

Samurai News from Honbu



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Word from Obata Kaiso

By Obata Toshishiro Kaiso

2010 will be my 30th year in California. I believe that Shinkendo will be going into its second generation. I have seen many good students move on with their lives, and many instructors retire. 30 years is enough time for a high school student to reach a mature age and their own high school student to the dojo for training, and a man of 30 to reach 60 years old. Although times have changed greatly in 30 years, it is still very refreshing to see young students come to the dojo and train earnestly. In that way, there is very little change in the dojo and the attitude of new students, but there is a great growth in the foundation as the students from years past have developed into mature individuals and great students/instructors.

Shinkendo is still a growing, developing art. As a budo, it is alive and takes a part in your daily lives. I hope to see the Shinkendo community grow and work together. I hope you will all be there to see Shinkendo develop.



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INSTRUCTORS AT THE HONBU FALL SEMINAR

By Dr. David Birdsell
Shinkendo Shihan

The fall International Shinkendo Federation Instructors seminar was conducted on October 15-18, 2009. The Shinkendo instructors of the International Shinkendo Federation have the opportunity to train together in the spring and fall seasons each year at the international Honbu. The purpose of the seminars is to help the Shinkendo instructors get more personalized instruction under the scrutiny of Shinkendo founder, Master Toshishiro Obata.

Often, when at their own dojos, an instructor is dedicated to helping the participating Shinkendo students and often will not have time to be able to help develop their own Shinkendo skills. The seminars presented by Kaiso Obata are a quality controlled management of Shinkendo instructors in the International Shinkendo Federation. Master Obata covers all aspects of the samurai sword art, Shinkendo. The dedicated Shinkendo students from the Honbu are also very helpful to visiting instructors by assisting Obata Kaiso with their example and expertise to help add additional quality to the seminar.

The five aspects of Shinkendo training presented are: Suburi, Tanrengata, Battoho, Tachiuchi, and Tameshigiri. The Suburi includes all sword strokes and variations in the Shinkendo system of samurai swordsmanship. The Tanren or “mind hardening” Shinkendo Katas are reviewed in detail by Master Obata with the participating instructors. Also, the Battoho which are a shorter version form is another aspect of the training. Great lengths of study time are dedicated to Tachiuchi at the instructor’s seminar that included many prearranged Shinkendo sparring sequences utilizing one or two sword (Ni To Ken) approaches.

The last of the five areas of study presented in Shinkendo was Tameshigiri or samurai sword test cutting. At the most recent seminar at the Honbu Dojo in the Little Tokyo region of Los Angeles, Kaiso Obata presented two person cutting routines of targets on two and three stands. These were unique approaches to a potentially dangerous stand cutting procedure which requires advanced timing and sword placement by both Shidoka.



During the three day seminar, Master Obata shares Shinkendo philosophy with the participating instructors. The Shinkendo instructors at the seminar were from Illinois and Georgia. One of the areas covered at the recent seminar was the student’s attitude during training sessions at Honbu and in individual dojos. Obata Kaiso reiterated that he has studied martial arts for forty three years and that time together is short and infrequent for instruction. Kaiso stated that “even if one is bored with the training that they should not act bored in respect to their teacher who has dedicated a great part of their life to the advancement of Shinkendo.”

A huge part of being an active Shinkendo student is to be able to self motivate yourself to mentally and physically grasp the samurai sword concepts that are being presented by the instructor. Of course, eating healthy food and getting proper rest are keys to



preparation of the Shidoka for extended training in Shinkendo. These beneficial life styles would help ones concentration and focus during the seminar presentation. A Shinkendo instructor must constantly cultivate their thinking and training habits to perfect their sword skills by relentless and tenacious practice efforts.

