gashuku. Just as Mrs Aoki had spoken of her work with the Tsunami survivors, communicating with them and allowing them to finally get off their chests their heartfelt stories, so people at this gashuku seemed to be following suit.

Aoki sensei himself, in a sense, got this ball rolling on the very first evening talk after the DVD. He admitted to aspects of Rakutenkai history that I myself had certainly never been privy to before, and felt privileged to now be hearing. He said he hadn't really invented Shintaido as such, he'd more collated it, from lots of people's various efforts. I never knew, for example, that Okada sensei invented Eiko! And various other sensei's, most of whom I'd never heard of, invented various other bits. He expressed sadness and regret that so many old Rakutenkai members had left, and he also wondered whether this was partly his fault. This was all a bit startling, but also, in a sense, heartening; the first thing we need to be able to do in order to address any issue (in my opinion) is be willing to admit to it, to talk about it. I think this set the stage for encouraging all of us to feel free to talk about our issues. I felt, in my conversations with new friends and acquaintances during the week (and old ones), an unusually high level of candour, of admission, of outpouring.



On the final day, Ito sensei too, took courage and admitted to deeply personal and heartfelt issues he had been struggling with, in a way that I feel simultaneously left many people taken aback but also deeply impressed, humbled and grateful that he had had the courage to do so.

### Be like Water...healing

The final keiko of the gashuku – the only one led by Aoki sensei that we could all join in with – was wonderful. Inspiring eiko, followed by inspirational kumite, followed by a magnificent meditation. It's interesting; it's been my experience that sometimes the most fast-moving of teachers can at the same time, when the mood takes them, inspire some of the most deeply profound healing stillnesses. And this was certainly the case with Aoki sensei as he led the final meditation. We were instructed to visualize a spherical area 100 feet in diameter in the earth directly below us, and then to imagine allowing all of our anxieties, angers, fears and agitations to drop into it and dissolve into "mu" (emptiness). But beyond that, beyond the "negatives", we were also encouraged to allow everything, even the "positives" to also drop into the earth and become mu; so all the hopes and dreams, happinesses and loves, joys and delights, similarly dropping and dissolving into nothingness. This had a very profound effect, and I felt rich cellular changes taking place. It's a meditation practise I'll certainly remember and repeat.

Over-all, I experienced the gashuku to be a very healing event. It was great to meet and experience the magnificent Aoki sensei. It was great to meet up with familiar friends and faces and also to meet and experience new Shintaido comrades; to build bridges and relationships across continents. And it was great of course, to do lots of keiko.

A massive thank you to all who contributed to this event, especially to all the Americans who worked so hard at organising, and did a such a brilliant job, and all the teachers who contributed their gorei and spirit – and literally to everyone – I feel we all contributed in one way or another (for example Charlotte – thanks for all your computer wizardry! – you are like our internet mission control).

I feel I'm still very much processing this event; and have been since I left the U.S.. This is about my 5th draft of this article! So I dare say in about a week's time I'll look at it again and think oh dear...should have said something different. But anyhow, this is it for now, my copy deadline's up; this is as far as I've processed so far...



## Reflection on the 2012 International Sonama, San Francisco

by Charlotte Stace

I only wish I had had more time in San Francisco as there is so much I would still like to see. I know for me though, the dream of going to USA alone (some of you will understand this more than others) was only made reality by Shintaido and the people that are part of it. Particularly those who supported and put up with me along they way as without them I would never have got there. For me, I feel wherever I seem to go in the world that involves this group of people related to Shintaido, in large, I feel welcome, comfortable, energised and that to a varying degree I can just be me and relax. Learn and gain confidence, do things I would not do or otherwise not feel comfortable about doing outside when I am with this group of people. For me, these are big things and it is this atmosphere that creates long held memories that I can return to and it is here that photos are additionally helpful.

I am so glad Aoki came as if he had not the opportunity may never have presented itself for him to say to me the things that personally are so relevant and so true.

Aside we all know that no event can ever be perfect and there are some things we can learn from and do something about while others are not directly within our control so it is also time to reflect and look at both for next time so wherever the next Gashuku is those organisers can learn from this and continue to grow.

Shintaido is an amazing and unique community so let it spread and grow!



## Italian Daienshu *The Colour of Movement*

by Pam Minagawa

I attended the Italian Daienshu in May this year and would like to share my impressions.

