



Samurai News from Honbu

Return of the Newsletter



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SENSEI'S CORNER

By Obata Toshishiro Kaiso

I am very happy to report that there are many new students at the honbu learning Shinkendo and Aikido.

Recently many advanced students and instructors have visited the honbu also.

Konstantine Laskaris, of Shinkendo New York has committed to an extended stay of three months. He began this visit at Keiko hajime. Shaffee Bacchus, also of Shinkendo New York, has visited twice in as many months.

Other instructors include; Travis Crane from Chicago. Charles Jund From France. Byron Shepherd from England, Jeff and Marlene Harris Sensei's, their students, and guests from Japan interested in learning more about Shinkendo.

Many projects / books are currently in varying stages of progress. One is a study



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of strategy that Mrs. Obata and I have been working on for a long time. Another edition to the I.S.F. library will be a about Shinkendo Philosophy. I have already had photos taken for a Shinkendo Kamae book of one and two sword, and their many applications.

I begin extensive traveling soon, visiting and conducting seminars in; Australia, then Europe, visiting the Netherlands, Hungary, and Germany. Later I will return to North America, for seminars in Canada and finally back in the USA in the states of Iowa, Alabama and Georgia.

Please remember to practice safely for the sake of yourself and others. Review proper procedures with your local instructors. If any questions arise please contact me for clarification.

All students who study swordsmanship, I.S.F. members or not, must conduct themselves in a manner that will ensure their continued safe, enjoyment of practice that never places anyone in danger.

Please become reacquainted with the lessons contained in my Tameshigiri book. Study deeply, practice, memorize, and absorb the exercises, and all information contained therein.

I feel if you carefully study the photos and illustrations in the book you will have the proper images which to envision and visualize when practicing or mediating on practice.

I look forward to seeing you in my travels, or at the honbu.

Spring - Instructor only seminar- May 22- 25

Summer- Shocho Geiko - August 14-17

Fall- Instructor only Seminar October 9-12

Editor's Corner By Lou D'Agostino

Ohishashiburi desu!

The newsletter has been offline for a while. Mike Shu Sensei has been very busy with a movie project, therefore I will do my best to post the newsletter in his absence. In order to do this we need our members participation. Please feel free to make a contribution. We will all benefit from your efforts. **Thank you - L.D.**

Konstantine Laskaris from Shinkendo New York dojo has contributed a fine article about his extended three month keiko at the honbu.

Kalila King writes about a recent crime committed in GA. and how Shawn Forristall Sensei was motivated to conduct a self defense class for women to the benefit of their community. His seminar was covered by the N Y TIMES !

Lou D'Agostino discusses I.S.F. Instructor Seminars.

Shaffee Bacchus will enlighten you with his Tribute to Mary in "An Exquisite Warrior"

I have continued the trend that a Honbu Dojo member started in his travels. Take a picture holding the Shinkendo tenugui in front of a local landmark while you travel around the world. Shall we start the Shinkendo version of the traveling gnome?

Obata Kaiso hopes to have more newsletters released regularly to bring the Shinkendo community together with everybody's stories around the world. That way, no matter how far apart, we will be one close family.

Jinsei Shinkendo !

Training At The Honbu By Konstantine Laskaris

I joined Shinkendo New York / Modern Samurai Dojo; in November 2001, and have been training under the tutelage of Sensei Lou D'Agostino since then. Recently I have had the good fortune to be able to come to the Honbu dojo for an extended period of training with Obata Kaiso. In the near future, I plan on moving to Greece to start a Shinkendo dojo in Athens so, as a result, I decided that in wanting to embark on such a trip it would behoove me to spend as much time training directly with Obata Sensei as possible.



Training with Obata Kaiso at the Honbu dojo is an experience unto itself. I recommend all non-Honbu students train with Obata Kaiso within their Shinkendo career because he possesses SO much knowledge and information on budo, bujutsu, heiho and life in general. You immediately learn so much about Shinkendo in particular, because Obata Sensei is, in reality, "The Source". Just the act of watching him move as he performs various suburi, batto-ho, tanrengata, tachiuchi and tameshigiri, as well as listening intently to what he is saying as he explains the heiho, ashi, tai and ken sabaki involved, truly opens up completely new areas of deeper learning and understanding you previously may not have even realized existed. I have found that this can exponentially accelerate your capacity for improvement if you apply yourself to what you are being taught. This does not apply only to new techniques you may learn, but with techniques you may have already performed hundreds of times. This aspect of training, I believe, must be approached with an "empty cup" frame of mind. One must simply absorb the information and utilize it, rather than sticking to preconceived notions of what they might believe is, or isn't "correct".

