



BODY Dialogue

Barbara Barnard Reflects

General Instructor Jim Sterling suggested that Body Dialogue ask senior Shintaido practitioners for their thoughts. This is the first in a series of these articles.

My cousin Pam Olton introduced me to Shintaido when she moved to San Francisco; I enjoy her company and liked her friends who arrived the same autumn. I tried several classes with them in Golden Gate Park, barefooted on the cold, wet and sharp grasses, awkward, unbalanced and unhappy with my performance. My mental picture of the Japanese culture was one of grace and calm attention to the arts. I didn't want to miss the opportunity to learn from the inside out and joined the keiko practice when they met indoors at Project Artaud. Michael Thompson described visual images of the five movements, as gifted teachers do, that seemed to be familiar, pictures I already knew and understood. From that, I thought I understood the basic outline. I wanted to color in the spaces with my own brush and palette each time. Like adding to a group portrait. Like discovering my own path. Being open and unafraid really caught my attention. And I had company. Enthusiastic, bright, spirited people touched by wildness.

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Recognizing Prayer

by

Bill Burtis

Since almost the day of my first encounter with Shintaido in 1973, I've wrestled with the question of its purpose in my life, or in anyone's life. How often have long-time practitioners contemplated the meaning of Shintaido? What is that message? What is "life expression"? Why do we do it? Perhaps more importantly, why do people stop doing Shintaido?

I have never reached a conclusion about these questions. But just recently there's been a little meshing of my thoughts and feelings and what remains of keiko in my life.

In her excellent book *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor relates that a famous Benedictine monk called Brother David said "even biting into a tomato can be an act of prayer."

This resonated and sent me searching through the tomatoes in my life to find one that satisfied this condition. I'd grown enough tomatoes myself to rummage first through my times in gardens when, having picked a perfect looking tomato from the vine, I'd given in to temptation and eaten it right there, bending forward slightly from the waist to keep the juice and pulp and seeds off me.

I spent a while at tomato one, which I recall most clearly, back in the first neighborhood I remember: an exploding one, new houses taking over disused farm land at a rate I would have found alarming if I had the knowledge I have now. The constant sound of hammers, handsaws, and simple machinery, and the smell of milled pine were everywhere.

Among the first to build were the Rizzos; a crew of Italian craftsmen built a beautiful house and pool. Construction was accompanied by the music of a language I'd never heard: Italian. Faint conversations, shouted instructions, occasional complaints...all unintelligible and fascinating.

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Shintaido in a Museum and a Cathedral

In the past two months Shintaido has made appearances in a museum in Worcester, Massachusetts:

<http://www.shintaido.org/news/000168.html>

and the chapel of a cathedral in Montreal, Quebec:

<http://www.shintaido.org/news/000169.html>



These demonstrations and performances are helping to spread Shintaido in North America.

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS

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Please submit articles, poems, pictures to the editor at newsletter@Shintaido.org. Deadline for submissions is September 15, 2015.

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Barbara Barnard Reflects *Continued from p.1*

What I love about Shintaido is the people, the ones I've met and the ones I meet for the first time in the dojo. People who are attracted to Shintaido practice are alert, attentive, and sincere. Moving with them, caring for them, receiving their energy in partnership is a unique and great gift every time. When my breath catches up with my words, I'm aware of the gratitude and offering in all of our movements. I also love running down the beach with the group: my arms outstretched to the whole world, my arms and hands pushing through the usual landscape. I love cutting through the veil in front of my eyes to see otherwise. Intent and focussed and ready. Each keiko creates a community, a loving and supportive and encouraging team of friends contributing to our immediate moment.



Barbara Barnard

And there is something startling in the effort to imagine a different picture, a new description, another image filling up the movement spaces in a way my intention can't do on its own. I'm so excited with the thinking and the visions the instructors bring from their meditations and study and themselves. I remember Ito's description of a single snowflake in the mountains which held the whole physical world in it, before we measured time and after and always. I felt included in something grand and too big for words. But not too big for movement. It was like hearing a catch in someone's throat, then, seeing a cardboard with the letters C O U G H on it and trying to reach the connection between the two. In practice, I'm confident there's a connection and more beyond it and I want to go that way. It's a way of simple truth.

