



# Samurai News from Honbu

## News from The Big Apple



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### Sensei's Corner

By Toshishiro Obata

I have just finished the seminar in Arizona. I believe the number of students attending this year has gone up, and we are able to do some higher-level training. I enjoyed watching the students improvements in Bojutsu. After the seminar, my wife and I stayed in Sedona for two days and visited Montezuma's castle and the meteor crater. I have seen the crater numerous times while flying to and from Arizona, and it was very exciting for me to actually visit the site for the first time.

I believe that, recently, we have had more students (who are of instructor level) join from Aikido Yoshinkan and laido organizations. In the past, we attracted Karate, Judo, Jujitsu, and Taekwondo instructors and students to Shinkendo and Aikido. I am glad to see a growing amount of appreciation and participation from Aikido Yoshinkan and laido instructors and students. It is very exciting for me to watch other organizations that deal with some aspect of swordsmanship, whether theory or technique, recognize the benefits of learning Shinkendo. I believe that in the next 5 to 10 years, students and instructors from other organizations will get a better understanding and appreciation of Shinkendo and Aikido. It is my belief that learning Shinkendo will help Aikido Yoshinkan students further understand their techniques, especially since Aikido students claim that Aikido came from sword techniques. As for laido, I believe Shinkendo will benefit it greatly. I have seen increasing interest from laido students in the area of sparring, techniques done standing, and especially Tameshigiri.

Recently I have seen an increase in the level of skill amongst my instructor-level students across the branches. This year, the Honbu will be recommending more students to test for Kyoshi. If the instructor believes his or her student is ready to test for Kyoshi, please let the Honbu know.

Students, please also note that the instructors have received Shinkendo student test guides to pass out. If you have not received the test guides, please e-mail the Honbu directly. The Aikido, Toyama Ryu, and Bojutsu test guides will be coming out soon.

I would like to announce that, from now on, I will be doing all Instructor-rank testing (Kenshuin and above), Shinkendo ranks above Gohomokuroku, Aikido ranks above Ikkyu, Bojutsu ranks above Ikkyu, and Toyama Ryu ranks above Ikkyu for your students and the instructors. This is a way for me to check all the students and bring everyone to the same level. Most importantly, it allows me to check a student's character, personality, manner, etiquette, safety, etc. It is a way for me to communicate directly with future instructors. All these tests will be done at seminars, or when students attend Honbu training. Instructors should send a list of students who will be testing before the seminar. Students and Instructors who will be attending seminars from other branches have the responsibility of letting me and the host instructor know that they are interested in testing. If the student needs to be promoted to Kenshuin and I am not available at that time, the branch instructor can conduct the Kenshuin rank test with my written consent.

Please understand that, as the founder, it is my responsibility to test the techniques of the students. However, I have distributed that responsibility to the instructors up until now. As the number of branches increase, I have started to notice how the levels of students are very different. I want to focus on the quality of the students and their techniques to improve the quality of the organization as a whole.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**2** 2006 NEW YORK SPRING SEMINAR

**8** BIG APPLE TO CHERRY BLOSSOM

**8** NEW TO THE FAMILY

**11** MAKING A TRIP TO BEGIN A JOURNEY

# 2006 New York Spring Seminar

By Lou D'Agostino



**Obata Kaiso demonstrates Nitoken Tameshigiri**  
*Sakura Matsuri Enbu Brooklyn, New York 4-29-06*



Once again, Obata Kaiso continues to amaze us all with his energy, enthusiasm and love of researching, refining, teaching and sharing the art of Shinkendo. As we have come to appreciate, Sensei's custom each year in choosing a new focus of study during seminars continues.

This spring, we were introduced to another Shinkendo demo format which also doubles as a standard keiko routine. This combination of the Shinkendo Gorin Goho Gogyo is interesting to the audience and enjoyable for the practitioner. Another fine aspect of this format is the usual flexibility regarding time segments while allowing all-level practitioners to participate. Also reviewed was the Toyama Ryu demo format, which can be employed for Tanrengata or battoho as well.



Sensei also introduced a new ashisabaki / kensabaki exercise that is designed to facilitate and enhance the Shinkendoka's ability to move continually while incorporating basic and intermediate suburi utilized in all elements of our practice. The main point of this drill is to improve one's ability to perform tachiuchi. Since Kaiso departed New York, he has begun to instruct additional movements of this drill known as goshin, hashin and jushin, representing a five-, eight- and ten-count.