Our classes are filled with a lot of different techniques from the most basic, like Happogiri or Ichimonji Suburi, to more advanced techniques such as Goho Batto Ho Makiuchi Ichi and Ni and Gohohoen, with an

emphasis on repetition for the sake of memorization. I use the word "Basic" for some techniques very loosely, as I've found that there is really nothing basic about them at all. They are the foundation for all our other movements. As such, in my opinion, they should be considered advanced in that, without a solid and thorough understanding of them, all other subsequent learning will be weak and unstable. Consider a new house being built. On the surface, it may be a most ornate, elaborate structure, with many beautiful accoutrements, but, if this house is built on a foundation of sand, for all its beauty, it will surely fall due to a weak foundation. The same house, built on a foundation of concrete and bedrock can and will last a lifetime and beyond. Interestingly enough, I realized while listening to Obata Sensei talk about teaching and learning Shinkendo, he uses the exact same analogy. It is safe to assume then that this is a valid and important point!

Obata Kaiso is a wonderful teacher who demands we fully apply ourselves to what he is teaching us. It is our job to honor that and always apply ourselves to the utmost when training with him. The information comes quickly, and in large amounts, so we have to be sharp and attentive at all times. This may sound daunting but, all this information and necessity of excellence is presented with a sense generosity and humor.

Kaiso may be tough, but he is also fair, kind, and very funny! His wish is that we all learn as much as we can. This coupled with Sensei's love of adding a witty remark or joke while teaching lends itself to the positive environment at the dojo.

Obata Kaiso likes to push his students' capacity for memorization to the utmost limit. He has so much information to share, that it can be an overwhelming prospect trying to retain all that information in such a short period of time if one does not come completely prepared. In that regard, it is necessary for one to take copious amounts of notes of all the various topics discussed. As Obata Sensei has said many times to me and other students while I've been here, "When you come to the Honbu dojo to train with me, do not bring a small bucket. Please bring a BIG bucket!" He is using "bucket" as a metaphor for us opening up our minds to every aspect of his teachings. He not only tries to teach us as students. He always includes the tools and methods necessary for us to someday become instructors ourselves. This requires us to open ourselves up to clear observation to what is being done and to listen to what is being said.

In this regard, I would like to focus on the aspect of note taking. Kaiso explained that taking notes is just as important as doing the techniques. Our brains retain information better not only if we do the movement, but if we also say the name of it, count it out loud, kiai and, very importantly write it down. In this case, we are using several of our senses to retain the information, which will help us lock it into our brains.

It can not be said enough to take notes, take more notes, and take even more notes. My first month here, after a regular 1 hour class, I would spend the entire rest of the evening and most of the following day writing out, in detail, what we had done and what I had learned in class. So a 1 hour class would culminate

into a day of note taking. It is a kind of “Shinkendo diary” that allows me to remember, many days and years down the road, what I have learned and when I have learned it.

This would not only include the movements within each technique, but minute details of each movement, as well as any finer points Obata Sensei would explain to us about specific movements.

As well, I would include any ideas, comments or philosophy Sensei would talk about during the course of his classes. In my 2 months I’ve already spent here, I’ve almost filled up an entire notebook with information.

I have also learned that, as Obata Sensei’s students, we must leave a lot of room for learning new attitudes regarding techniques and ways of looking at Shinkendo and life in terms of strategy and, as often pointed out by Obata Sensei, in the sense of “Ji, Ta, Shizen”, as presented in the Hachido precepts of Shinkendo. Of course, this directly relates to our motto “Jinsei Shinkendo”. Shinkendo is not something to simply do at the dojo for 1 hour during practice. Its techniques, thought process, and fundamental teachings and philosophies are things that we can and should apply to our daily lives in so many different ways.

