

News from Honbu



ISF/AB/KTRR



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Sensei's Corner

For a while, the Honbu has been busy hosting students from Georgia, New York, Australia, Illinois, Japan (not a Shinkendo student), and Arizona. Early in July I was often out of class because of the seminars in Iowa, Hungary (2 weeks), and Oakland. The last week of July, Sensei Hans and Peter from Germany trained at the Honbu.

This August, the Honbu and branch dojos will be busy with demonstrations for Nisei week.

Our own Honbu student Victoria Vanfleet will be opening a new branch in Michigan, and long time student and instructor Lonnie Oaks is currently in the process of opening a branch in Singapore!

It is my goal to have more seminars in Australia and New Zealand. I would also like to one day open a branch in Japan and have more branches in Asia.

It has been 23 years since I arrived in Los Angeles, and it seems like many Honbu students have opened their own dojos only recently: Nathan Scott, Peter Teymouraz, Matthew Lynch, Masaji Saito, and Sammy Briggs. I have always wanted more dojos and instructors in California, and finally this wish has come true. Now I wish that these instructors will be successful and help the spread of Shinkendo, Toyama Ryu, & Aikibuken.

In 1994, the pyramid style foundation - with dojos branching off from the Honbu - was established. It has been 10 years since then and the pyramid has grown larger with new instructors & students, and stronger with a more organized federation. I hope that all the students and instructors may look forward as we grow instead of looking back. The river water will always flow towards the ocean, but small ponds will dry up. Jinsei Shinkendo: *Mayowazu Zenshin!*

Lately students and instructors from different branches have started attending seminars in other counties, states, and countries. It has become quite common seeing my students attend seminars out of state. This can lead to new encounters with other Shinkendo-ka, more training, and help maintain a united federation.

Ten years ago my students and I concentrated only on long hours of hard training. Many branches nowadays have high levels of technique and understanding, and so it is possible to train them at a very advanced level in a shorter time. This means I have more time for sightseeing and relaxation on my trips!

I have traveled to Europe 18 times and half of the time I went to train in two different countries. I have led over 30 seminars in Europe, and have seen 37 castles before, between, and after seminars. I have enjoyed many delicious wines and beers in Hungary, France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, and Amsterdam.

-Toshishiro Obata



Obata Kaiso with Hans Sensei (Left) and Peter Sensei (Right) from Germany

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大鹽湖 から どうぞ宜しく! Greetings from the Great Salt Lake!

By Anita Y. Tsuchiya
Ryū Sui Mon Dōjō, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

OK, it's not actually **in** the lake but **Ryū Sui Mon Dōjō** is only about an hour away. Though small, our school has one of the best surroundings imaginable for practicing the “*true way of the sword*.” Sitting in the shadows of the Wasatch Mountains, we're rewarded with spectacular views of snowy peaks throughout the winter and spring.

Our shibuchō is **Sensei Kurt Johnson**, longtime student of **Mike Esmailzadeh** of **Suigetsukan Dōjō** in Oakland, CA. In addition to Shinkendō, Kurt sensei teaches Hapkidō, firearms safety and self-defense. Kurt sensei considers martial-arts training a way to improve your personal values, as well as your physical and mental health. So it was no surprise that he found a perfect fit with Shinkendō.

Recently, our dōjō hosted Mike sensei for a visit—a nice way of describing an official inspection. So we pressed hakama pleats, bleached kendōgi, measured mon placement, and practiced our “onegai shimasu.”

On the night of class we all arrived early. We nervously checked and rechecked our obi knots and awaited the arrival of our **sensei's sensei**. Those of you familiar with Mike sensei are probably giggling by now because you know how very warm and good-natured he is.

We soon learned for ourselves as he took over class for two nights. Mike sensei's enthusiasm was infectious and the room was charged with everyone's energy. Kurt sensei watched over us quietly and tried not to beam too much.

Tachiuchi practice was enhanced with numerous explanations and demonstrations from Mike sensei. Even his corrections were delivered in a manner that was both encouraging and memorable (a very useful teaching technique)—such as “Anita, ‘oops!’ is not a kiai.”

