BODY Dialogue

Journal of the U.S. Shintaido Movement Issue No. 9. 2001

Confronting Evil

by Michael Bogenschutz, M.D.

The last issue of *Body Dialogue* was packed with wonderful and varied articles by practitioners about the essence and purpose of Shintaido, what it is and why we do it. Related pieces by Matthew Shorten, H.F. Ito and David Franklin grappled with the issue of violence and how Shintaido may be used to

…I am daily confronted with the reality of violence, its devastating effects, and the question of how best to respond to it.

respond non-violently but effectively. And Michael Thompson spoke of his commitment to the unpopular spiritual or religious essence of Shintaido. As a Shintaido instructor and a psychiatrist I would like to share my reflections on these topics and contribute my own perspective.

Many of my patients have problems with violence, as victims, perpetrators, or both. So I am daily confronted with the reality

Continued on p. 10

INSIDE

Shintaido ORIGINALS

interviews by Eva Thaddeus

Ever since I began studying Shintaido, I have wanted to know more about Rakutenkai, the group responsible for the development of Shintaido. It is intriguing and somewhat mysterious to today's American students. I knew that the Rakutenkai practice was extremely demanding in every way— physically, mentally, spiritually. I knew that many of the practice sessions took place in the middle of the night. I had heard that many different people were involved in the development of Shintaido— men and women, people of different ability levels, people from different backgrounds— and I wondered what this meant, considering how rigorous the practices were reputed to be. I had heard some of the Rakutenkai people described as "dropouts," and I wondered what they were dropping out from. Finally I had the opportunity to ask some of these questions, and have them answered. I was lucky enough to be able to interview three of the core members of Rakutenkai about their experiences during Shintaido's formative years.

Haruyoshi F. Ito

H.F. Ito, Master Instructor of Shintaido, began his study of martial arts in 1960. During his college years, he studied Shotokai Karate under the instruction of Mr. Hiroyuki Aoki. In 1961, he began visiting his teacher's house for dinner. From that time on, he became a regular guest of the Aokis, often staying up all night in discussions of subjects such as the history of Japanese art. A couple of years later, the informal get-togethers at the Aokis' house became formalized as Rakutenkai, or "the meeting of optimists." Under Mr. Aoki's guidance, the martial artists in Rakutenkai researched and developed the forms which

Continued on p. 4

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Excerpt from the Foreword to *Total Stick Fighting: Shintaido Bojutsu*
(see page 8)

He told us that it was totally anachronistic to be trying to learn to use the *bo* [wooden staff] as a weapon at the end of the twentieth century, and that *bojutsu* [staff technique] should instead be viewed as a discipline that would help us as we continued along our Shintaido path. From that point, instead of whacking each other with our *bo,* we began to throw the *bo* into the air, catch them and roll with them onto the ground. We would balance them on the tops of our feet, use them to play catch with a partner, and do dance-like movements in which we would move in tandem with our *bo,* alternately leading and following them. The ultimate goal was to establish unification, even intimacy, with the *bo.*

In this way we finally learned to regard the *bo* as a tool with which we could achieve greater flexibility in our bodies and minds, rather than as a weapon that had lost all connection to everyday life. But I felt that this approach was not essentially different from the way I had begun my own practice of *bojutsu;* it was just more efficient (and more fun, I admit)…

…[T]he ideal would be to find a qualified *bojutsu* instructor and study with him or her. But if that is not feasible, why not try spending a year or so running Eiko and practicing the various techniques for unification of practitioner and *bo* that are described in this book before moving on to specific *kata.* The results may surprise you.

Michael Thompson
General Instructor
Co-Founder, Shintaido of America

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Mountain Girl

by Annelie Wilde

It's early August in New Hampshire and the shoreline of Lake Winnipesaukee gives way quickly to moss-covered rocks and pine forests. The brown needles are soft under foot and the smell of pine is a pleasant reminder that we have left behind sticky, polluted Northern Virginia. Kesh, Neena, Ravi and I have returned for another summer *gassuku* (retreat, workshop) in New England. Will it be cold, will it rain, will the kids find something to do, will practice be difficult, will I remember how to move? The usual concerns niggle at my mind.

There is no bright feeling, no lightness of spirit. I feel totally depleted and begin to fantasize that I am ill, anemic perhaps…

My last formal Shintaido practice was 12 months ago on this same site. Since then I ve done a little Yoga, walked the dog and done Tenshingoso (a basic Shintaido form) when the spirit moved me. Not quite the stuff of which warriors are made.

I protect myself from disappointment by keeping my expectations low. I tell myself that I am here simply to enjoy time with my family and catch up with old friends. Since I have no reputation to uphold, no students to disappoint and no exams to take, I plan on enjoying myself and opt out of the advanced workshop. After the first two practices I am forced to admit that nothing is right in my *keiko* (practice; lit., "studying the ancient"), in fact I am feeling quite bored. Now how could that be? The teaching is precise and rich, my partners are committed, my concentration is good, my body isn't sore, yet I am drowning in lassitude. I can barely move because my limbs feel so heavy. I feel that I have been practicing alone, not connecting with anyone.

Perhaps, I reason, this is a consequence of my more recent Yoga practice which discourages competitiveness and encourages focusing inward.

Saturday morning is sunny and gorgeous for practice session no. 3, yet I am now in deep trouble dragging my ass around the field from the get-go. There is no bright feeling, no lightness of spirit. I feel totally depleted and begin to fantasize that I am ill, anemic perhaps, or terminally depressed, conditions which I have experienced previously. So I quit. This is the last *gassuku*, I decide. No point in coming anymore. The food is unattractive, the bathrooms ghastly, there is nothing for my children to do, and clearly I am just too old and out of shape

Continued on p. 11

25th Anniversary
Gasshuku
June 14 - 17, 2001
Stoneleigh-Burnham School
Western Massachusetts

Come celebrate 25 years of Shintaido in America at this retreat / workshop in beautiful New England. Special guests will include H. F. Ito from San Francisco, Michael Thompson from Cambridge, and Alain Chevet from Lyon, France. Examinations and an advanced workshop will be offered. The Director of Instruction is Joe Zawielski.

