

News from Honbu

Europe and New York

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Sensei's Corner

By Toshishiro Obata

I attended two seminars in September. The Georgia seminar was held from September 9th to 13th with about 45 participants. We went through Aikido, Shinkendo, Bojutsu, Tantojutsu, and Shinkendo. Many students of the Atlanta Budokan dojo have practiced for many years, so their levels are high and we had a very enjoyable seminar. Randy Beard Sensei from Arkansas attended the seminar and wishes to organize an Arkansas seminar next year.

The second seminar was in Munich, Germany took place from 9/21 to 9/27. This was my first seminar in Munich, with about 70 participants from England, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Hungary, France, and Germany. Four Aikido instructors from Poland drove 900 kilometers (12 hours) to ask me to teach an Aikido/Shinkendo seminar in Poland next year.

I have been having seminars in Europe for 10 years now, and this Germany seminar was the 19th trip to Europe, and the 6th visit to Germany. Before Peter Felber Sensei took me to the Oktoberfest, we went to see the longest castle in Europe. The castle was near the Austrian border, and has a length of 1040 meters. This was the 45th castle that I have visited in Europe! We also went to a cave on the side of a mountain where we can dig salt.

After the seminar on Friday, I joined 30 members in a trip to Oktoberfest, and drank beer under a tent. There were probably eight or nine thousand people in the tent with us singing, drinking, and having a good time. There were about 12 more tents of this size. The mayor visited the dojo on Friday when the seminar started; he also came back Sunday after training was over with beer and crackers...so we had a small celebration. The seminar went very well; the only thing I don't like about Europe is the long flight.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 A MAP OF FRANCE
- 3 OBATA SENSEI SEMINAR IN NEW YORK!
- 5 NEW HORIZONS AND... A YEAR LATER
- 8 OBATA KAISO AND YOKO OBATA VISIT
- 10 SHINKENDO EQUIPMENT SAFETY
- 12 MY FIRST SHINKENDO SEMINAR
- 14 TOUR DE SHINKENDO - PART II
- 16 SAMURAI ARTS SEMINAR

Computer Woes

I bring to you a September/October Edition instead of a simple September Edition due to a Trojan virus that nearly devastated all that was Shinkendo on my computer. Those tricky Trojans...

Thankfully I salvaged many of the articles that were submitted so I was able to complete this. But if anybody notices that something they submitted a while back hasn't made either this or the August issue then please send it again right away to news@shinkendo.com

Like the August issue, we have here a jumbo sized newsletter thanks to the continued chronicles of Kaiso's visit to New York. There are so many great contributions from the Modern Samurai Dojo that we have to spread it through separate issues.

Tosh Daley of the Mesa, Arizona Dojo details his personal experiences with Shinkendo journal style on page 5. I think all Shinkendoka can relate to his Journey.

Those who have or are planning to buy their own shinken should study Brian VanSpeybroeck Sensei's article on sword maintenance.

Nicholas Lauridsen's 3 part special on his European Tour, continues into France and Dresden, Germany in this second installment.

Oh, and for a smile (literally) check the back page!

NEWSLETTER STAFF

PUBLISHER

OBATA TOSHISHIRO KAISO

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

MICHAEL C. SHU

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

RAYMOND BOUTET

MICHAEL MASON

TOSH DALEY

DAN CORDERO

BRIAN VANSPEYBROECK

ERIC BAUER

NICHOLAS LAURIDSEN

A Map of France

By Raymond Boutet, Kenshuin
Kamakura Dojo - Perpignan, France

If you want to know how far you can practice Shinkendo in France, you will need a map. In the far South of France, along the Mediterranean Sea and close to the border of Spain, there is a little town under the sun: Perpignan. It is situated much closer to Barcelona, Spain, than Paris.

If you don't find it, ask Obata Kaiso. He visited us in October 2000, during a seminar organized by Adrien Six, president of the "Association Française de Shinkendo". We were very lucky and honored to host a Shinkendo seminar with Obata Kaiso in our little town. We have been practicing Shinkendo in Perpignan since 1998. We are few but have already had several opportunities of meeting Obata Kaiso during his European seminars in Paris, and recently at Effingen, Switzerland thanks to Joseph Sturm Sensei.

Any problems with our English so far? English is not what we practice the most... but, with Obata Kaiso's slight "Scottish accent" (that's how it sounds to us), we understand the essentials and also that Shinkendo can easily be learned in Japanese...

So if you have a chance to visit the South of France don't forget to visit our dojo.



Obata Sensei Seminar in New York!

By Michael Mason, Student – Shinkendo New York



This past weekend, we were thrilled to host Shinkendo NY's first Seminar with Obata Sensei. Because of limited space, we split ourselves into 3 groups. Group 1 consisted of senior students (ranked), Group 2 (my group) was for some of our intermediate students (most of us just achieved Ichimonji), and Group 3 had our new students.

Obata Sensei immediately impressed us all with his enthusiasm and energy. I am particular struck by the pure joy he brings to teaching. With Yoko Sensei's invaluable assistance, he led us through a few basics before launching into some tachi-uchi that most of us hadn't really done before. Ironically, the hardest thing for most of us was the kiai. It's funny how hard it is to say "Ei-Ya-To" when you are trying to do so many other things. All in all, it was a great first day with Obata-Sensei for my group.