The theme of the Italian Daienshu was 'Shintaido, an art of expression...The Colour of Movement'. This was inspired by a painting by Kandinsky, entitled 'Painting with White Border' which a member of the Omegna group had recently seen in the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Davide says 'Your eyes are immediately caught by a big white mass in the lower centre of the picture. The focus allows the observer to follow the white border like a wave and then to be driven directly to the middle of the picture where there is a big explosion of colours.'



Parallels were drawn between the painting and the explosion of spring colours in nature and the white of Shintaido. We were encouraged to show our true colours in keiko.

About 30 people attended in total. Most were from the Omegna group, including about 6 children. Gianni keeps good contact with groups in Piza and Florence, and several people from those groups and also 4 from UK attended. It was lovely to see the strong connection Gianni has with the people who live in his town. The parents obviously know Gianni very well, and have great trust and respect for him. The Shintaido members lovingly cared for the children during the event, always including them in every aspect of the workshop. They have a lovely relationship, all ages mixing so well in a real family atmosphere.

The first keiko was led by Gianni. After an inspiring warm up in true Gianni style, we explored Tenshingoso Applications. We formed groups of 6, and did Tsuki facing towards the centre of our group. Looking across the dojo, the patterns formed by all the groups looked like flowers in bloom. Next we practiced in pairs, sending energy, trying to visualise their energy rising and falling. I imagined a water fountain rising up and gently cascading down. After the keiko Gianni said his image was of flowers, butterflies and fountains. He really managed to show his image, and brought colour to the keiko.

The second keiko was led by David Franklin and we explored various forms of Renki kumite, fist to flat hand, leading and following, followed by linked fingers and then just finger tips touching. It required concentration to really listen to your partner and not break the contact.

After that we had great fun doing running Tsuki. We all lined up facing one direction, with one hand stretched out to the side. The person doing Tsuki had to run the whole length of the line, as fast as possible, gently touching each outstretched hand with their fist. It was so exhilarating to feel the energy rushing past and feel the presence of the person, sometimes like a soft breeze, sometimes like an energetic wind. Some people were very powerful, some gentle, but every one really enjoyed the keiko.

The final keiko was led by Minagawa sensei, and we started with Taiki Mai leading into Eiko, followed by Tenshingoso Kugiri geiko (stepping and breaking Tenshingoso into parts). This led to kumite using the movements we had practiced.

One of the highlights of the workshop was the exam session. Before the session began, each group of people had a quiet talk, the leaders reminding members of their groups what they will be showing. Some people practiced together for a few minutes, older members encouraging younger ones.



Aaron started the session with his Karate exam, filling the dojo with his power and his voice. Next came 2 young boys aged 13. They performed individually as they were taking different exams. For those of you who attended the European and International events held in Italy a few years ago, you will know the size of the hall. Each boy filled the hall with his presence. It must have been daunting to stand alone in front of so many people, in such a large hall, with an audience upstairs. However they gave wonderful performances in bojutsu and Shintaido. Their fluidity, precision, expression and energy was amazing. I was moved to tears. A man was filming beside me, and I asked if he was the father of one of the boys. He proudly said he was. I congratulated him on his son's performance.

The groups from Piza and Florence also took exams, several of the people are black belt karate (2 or 3 dan) but they have started to do Shintaido and took Nyumon, Sho to ka (Introduction and Elementary level) exams with real humility. They showed softness and great understanding of Shintaido.

While the exam deliberations were taking place I talked about why we wear white in Shintaido (linking with the theme) and relating it to Japanese culture.

We then had a hakama folding session. Everyone seemed to enjoy the challenge and one or two talented hakama folders emerged!!

David delivered a very up beat and energetic feedback, which kept every body awake till past midnight.

The event started on Saturday after lunch and finished 24 hours later, but it was a very full event. We managed 3 keiko and an exam session plus feedback. It was relaxed, very well organised and a joy to attend.



## European Shintaido Collages Tenshingosho DVD project

### Project Blog

by David Franklin

The development of Tenshingosho variations started when ETC became aware that Shintaido members not having time and/or interest to study Karate ou Nage-wasa might have difficulties challenging higher level of instructor exams.

The main architect of those developments was without doubt Minagawa sensei who made many proposals to the ETC over the years and managed their feed-back to come up with a program simple yet deep enough for everyone to study.

After many iterations and refinements ETC feels that this program is complete and wish to put it in a DVD and over the web so that it will get known from the general public and that instructors and group members may have a referring system for their practices.

Masashi Minagawa, Giovanni Rossi and David Franklin are in charge.