I have currently been training at the Honbu dojo for 2 months and am just beginning my third. At the moment, I am not sure exactly how long my trip here will last. Although I am anxious to get to Greece, I am nonetheless savoring and appreciating every moment that I am at the Honbu and learning from Obata Sensei. This may be a once in a lifetime

experience for me and I intend to enjoy it to the fullest and learn as much as possible. The amount of information Obata Sensei has to offer and shares with us, his students, is, simply put, astounding. As his students, we must always keep in mind just how lucky we are to have such an accomplished Sensei, who has such a thorough understanding and experience of so many martial arts, as well as life, from whom we have the opportunity to learn. Whenever possible, we must create the opportunity to spend time training with him. I can not stress this concept enough.

Jinsei Shinkendo!



**Konstantine with Kaiso at
Keiko Hajime 2008**

Self-Defense

By Kalila King



**Sensei Shawn Forristall and Sensei Bill Reynolds
Sensei Demonstrate Self Defense**

On New Year's Day this year, a young woman hiking in the North Georgia Mountains was reported missing. The drama and the tragedy played out on our local and national news. You may have followed the story of 24 year old Meredith Emerson hiking with her dog, Ella, who was kidnapped and murdered by an alleged serial killer, Michael Hilton, age 61.

The story of a young athletic woman whose life ended much too soon in such a tragic way by an older man touched many hearts across the nation. But that is not the focus of this article. This article is what about happened when a local radio station called Atlanta Budokan for help.

Shawn Forristall sensei knows the beauty and allure of the North Georgia Mountains; over the years he has moved closer to them. Once, when Kairo was in Atlanta for a seminar at Atlanta Budokan, Shawn sensei and a large group of students, some with families, took Kairo for an afternoon of light hiking and horseback riding not too far from where Ms. Emerson went to start the New Year with a few hours hiking. The Georgia Blue Ridge Mountains are part of the Appalachian Mountains. The highest point that Kairo reached on that Sunday afternoon was just 5 miles from the start of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (known to hikers as the A.T.) which starts in Georgia and ends in Maine.

In the days following the discovery of Meredith Emerson's body on January 8, 2008, details about her ordeal were frightening. Ms. Emerson was an intelligent young woman in very good physical shape and she had martial art training. She seemed like the least likely person to become a victim. The fear in the Atlanta area was almost tangible.

A local radio station wanted to bring information about self-defense for women to their listeners. Someone from a morning program, "The Bert Show", on WWWQ (Q100) called Sensei Forristall and asked him to do a live on-air interview about self-defense for women. The interview was held on January 9, 2008, the morning after Ms. Emerson's body was found. You can download the two-part interview on MP3 here:

[Part 1](#) (13mb mp3)

[Part 2](#) (16mb mp3)

During the interview, the idea was born to reach further into the community by doing something big, public and positive. The people at Q100 and "The Bert Show" with Atlanta Budokan and Sensei Shawn organized a series of free 90-minute classes at various locations around Atlanta.

The teachers would be Shawn Forristall sensei and Bill Reynolds sensei. For one week this "Dangerous Duo" took their show on the road from the Center Stage in midtown Atlanta, to the Smyrna dojo, to the Gwinnett Center, the Henry County Performing Art Center and the gym of a school in Acworth, GA, all venues that could hold large numbers of people.

And those people came in droves. 300 people attended the first class where Sensei Forristall and Sensei Reynolds taught and entertained with statistics of crimes against women, practical advise, demonstrations and humor. Perhaps it was the humor that put the crowd at ease with the instruction and helped them pay attention, enabling them to take away knowledge that was empowering. The news of these classes spread quickly and the numbers for each class grew. At the end of the run of classes, over 3,100 people attended.

Over the past several years, courses in women's self-defense had been an infrequent offering on the schedule at Atlanta Budokan. Now, the classes are a regular part of the curriculum and the classes fill quickly. Sensei Forristall and Sensei Reynolds recognize that women, especially those with no martial arts training, need the information and the practical hands-on experience in the dojo. The two Sensei are gaining a strong reputation for a high quality course of instruction in women's self-defense.

The week long event was reported by Atlanta area newspapers, radio and TV and nationally by the New York Times. To see more, go to:

http://www.atlantabudokan.com/budokan/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=72&Itemid=67

ISF Instructor Seminars

By Lou D'Agostino - Shinkendo NY

Obata Kaiso frequently travels to numerous Shinkendo and Aikibuken branch dojo's in the USA, and abroad as part his ongoing quest to "spread" Shinkendo.