Stoneleigh-Burnham School is located in Greenfield, Massachusetts, about 2 hours west of Boston and 3-4 hours north of New York City. The closest airport is Bradley International Airport between Springfield MA and Hartford CT.

If you would like more information, contact:
Jed Barnum, Gasshuku Coordinator
20 Rugg Road, Allston MA 02134
ph 617-254-7903
jbarnum@world.std.com

ORIGINALS

continued from p. 1

became Shintaido. I had the opportunity to ask Mr. Ito several questions about his years in Rakutenkai.

Who were some of the most interesting people you knew in Rakutenkai?

The most interesting for me was Etsuko Aoki, Mr. Aoki's wife. She was a kind of Christian role model. Her lifestyle had a strong influence on me.

Did she practice with you?

She hardly practiced any martial art, but when Rakutenkai happened she was our teacher of tea ceremony. I think she was very open and could see people's character directly, so she ended up encouraging us, or giving us good criticism, good feedback. Also, compared with the people who came from martial arts training, physically she was quite weak and very sensitive, and so for instance if we had bad concentration or bad energy, she ended up throwing up, though not on purpose— her body was a kind of litmus test.

Mr. Aoki really trusted and respected her character, so whenever he had a question he asked her very openly for her feedback. That was pretty interesting for me because although nowadays, men's and women's relationships have changed even in Japan, in the old days Japan was based in masculine culture. The husband said what to do and the wife would usually follow. But I recognised, when I started eating at the Aokis' house, that they were quite equal, even forty years ago. She is the one who started doing a short meditation before the meal started. Nobody forced her to do it, but she was doing it

naturally, so we naturally ended up following that kind of *kata,* or form. It became a kind of Rakutenkai tradition that before we ate a meal we did a short meditation to express appreciation for the food.

In those days, living as a Christian was still unusual. Of course, in the Japanese constitution it's guaranteed that you can choose your own religion, but in Japan being a Christian was very difficult. Today, maybe it's not so strange because there are so many strange fashions and styles in Japan, but in the old days, although nobody persecuted you, you were indirectly criticised. But Mr. Aoki and Mrs. Aoki were very

> *…[I]f we had bad concentration or bad energy, she ended up throwing up, though not on purpose— her body was a kind of litmus test.*

open, and not afraid to show their Christianity. They never belonged to a church; they kept their own faith, their life principles that were based on Jesus' teaching. I was fascinated by their philosophy and their discussions.

Did you study the Bible together?

Not at all. They didn't do anything like that. Their style of living itself was Christian.

The lifestyle in Japan based on Buddhism or Confucianism has many taboos. Obviously, there are some people who know that taboos have no meaning, but still, they are afraid to break the taboos that many Japanese blindly follow. Mr. and Mrs. Aoki were really free from this kind of taboo. Of course when I met Mr. Aoki, he was already a senior practitioner of karate, so it wasn't a surprise to me that he was free— if he was strong he could be free! But that a weak woman like Etsuko should also be free, not afraid of taboos, do's and don'ts— that was really— wow!

When Rakutenkai began, we started meeting more formally. "Let's get together on Monday night." Mr. and Mrs. Aoki recommended a book to read, and then we would get together and share our impressions. The total membership of Rakutenkai was maybe 30 or 40 people, so maybe 10 or 15 people would come to this kind of meeting.

Gradually we started the outdoor practices. But this kind of practice— nobody forced us to do it. Mr. Aoki always had interesting ideas, and wanted to test them. We were almost addicted.

I think that Mr. and Mrs. Aoki's personalities attracted people. Karate students came, and Etsuko's tea ceremony students came. I came from the university Karate club, but Mr. Aoki also taught at the local *dojo* (training hall), and when you teach in a local *dojo,* many different types of people come. Some people were schoolteachers, other people social workers, others restaurant owners. Not only martial artists. Both women and men. Etsuko Aoki was also running a school of flower arrangement. Usually, it's a Japanese tradition that a

Continued on p 5

ORIGINALS

continued from previous page

teacher of tea ceremony also teaches flower arranging. So through her group people always ended up coming.

Rakutenkai was not only martial arts training. It was people coming from two different directions, more intellectual and more physical. There were Buddhists and Shintoists, tea students and flower arrangers, social scientists and natural scientists— for instance, Mr. Hokari [interviewed below] is a chemist. Mr. Aoki always wanted to keep balance in the group. He had no prejudice about intellectuals, non-intellectuals, people's educational background— he accepted everyone. So in Rakutenkai we had many kinds of people. People who loved to have a discussion, who wanted to study Mr. Aoki's philosophy, were also there.

Did they attend practices too?

Occasionally, yes. For example, after Mr. Aoki found Tenshingoso (a basic Shintaido form; lit. "five expressions of heavenly truth"), then other people tried it. Hard training happened at midnight, but one weekend a month we usually went hiking or camping, and then it wasn't just martial artists. The students of tea ceremony and flower arrangement came, and they studied Tenshingoso— kind of *kenko taiso* (health exercise) style.

Most of us weren't sure what Mr. Aoki wanted to do. When we were in Rakutenkai we just enjoyed practicing and having discussions, but we really didn't understand where he was going to take us.

What is meant by the description of some of the Rakutenkai members as "martial arts dropouts"— what exactly were they dropping out from?

