



BODY Dialogue

Discovering Shintaido (Part II)

by Paul Gordon

Part I of Paul's article, "Why Are These People Smiling," appeared in Body Dialogue #12 in 2002.

C'est What?

I arrived in Quebec City for my first Shintaido workshop on a cold afternoon in March, 1995. Not being dressed for the weather, the wind bit at me as I got out of my car and stretched after the six hour solo trip from Fredericton. Had Mr. Ito brought *Karate-Do for the Professional* as he had promised me on the telephone? A month had passed since we talked, and I was anxious to see this rare book of Karate *kata* (forms) for the first time.

How different this city was! How Français! I would regret skipping those all those French lessons to go skateboarding with my friends. In truth, I didn't speak any French at all, and this was to prove a serious obstacle in the days to come.

Quebec City is both the political and cultural heart of French Canada. Many of its residents speak very little English, and some none at all (I think Quebec is the only city in North

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The Great Exam Debate

by Michael Thompson

Shin Aoki

& David Franklin

Introduction

by Michael Thompson

Michael Thompson is a General Instructor of Shintaido, and co-founder of Shintaido of America.

After a power lunch in Berkeley when the topic came up, I asked David Franklin and Shin Aoki to conduct a debate in these pages about the importance and role of examinations in the Shintaido program. We already have a 25-plus year history of Shintaido in this country and a lot has changed since Mr. H.F. Ito and I started the enterprise up in Geneva, NY and San Francisco.

One of the biggest changes has been in the approach to and conducting of exams. When I started my Shintaido career, an examination system had not yet been put in place. For example, I took my Instructor's "exam" four years after I had begun my practice without passing through any preliminary stages such as Assistant or Graduate. I put exam in quotation marks because it was more like a video feedback after taking a private lesson with Aoki-sensei (Mr. Hiroyuki Aoki, founder of Shintaido) that Ito had set up at Mount Asama in Japan. The main critique I remember was that it would be a good idea for me to try to coordinate my arm movements in Tenshingoso (a basic Shintaido form). At any rate, I got my diploma then, two years after embarking on my teaching career in Geneva.

My bo shodan (first degree in wooden staff) was similar: I learned the form and practiced the *kumibo* (partner exercise) with Tony Hammick at a *gasshuku* (retreat) in Japan and took the exam two days later. I had never taken a *kyu*-level exam up to that point. On the other hand, I had been practicing with the *bo* for over six years, including attending several *bo gasshuku* in Japan.

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About Shintaido of America

by Eva Thaddeus

member, SoA Board of Directors

Shintaido of America is the organization that puts out this newsletter. If you received *Body Dialogue* in the mail, you are an SoA member. But what more do you know about this organization? Here's a brief summary of what SoA does, including updates on changes we have made recently. Please forge your way through this, especially if you are an instructor, so that you can be kept current.

Our Purpose

The following are the vision and mission statements of Shintaido of America, as found in the SoA policy manual (available on the website.)

VISION:

Shintaido is a system of natural body movement to integrate body, mind, and spirit, build healthy relations with others, and encourage spiritual growth. Shintaido of America (SoA) is a national network of regional and local Shintaido groups to support, encourage, and guide members in their Shintaido practice. SoA also offers advanced training for those who teach Shintaido.

MISSION:

The mission of SoA is to transmit the form and spirit of Shintaido in the United States.

- SoA encourages the growth of regional and local Shintaido groups.
- SoA works with the regional organizations to offer examinations, accreditation, advanced training, and peer contact for SoA members.

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Discovering Shintaido

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America where this would be possible). When I entered the reception area of L'Attitude that afternoon and announced "I'm Paul from Fredericton and I'm here for Shintaido", the receptionist looked at me like I was from another planet.

I tried using hand gestures to indicate that I was there to study Karate— no luck. Finally, after repeating the word "Shintaido" a couple more times, she handed me a book: *Shintaido: The Body is a Message of the Universe* (French edition) and led me to a back room until someone bilingual could explain the weekend schedule to this English kid.

L'Attitude is a massage studio and school where Mr. Ito has been teaching for many years. I had spoken to the owner, Michel, on the phone prior to my visit. He informed me that the weekend Shintaido course was a requirement for his students to graduate from the school's two-year massage program. At the time, I thought that somewhat odd. "Why would a martial arts program be a requirement for graduating as a massage practitioner?"

As I leafed through the Shintaido textbook waiting for my Karate friends, Lucian and Ovid to arrive from Montreal, it became evident to me that the martial art Mr. Aoki had created was not like anything I had ever seen before.

Unable to read the text, I studied the pictures carefully. A lot of running in sand, a tendency to stretch up and look at the sky. A standing meditation exercise. Two men in seiza (formal sitting posture) resting their heads on each other and holding hands. Oh-oh, I thought, this doesn't look like my type of thing.

My tummy was starting to rumble, so I headed up the street in search of food and ended up at an Italian restaurant eating some very good pasta and drinking French wine, by myself. The waiter spoke English, "Are you here on a holiday" he said. "No, a Shintaido seminar" I remarked. "What is Shintaido?", he replied, "It's, uh... well, a new type of martial art from Japan that I'm trying out for the first time". "Sounds interesting", he said, "Enjoy your stay in Quebec".

I remember not feeling satisfied with the description of Shintaido that I had given the waiter. But alas, seven years later I'm not much further ahead. I will only try to describe

Shintaido if pressed. "Just come and practice with me sometime", I say with a grin.

Great Expectations

Later that night, after my friends had arrived at L'Attitude, we were invited to attend a lecture to be given by Mr. Ito. Heading upstairs, we found him sitting quietly on the floor of a large open room studying some papers. Michel introduced us, and Mr. Ito, looking up with a smile, exclaimed, "Ah, the Karate kids have arrived!", and tipped his head back in laughter. "I brought your book", he said, becoming more serious. Then turning away, he indicated to Michel that it was time to begin the lecture.

I don't remember much of what Ito said that night. The fatigue from my long trip mixed with anticipation and excitement for the days ahead. My head was spinning. The lecture ended, but the book never materialized.

The next morning, we drove to a community college down the street from L'Attitude to attend the morning *keiko* (practice). We met Ito on the steps leading to the *dojo* (practice place), where he finally presented the book. I paid him nervously, babbling on about Canadian versus US exchange rates. After examining my money order, he handed over *Karate-Do for the Professional*. It was large, quite elaborate and very formal looking, bound in a slip cover of green woven cloth. Lucian and I grabbed it and scurried off to examine our new treasure before class started.

