



BODY Dialogue

Sharing Tenshingoso with a Bunch of Buddhists

by Deborah Jai Levy

I've been a Buddhist for decades now, mostly in the Tibetan tradition, the Tantric (Vajrayana) path, and boy, do we LOVE the body, coarse and subtle, as vessel, temple, vehicle, teacher, for awakening.

So, when the annual Natural Dharma Fellowship teacher's retreat came around, and I was asked to lead some movement sessions, I thought, wow, maybe I could share something I'm exploring that is different from what I've led in the past even though I barely know a thing about it!

(zen koan: How do you step off a 100 foot pole?)

I asked Margaret , (who I first met in Tai Chi classes), Bela and Stephen if it would be ok to share Tenshingoso with the group of meditation teachers, and to my surprise they said, "sure!"

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Teaching Shintaido in a Challenging Environment

by Carole Brouillette

[Quebecois practitioner Carole sent in this description of her foray into teaching Shintaido at an employment office. Note that the title is the editor's choice, not Carole's. She is too modest, but the editor feels that it is an accurate representation of the courage it took to begin the class and continue it to a conclusion. If we were all this brave, Shintaido would flourish amazingly! Ed.]

There are many different ways to share Shintaido. Last year, I had the chance to experiment with a one-hour workshop. In fact, I was invited to give a session to a group of eight people between 22 and 52 years old, for a local employment center.

This group was engaged in an eight-week session in order to prepare them to go back to work. During this session, the center was offering short lessons on many subjects to help job seekers to develop different skills and to get back the necessary confidence to find a new job.

The manager of the group had informed me that there were a few people with learning disorders and others with attention deficit disorders. I was asked to take time to present myself and the Shintaido practice at the beginning of the gathering.

Preparing myself for this one hour workshop, I thought I would have them practice warming up and then try Tenshingoso kata.

When I arrived, we all sat in a circle and I began to present myself. As soon as I started to talk, two young men began to speak to each other like I wasn't even there. I quickly realized that this hour would not go as I expected.

I did ask for their attention but finally, because I got no results, I decided to shorten my opening presentation and I thought: "Let's move!"

So we began warming up, and the same thing happened

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DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS

The next issue of *Body Dialogue* will be in May, 2015.

Please submit articles, poems, pictures to the editor at newsletter@Shintaido.org. Deadline for submissions is April 15, 2016.

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Shintaido for Buddhists *Continued from p.1*

This is VERY different from a tradition that has practices one would only receive from a qualified Lama, perhaps only in long retreat, and one certainly wouldn't attempt to teach a practice that you hadn't penetrated, done for many years, with guidance, depth, sincerity.

So I thought, wow, this is beautiful, how open, how generous, how CRAZY! I love it.

Who, me, share Tenshingoso, that I barely had begun myself?



Jai doing Tai Chi in at the Louvre in Paris

But, with some fun and rich tutorials from Margaret, a little reading, and also the depth and understanding I already brought from my own journeys, retreats, body and energy explorations, I somehow pulled it off.



Jai Doing Tai Chi in Paris

The group was very receptive and curious. We gathered in the beautiful meditation hall at Wonderwell Mountain Refuge in Springfield, NH. A nearly life-size statue of Tara looking on compassionately and views of the mountain ridges and sky behind us to the West.

I offered a full disclaimer, that I am sharing a nascent practice because I enjoy it and find it moving, but I am actually unqualified, yet somehow got permission. With that inspiring prelude, I broke it down, starting with speaking about Tenshingoso a bit, doing a demo with just the movements, then adding sound. And the session unfolded very organically, proceeding the same way, breaking it down into parts, answering questions (WHAT?? But I don't know anything!!) and doing rounds of practice, step by step, until we were all running around, opening and offering to the universe and being very loud! No doubt a Shintaido practitioner of many years would have looked on quite bemused by the scene, but I think something essential did come through, did get across.



Jai in NYC

I showed some photos to the group from the beautiful Shintaido book I ordered, and everyone enjoyed those, and found them inspiring and quite beautiful.

I myself have too many practices these days, and I don't know where Shintaido "fits" or even if it does, but something did speak to me there—the aliveness, the fullness, the connection to spirit and psyche and soul, the cycle of a life, precious and rare. The dance dancing. Or as Adyashanti puts it, "emptiness dancing".

Thank you for the opportunity to share the dance with a group of dear dharma friends and colleagues.

It was lively! And rather than judge myself for really being rather inept, I just reveled in the joy of Being.

And in our shared humanity.***

Shintaido Challenge*Continued from p.1*

again--the guys were talking and having fun, laughing about the movements we were doing.