This project, aiming autumn 2012, is well under way now.

### Rough Cut Completed *posted August 31st 2012*

Last weekend (24th-26th August 2012), Minagawa-sensei and Gianni Rossi came to Pilsen to turn my living room into a collaborative video editing studio. We had over 300 clips shot in Bristol, (England), Lamorlaye (France), and Verbania and Omegna (Italy of course), including footage of kihon, kumite, meditation, interviews, and art/nature footage. I had sent Gianni and Minagawa disks with the raw footage to preview and with this we attempted something never done before: using a new video format (HD) and an updated version of the editing software (Final Cut Pro), a team that had never worked together as video editors tried to produce a rough cut of a video about a new arrangement of the Shintaido program ("Tenshingosho Arrangements").

We already had a rough shooting script (necessary for deciding what to shoot), but of course you never know what you really have until you start editing. We set up two boards (in fact parts of an old table I had in the basement) and used the large one for "non-linear" brainstorming of ideas on sticky notes. Through this process we realized that the Tenshingosho Arrangements program is quite rich and there are a variety of ways it could be presented. However, video is a time-based medium and generally that means the material must be organized in a linear way (a time line) to create a video. For that we used the smaller board (at the lower left in the photo).

I connected the television to the computer as an extra mirror monitor so that Minagawa and Gianni could see exactly what I was seeing as I worked and I could show them various possibilities. Meanwhile, they each had their own computers so they could preview and discuss the next shots to be edited while I was working on something that required a few minutes' work. From this chaos (at first), with the help of some tea, coffee, food, short daily keiko in the nearby park and computers, we worked intensively for 3 days to create a first draft of the video: the rough cut.

We'll put a few bits on-line soon so ESC members can see what all the fuss is about.



## **Gasshuku Closing Ceremonies** *Why do we have them and how do they work?*

by Charles Burns

### **What is a closing ceremony?**

A closing ceremony, such as those held at the end of a Shintaido gasshuku, is an integral - but occasionally overlooked - part of any successful event. This essay is an attempt to provide some explanation of the role it plays, as well as some guidance for those who may find themselves running such a ceremony. It is based on my own attendance of many gasshukus, as well as my work in the world of corporate and private events.

The ceremony performs a number of roles. It provides a kind of practical and emotional closure for the participants, making it easier for them to internalise the lessons they have learned and to return to the real world in a sane state of mind. It is also a way of 'giving back' and offering thanks, both to the sensei who have taught at the event and also to the organisers and helpers on which any event relies. The ceremony should appear a natural and inclusive part of the proceedings, and leave everybody feeling they have had a chance to contribute.

Closing ceremonies can perhaps be thought of as an important kind of practice, or keiko, in their own right. As such they can be divided into separate parts; an opening (or warm up), a main practice, and some kind of definitive ending. To make this work one needs a leader, or gorei-sha. Several things must happen at a closing ceremony, and it is the leader's role to see that they do.

A typical opening will usually consist of a few short words from the leader, who will thank both the sensei and all the organisers by name, and will then go on to add a few personal words of their own. There may or may not be token presents for the sensei and event organisers, depending on the size and budget of the event.

The 'main practice' for a closing ceremony consists of the comments and impressions of those who have attended the event. These comments are important both for the sensei - who will find them far more valuable than any presents they may or may not have received - and for the other participants, who need to hear that others are feeling the same kind of things they themselves may be feeling. This will help them to validate their own experience and so cement the gasshuku as an important event in their memories, part of the history of their own personal development in Shintaido.

The end of the ceremony is usually given to the sensei to add their own impressions to the others already voiced. This is a good way to bring the whole event to a natural close, however it should not be expected that the sensei will contribute too much at this point in the gasshuku. They have already planned and delivered the keiko and may not be expecting to also deliver a long speech at the closing ceremony.

### **What can go wrong?**

To be a meaningful part of any event a closing ceremony should mainly consist of short but pertinent comments from some or all the participants (depending on how many are present). However, orchestrating this can be a tricky business!

A typical sign that a ceremony is running into difficulties would be if the leader asks for comments from the participants and there is a sudden rather awkward silence. Alternatively some people may try to fill the silence with rather asinine but 'safe' comments, for instance saying how much they enjoyed the event and that they found it all very well organised. At the end of a long, well-taught, and - for some - emotional gasshuku it is inconceivable that nobody should have anything meaningful to say, therefore this kind of silence is a sure sign that the participants do not feel safe in saying the things they really want to say.

