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Words From Obata-Kaiso

Noki Shita & Engawa

I HAVE DONE two seminars back-to-back, but this spring was my first time doing three consecutive seminars. The first was in Poland, the second in England, and finally one in the Netherlands. I think this made it possible for more students to attend the seminars in their area. This was a very hard training schedule, but I think it was worth the time. Usually people consider 62 years an age appropriate for retirement. However, I am always continuing my research and discovering better ways to teach, and, in this way, perhaps these seminars allow me to get the most training.

In Poland, we had a photo viewing party, as well as a demonstration. My fondest memory is of going to see a castle in the rain. The castle was located on a rocky hill, and there was no roof for cover, but I enjoyed the castle immensely. Although I got wet, I had the opportunity to visit the castle as rain turned to snow, and felt like I was on a movie set. Unfortunately, I did not learn much of its history, but I acquired a sense of those who protected their castle during rain or shine.

In England, we started training from the day I arrived, but I had the chance to visit a few renowned sites. Last year, I had the chance to see Stonehenge, which was very inspirational. This year, I came across an enormous tree that I found inspiring. I had a chance to view the tree for 20 minutes are so, and compared the 62 years of my life to a 15-cm portion of the rings of the tree to which they corresponded. The word "tree" in Japanese is *ki*, with the same pronunciation as the ki for energy, the ki for chance, the ki for strongest/super, and the ki for time. Thinking back, I realize that this had taken place on May 10th, the anniversary of Shinkendo – I am glad to have come across this tree on such a day.

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In the Netherlands, there is a street of antique shops between the train station and Van Gogh that I enjoyed immensely. Every month, I go to the Rosebowl swapmeet here in California, but I was unable to go this time because of the seminar. The antique shops in Amsterdam gave me the chance to enjoy the antiques. Japan and the Netherlands have a 400-year history together, and viewing the antique shops gave me a glimpse of this shared history and culture.

Although this trip was long, it was an eye-opener for me. One thing that I have been pondering a long time has finally made itself very clear on this trip. In Europe, I got this sense from, for example, Jean Valjean or King Lear that everything is black or white. The outside is hot; the inside is shady and cool. It is either yes or no. If you are invited inside, you are served tea and snacks, but if you are outside, you are ignored. Jean Valjean had to go to a church to receive food and warmth, or live under a bridge. For King Lear, if he was inside he was taken care of, but if he was outside, he was ignored. Japanese houses are very special. Houses in Europe do not have an area to cover the head, but Japanese houses have an area called *noki shita* (軒下; under the eaves), which is a roofed area that anyone can stand under for shade or to get out of the rain, and which everyone is welcome to use. Old Japanese houses also have *engawa* (縁側; veranda), which is a porch-like area. It is a very neutral area where, if you are invited to relax, you can sit and rest instead of standing under the noki shita. At the engawa, you can sit and relax, but you do not take off your shoes, as it is considered the space between the outside and inside. If you wish to smoke, for example, the smell will not travel inside the house; this is convenient, as you cannot smoke outside if it is raining, and you cannot smoke inside because the smell will bother everyone. To put it another way, children are raised inside a house under the full protection of the house and the watchful eyes of the parents; neighborhood teenagers have a safe meeting place (a place for training for the outside world) at the engawa and noki shita, where parents can hear them and monitor them from inside without having to constantly keep an eye on them; and ultimately adults will be able to leave the protection of the house completely. The engawa is a place of care, a meeting a place, a place where people can leave gifts or offerings without bothering the person inside. The engawa connects those inside and those outside – the *en* means "connection." This neutral area is something I do not find everywhere, and is perhaps lost in the modern day. Modern people must not forget the heart of the engawa. There is a lesson that we must learn in old-style Japanese houses, which encompass the spirit and soul of Japanese culture and tradition.

If the noki shita is a safe place that offers refuge to strangers and travelers, the engawa is perhaps the next step in allowing someone into one's life, and, in this way, it connects people from all areas and all walks of life.

