

Samurai News from Honbu



Summer's End



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SENSEI'S CORNER

By Obata Toshishiro Kaiso

The last time I visited Champaign, Illinois was 2002. This year there were 40 participants in a very wide dojo. We all hope that the seminars will continued to be hosted in Illinois yearly.

Some of you may have noticed my appearance on the discovery channel a few weeks ago.

Yesterday, 9/16, I went to the Pacific Asia Museum for the filming of TMgLonely RoadsTMh. The independent movie was about Elvis PresleyTMfs life. I appeared as a "Zen Monk" in front of Elvis for a few seconds, and met 71 year old Elvis.

In October I will be inducted in the Martial Arts Hall of Fame Museum. You can get more information at www.martialartsmuseum.com.

Who is that cat? When I went to see my 50th castle, there was a white cat waiting for me at the door, so I took a picture with him. In Japan we have a lucky cat that beckons people, so I took this cat as a sign of invitation.



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Hungary Seminar July 2006

By Michiel Boere

The international aspect of Shinkendo was one of reasons why I started Shinkendo. I like the idea that there is a community spirit surrounding Shinkendo training sessions. We notice this in our own dojo, where people you train with become good friends that also hang out together. But the places where you notice this most is at seminars. It always surprises me that wherever we go to train we are always welcomed and I always meet all kinds of different people who share the passion for this art.

This year we went with five people to Hungary. Together we would follow our Sensei to the east of Europe; not by car this time but by plane. I tried to convince my boss and my colleagues that it would be hard work and that it would NOT be a vacation...

Previous years we had trained in the city of Budapest but this year the seminar is held in Veresegyház. This small village is about 30 kilometres north-east of Budapest. When we arrive there, we pass by the gym, which looks like a really nice place. After a couple of hours sleep it's time for training.

The seminar was four days. We had two classes (Shinkendo & Aikido) in the morning and one Shinkendo class in the afternoon. There was also one Bojutsu class replacing an Aikido class. The Shinkendo classes were quite full, with more than thirty people training at the same time, while the Aikido classes were a bit smaller with some 15 people training.

The training in Hungary this year was once again an excellent experience. We did a lot of brand new Nitoken techniques and all students there were very happy to do more of this style. We also did some new *taisabaki* exercises, a bo vs. bokuto version of *juppondachi* and there



was the emphasis on teaching Shinkendo throughout the seminar which I liked very much.

After training for more than three years I sometimes feel like I am at a point where you train and perfect your technique over and over again, where you progress only very small steps each class. This is not like the first couple of months of training where you can make huge steps forward in each class. The difference is learning new techniques vs. techniques you have already practiced before. Learning new techniques at seminars is something that echo's in the training of the coming year. It always helps if you learn these techniques from the source (which in this case is Obata Kaiso)

The very last training of the seminar was a teacher training. To lead a Shinkendo class is quite different from only practicing Shinkendo. It requires you to see and correct habits, show and explain techniques but also to keep an eye out for all students, their progress and their safety. It requires much more work but it is also very rewarding to do. I have learned many things about teaching Shinkendo from my own sensei Brent Hire, but when Obata Kaiso explains what to keep in mind while teaching I still learn so many new things.

This involves exactly why we start a technique slowly, why moving out of the way is so important and why it is so important to make room for yourself when you are in a

crowded dojo. A lot comes down to one thing: Safety comes first!

Many people ask me if I never get hurt when doing Shinkendo. They assume we wear armour for protection. I then explain to them that we do not need armour and no one ever gets hurt when we practice Shinkendo. This is of course because of the safety that has been part of Shinkendo teachings all the time. This is the kind of insight that I received from the instructor's training, which was new and



important for me.

After the teacher training we sat down together to speak about how Shinkendo will continue in the coming years. We were glad to hear Obata Kaiso is working on another book and the further development of the Nitoken style. Also the idea of creating a Shinkendo village in America was received with much enthusiasm. We can't wait to go there and meet more fellow students from all over the world. Already two Hungarian students have plans to open another dojo. This has also happened in the Netherlands with the opening of the newest dojo in Delft. More places to train should result in more students and more people to share our passion with.