There are many valid reasons why participants may not feel safe in speaking, and most of them are fairly easy to overcome. Quite often the problem is simply the natural human feeling that nobody wants to be the first to speak! This fear of 'being the first' is perfectly reasonable and occurs at many different kinds of event, especially if people find themselves in unfamiliar social surroundings. They may well wish to share deeply personal feelings with the group, but wish to hear others speak first to reassure themselves that their own comments are really appropriate. They may also wish to gauge the audience reaction to what others are saying, to see if such personal comments are in danger of being misunderstood or (worse still) ridiculed.

It should not be assumed that just because "we are all Shintaido friends" gasshuku participants will be immune to this kind of insecurity. It is one thing to reveal your soul to a single kumite partner during an inspirational keiko, but quite another to put your feelings into words in front of the entire assemblage. Many people have a natural fear of public speaking which needs to be respected. The more personal the words they wish to speak, the deeper will be the fear.

## Planning a ceremony

There are a number of things event organisers can do to overcome this kind of reticence and create a successful closing ceremony. Some of these involve advance planning, while others are to do with the skill of the leader on the day.

The most important point about planning is to appoint a leader well in advance. One obvious choice is the event organiser, but failing this it's important not to thrust the role onto somebody at the last minute without giving them time to prepare. Make sure the chosen leader is happy and confident in the role. At large events it might also be a good idea to make it clear in the event program, and ongoing announcements, that the closing ceremony will include an opportunity for people to speak. This will give everybody a chance to think beforehand what they might like to say, rather than having to scramble for words while others are already speaking.

Consider carefully the location of the ceremony. The best choice will be the main practice hall, or dojo, but if that isn't available choose a space that can be made to feel like a Shintaido dojo. Participants should feel they are in a secure and respected place in which all things are OK and anything can and may happen. The ceremony should also be private. Nothing puts people off speaking their heart as much as an awareness that their words will be overheard by strangers who have not taken part in the event (eg: venue staff or random passers-by).

Finally, think about the seating arrangements. For small events (with shorter ceremonies) a simple circle seated on the floor after keiko will work well. For larger gasshukus (with longer and more formal ceremonies) make two or more rows of chairs, arranged in a Shintaido-style circle, with younger and fitter participants sitting on the floor inside. This will make the circle small enough for comments to be audible by everybody. The importance of a circle is that it encourages the notion that everybody is an equal participant with an equal right to speak. This is the same reason we use a circle during the opening and closing of keiko.

The worst possible arrangement for a closing ceremony is to create a conference-style stage for the leader and sensei, while the participants are arranged in rows of seats facing them. This clearly indicates that there is a small group of active 'performers' while everybody else is expected to act as a passive 'audience'. Members of such an audience will feel inhibited to speak because they cannot see the faces of other audience members, and therefore find it difficult to judge how their words may be received. From a practical point of view it also harder to listen to the comments of other audience members if they are either speaking from behind you, or from in front with their back to you.



## Chairing a closing ceremony

Having thanked the sensei and organisers it's a good idea for the leader to include in their opening remarks a few personal words of their own. This helps to set the tone and reassures everybody that voicing real feelings is OK. The leader should then clearly introduce the 'main practice' of the ceremony by explaining to everybody that it is now their turn to speak and why it is important that they do so (ie: that the sensei need to hear reactions to the event.) Clearly explain any rules that may apply (for instance if everybody is to speak in turn, or if time constraints mean just a few volunteers are required) and emphasise that people should feel free to make any kind of comment, whether good or bad.

At large events it might be OK to try a little 'stage management' by asking one or two experienced participants beforehand if they would mind being the first to speak. Done well, this can really help break the ice; however nobody should feel under pressure to speak, or they may hide behind some easy platitude which will set entirely the wrong tone for those who follow.

Once people do start to speak the role of the leader is simply to provide a light rhythm, or *gorei*: counting time, encouraging the shy to speak, and gently reminding the verbose that time is limited. Thank everybody for their contributions. Occasionally somebody might voice a negative comment or recount a bad experience; at such times it is important not to try and justify the event - or worse still make light of it by making a joke - as this will immediately send a signal to those still waiting to speak that some types of comment are 'not safe'. Simply thank the participant and praise them for their courage in speaking.