This new pattern is reminiscent of Oigata in some ways, but combines more ashisabaki patterns while adding an offensive beginning to the drill. Kaiso also showed a henka whereby you repeat each pattern thereby creating a considerable cardio workout when practiced at speed and for repetition.



Tachiuchi was another component strongly stressed during Obata Kaiso's visit. This time, Sensei reviewed in greater detail the Tomoe Dachi series with a few new twists. Speaking of Tomoe Dachi, it was my honor and privilege to demonstrate this tachiuchi with Howard Quick-sensei from the Big Pond (that's slang for Australia, mate) during what has become our annual enbu at the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens Sakura Matsuri festival.

As part of our ongoing tachiuchi practice, Obata Kaiso reviewed basic and advanced ippon dachi, suggesting minor adjustments on mikazuki, makiosae and kirikaeshi applications. These adjustments broaden our perspective from a practical sense, but offer another challenge in making new adjustments to practiced routines.

As if all of the above weren't enough, Sensei reviewed Nito-ken, introducing some new (to me) kihon, suburi and tachiuchi patterns. Another custom which Obata Kaiso continues is to put me on the spot at demonstrations. This year's surprise was to perform Nito-ken while Matthew Sensei of Mashuu dojo attacked. Did anyone say "pressure"? It all turned out fine, though I will have to work diligently at improving this very challenging skill set. Speaking of talent, Matthew Sensei was not only a great guest, workout / demo partner and skilled Shinkendoka, he was also a terrific M.C. at our demo. His participation was absolutely wonderful, and while I don't mean to take any thunder away from our performance, which was good, Matthew Sensei made us all look great and the audience really paid attention to our demo due to his role as M.C.



Due to our dojo expansion during the Christmas-New Year's break, we have more than doubled the size of our facility, and because of this, we felt comfortable in inviting out-of-town students and instructors to attend Obata Kaiso's spring seminar.

Our guests included David Birdsell Shihan from the Midwest region, Howard Quick Sensei representing Australia, Matthew Lynch Sensei of Mashuu Dojo and his student and our good friend the "famous" Luke La Fontaine, Bruno Sensei of Canada, out-of-town Shinkendo New York student Jeremy Sather from Philadelphia and new-to-Shinkendo and hailing from Baltimore Flemming Madsen. Flemming-san contributed a very insightful article which students and instructors may find very enlightening.

David Mancuso, a former Honbu student now living in New York where he is performing percussion and sometimes playing the Maestro and conducting on Broadway in the hit musical *Spamalot*, also took part in the seminar and demo. David has been a great friend and practice partner in recent times and I am delighted that he is part of our dojo.



Hosting Obata Kaiso for a week is always an honor and privilege in the extreme, and this time it was made all the more fun with Howard Quick and David Birdsell also staying with us. Once again, my wife Terry was outstanding in her hosting duties, which literally and figuratively ran 24-7. My only regret is that because we were so busy training each day -- mornings from 10 to noon and in the evening from 7 to 9 -- no time was available for sightseeing. Due to the size of our Taekwondo-karate program, I was unable to cancel those classes entirely and this too contributed to the lack of free time to socialize and sight see. Perhaps this will be remedied in the future.

Special thanks to Shinkendo New York students Mike Mason and Shaffee Bacchus for arranging transportation to the Brooklyn Botanical gardens, making our travel fun and stress-free. Following our performance, we retired to a local Hong Kong-style Chinese restaurant for an enjoyable dinner.

Thank you, Obata Kaiso, for all of your efforts and dedication to Budo.



## Kaiso Turns “Big Apple” Into Cherry Blossom

By Dr. David Birdsell

On April 29, 2006, Kaiso Toshishiro Obata turned the “Big Apple” into a cherry blossom at the Cherry Blossom Festival in Brooklyn, New York. Over 30,000 people were in attendance at the annual event. The Shinkendo martial art demonstration was sponsored by Modern Samurai Dojo of Queens, New York. Sensei Lou D’Agostino, local Shinkendo instructor, hosted a special week of Shinkendo training conducted by Master Toshishiro Obata at his martial art training facility.

