

Samurai News from Honbu



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Traveling Students

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ENBU WHILE AT THE HONBU	KATSUJINKEN	TENUGUI TRAVELS
G. Konstantine Laskaris's adventures with the Honbu demos.	Ruminations about the life-giving sword.	The roaming gnome takes a backseat as the tenugui travels the world
Page 3	Page 10	Page 12

SENSEI'S CORNER

By Obata Toshishiro Kaiso

We've had many students visit the Honbu Dojo lately.

At the Australian seminar, Jeffery Tie Sensei attended. He is currently holding seminars in Singapore and Indonesia. We have had an interest from the Philippines, and Mr. Jesus Tamesis recently visited the Honbu dojo with his family to introduce himself. I noticed that his daughter is especially eager to learn Shinkendo, and I look forward to their progress. Mr. Tamesis will be guided under Tie Sensei.

We also had Mr. Otani from Japan, who stayed in Los Angeles for two weeks, come to train with us at the Honbu. He returned home with a knowledge of basics, and has been training at home. He originally thought that I would not be very different from Japanese swordsmanship instructors from Japan, but he was surprised to learn that my whole system, energy, and techniques are very different. Honbu students Konstantine Laskaris and John Liu took care of Mr. Otani during his stay. I am happy to see the Shinkendo family take care of visiting students.

I have just received an e-mail from my ex-student, Eran. After traveling to New York, he will be leaving for Hawaii and inquired about a dojo there. It is my hope that we will have a dojo there one day. He stated



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that most other dojos in NY did not have the accuracy in technique and professional care that he found at my dojo, and I am glad that he was able to understand and appreciate his time here.

Recently, NY student Shaffee Bacchus moved to Massachusetts. Shaffee has attended numerous seminars in NY and Los Angeles, and it is my hope that he will have a dojo up and running one day.

Also, if there is any news from the branches, please send them to our Honbu correspondents. We would like to hear from both students and instructors.

Picture from the upcoming Shinkendo Kamae book



Editor's Corner

By Michael Shu

Hi Again!

The Honbu dojo is bustling with life as many friendly new students are filling the dojo with positive Ki.

G. Konstantine Laskaris, after 4 months of study at the Honbu, has left for his travels to San Francisco, back to New York, and finally Greece. It is his hope to start a Shinkendo dojo in Greece and he has made an open invitation for everyone in the Shinkendo family to visit him.

During his stay, I videotaped many moments of Konstantine to put together into a mini promo-piece that Konstantine could use when first starting his dojo in Greece. I will take time and care to make sure he looks awesome in the video.

Speaking of video, about a month ago, Mrs. Obata unexpectedly gave me a big box of VHS tapes that have been taking up space in their closet. This was what I dubbed the "*Kaiso Mountain of Dusty VHS Glory*". Mrs. Obata wished for me to transfer the videos into digital form and perhaps show some of the content on Youtube. I thought it was an awesome idea and, as many of you know, we've started *ShinkendoTube*, a Youtube channel of Shinkendo videos straight from the source.



Check out the channel by clicking [HERE](#)

And remember to send some of your favorite videos to add to the official Youtube channel of Shinkendo videos!

Enbu While at the Honbu

By G. Konstantine Laskaris - NY Student/
Honbu Guest

I've been a student of Shinkendo for about 6½ years at Modern Samurai dojo in New York, run by Sensei Lou D'agostino. I now have the opportunity to move to Greece, where I plan on opening a Shinkendo dojo. This helped me decide to come to the Honbu dojo from January thru April 2008, so I could study directly under Obata Kaiso before embarking on my move. While here at Honbu dojo, I've had many, many wonderful experiences, some of which included getting to join in and perform in several Shinkendo demonstrations put on by the Honbu dojo.



Our first demonstration, held on March 15, was at Loyola Marymount University (LMU), in Marina del Rey, as part of their annual “Japanese Culture Night”. We were performing with various other groups, from traditional Japanese dance troupes and Taiko drummers, to my favorite Japanese punk rock band, Thee Out Mods. The demonstration itself was held on a wooden stage, located inside of a small auditorium.

There were about 10 of us Shinkendo Honbu students there, being led by Mike Shu Sensei. Prior to going on stage, we had a very quick dry run of what we may end up doing on stage, and with whom we would be partnered. As soon as we walked on stage, an audible hush fell on the crowd, as they were not quite sure what to expect. Mike Sensei did a great job of M.C.'ing the event, explaining in “laymen’s terms” what exactly it is we were performing, and why it was we learned the various kamae and kata. While going through the various kata, you would hear the

audience “Oo” and “Ah”, as well as loud applause when we would finish the various segments of the demonstration.

