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

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 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 of violence, its devastating effects, and the question of how best to respond to it.

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. Hirokazu 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...
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He told us that it was totally anarchistic to be trying to learn to use the bow (wooden staff) as a weapon at the end of the twentieth century, and that hioji [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 bow, we began to throw the bow into the air, catch them and pull with them onto the ground. We would balance them on the tips 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 bow, alternately leading and following them. The ultimate goal was to establish unification, even intimacy, with the bow.

In this way we finally learned to regard the bow 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 in which I had begun my own practice of hioji; it was just more efficient (and more fun, I admit)... ...[The ideal would be to find a qualified hioji 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 tool in that are described in this book before moving on to specific kata. The results may surprise you.

Michael

General Editor
Co-Founder, Shintaido of America

Boogie Taiso Instruction Video I

Kenko Taiso Instruction Video II

Produced by On Sit Enterprises, this 90-minute video presents the classic Shintaido bowl-tie warm-up sequence with detailed explanation. The 15-minute warm-up sequence, done in a stimulating manner, includes stretching, strengthening and toning routines that are excellent for those who are old but new to body movement.

Kenko Taiso I & II ($20)

Demonstrates a series of more advanced health exercises and exercises that two people can do together, and introduction to group warm-up movements. Also includes a section on self-massage and ozone meditation with the diamond palate. Excellent for instructors or group leaders who want to broaden their techniques for leading group warm-up exercises.

Golf/Shi ($20)

Master Shintaido Instructor I. This book teaches the Way of Golf, a series of 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 rice-stalk oak staff, it demonstrates the proper way to stretch, relax the body and focus the mind for a fun and enjoyable round of golf. It also provides excellent exercises for the eyes and mind. Golf/Do provides insight into the unification of mind and body that produces golf.

Kata

Detailed instructions in Kata, concentrating on breathing and energy cultivation techniques. Includes kata instruction in the Tenshingoso reverse-breathing technique, basic Tenshingoso, and seated versions of both kata.

Kosha Taiso Instruction Video I

Produced by On Sit Enterprises, this 90-minute video presents the classic Shintaido bowl-tie warm-up sequence with detailed explanation.

Kosha Taiso I ($20)

Detailed instructions in Kosha, concentrating on breathing and energy cultivation techniques. Includes kata instruction in the Tenshingoso reverse-breathing technique, basic Tenshingoso, and seated versions of both kata.

Tenshingoso I & II ($20)

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if I was still living in California. I became 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 tapura burrito with a side of (watermelon) agu frosa 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 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 something to me. I had one glorious EikoDai (a basic Shintaido form), running down Ocean Beach with my arms widespread and outstretched, screaming into the wind and feeling completely and almost psychically 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 dream 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 myself 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 moon dust a quarter mile 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! •••

**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, Noena, Ravi and I have returned for another summer gassaku (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 kyo (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 dwindling in laditude. 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 gassaku, 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.
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 the 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 tearing up, though not on purpose. 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

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 never 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!

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--[If we had bad concentration or bad energy, she ended up tearing up, though not on purpose—her body was a kind of litmus test.

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?

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 through.

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We 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 ... so that I could create shrieking feedback even in the backcountry, or wherever we were camping in our quasicomical wanderings.

If I had it to do all over again, I would 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 fringes of established society. I suppose I would. That path also led me to Shintaido, to [wherever it was] 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.

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The Sixties, 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.

I don’t care that you only hear Jimi’s music sampled in commercials nowadays.

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Continued on previous page

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 train you to behave in accordance with it—whether you realize it or not.

Many people in Rakutenkai, including Mr. Aoki, Mr. Ito and arrangers, social scientists behave in accordance with it—whether you realize it or not.

Buddhists and Shintoists, more physical. There were keiko-gi without wearing a uniform open with a partner. Project your vision through your partner as you give support. We stepped away from each other, looked into each other's 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 Tokyo. 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.

In my opinion, 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. Hokai (inter-viewed 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 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 Tenshingso (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 arts. The students of tea ceremony and flower arrangement came, and they studied Tenshingso— kind of koentei taiso (health exercise) style.

Most of us didn't care what Mr. Aoki wanted to do. When we were in Rakutenkai we just enjoyed practicing and having discussions. We didn't understand when he was going to take a break. 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 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 kunite (partner practice) to kiri- otsuke (freshcutting down coming 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 kunite with some situations. There was no sacrifice, no seriousness, no effort! Our kiri was clear, deep and sweetly profound. We stepped away from each other, looked into each other's eyes, smiled and bowed deeply. Every word was necessary. Words in fact would have spoiled the exchange that had just occurred.