I stayed to observe the next group and was privileged to observe Obata-Sensei instructing, and without having the added stress of DOING. Obata-Sensei broke *ashi sabaki* movements down into simple pieces. While this initially confused a few people, it became clear that after a few times, people were really improving their smoothness by relaxing. Each piece seems much simpler on its own afterwards, and combining them seems much more natural. Obata-Sensei's emphasis on natural movement and relaxation was a total revelation to me. I knew beforehand that smoothness will bring speed later, but haven't really been able to apply it in a natural and relaxed way. Seeing both Obata and Yoko Sensei demonstrating such relaxed fluidity to every movement really gave all of us something to think about.

The next day, we took a new direction. We were lucky enough to learn some Basic Bo techniques and even some Aiki-Bujutsu (Lou Sensei having just joined the federation's aikibujutsu). This is a real treat for us, because we currently don't study the Aiki side of Obata Sensei's technique at our dojo. However, recently Lou Sensei has introduced us to some basic self defense scenarios, as well as the skills required for *ukemi*. I think it has really inspired us all. We can't wait to start a study group when Lou Sensei is ready.

I was particularly lucky, since I was chosen to be *uke* for Aikido in some demonstrations. It had been a while since I had been *uke*, and although Lou-Sensei had been preparing us with basic break falls and rolls, I forgot perhaps the most crucial element...

There I was, having been the recipient of some sort of joint lock, flat on my face with my arm hopelessly trapped behind me, body screaming at me to make it stop, and all I could say was, "WOW, OUCH, YIKES, NICE TECHNIQUE! WHOA! YEE! ACK!" After what seemed like 10 minutes (but I'm sure was more like 15 seconds) during which the pain level got (inconceivably) higher, I hear Lou Sensei whisper at me... "Mike-San, Tap out..."

OH YEAH! I knew I was forgetting something. "WHACK!" went my free hand on the mat. Oh blessed release... Obata-Sensei was grinning from ear to ear. It took a few minutes before my arm stopped sulking and resumed obeying my commands. Luckily, my error seemed to prove instructive for my fellow students, none of whom made the same mistake. We spent the next day doing more Bo work, which seemed to please everyone concerned.

Sunday morning was reserved for Tameshigiri. For many of us it was the first time performing tameshigiri (myself included). After a very helpful and practical instruction from Obata Sensei, we got up and cut individually. Nerves were evident, and not all of our cuts were clean, but Dan Cordero turned out to be a natural. After Dan cut (his first time), Obata-Sensei pointed out how natural, smooth and relaxed his cutting was. If memory serves, the word "perfect" may have actually been used. We have videotape to prove this...

I went right after Dan (ack, the pressure) and acquitted myself tolerably well, if perhaps not "perfect". Obata Sensei gave me some good things to work on. I need to straighten my wrists at the end of my cuts, relax my shoulders and use a touch less power. I was definitely relieved that all of my cuts dropped some mat to the floor, with the exception of one *kesa* cut that merely "shaved" the mat (a bit high, that one).

Obata Sensei also pointed out a more practical error that I made. I had my sleeves rolled up above my elbows. When Obata-Sensei noticed this, he stopped for a second and discussed in some detail why this was a bad idea. When drawing the sword, (which I did not have to do that day), the extra fabric can protect your forearm in the event of bad technique or a slip, since the edge is facing up. We all instantly recognized the practicality of this. All in all, a great experience. Special thanks to Lou Sensei for loaning us all a shinken. His generosity has really set high standards for us.

We had some more classes that afternoon, which focused on the Bo. We were definitely excited to have an opportunity to really get some of the Bo kata closer to a memorized level. The dojo was a little tight, but we adjusted and had a great time.

By this time the mental strain was starting to show, as we began to make simple errors. Luckily, it was almost time to relax. Terry and some of the other students who had finished for the day were already preparing for our seminar closing party.

I really cannot say enough about the amount of work Terry put into this whole event. She is always a top notch host, but this time she outdid herself. She even had a cake with Obata Sensei doing the honors of cutting, and the Shinkendo Logo on it specially made for the event. I didn't need to eat for a week afterwards.

All the students who attended had a great time and learned a lot. We have a lot to think about and practice later, and are looking forward to our next training with Obata and Yoko Sensei. Special thanks to Lou Sensei for all his time and hard work preparing us for this and making all of it possible.

New Horizons and... A Year Later

By Tosh Daley

- Discovery
- First Impressions
- Learning Curves and Frustrations
- Testing
- Training with Obata Sensei
- Reflections and the Journey Ahead

Discovery

The idea of handling a sword has been a dream of mine ever since childhood. At the age of 22, my dream became a reality when my girlfriend, Angela, came across an ad in the yellow pages for Shinkendo Japanese Swordsmanship. I never thought that training in an art like Shinkendo was even possible except maybe in some hidden-away dojo in Japan kept secret from the outside world. I decided instantly to call for more information. Surely, a real Japanese sword art being taught here and today had to be some sort of gimmick, right?

I called the number listed on the ad and a man by the name of Jeff answered. He gave me a brief description of the curriculum and set up a time for me to come in and watch a class. It just happened that I was able to watch a class that night. What I witnessed that night excited and amazed me. The fluid movements, the sounds, and the intense energy observed was like a time-warp into the days of the samurai. I knew then that this discovery would open a new chapter of my life.