Shinkendo instructors from around the world were in attendance from countries including Australia, Canada, and the United States. The USA Shinkendo instructors were present from Los Angeles, Illinois, and New York, as well as a flavoring of samurai students from the eastern region.

The week of Shinkendo training was climaxed by the Cherry Blossom Festival Shinkendo demonstration directed by Kaiso Obata. The Shinkendo instructors and students performed different aspects of the samurai sword art with Suburi, Tanrenkata, Goho Battoho, Tachiuchi, and Tameshigiri test-cutting. The responsive Brooklyn audience was very appreciative of the samurai demonstration. At the conclusion, Kaiso Obata “turned the ‘Big Apple’ into a cherry blossom” by personally performing Tameshigiri test-cutting with Nito-ken (two-sword technique) as well as the individual sword to the delight of the New Yorkers in attendance.

Personally, I was emotionally moved by having the opportunity to observe Mr. Obata’s display of sword skills. The Nito-ken Tameshigiri display appeared almost magical with the fluent precision cutting with two samurai swords. All in all, it was a great week in the Big Apple. Very special thanks are extended to Sensei Lou D’Agostino and his Shinkendo students for hosting such a great martial art event.

## New to The Family!

By Flemming Madsen, Baltimore

The Shinkendo family is ever growing – and now you even have a Viking amongst you! Ok, so what is this all about? My name is Flemming Madsen and I joined the Shinkendo federation in early April this year, through the kind introduction of Lou D’Agostino-sensei in New York. I am a Danish citizen currently living with my family in Baltimore, Maryland, and working for an investment management company. I have been studying traditional and modern Japanese martial arts under a different teacher for many years, but decided to change my Budo “path” earlier this year for various personal reasons.

For many years, I ran a part-time dojo in my native Denmark, which I handed over to my senior students there when I relocated to Baltimore in 2004. The teachings of the dojo were primarily within Aikido (Yoshinkan) and Jujutsu (various *Koryu*, old-style schools). However, senior students also had the opportunity to study Mugai Ryu Iaido and Okinawa Goju Ryu Karate-do. All of these arts had been taught to me throughout nearly 20 years of training under a traditional teacher in Southern Japan. For years, I was the “typical Budo-tourist” who traveled back and forth between my home country and Japan, each time trying to pick up a little extra knowledge and receive many, many corrections to the bad habits I developed during my own practice (and sometimes struggling with the language barrier, too!). After moving to the United States, I was on the lookout for a new dojo where I could continue to practice. It is hard when you have been doing the same arts – or a particular style within an art – for many years to find a place where you could easily fit in and find common ground and beliefs. I did not find that in the Baltimore area, so I just continued to practice by myself in my home-dojo.

I had been the lucky owner Obata-kaiso’s books and videos for years, and have always bought the new ones whenever they came out. There was always something powerful drawing me towards those books and videos, and I was very intrigued to learn

more about this outstanding teacher. Particularly the Tameshigiri and the fast and energetic Tachiuchi impressed me and spurred my curiosity. When I finally decided to seek a different path, it was obvious to me that it had to be Shinkendo. I contacted Lou-sensei in New York to learn more about Shinkendo and Obata-kaiso and how to possibly join the organization. We had a great first conversation, and I immediately felt that this could be the right thing for me. A few weeks later, I had the opportunity to be in Los Angeles, and Lou-sensei arranged a two-day visit for me with Kaiso.

It was with high expectations I traveled to the Honbu for my first real introduction to Shinkendo. My expectations were more than fulfilled, and I don't need to tell all of you what an eye-opener it was! To spend two intense days with Kaiso and Mrs. Obata was a very inspiring experience for me. Despite Kaiso's high standing in the martial arts community, I immediately felt at ease with him. He headed straight into the practice of the important Ashisabaki, and as the day progressed with training and interludes of explanations and talking about key concepts, I knew I had found the right path. We continued to work through several levels of Goho Battoho and other parts of the Shinkendo curriculum, and in the regular classes in the evening, I was introduced to tachiuchi, Toyama Ryu, as well as basic series of Aikido. At the end of the first day, my head was spinning – but my spirits were high!