In a university martial arts class, usually 100 to 200 people signed up to study Karate and paid the membership fee. But obviously, the *dojo* was too small. So we did very brutal practices to reduce the number of members, in order to keep the money without having to take care of so many people. Mr. Aoki didn't like that idea. He was not really popular among the club's senior students, because they were having a nice time spending this money by themselves. Mr. Aoki's idea was that, as long as they kept this tradition, most of the really talented, smart young freshmen would drop out, and then some who were sadistic— not sadistic but masochistic, who loved to be beaten— would stay. But traditionally, there were many senior students who really believed this was the right way— survival of the fittest. Mr. Aoki felt very sorry about the people who had to quit Karate training because of this brutal and unreasonable survival game. So he kept contact with the people who dropped out, and because of his openness and hospitality, even after they dropped out, many ended up visiting him. That's how some of them ended up coming to Rakutenkai. Later we recognized that the ones who dropped out were smarter, more sensitive, had talent and good sense. So I think his way of appreciating, his way of finding talent, is of course different from that of most of martial arts traditionalists. Mr. Aoki liked to quote St. Paul's words:

Chi Pai-Shih: Blum Blossom (detail)

> *Rakutenkai was not only martial arts training. It was people coming from two different directions, more intellectual and more physical. There were Buddhists and Shintoists, tea students and flower arrangers, social scientists and natural scientists…*

What is more, it is precisely the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest which are the indispensable ones. (I Corinthians: 12/22-25— The Jerusalem Bible)

What was the range of physical ability then, compared to the range of physical ability seen among Shintaido practitioners today?

Obviously, Shintaido practioners today are in better physical condition, because the diet is very different. We were so poor, we couldn't afford any animal protein besides fish. Most of us were really skinny. Nobody was fat. We put money together, cooked together, but we were always hungry. Most of the money that we earned, we used for practice and food.

That's why, traditionally, "*sensei* care" (*sensei:* teacher, maestro) was so important. If we wanted Mr. Aoki to provide good leadership, we had to give him good food. Because generally speaking, he was poor, he was not eating well. Nowadays at a Shintaido *gasshuku* (retreat), everybody's eating well, so the *sensei* care intention is different. You have to find out about the *sensei's* diet— what he or she likes to eat. In the old days, providing good care was simpler: a good beefsteak, which was quite expensive.

Another thing— I think in the Rakutenkai days we didn't have as much information about our bodies as you have these

Continued on p 6

ORIGINALS

continued from previous page

days. For instance, especially in California, there are so many body therapies. So these days, people who study body treatment have their own ideas that certain movements of Shintaido are no good for their bodies. And it's true. Some of our jumps are no good for the discs of the lower back if you do too much. And if you do too much jumping not thinking about your body weight, you end up hurting your knees. But in the old days we didn't think about that. We didn't know so much about body mechanics.

Also, of course, Rakutenkai members came from a Japanese lifestyle, so generally they had strong and flexible lower limbs, and could jump around. But when I came here and started teaching, I found the Westerner's body was different. The upper body is much bigger and heavier, and of course the lifestyle is different. So if I taught jumping, or some kinds of stretching originally designed for Japanese bodies, many people had a bad reaction.

But thanks to California culture, people became smarter. They love Shintaido philosophy and they appreciate the basic idea of Shintaido, but they let Shintaido ideas go through their own filter, and then accept them. *Shin tai ishki* (body consciousness) is different from in the old days.

What aspects of Rakutenkai do you think we keep in our Shintaido practice here in America? What have we lost? What have we gained or learned since those days?

At the end of a Shintaido *gasshuku*, [Masashi] Minagawa, Michael Thompson, and I like to say we get a strong Rakutenkai feeling— a strong community feeling. Michael calls it "sticky *ma" (ma:* space)— we don't want it to end. I think that's really Rakutenkai. In Rakutenkai we shared everything— ended up eating from someone else's bowl, and didn't care. Even now in a workshop we end up creating this kind of thing.

Of course, in the Aikido and Judo workshops I've attended, people become a little closer too. But Shintaido's family atmosphere is so unusual. I think one of the reasons is that Shintaido has a concrete embodiment of unification beyond conflict. Most of Shintaido *kumite* (partner exercise) is like that.

One thing we've gained is that now we have a specific programs, meaning *yokitai* (nurturing life energy), *kaihotai* (opening and expressing energy), *seiritsutai* (meditation posture), and *jigotai* (holding energy). In the old days, everything was mixed, with more of it from Karate, with a a little bit of *bohjutsu* (staff technique) and *kenjutsu* (sword technique), a little bit of Tenshingoso with partner or something like that. Now we have a wide-ranging arrangement from soft to hard— from healing and meditation, to physically demanding dynamic practice. And the *bohjustu, kenjutsu*, Karate and Shintaido programs are separated and well organized.

What we've lost is a strong commitment. "One life, one chance"— now or never— this kind of feeling. It's a different time. For example, in the old days a *bokutoh* (wooden sword) was very expensive— so once we bought it, we had to treat it very well. Of course, it is tradition to take good care of equipment, but if you break something or lose it now, you can buy another one. Now that we're wealthier, we're more relaxed. For another example, say a workshop is happening. In the old days, if we missed one, we might not have another chance, so everyone would go.

Compared with dance or Yoga or other martial arts, Shintaido practitioners always commit themselves a lot, even now. But comparing these days with the old days, during practices sessions, their commitment is very different from "one life, one chance." "It doesn't have to be right now"— that kind of feeling. Individually, of course, for people who commit themselves, it doesn't make a difference.

I remember the old days— when I was conducting a group, people's commitment was so strong that I as the *goreisha* (group leader, conductor) had to commit myself too, almost like going to a duel. If I didn't prepare enough, they'd get me. Nowadays things are much easier, so I don't have to be too serious. If I'm too serious, if I prepare too much, it ends up becoming overkill, so it's almost better I don't prepare too much. In the old days, in the workshops, the tension was strong. Of course, the period is different now. That was the "R and D" phase, but now the Shintaido program is established, and we are going to provide it to the world. So it's difficult to compare.

What does it mean to keep the spirit of Rakutenkai alive?

Shugyo and *shakai-kaikaku*, or a life-long practice to regenerate society!

Continued on p 7

ORIGINALS

continued from previoius page

And I would like to add this quote from "Origins," by Mr. Hokari, where he says:

> The aim of Rakutenkai was clearly stated in its founding declaration:
> We pursue truth through daily life
> to acquire perfect liberty,
> to live with the light of liberty
> and become the light of the world.

