

Samurai News from Honbu



Taisai (10/20)



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Sensei's Corner

By Toshishiro Obata

This year there were 10 seminars outside of Los Angeles, and 17 branches trained at the Honbu. Many branches have already scheduled their seminars for next spring. I also hope to go to Europe 3 or 4 times next year in the summer and autumn.

The Honbu Keiko Hajime is the second week of January; I hope to see you all there! Bring shoes or tabi (for those of you who might end up practicing tachiuchi off the mat on concrete).

I hope that 2005 will be another safe year for instructors and students. Please be careful when handling swords, and also during tachiuchi. I heard some news from an old student of mine, that many people in other organizations bought cheap swords (from \$300-\$800) which broke during practice. The tips broke off on many swords, and hurt the owners. One person almost cut the tendon in his arm. So please refrain from cutting with low end swords.

Most importantly, take care of your health!



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Oct 21, 2004 – Taisai - Kaiso's Birthday Photos!

Commentary by Michael Shu
Photos by Don Hirose

On the evening Oct 21st, 2004, members of the Honbu Dojo, Tsuki-Kage Dojo, and Mashuu Dojo all trained together under one roof. It had the feeling of a seminar, with the Honbu Dojo packed as it was that night. But that night we trained together to celebrate the birthday of Obata Toshishiro Kaiso by filling the Honbu with all of our energy, our kiai resonating throughout the hall.

Obata Sensei paused class from time to time to tell us stories. Most memorable was his story of how his grandmother teased him by throwing hot coals at his feet, thus teaching him good ashi-sabaki. After class we all joined together in a potluck, where all students toasted to Obata Kaiso's birthday with sake (under 21 had root beer of course).

It is Kaiso's wish that all dojo around the world make it a tradition to celebrate both Shinkendo Sosetsu Kinenbi (Shinkendo founding anniversary) on May 10th, and Taisai on Oct 20th.

Enjoy the pictures! Thanks goes to Honbu student Don Hirose for photographing the event!





Sake!

More sake, Nathan!

Sake!

The Honbu



Tsuki Kage



Mashuu



Atlanta Budokan 2004

By Shawn Foristall

This year's Atlanta Budokan seminar went very well. It is always nice to see familiar faces from other dojos, and this year we had over 50 students and instructors attending from Atlanta Budokan, Japanese Swordsmanship of Gwinnett, KiKen Tai Atlanta, Atlanta dojo of ISF/AL-GA, and special thanks to Sensei Beard of Arkansas for making the trek. For those who could not make it this year, we hope you will be able to come train with us next year. Here is a review of this year's seminar.

On Friday morning we arrived early to start training. Obata Kaiso launched the seminar off with a series of eight waza starting from a blind standing position. In these waza, uke is in migi tegatana and simulates holding tanto to tori's back. The spring gymnastics floor was a welcome factor for the first spinning takedown choke-out, which was a major hit with everyone present. This technique is reminiscent of older hard style jujutsu kihon waza and incorporates quick, close grappling and a hard takedown. These waza are a not so subtle reminder of the devastating effectiveness and martial veracity of our art. With a spring floor to practice on, we were able to get in many repetitions, which some of us enjoyed perhaps a bit too much (we're seeking counseling). One can imagine only a few repetitions of this on hard mats before uke begins to break down, and it is easy to see how hours of this type of waza could earn the old Kobukan a nickname such as Jigoku-dojō (Hell dojo).



Sensei Jim Stratton as attacking uke, as Obata Kaiso explains mawari for this technique

After a vigorous hour or so of practicing, Kaiso moved directly into Yokomenuchi Sanbon Ichi and Ni. This series of waza was a direct relation to the material Kaiso covered at last year's Budokan seminar, and stresses many of the main points of aikibujutsu including blocking and striking, blending and timing with uke's attack, control of balance, taisabaki, ashisabaki, and proper center alignment. This is a rewarding drill to show students exactly in which areas

they are in need of improvement. Since we had several Ikkyu and Shodan present, Obata Kaiso then tested our ability in demonstrating these principles effectively for the group.

During lunch breaks on Friday and Saturday, Obata Kaiso was quite generous in allowing students to ask questions about a wide range of topics. It was an excellent opportunity to hear Kaiso speak about his life experiences. It is an

important part of training is to reflect on these life lessons from those who are wise in order to develop bushi damashi. This also helps one to understand the principles of our style and the manner in which its creation occurred.