The text was Japanese, so needless to say, we weren't able to read our new book. I was starting to think about

how to break this to my wife when I got home. "Look honey, I just spent \$500 on a book that I can't read! But the pictures are great!". Inside we found a treasure chest of images that showed a very young Hiroyuki Aoki demonstrating all the traditional Karate *kata* of the Shotokai style. For many of the *kata*, there were multiple versions shown— as many as three in some cases. The last chapter was devoted to numerous *bo* (wooden staff) *kata*.

Researching all these *kata* and documenting them in hundreds of pictures must have taken years, I thought. Later, Ito told us that the book had been a project that Mr. Aoki and his stu-

*It was a group dynamic,
a feeling, a chorus forty
strong belting out sounds
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differences or textbook
knowledge*



D. Franklin photo

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Discovering Shintaido

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dents (Mr. Ito among them) had completed at the request of Mr. Egami. In creating this book, the seeds of Shintaido were sown.

I wanted to learn all the *kata* in this book. At the time, I thought that what we held in our hands was all that Lucian and I needed to become true Karate masters. After all, between us we already had thirty odd years of experience in the basics—kicks, punches, blocks, not to mention dozens of *kata*. Now all the remaining technical information needed to complete the Shotokai requirements for fifth dan were at our fingertips.

Why, I wondered, had Ito simply handed over this comprehensive encyclopedia before we had attended even one of his classes? It seemed to contain most of the technical knowledge of Karate that he might impart on us. At that time, I was accustomed to instructors (myself included) who would withhold secret *kata* or techniques only to be revealed after a pre-

class. Had Aoki gone mad?, I wondered out loud. “Give it a chance”, Lucian said.

Sunday morning came, and with it, more Tenshingoso practice. By this time, I had decided to just give in to it and stop trying to rationalize or understand the sounding of the vowels, the slow simplistic movements or the way that everyone looked when they stuck out their tongues for the sound of EH. I began to concentrate and engage myself fully on just practicing the movements.

A Breakthrough, or, the Effects of Cold Water on the Male Anatomy

Over the course of my Karate tournament career, I had developed the habit of performing *kata* that I knew only superficially in such a manner that someone watching might think that I was highly skilled. In a way, I had learned to trick the judges and spectators by putting on a concentrated mask and empha-



scribed amount of time, or money had changed hands. Ito had just handed it all over on day one! “Is he crazy”, I thought to myself, “What is he going to have left to teach us?”

I am ashamed to think of this years later, but reflecting on my thoughts from that time, I realize that rarely in my life have I been so naïve or ignorant. How does the saying go? Youth is wasted on the young, or something to that effect. Ito, I realize now, was already teaching us—had been since the night before. I just didn’t know it yet.

If I Weren’t a Piece of Seaweed, I would Run

The warm ups started with simple stretching, moving into partner work. I was asked to pretend that I was an ocean current, or alternatively, a piece of seaweed. My self-consciousness must have shown. Lucian’s frequent glances in my direction said it all—let’s run, his look said. The afternoon led to Tenshingoso (a basic Shintaido form) practice, and more Tenshingoso practice. I kept glancing at the clock.

Later that night, in a cafe, Lucian, Ovid and I studied our new book. Observing Aoki’s crisp clean classical movement, I wondered how all that practice and knowledge had culminated in what we had experienced that day in our Shintaido

sizing flashy techniques. Performing *kata* for me became an act that didn’t require me to be fully engaged, or even that interested. I was going through the motions.

I eventually realized that Tenshingoso required much more of me than just memorizing the techniques. This experience could not come from a book. It was a group dynamic, a feeling, a chorus forty strong belting out sounds that defied language differences or textbook knowledge. On the other hand, Tenshingoso was very personal, and it caused me to reevaluate everything I had studied up until that point.

Tenshingoso was a different type of *kata* completely. This *kata* would never win me any trophies, but through it, Ito-sensei taught me a practical and easy method to test my inner state. I have never figured out how to “cheat” at this *kata*. Every time I perform it, whether alone, or in a large group, I have the distinct feeling that I am revealing myself in the most explicit way possible.

Running naked down Ocean Beach after a workshop in San Francisco didn’t even hold a candle to that feeling. But running back up the beach after being in that cold water... ●●●

Shintaido with Julia Child & the Elves

by Rob Kedoin

At the Shintaido Northeast Kangeiko (winter retreat workshop), the special guest instructor was Anne Harley from the Voice Institute (www.voiceinstitute.org). She lead us through a number of exercises that I found very challenging. I would like to describe the exercises that we did and draw some parallels between the voice practice and Shintaido.

As I remember it, the class had three major sections:

In the first section, we sat on the floor of the *dojo* (practice hall) and we were asked to draw a picture of our voice from some time when we were happy with our voice. After the allotted time was over, we were asked to come together in a circle, introduce ourselves, show and explain our pictures and pass them around the circle.

For the second part of the class we began to use our voice. We began with the sound *tss*. We were asked to lay down on our back with our arms extended to our sides and exhale our air past the palms of our hands as we made our *tss*. After a while of *tss* we took a break from that to make the smallest sound we could. Not the softest necessarily, but the smallest sound that could be created by passing air past our vocal cords. We then spent some time directing that sound to specific locations on our body to get those parts to vibrate and relax with the sound. Finally, we returned to the sound of *tss* and practiced a rolling exercise where we inhaled as we rolled onto our back, then exhaled with a *tss* as we rolled over onto our bellies, extending ourselves along the floor as we rolled. We were asked to begin our rolling motions from our hips. As the rolling exercise progressed, we had a partner who would help us to extend further as we rolled.

For the last part of class, we were standing in a circle. Anne then launched into a story about Elves that she knew and proceeded



D. Franklin photos

Anne Harley leading the voice workshop at Shintaido North East Kangeiko, February 2003

to imitate an Elf for us. The high-pitched, nasally *ee* sound of her voice was then something each of us was asked to mimic as we were asked to greet each other in the circle as if we were a hungry Elf searching for food from the person we were greeting. We then reformed the circle and Anne had each of us speak something in Elf in turn around the circle. Later Anne launched into a story about a Duchess and easily demonstrated a very proper sounding Julia Child voice which Anne said was full of *oh* sounds. We then went around the circle trying to mimic Anne's Julia Child voice. The final exercise involved the "magic orange". Anne would start a sound while she held the orange. As she prepared to pass the orange to the person next to her, the receiver was supposed to match her body language, make eye contact and then as soon as the receiver touched the orange he or she was supposed to begin the same sound they heard matching the pitch and timbre of the sound as closely as possible. The receiver then passed the orange to the next person in line stopping their sound as soon as they released the orange.