Mr. Masashi Minagawa

I was able to hold shorter interviews with two Rakutenkai members who live outside the United States. Masashi Minagawa was one of the younger members of Rakutenkai. He became involved in 1969, when he was nineteen. He described the spirit of Rakutenkai in this way: "To have a creative and positive life, and to be free with gratitude." He shared with me the story of his involvement with Rakutenkai:

I think that any keiko contains basic forms which symbolize a certain pattern seen in daily life. By repeating forms during practice, you can realize the fundamental meaning of the pattern in daily life.

I was a beginner in the Rakutenkai time, and I accidentally entered the group. At the university I had been part of the Karate club, and sometimes we asked Mr. Aoki to lead our group. I heard that our senior members said, "We did a very strange practice"— that was actually Eiko (a basic Shintaido form).

When I graduated, I did Karate every day, but my body had a very dark feeling, and I was depressed. I lived in darkness. I saw the Rakutenkai members and they were so bright. Mr. Aoki said "Just do Eiko." When I did Eiko, my life changed,

and light came into my body. I stopped Karate— I was 19— and became completely involved in Shintaido practice, and then I decided to work for a Shintaido life, to devote my life to Shintaido. Even the people who stopped Shintaido, we are keeping their dream alive. This is my destiny.

At that time I was not so talented or physically strong. I had a stiff body, so I always followed the women in their practice.

The sensitivity of the women's group was great, and the movement so quick. I studied strength through them, not power. Gentleness is more effective, stronger than force. Chiko was my *boh* teacher. You may have seen the beautiful photograph of her doing *boh tenso* (stretching up to the sky with *boh*).

Everyone has a picture of Rakutenkai practice being very hard and rigorous, but I really enjoyed it. People laughed a lot, just like today. Mr. Ito showed a very joyful but very serious practice. If it had been too heavy, I couldn't have continued. I hated the competitive way, and gave it up. I saw that the Rakutenkai members were dropping out of the violent and competitive aspects of martial arts because they could see there was something more important beyond that. They were going toward much more freedom to improve and develop themselves. The actual meaning of *budo* [normally translated as "martial way"— ed.] is "peaceful art." or "to have no enemies."

The members of Rakutenkai were all very specialized in their different areas, so it was like a project team— Mr. Aoki pulled them all together and then they researched different aspects, and repeated them over and over again, through trial and error, making them very simple so that anybody would be able to do the movement. That's how Shintaido came together. The original ideas came from Mr. Aoki— he said I want to study this— but everyone contributed. They were always very surprised by his crazy ideas. For example he'd get them to do all sorts of things they couldn't even imagine, or possibly do. Sometimes Mr. Ito does this kind of thing now.

I was one of the youngest members of Shintaido when it began to be presented to the public. Mr. Ito began managing a Shintaido office in Tokyo that had just opened. When Mr. Ito decided to move to the United States, and Mr. Aoki went on a world tour, I took over the management of the office.

We thought Rakutenkai's work was completely finished, but then Mr. Aoki traveled, and after that he created the *bohjutsu* curriculum, and then *yokikei.* Internationally, the movement began to grow when Mr. Ito moved to the United States in 1975. There used to be so many young people my age, now of my generation there's just me. So I can't stop, actually.

It's very difficult to compare those days and these days, because in those days the people practicing were specialized people who had been chosen to train. They were all in the top of their class, very young and at the peak of their physical

Continued on p. 9

BOOK REVIEW

Bohjutsu "for Dummies"... not!

Total Stick Fighting: Shintaido Bojutsu.
By Hiroyuki Aoki. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2000;
220 pp.; illustrations. $27 US hardcover (ISBN 4-7700-2383-9).

review by Bill Burtis

What martial artist would not want to own a book called *Total Stick Fighting?* It just has such a great kind of Jackie Chan meets Chuck Norris thing going for it. But for those who are familiar with the sometimes-martial art called Shintaido, seeing the book with this title and a picture of Shintaido founder Mr. Hiroyuki Aoki on the cover (why does he have his index fingers pointing up in the air?) is… well, a little disconcerting. Stick fighting? Sounds a little Hollywood… commercial, crass, offensive. Look what they've done to my pure, spiritual Shintaido!

But have no fear. The cover may be commercial, but the contents are full of the inner light, the white light, the spirit of Shintaido. In fact, I suspect the content would send Chuck Norris screaming off into the night. For example:

> Shintaido bojutsu is above all else a body art meant to purify the mind and soul, refine the ki and elevate the spirit by means of the extraordinarily simple tool of the bo. (Introduction, p. xi)

[*Boh:* wooden staff; *bohjutsu:* staff technique; *ki:* life energy].

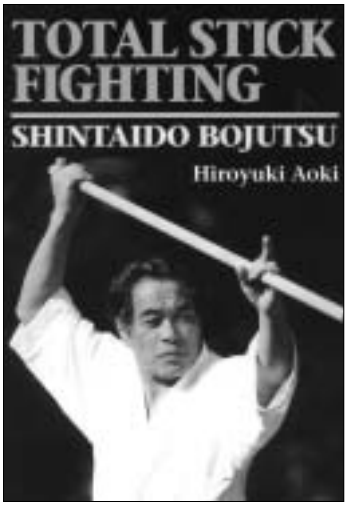
Or this, the explanation of where the *nagewaza* (throwing techniques), which Mr. Aoki notes are the factor most distinguishing Shintaido *bohjutsu* from traditional "stick fighting," came from (p. x, Introduction):

> I returned to Japan art the end of March, 1978, and for the next month or two began having a vision every day in which a man would suddenly attach me with a bo. Each time, I would see this vision once and then it would be repeated, but the second time I would see a man step out of my body and use stick-fighting techniques that I had never seen to throw the attacker off his feet. At first all I could do was just watch. The *waza* [techniques] were so amazing that they took my breath away. Then it occurred to me that I should be recording the techniques, so I began to take notes each time.