In the beginning, I thought I would eventually remember all the steps, the gestures, the rhythm of our practice; I even dreamed I could learn a kata one day. Years later, I discover my memory didn't improve; in fact, it skitters away in a game of hide-and-seek. One of my keiko challenges now is learning the sequences and remembering them long enough to practice with a partner. And with that, accepting my limi-

tations and disappointments as part of my present keiko. Letting go of the longing to move my body in ways I'm not strong enough to do is another part, as well as the wish to accomplish bold moves. But, come to think of it, I never even tried the brash, lightning strikes of combat; I've always been drawn to the mutual practice and the co-authored moments of insight, that opening another's world for their use.

And the knowledge that we do open each other to possibilities, both unknown and certainly unlooked-for, has affected my interactions in the outer world. I have gotten used to the idea of sending signals to others I don't even know that affect them in ways I don't know: feelings of acceptance or not, purpose or not, satisfaction or not, belligerence or not, ease or not, Nobody comes to the table for an exchange — it's just there. And the openness and alertness to the immediate situation in the dojo refreshes my attitudes when I leave.



Barbara Barnard and Anne-Marie Grandtner

And that's why I'm still here: I am refreshed by Shintaido practice. I need reminders of how I want to be in the world as a partner, as a helper, as a supporter. Sometimes I stop and stand where I am and rearrange myself with our five moves and enjoy that giggly sensation of flowing energy. And I like to practice taking a stance and not losing my balance. And I like to eat and laugh and be at ease at our Shintaido gatherings.

This is the place in my world for the surge of energy, that exuberance of spirit which overwhelms my sedate claims of civilized behavior. It can be let loose in a given space and it can be contained in concentrated intention. It is recognized, enjoyed and made use of. I remember a gathering at the Sterlings' where Spencer challenged the taller, older Nick with a wooden sword. I saw that fiendish joy in charging the foe, flags flying, heart bouncing, voice voluminous in five-year-old glee, hurtling toward the meeting and possible union. I smiled because I know that feeling of mayhem and riding-hell-bent-for leather and that satisfaction of choosing union. ***

Recognizing Prayer*Continued from p.1*

I'd been told by my sensible and protective parents not to go onto the lots of the houses under construction; but curiosity brought me right to the edges. I was sitting on the old stonewall in front of what was becoming the Rizzo's house one hot summer day when the crew broke for lunch. A few of them came over and sat in the shade, smiled at me and said hello.

One of them asked if I liked tomatoes, holding up a grapefruit-sized beauty. Though it seems unbelievable to me now, I don't recall that I had ever seen an actual tomato. I didn't know whether I liked them or not. I raised my hands, palms up and shrugged.

"You don't know eh," the man responded. "I've never had one," I said. The men laughed: "Oh," they seemed to say as a chorus, "you have to have a tomato!"

While I may have heard not to take candy from strangers, I apparently didn't translate this to this fruit, which I took. I looked at it and imagined how to eat it.

Lou passed me a little glass salt shaker. "Eat it like an apple," he said. "Choose where you want to bite it and put a little salt there, take a bite and then put a little salt on the next bite."

I turned the tomato in my hand, chose a spot, salted it, opened my mouth as wide as it seemed safe to do, and bit down.

What happened next is predictable in many ways, the sudden saltiness, the explosion of juice, and the surge of delicious, fresh, tangy tomato, all producing a delight I have never forgotten and which, apparently registered on my face, because the men cheered. I wiped my chin on my sleeve, smiled, and salted the next section.

I am not going to say that it was the best tomato I've ever had, but it's the only one I've never forgotten.

Was there in that moment a kind of ecstasy? Perhaps; but I certainly did not think of any God I knew at that time at that moment; I would not think of eating that tomato as an act of prayer. But I am not so sure that prayer requires its own special consciousness; I'm beginning to recognize a visceral awareness as being enough.

But what does this have to do with Shintaido?