First Impressions

After I was able to watch a class, I set up a time to participate in an introduction to Shinkendo. This would be a chance to handle a bokken and learn a little more of what Shinkendo was about. I remember being somewhat nervous as I approached the dojo. I took my first step into that humid, energized room not knowing what to expect. Sensei Marlene greeted me and introduced herself. She instructed me to remove my shoes and find a place on the mat. The students were gathered in small groups, some of them stretching and preparing for class while others shared stories of their day.

As the class began their normal warm-ups, Sensei Jeff introduced himself and directed me over to the back mat of the dojo. Here, we began the intro with a brief description of the Shinkendo curriculum and basic studies. After a few moments of discussion and answering a few questions, it was time to begin the hands-on part of the intro. Sensei Jeff handed me a bokken and began to go over some of the basics of handling a wooden sword. He went over things like grip, re-sheathing, stances, basic set-up points, etc. It was at this point that I realized how clumsy one becomes when given an external tool to incorporate into their basic body movements and mental focus. Basically, "it's not as easy as it looks"!

By the end of the intro, I was completely addicted and hungry for more. I decided then that if Jeff and Marlene Sensei would accept me that I was most definitely ready to sign up and become a new student. As I began to attend regular classes I slowly began to feel comfortable and form various new friendships. By the time I made it through my first month, I felt like one of the group and realized that I had definitely made a good choice. I had not one but two Senseis, always willing to help me with any problem I would encounter. I had also

found a great group of people to train with, who like Senseis were always helping me learn new things and overcome new obstacles. As I began to see new horizons, I felt comfortable in that these first impressions were good ones.

Learning Curves and Frustrations

After the first month of acclamation, I was still in a state of awe as I watched that class around me at different levels of skill and accomplishment. There wasn't a day that went by that I wasn't learning something new, some detail in movement or proper blade angle, even terminology and phrases of a new language. Even though to some this might have seemed like a constant mental overload, I remained blissful and eager to learn. I was eating and sleeping Shinkendo. It was all I could do to stay focused enough throughout the day to perform my job.

During the first few months, I continued to learn more and more, and began to see myself change physically and mentally. It was at this time that I also came up against my first frustrations. Some of these frustrations, like hand and feet coordination, speed and breath control were easily conquered with a little extra focus and practice. Other frustrations like blade angle, footwork, and precision and movement are frustrations that to this day continue to au me. I now know that learning curves and frustrations will always be a part of training. Learning to work through these phases will play a major role in increasing my skill and understanding in this art.

Testing

After about 4 months of practice, it became time again for testing. I was shocked to find out that I was invited to test for the first level of Ichimonji. I had one week to prepare for my test. This included learning proper manners for conducting oneself during a test, as well as practicing all material learned thus far.

Over the next week, I practiced intensely, ironing out any last details, making sure I understood my material. The day of the test arrived and myself and a few others gathered at the dojo for testing. My nerves were on edge, palms sweaty and there were millions of thoughts running through my mind. The atmosphere in the dojo had changed. What once was a melting pot of conversation and intense training had now become a silent chamber of serious focus. This heightened my sense of apprehension.

Sensei Marlene gave the call for everyone to take their place on the mat as testing was now to begin. As the test began, Sensei called upon different students, either singly or in groups. As the students began their tests, I sat patiently on the side of the mat, feet cramped from sitting in *seiza*, completely focused on the testing in progress. As the last group of student's test came to an end, Sensei Marlene called for myself and one other student to take the floor. As I stood up, I could instantly feel the nervous sweat begin to pour, my hands were shaky and my breathing was completely uncontrolled. Before we began, Sensei Jeff and Marlene talked to us a bit about what they expected at this level and reminded us that although our first test was an important step in our training, it was also not expected that our material be perfect. There were mistakes made during the test, mistakes I thought would surely cause me to fail this test. The test came to an end and was followed up with a few words from the Sensei. They began by saying, "we are proud to say that everyone has passed their test". I couldn't believe my ears. Finally, a big relief came over me and I was able to breathe again. It was then I realized that testing was not about perfection, but about improvement and understanding of the material given to you during class time. Perfection is left up to the student.

Training with Obata Sensei

The week following the test, Sensei announced that they were planning a trip to L.A. to train at the Honbu Dojo with Obata Sensei. There was no way I could miss a chance to train with the Master of Shinkendo. I began saving

my money the very next day. Those of us who were able to go, began preparing for the intense training we were to experience in a few short weeks. As we neared the date of our departure, the excitement grew within everyone. I still could not believe that I was going to train with Obata Sensei. I was nervous and excited all at the same time.

Finally, the day came and we set off towards California. Chris, (a fellow student /practitioner) and myself were able to hitch a ride with Jeff and Marlene Sensei. It was a long ride to L.A. but we kept the time flying with plenty of good conversation. We arrived in L.A. somewhere around midnight. Tired from the ride over we drug all of our luggage down to the hotel lobby.

Chris and myself stayed in Sensei's room that night as our reservations weren't valid until the next day. That night in Sensei's room, the four of us, somewhat goofy from the long ride over, stayed up watching Sumo on Japanese TV and sipping wine. After a few hours of shut-eye, we woke up refreshed ourselves and hit the streets of Little Tokyo L.A. for some breakfast. We spent most of the morning exploring the many shops of the Little Tokyo Square. We walked a short way to the Little Tokyo shopping mall to see the Honbu Dojo before training that evening. I was amazed by the size of the dojo. The Honbu Dojo resides in what used to be an old bowling alley. Although the Honbu mats don't fill the entire space, there is more than enough room for future expansion.