After lunch, we worked through bo-san techniques to get the blood moving again. Once warmed up, it was time to move on to some new bo handling drills, bo versus bo waza, and bo versus sword, which is always a fun way to re-establish maai and a sense of reality for the Shinkendoka among us. Practicing more with the bo, the swordsman realizes the advantages of the yari, naginata, nagamaki, and other pole arm weapons, and one is left with a healthy respect of the proficient use of them. The yari (spear) is an important historical weapon in Japan. By ancient Japanese legend, a yari was given to the god Izanagi no Mikoto, from the lord of heaven. From the tip of this spear, the land of Japan was born of mud and water. While the yari's role may seem less romantic than that of the sword in Japanese history, it would be sheer folly for a Samurai to ignore its potential in combat. It is a distinct privilege to learn this weapon form from someone as knowledgeable and skilled as Kaiso.



Sensei Beard and Sensei Kibler demonstrate yokomenuchi sanbon series.



Students drilling bo waza

We finished Friday with Shinkendo, working our way through all of the Tanrenkata one by one. Our new shinkendoka got a taste of what lies ahead in their near future. Later in the evening, instructors got a taste of Cajun food at the instructors' dinner with Kaiso at Fee-Lay Gumbo, an eclectic, southern, Cajun restaurant with original artistry paintings displayed on the walls and live blues music. Then, it was off for home and a decent night's sleep leading cavalry troops in one last brave death charge against the Nobunaga gunners and Tokugawa army on the plains of Nagashino...Hey, why not dream big?

Saturday morning we arrived early and began stretching out the sore limbs and joints following a good day of training. After regular taiso exercises, Kaiso spent some time explaining the importance of proper ukemi, straight line centering, and demonstrated some ukemi variations. From here, we moved straight into ukemi practice and then on to the cartwheels. Cartwheels always seem to elicit the same response from aikidoka, half wonder and half humor.



Many of our juniors were quite surprised when Kaiso gave them special direction with their ukemi. It serves as a reminder of our access in training with an instructor of Kaiso's knowledge and ability in the prime of his life. This is a precept that Kaiso himself has stated many times as an important facet of his training with Shioda Sensei and Nakamura Sensei. Training in styles with obscure leadership, or training with instructors far past the prime of their life honors neither the art

nor the instructors.

In the second morning session we reviewed all of the waza from the previous day, then split into two groups to allow Kaiso to teach the variations to instructors. This culminated in demo practice in pairs at around noon. In the afternoon sessions we resumed bo training with a full house of students. Shinkendo followed immediately after, as Kaiso led us through Toyama Ryu, Ippon Tachiuchi, and the revised ending of Juppon Dachi Jokyu. Kaiso then requested that juniors clear the floor to the glass viewing area as he led instructors through Nitoken exercises. Through the glass the juniors watched with wide eyes as the instructors went through the dual sword basics. We wrapped the day with Kaiso speaking briefly to instructors and taking some pictures, then it was off to dinner at Pappasitos for the whole group.

The group dinner is always a fun experience, and this was no exception. Kaiso passed around some fine shochu sake brandy, and we presented Kaiso with two bottles of sake from Japan. The first bottle Kaiso recognized as being from the vicinity of his own ancestral shrine, and the second was brewed near the site of Kawanakajima, where Kaiso's ancestor fought under the Takeda clan. As such, Kaiso was in good humor that both bottles were in fact related to him. He visited each table where students had an opportunity to speak with him and share some sake. It was an enjoyable evening.



After a short training session on Sunday morning, many students took the opportunity to accompany Kaiso to Amicalola falls. This waterfall marks the start of the Southern terminus approach trail of the Appalachian Trail here in the foothills of North Georgia. There is a short but fairly strenuous hike up along the falls to the top viewing area. Amicalola is a word from native Cherokee meaning "tumbling waters." The falls drop 729 feet in seven cascades, making it one of the seven wonders of Georgia, and the highest waterfall east of the Mississippi River.



The rest of the group elected to saddle up and ride the local trails on horseback. A local horse rescue program leads these trail rides through the Cherokee National Forest, named for the Cherokee Indians that made their ancestral homeland in these parts. The area is rich in nature and history, and marks the beginning of the infamous "Trail of Tears" (1838) of the Cherokee people. The ride was enjoyable and only claimed 1 victim. I'm not certain which uke had the misfortune of being thrown, but I trust it was proper ukemi that allowed them to land uninjured. Hmmmm.....perhaps next year we will convince Kaiso to show us the proper method of mounted samurai combat.... until then, come to the dojo every day, and train hard and never quit.



