

News from Honbu



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Sensei's Corner

We encounter many people in life, these encounters may sometimes change the way we think or live. We are friends who have encountered each other through Aikibujutsu and Shinkendo, and we are family in the organization. I would like our organization to become stronger and bigger with time, and the encounters in the organization to be significant.

On the internet we have a discussion forum that was meant to be a place for Shinkendo students to talk, however, I would also like Aikido students to join in. Through the discussion forums and the newsletters, I would like everyone to talk about their opinions or introduce their homeland including any good places to visit, food, or even climate. Everyone should use the discussion forums and newsletters more freely to express themselves.

If you personally have questions regarding techniques, swords, rules of the organization, or any serious comments, please direct them towards the Honbu. If you send me an e-mail and you don't receive an answer it's probably because we missed the e-mail, please keep e-mailing and asking.

In June the Honbu welcomed students and instructors from Illinois, Australia, and New York. In order to train at the Honbu, they need time, money, and the support of their families. I would like to thank everyone who made it possible, and I would like to thank the students and instructors for coming out.

In recent seminars, there are more and more people who participate from different dojos. When participating at different seminars, students understand the situations in other dojos and are able to train together with other dojo members who they may have spoken with on the internet. The seminar schedules are made up months before the actual seminar, and I would like people to participate in order to not only train but meet new people, and include sightseeing in foreign countries. Currently the Honbu is in the process of planning a seminar for early next year right here on the third floor of Mitsuwa plaza. The space is very large, and we are hoping for a good number of students to participate. If you have any questions, please contact Sensei Saito or Mrs. Obata for more details.

-Toshishiro Obata

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From Oz to LA

On this year's trip to the Honbu dojo I was accompanied by my fellow student, Michael Bauce. We left Melbourne on Wednesday morning, the 9th of May at about 9am. We arrived in Los Angeles at about 11:30am on the same day. For those who are thinking I just made a typo, I didn't. Travelling from Australia to the U.S is like going in a time machine. We flew from Melbourne to Auckland (New Zealand), where we had a 3 hour stopover, then onto L.A. If we had flown direct from Melbourne to L.A, we would have actually arrived before we left???

After approximately 18 hours of planes and airports we arrived in L.A and headed straight for the hostel in Hollywood. The **USA HOSTEL HOLLYWOOD** is a great place to stay for any overseas students planning a trip to the Honbu dojo. Hollywood is much cleaner now than it was 4 years ago when I made the first trip. You can actually walk more than 20 feet without being asked for money by someone who usually appears to be better dressed than yourself.

We unloaded our suitcases at the hostel and headed straight for the dojo. The train takes about 20 minutes to get from Hollywood/Highland station to Union station and then there's a walk of about 1-mile to the plaza, which houses the Honbu dojo.

We were greeted by Obata Kaiso now sporting a beard, always something new!

Nerves were a little frayed at the start of the class, however a few familiar faces along with the ever-familiar teaching style of Obata Kaiso soon put the nerves to rest. For those who haven't had the experience of close personal attention from Kaiso, you don't know what you're missing....really....you have no idea!

Kaiso seems to be a big fan of the 'sink or swim' theory. As Australia is surrounded by water, I think he believes I must be able to swim, therefore I'm usually thrown into the deep end. I'm no 'crocodile hunter' but I think my task is a harder (and maybe more dangerous) one. **CRIKEY!!!**

Things worked out well for the Aussie (pronounced OZZY, for our American friends) visitors this year. We managed to be at the Honbu dojo between Mothers day and Memorial Day, therefore there weren't many other students there and we were able to have double Shinkendo classes every day.

As usual Obata Kaiso and Mrs. Obata hosted us at their home for tea and some extremely enlightening conversation. At one stage Nathan Scott Kyoshi, Michael Bauce and myself were in tears with laughter at Kaiso's descriptions of particular sword methods, including muto-dori and tachi-dori.