Back at the hotel, as the evening rolled in, we began the ritual of preparing for training. We set off for our first night of training with my nerves rattled and boiling with excitement. As we entered the dojo, there stood Obata Sensei and Mrs. Obata. There he stood, alive and in person. Sensei introduced Chris and me to Obata Sensei and Mrs. Obata. Obata Sensei then asked all of us to take our places on the mat. The training that night was intense and very detailed; Obata Sensei has an eagle's eye for the minutest detail. At times, it was difficult to know what Obata Sensei expected of us as there was a slight language barrier. But as time passed, my ears grew adapt to his English. At the end of class Obata Sensei shared a few words with us about training and what part Shinkendo plays in each of our lives. He simply put it, "life is hard, Shinkendo is hard – life is Shinkendo". At the end of the third day of training, Obata Sensei and Mrs. Obata graciously invited us to have dinner at their house. We all arrived at Obata Sensei's house at 6 p.m. sharp, as we were instructed.

Mrs. Obata had prepared a wonderful meal, full of various choices of American and Japanese food. Together we shared a long evening of interesting conversation and cold drinks. Mrs. Obata's margaritas were a big hit. Witnessing Obata Sensei off the mat was definitely a memorable experience. That night showed me the true wisdom, compassion, and intense effort Obata Sensei has for his art and his students.

On the trip back home, while discussing our training with Obata Sensei, I started to grasp how much I truly learned in that short amount of time. I brought home with me a new sense of understanding and appreciation for the Japanese culture and Shinkendo.

Reflections and the Journey Ahead

It is now a year later. I have a few more tests and training trips under my belt to add to my experience as a practitioner. I am still discovering different aspects of my self and my training. Reflecting upon the last year, the discoveries made, the learning curves and frustrations, testing and plenty more training trips with Obata Sensei, give me a sense of achievement. Shinkendo has brought me self-confidence, compassion towards my fellow person, and commitment. Shinkendo has helped my rediscover a passion I once had as a child, that innocent feeling of knowing no boundaries. In the beginning I looked towards reaching my destination. I have only now begun to realize that there is no destination, there is only the journey.

Obata Kaiso and Yoko Obata visit: Shinkendo New York seminar

By Dan Cordero



Evelyn & Dan

It seems that I was initially unable to follow Kaiso's instructions because I do not speak Japanese. It became obvious to me that if I relaxed I could follow his instructions. I found that after the initial shock of actually meeting and having the privilege of being taught by Kaiso himself, I could follow his instructions in English. This was the first time I met Obata and Yoko Obata and I was not sure of what to expect even after being advised by Sensei Lou D'Agostino and my sempai as to what behavior was expected from me in terms of etiquette.

I was grateful to have had Yoko Obata present at our seminar here in New York. She was helpful in many aspects. In particular I recall her in your face approach to Shinkendo instruction. I felt as though she were a sergeant taking the time to show me on a one to one basis what the technique is supposed to be compared to what I was doing. I interpreted her straightforward style of instruction to suggest as if she were saying to me, Obata Toshishiro and I have flown and traveled many miles to visit and instruct you and I'm taking the time to demonstrate how you should employ the technique. So take full advantage of this opportunity and get it right! I am glad to report that I was only one of the many who received such excellent and personal instruction. She was great and I only hope that I get to have the opportunity to receive instruction from her and our Kaiso again.

I am also thankful for their patience, especially Kaiso's level of attention to the smallest of details for example; I in particular was told that I should hold my waxwood with the correct tenouchi. I should have been more focused on my technique. What matters most about this incident as well as many others was the level of detail, which our Kaiso would go into in regards to every aspect we covered during training. I am grateful to have such critical instruction from Obata Sensei. I appreciate the effort on their part and I will try to put my maximum effort towards being as good a Shinkendo-ka as I can.

At the Conclusion of Our Shinkendo Training

Our Shinkendo training and the entire experience was much more than I had expected. The introduction of Bojutsu and Aikido gave me a deeper look into our samurai training. I am certain most of us if not all are looking forward to the addition of Bojutsu and Aikido to our training.

A New York After-Training BBQ dinner

First I would like to thank My Sensei, Lou D'Agostino and his lovely wife Terry for delicious BBQ Dinner. If you consider all of the effort that it takes to prepare for a seminar as well as hosting Obata Kaiso and Yoko Obata one can assume anyone doing so would be at the end of their rope in regards to stamina. Now let us add to that preparing a BBQ Dinner for approximately thirty or so people. I can not forget the fact that many Shinkendo-ka as well as their family took part in helping make this event possible. A few helped with the cooking, others helped in any way they could and many assisted in running errands which no one person alone could do by themselves. I can tell you that from where I stand I feel proud to belong to such a group of quality people.

As to Sensei Lou and Terry's hospitality, I offer you my sincerest thanks. Not only for these things but also for the many others you both offer us so openly.

At the BBQ several of us had the honor of receiving our Ichimonji rank from no other than our Kaiso, Obata Toshishiro himself. It was very enlightening to have spent some personal time with Obata and Yoko-san at the BBQ. Our Kaiso isn't a touchy feely kind of man. I would describe him as serious and reserved. That being said, I believe I had the opportunity to see a more relaxed side of him during the BBQ dinner. He told us a few stories and shared some of his past experiences with us all

I realize I am but a beginning Shinkendo-ka, however I would like to recognize our Founder and his daughter's fine manner and patience with us all at the New York Modern Samurai Dojo. Ni-rei! to Obata Kaiso and Yoko.



