



# BODY Dialogue

Journal of the U.S. Shintaido Movement

Issue No. 8. 2000



Kazu Yanagi / Jennifer Hicks

## Shintaido and Non-Violent Resistance: the dialogue continues

### Kamae: Postures of Engagement

by Matthew Shorten

In the previous issue of *Body Dialogue*, Sensei Haruyoshi F. Ito wrote about the interface of Shintaido, political activism and non-violence. While I cannot approach his knowledge of martial arts, I hope to share some insights on the interplay of these three disciplines. All are powerful sources of personal transformation and social change. And in each case, the *kamae*,

or presenting postures are critical elements in the terms of engagement.

I'll begin by letting you know that I am both a pacifist and practicing martial artist, and see no contradiction here. On the contrary, they both inform the other in ever-challenging ways. Although Shintaido is

based on traditional martial arts forms, it shares many qualities with progressive, process-centered approaches to conflict resolution. Indeed, some would say these aspects are precisely what most distinguishes Shintaido from other martial arts.

*Continued on p. 6*

### Call & Response

by H.F. Ito and David Franklin

*A summary of "Stream of Consciousness: Shintaido and Non-violent Resistance" by H.F. Ito, which appeared in the last issue of Body Dialogue (No. 7, 1998):*

*Shintaido practitioners in Germany who are also members of the anti-nuclear power movement asked Mr. Ito how Shintaido could be used in their confrontations with police during demonstrations. Ito thought about this question for several years but realized that in this situation, force leads to escalation of force. He wondered what was the use of all the years of study of martial arts to which he had dedicated his life. After meeting a pacifist choir group, he realized that their singing at demonstration picket line had the effect of calming people and avoiding an escalation of violence. Shintaido also would not help people fight with police, but could help people prepare their minds to face them. The goal of practice should be to find peace in our minds. Later, Ito discussed this issue with some other peace activists who are not Shintaido practitioners. They thought martial arts training would be valuable for people on the front lines of protest picket lines because it helps people control their fear and anger. If people are trained in martial arts, it gives them confidence because they can choose to fight back if they wish to. Even if they choose not to, they feel free in their minds and their confidence is reflected in their bearing and actions, keeping them calm and steady in times of crisis.*

*Continued on p. 4*



David Franklin

# EXCERPTS FROM LOST MANUSCRIPTS

from an untitled essay by Michael Thompson

We have to recognize that there is a religious aspect to Shintaido that will automatically put some people off. I was told of a group of ethnologists in France who refused to prac-

**“It looks like some kind of religion...why don’t they do it somewhere else?”**

tice the “A” or *tenso* part of *tenshin-goso* because it is seemed to them to represent a “religious” feeling. They are right, but there would be no Shintaido without it.

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[*Tenso*: lit. “expression of heaven”—opening and stretching to the sky. *Tenshingoso*: lit “five expressions of cosmic truth”—one of the basic Shintaido forms.]

I was recently on a beach watching two of my students practicing *tenshin-goso dai*. A group of beach-goers walked by and wondered out loud what was going on: “It looks like some kind of religion,” one said, “why don’t they do it somewhere else?”

I thought that comment summed up pretty well both our strength and our dilemma. If we eliminated the feeling of *tenso* from Shintaido we might attract a larger following but we would be selling our soul. Although the United States was formed in part to allow individuals freedom of religious expression, its modern-day citizens sometimes lose sight of that fact, and a great deal of pressure is exerted on the population to conform to accepted standards or at least stay out of sight.

I am always amazed by how radical some of Shintaido’s forms are despite their simplicity. But without them I am sure that I and many others would have stopped practicing a long time ago. As we reach the end of the millenium, however, it seems there is

an increasing intensity in spiritual longing and we should be prepared to respond to that with an accessible and, at the same time, profound Shintaido practice. ●●●

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# Shintaido, Music, and Kata

by Jennifer Peringer

Since I was five years old I have been studying music and movement. Both the subject matters and the discipline involved in learning them are so similar to me that they often vie for attention in my life. So far music keeps winning as my number one priority, but sometimes only barely.

The first movement forms I studied were ballet and jazz dance. This continued with some seriousness until I reached the excruciatingly self-conscious age of fifteen, when I realized that my body size didn't fit the dance norm. So I switched to yoga, then Tai Kwon Do, until at twenty I found the love of my life as a mover in Shintaido.