First there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is

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 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.

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

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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...
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 swordsmen. 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 our-
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 “evil” 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 clear cases in which a violent response to aggression has a net positive effect on this world.

Examples that come to mind are the Allied fighting World War II and a person successfully fighting an off-beat racket. 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 for 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 swordman 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 combat[s]...a spirit of self-transcendence. In the case of Ichiun the practice consists of the cultivation of mindlessness 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. Ichiun is mindful of things as well; but this is what it is basically about for me.”

Although swordsmanship may have been fundamentally a spiritual practice and not an activity with sword (normally translated as “martial way”—ed.) is “peaceful art.” or “to have no enemies.”

And light came into my body, I stopped Karate—I was 19—and became completely involved in Shintaido practice. 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 Budo Dialogue, a spiritual practice, rather than a form of fighting which uses spiritual techniques. My definition of spiritual practice is an organized activity whose purpose is self-transcendence. In the case of Shintaido the practice consists of the cultivation of mindlessness 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 mindful of things as well; but this is what it is basically about for me.

Although swordsmanship may have been fundamentally a spiritual practice, we practiced with swords and were careful not to strike anyone. Shintaido is not a practical fighting art. This means that the consequences of our intention is
**Body Language**

**BOOK REVIEW**

**Bōjutsu “for Dummi’s”... not!**


review by Bill Burts

What martial artist would not want to own a book titled Total Stick Fighting? It has such a great kind of Jackie Chan meets Chuck Norris thing going for it. But for those who are familiar with the sometime-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 finger pointing up at the title?...)... 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, if you suspect the content would send Chuck Norris screeching 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 spirt by means of the extraordinarily simple tool of the bo. (Introduction, p. xi)

[Boh: wooden staff; bōjutsu: staff technique; kī: life energy]

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

I returned to Japan at 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 use 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 nagewaza [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 now I had the answer. It came to me with a very clear image and I was no longer puzzled. The answer was that...I said, OK, I can now stop practicing. That was 25 years after I started Karate, and 20 years after I met Mr. Aoki.

It took me 20 years to reach a point where I was convinced...found a great reference for their continuing study...with a more experienced... hints for successful meditation. And, anyway, you can’t take off the cover wrap and have an elegantly bound blue book! •••

practitioners who wish to understand the form more deeply and to have a great reference for their continuing study...Mr. Aoki goes on to note that he rejected about a third of the techniques, which Mr. Aoki notes are the factor most distinguishing Shintaido bōjutsu from traditional “stick fighting,” came from (p. x, Introduction):

My concern is, as one who has labored long and fairly hard in the attempt to teach a relatively low level of proficiency with a bo, 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 Joh niyo (warm-ups with bo) using this book. I have far less confidence, however, in a new practitioner’s ability to proceed correctly from yoi (ready position) to (fuldare (forward stance), for instance, without developing a quirk that would leave some permanent “tie” in his or her movement forever I won’t bother to comment on the likelihood of success with the 115 photograph series which illustrates nido 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, and doing 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 bōjutsu 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 Tenshinso and Eko (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! •••

**TOTAL STICK FIGHTING: SHINTAIDO BOJUTSU**

go to www.amazon.com/ search on Books/ “Aoki, Hiroyuki” or “Shintaido Bojutsu”
Total Stick Fighting: Shintaido Bojutsu.

review by Bill Burtis

What martial artist would not want to own a book called Total Stick Fighting? It has such a great kind of Jackie Chan meets Chuck Norris thing going for it. But for those who are familiar with the sometime-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 finger pointing up to the sky?)... well, a little disconcerting. Stick fighting? Sounds a little Hollywood... commercial, crass, offensive. Look what they've done to my pure, spiritual Shintaido.

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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 bo, that I know the error that will haunt one’s form and blant one’s proficiency for years occurs in the spaces between the photographs. 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 bojutsu (partner exercises with hilt); and sei kumihitoe (fighting stances). The intended audience is the beginner, with good eyesight could master bojutsu “for Dummies”… not!

My sense is, one of the purposes of this book is to bring a relatively low level of proficiency with a bo, that I know the error that will haunt one’s form and blant one’s proficiency for years occurs in the spaces between the photographs. 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 bojutsu (partner exercises with hilt); and sei kumihitoe (fighting stances). The intended audience is the beginner, with good eyesight could master bojutsu “for Dummies”… not!

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Here we use the term “basic” 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, thereafter. The cover may be commercial, but the contents are full of the inner light, the white light, the spirit of Shintaido.

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Bojutsu “for Dummies”... not!

Originals

continued from p. 9

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 nen no kata.

