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Words From Obata-Kaiso

The Importance of Training in Budo in Modern Times

LOOKING BACK in history, the bicycle was invented in 1840, and the automobile is now about a hundred years old. In 1948, propeller airplanes started coming to Japan; in 1970, they became jet engines.

Life is very convenient now, and young people take for granted the technology that is available to them. However, for those who train at a dojo, using their bodies on a daily basis can improve their health and concentration. Getting exercise from sports or hobbies allows for fun and excitement, but training in budo gives something more. Everyone has *ki*, *kokoro*, *seishin*, and *tamashii*. Budo allows you to reflect on each of these aspects. Swinging around a bokuto may seem simple, but the focus required to handle a bokuto throughout many repetitions of techniques several times a week increases one's concentration, determination, perseverance, safety and awareness, and physical health. Tachiuchi practice contains within it the dynamics of *kyo jaku* (strong-weak), fast and slow, true and false, and many other opposing elements that one must learn. The *kiai* required during techniques is not merely an expression of our voice; it is a different kind of energy that we tap into.

There are no victories or losses in budo training; instead there should be more focus on using your body and mind, learning, connecting with your partner, and training that lasts a lifetime. As we continue to use machines and rely on them in our daily lives, we use less and less of our bodies. As we walk into the dojo and connect with other students on and off the mat and use our voice, we are able to become aware of what is important to ourselves in this modern day – through the pursuit of budo.



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The Importance of Training at Honbu Dojo

By G. Konstantine Laskaris
Shinkendo Athens, Greece

This past August, I had the opportunity to spend the entire month training at Honbu Dojo. I'm lucky that in Greece, where I live and operate my dojo, August is the unofficial national month of summer vacation. Most businesses close for 2-4 weeks so that people can take a break and enjoy the good weather. Since my dojo was closed, it was a perfect opportunity to take a trip to Los Angeles and train at Honbu Dojo.

Training at Honbu Dojo is something all Shinkendo-ka should try to do, if at all possible, on a regular basis. I know that it can be difficult (i.e. cost of travel, taking time off from work or school), but it is a unique and, for us, I believe, a necessary experience, the end results of which are quite beneficial.



Although many of us have the opportunity to see and train with Obata-kaiso at various seminars, being able to train with him at Honbu Dojo for an extended period of time is an altogether different experience. When spending time training there, you get to see a clearer picture of Obata-kaiso's teaching techniques – not only his methods of teaching, but also the direct influence it has on his students. This is very valuable in helping the rest of us get a clearer understanding of what Obata-kaiso is trying to accomplish and pass on to us, and how exactly we should learn it. This then gives us – teachers and students alike – a more definitive view of what we should be striving to accomplish with our own training.

This pertains not only to the spiritual and philosophical parts of Shinkendo – how to be strong-willed with good intent and purpose in all of our actions, how to be clear about what we say and do, how to always strive to do our

best, to better ourselves, others, and our surroundings – but also to the more immediate and physical aspects, such as how to teach new techniques, or, even more directly, being able to watch Obata-kaiso actually performing the techniques himself, thus giving us a perfect blueprint of not only what to do but *exactly* how to do it.



We all have to completely understand just how incredibly fortunate we are to be able to learn a martial art in which we have the ability to learn directly from our founder. This is a very rare situation, and not something to be taken for granted. I cannot stress this point enough. Obata-kaiso is the direct template for everything we are doing and learning in Shinkendo. When learning directly from him, we get to see exactly how everything should be performed, both physically and mentally. It is then our job and responsibility to try and reproduce those aspects as close to the original (vis-à-vis Obata-kaiso) as possible. To do anything less is basically, in my opinion, pointless.

Another positive aspect of training at Honbu Dojo is that it allows us to feel connected to our source. It's easy sometimes, while training at our own dojo, to get lulled into thinking "This is it," believing that



where we train and who we train with on a daily basis fully defines our experience and reality of what Shinkendo is. We have to, however, remember to take a step back and see the bigger picture. We are all part of a bigger whole. All that we are learning and all that our respective sensei are teaching us begin with Obata-kaiso and Honbu Dojo. That is where the hub of our wheel of learning originates.

While training at Honbu Dojo, we also have the opportunity to get updates on all aspects of Shinkendo – everything from technique updates and additions to the curriculum to the finer points of dojo etiquette. Shinkendo is a “living art” and, as such, is constantly evolving. This is something I know the long-time practitioners understand very well! Shinkendo today is



very different from the Shinkendo of 1990 or 2000. As such, to be true to the art, we must make sure and update our information and learn new techniques, refine established techniques, and also refresh our memories in regard to the old standards. There is *always* something new to learn or something old we can learn to do better. Training at Honbu Dojo with Obata-kaiso and being surrounded by and watching the Honbu students, who are influenced by him on a daily basis, is the most direct, and again, a most fortunate way of keeping up on all these changes, by fully immersing yourself in the center of our art. I often say that training at Honbu Dojo for one month is almost like training anywhere else for one year!