Shinkendo Safety and Equipment Maintenance

Brian VanSpeybroeck – Shibuchō – Aki Kaze Dojo - Moline, Illinois

Greetings, fellow Shinkendoka. Kaiso recently asked me to contribute something to the newsletter and I immediately began to scour my brain for an appropriate subject for my contribution. So, a quick refresher on safety, where shinken and training equipment are concerned, is the order of the day. The subject is the tsuka (handle) of your shinken and I have some quick suggestions regarding your maintenance and repair routines regarding it.

Please remember that it is your responsibility to maintain your sword and all of its components in safe condition. It is natural and normal for items used in daily training to require some amount of maintenance and repair in order to function properly and in order to get the most service life out of your training tools. Well maintained equipment not only performs better but it also gives one that extra sense of safety and peace of mind at demonstrations and during cutting practice.

Before using my swords to perform tameshigiri, I always perform the following routine to assure safe and proper functioning and make notes about wear and damage to the various components of the sword. It may help to keep a notebook and a schedule of maintenance similar to the notes or maintenance schedules that people keep on their automobiles. Before cutting, and at regular maintenance intervals, I disassemble the sword by removing the mekugi (bamboo retaining pins) from the tsuka (handle) and laying all of the mounting components out on a table in front of me. I note the condition of all components and especially the condition of the mekugi. There should be two retaining pins in all swords used in the practice of Shinkendo and they should be made of bamboo and be in good condition. Mekugi will last for many years but should be replaced with new pins if the old ones are becoming frayed or cracked looking in any way. There has been some advice floating around on the internet for years suggesting that chop sticks be used to replace worn mekugi and I can not recommend this practice. Some chopsticks are indeed bamboo and some, like the disposable kind from restaurants, are cheap and flimsy wood and are not suitable for use in this capacity. Bamboo is very fibrous and strong yet resilient and proper bamboo for retaining pins should be fine grained and well aged and dried. Mekugi can be improvised from a variety of things but my suggestion is to purchase bamboo exclusively for this purpose from a reputable source and make your own or refer the job to a craftsman skilled in such repairs. Ask your sensei for help finding someone to do this work for you if you do not feel up to doing it yourself.

Next, observe the condition of the tsuka core by removing the fuchi and checking for cracks in the wood. Sometimes the seams will split on the wooden core and you can feel the nakago shifting in the wooden core or hear noises from loose fittings when you swing the sword. This situation of having a cracked tsuka core must not go unrepaired. If the foundation of the sword handle is cracked or damaged in such a way as to allow the nakago (tang) to shift, usually a new tsuka is needed. Inspect the inside of the wooden foundation for cracks and opened seams by shining a flashlight down inside of it. Also take this time to inspect the mekugi ana (retaining pin holes) in the tsuka as sometimes cracks will propagate from the holes from having the retaining pins driven into them too tightly too often or as a result of humidity and temperature changes that cause the wooden core to swell or contract. Improperly sized or improperly installed mekugi will sometimes split or crack the wooden core as well.

Sometimes a tsuka core will develop some amount of looseness or play due to wear or because of humidity changes. This is not always a case for replacing the entire assembly. Sometimes paper or very thin strips of wood can be inserted into the inside of the tsuka in order to take up the extra space. A shim made of paper often works wonders when you feel a little "give" or shifting of the nakago inside of the handle while cutting but the core seems sound and not cracked or compromised in any other way. Much like adding an extra seppa (spacer/washer) or changing to a thicker seppa next to the tsuba (guard) will take up extra space and looseness and thus prevent

rattling sounds during the cutting stroke or while drawing or sheathing the sword. The file marks on the nakago create a rough surface which will grab the inside of the tsuka core. The entire assembly was designed this way. But if the sword has been disassembled many times, or if the original inlet into the tsuka foundation was carved to allow too much looseness or give, the nakago may shift a bit under stress. Try inserting some thin paper strips and see if this solves the problem.

Inspect the wrapping over the tsuka for cut and fraying tsuka ito or for loosening wraps or cracked and disintegrating same' (ray skin) under the ito. Usually these are not things to be overly concerned about but a deteriorating condition should be noted and suitable repairs should be kept in mind. Loose tsuka ito is distracting as it may allow the entire sword to slide around in the hands while cutting and is generally indicative of poor maintenance. It is difficult to maintain/attain proper tenouchi (grip) when the ito is shifting or loose under the hands of the swordsman. Samé is the skin of a ray and it tends to dry out and crack when used vigorously for many years and subjected to sweat, body oils and humidity. Please remember that the tsuka of your sword is a consumable component. That is, it is not a question of "if" it will ever need to be replaced, rewrapped, or repaired; it is a question of "when" it will need attention. Many antique swords with original mountings were originally mounted as display pieces and less attention was given to creating a mounting that was robust enough to stand the wear and tear of routine use. Always keep a close eye on tsuka components as the mount ages and is used for practice.