Once time begins to run short gently wind up the proceedings and ask the sensei if he or she would like to finish the ceremony with a few remarks of their own. It's a good idea to have arranged beforehand how long they might need to do this (and it's quite OK to keep control by reminding them of time constraints if necessary!) Make sure to leave a minute or two at the end for any housekeeping announcements that may be necessary as people leave.



## Shintaido outreach report *"Authentic Voice" workshop in Scotland*

by David and Nagako Cooper



We as a family attended "Authentic Voice" workshop with Chloe Goodchild, the founder of Naked Voice together with Minagawa sensei which was held at the Allanton Peace Sanctuary near Dumfries in Scotland from 20 to 22 May, 2011.

Allanton Sanctuary is the European Centre of the world peace prayer society. David & I first came across a group of women from the Sanctuary holding a big banner saying "May Peace Prevail on Earth" in the midst of the biggest demonstration against the government decision to send the troops to Iraq war back in March, 2003 in Glasgow. During our time living in Edinburgh, we developed our connection with the sanctuary and a deep friendship with Caroline who lives and holds the focus in the sanctuary with her Japanese husband, Uma san, together with the group of people working there. I remember from the very first visit my deep sense of home coming, with the place, purity of nature around, the atmosphere and the warm welcoming people whose eyes often twinkles with humour.

The founder of this movement, Masahisa Goi, who was also a poet and a singer, had a special connection with Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of Aikido. Ueshiba sensei often said that Goi sensei was the only person who really understood him and the spiritual essence of Aikido which he embodied.

Having known this, it was one of our dream to introduce Minagawa sensei and Shintaido to the people at the Sanctuary as we believed that Shintaido was deeply influenced by and is somehow connected to that stream in Japanese martial arts. At the end of last year, to our big surprise, we heard from Caroline that they had planned to invite Minagawa sensei and Chloe for the "Authentic Voice" workshop the following May! It all came about through several encounters and the mystery of human networks.

The weekend workshop began with us all singing a song called "Singing Field" based on a poem by Jelaluddin Rumi;

"Out beyond ideas of right and wrong doing  
There is a field, a singing field.  
I'll meet you there, I'll meet you there."

This song with an atmospheric Indian instrument played by Chloe took me to a completely different energy field, where everything felt more alive, open and vibrant.

Shintaido practice and movements played an important part throughout the weekend; gentle warm up to relax and open our bodies and souls, and the three pillars of Shintaido – Tenshingosho, Eiko and Wakame, were clearly introduced, but in a completely transformed and accessible way. (None of the other participants had any previous experience of Shintaido).

This transformation seemed to happen within "Ma", the energetic space between Minagawa sensei and the participants, light humour within "Ma" during the warm up exercises, and a subsequent "Ma" of deep silence and peace.

One of the highlights of the weekend was the introduction of the "Seven Sounds of Love". With the Indian Raga sounds of "SA, RE, GA, MA, PA, DA, NI, SA" Minagawa sensei created the new sequence of meditative movements based upon 10 position standing meditation, starting with Muso-i (Nothingness), followed by Shoko-i (Spreading light), Kamae (Gathering energy by drawing fists next to hips), Kenka-i (Offering flowers), Shosei-i (Brightening the world), Kongo-i (Diamond), Tencho-i (Top of Heaven) and ending with Tenso. These movements flow so beautifully and I felt each movement with its corresponding sound activating our 7 chakra points one by one, from the bottom all the way up to the top. After receiving the universal energy with Tenso, this energy then passed back all the way down to the bottom (back to Muso-i). We shared the pure joy of these movements with the sounds of one another, again and again and again...

At the end of the workshop, we had a Flag Ceremony, connecting to "the Symphony of Peace Prayers" whose main ceremony was held at Fuji Sanctuary in Japan on the same day, while many other groups around the world were also joining this event. (in 43 different countries). We prayed for peace for each country of the world while holding their national flag cards representing and reminding us of the people within each country. We then placed them around a peace pole engraved with the words "May Peace Prevail on Earth". At the very end of the ceremony, Minagawa sensei performed "Taimyo part 1". Halfway through Taimyo, a bright shaft of sunlight burst into the Festival Room shattering the grey clouds and rain that had been with us for most of the weekend. The colourful flags laid out in spirals around the peace pole were bathed in beautiful sunlight. This glorious light stayed with us for the next couple of hours.

The whole weekend was one of uplifting and joyful sound, movement and self discovery and felt like a very synchronous preparation leading us towards the Daienshu at Douai Abby the very next weekend.