Mr. Aoki goes on to note that he rejected about a third of the 75 or so techniques he observed as being "too difficult for regular students." Indeed. Later on, in the introduction to the segment on *kihon* (basic techniques), he points out that "basic" techniques are so-called "because they are fundamental, not because they are easy to perform."

In these statements, for me, lies a paradox. On the one hand, of course we (who are familiar with Shintaido) would all like as many people as possible to "purify the mind and soul, refine the *ki* and elevate the spirit." We'd like to do that ourselves! On the other hand, I find it impossible to conceive of anyone who is unfamiliar with Shintaido bohjutsu successfully using this book to learn it.

I mean this as no criticism of the author, the photographers, practitioners and designer, all of whom did an excellent job. The book has an excellent glossary, and includes chapters on *kihon* and *kata* (forms); basic and applied *kumiboh* (partner exercises with *boh*) and *soei kumiboh* (*soei:* lit., "creative management"); *nidan kata;* Tenshingoso and meditation; appendices on the structure of Shintaido; the precise position of cuts and stances; and how to get in touch with Shintaido internationally. The forward by Michael Thompson and introduction by the author are in themselves worth the price of admission.



My concern is, as one who has labored long and (fairly) hard in the attempt to reach a relatively low level of proficiency with a *boh,* that I know the error that will haunt one's form and blunt one's proficiency for years occurs in the spaces between the photographs.

I am sure, for instance, that a dedicated and careful student with good eyesight could master *boh taiso* (warm-ups with boh) using this book. I have far less confidence, however, in a

Continued on p. 9

ORIGINALS

continued from p. 7

ability, and that's all they did, their whole life was devoted to the study of that particular movement. Now Shintaido has become something that anybody can do, so for example those who are not very strong, of all ages, and different physical abilities can do Shintaido. But the people who are practicing now have greater mental ability and experience of life. They are better off because they have such a wealth of experience to fall back on, whereas the Rakutenkai people only had their

There used to be so many young people my age, now of my generation there's just me. So I can't stop…

martial arts. Plus, they were all Japanese, and now we have so many different cultures contributing, all over the world.

I think the American people have a very pure spirit of Rakutenkai. Also you are still growing and developing— it has become very rich because of Ito and Michael Thompson's leadership. Michael Thompson, though not an original member of Rakutenkai, is incredibly talented— a sort of ideal for me. You have lots of experience to fall back upon.

Mr. Shiko Hokari

Mr. Shiko Hokari was an original member of the Rakutenkai group. He is also the author of "Origins," an account of the early days of Shintaido.

Before beginning Shintaido I had already been doing Shotokai Karate for several years. The Karate practice was so hard, so severe, that many people stopped, but somehow I couldn't stop. I myself didn't know why I couldn't stop it, but when I met Mr. Aoki I realized that he should have an answer for me, whatever it might be. That was the biggest reason why I joined his group, Rakutenkai.

It took me 20 years to reach a point where I was convinced that now I had the answer. It came to me with a very clear image and I was no longer puzzled. The answer was that the Rakutenkai practice gave me a means to figure out the meaning and direction of my life. And when I completely understood the message given through Shintaido practice, I said, OK, I can now stop practicing. That was 25 years after I started Karate, and 20 years after I met Mr. Aoki.

I think that any *keiko* (practice, discipline) contains basic forms (*kata*) which symbolize a certain pattern seen in daily life. By repeating forms during practice, you can realize the fundamental meaning of the pattern in daily life. When you reach this point you do not necessarily continue the same practice. If you practice in daily life what the form has taught you in the training hall, you can continue the practice in daily life,

Continued on p. 12

Bohjutsu BOOK REVIEW

continued from previous page

new practitioner's ability to proceed correctly from *yoi* (ready position) to *fudodachi* (forward stance), for instance, without developing a quirk that would leave some permanent "tic" in his or her movement forever! I won't bother to comment on the likelihood of success with the 115-photograph series which illustrates *nidan no kata.*

All of which is only to say that there still remains nothing like live instruction to insure proper movement. As a parent and, therefore, a regenerating adult, I am keenly aware that we really only learn, at any age, by seeing and doing, seeing and doing, seeing and doing. No book, no matter how good, can accomplish this without the aid of a live, moving human.

The cover may be commercial, but the contents are full of the inner light, the white light, the spirit of Shintaido.

I am left, therefore to recommend this excellent volume as a resource for Shintaido *boh* practitioners who wish to understand the form more deeply and to have a great reference for their continuing study… with a more experienced teacher! Finally, anyone interested in Shintaido from any point of view will relish Mr. Aoki's comments about the development and meaning of Tenshingoso and Eiko (two fundamental Shintaido forms). Also a relief is the definitive 10-photo sequence of standing meditation, complete with terminology and meaning for each of the ten parts! There are also several helpful hints for successful meditation. And, anyway, you can take off the cover wrap and have an elegantly bound blue book! • • •

Confronting Evil

continued from p. 1

of violence, its devastating effects, and the question of how best to respond to it. In talking about violence and other destructive behavior I will use the word "evil." I want to be clear that I am using the word in its most general sense, similar to the definition of "sin" as "that which comes between one and God," but without the theistic implication. I also use the word "enemy" by which I simply mean someone who is trying to hurt us or something we value.

How to respond to the evil and violence in the world is one of the fundamental, unavoidable existential choices of life. I believe pacifism is a valid and honorable choice, but I am not a pacifist. I think there are clearly cases in which a violent response to aggression has a net positive effect on this world. Examples that come to mind are the allies fighting World War II and a person successfully fighting off a would-be rapist. I could consider violence to be wrong in all cases only if I believed that we are all linked to another world which is more important than this one, and that any violence in this world has negative consequences in that other world.