It was a great class. I can't tell you how many times I thought I wanted to be anywhere but in that room.

For me there were many similarities to Shintaido *keiko* (practice). Many of them made the class quite comfortable. The second portion of the class where we laid down and moved our voice around our bodies felt very familiar to me. At the time it felt like doing any Shintaido meditation exercise with the exception of laying on the floor. As I thought more about the class after the fact, that part of the voice class seemed very much like the beginning of breakout in *keiko*, where we try to lower our energy by doing *tachi* jump or *meiso* jump. Here we were trying bring our voice out of our throat / head

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Keiko with Julia Child & the Elves

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area into the rest of the body. Rolling was also very familiar as was having an unseen partner helping me to roll. I'm sure both of these would have been more frightening without having a Shintaido background. Similarly, the last part of class where we passed the "magic orange" had many elements similar to Shintaido. In order to mimic the person passing the orange, the receiver had to enter the transmitter's space using *irimi* (entering) in order to match body movements and voice. There had to be a clear, intense connection created between the transmitter and receiver much like managing *ma* (space / time) in *kumite* (partner practice). And just like in Shintaido one's role changed quickly from receiver to transmitter.

There were other similarities to Shintaido that were not as comfortable. There were parts of class that challenged my notions of what I could do and where my limits are. Just like in *keiko* when there's often those "just ten more" jumps that seem impossible but become do-able or the Eiko that seems impossible to run yet your feet keep going. The class pushed my comfort zones in many ways and I don't know if I would have stayed without having gone beyond my comfort zones before in *keiko*.

The first moment I lost it was when Anne asked us all to walk around greeting each other in our Elf voice. To watch all these people going around screeching in their high-pitched Elf voices with the bodies and hands contorted was too much for me. I was laughing. I was crying. I couldn't talk. Wasn't sure I wanted to talk. Wasn't sure if I could do the exercise. Wasn't sure I wanted to do the exercise. I was terrified to open my mouth. A few Elves came and shook my hand, smiling as they went by. I eventually managed to eek out a few words.

I thought, mistakenly, that I was out of the woods as that exercise ended. When Anne began going around the circle, one by one, asking each person to ad lib in Elf, I new I was in trouble. While I was thoroughly entertained by watching everyone on the other side of the circle be witty while speaking Elf, I kept laughing and crying. I was terrified of what to do when my own turn would come. Being asked to ad lib something in a voice that wasn't my own in front of thirty people was well beyond my comfort zones. I managed to do it though, and that by itself was a major accomplishment.

Of course, after Elf came our opportunity to become Julia Child. Well, I had a harder time with that voice than the Elf voice. So, when my turn came, it didn't end right away. Anne

helped me to correct my voice and we experimented with the voice up in the falsetto and down in my normal voice. All the while doing this in front of thirty people while trying to come up with some words to say. Everyone was very supportive. A number of people like Byron Russell were trying to get me to imagine myself with an "ample bosom" to project my Julia Child voice from, but that brought on a case of the giggles which prolonged the moment rather than ending it sooner.

The final exercise with the "magic orange" was the easiest for me. One of the hardest parts was remembering to make eye contact. I thought that was interesting since so often in Shintaido we talk about not looking into our partner and here we had the exact opposite instruction. Also, there was one variation on the exercise where we were to receive the orange and then do a vocal solo changing the pitch in any way we wanted before passing the orange to the next person. It wasn't an accident that after my turn Anne announced that the solos

were getting too short. They were supposed to be five seconds long. Mine was probably much shorter than that, though to me it felt like an eternity.

It was a hard class. I'm very glad I did it. Like all hard classes it made me think. It made me realize that I'm still haunted by my elementary music teacher who told me to stand in the back of the choir and not sing but just move my lips. I also realized that I've never been good at creating conversations. It's one of the reasons I always dread cocktail party situations. I also realized that although I've given presentations and done questions and answers sessions in business meetings, that's a very different skill than improvising. In the case of presentations, the material is all organized ahead of time and there is a limited

range for the questions and answers. It's much different than being asked to reply as if you are a Duchess who just had her afternoon tea interrupted by a strange man, dressed in a black suit, coming in the back door.

And like all hard classes it was empowering as well. Later that evening, Heather Kuhn was standing in the *dojo* with the lights out singing. Having spent part of the day overcoming fear of speaking like an Elf or Julia Child, I felt confident enough to approach her and ask if I could join her in her singing. We then spent some time sounding together. Sometimes accompanying one other. Other times mimicking. It was great fun and it wouldn't have been something I would have tried to do without the voice class that day. ●●●

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About SoA

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- SoA informs Shintaido instructors of new developments at the international and national levels, including changes in curriculum and examination requirements.
- SoA develops resources for teaching Shintaido, such as books and videos.
- SoA supports fledgling international groups and provides outreach instruction.

Who We Are

On the current Board of Directors of SoA are the following people. H.F. Ito and Michael Thompson, as the founding members of the organization, are lifetime voting members. The other voting members (elected every two years) are



Connie Borden, Eva Thaddeus, David Franklin, and Jennifer Peringer. Connie is a senior instructor and the president of the board. The others are all Shintaido instructors. There are also three honorary non-voting members: Henry Kaiser, David Palmer and Mario Uribe.

Officers not on the Board are Sandra Bengtsson, Chris Ikeda-Nash, and Stephen Billias. Sandra handles our membership, Chris does our accounting, and Stephen is “project manager,” providing energy to help us meet deadlines and follow through with our ideas.

Affiliated with the Board, and answerable to it, is the all-important National Technical Council. This body has gone through some name changes, so you may know it as National Instructors’ Council or National Technical Committee. Its name is now permanently (we hope) NATIONAL TECHNICAL COUNCIL. The NTC is charged with maintaining the quality of Shintaido curriculum and instruction throughout the United States. Practitioners who have achieved the rank of senior instructor or bohjutsu / karate sandan are eligible to be part of it. The current members are Lee Seaman, Jim Sterling, Joe Zawielski, Friedemann Schulz, Connie Borden, and Shin Aoki. Lee Seaman is the new chair of the council.