At the end of class, Mike sensei gave us a short oral quiz about the origins of Shinkendō and then finished by telling us some history of Japanese swordsmanship. Also sprinkled throughout the evening were numerous anecdotes about **Kaiso Obata Toshishiro**. My personal favorite involved a mondō about breath control. Mondō literally translates into “problem-answer” and is a form of dialogue particularly popular in Zen. Teachers use them to help students understand the experiential nature of Zen principles. Being Zen, simple, direct solutions are favored over long intellectual debates. OK, back to the story. . .

A student came to Obata kaiso with a question, “What is the importance of breathing in the martial arts?”

Obata kaiso responded with three words, “Hold your breath.”

He then turned to an older student and said quietly, “Enlightenment should arrive very quickly.”

In closing, we really enjoyed our inspection. We hope other ISF members will visit us sometime. Did I mention that we have “the greatest snow on earth”? Until then, **irasshai!**



Bamboo—It's not just for cutting anymore...or, is it?

By: Marlene Harris, instructor of Shinkendo at Arizona Shaolin Kenpo, Mesa Arizona

Here in Arizona, my husband (Jeff Harris sensei) and I have been seeking to get a stand of bamboo going in the bordered garden area of our yard so we can enjoy the benefits of enhanced shade with an Asian flair, along with a ready source of cutting fodder. From our investigation into the topic, bamboo is quite the plant from a variety of perspectives. My search began at a local nursery that I recalled had some in pots some time back. I revisited the topic with them, and their cuttings are taken directly from a rather large (!) stand that they have right there on the premises. The variety they have goes by the common name of "giant timber", and trust me, it lives up to its name! Even the canes in the pots (or "culms" as they're also called) are at least 8 ft. tall, and the "mother" stand has got to top some 25-30 ft.! So, is there a hunk of this stuff now growing in our yard, you inquire? Well, no, not yet...it seems that there are some caveats that come along with bamboo, so read on.

The trouble with bamboo...

...is that there are two general categories and not many people know the difference between them when they set out to make it a part of their landscape: there's the "running" variety and the "clumping" variety. Each variety has its own merits and evils, with the "running" variety being particularly tricky to deal with due to its nature. It's known for being extremely hardy and for growing quickly and easily...and this is both the good news and the bad news. The stuff is apparently so vigorous and hardy that it will easily take over even an established yard if left untended and will prowl over, under, around and through objects like cement abutments, block walls and the like. In some areas, bamboo has been dubbed a "nuisance plant" due to these attributes and is not looked upon with favor. It's been recommended by both Harper's and A & P nurseries (as well as some web pages we looked at..) that if you're going to plant the "running" stuff, you should likewise plant some swaths of sheet metal about 3 or so feet into the ground around it to go along with it for containment! The sad thing is, the "running" variety generally seems to grow to greater heights and with greater cane circumferences than the "clumping" variety with some running varieties reaching a height of up to 72' (yes, *feet!*) with a cane diameter of up to 5' around! And, in spite of their preference for warmer, wetter climates, many varieties can survive both droughts and sub-zero temperatures!

However, this is merely a comparative observation, because when viewed in singular, the "clumping" variety ain't no slouch when it comes to growth and hardiness either really—it's just not as "pesky" about its presence in the scheme of things. Many of the "clumping" varieties can reach heights of 15-25 feet with a cane diameter of 2-3 inches. Not the gargantuan beastie that the runners are known to be, but hey, these should be sufficient for the purposes of most advanced tameshigiri aficionados. This variety can also survive a freeze and be tolerant of a less-than-vigilant watering regimen, but it has the grace of not overrunning your yard—it seems to prefer a more modest group bonding strategy and thus is largely self-containing with minimal effort. The bad news is the 5 gallon pots available at A & P were \$125.00 each! The pots of runners at Harper's likewise were "chotto takai" at \$95.00 for a 5 gallon pot. Thus, we are doing without at present.