We performed a variety of things such as Happono Kamae, Happogiri and Shoden no Kata. We then demonstrated various tachiuchi such as Ippon Dachi Kihon and Jokyu. Mike Sensei and Saito Sensei finished the night off with a variety of Nitoken kata and tachiuchi. At this point, you could really hear the audience get more and more excited and animated. When we all lined up for our formal and final Rei to the audience, we were treated to loud applause. Afterwards, quite a few spectators as well as the event promoters came up to us to personally thank us and tell us just what a fun time they all had getting to watch Shinkendo in action.



[Click here for Youtube Video](#)



The next demonstration was on March 29, at the Santa Anita Park horse race track, as part of their “Japan Family Day” held in conjunction with the “Tokyo City Cup” horse races. Santa Anita Park is in one of the most beautiful areas of southern California that I have seen. Being from New York, you always think of southern California as downtown Los Angeles, or the beaches of

“Baywatch”. Santa Anita Park is nestled at the foot of some beautiful mountains, and surrounded by lots of trees, and grassy parks. It is one of the greenest places I have seen while staying here and, a perfect environment in my opinion.

The day was FULL of wonderful Japanese cultural events such as traditional Japanese dancers, Koto musicians, Tea Ceremony practitioners, calligraphy, flower arranging, and my two personal favorites, the Soma Nomaioi, (a group that wears traditional, authentic and sometimes antique samurai armor while riding horseback) and Sumo wrestling.

Our portion of the demo was to last two 15 minute sessions. We had a really good turnout of Shinkendo-ka, including Obata Kaiso and Mrs. Obata Sensei, as well as a rather large amount of people in the audience. In total, we went through a good amount of various kata, suburi and tachiuchi, including Nitoken kata, suburi and tachiuchi. The highlight of the day, however, was the amazing Nitoken tameshigiri performed by Obata Kaiso. It’s always so exciting to watch Kaiso perform tameshigiri, and watching Nitoken tameshigiri, especially kesa/kiriage at the same time, is just an extra treat. His precision and focus always blows me away.



The following weekend was full of demonstrations. The evening of Saturday, April 5, we performed at the University of Southern California (USC). Mike Shu Sensei teaches his Shinkendo class at

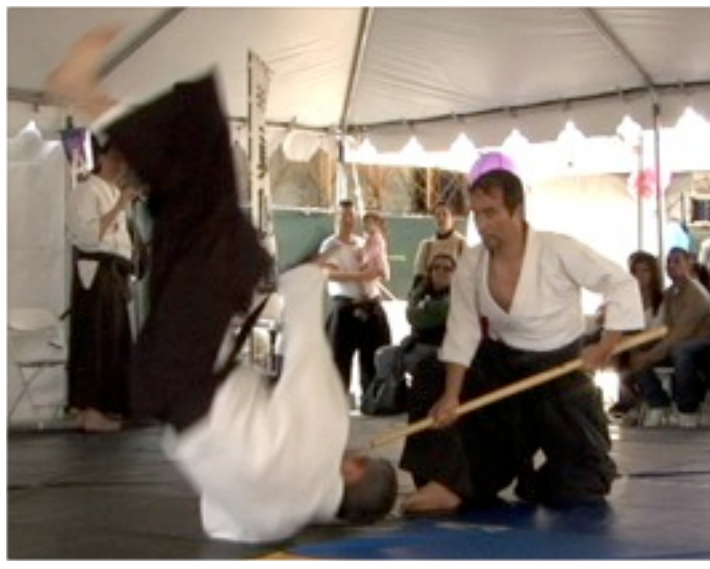


USC, so he set up this particular demonstration. The event was to raise money and awareness to help fight cancer and was held at the track and field at USC. There were people walking around the track and every mile they completed raised more money to be donated to their cause.

Our group performing consisted of Sensei Mike three of his students and several other Honbu students. The demo took place at the far end of the oval soccer/track field, which was surrounded by the runner's track. There was no stage, so we performed at ground level. The track itself was Astroturf sitting on top of some sort of cushioned padding. This was my first experience walking barefoot on padded Astroturf. I must say, it was quite comfortable. As there was no stage, we performed the demonstration at the same level as our audience. This gave it a more intimate feeling and made it less of a show. We performed for half an hour, once again various suburi, tanrenkata and tachiuchi. This demo also concluded with a display of tameshigiri performed by Saito Sensei and Mike Sensei, as well as myself. This was my first time performing tameshigiri at a demonstration in front of a crowd. I did not really feel nervous, all though I was feeling excited. My cutting went well and I was please with the results. Watching Senseis Saito and Sensei Mike cut, though, showed me that I have a lot to learn about cutting smoothly.