Recent Board Decisions

At the last SoA meeting, the Board worked to further define the role of the National Technical Council. The description now in the policy manual reads: “The role of the Council is to oversee the quality of Shintaido instruction in the United States. Specifically, they are charged with resolving technical questions, acting as a resource for local instructors, verifying that instructors not on sabbatical are attending at least one advanced workshop/year, keeping track of the status of instructors on sabbatical, conducting exit interviews with instructors who leave the organization, and disseminating information about SoA policy on maintaining instructional credentials.”

Some of the language above is new, specifically that which relates to sabbaticals and exit interviews. The SoA Board wants stronger communication among instructors, and support for them from the Council. If an instructor chooses to leave Shintaido, we would like a Council member to talk to them about their decision, rather than just letting them slip away.

We also want instructors to realize that the sabbatical option exists. It has in fact existed for years, but few have known about it or taken advantage of it. We all acknowledge that it takes time, energy and money to maintain Shintaido instructor status. Sometimes, the rest of life intervenes, and instructors need a break. They do not want to quit, but they want to pull back. The sabbatical option exists for this reason, and there is more information about it in the policy manual.

The Board also reaffirmed another long-standing policy, which is that active instructors are expected to attend advanced workshops on a regular basis. This is essential if Shintaido, and the skills of its senior practitioners, are to deepen and develop over time. It is also necessary because Shintaido is a young art, not yet “finished,” and there is new information and new curriculum all the time.

Updates to the Website

We have had a “member area” on the website where the SoA policy manual was kept, but we are going to eliminate this because it was a hassle for people to have to get the password, and there’s no secret information in there anyway. Now there will be an area on the website for “member resources.” The area will include the following:

The policy manual. This contains essential information for anyone organizing a Shintaido event such as a gasshuku. Every workshop or gasshuku manager should consult it ahead of time for information about fees, procedures, exams, etc.

“Superkata: a guide to organizing a local Shintaido group.” This how-to manual, developed several years ago by David Franklin and Eva Thaddeus, should be useful for group leaders.

A gasshuku organizer’s manual. Tomi Nagai-Rothe and Nancy Mardas are working on writing this, and should be done by year’s end.

If you have any questions or comments about Shintaido of America, please contact Connie Borden at <bordensheets@aol.com>. If you have any questions or comments about Shintaido curriculum or instruction, please contact Lee Seaman at <lseaman@nas.com>. •••

The Great Exam Debate

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Of course, university students enrolled in Shintaido Bojutsu or Karate clubs were being examined according to more traditional standards at that time, but those of us practicing at the Shintaido *honbu* (headquarters) were not involved in that system. As a result, examinations were never a primary motivator or essential component of Shintaido in our experience.

But, as they say, times change and examinations definitely play a greater role in people's practice and understanding of Shintaido now. And, as the East Coast attitude reflects my education, so the approach on the West Coast reflects Ito's. I thought it would be interesting to hear what two representatives of Shintaido's "next generation" have to say on the subject. It would also be interesting to get reader feedback which could be published in a subsequent edition of this magazine.

Exams Shouldn't Dominate

Opening Statement

by David Franklin

David Franklin is a Shintaido Instructor in Boston, MA

I have taken quite a few exams, and am just beginning to reach the privileged position of sometimes viewing the process from the other side of the table. Some of the most valuable, profound, interesting (or occasionally painful) lessons I have learned have been during exams or during exam feedback sessions. Shintaido exams, unlike those of some martial arts, serve not only to regulate credentials and provide a measure of accomplishment; they are an integral part of the teaching / learning system, where the technical and psycho-spiritual aspects of Shintaido come together holistically, and some of the greatest secrets of Shintaido are revealed.

However, I have great respect for people who choose to pursue Shintaido without challenging exams, or challenge them only up to a certain point. Some of those people have practiced Shintaido for years, and have a profound understanding of the discipline. I think it's important that as a community we not relegate these people to the sidelines, mistakenly believing that because they are not pursuing the path of examinations, they are not part of the Shintaido mainstream. Many of these people are the hidden gems of our community.



D. Franklin photo

Generally, Shintaidoists in the Eastern U.S. region challenge exams less frequently than, say, Bay Area Shintaidoists. Over the years, a Shintaido culture has developed in the East which de-emphasizes exams, and Instructors may not emphasize preparing students for exams as much. There are several reasons for this. Some are more historical, and some are more philosophical.

(1) Exams are perceived as an activity primarily for those who want to pursue a martial arts track within Shintaido (Bojutsu or Karate). Since Bojutsu and Karate have *kyu* rankings (incremental exams), it is possible to take exams in these disciplines more frequently. For those who are primarily pursuing the main curriculum of freehand Shintaido, the first real exam is Shintaido Assistant, which generally would not be challenged until at least two years of experience. Following that is the Graduate exam, which again requires a minimum of another two years of study.

Since Ito-sensei doesn't live in the North East, Karate and Bojutsu exams (especially at the upper levels) were likely to take place only when he was attending a *gasshuku*.

(2) Some of the *senpai* (senior colleagues) in the North East are not so technically inclined, and so the exam process has been a less significant component of their Shintaido path. Ideally the technical and psycho-spiritual aspects of Shintaido are integrated, just different sides of the same coin. But in practice, exams sometimes emphasize one side more than the other. Generally it seems that the trend in last few years has been in the technical direction. For some people, the psycho-spiritual side is what interests them more, and as exams shift away from this, they may become less motivated. As a result, their *kohai* (junior colleagues) were less exposed to the exam process, and had fewer opportunities to be inspired by seeing their *senpai* challenging exams.

For others—including perhaps the long-term practitioners and "hidden gems" referred to above—they see exams as an activity for people who intend to become teachers of Shintaido, and must become qualified in the technical aspects. Since they

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love Shintaido, but have no intention to become certified as instructors and teach overtly, they have no reason to take exams.

(3) Some people feel that Shintaido benefits from an attitude of slow growth and sustainability. According to this viewpoint, there's no need to rush to take the next exam as soon as possible. Take some time to let your technique mature. The most important thing is not to learn more techniques (the number has increased dramatically in Bojutsu and Karate exams), but to let the light of Shintaido spirit infuse the few techniques you know, and learn new ones gradually. Depth is preferred over quantity.

Of course, if this philosophy is pursued too vigorously, the maturation process may simply be overtaken by the aging process. In either case, this path advocates for slow progress, with more time between each exam; but following it through the Bojutsu and Karate curricula (as they are currently structured) might bring one almost to a standstill. On the positive side, this philosophy recognizes that Shintaido is a lifelong study. Exams, and the exam curriculum, should be structured for those who are in it for the long haul, not just a flash-in-the-pan activity for the youthful and athletic.