I’ve just returned home from my trip to Honbu Dojo and, needless to say, I’m already planning my next visit. I do urge everyone to try their best to make the trip. It will enrich your Shinkendo experience and make you a better practitioner on many different levels. You will be happy that you did. Jinsei Shinkendo!



My Visit to Honbu

By Saki Yoshida
Tokyo, Japan

I'm visiting the Honbu Dojo in Los Angeles right now to learn both Shinkendo and Aikibujutsu during my summer vacation for two and a half months. I quit my job right before I left Japan, which made such a long summer vacation possible. This is actually the second time I have come to train here at the Honbu Dojo, but last time I was here for only ten days (seven days of practice), which was not enough time for me as a beginner student to remember new things. What was worse was that I haven't been able to train in the two years since, and had forgotten almost everything. I suppose almost everyone is able to practice at a dojo regularly (even if it's a dojo located pretty far away for some of you); however, I don't have any dojo near my house, in my city, in my prefecture, or in my country even! Even though Obata-kaiso is from Japan, there are currently no branches in Japan. I was surprised about that at first; it seems strange, but it's true. However, I wasn't interested in any other martial arts in Tokyo, so I decided to stick to the study of Shinkendo and Aikibujutsu, even if I didn't have the chance to practice regularly. I'm sure that I made a great choice! I also started thinking about the possibility of setting up a branch dojo for Shinkendo and Aikibujutsu in Japan somehow in the future.



Everyone at Honbu Dojo is very kindly teaching me movements and techniques during class, but they are also reviewing them with me before or after class. They are trying to take care of me all the time so I can learn a lot from them and enjoy training together with them everyday. I especially would love to say thank you to Nicholas-sensei, who took a lot of time to practice tachiuchi with me before class. As Kaiso keeps telling me, "Jyozu-na hito wo maneshiro!!" which means "Copy those who do well!!" I've been trying to do just like the great seniors do – speed, timing, angle, distance, strength, feeling, and everything.

I was lucky to be able to participate in a demonstration for Nisei Week. Although I made some mistakes during the demonstration, I really enjoyed it very much. Also, I was happy to see Kaiso doing tameshigiri live for the first time.

Also, the Shochu Geiko from August 20-22 was an excellent opportunity to meet and practice with more Shinkendo students from different dojo – Nayef-sensei and his students from Atlanta, Trevis-sensei from Chicago, James-sensei from Arizona, Eric-sensei from San Jose, and also Konstantine-sensei from Greece, Françoise from England, and Péter-sensei from Hungary. Since the participants were all advanced, I definitely learned a lot those three days.

In addition, the other day Kaiso let me try tameshigiri for the first time at Honbu Dojo under his guidance. I had never touched a shinken before, which made me nervous, but Mike-sensei told me that I cut well for my first time. Yet after I saw Mike-sensei's beautiful and stable cutting, I really understood that mine was terrible. I'm certain that I need



Since there isn't a Shinkendo or Aikibujutsu dojo in Japan as of yet, I'm regularly asked how I discovered Obata-kaiso and Shinkendo and Aikibujutsu. Thinking back to three years ago, it was Kevin Taylor and John Flowers from Illinois, at the time studying Japanese at my school in Japan as exchange students, who taught me what Shinkendo is. That is to say, it was the

opening chapter of my Shinkendo/Aikibujutsu life. I may have never learned about Shinkendo and Aikibujutsu if not for meeting them. Here, I want to express my appreciation to them once again – thank you, Kevin and John.

to practice suburi more to cut like he does. Fortunately, tatami-omote is free and readily available everywhere in Japan.



During this visit, I stayed at Kaiso's house for about two months. It was a great experience for me to learn not only about Shinkendo but also his way of thinking. I have been learning from Kaiso directly, which means I'll be considered Kaiso Jiki-den (direct initiation from Kaiso). I'm 100% sure what that means, and it's going to be a

heavy responsibility to me. Honestly, I had never really thought this would happen so quickly because I don't feel experienced enough to start running a dojo suddenly. However, I definitely need to be completely confident about teaching once I've started, and to be more sure of myself so that others do not doubt me if I make a mistake. I realize that this as a whole is going to be a great challenge for me. That doesn't, however, mean I should put unreasonable pressure on myself, as Gabriel-sensei advised me.