However, the web sites we visited had much more affordable fare—running from as low as \$15-\$20 to maybe \$40 (for a 3 gallon pot) topping out at \$75.-\$95 for more rare varieties, so there are more affordable sources out there to be investigated. In the meantime, I have this cutting that I bought at the Ranch Market at Chinese Cultural Center in central Phx. which has over-run it's post in my kitchen window height-wise over the last year, so Jeff planted it out in the garden area by the block wall fence this weekend. We have no clue what variety it is but we are REALLY hoping it's not a runner... So far, it has shown no signs of the "sprouts from underground and off to the side" pattern typical of a runner, but, it's been incarcerated in a smallish pot, so who knows what havoc will ensue now that it's been set free...

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Confused Newbie Part III

By Michael Shu

Sorry for not making it to the April or May or even June issues but I was booked up with my finals and moving to a new apartment. If any of you missed my rantings then please e-mail me at mshu@sbcglobal.net to make me feel loved... or hated...

My first couple of weeks in the Honbu Dojo were a little disorienting and may I say a little scary. Aikido and Shinkendo times being switched every other day, I found myself being thrown on the floor instead of swinging a *bokken* on a few occasions. On my first class, shortly after introducing myself and finding out that my fear of there being Shinkendo hazing was unsubstantiated, I followed through the motions of bowing in. Even that was a bit of struggle since everything was shouted in Japanese, but discovering that my eyes were the only ones open – staring straight into Sensei's who stared straight back (!!!) – I figured out that I should be meditating. It took me a couple of classes before I started moving in sync with everybody else.

My memory isn't very clear but I remember my first day I was pulled off to the side of the dojo mat and paired up with a *sempai* student to go through the basics. My private tutors ranged from the perpetually laughing James Huang (maybe his hakama tickles?) to the scarily intense Sammy-Dave-Nathan trio (I could still feel the bruises inflicted by my own *bokken* rebounding from their strikes). Through the next couple of days of being in the corner, I learned how to hold and swing the sword properly, to stand in a deep *kamae* and learn the first set of *batto-ho*. After a little while of this private tutoring, I felt really segregated from the rest of the pack who received direct instruction from Sensei. When I started class with everyone else one day, however, I found myself looking around in confusion and swinging my sword in a pathetic mimicry of motions as the rest of the class performed *tanrengata*. It took many more classes for me to finally start to flow with it.

After a month or so, I stopped getting tutored altogether, although a *sempai* would help me out if we were paired up for *tachiuchi*. I noticed that I was mainly taught through others and felt kind of left out by not being taught directly by Sensei. He would occasionally come in to correct something I'm doing wrong or what someone is teaching me wrong, but I still felt really low on the hierarchy. Over time and continual attendance to class, Sensei began to interact with me more, refining my technique and giving me some food-for-thought lectures. My guess is that sensei likes to watch for a little while to see if a new student is really serious or just a casual learner. Unfortunately there are times I offend him by not fully understanding what he is saying (he seems pretty sensitive about his English) and I can only hang my head low and shamefully mumble "*gomen nasai*".

One of the things that really got me excited about Shinkendo was its integration of shinken in its instruction, which I felt added a level of authenticity. When I first joined Shinkendo I had images of me wielding my own katana in less than a year and had pestered Obata and Scott Sensei about getting my own quite a bit. But here I am, more than a year later, without shinken... but by choice. I first witnessed the use of a shinken on targets by Nathan Scott during the 2002 Pasadena festival. During class tameshigiri I would watch in class as my *sempai* cut speedily through the mats with fluid techniques, wishing I can be that good. One day after James finished cutting I heard Sensei call "Mike". Confused, I looked at Sensei and wondered if he wanted me to change the mats for the next cutter. However I noticed the mats had already been changed and sensei was holding one of his shinken upright as to pass it. After I gave a blank stare for about two seconds he motioned with his head for me to come up. Both anxiety and fear jumped rushed through my brain as Sensei showed me how to pass a sword. When he let go, the weight of the three-foot-long razor blade intimidated me greatly. Sensei asked me to swing it a couple of times and when I did, the weight of the thing damn near made me topple over. Sensei then told me to stand in front of the target and perform the basic tameshigiri set on it. The first couple of times went more or less smoothly but when I performed a right *kesagiri*, the sword cut cleanly through the target and continued to go down until it bounced off the mat. Fortunately I was able to keep the sword from flying away, unfortunately I left a permanent feature to the dojo mat. Surprisingly, Sensei didn't look angry, he almost had an "I-was-afraid-of-that" look on his face and just told me to learn how to stop the sword at knee level. And so my respect for the heavy razor-blade that was the shinken

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The amazing thing about bamboo...