The Unbound Blade: Swordsmanship as Limitless Language

By Jeremy Sather
Tokyo, Japan

The first time I encountered Shinkendo was in 2005. I was living in Japan at the time, finishing my undergraduate degree. I had had the good fortune to train and witness several different koryu sword styles such as Nito-ryu, various forms of Iai, Jigen ryu, Itto ryu, and others. At the end of the term, as I was preparing to return to America and enter graduate school, I set out to find a dojo that would satisfy my desire to continue practicing Japanese swordsmanship. Searching on the internet, I encountered the Shinkendo website. My first practice session was enough to convince me that Shinkendo was both technically and philosophically unique, yet it also shared much with the arts I had practiced. Fast forward six years, and I still feel this way, and am thankful that I was fortunate to have the opportunity to train in an art that I believe best captures the spirit of the warriors who once wielded the sword on the battlefield.

I have been working toward my doctorate in Japanese medieval history and literature; consequently I am by necessity filtering all of my training and introspection on Shinkendo through the lens of my work. In this respect I am continually struck by the sophistication of Obata-sensei's art when I compare it to the other sword arts I have practiced, witnessed, or encountered in my research. Most of us are at least vaguely familiar with the process traditional swordsmanship styles underwent as they came down to us through the centuries, becoming further and further distanced from the battlefields that were their home and ending up entombed within narrow technical principles; or, in the case of Kendo, becoming more and more a sport as its techniques and tools evolved to meet the needs of competitors interested in scoring points. Obata-sensei's exposure to various martial arts during his illustrious career has allowed him to compare, contrast, and most importantly, modify techniques to fit his vision of swordsmanship, with an eye toward acquiring a holistic understanding of the sword such as the samurai would have had. Indeed, this heuristic process is similar to that which the samurai themselves utilized during their musha shugyo, enabling them to hone their literal and figurative edge in combat.

I am reminded of the linguistic and semiotic theories of scholars such as Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Umberto Eco, whose work has been influential in my research on medieval Japanese war tales. In *The Role of the Reader*, Eco discusses his theory of open and closed texts. He explains that closed texts are those whose narrative structures guide the reader to specific interpretations. In short, the author had a correct reading in mind. Open texts, on the other hand, are fields of meaning which encourage interpretations that may be at odds with what the average (or as Eco says, the naïve) reader would take from the narrative. In open texts, variant readings can actually enhance one's enjoyment and understanding of the work while at the same time creating other narrative possibilities. To put it another way, open texts have almost unlimited potential for interpretation. In this respect I liken Shinkendo to one of Eco's open works of literature.

To put all of this in linguistic terms, we share a common language (Shinkendo) that is comprised of a matrix of discrete units of expression (the lexicon of techniques); we

have access to this lexicon through a basic set of tools—ashisabaki, taisabaki, and kensabaki (which we might compare to spoken language or writing)—and the technical building blocks that comprise them, such as proper grip, cutting angle, or weight distribution (which we might compare to morphemes or sememes). As we grow in our understanding of the principles of these principles, each begins to flow into the other, creating a web of knowledge that is continually tightening in its density as its borders expand outward into infinity. In this way we become more skilled in our deployment of the art, just as we improve our deployment of language the more we read and write. The possibilities, both in language and in Shinkendo, are thus limitless, and perfection becomes a goal that moves both closer and further away from us the more we strive for it.

To take my metaphor in the opposite direction, koryu arts more closely resemble closed texts. Prescribed in their narrative, they are confined to a single interpretation that remains within the constraints of each technique's theoretical background. To put it another way, I once read an article by a prominent koryu practitioner in which he boldly stated, "I don't care about you," by which he meant that the practitioner is almost irrelevant except as a vessel for the tradition, and by extension that the point was not to develop any nuanced understanding of the sword, but rather to preserve the art as it has been handed down. Reinterpretation is not only frowned on, but beside the point, the idea not being to learn the principles of the sword itself, but to memorize a response to a prescribed stimulus that just so happens to involve a sword. As one continues to practice the techniques of a koryu art, one carves away at superficialities, and after years of effort, the practitioner comes to the principle of the technique in its most distilled form. Watching a long-time practitioner of a koryu art can be a beautiful experience in the same way reading a book can be enjoyable despite a straightforward narrative. Yet the fact remains that both are restricted in their potential. Shinkendo, to my mind, is contradictory to this approach just as open texts are to closed texts.