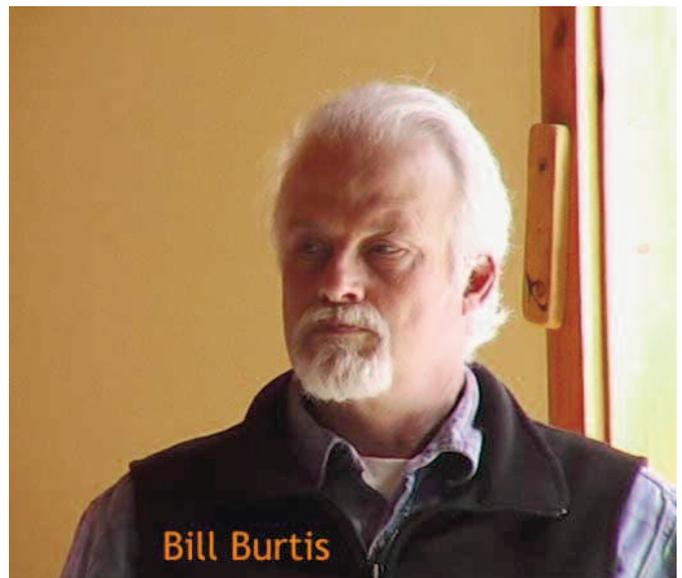
In the early years, after I was introduced to Shintaido, the fact that Christianity played a part in its creation was often a part of discussions about the form's origins, right along with Tantric Buddhism, western art and classical music and lots of other stuff. So there was from the beginning the notion that the "expression" the "self" was after had something to do with spirituality and with nature.

Some time later, in a discussion in the men's dorm at Point Bonita, north of San Francisco, a bunch of us were talking about why we'd stuck with Shintaido after our initial

response ("This is really weird!") had dissipated. It was almost unanimous that a kind of desperation led us to it and kept us there. I remember identifying with that, but not really understanding it.

In the years that followed, I became aware that my love-hate relationship with Shintaido had to do with the fear that arose in me before every keiko because I knew, at a subconscious level, that it was scouring my psyche and knocking loose pieces of my defenses, bringing me closer to a reality I had worked hard to salt away. I could see this at work in others in the way they would progress so far and then back away... and then stop. I'd love, by the way, to be able to say I kept going (*Gambatte!*) until I overcame my fear and got free. But that's not how it happened for me.

I'm not sure exactly when it was that I became aware of Tenshingoso as a prayer, but it was around the time my friend Cathy (who had been an occasional student of mine in New Hampshire and a work colleague at UNH) was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. I was invited to join in a prayer or heal-



ing circle for her, an occasion at which each participant, in a circle around Cathy, was supposed to offer something of a healing nature on her behalf—a kind of potluck spiritual banquet.

I've been writing poetry for all of my adult life and so I thought first of writing a poem for the occasion and reading that, but I wasn't able to produce one. I came to the circle empty-handed, figuring that being there was what mattered.

When it came to my turn, I found myself offering to lead the group in a prayer, with movement and vocalization. I named it, translating it as Five Ways to Heavenly Truth, Peace, or Wisdom, demonstrated the five movements, assigned the vocalizations to the movements, and led the circle in one round. Someone asked if we could do it again, there was general approval, and we did another Tenshingoso.

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And then the circle moved on.

But I remained convinced that I was right about Tenshingoso and have carried that as a part of my practice and the role of Shintaido in my life. It's simple and functional.

Recently, I've become interested in spiritual teachings in a new and somewhat uncomfortable way. I can best describe this in quasi-religious terms as a kind of thirst and a recurring, palpable desire to know or experience whatever the divine turns out to be. The uncomfortable part is that I have never hewed with any discipline to a religion, I am utterly untrained and have very little education in this area, and I'm left wondering if this is the conscious response to an unconscious concern about meeting my maker some time soon.



Bill Burtis and Pam Minagawa

The other day I had a little epiphany (or satori, if you like) about Tenshingoso as prayer in a more formal, perhaps religious sense.

As I understood the five sounds we make with the movements of Tenshingoso, **Un, Ah, A, E, O**:

- **Un** (sounds like *Om*), is the state of being, the "alive but sleepest" kind of attitude that our culture seems to force upon us, like a black bag drawn over our heads. We are busy; we must be busy; success and happiness lies in this busy-ness, etc., etc.
- **Ah**, becomes not just the awakening, but the crying out, the calling to the divine, the beseeching.
- **A** the making manifest, the setting up, the bringing down, making available, useful, the spirit of the universe, believing we've gotten what we asked for, that our request has been granted, all while seeing the world with clear eyes.
- **O** is so obviously the giving, the giving up, the giving praise, thanks, ourselves, and the yes, yes, yes, please yes, that I think it needs not much more or cannot stand much more said about it. It is for each one of us what it is at the moment, but surrender, praise, and thanks are all in there, with sincerity.