Take the time to check the tightness and for a secure fit of the kashira at the end of your tsuka. Sometimes these components have not been properly secured and as the ito stretches from hard use they will pop off of the end of the tsuka. This will result in the ito unraveling off of the end of the handle and a rewrap of the entire handle will result! I have seen this happen on some very well made swords but usually it is a result of cheap craftsmanship on the part of the craftsman who made the handle. If you discover that your kashira is loose, you will usually also notice that the ito is loose near the butt end of the tsuka. Sometimes the kashira can be secured with a drop of glue administered with a needle like applicator that can be pushed up into the end of the kashira when it is pulled gently away from the end of the tsuka. There is no need to use epoxy or some very strong glue for this application! At some time in the future the kashira will need to be removed for the creation of a new tsuka core so use a glue that will enable the kashira to be removed with some force at a later date. The use of two-part epoxy is not recommended for this kind of repair. Use silicon RTV or some type of water-soluble glue to facilitate future removal.

While the sword handle is removed, take the time to slide the habaki off of the sword and to clean and inspect the blade under it. Look for cracks around the hamachi as dropped swords will often chip at this location if they are dropped onto the kissaki even if they were in a saya at the time. Also, this is a good time to clean and oil under the habaki to prevent rust and damage to the polish in this area.

The tsuka is where the swordsman interfaces with his weapon and training tool and its integrity is of paramount importance. It is subjected to a considerable amount of wear and tear especially if you use it to perform tanrenkata and batto-ho as well as tameshigiri. No matter how well you look after it or how well it was originally constructed, it will eventually succumb to the rigors of training and hard use as well as the elements and it *will* need to be replaced, rewrapped, or repaired. Please be vigilant and safe and inspect all of the components of your training tools for the signs of degradation and take a proactive approach to maintenance. Please remember that safety is very important in the practice of Shinkendo and take every opportunity to insure that an accident never happens because of faulty or worn out equipment.

My First Shinkendo Seminar

By Eric Bauer



Eric B. Bauer- Standing second from left

We all have reasons for doing things: for adventure, historical, religious, or even medical reasons. I have never studied any of the martial arts (I have a fear of tumbling). Therefore, when I heard about Shinkendo at Modern Samurai Dojo, I thought I would try it.

I explained to Lou Sensei, that I was a klutz (a very slow and clumsy learner). He explained to me that it did not matter if it took a day or a year to get a movement down – as long as I came and kept trying, I would get it.

Therefore, I summoned up what little courage I had and went to my first class. People were turning left and right going back and forth. I am thinking to myself, “What did I get myself into?” Lou Sensei and my Shinkendo brothers and sisters would nod and say in time you will get it too. Over time, slowly it started to make sense, and I looked forward to each class.

During class, Lou Sensei or one of the senior students would sometimes tell us about Obata Kaiso, the founder of Shinkendo. As time went on and I heard the wonderful stories, I wondered to myself, “how much of this is fact?” Could one man have such charisma to demand such a loyal following of teachers and students alike? Therefore, when Lou Sensei told us that Obata Kaiso and his daughter Yoko were coming to NYC to do a four-day seminar, we were all in awe.

In the weeks to come, one could feel certain electricity building in the class. We wanted to work harder. At the end of class, Lou Sensei would sometimes say, “Who wants to keep training?” We would all chime in at once and say yes!

To many of us it was like a big extended family coming to visit. We all took pride in helping Lou Sensei and Terry get the dojo ready for Kaiso and Yoko’s arrival.

After months of training, the big day was upon us. I was to be in the Beginner's Group or, as we were called, Group 3. We would have six hours of instruction from the Master himself and his daughter Yoko.

No matter how much we prepared, we did not know what to expect. Standing there before us was the man whose books and videos we have studied for countless hours, Obata Toshishiro Kaiso. After bowing in to Obata Kaiso, Lou Sensei and Yoko-san, we started our warm up stretches. Sensei Obata was a commanding presence. He worked us very hard that night in the basics of Shinkendo. All the while, he was measuring us to see what our strengths and weaknesses were. By the end of class, I was happy Lou Sensei prepared us so well. I could not wait for the next class.

On the second day, Obata Kaiso not only taught the basics but also started us on some advanced drills. Though it was sometimes hard to catch on even the third or fourth try, he never lost his patience with us. Though he was a man of few words, you could tell he was pleased with our progress. He started to tell us about himself, the Japanese culture and customs. It was very interesting.

On the third day, it as like a dream come true. We started working with the Bo Staff. This has been a life-long secret dream of mine (though to me it was the Little John of Robin Hood fame) since I first heard of Staff Fighting. The class that day was like in slow motion, I never wanted it to end – it was that good. I never knew you could do so much with a Bo Staff. Toward the end of the class, we were all tired. Sensei Obata looked an all of us and said, "Take off your hakama now!" He told us that we were coming apart at the seams. Once we took off our hakama, he showed us the proper way to fold a Hakama for traveling. Then he proceeded to show us how to put on a hakama. The trick he said was how to tie it (that paid for the seminar itself).

On the last day, we were invited to watch advanced students perform tameshigiri – some for the first time. For me, this was one of the high points of the seminar. To watch the Master, Obata Kaiso, and Lou Sensei cut was an honor by itself. This was the start to a great day. However, the best part was when Obata Kaiso started to analyze all the students that morning. When he got to Daniel C., Sensei Obata just smiled and said one word. "Perfect." Daniel only started a month before me so I was glad that I could share in his happy moment.