Shinkendo's methodology also relies on forms, but uses them to guide the practitioner down a different path: from each form we draw on an ever increasing and interlocking set of basic principles that are applicable to any situation. Moreover, Shinkendo forms have any number of henka, none of which are incorrect; indeed, a technique is only incorrect if it fails in the situation to which one has applied it. Just as we can choose from any number of words stored in our lexical matrix to express a thought, we can choose any technique, cut, or movement from among those we know to achieve our goal. The superior swordsman is he or she who can apply the appropriate technique to the situation at hand. At the highest levels, this choice, and the outcome, is instantaneous, and certainly not subject to the conscious mind. Shinkendo prepares us for such choices, while koryu forms, in my opinion, are too structured to result in elastic and instinctive responses.

Ultimately, Shinkendo uses forms as tools to broaden our understanding of the sword and ourselves. To take up my previous metaphor one last time, koryu arts can be said to be a language whose lexicon exhibits a dearth of expressive possibility. While we can master the potential of these narrow fields, the fact remains that they are inadequate for nuanced expression. Shinkendo, on the other hand, is unchained from the rigidity of forms even as it makes use of them. It is a language with rules, but like all languages it is a tool that supplies nearly infinite combinatory potential. Shinkendo promotes expertise in the art of swordsmanship but does not stop there: it seeks to broaden our knowledge first of our body; next, the relationship between it and the sword; from there we progress to understanding our relationships with others, and ultimately of our place in the world. It is, in sum, a language whose expressive possibilities are legion, and which is restricted only by the limits we set on ourselves.

Life presents us with a continual series of choices, some of which are right, some wrong, but in all cases the correctness of that choice is determined by the physical, mental, and spiritual makeup of the individual, in addition to

situational context. Life is a fixed pattern in the sense that we are born and we die; but the choices between those eternities, though contextually based, are ours to make. Like an open text, it is up to us to apply our knowledge to each opportunity to arrive at the best possible interpretation and outcome. In this way Shinkendo is life, and vice versa.

Or, to use a more familiar term:

Jinsei Shinkendo.

Kaiso's Spring European Tour 2011

By Cuc Phan, Arcueil Dojo, France

This year Kaiso was able to come again to Europe to lead Shinkendo, Aikibujutsu, and Bojutsu seminars in Poland, England, and the Netherlands.

I am always pleased to attend international seminars. I love meeting and practicing and sharing with other students. We learn so much from each other. This is really important for me. Unfortunately, I could not attend the Poland seminar this year. Three seminars in a row – it would have been fantastic, but I could not afford it.

From May 7th until 9th I attended my second Shinkendo seminar in Milton Keynes in England. Stéphane, who is a regular attendee at Kaiso's seminars, came with me. I went back to France on the 10th but had no time to rest. I packed my bags again and took a train on the 11th in order to reach Amsterdam.

Amsterdam! My first seminar in the Netherlands! The seminar was scheduled from May 11th until 15th. I'd never been to Amsterdam before, and I was really happy that Shinkendo gave me this opportunity. It is a wonderful city! I loved it!

I was the only student from the Arcueil dojo, but not the only one from France. Students from the Alsace dojo joined the seminar too: Charles Jund-sensei, Emmanuel, and Cedric.

During these two seminars, Kaiso insisted on the basics and foundations of Shinkendo: ashi sabaki, tai sabaki, ken sabaki. Also, he reminded us about a central and key point in Shinkendo: safety for all students during training.

Finally, I went back to France, quite tired but so happy! I received so much from all the attendees, and of course from Kaiso.