(4) If the exam curriculum comes to dominate what is taught and how it is taught, then exams will become an obstacle to the development of Shintaido. Exams are supposed to be only one part of the Shintaido educational system. If instructors begin to place too much emphasis on preparing students for exams, then as with any exam-driven educational system, much of Shintaido teaching will be lost. A Shintaido exam is supposed to be a microcosm of the student's level of realization of Shintaido. But it's impossible to attain this ideal in every case. There is no way to test everything we hope a Shintaido student would learn during a short exam, so the exam curriculum can only be a partial picture. There will always be teachings of great value that are not included in the exam curriculum. With too much emphasis on exams, these other teachings may be overlooked.

The teaching, learning, and practice of Shintaido should keep the main focus on the love of the process, and not become overly goal-oriented. This is a universal principle of all art forms, without which they threaten to become merely craft or technique with no deeper meaning. If the way Shintaido is

taught becomes too focused on the goal of passing exams, it becomes "Shintai-jutsu" (*jutsu*: technique) instead of Shintaido. The meaning of *do* is the love of the path itself in this moment, not the goal or achievement that lies ahead. I believe this is why Aoki-sensei wrote that "Shintaido was successful in crashing the narrow gate that leads to the 'way,' and in that moment, made an opening for people all over the world."

The Message of Examinations

Opening Statement

by Shin Aoki

Shin Aoki is a Shintaido instructor in Berkeley, CA

I grew up in a Shintaido community and have studied some movements since I was a young boy. This has returned to me a great deal in many areas of my life. It has satisfied my hunger to understand myself, and to communicate better with the people around me; it has nourished me when I felt weak. So, I must say that I am well fed physically, emotionally, and spiritually thanks to Shintaido!

Taking exams has been like adding spices to my *keiko* (practice), fine-tuning my receptivity, increasing my concentration, ultimately making it easier for me to absorb the *keiko* practices.

I admit that I used to be an exam junkie. I constantly practiced with other exam aspirants, jointly preparing for our current and future exams. In this way, through the years I have come to understand the values of the Shintaido examination system, and how the system helps many practitioners.

The purpose of taking an exam varies from one student to another. During my first few years of active practice, I decided to take exams "because they were there." Before I ever took an exam, it was apparent that examinations were an integral part of Shintaido because many *sensei* (teachers) and *senpai* must have taken exams to achieve their different ranks. Outside the classes, examinations were a popular conversation

topic during *gasshuku* and other gatherings. This made me think that I would probably take an exam someday.

When I decided to take my first few exams, the preparation for the exam boosted the intensity of my *keiko*; I concentrated better, and practiced more frequently. In the past, I have found that focusing on my own exams gave me great support when I



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The Great Exam Debate

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had doubts about continuing to study Shintaido. My commitment became more solid because I felt that I was already in the circle rather than a spectator. When I was at beginning and intermediate levels, the primary goal for all my preparations was to show my best performance on the day of the exams. Somebody said “if we cannot use our techniques in an intimidating situation like an exam, how could we use them in our real lives?” This is a good point.

Advanced students seem to have a different attitude toward taking their exams. When I became an instructor, I noticed that many advanced students, including myself, develop a feeling of *let's get serious* when deciding to take the next level of exams. The most challenging part of taking exams at these levels is the preparation. Exam subjects are very specialized; a student cannot walk into a regular class and expect to study the materials for their next exam level. A student must make special arrangements to practice with students who are at their same level, and arrange to work with *senpai* who become less available the higher up your level.

martial arts that focus heavily on competition. At the same time, this approach can also be dangerous because it could make learning cerebral rather than physical. Whether a student takes an exam or not is less important than knowing and remembering that we learn a message of the universe through our bodies and not from words and ideas alone. The examination system and the Shintaido curriculum combine together to remind and help students to keep a healthy balance between body and mind.

When I refer to the exam system, I include the exam results and feedback sessions, which are extremely valuable, especially in this country. During my visit to Japan in 2000, my father, Mr. Hiroyuki Aoki, asked me an intriguing question. He said “In Japan all practitioners, from total beginners to very advanced, have the chance to learn my latest philosophy and inspirations by reading my recent books and articles. How is this done in your group? How are the latest inspirations of your many esteemed sensei passed on to a large number of people?” I thought for a moment and answered “Through the



Daniel DesBaux photo

There is a major mental shift for advanced students about the purpose of taking exams. The exam becomes more of a measure of their individual growth due to regular practice than a measure of how he or she performs on the day of the exams. We grow through *keiko*, not through exams.

Choosing to take an exam can influence your teacher in an interesting way. One way to prepare for an exam is to have private lessons with your teacher focusing on special subjects. As a teacher, I find examinations are great opportunities to evaluate my students with a different eye. During class, I try to look for and make comments on the good parts of the students' performance. I do not always notice details about what should be corrected in their form. When a student asks for a private lesson to prepare for an exam, they are making *irimi*, taking one step forward towards his or her teacher to receive a stricter and more objective evaluation. This takes their relationship to a new level.

Shintaido embodies the Tenshin (lit. “cosmos-truth”) philosophy. This philosophy aims to unite an individual with himself, with others, with nature, and with the spiritual world. It is unique and beautiful, and it separates Shintaido from other

examinations.” Examinations are the opportunities our teachers provide to share their wisdom and personal *satori*, or enlightenment, with us, and help us rediscover the strong link between physical *keiko* and its relevance to our individual lives.

Although I don't take exams as often as I used to, I have learned to spice up my *keiko* life these days. It has become much more enjoyable for me to support other students who are challenging for their next rank, and perhaps challenging for something personal behind that rank.

David responds to Shin's Opening Statement:

Shin made so many good points that I agree with! His statement also made me think about one point I did not consider: as an instructor, my student's exam is also my exam. When someone takes an exam, it reflects many things about their own character that are revealed through Shintaido technique: focus, consideration of others, expressiveness, etc. But of course it also reveals a lot about their teacher. The feedback my student gets during an exam is extremely valuable for me;

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The Great Exam Debate

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it's an opportunity for other instructors (often my teachers as well) to evaluate how successfully I am transmitting Shintaido to my students.