Our final demonstration in the time I've been here was the next day, April 6, at the Sakura Matsuri festival in downtown Los Angeles, in the Little Tokyo district (which, incidentally, is my beloved, adopted neighborhood and home away from home. I've been living here for the last 4 months and I was excited about performing in front of "my" neighborhood crowd). The festival was a 2 day even full of various Japanese cultural performances and demonstrations. There were many other martial arts schools of very varying styles putting on demonstrations, including Kung Fu, Escrima, Muay Thai, Judo, and, once again, my favorite Sumo wrestlers. The Shinkendo group, led by Sensei Matthew Lynch (Kaiso was in Alabama at the time, heading a seminar), had the honor of closing the festivities by being the final demonstration of the 2 day festival.



This demonstration was also held under a tented area, but the tent was much taller than the one at Santa Anita Park. The stage was a wooden platform raised about a foot of the ground, which was covered by soft mats. This allowed us to begin with a demonstration of various solidly and energetically performed Aikibujutsu techniques. Our M.C. for the event was Sensei Matthew who, if you haven't had the pleasure, has a wonderful way of speaking to a crowd. It is always a fun treat to hear him M.C. an event.

For this demo we had the room for those of us that had shinken, to use them for the various suburi and tanrenkata we performed. This always adds an extra element of excitement to the presentation for the audience. Needless to say, it takes extra caution on our parts to use our shinken safely, in such an environment. Not only do we have to watch out for those students standing around us. We also have to take extra care not to injure ourselves in the rush to batto, noto or perform kata and suburi while trying to keep up with the rest of the



group. Demo leaders should always keep this in mind when leading a group using live blades. We must also consider the audience when performing with Shinken, making sure to check the condition and safety of your sword prior to use. Are the mekugi secure? Is the tsuka in good shape? Is the tsuka ito clean and dry, offering a good grip? As well, you have to be careful not to be overzealous in your movements, making sure that you are not swinging the sword too closely to the audience members. You never know if one will decide to stand up or move in your way, or shuffle in their seat just as you are about to perform a cut, thus causing a very dangerous situation. I personally tend to knock the power out of my swings down a couple of notches, just to take the



extra precaution not to unnecessarily overstress the handle or blade, so as to avoid the possible mishaps.

Getting on with the demo, we had fun with our performance, as usual showing our moves with Happo no Kamae, various tanrenkata and suburi patterns. We also performed Toyama Ryu Batto Jutsu in paired demo format. There was also a lot of tachiuchi demonstrated, such as Ippon dachi Kihon, Juppon Omote and Juppon

Ura as well as Ryu Sui, Issonami and Shiho.

We concluded this demonstration with tameshigiri as well. I was lucky enough to get to test-cut on stage again. This was the 2nd demo in 2 days that I got to perform tameshigiri, so I felt I was quite mentally prepared although, once again, watching people such as Saito Sensei and Matthew Sensei perform tameshigiri very powerfully and smoothly, I realize that I have a lot to aspire to.

One major point I've alluded to throughout this commentary on demonstrations has been that at all the demonstrations we performed, we had been confronted by many different environments, setting, stages, and audiences. These are all things that we must take into account as we mentally and physically prepare



ourselves to perform at a demo. Although we may practice a set pattern of techniques, with a set group of people before attending each demo, nothing should be quite set in stone as so many variables come into play once we get to the demo area. Things such as weather, size and construction of the stage, quality of the stage/performing surface (is it rough, slippery, pockmarked, flat, etc), possible obstructions (such as overhead metal guide wires) audience location and which of our students actually show up to participate can mildly or greatly alter what you have originally planned on performing. You should keep in mind that your original plan should remain flexible in case you come across an unexpected situation. Do your best to keep the demonstration fun and informative, but, most of all, be safe; towards yourself, your fellow students and the audience.

Finally, I would like to say a very special thank you to everyone who attended all of the demonstrations and to those who took the time and effort to film the demonstrations. I, for one, really enjoy being able to watch the footage after the fact, so I can see what went on from the audience's perspective, as well as having a record to add them to my personal archive. I find these to be very useful learning tools that I can refer to at any time. I believe that they will prove invaluable once I move to Greece and have to lead some demonstrations of my own.