Tour De Shinkendo – Part III

By Nicholas Lauridsen

Weston-Super-Mare, England

From Dresden, I went through Paris one last time, and then took the Chunnel train to the Waterloo Station in London, where I found accommodations. The next day, I set off for Bristol in the west of England, the closest city to Weston-Super-Mare, which was where Fred East Sensei has his Somerset Budokai. Bristol was a lovely city, and after a tour of its university, I visited an excellent Japanese restaurant at East Sensei's recommendation, owned by one of his old time friends. The owner and chef, Yoji (if I remember correctly), along with the waiter (a Japanese exchange student who had studied kendo), became instantly animated when I mentioned that I studied sword, and the former spent a good while expounding on the nobility of the pursuit of swordsmanship and his personal experiences from his youth in Japan. Satiated by both the delicious fare and the good company, I returned to my hostel bunk and slept soundly, grateful to be back in my own language. After arriving in Weston-Super-Mare the following day, I was picked up from the train station by East Sensei, who took us directly to the gymnasium where he holds his Shinkendo classes.

East Sensei has studied the martial arts for decades, hearkening back to his residence in South Africa, and he now teaches Karatedo and Shinkendo. His students were wonderfully diverse in age and experience, and made me feel quite at home. Later that afternoon, East Sensei took me to his beautiful home, where he introduced me to his wife, Gina, and the two of them gave me the grand tour: I had the chance to see their extensive sword collection of several cultures decorating the walls, along with an array of Native American artifacts, and outside, their garden that had been transformed into a place for keiko. Most unexpectedly, however, I was treated to a stirring folk music performance – East Sensei and Gina have accumulated a bit of a reputation as folk singers, and were on high demand in their community for all sorts of events. This was truly special: they were both gifted musicians and performers, and I was incredibly honored to get my very own performance (it is still firmly impressed in my memory because of how *good* it was!).

Afterwards, we all jumped in the car and headed out to the seaside for a walk. This was the part that most satisfied my preconceived notions about the English countryside – wide, slightly undulating grassy expanses, a landscape remarkable in its simplicity and leisurely beauty. It was wonderful strolling the hillocks and moors while East



Sensei and Gina pointed out various types of wildflowers, and also revealed to me badger sets and fox dens hidden in the brush, entirely magical to an urban Los Angelian. Along the way, we stopped by an 11th century stone chapel at the top of a bluff, and of course we had to occupy the ancient watchtower on top of another bluff to see what we could see, which was nothing less than Wales faintly across the ocean.

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East Sensei dropped me off at the train station with a warm goodbye, and I was quite disappointed to have to leave it all,

especially since this was my last visit on the dojo tour, and scant days before my inevitable return to the States. Nevertheless, I was encouraged to saturate my remaining time with as much culture, sightseeing, and Indian food as I could. Therefore, I managed to visit Stonehenge on the way, tour the town of Amesbury, and see a bit more of London before heading westward (over the Atlantic) again.



I must express my gratitude to the several sensei with whom I corresponded and who were exceedingly hospitable and generous to me, but whom I ultimately did not have the opportunity to visit. From Perpignan, Boutet Sensei connected me to Adrien Six Sensei via telephone, who welcomed me to visit, but unfortunately his dojo suffered flood damage just prior to my return to Paris. I must also thank Peter Felber Sensei and Christian Woerl Sensei of Shinkendo Club Katana and Gerhard Kraft Sensei of the Kotaisan no Fumoto Dojo for corresponding with me during my travels and extending warm invitations to their dojo; I hope to make good on their invitations on a future trip to Europe, and express my thanks and appreciation of their hospitality properly in person. In all my Europe travels, nothing impressed me more than the openness and cordiality with which these individuals and the other sensei I visited received me.

Although we are separated by an ocean, these sensei welcomed me wholeheartedly into their dojo, their homes, and their lives, and it is by virtue of these sensei that I felt welcome in my travels in Europe, halfway around the world from home. It is no understatement that it is to them I owe the wonderful experience I had overall. I hope that others in the United States will have the wonderful opportunity to meet some of these people in the future. According to protocol, one must go bearing a letter of permission from the Honbu Dojo (I unfortunately had to leave before I could obtain one) when visiting other shibu; with this small token of encouragement, and the invitation of shibucho, Shinkendo students have the opportunity to discover just how large the Shinkendo community is.