To me it is useful to distinguish between the form of the action, such as physical aggression toward another person, and the intention of the action. I think a quote from the chapter on Zen and Swordsmanship in D.T. Suzuki's book *Zen and Japanese Culture* will make my meaning clear. He describes, as follows, the state of mind of the master swordsman according to Ichiun (school of the "Sword of No-abode"):

> As far as the master himself is concerned, he harbors no murderous intent in his mind. The inevitability of the situation has compelled him to face the enemy. It is the enemy who is filled with the evil spirit of killing, his mind is not at all free from the egoism of destruction. Therefore, when he comes before the master of the "Sword of No-abode" the evil spirit possesses him and he is killed by this evil spirit while the master is not even aware of having struck the opponent down.

A western example of the same state of mind is found in Melville's *Billy Budd,* when Billy, the Christ-like protagonist, kills his evil overseer Claggart. Such actions, made without anger or evil intent, are fundamentally different from ordinary violence.

We cultivate the same state of mind as the master swordsman when we practice *kumitachi* (partner exercises with sword) in Shintaido, but the situation is different in two important respects. First, of course, we are not in physical danger. We practice with wooden swords and are careful never to strike anyone. Shintaido is not a practical fighting art. This means that the consequences are not disastrous if our intention is impure or if our technique or understanding is lacking. We can learn from our mistakes. On the negative side, the absence of physical danger makes it possible to take the encounter less seriously than actual life-or-death combat.

Second, we assume when we practice Shintaido that our partner is pure of intent, not "filled with the evil spirit of killing." This, rather than the weapons we use or the practicality of our techniques, is the fundamental difference between Shintaido and the practical fighting arts. The relationship between partners in Shintaido is one of mutual love: I am trying to help my partner liberate himself and he is trying to help me liberate myself. We do not deal with the situation where one partner is filled with hateful intent, the other with loving intent. Of course we all deal with negative feelings during Shintaido practice, but I would never intentionally express such feelings in a way that would hurt my partner, and I trust that she would not intentionally hurt me. According to Ichiun, when two masters of the "Sword of No-abode" meet, the result is not *ai-uchi* (both combatants are killed) but rather *ai-nuke* (both escape unharmed). I think this is the ideal we are striving for in Shintaido *kumitachi.*

To put it another way, the difference between Shintaido and practical fighting arts is that fundamentally Shintaido is, as Michael Thompson indicated in issue No. 8 of *Body Dialogue*, a spiritual practice, rather than a form of fighting which uses spiritual techniques. My definition of a "spiritual practice" is any organized activity whose purpose is self-transcendence. In the case of Shintaido the practice consists of the cultivation of mindfulness while performing movements, alone and with partners, which are based in part on those of Japanese martial arts but have been modified and augmented to better suit this spiritual aim. Shintaido is many other things as well, but this is what it is basically about for me.

Although swordsmanship may have been fundamentally a spiritual practice for Ichiun, the swordsmen he encountered and fought with did not necessarily share this view. He would have encountered individuals filled with evil intent and the desire to kill. In modern martial arts too, there are students motivated by egotism and competitiveness. But in Shintaido we find this only as an aberration. Unlike the ancient swordsman, we do not practice the actual techniques of our art with others who use these same techniques for evil ends. So we have very little experience of confronting evil in Shintaido, except that which we find in ourselves.

So how can Shintaido help us confront evil in the world? When we face the world outside the *dojo* (practice space), we

Continued on p. 11

Confronting Evil

continued from previous page

must rely upon the states of mind acquired through practice of Shintaido techniques, rather than the techniques themselves. It is difficult to generalize these states of mind to other situations, but it can be done and must be done if Shintaido is to make much difference in our lives. First of all, Shintaido as a spiritual practice is an effective means of confronting and subduing the evil within ourselves. This is a fundamental moral responsibility, and the place we are most likely to be able to make a difference. Second, in Shintaido we practice sincere and loving interactions with people we trust. This practice can help us in our relationships with people we trust, those close to us.

When we are dealing with the evil intent of others who do not trust us or care about us, the situation is much more difficult. In the last issue of *Body Dialogue*, Mr. H. F. Ito described some experiences during the Rakutenkai days (the group that originally developed Shintaido) in which his teacher, Mr. Hiroyuki Aoki, set up life-threatening situations which the practitioners were supposed to break out of without harming the attackers. Here they were actually practicing non-violent resistance within the framework of Shintaido (or pre-Shintaido). My experience in Shintaido really does not include such situations. Perhaps it would be too difficult for most of us. Since I believe that there are cases when violent resistance is necessary, I hope that under such circumstances I would be able to use a compassionate cut against the enemy, like the master of the "Sword of No-abode." The intention remains pure, and the enemy is harmed as a consequence of his own evil. At any rate, I believe that the practice of Shintaido has made me somewhat more courageous and less attached to my personal comfort and safety, therefore more likely to do the right thing.

Most evil in the world is much more subtle than a single-minded physical attack. Aggression does not have to be physical, and harmful intentions are often mixed with good intentions and with fear. Most people are not perfect masters or single-minded doers of evil. Rather, they contain a complex mixture of thoughts, feelings, motives, and impulses, which may be contradictory. In most of our interactions with real people the possible outcomes are much more nuanced and varied than life vs. death. This gives us a great advantage over the swordsman: It may be possible to destroy the evil and leave the good. Since in reality we also contain evil as well as good, we can hope for a similar outcome for ourselves. Perhaps the "Sword of No-abode" can cut both ways in a single encounter: evil annihilates evil (*ai-uchi*) and good preserves good (*ai-nuke*). Since none of us is perfect, I believe that this is what actually happens in Shintaido partner practice. Outside of practice the same ideal applies, but since we can not control the intentions of others, even if our intentions are good it is possible that we or our partner could get hurt.

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Shintaido as a spiritual practice is an effective means of confronting… the evil within ourselves. This is… the place we are most likely to be able to make a difference.