This year we spent many hours with Hire Sensei, Roland Sensei and Obata Kaiso. We would all have lunch and diner together and in the evenings drink something together. We had the opportunity to speak to sensei in an-

other setting than the dojo which was great! We spoke about many things (9/11, Japanese peacekeeping forces in Iraq, Japanese history) but the comparison of martial arts & soccer, which was all quite nice (at that moment the finals of the world cup were being played here in Europe).

At the last day of the seminar Obata Kaiso handed out the certificates that our Hungarian friends had rightly deserved. Their group has a couple of hardcore student that have practiced Shinkendo for many years already. It is very cool to see that this reflects in the quality and style that most students now have there. Surprising enough our group from Amsterdam also received certificates from Obata Kaiso. We hadn't tested yet for these ranks, and it felt like a big honour to receive them from Obata himself.

We went to Hungary as 3 brown belts, 1 white belt and a very tall guy without rank and we will start the year with 2 black belts, 2 brown belts and a truly deserved first aikido rank for Stefan. Also our own sensei Hire received 2 certificates for Aikido and Toyama Ryu. It is very nice to see that in the end even our teacher is still a student.

The week after we returned to Amsterdam we had our testing weekend. This was once again very nice with lots of people coming from all dojo's in Holland (and our German/English student Sebastian dropping in for the weekend). One of the things I like most about these weekends is that we always have such a good time together. We are strict and dedicated when we're training, but also have so much fun before and after training. Here in Amsterdam training involves having some good fun with friends who share your passion. When going to a seminar, it always feels like a vacation; the travelling there, eating together and at nights having some drinks together; staying up too late and paying the price for this in the morning. Now all I have to do is convince my boss that it really was not a vacation and that he should stop calling me sensei all the time...

Hungary Seminar July 2006

By Jonas Afonso

After many seminars, this one was also a great success. Everybody gave all the energy they had and everyone was only focused on one thing.

Let me first introduce myself before I start with my article. I am Jonas Afonso a student of Brent Hire Sensei and I come from Amsterdam, the capital of The Netherlands. I started studying martial arts seriously from my 14th year on. I'm 16 now and the martial arts have become an important part of my life. I went to the previous seminar in Hungary as well and loved training together with all the people from all of these different countries. This was one of the main reasons I wanted to participate in this seminar once again.

There were six Dutch people, all from our dojo, the Shinbukan in Amsterdam. Stefan and I, a new fanatic



aikidoka left the plane and stepped into the Hungarian sun. We met with Peter Sensei and went into the city to eat some Hungarian food, drink something and change our Euro into Hungarian Forint. I asked Peter sensei how his year was after the last seminar. He told me he had back problems, and because of that he couldn't train so much the last year.

We went to pick up Michiel later that day and went to meet with Obata Kaiso, Hire sensei and Lajos sensei and some other Hungarian people. We ate our meals and went back to the hotel. We had standard rooms which were perfect for us, although the beds felt like they were made out of stone, but even that did not bother after a long intensive day of training.

Shinkendo

Shinkendo training was fresh and new for the most of us this seminar. A lot new techniques especially nito-ken jutsu were part of the training. I liked the tachiuchi with two swords against one, and I feel that I improved my two sword coordination. As always safety was an important part of the lessons. Luckily nobody got hurt and everybody could train and learn a lot. There was a



Hungarian student who had made himself a bokuto out of a big tree. It looked much heavier than any suburito I have ever seen.

Redbad, another student from the Netherlands, and me were practicing a lot of Juppondachi ura but I still think we have to practice it over and over again to make it better. Bojutsu was also nice. We did Juppondachi with bo against sword. I really liked the kumite because of the fluent movements.

Aikido

In my opinion there were too many shinkendo lessons and too few aikido lessons. I was very honored to be Obata Sensei's uke, which I really enjoyed. We did some jo techniques and some nice kakarigeiko square-formation kumite and many other things. The tatami were really soft that was also nice.

Stefan did his first hiyaku ukemi but fell right down on his lungs. Obata Kaiso said, "you should practice more normal ukemi."



Fun, food and culture

In the breaks and in the evening we went eating at a local restaurant. The food was okay in my opinion. We drank a lot because of the heat. Sometimes in the breaks I could feel the effect of dehydration on my tongue and on my lips. English, Hungarian, German and Dutch were spoken, but with the exception of Hungarian this was no problem for me. With Stefan's great driving skills we made it always on time everywhere.