I was thinking again that I would cut short my teaching, but since I was also thinking of the whole group, instead, I stopped moving and asked them. "Who really wants to participate in this workshop?" Five of the people lift their hands and three people did not. Well, that was honest! I gave all of them all a big smile, but then I said to those who hadn't raised their hands: "Ok! Now you see, many of you in this group want to participate. You have the choice to participate with them or you can sit down and support them with your presence, since one hour is not that long." (From my point of view, anyway.)

At the same time it came to me what we could do during the time left. Finally everyone choose to continue. I helped them to feel their *Ten Chi Jin* in a standing position. I was pleasantly surprise by the serious behavior of the young men who had previously been acting out.

The room was very small. I separated the group into two halves. The first group did *musubidachi* stepping, keeping the Ten Chi Jin standing and then they added in some one-hand cutting.



Drawing by Carole Brouillette

It was a very good thing that the room was so small and that one half of the group was watching the other half, because, to my big surprise, at the end, the group watching applauded!

I invited the second group to do the same exercises and asked those watching to give support to the group performing just as well.

When they were performing, I told them that pointing to the sky could mean connecting with Big Nature. I saw a few skeptical smiles! "One thing is easy to recognize" I told them, "that Great Nature is providing us air to breath, water to drink, food to eat, and that there is a harmony in the solar system that causes the sun to shine. And see how the earth's gravity is allowing us to stay on the ground instead of floating into space! Pointing ahead could mean we share this

awareness and gratitude with others!"

When the second group ended the stepping and cutting, they also received applause by the group watching them.

It was already the end of the workshop. At this moment, we all realized that one of the young men was now sitting on the very top of a big chair pile and he said to us :

"This is weird, I never thought, before, that I was receiving any kind of support!"



Ito Sensei and Carole Brouillette

Thinking about the class later, at first I focused on what happened to the young man who shared his *satori* with the group. That's what I wanted so much to share (look what Shintaido can do!). In order to convey the young man's experience, I described some of the steps of the keiko.

Now I am thinking a lot about *wakame*, and the "bamboo mode" of wakame. From what I understand, wakame is about the egoless state or at least approaching this state. And the bamboo mode is about expressing or at least working on one's true nature. Egoless for me means to be present: to listen, feel, and appreciate. One's true Nature means for me: letting sincere intention inspire one's action.

Both wakame and bamboo mode need to be in action when a situation evolves in a vibrant way. A good keiko comes from a good kumite between the teacher and the students. I think the good kumite in the employment office keiko came from the continual flow of wakame and bamboo mode from both sides!***

ISC seeks member's ideas for new bylaws, vision

by

Lee Ordeman, ISC Board member

In the coming months, the ISC will be revising its bylaws to reflect the current vision and purpose of our organization. The Board asks that you contribute by helping define who we are and what we want to accomplish as an organization.

The International Shintaido College plans to draw up new bylaws, ready for approval at our general meeting at the international gasshuku in Reims, France, in July. The process presents us with the much needed opportunity to reassess our mission and structure of organization and, ultimately, how well the ISC serves its membership. In order for this document to succeed, it requires the ideas and creativity of all ISC members.

The current bylaws (see link: http://shintaido-isc.org/images/documents/ISC_ArticlesofAssociation_February2009.pdf), approved in 2009, comprise a loose and vaguely worded document that has proven inadequate in face of developments since then. The ISC council recognizes pressures for democracy and decision-making, made possible by advances in communications technology and ease of travel. These advances are occurring already, despite the old bylaws, but they are happening with frustrating inefficiency.

Over the past 30 years or so, our organization has evolved from central, charismatic, top-down leadership to something more representational, operating increasingly along democratic lines. The process of change naturally continues, though it lacks direction and consistency between our regions, adversely affecting communication and decision making. The response to change has differed between these regions and led to confusion and inconsistencies regarding how the ISC relates with its members and how members interact.

For instance, this past spring some Japanese members, including all our Japanese Board and TC members, left the ISC over failures to agree with colleagues in other countries and lack of progress regarding changes to the exam and dan system. This came as a shock to the remaining ISC leadership, but equally surprising was the later realization that many in Japan were not aware of the split and did not agree with it. While leadership among the ISC is typically chosen in a democratic process, our bylaws allow for flexibility in this regard. The Japanese regional leadership had been conceded to a small group of instructors who were not elected but self-appointed. While this manner of organizing and

relating to the ISC proved adequate for some years, its limitations were made apparent by the disagreement that ultimately led to this unfortunate and unhappy situation. New bylaws could help prevent such issues. A new document could shore up how the ISC relates not just to national or regional leaderships but how it relates to and communicates with members as a whole. With better communication and understanding of how our organization works, we might better avoid disagreements and focus our energies.