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At that time I was not so talented or physically strong. I had 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, which symbolize a certain pattern seen in daily life. By repeating forms during 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 purely 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 truth that she would not intentionally hurt me. According to Ichiun, when two masters of the "Sword of No-abode" meet, the result is not evil (both combatants are killed) but rather at-one (both escape unharmed). I think this is the ideal we are striving for in Shintaido kihon-chi." 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 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 or with weapons, 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 made of things as well, but this is what it is basically about for me. Although swordsmanship may have been fundamentally a spiritual practice in its origins, I have found that even in modern times, people still use swords 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...
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days. For instance, especially in California, there are so many body therapies. So these days, people who study body treat-
ment have their own ideas that certain movements of Shintaido are no good for their bodies. And it’s true. Some of our students say no for the lack of the body. 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 all that. We didn’t know so much about body mechanics.

Also, of course, Rakutenkai members came from a Japanese lifestyle context. 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 bigger and stronger, and of course the body’s lifestyle is different. So I taught jumping, or something that was 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 t’ai (body consciousness) is different from the old days.

What aspects of Rakutenkai do you think we keep in our Shintaido practice here in America? Have there been, or 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 kunito (partner exercise) is like
a playful one. We play with the idea of “sticky
seiritsutai (open-
gasshuku, (nurturing life energy),
gasshuku) and good

mass of energy) with hand con-

At the end of a Shintaido

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

Shin Aoki, guest instructor, is teaching the
Sunday morning dawns bright and clear.
last practice. He begins with a gentle reminder that 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 sawaeidô exercise, or sake-tai. 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 still 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 kaikyû (partner practice) to kiri- ekkô (freshhead 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 kaikyû with some hallucinations. There was no sacrifice, no seriousness, no effort! Our ki was clear, deep and sweetly profound. We stepped away from each other, looked into each other’s 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 kaikyû. 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 ***

## Snail Climbing Mt Fuji

Tetsu Yonekawa:

Snail Climbing Mt Fuji

## Originals

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

On the other hand, physical practice has a strong effect in reminding us of this fundamental meaning and trains you to behave in accordance with it— whether you realize it or not. Because he wanted to create 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 it isn’t necessary 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.

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 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.

Rakutenkai was not only martial arts training. It was people coming from two different directions, more intellectual and more physical. There were Buddhists and Shintists, tea students and flower arrangers, social scientists and natural scientists— for instance, Mr. Hokin [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 wanted to have a discussion, wanted to study Mr. Aoki’s philosophy, were also there.

Did they attend practices too? Occasionally, yes. For example, after Mr. Aoki found Tenhôshô (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 arts. The students of tea ceremony and flower arrangement came, and they studied Tenhôshô— kind of kofu taiho (ritual exercise) style.

Most of us might not know what Mr. Aoki wanted to do. When we were in Rakutenkai we just enjoyed practicing and having discussions. We probably didn’t understand when he was going to do it.

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 training 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 spending too much time funding 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 who were sadistic—not sadistic but masochistic, who loved to be beaten— would stay. But traditionally, there weren’t many group members, everyone 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 practice 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:

What is more, it is precisely the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest which are the indispensable ones. (1 Corinthians: 12:22—The Jerusalem Bible)

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

Obviously, Shintaido practitioners today are in better physical condition, because the diet is very different. We were so poor, we couldn’t afford any animal protein because of lack. 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 gezshûkai (retreat), everybody’s eating is very energy-yielding. It’s a very different world. 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 beetroot, 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

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But most of all, for me the Sixties were about two ideals: free-thinking and alternative lifestyles. So were the Sixties. Pies 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 was born in the Sixties, in Japan, far from the hipsters 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?

When I look at old photos of Ito with a ponytail, or hear stories of my stone soul, floating free, somewhere, lost in the synapses, as if six was nine, tore up, ripping through the world feeling all of life in every movement, high, electric, cosmic, and for a millisecond I'm nineteen again, but music plays in my head, the world has passed me by. I don't care that I'm too old for rock and roll. Though not on purpose— her body was a kind of litmus test. 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. 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 not 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 naturally, so we naturally ended up following that kind of diet, 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 no 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 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?

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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 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 tuna potato bun with a sandwich (watermelon) aguas frescas 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 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 Podziewski cut me in Tenshingoso “A” so that I felt like she was doing it. I had a glorious EikoDai (a basic Shintaido form), running down Ocean Beach with my arms widespread and outstretched, screaming into the wind and feeling completely and almost psychadelically 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 strain 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 myself 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 moon dust a quarter mile away. Later that day I lay in a forest, entranced 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...