I plan to start looking for a place to practice and to set up a web site right away after I return to Japan. Luckily, there will be some fellow Shinkendo members back in Tokyo with whom I can practice: Dean Kaplan from California, who is studying at the Tokyo Institute of Technology; Jeremy Sather from Pennsylvania, who will study at Hosei University for two years; Antoine Testu from France, who will work in Tokyo for six months; and Vikram Talwar from Honbu Dojo, who plans to work in Japan in the near future. Also, some other students from around the world may be interested in joining us in Japan to train together. Of course, I'm going to try my best to establish Shinkendo and Aikibujutsu in Japan, but doing so by myself is quite daunting; so I welcome any advice and the experience of my fellow Shinkendo-ka. Visiting me would exceed all expectations, but please let me know if there is any possibility you will come to Japan!



Lastly, I want to say "ARIGATO GOZAIMASHITA" again to Kaiso and all who I met here during my visit!! And of course I'd love to come back to Honbu Dojo sometime soon!!



Samurai & Hussars

By Peter Parker
Sojokan Dojo, Chicago, Illinois

In June of 2010, Sojokan Dojo hosted the first Chicago seminar with Obata-kaiso. During short breaks between training sessions, people gathered around Kaiso's desk. Some sought advice, some asked questions, some were just hanging around and listening. There was a big map of Europe on the desk; the map had little dots for each Shinkendo and Aikido dojo out there. There was a huge concentration of dots in Hungary and Poland. I remember somebody asking why. The question made me think about it.

There are probably very simple reasons for the proliferation of Shinkendo and Aikido in the region. However, I like to go beyond simple and concentrate on interesting parallels in history.

The beginnings of the samurai as a warrior class were similar to that of European knights. The history of both was crafted by a period of feudal wars and territory disputes. It may seem strange to compare horse-mounted samurai to European knights in shiny armor, but there might be a small parallel between them, such as a self-enforced warrior code of honor. There was a change on the horizon. Surprisingly, for both cultures, it was riding on Mongol horses.

In 1274 and 1281, there were two unsuccessful invasions of Japan by Mongols. Samurai quickly adapted to a new style of warfare to confront them, but the invaders never returned. Most ensuing conflicts were domestic affairs, with an extensive period of civil war from 1338-1573 known as the Muromachi period. The samurai class as we know it started forming back then and was formalized under the Tokugawa Shogunate, during a relatively peaceful period known as the Edo period (1603-1867). Kimono, hakama, kaku-obi, and daisho – that is how the image of the samurai has been imprinted forever on people's minds. The following Meiji Restoration marked the end of that era.

In 1241, Mongols had also invaded Central Europe. Armed conflict with Mongols and Tartars persisted for the next 300 years. They were not fully defeated until 1778. Eastern and Central European nations needed to adapt their style of warfare and weapons to combat the highly maneuverable Mongol cavalry.

Due to the type of conflicts occurring in the Western part of Europe, trends in sword-making moved toward

producing stabbing weapons with thinner blades. A straight, double-edged blade was the favored weapon in the West. Swords there morphed from heavy broadswords into lighter one-handed weapons, and later rapiers. Modern Western fencing is based on the end result of that weapon transformation.



In Central Europe, swords developed into a hybrid between Western straight, stabbing-only blades and Eastern curved, slashing-only ones. The saber started to replace other swords in all areas. At that time, a new type of cavalry unit developed in Hungary, called Hussars. Depending on its etymology, *hussar* can be interpreted as either "raider" or "one in twenty." These elite formations become so formidable that similar units formed in all European armies.

Hussars were used in all kinds of conflicts up until the 20th century. Their image – colorful uniforms, mustaches, unusually long hair, and bravery in battle approaching recklessness – forever remains in legends.

What is really interesting is the noble class born of all that. In the 1500s, the biggest power in Central Europe was the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The noble class, endowed with unusual freedoms, was called “Szlachta,” from the German meaning “well born” and “the battle.” It was a noble class with a focus on military service and loyalty to the monarch. Some of them received land as a reward, some monetary payments. They were proficient with the sword, trained in many other weapons, and ready to be called for duty at will. The interesting thing was their dress code – long, two-piece robe with oversized sleeves, sizable silk sash, and custom-made sword.



Over many years, this class earned so many privileges that, when the Commonwealth’s king died without an heir, they started electing kings by themselves. One of the greatest elected kings was a Hungarian warrior-prince named Stephen Bathory. This further cemented a cultural exchange in the Central European region.