That evening there was a big party at Lou Sensei and Terry's home. Thank you again for opening your home to us, Terry, the food was great. We were all aglow. It was something akin to the rush the soldiers get when they survived survival training. You feel you could conquer the world. Obata Kaiso was telling us some funny stories of when he was a student studying martial arts. We all laughed so hard everyone was in a jolly mood.

Then came the time I thought I would never see – I received my first degree in Shinkendo, Ichimonji. Obata Kaiso himself presented it to me. I have gotten many honors and awards in my life, but none that has meant so much to me as this.

This has been a great experience for me; one I wish would be on a yearly basis. Obata Kaiso, I wish I had more time to talk to you; I am still a little shy around you.

Oh, I forgot to tell you, remember in the beginning of the story I said I was afraid to tumble? Well, I finally tumbled the other day in class for the first time with Lou Sensei's help. After I did it, Lou Sensei looked me in the eye and said the hardest part is over – you did it! Maybe there is hope for me yet.

Tour de Shinkendo – Part II

By Nicholas Lauridsen

Perpignan, France

After a wonderful time visiting Deuser Sensei and his family in Pfedelach, Germany, I set out for Paris, spending a few days at the Louvre before taking an express train down to southern France, toward Perpignan. Raymond Boutet Sensei, a student of Christian Saguer Sensei (the shibucho of the *Centre d'Arts Martiaux Yakushi*), had been in contact with me since he knew English quite well, and picked me up from the train station. Boutet Sensei was an extremely friendly man, with a wonderful sense of humor. I had unwittingly arrived a bit early – the next class session was not for two days, but Boutet Sensei insisted that I stay at his house for the interim. After about half an hour, I felt like one of the family.

Over the next few days, Boutet Sensei and his wife Cichit fed me (most often delicious Laotian fare, which was a new experience), took me on tours of the city (including a stop to see the medical clinic where he works), and showed me some of the many historical sites in the area. Just a stone's throw from Andorra and the Spanish border, Perpignan was an outpost town from ancient times, and therefore most of the city was cradled in a magnificent sandstone wall stretching around it. We visited the impressive fortress within the walls, also fashioned completely from sandstone block, from which we could see the Spanish mountains and the acres of vineyards all around.

The following day, Boutet Sensei took me to Saguer Sensei's beautiful dojo (see website <http://homepage.mac.com/kennesten/tourdeshinkendo> for pictures). Since a very young age, Saguer Sensei has studied a unique form of bojutsu that employs the *goshaku* (about five feet) bo, and his demonstrations for the class were exceedingly skillful. The class was a healthy size, most traveling from many miles away to attend, and thankfully there were several students who understood some English and could translate my words of gratitude to them all.

Afterward, Boutet Sensei, his wife and I went off on an excursion to see the fairy-tale castle town of Carcassonne, which had been beautifully reconstructed from ruins and now looks much like it must have in its time. We spent the afternoon wandering the winding cobble streets and poking into the little shops and restaurants, where I got to taste some authentic French country cuisine (including a really good *cassoulet*). We said our farewells at the train station, where I boarded a train bound for Nimes.



The medieval fairy-tale castle town of Carcassonne in Southern France

Dresden, Germany

After a stay in Nimes, I stayed in Paris briefly, and then took a *nachtzug* (night train) to Dresden, where I settled in and was delighted to discover a very Berkeley-esque atmosphere. The city of Dresden was subjected to extensive bombing during World War II, but has since recovered beautifully, with several enormous reconstruction and restoration projects in full swing when I visited, some nearing completion. With its unique architecture, its intellectual subculture,

and a little bit of friendly mayhem every now and again, it was one of my favorite cities among those I had visited in all of Europe.

I established myself in a bar/hostel on the north side of the river, and with half-directions (street but no number), traveled by taxi across town into the suburban section of Dresden.

Thankfully, the street was only four or five blocks long, so after just a short traversal I found Wolf-Peter Murawski Sensei and his students stationed outside a high school. I had met Murawski Sensei the previous summer when he accompanied Deuser Sensei on a visit to the Honbu dojo. His Shinkendo Dojo Dresden was newly founded, but he had discovered an excellent training space in a gymnastics room of the high school, and it was a pleasure to practice there. That evening, Murawski Sensei picked me up from my hostel and, along with two of his students; we all went out for a great dinner and an exciting midnight tour of the city. It was wonderful seeing Murawski-sensei again, and a delight to meet his students and wander around a centuries-old city with them for company.



Wolf-Peter Murawski Sensei (middle) and two students of Shinkendo Dojo Dresden on a midnight tour of the city

to be concluded...