We didn't go to Budapest but stayed in Veresegyhaz. This was okay for me but I would like to go to the Hungarian baths again next year, which will certainly mean that we will spend more time in the city.

The seminar was great and I hope that I'll be there next year too.



Nisei Week Demo 2.0

Commentary by Michael Shu

Photographs by Shatto Light

Exactly one week after Shochu-Geiko, one week after the Saturday demo in front of the Japanese American Culture Center, the Honbu Dojo was once again invited to demonstrate in the Little Tokyo Village in the final weekend of Nisei week. This time I had a whole weekend free so I wholeheartedly attended to make up for my lack of presence at Shochu-Geiko.

We arrived on time for our 1 PM showing, only to find out that the schedule had been pushed back to our choice of 2 or 3 PM. Kaiso chose 2 PM so we wouldn't wait idly for so long. So I chose to get some snacks... a venture Kaiso warned against... but hey, I was starving. I found out his point the hard way when I started to feel a bit spaced out around the time the demo began - as you can probably tell from my face on the picture to the right.



Kaiso was no stranger to the stage as he demonstrated some aikido with daughter Yoko, AKA Marimo, AKA tormentor of Michael Shu's pronunciation of Japanese terms....



Former Honbu regular Hidetoshi, left with a bang, demonstrating tachi-uchi with Dr. Nosaka.

An familiar situation is the presence of the big blue tarp that was threatened by being whacked by our weapons. Helpful shinkendoka helped prop the tarp up while we performed. This was especially important with tame-shigiri.

Speaking of tame-shigiri, this was my first time cutting since I had my appendix removed. I was





taking it slow over the summer, so please do understand why I have such a worried look on my face in the shot on the left.

All went well. However I couldn't quite pull off *inazuma* as well as I used to. More training needed for that.

Once again, too-young-to-drive Chuck Light was on hand to demonstrate his stunning accuracy and effortlessness with the shinken.



Of Course, Kaiso was there to make our tameshirigi look like child's play.

Shochu Geiko

By Deborah Strauss - Birmingham, AL

For the second year in a row, I attended Shochu Geiko at Honbu, (World Headquarters), Los Angeles.

I went out a week early, and attended the following: Shinkendo, Aikido, and Aikibujutsu classes.

When Shochu Geiko started, I saw many familiar faces and some new ones. As usual, everyone was very friendly and helpful.

This time, I was able to work with several Shinkendo students who had not tried Aikido, and Aikibujutsu, and it was fun to show them the beginning moves.

Similar to last year, when we were training during Shochu Geiko, if the class was doing advanced training, Mrs. Obata Sensei worked with the rest of us. Many of us paired off, and she would often check on us. Yoko Obata came home from college at UC Irvine, and we worked together as well.

We attended two outdoor demonstrations during the Nisei Festival in Little Tokyo, with many in the group participating.

While everyone was in town for Shochu Geiko, I was able to have dinner with some old friends and some new ones. Yumi Sensei and several other participants from our Dojo in Atlanta attended, and we were able to have several meals together.

There was a brief trip to Redondo Beach, and even though everyone



worked very hard at class, we had quite a bit of fun together, as well.

Mrs. Obata Sensei helped me improve considerably, and I am much more confident.

After everyone else left, I stayed on and had private 2 hour classes with Obata Sensei. He is very patient and taught me quite a lot of new moves, including 2 sword work. We also reviewed many beginning and intermediate Shinkendo techniques. This was wonderful. He told me I was improving and helped build my confidence.

I really enjoyed talking with Obata Sensei, Mrs. Obata Sensei, and Yoko Sensei; and feel that I made great progress while I was at Honbu.

I love Shinkendo and cannot imagine it not being a big part of my life.

As life has settled down for me in Atlanta, and my son is off at University, my goal is to attend all my classes, demonstrations, clinics, and seminars. I am looking forward to the next opportunity to work with Obata Sensei, and Mrs. Obata in Atlanta this November.

Yoko Sensei sent me a very nice e-mail and said that Obata Sensei was commenting that I was really starting to pick things up quickly during our private classes.

I am very happy with the results of this trip, and am back at the Atlanta Dojo, working on Shinkendo, and getting ready for Japan Fest.