Katsujinken

By Gyan Gearon – Student, Mesa Dojo, AZ

Introduction by Marlene Harris – Shibuchō, Mesa Shinkendo Dojo

One of our students, Gyan Gearon submitted the following essay in response to a class that one of our assistant instructors (Darrell Lynn) recently presented. I've included it in our dojo newsletter, but felt it also merited a larger audience.

A bit about Gyan: he has rheumatoid arthritis (a very debilitating condition), and he began training in Shinkendo as a form of exercise in the martial arts genre that he could participate in without undue decrement to his body. Despite his condition, he trains with great sincerity, heart, a search for the deeper understanding of the principles, and the will to keep trying to improve. Gyan and students like him are proof that Shinkendo can be compatible with people from all walks of life.

We love it when our sempais spark fires and creative thinking in our students. I agree with Thomas Jefferson that education (in any subject) should consist of "the lighting of a fire, as opposed to the mere filling of a pail."

Katsujinken

by Gyan Gearon

Katsujinken, the life giving sword, the sword that gives life, the sword that saves life, the sword that cuts down evil is the sword that gives life.

This is a phrase that I came across in Obata Kaiso's "Tameshigiri" book. From the book, "Depending on the swordsman's intent, his sword can be *katsujinken* ("sword that saves life" – living life in a just and good-natured manner) or *satsujinken* ("sword that takes life"). I had not heard of this phrase before but was familiar with the concept from the teachings of Morihei Ueshiba (founder of Aikido). I did a little "Googling" on the word and got inspired.

Sempai Darrell had us thinking about the "why" of Shinkendo. Why do we draw our sword, why do we perform this particular draw, why do we use a particular swing? The lesson had us focus



on Gohobatto ho kihon ichi, so I will look at that in this discussion. Ipponme starts with a horizontal cut on the draw. This can be seen as measuring distance to your opponent, or maybe a warning of “keep back, or I’ll cut you” as you draw and move faster than your opponent. This could be seen as katsujinken, use of a sword, to preserve the life of that potential opponent. It can give them a warning to stay back, to save their own life.

Kihon ni, could be used similarly I think.

Picture a situation between two people having a verbal argument with swords still in the saya. You can see that it’s not going to be resolved verbally and swords are surely to be drawn soon. A quick application of kihon ni, sword goes up and then immediately comes down, stopping just above someone’s head with a loud, clear kiai. This could be a way to get someone’s attention, again warning them, you could have just cleaved their head in two, but chose to “give them life” so they should carefully think their next action.

After thinking of the “why” of kihon ichi I came to gohonme. Why would I draw my sword, stepping back, and then make a quick, one handed thrust, bringing the sword back to my side. In thinking in line with katsujinken, maybe someone is approaching me to attack and I wish to, again, give them a little warning to stay away from me and my sword. Draw, step back gaining some distance to their approach, and make a fast thrust to their midsection. If I gained some distance I may not even hit them with the tip of the sword, but maybe seeing that pointing at them on their approach may put a halt to the advance.

These are just some of the “why”s I thought of while keeping katsujinken in the picture. There are of course many “why”s to these exercises. There are also many other ways that katsujinken can be applied and interpreted. The phrase I used above “the sword that cuts down evil is the sword that saves life” is another way of looking at things. This could be said as the act of killing an evil person, to save the lives of those they would have killed. This is along the same lines as, “one life to save many”. This could be seen as a move to cut off the head of the snake, to prevent it from biting others. We also look at this perspective when thinking about protecting others. Use of a sword to protect the innocent, from the evil of another, could be considered an application of katsujinken. How many of us would use our skills and training to protect our loved ones from harm, if given no other option? Let us not forget the obvious application of katsujinken, taking a life, to save our own life.

Katsujinken (sword that saves life) is a word, phrase, or philosophy, I find myself sometimes thinking of when training. We all have our own reasons why we are training in Shinkendo, but maybe keeping things like Sempei’s lesson of “why”, and katsujinken, applied to each situation we draw our sword for, will give us a deeper understanding of the kinds of things the great samurai warriors thought about. Satsujinken (sword that takes life) is the other side of this coin, and could be considered the ‘balance’ of this philosophy if you will. I’m sure with some thinking on satsujinken we could think of the “why”s as we did for katsujinken--maybe another inspiration, someday. ;)

Tenugui Travels – Machu Picchu Peru

By John Liu, M.D. - Honbu Dojo

We students at Honbu Dojo are indeed very lucky to have the opportunity to interact with Obata Kaiso on a regular basis. He inspires us in many facets of our lives. Kaiso's interests in mountainous regions and historical locales are no secret.