Another area of improvement could come to how the Board and TC relate with each other and make decisions. These two bodies evolved over the past 20 years, as our founders began delegating responsibilities and encouraged a more democratic approach. The progress has been generally successful though fitful at times. Over the past fifteen years or so the Board and the TC have functioned largely independently, but lately the two have begun to deliberate together with increasing frequency, forming what is informally referred to as the ISC council. There is support for institutionalizing this body because it has been found to hold real advantages for our organization in communication and decision making. However, our bylaws do not mention such a forum. Similarly, some have suggested a council of "elders", who would advise the Board and TC upon occasion. New bylaws could include the creation of such a body.

There are many aspects of the bylaws that could use improvement. The more of us who participate in their reform, the more likely they remain relevant to the needs of our organization. The ISC Board hopes that the process of drawing up new bylaws will stimulate discussion of who we are and how we can serve as an organization and thereby invigorate the practice of Shintaido.

In the coming months, you will be asked to contribute your thoughts and possibly your time and energy to this process. Please join us as we take this opportunity to move the ISC forward with vision and purpose.***

Last Dance at Shintaido Farm

The Shintaido Farm will be closing when sold. Thanks to all who made the Farm a vibrant place for the study and practice of Shintaido.



One of the first images of the Shintaido Farm--2006

“Applications of Tenshingosō” DVD

The European Shintaido communality has created a new DVD, directed by Master Instructor Masashi Minagawa and edited by Senior Instructor David Franklin.



*Master Instructor Minagawa
at Shintaido Northeast Kangeiko 2004 - Earthdance*

If you would like a copy of the Applications of Tenshingosō DVD, please contact Master Instructor Ito at: eikodai@earthlink.net



*Master Instructor Minagawa
at Shintaido Farm -- 2009 Shintaido Northeast Fall Gasshuku*

Reflections on a Theme

[On Sept. 1 Ann Sievers sent an e-mail to the Shintaido Northeast community, topic “Fall Gasshuku,” in preparation for the event held the weekend of September 26 at Shintaido Farm in Deerfield, Mass. The e-mail was the usual memo that goes out before a gasshuku, encouraging people to attend and reminding them to register as soon as possible. What ensued over the next ten days was the usual back-and-forth between a gasshuku organizer and those sending messages of happy anticipation, regrets, and concerns for volunteers, such as tea corner prep, and so forth. Between Sept. 10 and 11, however, the e-mail thread took an unexpected and interesting turn as Jennifer Hicks used the discussion as an opportunity to share a disappointing realization – that she felt no longer able to do the dynamic keiko she loved and wanted still to do. The response was immediate, sympathetic and telling of what’s on the minds of many of us as we age and seek to keep keiko a part of our lives.

Lee Ordeman, Editor]

Jennifer Hicks

Hi all,

There are a lot of folks on here I know and many I don’t, but I wanted to let you know that sadly I think my days of Shintaido practice may be over or at least seriously shifted. I’ve been stalling on sending this info out because I didn’t want to admit it even to myself, but my spine has been in bad shape for the past 2 years. Osteoarthritis. It gets a bit better then worse again in this cycle. I am doing what I can to avoid another surgery, and that means finally nixing some types of movement. No weighted overhead reaching, fast turns, rolling or hopping, etc. for me for the foreseeable future.

I’ve been practicing since 1986 and an instructor, but I have to face the facts that I can’t do what I could. I’m going to a new doctor now, so we will see what happens. I’m following their advice. One thing at a time, as they say.

In any case, I was wondering if I can come for the opening and morning keiko to watch or maybe just do some warm ups with you all? I miss practicing with you guys and I’m sorry I haven’t been around.

Thank you! OX!!

Jennifer Hicks

Eva Thaddeus

Dear Jennifer and everybody,

Maybe there is a shifted or gentler version of what "Shintaido practice" means these days. I can't do any of the movements you mention either. I broke my arm badly two years ago and can no longer lift it over my head. I have never been a "non-participant" and don't want to be, but I have also been contemplating what I would and would not be able to do at the gasshuku.

Reflections *Continued from p.6*

I know it is the last gasshuku at the Farm, so I am definitely coming. Just wondering how big an invalid section there will be. At least two of us, Jennifer, and I'm guessing more!

Love,

Eva

Bill Burtis

Well, Eva... I'll probably be there for some of it, so.... Sorry to hear about your arm!

BB

Nancy Billias

Dear Jennifer and all,

I am often at the sidelines at these events, having been affected for a few years by back issues, and more recently by an Achilles injury. I still get a tremendous amount out of [gasshukus], not merely the wonderful company, but also different ways of thinking about practice and my body.

Just my two cents' worth.