My life in music has run a similarly crooked course. My first love was classical piano. This I rejected in my twenties, turning to world music and jazz for inspiration. In my thirties I have returned to my roots with renewed understanding and commitment, and I am currently pursuing a career as a classical pianist.

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**Finally, you need to perform your kata/piece in order to share it with others and to understand it in that moment: "one life, once chance."**

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Which brings me to the point: music, Shintaido, and *kata* (form, sequence).

I first fell in love with Shintaido because of its opportunities for intimate interaction and intense self-expression. This was a period in my life when I was avidly pursuing the arts of relationship and improvisation in both music and my personal life.

Since then Shintaido, music, and my personal life have all become much more solo ventures, and the concept of *kata* has become a central focus, the search to find the right forms and rhythms with which to move forward in this world.

So here are a few thoughts about some specific similarities in my mind between the processes of learning Shintaido *kata* and of learning a piece of classical music:

First of all, the *kata* or the piece already exists. You don't make it up, you just interpret it. In so doing you make it your own, while establishing a deep energetic connection with an ancient tradition.

Secondly, you need to be able to master the technical challenges presented by the *kata* / piece. So you have to be in shape, and practice each bit separately and repeatedly, on a regular basis. Kinesthetic learning is crucial [*kinesthesia*: the sense that detects bodily position, weight, or movement of the muscles, tendons, and joints—ed]. The physical patterns gradually imprint on your brain.

Thirdly, you need to memorize the sequence of movements or sounds. Find a way of clumping individual gestures / phrases into larger sections. Notice any repetitions, recurring rhythmic patterns, or gestures already familiar to you. Go patiently, methodically, persistently: "Make haste slowly." Nothing cosmic or orgasmic here. Just keep putting one foot in front of the other.

Fourthly, you need to be able to move smoothly from one movement/sound to the next, without a break of concentration. This requires thinking slightly ahead, so your body is always ready for the next move. Mental work does wonders here: imagining doing the entire *kata* as you're lying in bed or driving to work. The *kata* / piece becomes meditation, one breath.

Fifthly, you need to find the soul of the *kata* / piece. Where are its highs and lows, when should it go faster or slower, louder or quieter; when should it be fierce, sad, joyful, wise, innocent, etc. For this you need to practice the *kata* / piece in all different moods: when you're feeling analytical, when you're feeling contemplative, when you're feeling exhausted, sad, lonely, joyful, silly, etc.

Finally, you need to perform your *kata* / piece in order to share it with others and to understand it in that moment: "one life, once chance."

Needless to say, this whole process requires hours and hours of solo practice, or *hitori-geiko*. I always feel surprised when I hear other veteran Shintaido practitioners talking about not practicing on their own, not knowing what to do on their own. I guess there are some improvising musicians, who just like to jam together. But for me as a classical musician and Shintaidoist, *hitori-geiko* is the heart and soul of the practice of both music and Shintaido *kata*.

So now you know. This is what I do when I'm on my own. There's a lot to be getting on with. In Shintaido, music and life. •••



## Call & Response

*continued from p. 1*

*Following is the correspondence exchanged between H.F. Ito and David Franklin:*

Dear Ito-sensei,

I found your article in the last issue of *Body Dialogue* quite thought-provoking. But this is one part I have some questions about:

[Quoted from the original article]: "Here is the analysis: If you are trained in martial arts and know how to defend yourself, you have choices. For instance, you can fight back if you really wish, but you may choose not to on purpose. When you have choices in your mind, you feel free. If you are free in your mind, you end up having confidence. Once you start having confidence in yourself, it appears naturally automatically in your actions."

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### Accepting defeat and crying for help are stronger than the strongest form in the martial arts

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If I read between the lines, this analysis is the one idea in the article that was contributed by people who are not actually Shintaido practitioners. Am I correct? I know that they are peace activists and, and you mentioned that one of them is a Buddhist; so we might expect their ideas to fit harmoniously with Shintaido's philosophy. And superficially there may be some similarity. But I suspect that someone who has experienced Shintaido's philosophy in their body would not have written that part. Here is why:

To be honest, I have heard this kind of explanation applied to other martial arts such as Aikido and even traditional Karate. I think it is a shallow philosophy. My own experience was that my Karate instructor also said that we should only use Karate for self-defense, and never to initiate an attack. But I don't need to tell you that in reality, the movements are very violent and so you almost end up hoping that someone will attack you so you can test your technique. This was the kind of mentality that led me personally to search beyond Karate and look for something else (luckily I found Shintaido).