With the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars period ending in 1815, the role of the fighting nobility diminished. They slowly transformed into intellectuals and bureaucrats. Even wearing a sword in public was eventually outlawed, though military officers were exempt.

Again, one can see parallels within history. There is a culture of honor and admiration for the blade in almost any culture in the world. Some places keep it closer to the heart, though.

What I find fascinating about Shinkendo is the connection between past tradition and core philosophical values, which are universal. It takes time and dedication to become a swordsman, and these days it is an unorthodox skill. Respect for the blade, respect for centuries of tradition, respect for details, and a lot of fun practicing – that is what makes Shinkendo a very unique martial art.

Impressions of Obata-Kaiso’s Seminar

By Пётр Миха, Russia



It’s hard to write about the experience in a manner that is coherent. I’ve attended a lot of different seminars before, but I’ve never seen such a good-quality and well-organized seminar before.

I’ll try to express what I’ve seen in few points, and I apologize ahead of time for being excited and perhaps difficult to understand.

I. I’ve really learned a lot – not only technique, but also the style of teaching! Everything Obata-kaiso shows us is

really awesome, and I could understand everything even without translation!



2. The energy of the seminar was fantastic! I wanted to train more and more in spite of the heat.

3. Obata-kaiso paid attention to every single student. He explained mistakes and demonstrated the correct movements patiently and clearly. Also, his speed and technique are amazing – I've witnessed real mastery of swordsmanship for the first time.



4. I really enjoyed Aikibujutsu. It is a great martial art of self-defense, realistic and natural. It's completely different from what I've seen and tried in my own country. And it combines harmoniously with sword and bo technique. It's really a pity I couldn't attend all of the training sessions (due to old knee injuries). When I see Kaiso's technique, I realize that it represents how the samurai were actually fighting and training. And, again, the style of teaching was great – I was able to understand everything without knowing the language!



5. The atmosphere of the seminar was great! People were kind and generous. In spite of the hard training, I feel as if I've just spent two weeks abroad having a vacation! Special thanks to Roland-sensei for organizing the seminar!

6. Unfortunately, everything has its end. Four days of seminars is really a little – even when I was about to leave, I really wanted to train further! There is really a lot more for me to study! But I'm really looking forward to seeing you all again soon!



Again, thanks a lot to Obata-kaiso for his great Aikibujutsu and Shinkendo techniques and teaching! Also, to Roland-sensei, for his teaching, kindness, and help; to Vadim-sensei and Sergei, for their kindness and invaluable help; and to all my friends for participating in the seminar – thank you all!



My Trip to the Honbu Dojo

By Péter Lukács
Shinkendo Hungary



This August, I traveled to Los Angeles for the fourth time in my life. From this point of view, I can say that it was a familiar flight, and the big city was also not new to my eye.

Every time is similar in certain ways: for example, I am amazed of the gigantism of American life, of the distances in space and in culture. Every time I step into a new period of my life, the trip gives so much that, when I return, this energy lasts usually months and helps me start or continue a new episode in living, working, and studying.

This is thanks to Kaiso and his family, and to the Honbu Dojo students. Every time, they welcome us with courtesy and with a big heart. They spend energy, time, and money so that, whoever the guest is, he or she is completely comfortable.

On the other hand, every trip of mine has been different. I took my first trip to Honbu when I was 19 and have spent two months training there, with the honor of staying at Kaiso's home. I learned Aikido for the first time then. The second time was shorter, but though it was hard to focus, I still learned a lot. The third time, I was accompanied by my Hungarian sensei, Roland Lajos, as well as Ferenc Sziklai and Peter Kottek. We stayed in Hollywood and traveled to the dojo together; it was a different feeling traveling with a group.

My recent trip was very different once again. I spent my August at the Honbu Dojo with Konstantine Laskaris-sensei from Greece and Saki Yoshida from Japan. We became friends, and this connection proved to be strong, as we could learn from each other and could support each other. This time, I could feel a very firm, cooperative atmosphere – we helped each other without being selfish or ignorant, a rare thing in today's social life.

Making such a trip to another country is of course a matter of money. I am fortunate that I could afford these trips. Then again, if someone is serious enough to spend their patiently-collected money on a trip like this, it can change the road on which you are heading. I am 25 years old and I do not know much about life, but still I can feel that the teachings of Kaiso are helping me make better decisions and have better relationships with other people and the society I live in. I am becoming aware of more and more things I will have to change or rethink in life before taking more responsibility.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Yukishiro Obata-soke also for taking the time and energy to help correct mistakes.

We will continue to train hard in Hungary. My very best regards to all.