Knowing this, my wife (and fellow Honbu student) Marita and I visited the Andean nation of Peru in June, 2007. Our goal was to undertake the arduous 4-day hike on the famous Inca Trail, which ultimately leads to the fabled archeological site of Machu Picchu.

First stop: Lima, Peru (Elevation: Sea level)

Frequently overlooked by travelers as a brief layover on the way to Machu Picchu, Lima is definitely worthy of a visit in its own accord. Being a seaside city,



the fish market was bustling, and the famous Peruvian ceviche was delicious beyond compare.

Next stop: Cusco, Peru (Elevation: 10,860 feet above sea level)

Yes, you read the elevation correctly. We are now in the Andes. From sea level to over 10,000 feet in one day can cause a condition known to the locals as soroche. English speakers know it as altitude sickness. The solution (as our local guide prescribed): Lots of rest, fluids, hyperventilation and aspirin the first day. By the second day, Marita and I were both truly feeling better.

Lucky we recovered, because that day we got to see one of the great annual spectacles of South America: The Inti Raymi Festival. The Inti Raymi is a truly accurate historical reenactment of a religious ceremony, complete with period costumes, llamas, and





camp at 9,840 feet. I almost succumbed to hypoglycemia that night, but was able to pull through, thanks to my wife's insistent feeding of canned peaches in heavy syrup (man, that stuff worked great)!

Day 2: Wow! The trail has taken us through 7 different climates, and we encountered some of the most amazing mountain flora and fauna, including many species of endangered orchids. The trail was scenic, but also incredibly arduous. The highest point that day (and in fact highest of the entire trail) was Warmiwāñusca, or Dead Woman's Pass, with an elevation over 13,800 feet. Truly the air felt rarified at those heights. We camped at 12,000 feet.

Day 3: A relaxed day (yay!), with mostly flat trails, but also dotted with many historical Incan ruins. Camp: 11,930 feet. That evening, Franklin, the porters, Marita, and I all opened some beer and had a toast to

(fake) animal sacrifices! MTV was there, filming the whole thing, with Cameron Diaz in tow (I guess we can't ever truly escape L.A.)!

Next task: The Inca Trail (4 days)

Day 1: We start the day in cold-weather gear by the snowy banks of the Urubamba River. Our party consists of 2 travelers (Marita and myself), 1 guide (a really cool dude named Franklin) and 6 (yes, six) porters. Why 6 porters? Well, 2 carry our luggage, 1 is our cook, and the rest carry camping equipment for all 9 of us, food, propane tank (open cooking fires are forbidden on the Inca Trail), and our trash. They carried all that stuff, and yet Marita and I were undoubtedly the slowest members of our party. Those porters were simply amazing. We a





with the Shinkendo tenugui. At the peak of Huayna Picchu, which was 1,180 feet above Machu Picchu, I took my well-worn hiking stick, and performed Happo Giri (with very robust Kiai) to commemorate our accomplishment.

The journey itself was hard enough. To do so at an average of 11,000 feet above sea level was, well, one of the emotionally satisfying (and physically demanding) experiences of our lives. From our trip, I've realized that, besides having Kaiso as our instructor, we're fortunate at Honbu Dojo in another sense – We are near sea level.

thank Pachamama, or Mother Earth, for providing us with safe passage on our sojourn.

Day 4: The fourth day began at 3AM (yes, 3AM), with hiking in the utter darkness, aided only by our flashlights. As the sun rose around 5AM, the trail began to get precipitously steeper upwards. We were going through the "Sun Gate," the final approach, which culminated our 4-day labor. We were rewarded with our first glimpse to the mystical and ancient city of Machu Picchu around 6AM. When I first saw the magnificence of the city as the first rays of sunlight rushed to illuminate it, I imagined how Machu Picchu must have looked to the countless ancient Incans who have made the exact same pilgrimage before us. I brushed back tears of joy, and thanked our porters as they parted ways with us at our hotel in Machu Picchu.

We (Franklin, Marita, and I) spent the next 2 days at Machu Picchu. We explored its many facets, talked about Incan history, had more beers and Pisco sours, climbed yet another (near-vertical) mountain called Huayna Picchu, and took that famous photo