The point about students preparing for exams by taking private lessons and arranging to practice with their peers is essential. The content of regular group Shintaido classes cannot be limited by the subject matter of exams (though the exam curriculum can be a rough guide). Shintaido *keiko*, including Bojutsu and Karate, is a huge field of study, like a vast ocean stretching to the infinite horizon. It's not that students won't learn enough in regular classes to prepare for exams—they may learn too much, while the exam requires a narrower focus. But if preparing for an exam includes private lessons and peer group study, then the exam system becomes a positive vehicle for developing Shintaido community. Besides group classes, individual practice, and *gasshuku*, private lessons and peer groups preparing for exams can deepen friendships and become a form of positive "cooperation" (cooperation and competition combined).

How do we learn to take the philosophy of Shintaido, which we understand primarily through the wordless experiences of body movement, into the realm of spoken communication? I agree, in the U.S. it is mostly through exam feedback. This is one of my favorite parts of exams for so many reasons: there is often humor. There is a sense of relief, because the physical part is over and the exam results have been announced first. But there is still some tension—will they say something that will give me new insights about my own character? There can be such a range of emotions, it's almost like theater. At the same time, there is so much valuable technical information.

Shin's point made me wonder: maybe the Shintaido movement has now reached a stage of maturity where we can be more open to introducing the philosophy during regular *keiko*. But in fact, one quality of Shintaido that I have always loved, especially in this age of hype, is the focus on experiencing it first. It is what it is—no sales pitch. If you like it, keep coming. You don't need to "understand" it right away.



One of the great things about exam feedback is that even when it is more philosophical, it grows directly out of the actions performed by the examinees in the *dojo* a few hours earlier, not from any preconceived ideas. And maybe waiting a few hours, or a few years, makes the fruit sweeter.

Shin responds to David's Opening Statement:

I appreciate David's comment about "hidden gems" of our community, the longtime practitioners who place little or no emphasis on pursuing the exam path. The motivation to practice Shintaido for these people, I believe, comes from their strong awareness of the benefits of *keiko* to various aspects of their everyday lives. It amazes me sometimes that this awareness is strong enough for them to continue their practice for years, and not be discouraged by intense aches, pains, and soreness. Their motivation is to do it because they love Shintaido!

There is a downside to focusing too greatly on examinations. Examinations are a microcosm of one's understanding of Shintaido, as David described, as opposed to a recital of what you've been rehearsing for the several months preceding the exam. If we fail to distinguish between the microcosm and the recital, we end up being obsessed and vulnerable to the outcome of the exam and the feedback. Also, we end up discontinuing or devaluing the curriculum that we already finished and graduated from, and move on hastily to newer material. The forms we study in Shintaido, whether they appear elementary or advanced, are not something we aim to be merely proficient at. We can keep learning for many years from any one form, deciphering its hidden power, and appreciating its effect on our bodies and our everyday lives.

The true challenge for exam-takers is not to show 100% of your ability on the exam day. It is to keep a parallel track in your practice as you continue studying the basic and core curriculum, and let their roots grow deeper and stronger in your Shintaido practice. •••

A Visit to the Wellness Resource Center

by Rob Kedoin

In March I went to Massachusetts to visit the Wellness Resource Center where Ito was teaching. One of the reasons I went was because I was curious about the WRC itself (<http://www.wrc1.com/>). It's a school which teaches Aikido and massage. More intriguing is that the massage school teaches Amma massage and they also teach the TouchPro chair massage (developed by David Palmer, honorary member of the Shintaido of America Board of Directors —ed.).

The schedule for the weekend was to include Aikido taught by *sensei* (teacher) Don Cardoza, Shintaido, Tai Chi, and test cutting taught by Ito-*sensei* and one class of Yoga taught by a third instructor.

I headed up Friday excited, curious, and a little nervous about being a Shintaido practitioner in an Aikido *dojo* (school). I had been told that Friday night I would be allowed to visit the center, but not enter the *dojo* if I arrived early. I headed straight to the center based on my Yahoo! map directions and got there around 6 pm. I turned down a dirt road that looked very much like a driveway. Thanking nature for it still being daylight, I found a house on the right with many cars parked around it. There was no doubt that I was in the right place. In an enclosed patio space to the left of the house, I could see Ito teaching. It was easy to identify the door to the *dojo* so I avoided that easily enough. A large dog was my only greeter. To my relief, he was a very friendly dog. There were two front doors either of which could lead to the center part of the complex. I couldn't tell if they went to someone's living space or part of the *dojo*. So I walked around with my dog friend and visited a beautiful pond that they have. I got back in the car and back to the hotel.

The *dojo* when not used for Aikido, is a large carpeted room suitable for potlucks or for massage tables to be set up for massage classes. Conversion to the Aikido *dojo* is ingenious in its simplicity. They have a canvas Aikido mat cover which is unrolled across the floor. The mat has large plastic clips sewn onto straps which snap into mates that are attached to the floor around the perimeter. The straps are then adjustable so you can make sure the mat is quite flat to floor. There is padding and springy flooring they have installed for the Aikido floor.

On the grounds of the center there is the pond, a Japanese *toori* archway, and a rock garden. Behind the building there is a large area of tall reeds and a foot path cut within them. All in all, a cool, very funky community-oriented *dojo*.

Aikido

I had only ever attended one Aikido class in the Bay Area before I left. I didn't really know what to expect. I was anxious before I left

about how people would react to an outsider practicing in their *dojo*. So, with Aikido being the first practice on Saturday, I got all these concerns out of the way. We began by lining up facing the *shomen* (altar). It had a picture of O-*Sensei* (Ueshiba Morihei, the founder of Aikido), calligraphy for Aikido, and was adorned with flowers. Don sat in front of us also facing the *shomen* and we went through what I realized later was the standard opening. Bow to the *shomen*. Rise. Clap twice. Bow again. Bow to the *sensei*. Begin.

Warmups were done from *seiza* (formal sitting). They were very short. Once we ran through those, Don called one student up to demonstrate with him. He demonstrated a technique twice, rattling off the name of the technique as he was doing so. Everyone then bowed, found partners and began the exercise. Well... I had no clue what to do. It took once just to try and watch the attack. Then once to try and watch the receive. Thankfully, the Aikido students usually knew what we were supposed to do and they were all very understanding with me. I have to confess that I was happy

when I saw some people calling the *sensei* over to demonstrate the technique again because they did not see exactly what happened.