The next day brought another surprise for me: tameshigiri. I have been doing iaido for nearly 20 years, but had never cut anything else but thin air.... I knew earlier on that swordsmanship would not be complete without tameshigiri and that I had to add that element to my training. However, within most iaido ryu, hardly any real cutting is done these days. Of course, it varies from teacher to teacher, but in most cases you would only see it at demonstrations. I had seen Toyama Ryu tameshigiri demonstrated, but apart from that, I haven't come across a school where tameshigiri is as ingrained as it is in Shinkendo. This is probably one of the biggest differences between traditional iaido and Shinkendo as I see it. The other main difference is the emphasis on tachiuchi in Shinkendo. The traditional iaido Ryu all have some tachiuchi, but again I think that the

practice of those is limited in general. Not only that, but the "traditional" tachiuchi is often practiced in a slightly "stiff" form with plenty of "zanshin" and time to think about the next move.... My initial experience with Shinkendo tachiuchi is that it is much more dynamic and challenging. You really need to teach your body to react unconsciously and with great flexibility. I don't know every single iaido ryu and dojo around the world – so please forgive me out there if I am making unfair generalizations...

Looking at the Shinkendo Battoho versus "traditional" lai waza, it appears to be more simple, yet very flexible and practical. When I say simple, I don't mean that from a technical perspective, but rather in relation to the limited number of basic forms and how they are practiced. It is very deceptive though in its simplicity... Whereas "traditional" iaido Ryu often have many, many specific waza – each designed for a particular situation ("when the enemy is coming at you from the right in a dark room," "when the enemy is attacking you just as you enter the gate," "when several enemies are attacking you as you walk down the stairs," etc. etc.) -- the Shinkendo waza can be used with great flexibility in virtually every situation one can imagine. From my viewpoint, this is because the Shinkendo Battoho is more of a training method for your body and brain (you know, not the brain "upstairs," but the one that runs down your spine...) rather than specific attack situations which the waza is trying to deal with, and where your body and brain will have to remember so much more information based on certain form (and imagination, too!). Kaiso's Aikido teacher, Shioda Gozo-sensei, said that to learn the correct form first was essential, but that after this you have to free yourself from that form in order to be able to respond freely to any attack. Yoshinkan Aikido also has a lot of forms practice -- and perhaps sometimes a little bit too much emphasis is put on this – but at the end of the day, it is also a very effective training method which "codes" your body and brain to respond effectively to endless types of attacks.

The traditional way of practice in Koryu, whether it is armed or unarmed, is through kata ("forms"). Many will say that this is the way technical concepts and "secrets" are transmitted from one generation to the next. There is absolutely some

truth to that. However, in today's world, where the martial arts no longer plays as important a role in conflict as before (it can on an individual basis in the circumstance of self defense – but not from a broad military conflict point of view), I think that a lot is “lost in translation” and interpretation between the generations. Particularly in the West, where there is increased fascination with the Koryu, we are often too anxious to copy the exact ways of the past through the kata, and we often have limited time to learn and practice. It can therefore easily end up being just an “empty shell” of dozens or even hundreds of kata, with very limited meaning. Our society, our ways of living and moving about, changes for each generation, which does have an important impact on the approach we should take to martial arts training. It is essential that each generation of teachers has the insight to break down the information contained in the kata and devise new, updated ways of training relevant to the times we live in. Not only that, but at the same time they should also be able to extract key elements from the past times, when these combat methods were a real test of life or death. This is exactly what Kaiso has done through the creation of Shinkendo, which places him in the league of other “greats” who have transformed the martial arts and devised a system which incorporates modern teaching principles but is still based on the real battle-tested fighting methods of the past.

Another observation I have made through my initial introduction to Shinkendo is how everything is integrated. The Ashisabaki and Taisabaki seems to be connecting Shinkendo with Aikido and the other related arts. This should be the obvious way, but it is not always what the “modern” budoka is faced with. Because most martial systems today are only fractions of what they used to be in terms of capabilities in both armed and unarmed fighting, we are often faced with the need to study several unrelated martial arts to get to the point of “Sogo Budo” (“complete” martial arts). From a practical point of view, if you study Karate, Aikido, Jujutsu, Iaido, Jo-do, Kendo etc., you will be taught what is sometimes very different patterns of movement, in addition to simply “what's right” and “what's wrong” within each art. This can be difficult to combine into one comprehensive method. Through Kaiso's

creation of Shinkendo and Aikibujutsu, you have a complete art where all the principles of body movement have come together into one and the same thing. Anyway, those were some of my initial thoughts and observations from my first brief encounter with Shinkendo and Kaiso's teachings.