On many occasions during our stay at Honbu dojo, Nathan Scott Sensei picked us up in his truck (I want one) and carted us off around the countryside. Malibu, Venice Beach, Beverly Hills and Belair to name just a few areas we visited.

Thursday morning we were met by Paul Pocock Kyoshi from Arizona. Pocock Sensei is actually responsible for establishing Shinkendo in Australia. We trained at the Honbu dojo for another 2 days, including private classes. We then headed back to Apache Junction in Arizona to the home of Pocock Sensei where we were greeted by his lovely wife Kim and their son Nicholas.

Arizona is our 'Holiday' part of the trip, and a chance to write more elaborate notes, and go through the things we learnt whilst at the Honbu dojo.

This year we visited Tombstone and watched a re-enactment of the 'gunfight at the O.K. Corral'. We also visited a lake in Arizona, which I'm still not sure if it was real or a mirage. I don't believe water exists in such a hot place.

On the Saturday night, a BBQ was held in our honor (or maybe that was just an excuse). We had the opportunity to catch up with some previous Shinkendo acquaintances. Gene Hauenstein (retired Shihan), Sandra Schwanz Sensei, and James Fabian Sensei along with a few students from the Scottsdale dojo of Sensei Pocock.

We were dropped at the airport in Phoenix on Wednesday afternoon on the 28th of May. We arrived home on Friday morning.

Every year the trip to the Honbu dojo gets better. The entire Shinkendo syllabus seems to triple each time I make the trip over. Obata Kaiso explained to me that he doesn't want people to get bored. I really don't think there's much possibility of that, we only have ONE lifetime!

Thank you to Obata Kaiso for his ongoing support, patience and never ending knowledge.

Also for his and Mrs. Obata's wonderful hospitality.

Thankyou also to Nathan Scott Sensei. He always looks after us extremely well during our visits and goes out of his way to make sure we have everything necessary to make our visit as enjoyable as possible.

Last but by no means least, a BIG thankyou to Paul and Kim Pocock. We are always looked after like kings whilst staying in their home. They house us, feed us and ferry us around all over the countryside making us feel as much like we're at home as possible. If not for Paul Pocock Sensei, Shinkendo in Australia would not exist today.

Every year, as I get on the plane to come home, I already look forward to the following years visit to the Honbu dojo.

P.S. Obata Kaiso likes Vegemite! Therefore I think all Shinkendo students should eat vegemite on toast every morning for breakfast. (Hee! Hee! Haa! Hee!)

Standards In Testing By Sammy Briggs

When Obata Kaiso created Shinkendo, he chose to use a different type of ranking system than the standard kyu/dan system adopted by many modern Japanese (and even non-Japanese) martial arts. He elected to do this for several reasons – one of them due to the saturation of gratuitous dan rankings given away by so many teachers. Additionally, Kaiso did not want his students to be compared with those of other styles, which still adhere to the kyu/dan system. For example, when comparing two students of different sword schools, it is common for people to believe that the higher ranked individual will naturally be the more skilled. This can not hold true however, as each school has its own grading criteria and expectations. Obata Kaiso often uses the example of the 9th dan shogi (Japanese chess) player who attends the same event as the 10th dan go (Japanese checkers) player. It can only be assumed that the go player is more skilled than the shogi player due to the higher dan rank. In reality, the two completely different games cannot be compared as such. Additionally, the dan system used to grade shogi players tops out at 9th dan – no higher rank is achievable.

At the Honbu Dojo, I was fortunate to be able to train directly under Kaiso, five days a week if desired. Students that trained seriously for four or five days a week typically will be expected to test every three months until obtaining the rank of hyaku-e. After obtaining hyaku-e, the time progression involved in obtaining future ranks increases exponentially. For example, hyaku-e to ren-e may take one to one and one half years. Ren-e to ji-e will usually take about two years, and so forth. This is not being conservative, but is quite normal for a “full time” student. Many branch dojos, such as the Tsuki Kage Dojo, led by Nathan Scott Sensei, opt to test less frequently. In his case, Scott Sensei will conduct testing about every six months, to those students whom he believes are ready to advance.