I'd like to thank Byron Shepherd-sensei and all his students. Thank you to Joost Berkhout-sensei and his organization team. I had a great time attending their seminars! Thank you to Roland Lajos-sensei for his help and advice during the Dutch seminar. And I do thank Kaiso for his teaching. I am looking forward to practicing again under his guidance in France in October!

Jinsei Shinkendo!

Amsterdam Seminar 2011

By Joost Berkhout, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Last May, we organized a tour through Europe, during which Kaiso taught at three seminars. Starting from Honbu, Kaiso went first to Poland, a week later from Poland to the UK, and lastly came to the Netherlands. The flight from Poland to the United Kingdom is about two hours; London to Amsterdam is about one hour, and the direct flight from Amsterdam to Los Angeles around 11 hours.

Kaiso arrived at Schiphol, Amsterdam on Wednesday, May 11th in the afternoon. After a short rest and Hungarian food made by Roland-sensei at Mark Wallace-sensei's house, we went to the dojo for a 1.5-hour shinkendo class. This was the start of the shinkendo portion of the seminar, which focused on Ichi-no-tachi Battoho, Fumikae-Uchikomi, and also demonstration forms with large groups,

small groups, four persons, and in pairs, as well as basic form and technique.

The next day, we had time reserved to go out in the city, and we went to see antiques and craftsmen work at shops in the art-and-antiques street, the Spiegelgracht. After that, we had an early dinner with a wide view over Amsterdam. In the evening, there was aikido/aikibujutsu and shinkendo training during our regular training hours.

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday were days with a full training schedule; it was mostly aikido and shinkendo, but also bojutsu and tantojutsu. I found the tantojutsu class very interesting – the various ways of using and handling the tanto and the seriousness of it. Kaiso made it very clear that aikidoka should be more realistic and careful; this approach is also what I find so important in the Aikibuken. Aikido had a new ashisabaki box variation and new combinations of techniques for me; I find this "hasami" control extremely effective.

I heard many students enjoyed bojutsu; so did I. This lesson consisted of more basic swinging, grip changing, striking and defending, and the use of the "long side" of the bo and ways of changing these sides. Bojutsu in our dojo is not practiced on a regular basis yet, but we're planning to reserve more time for it.

Sunday, the seminar finished with tameshigiri, in which Kaiso did an impressive nitoken (two-sword) cutting demonstration, and showed us how easy it is to cut targets if everything is performed with good balance, naturally, and correctly.

Last March, we moved to our new training location, which is a new building and where the whole seminar took place. It managed to fit in more than 40 persons practicing shinkendo, although extra attention for each other was required. Thank you all from Europe who attended, and all the members of Amsterdam who made it possible to host Kaiso this year.

Thank you, Kaiso, for this seminar; it was truly a great learning experience again. The study and refinement of form, posture, technique, and kiai, as well as working on elements of the Kuyo Junikun under Kaiso's direction are essential for keeping shinkendo and aikido alive. Thank you, Kaiso, also for sharing the many exemplary historical stories and the great examples from your own immense experience. It is widening my view and perspective every time and forces me to keep looking at things from different angles, and to keep on training.

Domo arigato gozaimashita.

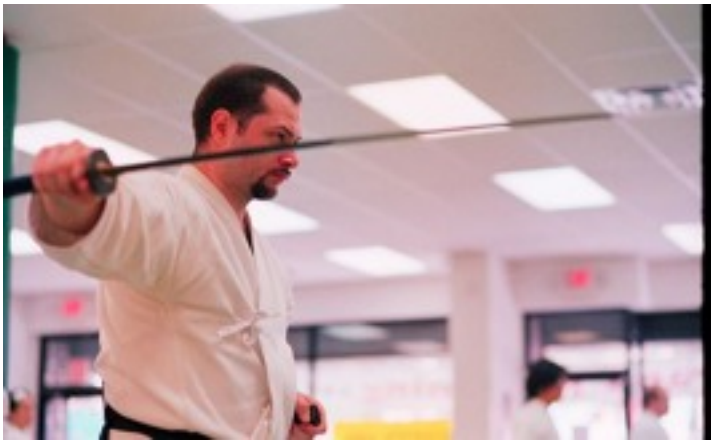
Full Circle: From Student to Teacher and Back

By Michael Mason
Honbu Dojo & Shinkendo NY

I started my training in Shinkendo officially in February of 2004. But I had chosen Shinkendo several years earlier. I had picked up a copy of Crimson Steel at the local martial arts shop in the 1990s, and would pester my stage combat friends with quotes from the book. "Why do we do X when X makes no sense?"