• And back to **Un**, but renewed, we hope, with a peace and purpose and understanding of this absence and being, all at once: that here is the complete possibility of everything, again, embodying the call, the surrender, the being at peace and thanks and patience, all at once.

No, I haven't forgotten E. I saved it for last, out of order, because, for me anyway, it contains the mystery. Having made the spirit manifest, given it flesh, brought it down to earth in a literal way, we move into a very dense and relatively small space, at least from a physical, simply real point of view. But this is why I love E so much.



Michael Thompson and Bill Burtis

This is the be-here-now movement, the place where we make our commitment to the present moment, to living completely, utterly *here*, harshly or sweetly as the facts of existence demand at this precise point, and we clean down to the bottom of it and say ok, here I am, steadfast and full of faith. And we finish, looking up and forward, from this now. To me, this is the ultimate in mindfulness—except without any attachment to external things or ideas.

And then we can give proper thanks, having gained that most wonderful of all things, presence, *the* presence, and survived. And having become present and having given thanks, we can, indeed, go home in perfect peace. Un. Amen.

The next time someone asks me what the purpose of Shintaido is, I'll tell him or her it's purpose is to teach you how to pray. And then I'll tell them to find out for themselves. ***

Recommendation from the Masters

[The following is a letter from three Shintaido Master Instructors, H. F. Ito, Michael Thompson, and Masashi Minagawa, to the International Shintaido College Technical Committee, concerning a suggested change to the exam structure. Michael asked Body Dialogue to share it with the readership. Ed.]

To: ISC TC

From: Ito, Masashi, and Michael

Re: post-Aoki Sensei exams

Since it is most likely that the 2016 International event will mark the last time Aoki Sensei will be available as an ISC examiner, we think it would be wise to start planning for the future.

Our idea is that General Instructor would become an honorary rank bestowed by the ISF organization, based on recommendations from a national or regional group in recognition of long-term practice, teaching, and contribution to the spreading of Shintaido. "Long-term" might be 15+ years, for example.

The candidate should perform a demonstration at an international event of kata/kumite appropriate to his/her age and body condition, not necessarily according to a predetermined examination curriculum.

The General Instructor group could act as a kind of "upper parliamentary house" and separate from the TC [technical committee] whose main role would continue to be R & D [research and development] (and should, by the way, make an effort to meet in person every two years).

What we are suggesting applies only to Shintaido itself and not the related disciplines of Bojutsu, Karate, and, possibly, a separate Kenjutsu program which would retain the current 5/10 dan arrangement. In addition, the levels in Shintaido up to and including Senior Instructor would not be affected

We are making these recommendations in our capacity of consultants to the TC who do not have decision-making authority which, of course, remains yours.

Best wishes, meilleurs vœux, etc.

Kumite: the missing link to social transformation

by

Anne-Marie Grandtner

Shintaido?

Have you ever tried to explain what Shintaido is all about to someone? Easy? Sometimes, when asked about Shintaido, I use an analogy that has offered me some help over the years. I say that martial arts are like Smarties® candy: all sorts of bright colors outside, but always the same good chocolate filling inside. It could be said that most martial arts share the culture of Budo. Energy conservation and healing, physical discipline and transcending limits and, occasionally (or gradually), some aesthetic and spiritual explorations offer various ways to the Way. If Shintaido is a martial art, what is the color of Shintaido?

I am trying to convey what I have learned up to now through Ito Sensei's teachings, triggered by a recent article by Stephen Billias and James Cumming in *Tikkun* and nourished by ongoing conversations with Shintaido community members, both fellow practitioners and instructors. Shintaido is evolving between Karate and Tai Chi with pivotal points on *kiri* (cutting) (Aoki, Thompson, 2001). Shintaido is also about *Kumite* (partner practice).

Kumite? What kumite? How kumite?

The physical and energetic feeling of being in very good kumite has always been so powerful. The same thing may be said of very bad kumite that turned good and also of bad kumite that, I hope, one day, will turn good. It goes beyond simply doing kumibo or doing Tenshingoso kumite or even having a conversation. Deeper than the form, appears the ocean of energetic currents. Variation of sights and sounds, rhythms or textures are sometimes hard to follow and surely difficult to appreciate to the fullest. But nevertheless, we try.

Trying to identify with words at least chunks of the process, the *what is?* and the *how to?*, I have become geared up with my professional reflex of modelling. The idea of how can I get better at this? was part of my intention. Also present was the deep wish to refine my personal exploration of this vital kata but, above all, the wish to be able to share it with others.