Time and skill are not always the only factors involved when testing, however. Naoya Araki began training with Kaiso when he was nine years old. As a young adult, Naoya was asked to test for nidan in Aikido. Although Naoya’s skill and time of training well matched the potential rank of nidan, Naoya declined to test. Why? At that time, Yukishiro Obata Soke Dairi was ranked as a shodan. Naoya realized this and believed that it would be an unspoken breach of etiquette for him to be ranked above his sempai, Yukishiro. Indeed, Yukishiro had spent more time on the mat than Naoya, and accordingly, his skill was far more advanced, even at his young age.

In a similar instance, one of Kaiso’s students from many years ago was asked to test for an upper level rank. Despite having very good technique, this student refused to test. He began his training at the request of his boss, Mr. Ichiyanagi (affectionately known as “the candy man”), and believed that he was studying more for his employer than for a true love of the art. This student did not seek out his training under Kaiso on his own accord, and therefore did not feel that he was not deserving of the advanced rank.

There are many more situations such as these, and many that are quite the opposite; where time of training, skill and etiquette are overlooked. More recently, students will test any time the opportunity presents itself, and the unspoken rules of etiquette are overlooked. This is unfortunate, as it is obvious that the student is testing only for his own personal gains. If a student takes an extended leave of absence, or attends class only a few times a month, he will probably not be ready to advance to the next level. Yet, often times, he or she will expect to test, believing that they are well prepared. Only in extreme cases, such as the student who practices diligently at home on a *daily* basis, should that person be allowed to test. In other instances, a student may wish to advance to a rank equal to or even beyond that of his sempai. Many would consider it quite brazen for a student to assume a rank higher than that of those who helped teach him.

In reality, there is no meter that tells when a student should test. Everyone has their own reasons for studying, and accordingly, everyone will have a difference in ranking ideology. Some students will test when, in their hearts, they feel that they are ready, and some will test because it’s an opportunity for promotion. Although skill and mat time factor in highly, these are not the only criteria when grading a student. Other factors include age, maturity, dedication to the art, motives for studying and so forth. Often times a student is tested depending on how far he has progressed within his own means. Despite hard training and a strong will, a mediocre student may never have the potential as one who is more talented. Is it fair to hold this student back, despite having made considerable gains within his own realm? That is a question only the instructor can answer.

Kaiso put a great deal of time and effort into the creation of Shinkendo and its ranking structure. Many instructors have been entrusted with grading and licensing students in branch dojo from around the world. It is up to us to maintain the high standards of Shinkendo in order to ensure the art that we have strived so hard to perfect can be passed on for many generations to come.

The author wishes to thank Nathan Scott in helping to prepare this article.

Another Great Honbu Visit



Lou D'Agostino & Kaiso

I recently had a chance to visit the Shinkendo Honbu to train with Obata Kaiso for four days. As always it was exciting and very informative. Before going any further I must thank Saito Sensei for his help and support, as well as Mrs. Obata for her interest in helping with note taking and curriculum.

I arrived at the honbu early at 9:00 AM to set up and just get settled in. Thinking I would be the first to “greet” the dojo. I was pleasantly surprised instead to find Saito Sensei and be “greeted” by him and a cup of green tea.

Obata Kaiso, walking briskly as is customary, arrived well before our agreed upon 10:00 AM start, with his usual enthusiasm, bursting with energy and focus. We started promptly at 10:00 AM, and I was immediately reintroduced to the honbu and Obata Kaiso way of learning Shinkendo. A lot of information, very quickly, in great detail. I might mention that it was also a lot of fun, and as with all Shinkendo curricula, it was practical and effective.