Nancy

Jennifer Hicks

Nancy and Eva! Wow you guys! This is huge! Thank you so much for saying this. Our bodies change, we get injured, and we have to find a way to manage, through pain, fear, ego, cost and change. The nature of change and adoption [and adaptation] of the body (or not) and how we go with this flow, as it were, is an enormous conversation that I haven't heard much of in a public Shintaido forum. This is an important conversation! I didn't mean to take over this gasshuku thread, but if you want to talk more on the subject, I'd love to be part of that conversation.

Thank you!

J

Michael Thompson

I'll be there, waving my cane around; maybe we can form a sub-group and look for constructive ways to move our functioning body parts....

Jennifer Hicks

Sounds good to me! See you there!

J

Matt Shorten

Hi Eva and Jennifer,

I don't believe Shintaido practice should be limited to the young and genki.

You may consider yourselves invalids (compared to what you used to be able to do), but I'm certain you could still make VALID contributions, especially as you have sooo much body wisdom accumulated.

Matt Shorten

Eva Thaddeus

Thanks Matt.

What I am most afraid of is my own bad judgment. I counted myself among the young and genki for so many years, and I am not used to backing out when an exercise gets too intense for me. Should be a good lesson in humility.

Eva

Bela Breslau

Hi Everyone,

I am so glad to have received these e-mails. It is an important thread for thinking about what to do at the gasshuku. I am looking forward to seeing everyone and having a way to share and practice together with our older selves and bodies.

Looking forward to seeing everyone and being together.

Bela

Nancy Billias

I will never forget watching the graduate exam of a woman in Shintaido UK which she did from her wheelchair. [...] It was very moving. This was in 2012, in Bristol. Her Tenshingoso was beautiful.

Heather Kuhn

Thanks for sharing your truth Jennifer. An important thread indeed! Even though Shintaido aspires to be an art that anyone can do, it is no secret that it also privileges the athletic. Maybe you all can lead the way for developing the gentler version of core Shintaido curriculum?

Yay! And I WISH I could be there!!!!

Love, Heather

Bill Burtis

I once taught a series of ten Shintaido classes to quadriplegics. Eight students, all in wheelchairs. The smiles on their faces told the story.

Lee Ordeman

Well, it comes as no surprise that Bill Burtis has said in 15 words what I was attempting in 300, but here goes.

I have a student with cerebral palsy who spends most of her day in an electric wheelchair. She hasn't the strength or mobility in her arms to operate a manual wheelchair. Yet she loves Shintaido. Her Tenshingoso is hardly textbook, but we practice together under the assumption that the mind, or kokoro, can maintain the form even when the body falls short.

I reflect on the dynamic style of keiko that increasingly I cannot do: Sometimes [in strenuous keiko] due to fatigue our form breaks down, yet in our minds we practice deep

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concentration on that form to maintain it even as it outwardly falls apart. In this state of mind, despite increasing physical limitations, the form is still working in us and we are expressing its spirit, possibly more purely than when outwardly we could maintain it.

My student is opening up for me what keiko can be. She wishes she could do free and dynamic keiko, but she is finding something there nonetheless, and she won't stop bothering me for more keiko! Everyday when I teach her, I have to figure out what is keiko, even when the body's "message of the universe" isn't matching my preconceptions.

If we hold to a general belief that "the body is a message of the universe," we can assume that as we age it becomes no less so. I think the motto can liberate us from these worries (about infirmity and aging), which we all face. I take the phrase to refer to all bodies, young, old, fully able or with limitations, as all our physical states reflect the universe, or are just permutations of the universe, perfectly individually and in their sum. We can find reassurance in this. So it is a very interesting part of our practice, as our bodies change, to explore what is keiko. Keiko is there, but it is not going to be the same for everyone, and every-

one's keiko will change individually, and this can be disappointing. The fun will not be the same, but it is our practice to find new fun. There is no reason, I feel, that keiko cannot be as profound as it was, and we can explore to find that, as it is not mapped out so clearly. The early dynamic practice we loved has hopefully prepared us for this.

Finally, in context of this discussion, it is funny to note that a literal definition of the word keiko is "study of old things."

Joe Zawielski

Hello all,

As I read these e-mails, I cannot help but think of the theme of the gasshuku: "Cycling through to completion." How timely in many ways. When something is brought to completion, that is the time of beginning, a time for something new to be born. A new cycle beginning with the experiences and wisdom earned from a lifetime of cycles. How blessed we are to have in our bodies and spirit the experiences of years of practice (through genki times and not-so-genki times). We embrace the day and move on to whatever the future holds for us.

To quote Aoki Sensei: "What is received by the body will never disappear because the body has been transformed in the process."

Looking forward to seeing you all soon, in whatever shape we are in.

Peace, Joe***



新
体
道

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