I can't wait for the next opportunity to work at the Honbu.

Shochu Geiko: From NY

By Lou D'Agostino - Modern Samurai Dojo, NY



Due to the expansion and renovation of Modern Samurai Dojo last winter I was unable to

attend the 2006 Keiko Hajime. While I was disappointed that I could not attend fortunately Mike Mason did representing Shinkendo New York.

Although Obata Kaiso now visits our dojo each spring and fall, I felt compelled to attend the Shocho geiko (summer training) at the I.S.F. honbu. My feeling is that since I am making a cross country trip I might as well get in as much training and instruction from Obata Kaiso as possible. As Michael and I did last summer, a full weeks training was scheduled. Accompanying me were New York members Dr. Shaffee Bacchus and Mike Mason. It was an intensive but worthwhile endeavor.

Beginning on Monday we met Kaiso for two hours of morning practice and another hour of private training before evening classes as well as participating in evening classes. In truth it's simulta-

neously exhausting and exhilarating. On Thursday many of the students and instructors began to arrive and Kaiso's energy reached another level. He asked who would like to begin training early Friday morning before the scheduled start of the seminar.

On Friday morning? I had planned on resting Friday morning after five hours of daily training, but immediately was up for it as was everyone else on the mat. Sean Sensei of the Atlanta Budokan literally left his home early on Thursday, but due to many obstacles and hassles of travel now days did not arrive in Los Angeles until late in the evening. No matter, train, train, train and then more training. ☒

Speaking of training one of the best by products of attending a honbu seminar is meeting

Other Shinkendo-ka, students, and instructors alike. Friendships form, suggestions are spoken of and listed to and

a very rewarding time is experienced by all participants.

As is customary, Kaiso always has a battle-plan; and the focus at least 80% or 85 % of our practice this seminar is Shinkendo Nitoken (two sword). In the past few years Kaiso had begun to introduce more and more aspects of Nitoken to instructors so that they would become more accustomed with its implementation so that in the future; teaching two sword, to qualified students would be more comfortable and enjoyable for both instructor and their students . Kaiso's past guidelines were that only qualified instructors or students of Hyaku-i inka (rank) and above learn the two sword method. This guideline has been amended and is now left to the shibu's (branch leaders) discretion.

The basic concept is that the student should be introduced to Shinkendo nitoken when the student demonstrates a good understanding of Shinkendo Shikon: (4 kihon to know and train

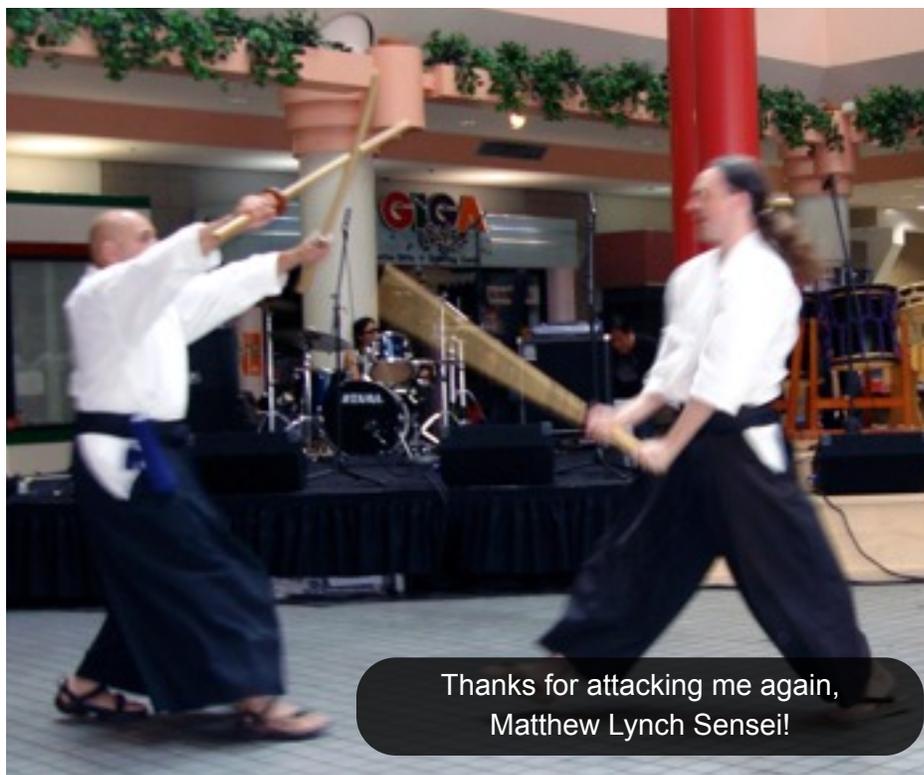
evenly) ashisabaki, taisabaki, kensabaki and Toho-juhin-ho (10 fundamental techniques for sword development)