## Hitōri Keiko

by Peter Furtado

Hitōri keiko is great. I call it jumping - which gives you a clue as to how I approach it. For years, I had a dojo which was a football pitch on a hillside plus a bit more at each end; each time I did keiko I would do minimum six lengths of eiko, followed by minimum two lengths of jumping. Then some waza, then some kata. Somehow it was the jumping (especially going back up the hill) which summed it up for me. (Now I'm a bit older, I've cut down on the jumping, and right now I like doing eiko walking - I must be slowing down.)

But there are lots of questions as you do it. Here are some of them that I have encountered. It would be really interesting to know how others of you have answered them, or what other questions you have about it.

**Where?** You need a dojo, and probably you haven't got access to a hall. So unless you have a big private garden or field, it's probably in public. Can you make a public dojo all by yourself? If you succeed, it will be a treasure for your whole life. I have several around Oxford; and they are all precious. The hillside football pitch was wrecked when the put a floodlit hockey pitch near it; but the magic remains in the daytime....

**When?** Can you find a regular time of day for your hitōri keiko? Something that fits the rhythm of your day, your body, your dojo? For me, it's either 6am or 11pm. I like late at night because it's quite a private time. (But I've never forgotten one dark night when I was doing boh eiko and collided into someone, which wasn't ideal...) It can be hard to sleep straight after late-night keiko, but that doesn't really matter.

**Why?** What can you do by yourself that you can't do in class? Here are a few thoughts; Practise what you've learned, or deepen your kata. Figure out some complications or things you are confused about. Make the practice your own, rather than something borrowed from your teacher. Keep up your fitness and flexibility. More interestingly, explore things you think you know well, and make them new. Experiment (right now I'm seeing what happens if you do Taimyo backwards...). Catch an idea, and see where it takes you. Imagine, create, have visions. Explore what your body knows, and what it can do. For me, for the last year or more, almost every time I do hitōri keiko I glimpse some profound insights in the very simplest kihon - it's like magic.

**How?** So much Shintaido is about kumite; how do you do that? Two ways. If you use your imagination to visualise your partner, you can still explore the ma, the attacking, the receiving, the energy exchange. Or use nature as your partner. By my football field is a huge oak tree, and that's my kumite partner, especially for boh. Or you can use the moon (try using your boktōh to cut the moon when it's near the horizon) - or the wind (for wakame, of course) - or even the darkness itself (it's also great for cutting).

**What?** What keiko do you do? If you are practising for an exam, then this answers itself, but if you're not, you need an idea in mind when you go out. Your idea begins with the choice of boh, boktōh, joh or open-hand; then you can choose whether it's going to be a technical practice, or inspiration, or just relaxing. And you need to follow the patterns of keiko - warmup, mokuso, rei. Chances are your programme will grow and change during the practice itself, and that's fine - you're entirely free to do whatever you want, as no-one will ever know! But don't cheat yourself or pretend - YOU will know if you do, and you'll be disappointed in yourself.

**Who?** There are two of you present when you do hitōri keiko: the you who's doing the practice, and the you who's giving gorei. It may sounds strange giving gorei to yourself if you aren't used to it, but it's important you think like that. As goreisha, you have to hold the space safe for yourself to practice. As goreisha, you have to catch and create the rhythms of your body. As goreisha, you have to shape the keiko, and know when to push yourself, and when to stop. At the end, bow three times: once to yourself as goreisha, once to yourself as practitioner, and once to the dojo and the keiko itself.



## Tenshingoso Spirit Cleansing

by Andrew Stones

Minagawa sensei has spoken of the cleansing effect of Tenshingoso kumite; how in each gesture of the arms and hands, the receiver is receiving a kind of energy-cleansing treatment from the partner doing the kata. Energy is cleansed in an upwards direction, as the arms move upwards, and in a downwards direction, as the arms move downwards, and this process is repeated several times throughout the kata. Sensei commented that this cleansing that occurs, is one of the reasons why, after a session of Tenshingoso kumite, everyone's body has become very soft and fluid. In my work as a craniosacral therapist and energy healer, I have found Tenshingoso to be a powerful therapeutic tool for energy cleansing. Following the principle that the power of gesture and sound can be added to utilizing the power of mental intention (body, speech and mind), I sometimes concretize my intent in the form of prayers. Here is the sort of thing I have found helpful in utilizing Tenshingoso in the therapeutic setting:

AH - MAY ALL NEGATIVE SPIRITS WHO SHOULD BE DISPELLED TO HEAVEN, NOW BE DISPELLED TO HEAVEN....