...besides the fact that the books at the nursery noted some 36+ different varieties (and I'm told this is a conservative representation of the actual number...), is how many uses it has (besides shade and cutting fodder, that is)—it's been used for all manner of eating and drinking vessels, for musical instruments, furniture, housing and building structures both inside and out (apparently, bamboo scaffolding has been known out-live more modern materials in a typhoon...), its edible (ever hear of "bamboo shoots"?), and from a web-page Jeff stumbled onto, makes a mighty slick looking (and probably very durable) flooring!

At any rate, we will very likely invest in and plant some of the "clumping" variety in the next couple months or so, that is, unless that little sprout that's been turned loose in our yard turns out to be a runner... In which case, if we suddenly don't show up for training some night, send out a search party as we're probably lost in the grove...and, oh yeah, by the way, be sure to bring your swords!!

If you're interested in reading more about bamboo, one of the web sites we checked out that is particularly informative is as follows:
<http://www.ces.uga.edu/agriculture/horticulture/bamboo.htm>

went way up after that day and I became much less anticipative of getting a new shinken.

In the past year, plenty of stuff has happened. I've seen new students come and go as well as seeing some of the sempai becoming MIA or having to leave. I sort of miss the overpowered attacks of "Tattoo" Dave and Sammy Briggs, my blocks haven't been as firm since they left. Anyway, in my first year I have learned many new things about the art and myself. I realized the many meanings of the philosophies of Shinkendo and learned my weaknesses in the techniques. At first I joined Shinkendo just to know how to use a sword, now it is my goal to learn enough to be able to teach it to others. It will definitely be a while from now before I get students, but I guess being young gives me plenty of time to learn... and avoid getting more bruises.

Make a Funny!

You've heard me asking for suggestions several months ago and many of you thought that I had given up on it. But now I'm the editor! The humor section has returned and nobody can stop me!
 MUHAHAHAHAHA!!!!

... Sorry, I've sustained concussion from my own bokuto.

You know you're a Shinkendo-ka when...

- You chiburi/ното your pens
- The web of your thumb and index finger is covered with ink from the aforementioned pen chiburi/ното.
- Your callouses allow you to hold scalding hot cups of coffee
- You accidentally grunt "onegaishimasu!" to your boss at work
- You begin scoffing at the unrealistic katana fights in Hollywood movies
- While hammering a nail, you find yourself doing suburi practices, thus destroying what you were nailing
- You chiburi your wet umbrella imagining the rain flying off is the blood of a defeated foe
- You've postponed buying that engagement ring to save up for you shinken
- Whenever you get your hands on something a meter long, you have an irresistible urge to swing it
- You've broken a good number of meter-long objects
- You become seriously offended if anybody refers to your hakama as a "dress"
- You've grown a topknot
- Your grown a topknot and shaved half of your head
- You wear your hakama around the house
- You sleep holding your bokuto
- You answer questions with "hai" and people are confused with the random salutation
- You chiburi your steak knife after dinner, the flight of steak fragments ensue
- You have also begun training with the spackling knife and putty to repair all the dings you've put into your ceiling and walls
- You see someone slice a large piece of fruit with a shinken and the first thing that comes to mind is that Obata-Soke wouldn't approve.

Nisei Week!

The International Nisei Week is coming and the Honbu Dojo will be demonstrating at Little Tokyo Village Plaza at 1:00PM on the 10th and 16th of August. The demonstration will be held at the fountain in front of the "Frying Fish"

We ask anybody who can make it to the demonstrations to please come to help out or show your support. We would also appreciate if members can videotape or photograph the event.