The idea that "you can fight back if you really wish, but may choose not to, and this gives you confidence" reminds me of the idea of "peace through strength." The idea of "peace through strength" seems to be a well-accepted philosophy in the USA, but to me it sounds like "newspeak."

Of course you may recognize the phrase "newspeak" from the book *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell. "Newspeak" were slogans and phrases the government used in its propaganda to justify totalitarianism. So "peace through strength" would be a way to suppress people, to take away their freedom by preventing them from thinking for themselves. In the

real world I believe the concept of "peace through strength" has been used to justify the nuclear arms race in the first place, and it is not that different from a shallow interpretation of martial arts philosophy.

I have observed that Shintaido often has an odd effect on people: it does not make them feel "confident"; in fact, sometimes it makes them feel uncertain, helpless, or spiritually weak. Yet just exactly at those moments, they are sometimes able to act boldly and courageously.

One of the sentences in Aoki-sensei's Shintaido textbook that has always remained in my mind is: "Accepting defeat and crying for help are stronger than the strongest form in the martial arts." This seems to me one of the unique points of Shintaido that sets it apart from other martial arts, and obviously this is very different from "peace through strength" or having "confidence."

But as for exactly how to apply this philosophy concretely and when dealing with police and picket lines, I have no idea at all.

In any case, your article made me think a lot about why I do Shintaido and how it relates to the peace movement. The connection between Shintaido and the peace and anti-nuclear movements is a story that not many people know about. The idea of "losing the battle as slowly as possible" is especially interesting. Thank you.

David Franklin, Boston MA

*H.F. Ito responds:*

Dear David,

Thank you for your honest feedback! I appreciate your sharp criticism regarding the "confidence" I described in my last article. Also, I was impressed by your essential understanding of Shintaido which sometimes creates feelings of uncertainty, helplessness, or spiritual weakness. I understand that I cannot cheat someone like you by describing the effect of Shintaido superficially.

In the days of *Rakutenkai* [lit, "group of optimists;" the group that originally developed Shintaido. H.F. Ito was a member—ed.], I remember that Master Aoki often set up a kind of life threatening situation and put us into it while we were experimenting with many kinds of sparring exercises. The challenge we were requested to figure out was not simply how to fight back, or escape, of course, but how to break through the actual condition, ideally without hurting the opponent(s). Then, some of us ended up re-experiencing true *sankaku-tobi* (a secret stepping technique), while the others ended up finding the form of *tenso* (the heavenward "Ah" movement).

In fact, you know that you end up moving your body against gravity when you play *sankaku-tobi* perfectly while you are practicing Shintaido-Karate sparring exercises.

*continued on following page*

Call & Response *continued from previous page*

Also, while you are doing *kumitachi* (sparring exercises with a sword), once in a while you get a chance to cut *daijodan* (a powerful downward cut) but on purpose, you freeze it at *tenso* position, because if you would keep going, you would end up smashing your opponent on the head. If your opponent is sensitive enough, immediately he feels that an actual incisive energy is exactly coming down from the top of the sword, so that his body gets frozen.

The following is my interpretation of what is happening in this kind situation:

When we are in an urgent and life-threatening situation, yet if our minds are still under the control of a clear consciousness and our power of concentration, our body ends up going beyond our usual sense of the three-dimensional world, and moves freely or expresses unusual energy. In a way, we end up experiencing a kind of twilight zone, if you will let me use a term of science fiction.

In order to describe this kind of phenomenon, the example does not have to be drawn from martial arts training. You may find it in stories of how people saved themselves from a fire, accident, or other natural disaster. After the accident, in a peaceful environment, they are never able to repeat what they had done.

For example, someone ended up carrying a big refrigerator out of his house by himself. Two people ended up moving a piano through many tight doors within a few minutes. A non-athletic mother ended up running faster than an Olympic level sprinter in order to catch her baby who was falling from the window of her third floor apartment. Many physically disabled patients ended up running away and escaping from their hospital rooms when a giant snake entered the building.