I enjoy the seriousness of Shinkendo, the history of Japanese swordsmanship and how Obata Kaiso has, and is continuing to research, promote and develop Shinkendo. On a personal note, Obata Kaiso has a knack for making you smile, or laugh at just the moment when you think that maybe you are not “getting it”. As a result training is most enjoyable.

There have been times in the past when I was totally stressed out by everything we were doing. However, although I am just scratching the surface of what is possible in Shinkendo, I can now relax and enjoy practice, Obata Kaiso, and his wisdom more naturally.

The basic outline of my practice might be helpful as a guide to those that are interested and eligible to visit the honbu dojo and take practice with Obata Kaiso.

Friday:	Practice 10:00 to 12:00– Lunch – Practice 1:00 to 3:00
Saturday:	Practice 10:00 to 12:00– Lunch – Practice 1:00 to 3:00
Sunday	Practice 10:00 to 12:00
Monday:	Practice 10:00 to 12:00

This schedule works quite well for me as it leaves a little time to rest the body and brain, while providing ample time to review past lessons, become introduced to new ones and have time to review everything in detail. This also helps with Jet Lag, three-hour time difference and just surviving the flight from NY to LA. while still leaving some personal time to sight see, relax etc.

For those considering a honbu dojo visit and private lesson with Obata Kaiso, here are a few points of interest and items to be sure you have available, to make your training session as enjoyable and productive as possible.

- *Students must be sure to gain permission from your instructor first.*
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Be sure to arrive early so that you can set up comfortably and not rush. You can take extra time if you need to stretch before class. This might also be good time to review your notes and practice them also.

Tripod / Camcorder / Tapes / Extension cord
Water or sports beverage
Notepad and pen (laptop)
Face cloth

Other points of interest while in Little Tokyo

Great food, everywhere

Shiatsu Spa : Sauna / steam / massage.

Clean, healthy way to relax and help your body recover from traveling and the rigors of training.

Outside Little Tokyo**Nearby Chinatown****Huntington Museum**

Obata Kaiso and Mrs. Obata gave me the grand tour of this magnificent home and gardens, which include a Cactus garden, Japanese garden complete with numerous ponds teeming with Japanese koi, goldfish and carp and a wonderful traditional Japanese home. Inside Huntington house are many wonderful paintings, and articles pertaining to American history too.

Mexico town

Obata Kaiso loves Mexican food and particularly mariachi bands and music. I was lucky enough to visit one excellent area on a Sunday afternoon that had two bands playing at once! The food was great, and so was the cold beer. If you like western clothing, hats, boots etc, there are many good buys, quality and good price. Best of all, I shared it with Mrs. Obata and Obata Kaiso.

About taping class

I want to say that doing so will be well worth the hassle of packing the camera, tripod and so on. Although I took notes while at the dojo and later reviewed and re-wrote them, after viewing the video I can not only see what Obata Kaiso was pointing out, regarding mistakes or suggestions, but find that there were so many other things that I just forgot about. So, after my return to New York I find that I have more lessons and curricula to practice, review and teach. It's a real bonus.

Obata Kaiso

Besides my recent visit to the honbu May29th – June 2nd. Obata Kaiso was working for the previous two weeks with students and instructors from Australia, Howard Quick Sensei, and students from the Mid-west region. * I am sorry I do not recall the persons from the mid west, no slight intended in not mentioning their names.

However, after all of the regular teaching duties and extra intensive practice sessions, the numerous hours practiced and taught, Obata Kaiso always has a "full tank of gas".

I have enclosed some photos of my visit so that others might enjoy them. Please look for the Photo of Obata Kaiso having a little fun. Really great stuff.

Thank you again, Saito Sensei, Mrs. Obata, and Obata Kaiso for such an enjoyable, productive visit, and practice.

To the Obata family thank you for sharing your personal time as well.

To the Shinkendo NY dojo, thank you Konstantine (konto-san) Laskaris and my wife also, for conducting classes in my absence. Special mention to our NY members who helped out as well.

Sincerely,

Lou D'Agostino

Shinkendo NY Dojo