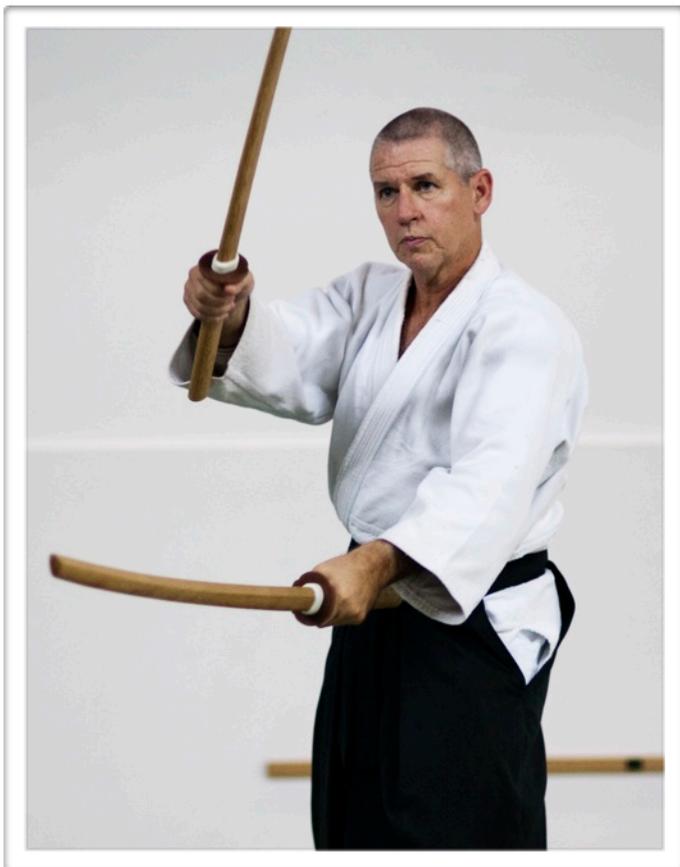
Having the privilege and honor to train with Obata Kaiso for the past twenty four years, like many other Shinkendo students, we have been able to observe many changes and progressions that have been developed by its founder. Obata sensei has compared his ongoing progression as positive development of Shinkendo just as Disneyland is always improving their theme parks with better rides and services. Shinkendo is an ongoing process that will continue to grow and improve under his tutelage.

The spirit of the samurai is embodied in Shinkendo training. The statement made by the Lexus automobile producer appropriately describes Shinkendo's ongoing development of this martial art as "the relentless pursuit of perfection". Shinkendo is life and life is Shinkendo. We look forward to the opportunity to train in future seminars with Kaiso Obata thanking him to his personal dedication to teaching and development of Shinkendo.



“Illinois Reverses Weather Trend”

By Stephen Bertsch
Illinois



the aikido class. That invoked a mile wide smile to our faces.

“Insights”

With a small group (6) in attendance, Kaiso was able to focus more closely on our individual techniques and helped tremendously in fixing and refining smaller details. A trend carried throughout the seminar and aided greatly with the additional efforts of Yoko sensei, Nicholas sensei and Matthew sensei... Kaiso instilled upon us the importance of raising our level of awareness and feeling in our sword work, and not to settle for “just going through the motions”.

Thank you Kaiso for continuing to make Shinkendo such a wondrous adventure!

For some reason, Illinois students have had a track record of often bringing rainy weather from Illinois with them when they travel to L.A. This year’s October Instructor’s Seminar saw that trend reversed when Stephen Bertsch and Blake Meyer from Yamakaze Dojo and David Fazio and Raheem Syed from Iwanami Dojo left on a rainy Thursday from Illinois to arrive with sunshine and near record temperatures in L.A. Also contributing to the warmth and sunshine were fellow Illinoisan Shihan David Birdsell and Mary Giles from Georgia. That warmth and feeling of wellness carried over to the seminar as Kaiso continued to lead us into new areas of awareness in swordsmanship.