Obata Sensei has spoken often of “nurturing the circle of Shinkendo”, and I believe these individuals have done above and beyond what is needed to preserve this ideal in the (now global) relationship in which we all participate as students of Shinkendo. I have come back from my travels feeling profoundly satisfied in the practice of martial arts as a force in the development of a moral self; and even more so, in the possibility of a community stretched out across the world. Moreover, I have been deeply touched by the generosity of these instructors and students I have had the privilege of meeting. Once again, to them all: thank you!

Martial Arts and the Gains to One's Person

By Marti L. Lewis - Ryu Sui Kan, Utah



Marti Lewis (left) and Kurt Johnson Sensei (right) perform Rokudo Tachiuchi for Aki Matsuri, 25 September 2004.

I got started in Shinkendo just over one year ago. I was introduced to the martial art style by a close friend who had been studying for some time. When I went to the Ryusuikan dojo of Sensei Kurt Johnson to watch a session, I knew right away that this was something that I just had to get involved with. I had always wanted to study the martial arts, but I had never looked seriously into any forms prior to shinkendo. The largest motivating factor for me was that my father had studied shotokan and kyokushinkai karate. His martial arts adventure had done great things for him. It took him from a shy reserved individual to a very out going and confident young man—at least, according to my mother!

I remember when I was about seven years old snooping through my dad's closet and finding his karate gi. He explained to me that he used to fight in competitions as a brown belt against black belts, sometimes winning, but not always. He told me about how they would break things with their bare hands and such. So, being the curious young man, I went across the street from my house where they were building a new home. I picked up a brick, brought it home and gave it to my dad, and said "Break it!" Of course he had an audience because I brought all my friends over to see. He sat the brick flat on the concrete floor in our basement and made a funny looking fist. Then he let out a loud scream of some kind and "pow!" snapped the brick in half. It was the most amazing thing my eyes had ever seen, a moment that made a real impression on me.

Later, I asked why he had stopped studying the martial arts. I found out that the year before I was born, my father had gotten in to a car crash that had broken his back in seven places and crushed one of his feet. Today, he's a

very strong and proud man of 61 years and you really wouldn't notice that he had suffered such an accident except for a slight limp when he walks. When you look at him, the way he lives his life and how he carries himself, it's evident that the martial arts and philosophies have helped mold him into a great man.

So this is what inspired me to begin practicing shinkendo. After a few months of training and working with other students in the dojo, I was introduced to some martial arts demonstrations. The first one was in Salt Lake City, Utah, for the Japanese American Citizens League. The first kata I performed was Happogiri, followed by two other tachiuchi sets. That first demonstration was a big success. We talked with our audience and ate Japanese food with them. One older gentleman even called me over and commented on my performance, telling me that I had a great kata. The positive reaction of our audience and their compliments made me excited for the next demonstration.

Also, after some reflection and ongoing training, I shared some comments at the dojo about our demo. I described how the preparation, inside and outside of the dojo, had been very helpful. In many ways I felt it had helped my training and elevated it to a new level. Participating in the demo was very exciting for me and when I looked back on it I realized that I didn't recall even seeing the audience; it was almost as if they weren't there. The focus and level of concentration I had experienced didn't sink in until sometime afterwards but it has become clear to me that doing demonstrations is a key part of our training. They have many things to offer in our ongoing quest for knowledge and all other things yet to be experienced.

The second demonstration was performed at the Aki Matsuri celebration in Salt Lake City, Utah, at the Japanese Church of Christ. This one was equally exciting for me, and I came away from the experience a better student. For me, demonstrations are a part of the entire process of learning. The kata change from demo to demo but back in the dojo, the ongoing training helps bring many of the parts of the larger picture together. Eventually they all become one complete kata, on a much larger scale.

Learning the martial arts has allowed me to become a much more humble, happy and understanding person. If I could do anything different with my experience, the only thing I would change would be to have started much sooner. It's my wish that everyone could experience the martial arts at some level in their life. There is so much to gain and so much to learn that you can't help but wish the same for others.



Marti L. Lewis, J.A.C.L. Picnic, 24 July 2004.