After meeting my wife and moving around the country, we ended up back in NYC in a part of Queens that was, luckily for me, home to the only authorized dojo in the Northeast at the time, under the able instruction of Sensei Lou D'Agostino. I watched two full classes, then signed up.

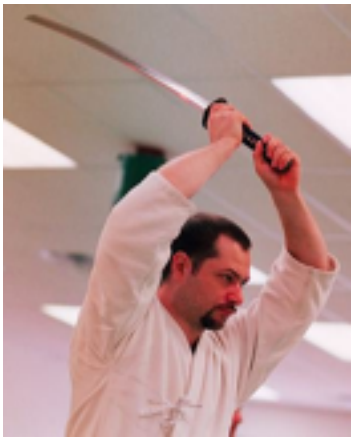
It was, in many ways, like going home. Shinkendo was the first sword art that made *sense* to me. Everything was done for a reason, and most of those reasons were pretty clear. Safety first, then continued good training. Focus on individual pieces while keeping them integrated into the whole.



Lou-sensei is a great teacher. He has a knack for breaking down technique very clearly and has (no coincidence, I'm sure) the best collection of notes I've seen. I lived very close to the dojo at that time, so I was able to go to almost every class, setting some attendance records, and generally making a sweaty nuisance of my self. We got to know each other's timing very well. I'm particularly proud of a video he made of us doing side-by-side tameshigiri in near perfect timing (YouTube "Shinkendo paired tameshigiri").

An added benefit of studying in NY was the opportunity to travel to and help host seminars with Obata-kaiso. During these seminars, I got to train with many great students and instructors. With Lou-sensei and on my own, I've been to seminars hosted in NY and travelled to Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, and California. My thanks to all the seminar hosts over the years.

It was at these seminars that I began to think: (1) maybe I could teach this someday, and (2) I would like to train at Honbu for an extended period. Luckily for me, I was able to do both.



After a few years of training, I achieved my junior instructor license (Kenshuin). Lou-sensei and I began exploring options for expanding the Shinkendo New York locations. Eventually, after an experimental period in Manhattan and some time off, I ended up finding a karate dojo in Brooklyn that a friend of mine ran. I became "Sensei Mike."

I was lucky: I had a small group of great students, and I had a support system nearby in Lou-sensei and my senpai, Dave Mancuso-sensei. I taught two or three classes a week in Brooklyn, and tried to get out to Queens as often as I could to train with Lou-sensei and David. But the journey wasn't over for me (are they ever?).

After teaching in Brooklyn for more than a year, my wife and I realized it was time to make a big change. She's an actress, I'm a Shinkendo-ka… It was time to move to Los Angeles. I was worried that my departure would leave my students in a rut, but thankfully Dave was able to take over and continue what I began. I couldn't have left the dojo in more capable hands.

I was very blessed in finding work and an apartment before we moved. I now live and work in Santa Monica, California, a short walk from the beach. I'm able to get to Honbu 2-3 times a week now, training directly under Obata-kaiso and Yukishiro-nidai soke. It is a tremendous opportunity. I'm back to just "Mike-san" (#2). My next goal is to get to some of the European seminars with Obata-kaiso, maybe in 2012. Eventually, I'd like to live closer to the dojo and take more aikido classes, but for now I'm simply grateful to all the people who've helped me on my path to get here, particularly Obata-kaiso, Lou-sensei, and David-sensei.