One must grasp the concept that while Obata Kaiso is attempting to get a student or instructor to understand a “new” concept or waza, Sensei is already planting the seeds to reap the rewards years from that moment. Meditate on this deeply for it may allow one to

begin to look ahead as well. Nothing is a constant, if you are not moving forward then in

all likelihood you are in reverse. One must continually challenge their mental, physical and spiritual reserves lest our study be reduced to mere exercise.

Very important FYI – While Obata Kaiso is very enthusiastic about students and instructors learning; practicing, and demonstrating Shinkendo Nitoken, instructors must not perform Shinkendo nitoken Tameshigiri without Obata Kaiso’s permission and blessing. This is logical and speaks to common sense which is another main point of



Sensei’s personal, and professional philosophy.

My unsolicited opinion and personal experience from practicing Shinkendo Nitoken for

at least a few years now is that it is of great value in improving ones coordination, body

mechanics, simultaneously enabling improvement with one sword. However this can only be realized by slow, steady methodical practice carefully following the curriculum which is logical, practical and effective. This is the Shinkendo way, or is it Obata Kaiso’s way of life? Same thing, right? Shinkendo is life, life is Shinkendo!

My personal discovery and observation from a weeks worth of intensive Nito practice is that my hasuji felt very good when performing bamboo tameshigiri during both demonstrations held on Saturday. In the past I have felt that my bamboo tameshigiri was acceptable but in viewing video noticed a few points that required additional attention and improvement. I was pleased to learn how Nitoken helped my technique and



particularly, hasuji. Since I have no access to bamboo in New York; especially the large diameter variety that Sensei grows, it's a real treat to be able to get tested on the spot as a check of ones technique. I am not sure if I enjoy this more or Sensei does in checking a students progress.

Shinkendo is a comprehensive martial art that encompasses all aspects of Japanese samurai swordsmanship. Many non Shinkendo practitioners have recently become

aware the importance of tameshigiri. It's a fact that Obata Kaiso's immigrating to the

U.S.A twenty five years ago is contributing factor in Tameshigiri awareness. The same

observation may also be gleaned from tachiuchi. Many have now been made aware that

some Koryu lack enough tachiuchi and some styles of swordsmanship have almost none.

This relegates the tradition of the Samurai to kata only; or kendo, sport only, which is demoralizing to the spirit of the sword its history and the samurai tradition. This concept is explained in the first Shinkendo publication; as sho no budo, and dai no budo, I.E. small marital art and large martial art.

Kaiso is now undertaking to develop, refine, and instruct some very interesting Shinkendo Nitoken tachiuchi. Its most exciting and enjoyable and in some ways

easier than standard tachiuchi. One of the facets that I find most rewarding from my background as a Jazz musician is the nature / methodology Obata Kaiso has built in.

Once the basic (for now) patterns are understood and studied, one can begin with

an agreed upon pattern but quickly and smoothly transition to complete improvisation using the patterns Kaiso has



offered us. I see much more to come and its very interesting.

Another aspect that should not be overlooked is the enthusiasm students have for learning

Shinkendo Nitoken. Many students are quite motivated to learn Nitoken, and feel privileged to be included in Nitoken practice. Instructors should pay special attention to this.

Part of the fun of attending hunbu seminars is the opportunity to participate in demonstrations and as in years past, we took part in the annual Nissei week festivities. Many of the visiting students and instructors took part in demos and did very well.

While we are humble, they have much to be proud of, mostly the fact that they represent the I.S.F. and the Obata family. This cannot be overstated. We are most fortunate in having a true visionary to follow and learn from. *Thank you Sensei.*



With Saito Sensei