Obviously, daily life, we are not allowed to put people into life-threatening situations in order for them re-experience the accidental movements mentioned the above. But, in martial arts training, the situation is a little different. I think that it is possible for practitioners to put themselves into this kind of situation voluntarily in order to find their *senzai-nouryoku* or hidden talent.

On the other hand, this is one of the reasons why we keep Shintaido under the limited conditions of *budo*, or martial arts. I believe that a good Shintaido instructor always creates a kind of unusual environment in which his students have to study how to let their minds and bodies react in order to find a new way to break through.

Personally speaking, when I use my clear consciousness and power of concentration combined with universal Love, I can create a kind of small miracle around me. I mean that I can go beyond the usual sense or limited conditions of the three-

dimensional world. But the problem is that I cannot let things happen consistently in the same way.

I wrote my last article in the order to report the advice I gave to my friends who are participating in public demonstrations. Obviously I could not tell them: "Bet your life while you are trusting the effects of Shintaido, and a kind of miracle will happen if you are lucky!" Frankly speaking, if I myself were in the picket line, I am not sure how much and how long I would stay calm, especially when I saw how unreasonably and unfairly my friends were treated by my "opponents."

Since I trust the effect of Shintaido more directly, I might take some action as soon as I found the right timing. However, if I took action, I would not expect any promising results. I would like to offer my body just like the young Chinese who stood up in front of army tanks in the Tiananmen Square protest in 1989. Simply speaking, I might be beaten by one of the police force, and get killed instantly, if I am lucky. Then, I would imagine that I have just paid off what I owed from my past life and finally thank everyone for letting me free myself and making me omnipresent.

If I could choose the results of my action, I wish I could do it, like Jesus did when he faced an angry crowd. Remember that he just walked through them. Was it a miracle that he showed, or a kind of martial arts? I think he was performing a perfect *wakame* (soft, yielding movement) in Palestine.

In order to conclude this discussion, I would like to share two of my favorite texts with you.

One is from a famous Zen *koan* (a seemingly irrational phrase or question) which says:

*Hyakushaku kantou subekaraku ho o susumeba, jippou sekai kore aratanari.*

"If you step off the top of a 100-foot high bamboo pole, your whole world will be completely renewed."

The other one is from one of the essays written by Henry Miller, which I read a long time ago and still remember only in Japanese. So, I have to translate it from Japanese to English. (If you know someone who loves his essays, please ask him to find the original sentence for me.) [We were unable to locate the quote; any readers familiar with it are invited to contact Body Dialogue—ed]:

*Hito ha sono nagashita chi to onaji ryou no jiyuu o kakutoku suru.*

"A man will win as much freedom as he spills his blood for."

Tell me what you think of my fanatic understanding of Shintaido!

H.F. Ito, San Francisco CA •••



Kazu Yanagi

## Kamae *continued from p. 1*

Process-centered approaches include activities such as meditation, mediation, protest demonstrations, creative writing, modern art, sincere prayer, and good conversation. Playing frisbee is about process; football is about the outcome. Democracy is the ultimate political process: elections being valid is much more important than who wins.

In his book *Sword and Brush* Dave Lowry reveals that ancient Japanese martial arts practitioners often assumed vulnerable stances, apparently leaving themselves wide open, as if to invite attack. He contrasts this with the practices of most modern students, who strive to present themselves as impregnable.

### The Power of Open

When a Shintaido practitioner opens into "A", it looks quite vulnerable, and is a posture to be avoided in other *budo* (martial arts). But after enough practice, we come to realize there is power in its openness; dare I even suggest a comparison with Christ on the cross? And unlike the ancient practices referred to above by Lowry, this power has nothing to do with the strategy of a false invitation to a trap. We know that truly strong people are much more open, less defensive, less tense, less driven by impulses. They practice flexibility instead of rigidity.

Shintaido students are taught that softness can also be a great asset. It is much more useful to be able to "harmonize with the flow" rather than perpetuate the cycle of block and punch, block and kick. Even Bruce Lee acknowledged this in his text *The Tao of Gung Fu*. But Lowry takes the idea a step further, as he interprets the Japanese written character of *ju* or "pliancy" to mean "the process of turning to an aggressor the other cheek— only to use the movement of the turn to effect his defeat."