EH - MAY ALL NEGATIVE SPIRITS WHO SHOULD BE DISPELLED TO EARTH, NOW BE DISPELLED TO EARTH...

EE - MAY ALL NEGATIVE SPIRITS WHO SHOULD BE DISPELLED TO THE FURTHEST REACHES OF THE UNIVERSE, NOW BE DISPELLED TO THE FURTHEST REACHES OF THE UNIVERSE

OH - I OFFER THIS PERSON (or this place, this group of people, this country, this family, my self), INTO THE LOVING ARMS OF GOD/GODDESS/ALL THAT IS - MAY THEY ALWAYS BE PROTECTED IN LOVE AND LIGHT...

UN - I NOW SURRENDER MY SELF AND ALL OF US AND THIS WHOLE PROCESS INTO GOD'S GRACE, AND THE LIGHT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND THE LOVE OF THE GODDESS...



## JOYFUL SHINTAIDO

Refreshing  
our Mind and Heart

### A series of three workshops with Master Minagawa Sensei.

**Sunday June 10th 2012 — 2 to 5p.m.**

*Expression of energy and self-awareness.*

Tenshingoso, Tenshingoso applications, Renki, Taimyo.

**Sunday September 30th 2012 — 2 to 5p.m.**

*Harmony with people.*

Meiso kumite – moving meditation, Taimyo

**Sunday November 11th 2012 — 2 to 5p.m.**

*Refreshing our mind and heart, Harmony with nature.*

Eiko, Taimyo, Toitsu kihon waza.

Each workshop costs £23 for non British Shintaido members  
and £18 for British Shintaido members.

The venue is:

**Almondsbury Sports and Social Club, BS32 4AA.**

Contact: Susan: tel. 01225 812 088 or 07590 368 998  
email. slacroix@btinternet.com



## ***"A movement of life expression" A reflection on examinations from 1983 to the present.***

by Ula Chambers

It is usual in England to hold examinations twice a year alongside a workshop or *gasshuku*. This spring however saw a day dedicated to examinations alone, an exam day. It was held in the now familiar dojo, the Greenway Centre in Bristol, which already breathes the atmosphere of many *keiko* sessions. As soon as I arrived for the event, I felt that it may be a special occasion – the *shomen*, (thanks to Pam Minagawa and Carina Hamilton) was a stunning display of flowers - deep pink and white against a deep blue wall, it was like a rich, vibrant impressionist painting; and there was a hum and bustle of people getting ready, in their *keiko-gi*, or practising already. There were seven people taking ten examinations, and it was a small and very focussed group.

On this occasion I was taking part as examiner for Shintaido, alongside the British Shintaido exam team. I have been involved one way or another in examinations since 1983, first as an examinee, a state which is on-going intermittently till this day, as exam *Goreisha*, as exam coordinator at events and as national exam coordinator. I now also have the privilege of sitting as an examiner of Shintaido.

I remember my first exam as being nerve wracking: for me, a person who had two left feet, couldn't remember sequences and used to fall over all the time, it was very daunting. I am not a naturally athletic person, and was worried to such an extent, that I shook throughout my demonstration of *Tenshingoso sei*; my voice for *Eiko dai* was but a squeak. The examiners didn't seem to notice and gave me kindly feedback, but I felt I could have done better. I also listened carefully to the general feedback and thought how it applied to me:

"The English character is reticent. It seems to be a cultural norm that expressing yourself is frowned upon. Children should be seen but not heard, you should have a stiff upper lip and not express your emotions. In Japan there is something similar - people are deferent and self-effacing. Yet through Shintaido we have a channel to express ourselves fully, just as we are at that moment. Your examination is a performance of your life, your artistic expression as well as your technical skill. People in England have much that is deep and rich, and you can be passionate about many things, so don't hold yourselves back. Express everything as if it was your last moment" (un-named examiners circa 1983)

I must admit that this was easier said than done. After all, this is a very vulnerable position to put oneself in. Express myself as I am at that moment, but what if they don't like it? What if they see me as I "really" am? Will I be upset by the feedback?

To help confront these fears, I decided to try and work it out through my regular *keiko*. I tried to express myself more during the class, putting aside thoughts of feeling exposed or stupid, trying not to worry about getting it wrong, or about what my fellow practitioners would think of me! I found there were moments when I could immerse myself in the movement, feel the energies between partners and I could enter another world. This turned out to be a turning point in my *keiko* and I tried to seek out these precious moments as often as possible. Since then, when preparing for an examination I try to incorporate the feeling of those moments, when the body is free to be what it is and my spirit with it. I hope that despite exam nerves I will be able to express myself fully. Before the exams I try to meditate and calm myself. Even now it is not easy!