I look forward to teaching again in a few years, but for now, trying to be "deshi" is quite enough. When you come out to Honbu for seminars or training, say hello. I'm the big scruffy guy breathing too hard in the middle of the line, with a goofy smile on my face.

Thank you all. Jinsei Shinkendo!

Letters From Amsterdam

By Millaray Crawford & Reginald Soerodimedjo

Dear Kaiso,

I was only at the seminar on the Saturday for Shinkendo, but I really enjoyed it. I learned a lot from watching all the experienced sensei. I also really liked the atmosphere and that there were so many people.

Hoping to see you again,
Millaray Crawford

Dear Kaiso,

Again, it was a great pleasure to receive your guidance at the recent seminar in Amsterdam, Netherlands. This is the second time I've experienced your teachings.

The length of this seminar differed from the previous seminar: five days of training Aikibujutsu unveiled some techniques that I had not yet understood during the previous seminar. Defense variations, locks, pins, etc. were much more clear as I applied them this time. I really enjoyed the bojutsu training, as last time I couldn't keep up with hand-exchanging movements on the bo.

You're always welcome to come back to Amsterdam, and I hope to see you soon at the Honbu Dojo.

Sincerely,
Reginald Soerodimedjo

2011 May Instructors Seminar at Honbu

By Dr. David Birdsell
Moline, IL

The 2011 May Shinkendo Instructors Seminar was conducted by Kaiso Toshishiro Obata and his Honbu instructors, including his son Yukishiro Obata. The training was from May 27-29. There were approximately 20 hours of martial art topics presented to those participating in a workshop format over the three-day weekend.

A myriad of martial art knowledge and training was presented by Kaiso Obata. The training sessions included everything from Shinkendo nito-ken, refinement of Shinkendo tachiuchi, and bojutsu, and concluded with Shinkendo tameshigiri (test-cutting) on the final day.

Kaiso demonstrated some very crisp samurai sword cutting with two swords (nito-ken) on various targets. The tameshigiri cutting was so smooth and quick, which made it hard for one to perceive the actual sword movements. Many of the other instructors were coached and critiqued by Master Obata during the tameshigiri session.

Sensei Lynch performed an impressive three-stand cut with precision, clarity, and skill. Sensei Crane from Chicago practiced nito-ken tameshigiri while wielding two samurai swords, cutting through straw targets on the cutting stands while receiving critique and suggestions from Kaiso Obata. The Shinkendo instructors that participated were from Illinois as well as very helpful Honbu instructors who shared their Shinkendo skills with the participants.

May marks the 21st anniversary of the founding of Shinkendo by Kaiso Obata. The Honbu provided a great meal on Saturday evening, which was enjoyed by all who came to celebrate. The next Shinkendo Instructor's Seminar is scheduled later this year in October. All Shinkendo instructors and advanced Shinkendo students should plan to attend this high-level martial art seminar that is conducted twice a year at the International Shinkendo Federation Honbu in Los Angeles, California. We hope to see you in October!

Kaiso's Second England Seminar

By Byron Shepherd
Milton Keynes, UK

This year, Obata-kaiso returned to England for his second Shinkendo seminar. I remember when I first started Shinkendo in 2005. I was studying under Wayne Kensett-sensei and Brent Hire-sensei at the time. On many occasions we discussed the possibility of bringing Obata-kaiso to England, but every time we concluded that our group was not big enough and that we would be unable to do it. As time progressed, Shinkendo in England underwent a transformation. I began studying under Obata-kaiso directly and Wayne-sensei retired from Shinkendo. With time, I began to know Obata-kaiso and many opportunities to talk with him presented themselves. Kaiso would often recount his only story of England to me, which was that he had once stopped in Heathrow for two hours and was impressed that they had signs up in Japanese as well as English. He would always finish his story by saying that perhaps one day he'll be able to visit England. It was not until I met with Kaiso at the Hungarian Seminar in 2009 that I started to take the idea seriously. On this occasion, Kaiso introduced me to the Hungarians as the English Instructor, but followed up his introduction by adding that perhaps one day someone from England will invite him to host a seminar there. In May of 2010, I invited Kaiso to England to host the first English Seminar. Now May, 2011, it has been my great privilege to host Obata-kaiso for the second time.