As we moved from technique to technique, I found myself paying less attention to the names of the Aikido movements and trying to translate the movements into Shintaido. "Ok. *Ee* block. Pull the arm down. Then *Oh* here. etc..." For the most part that kept me grounded—the ability to break down some of the movements into familiar parts. But that only got me so far.



D. Franklin photo

While I'm used to not worrying about where I block someone's arm in Shintaido, in Aikido, there are very specific points to grab the attacker's arm. There are even very specific ways to do the grabbing. Part of my *keiko* sounded like, "Now grab my wrist near my thumb. No. The other way." It all makes sense from an Aikido point of view. Many of the movements are designed to control an opponent's movements, often by controlling them from the hand, forearm, or elbow. To do it correctly, you need precise control of where your hands meet the attackers. Still, it was a little alien for my Shintaido mind. Fun—just alien.

Some of the *gorei* (instruction) was fun too. "Ok. Now grab the forearm. Make sure you're holding it just like a sword. Good. Now use it as a sword. Cut down." I had to chuckle with the idea of using the attacker's forearm as a sword to cut them. Nevertheless, it was effective at getting them to roll. Unfortunately, I can't remember how I got the person into that position.

At one point I was having difficulty with one technique. To me, it felt like we were doing origami with people. I still think it's an

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appropriate way to think of the Aikido techniques I've been exposed to. I eventually managed to follow people through this maneuver, but I can't recreate it at all on my own.

In addition to freehand movements, we practiced with *bokken* (wood sword) and *jo* (short wood staff). We also practiced with *shinai*, which are leather-covered, bamboo swords that inflict little damage when you are hit. We also practiced doing attacks with a *tanto*, which is a wooden dagger. A number of the *kumite* with weapons involved controlling the attacker until he/she was willing to release the weapon. If you don't let go right away, you get treated to another throw and perhaps a pin until you let go. It was fun.

The Aikido *keiko* ended with an exercise they call *kokyūho*. The exercise is very similar to the *I-O* (or *renki*) *kumite* that we have. Both partners begin in *seiza* with one holding the others wrists. The idea is to try and enter the other persons center and split it apart to get them off balance. Usually, one person would lead four times and then we'd switch. With many of my partners we did it very quickly. Often times, I wasn't sure how much was accomplished by maneuvering centers and how much through brute force. I found it difficult to do it quickly and not use muscles.

The end of class had us all line up again and bow to *sensei*. Then he would move off the side giving us instruction to thank one another. At that point we made a semi-circle by the *shomen* and bowed to each other. I missed making a complete circle and it felt strange to close twice. But I suppose it's just a matter of what you get used to.

I found, over the course of the weekend, that I missed break-out. Perhaps it was because so many of the movements were new to me, but I felt myself being very much stuck in my head. I missed lowering my energy, and emptying myself as well as opening myself to big nature.

Shintaido & Tai Chi

The second *keiko* of the weekend was Ito-*sensei* teaching Tai Chi. He taught the Tai Chi breathing *kata* that he taught at the San Francisco Advanced Workshop. Everyone seemed to enjoy the *kata*. I know that they videotaped Ito doing that *kata* so they could keep it on file.

The Shintaido class was very interesting. First off, it was only scheduled for an hour. I wondered what we would do in an hour. Ito started everyone off with Tenshingoso. I noticed that he didn't focus on *kaishoken* (open hand) at all. He just taught them the movement and vocalizations of the *kata*. There was an Aikido class between the Tai Chi and Shintaido, but Ito still leveraged movements from Tai Chi when teaching Tenshingoso. He taught *Ee* by having everyone open their arms to the sides as in the Tai Chi *kata* and beginning from there to build a "sand castle" and push out to *Ee*. I seem to recall that *Eh* was one of the last movements taught. Ito asked us to focus on making the longest vocalizations possible with the movements. I found this difficult. It also felt strange to lis-

ten to some very controlled, somewhat strained sounds as people tried to make their breath last as long as possible. The sounds just didn't seem natural to me.

I got to help out as Ito's assistant which was fun. We showed them *tachi* jump, *meiso* jump, and variations. Then to my surprise, Ito asked me to demo Shintaido jump. Then to my further surprise, he asked everyone else to do it too! They did fine. (By the way, that's how I know there's something springy about their floor. I felt like I was flying doing my Shintaido jumps. I thought to myself that it must have just been a good day, but Ito demoed one at one point and crushed that thought when he mentioned that the floor was very springy). Some of them had seen the jumping man logo, but had never seen the jump done and none had tried it so I was stunned when they did as well as they did. I don't think anyone fell backwards as I've seen before.

*To me [Aikido] felt like we were doing
origami with people*

We then did some *sumo*, first with hands on collarbone providing resistance. Then shoulder to shoulder providing some resistance. Then finally starting at some distance and running a short distance and crashing together shoulder to shoulder. There was one newer Aikido student who looked like he used to be a football player. Russell was a fairly large gentleman who seemed quite at home squatting and running forward for this last exercise. Ito let anyone who wanted to, try and do *sumo* with Russell. I couldn't resist. Running toward him and pushing him was hard work, but doable. Receiving him, crashing into me, was a whole other matter. Boy did I feel small. I eventually was able to lower myself some and slow him down a little, but I felt much like a fly trying to stop a train. I think we finished with Tenshingoso Sei.

Everyone seemed to enjoy the Shintaido. I did hear some complaints about sore legs the next day though.

Exams

The last event on Sunday was Aikido Black Belt exams. Ito was one of two guest examiners. One of the examinees asked me to take video for him and I couldn't refuse. Most of the other Aikido practitioners had to attend the exams as attackers. There were three examinees. They ended up standing on one side of the *dojo* facing the line of other Aikido students. *Sensei* Don would then call out something like "shomen attack. 5 receives". Three people would get up and then attack each of the examinees and they would do the techniques. Then *sensei* would call for new attackers, call out a new technique and they would continue. It was very fast paced. And very long. I watched the event through the viewfinder of the

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camera, but it was still fascinating. They did open hand receives of open hand attacks and *tanto* attacks. They did 3 attackers vs 1 with open hands knee walking. They did 3 attackers (*jo*, *shinai*, *tanto*) vs 1 with open hands standing. They did some *kumijo*. They did *kumitachi* with *shinai*. They did *kumitachi* with swords. (I didn't get to look at the swords to see how real they were. They were metallic, but I don't know if they had real edges on them. No one looked nervous enough for them to have a real edge...) The exam seemed quite comprehensive. When the exams were done, Don awarded certificates and black belts to the students. Ito's mother apparently embroidered their names onto the belts.