I remember that after the international examinations in 2008, Ito sensei said he would like to see our movement become so beautiful that it could be hung in the Louvre. I believe that through expressing fully our personal encounter with the essence of Shintaido, our movement is transformed to another level and goes beyond technique. When examiners watch, or the audience comes to engage in *mitori keiko* (learning by watching), they can experience something of each examinees feeling and desire. It is indeed like coming to an exhibition or performance.

In May 2012, sitting as an examiner and carefully watching the examinations taking place, I noticed how courageously people were expressing themselves. There were some beautiful and intense moments that were very moving to see. I was also realised that there was a balance to be struck between expressing yourself fully as an individual, say in performance of a *kata* and *kihon*, and being able, in *kumite*, not only to express

yourself, be also to consider your partner's condition and allow them to show their best performance – a expression of humanity as well as of individuality. When the examinees were able to put themselves fully into the movement, and also show consideration of one another, it was as if they were both shining.

I was glad that somehow, through the decades, the message from so many years ago has filtered down to the bodies of Shintaido practitioners in the UK. Shintaido is after all a "Movement of life expression".

Congratulations to everyone. The results are given below.

The next BS examination session will take place as part of the BS Autumn Workshop, in Brighton area on November 24th/25th.

## British Shintaido Examination Report

### BS examiners:

Masashi Minagawa

Ula Chambers

Charles Burns

Examinations this year took place in Bristol, Bath and at the 2012 Shintaido International in San Francisco. Congratulations to all those who took part.

Here are the results.

### Shintaido

Sally Sharpe	Nyumon-ka
Matt Vandre	Shoto-ka
Masahiro Minagawa	Shoto-ka
Craig Thorn	Shoto-ka
Laurent Lacroix	Shoto-ka
Susan Lacroix	Shoto-ka
Andrew Stones	Koto-ka

### Karate

Miles Bennett	8 kyu
Andrew Stones	4 kyu

### Bojutsu

Charlotte Stace	8 kyu
Carina Hamilton	7 kyu
Miles Bennett	5 kyu
Laurent Lacroix	5 kyu
Susan Lacroix	5 kyu
Andrew Stones	5 kyu
Paul Buck	1 kyu
Charles Burns	3 dan

## Programme, Contacts & Classes

### 2012-2013 Programme

See [www.shintaido.co.uk](http://www.shintaido.co.uk) for further details

30 September 2012	Shintaido Workshop - Joyful Shintaido - Refreshing our Mind and Heart, Bristol Contact: Susan Lacroix - <a href="mailto:slacroix@btinternet.com">slacroix@btinternet.com</a>
11 November 2012	Shintaido Workshop - Joyful Shintaido - Refreshing our Mind and Heart, Bristol Contact: Susan Lacroix - <a href="mailto:slacroix@btinternet.com">slacroix@btinternet.com</a>
24-25 November 2012	BS Autumn Workshop, Brighton Contact: Ula Chambers
5-6 January 2013	Kangeiko at Douai Abbey, near Reading
24-26 May 2013	Daienshu at Douai Abbey, near Reading

### Contacts

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Equipment	Laurent Lacroix		
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\*from Autumn 2013

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### 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

<b>Monday</b>	Farnham, Farnham Maltings. Ramsgate, evening. Shintaido or Tai-Chi	7.30 - 9.00pm	Shintaido
<b>Tuesday</b>	Nailsworth, Christchurch Hall. Bath, University of Bath.	1.30 - 3.30pm	Lightwaves Class
<b>Thursday</b>	Bristol, Greenway Centre.	7.30 - 9.00pm	Bath Bojutsu Club
	Brighton, Hollingbury Methodist Church.	10.30 - 11.30am	Shintaido for people with Learning Difficulties
<b>Weekends</b>	Specialist classes with any BS Instructor. Available by appointment.	8.00 - 10.00pm	Shintaido

2013 marks *40 years* of British Shintaido so look forward to celebrating!

Further information will follow in next edition.

# Taimyo

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Taimyo Next Issue - Spring 2013. Thank you to all who contributed articles. Please send further articles, pictures and ideas to [newsletter@shintaido.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@shintaido.co.uk)