I continued my new “Shinkendo journey” at Lou D'Agostino-sensei's beautifully renovated Modern Samurai Dojo in New York when Kaiso visited there at the end of April. This was an equally wonderful experience, as I also got to meet several Shibuchos with tons of experience, as well as Lou-sensei's great students. I felt like I already knew a lot of you before we even met, since I had at that point read every single page of the Shinkendo newsletters, and learned a lot about the Shinkendo family. The good feeling I got from reading those newsletters was another important reason why I decided to join Shinkendo. On the mat, I was again met with energetic and rapid-fire demonstrations of tachiuchi, and I was impressed with the overall level and ability of students and teachers. Kaiso's lessons were also very inspiring. Not only did he give great technical Shinkendo insights, but he also talked fondly about his past teachers and how he came to various conclusions about what Shinkendo should be like as an art. He gave us practical demonstrations too of how various forms of traditional etiquette had led to certain ways of moving, sitting and specific behavior. All in all, it was a true “full-bodied” experience!

As a bonus, I got to witness a great demonstration of the various Shinkendo elements at the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, where the Modern Samurai Dojo had been invited to demonstrate their skills at the annual Sakura blossoming festival. It was 25 minutes of fast and powerful demonstrations of Suburi, Battoho, Tachiuchi, Tameshigiri -- and of course Kaiso's magnificent Nito cutting. The latter was a real crowd pleaser with lots of “Ah!” and “Wow!” from the audience. He made it look so easy – like slicing through butter – that I doubt the audience even understood how much training lies behind those skills!

Lou Sensei held the NY Shinkendo flag high by demonstrating solid Tameshigiri as well as doing a nice demonstration of Nito-ken Tachiuchi – which I

was told had only been learned a few days before! Well done to all participants.

A big thank you to all who partnered up with me and led me as I “fumbled” my way through the Tachiuchi practice in particular. Also a big thank you to Lou-sensei and his wonderful wife Terry, who did an outstanding job in running the seminar and taking good care of everybody.

Finally, I would like to thank Kaiso and Mrs. Obata for welcoming me into the Shinkendo family. You were kind enough to share your time and energy wholeheartedly with me when I visited Los Angeles recently. You are both tremendously inspiring people in many, many ways, and I look forward to a long-lasting relationship.

Jinsei Shinkendo!

## Making a Trip to Begin a Journey

By Nigel Providence – Toronto, Canada

Not content with simply waiting for someone to bring Shinkendo to Toronto, I arranged to travel to Rimouski to receive a week of private instruction from Bruno St-Pierre-sensei. Traveling to Rimouski was no small trip, however, as it's about 670 miles from Toronto and takes 14 hours to get to by train. Shinkendo training was well worth traveling that far and that long, I thought, and I made all the necessary arrangements and booked my ticket. Bruno-sensei was kind

enough to let me stay at his home, and even picked me up at the train station at two in the morning.

It was my first time in the province of Quebec, and I wasn't really sure what to expect... especially since I was going to a city where only a very small amount of the population speaks any English (Quebec is the French part of Canada). When I got there however, I found the people very friendly, and Rimouski is very beautiful and serene... the perfect environment for training, and a welcome change from living in a much larger and busier city like Toronto. There was even ample space around Bruno-sensei's home to practice outdoors on the days that we didn't go down to the dojo.

As for training, due to the fact that I'd been familiarizing myself with Shinkendo for quite some time (I studied any material that I could get my hands on), I had a good grasp of the terminology and some of the basics. With some existing knowledge to build on, and having an excellent teacher like Bruno-sensei, by the end of my visit I was amazed at how much I'd learned. Overall the trip was well worth it and surpassed my expectations... I even picked up a little French! Another outcome that I didn't expect was a change in my intention to teach Shinkendo “someday” to actually finding myself taking up the challenge of trying to start a Toronto study group under Bruno-sensei's supervision.

Thanks to Bruno-sensei for taking the time out of his busy schedule to give me private instruction, and for his hospitality. Also, thanks to his girlfriend Valerie for training with me, showing me around the city, and for cooking all those great meals. I'm looking forward to my next trip to Rimouski.

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Kaiso in Santa Anita Race Track for Japan Culture Day