Mountain Girl

continued from p. 3

for all this anyway. No need to wait, I decide I'll start by skipping the evening practice. While exams are going on I take the opportunity to walk my kids to the beach. On the walk down I inform them of my decision to cut the evening class. My young son is delighted that Mom will be available for company and to walk him back through the scary dark woods. My daughter surprises me. I had thought she would be happy to be relieved of the company of her brother for a few hours and would be only too happy for Mom to skip class. Instead she lists all the reasons why I should go to class. (You can't do Shintaido in Virginia, Shintaido is good for you, you've never skipped a practice at a workshop before, and so on). I am pleasantly surprised to find our roles reversed. Usually I am the one cajoling, coaching and cheerleading for her.

At the beach I nap for a while then play water frisbee. Returning to the site I am surprised to find that I do feel better, that the intense lethargy has lifted. Practice after supper is for all levels and turns out to be a playful one. We play with the idea of "sticky *ma*" (*ma:* space), first mirroring our partners movements with hand contact, then with no contact, and finally at the end of a piece of string with eyes closed. The mood is light and joyous. (See, Mom, my daughter whispers — aren't you glad you didn't skip this). I am and I tell her so and thank her for taking care of me when I couldn t take care of myself.

Sunday morning dawns bright and clear. Shin Aoki, guest instructor, is teaching the

Continued on p. 12

Mountain Girl

continued from previous page

Tesshu Yamaoka: Snail Climbing Mt Fuji

last practice. He begins with a gentle smile and tells us we will be opening ourselves to nature. Then he cautions, Don't try to take pieces of nature into yourself, let nature absorb you, project outwards into your surroundings. It is a new approach and it helps me get out of myself.

Now Shin instructs Let's do seaweed exercise, or *wakame-taiso.* But first you must make yourself soft before you can help your partner to be soft. We play with these movements for a while. Now do *kaikyaku-dai* (vigorous open jumping) with a partner. Project your vision through your partner as you give support. My partner was intense and very serious in his effort. His body was stiff and unyielding as he launched himself backward in a big Ah, face grimacing from the effort. My face matched his as I struggled to support his weight on my outstretched arms. I let him collapse on me, focused on the pine trees and gave everything I had. When it was my turn to receive, there was nothing going on behind me.

So I reached down into myself and crossed the field alone feeling that I was now pulling my partner back. Shin's feedback was for all of us but might as well have been directed to me: Don't sacrifice yourself for your partner, putting all your energy forth and leaving yourself drained. First get your energy from nature, fill yourself up and then share this energy with your partner.

We changed partners and *kumite* (partner practice) to *kiri-oroshi* (freehand cutting down from above). Shin's instructions were, First get your vision of heaven, then open up in Ah and take your partner to heaven, then cut back down into society. My new partner was experienced in Shintaido but not someone with whom I had practiced much. We began our *kumite* uncluttered with prior expectations. There was no sacrifice, no seriousness, no effort! Our *kumite* was clear, deep and sweetly profound. We stepped away from each other, looked into each others eyes, smiled and bowed deeply. No words were necessary. Words in fact would have spoiled the exchange that had just occurred.

Here then, was the answer to my isolation in *keiko.* First make yourself whole, by becoming absorbed into the larger world, take this vision to your partner. Give of yourself but don't lay down on the altar of sacrifice. Be sincere not serious.

First there is a mountain,

then there is no mountain,

then there is

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ORIGINALS

continued from p. 9

without wearing *keiko-gi* (traditional uniform), and without going to the training hall.

On the other hand, physical practice has a strong effect in reminding you of this fundamental meaning and trains you to behave in accordance with it— whether you realize it or not.

Many people in Rakutenkai, including Mr. Aoki, Mr. Ito and myself, came out of Shotokai Karate. Mr. Aoki collected not only elite martial artists from Shotokai, but also dropouts, because he wanted to give an opportunity for dropouts to re-challenge. I'd say that out of maybe ten core people in Shintaido, nine were from Karate. The core people were sharp and strong and highly trained, mentally quite strong.

Most of the Rakutenkai practice was concentrated on the core people, but it wasn't purely for them. There were practice sessions opened up to other people. In one retreat, Mr. Aoki even arranged different levels of practices in the same place and at the same time. Because he wanted to make some kind of utopia, not only Shintaido practices but also other things were included in Rakutenkai activities, such as tea ceremony and musical performances.

Of course, if you look only at the practice for core people, it was very rigorous. But if you include all the people in and around Shintaido, the physical ability of the group was not necessarily better than it is today. It was quite mixed.

In my opinion, Rakutenkai was a big experiment, an attempt to develop something new, out of many elements mixed together. It was not necessarily martial art, or new art— it was something mixed, and in the end the Rakutenkai movement came out with Shintaido. So Shintaido is a kind of crystallization of people's dreams. •••

PRACTITIONER'S CORNER

Shintaido, The Sixties, and me

by Stephen Billias

David Franklin asked me to write this article as we talked on the seemingly endless bus trip from Tokyo to Haguro in May of 2000, on the way to the Shintaido International. We wondered together: what was the connection between the practice of Shintaido and the spirit of the Sixties? This article is not a history of Shintaido in the Sixties, or the story of Rakutenkai, but a personal reminiscence.

axis: bold as love' (again)

i don't care that i'm too old for rock and roll.
i don't care that you only hear jimi's music
sampled in commercials nowadays.

the world has passed me by.
they're all forgotten, those who threw their lives away,

but music plays in my head,
and for a millisecond i'm nineteen again,

high, electric, cosmic,
feeling all of life in every movement,

tore up, ripping through the world
as if six was nine.

somewhere, lost in the synapses,
my stone soul, floating free.

there will never be another time like that.

When I look at old photos of Ito with a ponytail, or hear stories of the intense practice, and of Michael Thompson and his ragtag group of Hobart graduates who made up the early core of Shintaido practitioners in the Bay Area, it makes me wonder: what attracted these fringe people to this fringe practice?