In addition to his travels, Kaiso now hosts four annual training events at the International Shinkendo Federation Honbu dojo, headquartered in Los Angeles, CA. Keiko Hajime (*first training of the new year – winter*) Instructor training in the Spring - Shocho Geiko (*summer training*). Fall Instructor only training.



**Photo of Last Years inaugural Instructor only seminar
May 2007**

As the I.S.F expands, Obata Kaiso is adamant that the quality of Shinkendo students and instructors continue to improve as well. While this is something all students strive for, Kaiso is ever enthusiastic to impart his knowledge for our benefit and that of the Shinkendo marquee.

In order to accomplish this task Obata Kaiso announced an Instructor seminar series the first of which was held in May of this year, in order to provide an opportunity for fellow instructors to work closely together, obtain feedback from each other, while under the watchful eyes (*and everything else*) of Obata Kaiso who

is always on hand to cajole, encourage provide corrections of technique, and offer insight to the Shinkendo learning process. If necessary Kaiso might also tease you, in a way he knows you will find amusing, offering a humorous approach (tactics) to get you to loosen up a bit and relax.

While we are reviewing the extensive, comprehensive Shinkendo curriculum mindful of Kaios's comments and suggestions to help us refine our Shinkendo, Sensei is simultaneously introducing new innovations in Shinkendo Nitoken. (*the two sword method, created by Obata Kaiso*)

Just as Shinkendo is represented by the gorin gogyo (*five main structures*) Suburi, Tanrengata, Battoho, Tachiuchi and Tameshigiri, likewise Shinkendo Nitoken closely mirrors this philosophy, excepting Battoho which is not addressed in the depth, manner and detail employed by Shinkendo-ka with one sword, due to the fact that we initiate our practice with two swords already in hand. No pun intended.

While physical practice of technique is critical to our goals in effective implementation of samurai swordsmanship, so too is the philosophical underpinnings of Shinkendo that Obata Kaiso imparts as crucial to our endeavors. Various exercises and drills are employed to represent divergent Heiho (*tactics and strategy*) which are first introduced, practiced, learned and hopefully mastered as integral to unifying mind and body as one.

In October (07) the second, instructor only seminar was held this year at the International Shinkendo Federation Honbu dojo, the inaugural instructor seminar took place in May.

The I.S.F. Honbu now offers training four times per year; Keiko Hajime (*New Years*), Instructor training, (Spring), Shocho geiko (Summer) and one more Instructor seminar in the fall. Obata Kaiso is very appreciative of the time, energy, money and more that is involved in traveling to the honbu. This is one of the reasons why Kaiso continues to travel to branch dojo worldwide to realize his dream. Those who have participated in the Instructor seminar series received invaluable insight and knowledge from Kaiso and wish to see you at the next seminar.

Until then, Jinsei Shinkendo!

Don't miss this years 2008 Instructor only Seminars

Spring seminar - May 22- 25 * Fall Seminar - October 9-12

A Shinkendo Tribute to an, “Exquisite Warrior”

By Shaffee Bacchus &
Carl Chmela

*“I believe in the power of the drumming
of distant hearts and souls.
I call out with sacred turning
and bring down heaven’s arrows that pierce me whole.
Change carries my reflection
with still eyes and torrid glance.
I am now transforming
the state of Grace from belligerence.
To be a wimp and slowly evaporate into the white linen
or raise my sword and be a Warrior for my life.
For my memory, for my spirit!
I would raise my weapon high on the white ribbon of time.”*

(From “Soldier of a Creative Mind” by Mary L. Chmela, 1991)



Mary entertaining
her students

These are the words written by my good friend, Mary Leonard Chmela, who passed away 20th December 2006. Mary was truly an exquisite warrior of enormous spirit and fortitude. Born with spina bifida she used a wheelchair from the time of her birth. She never allowed any limitations to confine or entrap her physically or mentally. Her mind roved far and wide and soared into poetic heights. Artistic expression was how this amazing woman chose to define herself.

Mary attended New York University, majored in Music Education, and then focused her professional interest as a teacher for physically handicapped children at the Henry Viscardi School in Albertson, New York.