Kaiso arrived in England on Wednesday, May the 4th, having just spent the week before teaching in Poland. On the day he arrived, he taught a two-hour Shinkendo class. The class focused on Battoho Ichi No Tachi, a form that I had learnt at the start of the year at Keiko Hajime. It's amazing that in no less than five months the form had not only changed but had been enlarged.

The next day, Thursday, Kaiso took the morning off. After a short breakfast, he accompanied me back to my house to watch the DVD of Ueshiba Doshu's seminar in England. Afterward, Kaiso took coffee and cake at Patisserie Valerie. You can't get much more English than having your afternoon coffee and cake at a restaurant chain that was ordinarily founded in Harrods, and made famous by the Queen eating there. Later that afternoon, Kaiso taught an Aikido and Shinkendo class. Kaiso focused on Ikkajo. Kaiso explained: if you can do Ikkajo well, then you have a good starting point from which all Aikido techniques can later be performed.

The next day, Friday, we took Kaiso to Woburn Abbey. Woburn was originally founded in 1145. Over time, the Abbey has been destroyed and rebuilt numerous times. The modern town of Woburn is still very traditional and is

home to multiple antique shops. The Abbey itself houses many treasures, which have been accumulated from various wars and conquests over the centuries. Halfway through the Abbey, Kaiso turned to me and said that he wasn't enjoying his time there. I asked him what was wrong; he replied that it was all very nice and beautiful, but joked that he was disappointed that he couldn't buy any of it to take home. Later that evening, Kaiso held another Shinkendo and Aikido class. In Shinkendo, he introduced us to Fumikae Migi Waza, and in Aikido we continued to concentrate on the Ikkajo controls, but this time from Shomen Uchi attacks.

The Official UK Seminar began on Saturday, May the 7th and ran until Monday, May the 9th. The format for each day was three hours of Aikido, three hours of Shinkendo, and one hour of Bo. This meant that Kaiso was teaching for roughly seven hours a day. Kaiso's limitless energy never ceases to surprise me. I asked him if he was happy to continue with this schedule or whether he would like me to reduce it slightly. Kaiso just smiled and said, "You set it and I'm an honest instructor, so I will follow it." Such humility from a master instructor is so rare, and I honestly feel that, as Shinkendo-ka, we should be grateful for such a fantastic headmaster.

The foreign students and instructors who attended the seminar included: Stéphane Molina and Cuc Phan from France, George Konstantine Laskaris from Greece, Mischa de Brouwer and Dedmer Sierksma from Holland, and Ben Depuydt from Belgium. I would personally like to thank these students and instructors for taking the time to visit England and come to our seminar – domo arigato gozaimashita! Your presence there helped to make the event even more special.

During the seminar, the Shinkendo training focused on Battoho Ichi No Tachi. It began to dawn on me just how useful this set of techniques is. If you think about it, it includes all of Kaiso's major body movements in one set, i.e. steps, jumps, forward turns, back turns, turning under the sword, etc. Each movement begins with Battoho Ipponme, but then digresses into a tool capable to refining good, smooth and stable body movement. Furthermore, when done in a square formation and sōtai, the form dynamics and the mobility of Shinkendo really come to life. As Kaiso says, it really begins to look nice – and as I'll mention later, aesthetics matter.

The Aikido training was far more diverse in that we tended to concentrated on the Ikkajo controls, Nagewaza, Ushirowaza, and the Bogyo forms. Kaiso's main point of concentration was not so much the number of techniques that we practised but rather our understanding of the

distances and the ease of movement that we share with our partner.

On Monday, Kaiso took the morning off. This gave Kaiso ample opportunity to visit the local stone circle, which lies just outside of Milton Keynes Lake. Kaiso's eye for detail with regards to these old stone monuments is truly remarkable. Kaiso told me that when he studied at the temples in Japan he learnt that every part of the aesthetics has some special meaning. It was from these studies that he learnt to discern what the details might mean. But these studies also helped him to think about aesthetics elsewhere in life. Furthermore, when coupled with his martial artist eye, this helped to make his attention to detail flawless.