There did not appear to be any doubt in the *sensei's* mind that all three would pass. There was no exam feedback session that I was aware of. Still, it was quite a marathon they were put through. The speed alone of the exam precluded much thinking on the part of the examinees. It was a go, go, go sort of affair.

From: Andreas Baer

To: H. F. Ito

Dear Ito-sensei,

I want to thank you sincerely for this wonderful workshop you taught at Renkikai (Switzerland). It took me about a week to understand the feelings in my heart. During this workshop I could never quite relax. Even though (as I have said at the end of the workshop) I didn't really have to do much. That so many people came was a surprise. On the one hand I felt very glad and on the other hand I felt under pressure that everything would go well. But during this last week I came to realize just how wonderful it was having you here, teaching Shintaido, and again what a beautiful art it is.

I think Shintaido has this unique capacity that it increases the energy I can feel and at the same time it instills a peaceful heart. For a long time I have always wanted to be a powerful warrior and often I was angry and felt the need to prove myself. But when we did Taimyo kata (a Shintaido meditation form) during Sunday afternoon I wanted to invest that power for peace and not destruction.

In this troubled time we live in with a war looming in Iraq I appreciate it even more that you brought Shintaido into my life. There is a lot of positive feeling in the dojo and in my heart left over from the workshop. I believe this is due to the fact that through Shintaido all this people who came created some kind of powerful peace energy in the dojo, for which I thank them but also especially you for generating it. You know, I am not normally someone who expresses himself so esoterically, but this time I really feel this. Domo arigatoo gozaimas.

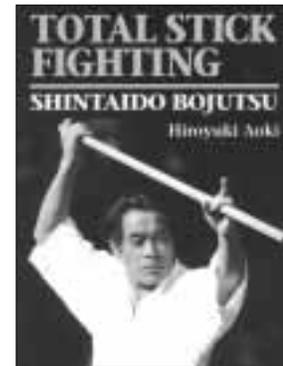
Impressions

I really enjoyed the WRC. For me, it felt like a micro version of Pac Shin. Here we had people practicing martial arts. People practicing massage. Both at the same place. Some of the practitioners overlapped between the two. A family-like community of people. Leaving to drive back to NJ was hard. There were no formal opening or closing ceremonies. Not everyone attended all of the *keiko* so there was never a chance to say goodbye to everyone. I felt very welcome by everyone there. Many of them spent a lot of time helping me out on the mat to get me through each exercise. It gave me something to shoot for once I have my own dojo.

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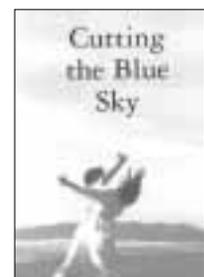
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Demonstrates a series of more advanced health exercises and stretches that two people can do together, and introduction to group warm-up movements. Also includes sections on self-massage and *seiza* meditation with the diamond mudra. Excellent for instructors or group leaders who are leading group warm-up exercises.

Golf-Do (\$20)

Master Shintaido Instructor H.F. Ito teaches the Way of Golf, a exercises designed to help golfers: (1) stretch and limber up; (2) relax; (3) focus and concentrate; and (4) enjoy. Using a golf club instead of the traditional six-foot oak staff, Ito demonstrates how to stretch, relax the body, and prepare the mind for a pleasurable round of golf. Golf-Do provides insights into the unification of mind and body that produces the best of golf.

Life Burn (\$20)

Document of the live painting / shintaido / music performance collaborations at the Theater Yugen in San Francisco in August 1992. Featuring painting by Kazu Yanagi; music by Henry Kaiser and others; and Shintaido movement led by H.F. Ito.

Kata and Kumite (\$20)

H.F. Ito gives instruction for *kaiho-kei* (opening and challenging) exercises with Michael Thompson and Robert Bréant. Includes: group practice, bo kata (hi no kata, kaze no kata, sho-dan, nidan), jo kata (taishi, hojo), karate kata (sanchin, tensho), kumi-bo arrangements, kumitachi (sword vs. sword) nos. 1 - 9. 120 minutes.

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BOOKS

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various authors (\$20)

An anthology of the best articles from the Shintaido of America newsletter over the past 25 years, commemorating the significant milestone. The articles were written by students and instructors. There are 32 articles, 33 photos, 162 pages, grouped by topics: the roots of Shintaido, cultural clashes, spiritual development, using Shintaido in the world, and musings on timing, facing death, the invisible world of the 4th dimension, and passive resistance.

Untying Knots: a Shintaido Chronicle

by Michael Thompson (\$20 / 15*)

This autobiographical memoir by one of the co-founders of Shintaido of America tells of the author's cross-cultural adventures in France, Japan, and California of the course of his 25-year Shintaido career.

Shintaido: the Body is a Message of the Universe

by Hiroyuki Aoki (\$20 / \$15*)

For years this textbook has served as a gateway and guidebook to the practice of Shintaido. Includes sections on the history and philosophy as well as detailed explanations of technique. 120 pages, illustrated with photos. This second printing features more information about the ten Shintaido meditation positions.

... ETC

History of Shintaido Scroll (\$15.00)

A pictorial description of the cultural inheritance and history of Shintaido, from the three martial arts masters Ginshin Funakoshi, Shigeru Egami, and Hiroyuki Aoki. Created by Tomi Nagai-Rothe during a lecture and discussion on the origins of Shintaido led by H.F. Ito during the PacShin Kangeiko in 1999. 9" x 32" on gloss laminate paper.

MINI-BOOKS

Tenshingoso and Eiko

by Hiroyuki Aoki (\$10)

This booklet is for Shintaido practitioners what the Diamond Sutra is for Buddhists: a concise yet thorough description of the basis of practice. *Tenshingoso* and *Eiko* are two of the fundamental movements of Shintaido, which embody philosophies and prescriptions for human growth.

The Zero Point of Consciousness and the World of Ki (\$5)

In this interview Mr. Aoki describes his experience of reaching the "space of *mu*" (nothingness). He also discusses his unique understanding of *ki* energy (life force).

Origins, a History of Shintaido

by Shiko Hokari (\$7)

One of the founding members of Shintaido relates the stories of Rakutenkai (the group that developed Shintaido), and of Aoki-sensei's early days.

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Japanese jazz musician Toshinori Kondo discusses Shintaido, performance, and music. Illustrates how one artist benefitted from Shintaido by going beyond his limits.

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