Samurai Arts Seminar

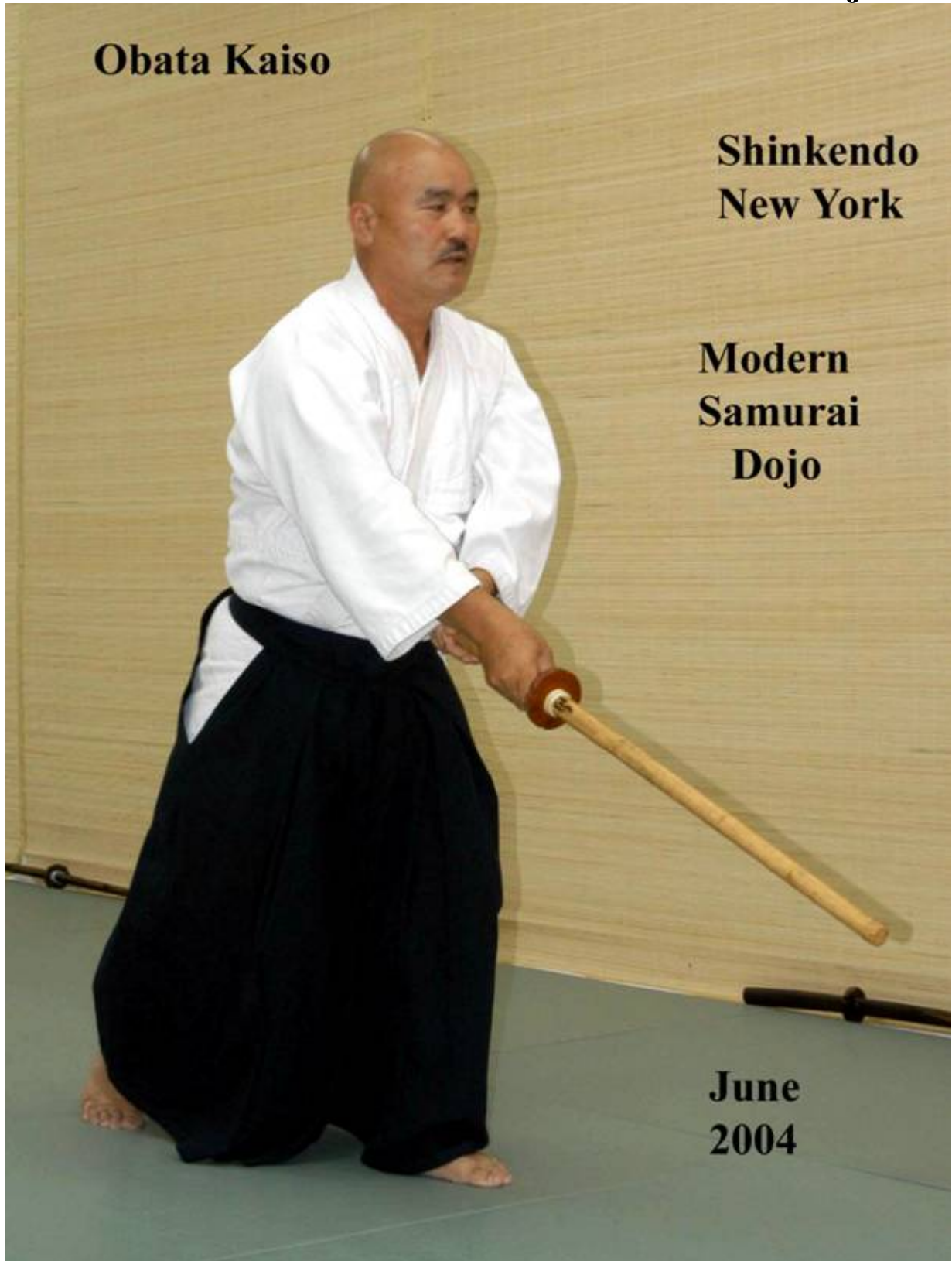
At

Shinkendo New York - Modern Samurai Dojo

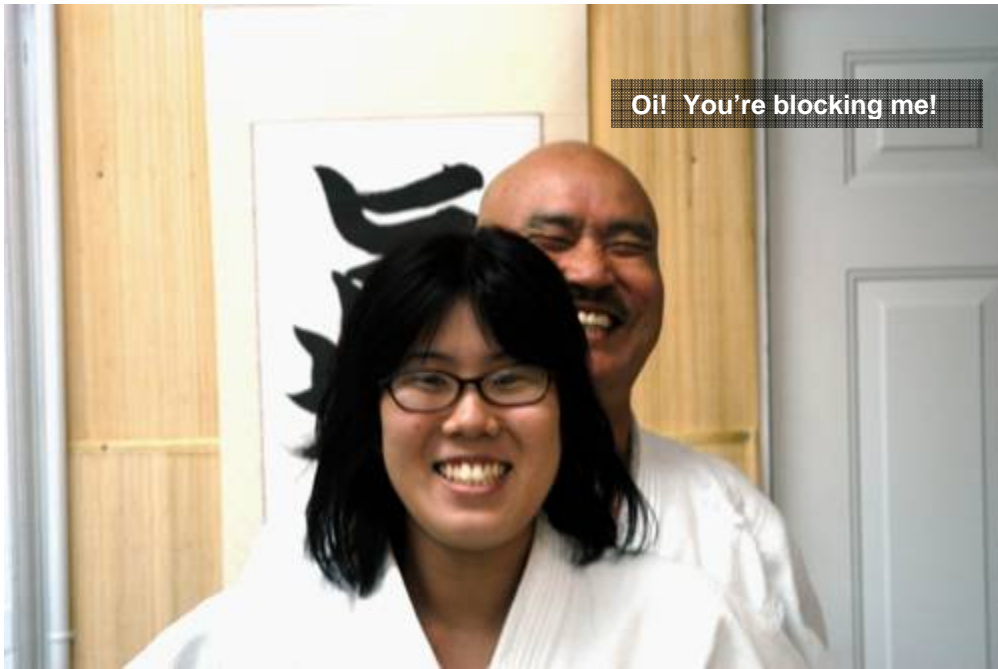
Obata Kaiso

**Shinkendo
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**June
2004**



Thank you Obata Kaiso, and Marimo!
Jinsei Shinkendo