Tuesday, May 10th, was Sensei's last full day in England, so we took him to Stowe. Modern Stowe is situated in the heart of Buckinghamshire. The nice thing about this locality is that it is situated in a part of the country that can only be described as untouched by time. Whilst there, Kaiso came across an old tree. The significance of the tree, Kaiso explained, was that if you cut the tree in half, you can mark the rings and match them up to key dates – for example, the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603), the Battle of Sekigahara (1600), etc. Then he talked about the creation of modern day Aikido, which was established in the 1940s. He followed this by talking about the creation of his Shinkendo school, which formally began in 1990. As he says, given that Shinkendo has only been around now for just over 20 years and that the number of worldwide dojo has already grown to a staggering amount, someday the Shinkendo organization will be massive – just like this tree. Kaiso explains that Shinkendo is only in its baby stages; it has not yet even become a teenager. As Shinkendo-ka in the initial stages of the art's growth, I think that we should count ourselves part of a privileged and unique few. To be able to help the organization grow in our respective countries at these early stages is truly an honour few martial artists could ever boast. I think that we should remind ourselves of this every time that we rei to the Shinkendo flag. Our positions might be privileged, but there is also another side of the coin. Like the pharaohs of past, we don't want to go down in history as being the ones who caused the dynasty to fall. It is true that we have a great responsibility to ensure that the integrity and qualities of our arts are safeguarded, as our actions reflect on our teacher and, in turn, his organization. But, like all kids, the lessons of our parents can only go so far. It is our responsibility to ensure what type of adult we grow into. It is perhaps useful to think about this and the analogy of the tree every time that we train in order to truly consider how we present ourselves and how far our training is progressing us.

Later that evening, day seven of the training began. After a week of rigorous training, we welcomed a brief respite as Kaiso spent time discussing intermediate techniques with us. As he explained: you can learn plenty of techniques and routines, but these are only really starting points. When you're new, you tend to think that the more routines you know, the better skilled you are. But this is not necessarily true. I must confess that Kaiso's explanations here really

changed my way of thinking in a big way. I can honestly say that perhaps this was my defining point in Shinkendo. To explain: as Kaiso says, the more advanced you become, the greater you need to concentrate on the way that you present yourself, your balance, your body shape, your form, and your attitude. These principles are not developed by swinging the bokken aimlessly through routine practice over and over again. They are not developed by knowing more routines, techniques, or being super strong. Instead, they are honed through "mindful" practice. The Shinkendo-ka needs to slow his form down, concentrate on how he engages with his partner, and consider his tempo, timing, and attitude. By doing so, he focuses on his aesthetics, which in turn enhances his professionalism. This is the kind of teaching that lasts a lifetime and can never truly be perfected or completed. It is what the public sees and how our arts are perceived. If Shinkendo is to grow into an adult worthy of note, it is this side of us that we need to focus on the most and refine the best. It is what must, and should, stand out, and what will set us apart from others. It is this professionalism that will carry us forward, not the number of forms we know. I think that this is a valuable reminder to us all. It is certainly the main principle on which I will be focusing as I move forward.

On Wednesday, May 11th, we said our goodbyes to Kaiso. As he sampled one last Old Speckled Hen, his favourite English beer, he asked us to seek their sponsorship for our 2012 seminar. Whilst I cannot guarantee this, I will certainly promise to try. Kaiso's parting was a sad occasion, and we missed him immensely. On behalf of Shinkendo UK, I would once again like to thank Kaiso for taking time out of his busy schedule to visit England, especially as my timetable was not the easiest for him to complete. It was an honour to host him again, and we look forward to seeing Kaiso back in the UK in 2012. Until then, Sensei, we miss you and continue to wish you good health. Until we meet again, Jinsei Shinkendo!