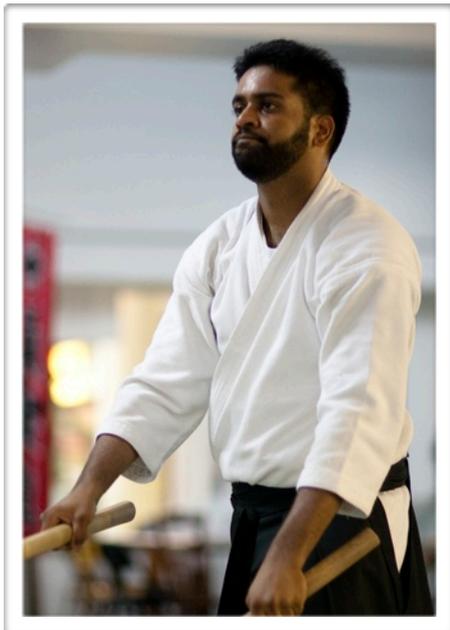
“A family affair”

Our arrival at the dojo for regular classes on Thursday evening brought us the welcome sight of the ENTIRE Obata family (father, mother and all three siblings), on the mat for



“音魂(Otodama) 言魂(Kotodama)”

By Raheem Sayed
Iwanami Dojo, Illinois



Although this last instructor seminar was my fifth visit to the Honbu. I experienced many “firsts.” The night that we arrived, I was privileged to see the entire Obata family on the mat during the Aikido class. It was a first for both me and all of the other Illinois Shinkendoka I had traveled with. This also was the first Honbu seminar I attended with so few attendees. Making up for the lack of attendance from out of state was the presence of Honbu instructors. It was truly a pleasure to train with Yoko Sensei (for the first time), Nicholas Sensei (for the first time), and Matthew sensei. I would like to thank the Obata family and everyone at the Honbu for another informative seminar and their welcoming hospitality.

What wasn't a “first” was the demonstration of Kaiso's ability to inspire and instruct us in Shinkendo. As always, Kaiso uses great anecdotes to express and teach the application of theory within Budo. One anecdote I particularly enjoyed was on the topic of “kiaï”. On Sunday, during our last few hours of instruction, Kaiso yelled out “Kiai, Kiai! Kiai!” He shouted in response to our kiaï being weak.

Obata Kaiso explained “Otodama Kotodama” is a concept that best describes when two people communicate face-

to-face. The first word begins with 音(oto) meaning sound.

The second word begins with 言(koto) meaning words.

The suffix 魂(dama) is spirit. Kaiso continued to explain that words are “living” and that there is meaning in sound. To illustrate this point, he provided some examples. If a doctor were to say, “Your face is looking pale today.” You may end up believe you are sick, regardless of how you actually feel. Words are powerful. When you're in a dark room and someone shouts, “Abunai (danger)!!!”, you respond even though you can't see the danger.

Kaiso further explained, when a person practices Shinkendo with a weak kiaï, that person is practicing with a weak 精神(seishin - mind, spirit or soul). Kaiso finished

the anecdote by saying, you should raise your Kiaï intensity high while your partner does the same. One kiaï then becomes louder than the next, going back and forth until neither of you can go any higher! Hopefully I can truly understand Kaiso's teachings by putting them into practice! I hope to see you all next year at a Honbu seminar so I can feel everyone's otodama kotodama!