Shintaido was born in the Sixties, in Japan, far from the hippies of San Francisco and Berkeley, the riots in Paris, on the Columbia University campus and the streets of Chicago, and very far the commune in Pennsylvania where I lived and experimented with psychedelics in 1968 and 1969.

Shintaido is about personal expression. So were the Sixties. Shintaido is about the search for an ultimate truth. For some of us, so were the Sixties. Shintaido is about pushing the envelope, stretching yourself, exploring the unusual, the ecstatic, the mystical. So were the Sixties.

But most of all, for me the Sixties were about two ideals: freedom and community. We were seeking freedom in all ways: civil rights freedoms, free love, freeing our minds with consciousness-expanding drugs, freedom from governmental, societal, and corporate strictures. We believed we were establishing a global commune, a community of like-minded individuals. We wanted to share rather than possess the world. We turned our backs on war and embraced peace instead. Yet the promise of those years, the idea that anything was possible, that the world was about to change radically and forever, has not been fulfilled in my life. I heard it said once that the revolution happened, and we lost. I still hold to the beliefs I had in 1969, but my life is much more ordinary than I would have imagined. Except for Shintaido.

Many people got lost in the Sixties. Some of them never came back. I have a tattered photo of myself from 1969 that contains all the classic elements of hippiedom: I'm standing in front of a battered Volkswagen van, electric guitar in hand, waif-like girlfriend in cut-off jeans by my side. I have long hair (of course), I'm wearing rolled-up jeans and a farmer's plaid workshirt. We're both barefoot. I look a lot like Meatloaf. I'd rigged a battery-powered amplifier so that I could create shrieking feedback even in the backcountry, or wherever we were camping in our quixotic wanderings.

If I had it to do all over again, would I follow the painful path of drug use, radical politics, of having no professional career until I was well into middle-age, a path that made me a pacifist, a vegetarian, a person on the fringe of established society? I suppose I would. That path also led me to Shintaido, to [wife] Bela and [daughter] Sophia, to act in plays and write books. So for me, Shintaido is the only part of my life (other than writing) that still echoes the high ideals of the Sixties.

When I started practicing Shintaido in 1990, I had just stopped smoking dope after twenty-three years of constant indulgence. I had given up psychedelics some years before, but found myself one of the last of the last of the steady dopers. If people asked me if I still smoked, I said— "Only all day

Continued on p. 14

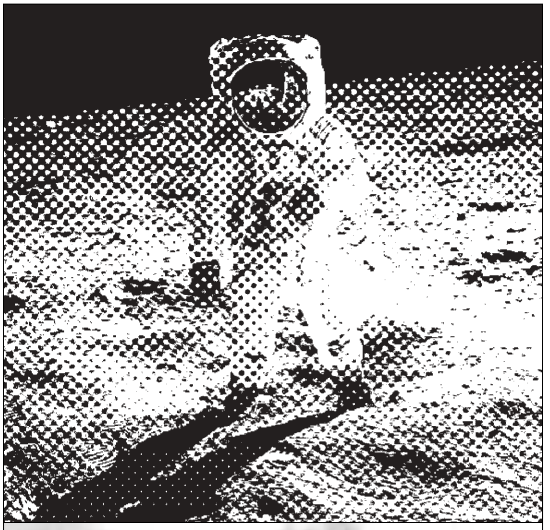
Shintaido, the Sixties and me

continued from previous page

every day." Most of my friends had quit, and one day I did too, going cold turkey after years and years of daily habitual use. Naturally enough this left a big void in my life. I had become a somewhat solitary character, spending lots of time alone. This period of my life had its compensations—I wrote several books, but the relentless use of cannabis had left me "comfortably numb" in the words of Pink Floyd. I was emotionally withdrawn and socially somewhat of a hermit. I was also looking for something that would replace the high I'd been on for so many years.

After my first few Shintaido classes (actually for several months) I would scurry away, avoiding the repeated invitations of people to come out for traditional after-class meals. My favorite dinner was still a taqueria burrito with a sandia (watermelon) agua fresca laced with a half-pint of cheap vodka. The repeated feedback I got in class was about my eye focus—I was always looking down, a legacy of the dope-smoking that regularly left me both red-eyed and avoiding eye contact.

I had a few early experiences in Shintaido practice, as many people do, that began to transform me. Once Lilia Podziewska cut me in Tenshingoso "A" so that I felt like she was doing open heart surgery without anesthetics and sawing right through my ribs to get at the heart (and emotions) beneath. Another time I found myself inexplicably in tears after doing the most basic movements. And I had one glorious Eiko Dai (a basic Shintaido form), running down Ocean Beach with my arms widespread and outstretched, screaming into the wind and feeling completely and almost psychedelically harmonious with the ocean and sky around me.



But I think it was the cumulative effect of Shintaido, bringing me back in touch with my body and my emotions, that has most changed me. Through Shintaido I have met and become close to so many people, most especially my wife Bela, who was also my first teacher, and my great friend and mentor Jim Sterling, but also many, many others. I found myself becoming the person I had always longed to be—confident, outgoing, connected to my spiritual side, still creative but without the drain of having to take drugs or be constantly alone to achieve artistic expression. So for me, Shintaido became the vehicle to finally leave the Sixties, where I'd been stuck, and move forward into an even richer future.

I still believe that we should all love one another, that we can come together, find a groove, live in peace. In Shintaido, we have a spirit of fellowship and love, and a spirit of seeking that I haven't felt since the Sixties. But like in the Sixties, I find us marginalized, though we haven't been co-opted yet! We are stuck on the edges of society. We're not a safe hobby like Karate or even Aikido. When will the day come that many thousands of people are practicing Shintaido, instead of the few hundred of today? Is that a faded dream, or still a real possibility?

I remember one day in the summer of 1969, when I was nineteen years old, wildly high, watching as ghostlike figures kicked up moondust a quarter million miles away. Later that day I lay in a forest, entwined in vines and creepers, at one with the earth, moon, sun, and stars, knowing forever that the Universe is One. Even today, that's the real me. I look to Shintaido to take me higher! • • •