### Gandhi's "Truth Force"

Mohandas Gandhi, M.L. King, and other great pioneers of pacifist politics understood that non-violence requires its discipline to be truly ready (like the samurai of old?) to accept harm from their adversaries. Nor were they naïve in underestimating the ruthlessness of these forces. Yes, people would be beaten, jailed and even face death in their struggles for freedom. But to suffer this, and still stand firm in witness to your principle is the surest way to transform the conflict, and just maybe your adversary as well. Gandhi referred to this vital power as *satyagraha*, or "truth force."

To willingly present oneself as vulnerable cannot be lightly be sustained. It rarifies issues down to real basics; if we are standing (or sitting-in) at a morally strong position, we can courageously withstand considerable attacks, but if not, we will surely melt under the harsh light of suffering. When we expose ourselves with all our fears, faults and ugliness, masks are stripped off. This is the first step toward wholeness, and perhaps holiness.



"Ten" — heaven, sky, cosmos  
by the zen monk Ryokan

### There is no way to peace

When non-violent protesters take their public stances, they may understandably hope for some political or social impact as a result of their actions. But this can be a slippery slope, as the author and acetic Thomas Merton warned. It is easy to fall into the trap of ends justifying the means. Better to strive to do the right

thing for its own sake. To quote Lowry again, the Japanese spear, *yari*, was a double edged weapon which could be used to slash in opposing directions, right or left. This word, forming the basis of so many martial terms reminds us that the martial arts can cut both ways— for good or evil. The discipline of non-violence helps us to avoid this siren song, as in the old saying "There is no way to peace, peace is the way."

When confronted by overwhelmingly superior force, as the environmental movement was, traditional martial arts techniques may become moot. Yet pacifism is not to be confused with passivism. Passive resistance has even been likened to moral *ju-jitsu* (an art of weaponless self-defense that uses the attacker's own weight and strength) by tacticians. When confronted with injustice, we must respond as best we can. Sometimes the best we can may only mean initiating a silent witness, or sometimes call us to "speak truth to power" as the Quakers say. But whatever the strategy, it is critical to "keep perfect peace in our minds," as Ito suggested. Our inner strength may manifest itself more often, and in more ways than we typically perceive.

### Expression of "ten"

Another relevant, outstanding feature of Shintaido is the quality of *ten* ("heaven") in our practice. This uplifting posture not only heightens our own consciousness, but may help elevate that of our partner or adversary as well. When they can be lead into *tenso*, ("expression of heaven"— the movement of the sound "Ah") we may discover a whole different range of options are open to both of us, and may transform the conflict into a partnership.

Though Gandhi, for example, was a master strategist, he never sought to take what he considered unfair advantage of British political weaknesses; he always left space for the opponent to initiate taking the higher road—in that case, granting India its independence.

Like a productive mediation session, there might come a breakthrough, including possibilities (some of them outward or forward) that eluded us when we were stuck in a block/punch mode. With this new found openness, we might explore a win/win resolution for all parties; or we may still remain adversaries. But from here, we at least have more choices. •••

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*Shintaido: the Body is a Message of the Universe* by Hiroyuki Aoki (\$20 / \$15\*)  
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# BODY

## Dialogue

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*so white they glow,  
the others sit opposite me.  
i can see right through them.*

*this body movement  
turns humans into transparent  
shades.*

*all for naught.  
we bow and rise and are ordinary  
mortals again.*

*i long for a transformation  
so complete  
that the world never intrudes,  
sunrises are eternal, as in space,  
my nagging brain permanently pickled in ether,  
glorious wormwood absinthe,*

*mescal, peyote, sweet fuzzy cannabis,  
bella belladonna,  
all-forgetting heroin.  
then i could rest, put down my load,  
think of nothing and be happy.*

*for now i hop and jump,  
stretch my hands to the sky,  
sit in the circle,  
imagine myself enlightened,  
and hope for more.  
a ghost in daylight,  
already long dead,  
i stand at the threshold of paradise  
and look for a way out.*

—Stephen Billias

新  
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道

“Shintaido” means “new body way.” It is an art form, a health exercise and meditation through movement developed in Japan in the 1960s. Shintaido grows out of the roots of ancient martial arts, meditation and yogic traditions, but the aim is to help modern people re-discover the original wisdom known by the body and realized through movement and gesture.

[www.shintaido.org](http://www.shintaido.org)