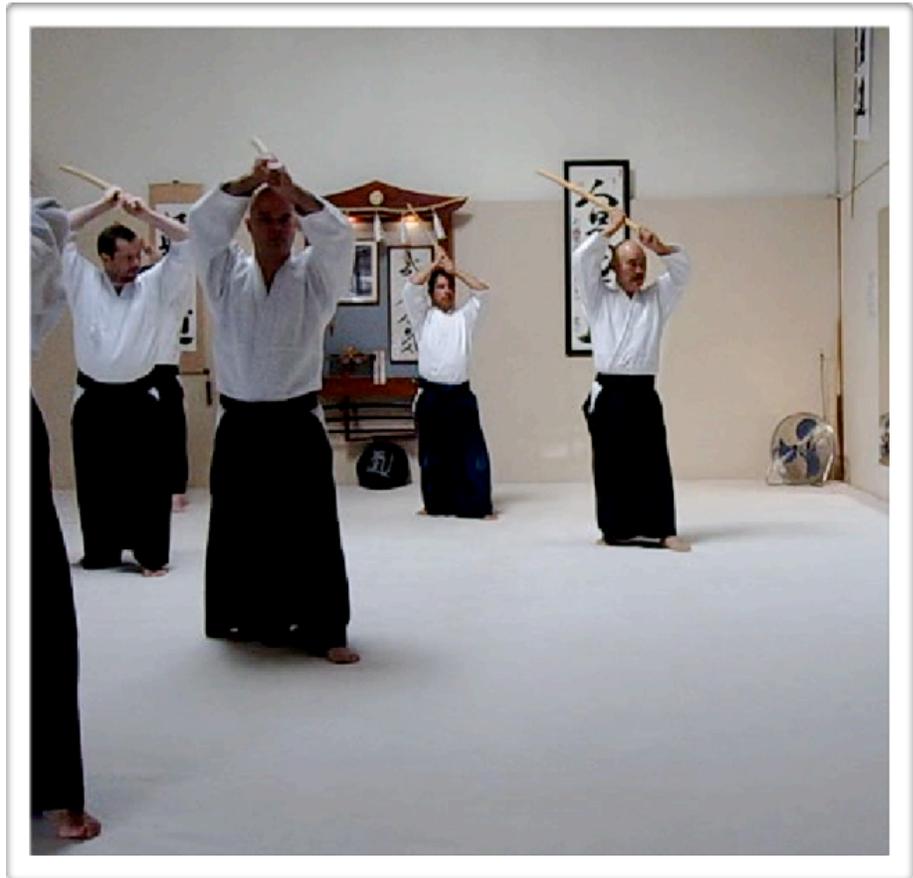


Obata Kaiso Visits the Shinrei Dojo

By Jim Alvarez
Livermore, CA

Kaiso graced us once again for our early Autumn weekend Shinkendo seminar. He arrived early on Thursday for a special outing I planned to the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco to see the Samurai Exhibit. I had gone previously a few months back but was excited to be able to go with Obata Sensei to hear his comments on all the displays. All I can say is that it was a wonderful treat to hear him explain, as only a few people could, the details about each exhibit. He was especially pleased to see a display of 10 tsuba. We spent a lot of time there admiring the stunning work that produced these exceptional pieces. Some of these tsuba Kaiso has only seen in books so he was amazed to see them in person. I confessed as I believe he did that we both wanted to reach through the glass and handle them. When we got to the display of the five scrolls of Musashi's Go Rin No Sho (The Book of Five Rings) he started to read them aloud as a small crowd listened. Kaiso loves stone carvings so our next stop was the third floor to see the Hindu and Buddhist stone carvings where he inspected, marveled and commented on each one.

After a long day we headed back to my home in Livermore. Located in Northern California, the temperature for this time of year can range from the mid 70's to over 100. The weather was predicted to be hot for the next several days and the weatherman was correct. Thursday afternoon's temperature was not so bad and we relaxed a bit at my home before coming to



the dojo for an informal class with my students before the seminar.

Matthew Lynch Sensei and Jason Ives from Hombu dojo arrived at my home on Friday afternoon and we set the target stands up for a tameshigiri session with Sensei. I think the last time I had done any cutting in Kaiso's presence was over 14 years ago so I was a bit excited to demonstrate. None of my students could attend this early session so it was just Matthew and I cutting.

Having him there proved to be just what I needed. He suggested cutting patterns that I had never thought of and, true to Shinkendo principles, if you do your suburi practice correctly with

cutting in mind then your tameshigiri practice will be exact. I felt pretty good to have pulled them all off in front of Kaiso. Matthew Sensei did equally well to top off the afternoon.

The seminar began in earnest on Friday night. The Shinkendo community in this area is not big so we were pleased to also have in attendance Margarita Jimenez and Rowdy Hall Sensei's from Seikishin Dojo in Morgan Hill with a couple of their students. Also in attendance all the way from New York was Michael Mason Sensei from the Brooklyn Dojo. It started with Sensei introducing a new tachiuchi, Tomoe - Shin Gyo So, filled with, you guessed it, a mixture of kirikaeshi, makiuchi, kaishiuchi,



and tomoe movements. Starting with Shin, Kaiso explained that its concept was very precise movements like those used in Japanese calligraphy where the kanji is clear like block printing.