She created numerous works of art – original songs, handcrafted jewelry, drawings and portraits – and created theatrical plays and music videos with her students at the school. Each spring she spent a week at the United Nations where she used music and drama to teach concepts of peace and understanding to groups of children from many countries. She was a charismatic and expressive actress and was the first disabled woman to have a

recurring role in a daytime drama, playing “Carrie” in Guiding Light.

Her memorial service on 27th May, 2007 was held at the Hancock United Church of Christ in Lexington, Massachusetts. It was an artistic expression of Mary’s life filled with poetry, music, song, recitations of her works, and dance. I felt that Shinkendo would be a fitting tribute.

I approached Lou-Sensei, who also knew Mary, and discussed the idea of performing Shinkendo in a church, and of using Shinkendo in such a different plane of expression. Once he was satisfied that I had obtained permission to use a sword in the church and that the necessary precautions would be taken, his enthusiasm, curiosity and flexibility in light of such an unusual request was amazing. We had many ideas, thinking about Mary. One of sensei Lou’s ideas was the manipulation of speed. He felt that dignity and power could be illustrated by an exaggerated slowness. We both felt it was important to choose the right techniques and to display commitment in each movement as an expression of Mary’s character.

Even, in death, Mary had the capacity to inspire people to artistic expression. We looked to her for guidance which she readily provided in her writings where she wrote, “I am now transforming the state of Grace from belligerence. To be a wimp and slowly evaporate into the white linen or raise my sword and be a Warrior for my life, for my memory, for my spirit! I would raise my weapon high on the white ribbon of time.” Out of her creativity came our inspiration.



The tribute to Mary was entitled, “Exquisite Warrior” and accompanied by the Skyloom Dancers, an accomplished group of elderly women who typically perform in church. We performed Goho Kamae and Happogiri, illustrating Jodan Kamae from Mary’s play where she stated, “raise my sword and be a warrior.”

At first the five of us performed Goho-no-Kamae and Happogiri empty handed, in a slow and dignified manner, bathed in sunlight filtered through the stained glass windows of the church. After which the dancers receded to form a tableau of stillness; women dressed in black. A frame of four motionless Kamae. Within this frame I repeated the five sword positions and Happogiri with “Shinken” at half speed.

Throughout the performance we were accompanied by the beautifully orchestrated music of a hammered dulcimer and an instrument from northern Ghana, the gyil.

Life continued to test and challenge Mary, and she was diagnosed with brain cancer. I have often thought of this period of her life and how she handled this new infirmity. Mary wrote:

*“It’s malignant he said pointing at my head.
That had always been a place which was my private sanctuary,
Where my dreams were free to breathe the air and I could allow visions and creative spirit to move me in an
otherwise stagnant life.
There was no judgment there,
Where my hair was born of renaissance curls and swirls of sweetness and the purest milk that came from above
as gifts and as inner love
I say to myself, find me a window and I shall fly out into the hands of God who knows who I am. He knows me”.*

This new illness would slowly rob her of physical abilities and independence. Yet throughout she maintained her grace, poise and her creative essence. I am overcome with emotion as I try to understand what it must have been like for her and Carl, her devoted husband and my good friend.

One of Mary’s works was a play entitled “Soldier of a Creative Mind,” wrote a few years after she was diagnosed with brain cancer. The play was a creative expression of many of the thoughts and experiences she had while dealing with the surgeries, radiation treatments, inner fear and anger. Most importantly, Mary wrote about the idea that miracles can come forth from times of great stress and pain and events that easily shatter confidence. She felt one can arm oneself with self-recognized talents and strike out with acts of creativity. She illustrates this in her play with the following verses:

*“Later that evening the rain moved down on the window.
Somehow it released me from my inner screaming, almost as though God allowed a universal continuum of
crying.
Oh rain quiet me.
Put my fear into the ground.
Give my mind away to the breezes of the forest and I will fly freely.
Just as I once did when I was winged and blue,
Tell me once again of the reasons to live”.*

I wanted to share this with my fellow Shinkendokas, and to remind you that the spirit of Shinkendo is inclusive. We should notice, and honor those who dedicate their lives to humanity, to life itself, honor their strength of character and purpose. Obata Kaiso honors us and those before us with Shinkendo. Our every thought must be to preserve this honor and pass it on.



Terry Lee and Lou D'Agostino in San Juan Puerto Rico 12-07