Saturday turned out to be a hot day but we launched into the next set of movements, Gyo, that morning. Here the movements become a little more flowing, again using calligraphy as an example. Like going from block printing to cursive in Roman script. This set was shorter with more action from both Shidachi and Uchidachi. The last part, So, was the longest with much more action as Shidachi and Uchidachi moved in circular patterns in both directions. I can imagine that this last part, once I can memorize the order of the pieces, will flow like the wispy calligraphy you can sometimes see

on woodblock prints or kakemono. Kaiso devoted some time in the afternoon on Saturday to the demonstration patterns he has developed. This will be especially helpful as we prepare for the demonstration we will give for our 20-year anniversary next month. What great timing!

We spent Sunday morning going through the Batto-ho patterns from kihon to henka as well as Tanren Kata. I love this part of all seminars as it gives us all a chance to show Kaiso what we know. I can concentrate on each part to show him my best and get his suggestions on what I need to do to improve my technique. The rest of the day he sat off the mat and just watched us review what had been presented during the weekend. If you thought he wasn't paying attention you were wrong, he often

got up and gave some personal recommendation or correction to each of us in the group.

This was Kaiso's second visit to our dojo in Livermore and we are extremely grateful that he can find time in his schedule for this seminar. We are eagerly anticipating his next visit.

Teaching

By Daniel Savoie
Rimouski Dojo, Canada

One day, I decided to go see what was Shinkendo. Quite a tough decision when one thinks it's definitely not for him, but I went anyway. Thus, I began Shinkendo in Rimouski's dojo in 2002 with sensei Bruno St-Pierre. It was my younger sister, Magali, who told me about this art she was practicing for a few years. I wasn't really convinced because I didn't see the practical side of Shinkendo. My name is Daniel Savoie and I live and work in Rimouski, Quebec, Canada.

My debut wasn't so glorious. I had a lot of bad habits for I was self-learning other types of sword combat styles. But the more I was practicing Shinkendo, the more I was enjoying it, so I kept working on it. I really hooked on Shinkendo with the coming of sensei Obata in 2005. That year, I met an authentic samurai! I was already eager about the Japanese culture and I was thrilled by his presence. So, I prepared myself to meet him by learning the basics of Japanese formal greetings. I thought I was ready, but when I arrived at the convention's location, the first person I met was Kaiso himself. I was so impressed by him that, as a reflex, I accidentally slipped a "Konichiwa Sensei". I kept calling me an idiot for so long because I couldn't say what I had prepared.

After that convention, my interest in Shinkendo kept increasing. Fifteen sessions later, I haven't upgraded much due to the fact that, according to me, the quality of the learning is more important than a piece of paper. I'm restraining myself to a limit of 1 grade per year of training, to make sure I reach a level of mastery I'm judging necessary. What is important to me is to honor this art by doing it well.

Recently, I discovered a new passion regarding Shinkendo: teaching it. Since last year, my sensei and sempais convinced me to take my instructor grade even though I was only of Santen grade. They believed that my level of knowledge, as well as my desire for perfection were enough to fill the gap. I took on that challenge while I was working on getting the Shiho grade. It wasn't a piece of cake for I've always wanted to reach the best quality possible in knowledge and practice. Therefore, my implication regarding the Shinkendo club kept growing. I am now in charge of the logistic and organization of all the demonstrations and conventions.



During our last convention in June 2009, I had the honor and pleasure to talk with Kaiso and to perfect my knowledge of some Japanese expressions. It was wonderful! I do hope to be up to the art created by Toshishiro Obata, and I also wish to participate in a lot of conventions with Kaiso.

To all the readers of this message, I tell you this: Keep on working hard and have fun doing it. I hope to meet you someday in one of Kaiso's conventions.



Update

By Obata Toshishiro Kaiso
Founder, International Shinkendo Federation

Currently many of the dojos are at a level where Tachiuchi practice is done at a higher level, speed, and with variations. I recommend using Tsubas for the bokutos, since it will deflect the bokutos from hitting your hand. We currently offer two types, one is where the center is circular for the round waxwood bokutos, and there is another one where the center is more oval shaped for regular bokutos. You can find leather tsubas [HERE \(click for web page\)](#)