At first sight, through *wakame*, *hikari*, or through other forms, kumite appear to me to be at the heart of expansion, both deep and wide. Kumite appears as a kata, a set of pre-coded actions and stances, physical and internal attitudes or postures. They convey to a point of being able to be standing on

Kumite *Continued from p.6*

our two feet, in our own energy and, at the same time, being in connection with the other, doing a kata and, above all, adapting to a push and pull process.

Kumite has had, over years of practice, the power to make me aware, attentive and connected. Good kumite, which is what we all hope for, has appeared to me to be a space of connection and recognition, an occasion of curiosity and learning, and a relationship leading to deepening and mutual transformation. A joyous transformational spiral!

But how to go through *kumite bliss*? How to find the starting point of this spiral and, more importantly, how to sustain it? Would it help if both partners would be relentlessly curious, listening, connecting, opening, learning, applying? All over again, between two bows? Would it help that they were intentionally benevolent? Would it help to try to practice a process leading to conscious development of a safe learning space? A chi-ma-ba-wa process?

The chi-ma-ba-wa process? What a charabia!¹

¹French word for bizarre, incorrect or incomprehensible talk, more or less equivalent to gibberish, gobbledygook

Let me convey what I have had in mind while exploring kumite, going from grappling hands to team building to establishing partnership, to strong personal connection. It can be seen as a Polaroid picture of the here and now of my understanding, and open to change over the course of further experience!

Chi to engage in being koshi aligned. As in *Ten Chi Jin* (body as unifying element between heaven and earth). To be personally clear with intention and precise with movements that convey this intention to the other, our partner, who can then react properly and accordingly. To get ready (*kamae* stance) by concentrating energy and opening wide all doors of perception. Infused with benevolence. Only benevolence. Not compassion. Not love. Not yet.

Ma to make contact. Creating a space in time, a moment of contact. A third space where it can be, where things can happen, where new ways can emerge. A third space where everyone engages to stay safe (*onegaishimasu*). This relational space, once created, can span over time and evolve depending on what each puts into it. It needs to be fed in order to become a relationship. It has a life of its own. Sometimes, it helps to step back and watch. This ma that can be sticky, tense or loose. If focused on task and on connection, no matter what (*shoko* stance), it can evolve profoundly and as long as partners engage in keeping this space alive. If they do so, they enhance the process of emergence. They let what is and what is becoming inform the process. But what if we are afraid, feel fragile, do not like, do not agree? If we do not trust? Here comes the Beauty of the Beast! How to engage in this third space, no matter what? How to get away with magic?

Ba to explore. To let curiosity lead. Where? Nobody knows! Except that it leads to learning and more over if added up

by integrating in a timely fashion. Staying in contact even if the road is bumpy, even if we do not know where all this is leading, can be difficult or pretty boring! Curiosity (life searching missile) stance of *tsuki* (Ito, 1993) makes every move in kumite a step of progress, as something always emerges from this state of being together. For the tension to become creation, Ma can transform into a "learning Ma": a Ba. Curiosity, coupled with openness and applying and integrating whatever emerges in order to see what's next ... what's next ... what's next? Staying alert and adapting as the state of being together changes every second. A simple move, a change of mind or even slightly loosing grip of concentration can become a tsunami! Looking for equilibrium. Beware of impact. This Ba becomes the context, the reflector of your action. Benevolence is the oil in the engine. Here it comes again. Benevolence. Not compassion. Not love. Not yet.

Wa to be in flow, in harmony. The warming and comforting bodily and heartfelt feeling that gives amplitude to Life. To know deep down how much to push or pull in order to give the other a chance to go further in a way that is positive and in accordance to where he or she stands. Is this teaching? Maybe. As we are both working on the third space while hosting change in our underlying nature (curiosity-learning-applying-reaching to the other), every body « wins » something in the context and we are evolving together on the base of separate individual perceptions or capacities. As we are melting together in the third place. We can then create a new Ma with another entity, and so and so on. These moments become the no man's land, the "try out" space for becoming better. Better at practicing, better at connecting, better at learning, better at timing, better at connecting, better at emerging. Could it be better at intimacy as well? Surely better at enjoying and celebrating the dance of Life in the Dojo spirit! Safe and sound. Not quite love? But approaching the sacred space.

Every model addresses part of reality, as the onion skin reveals very little about onion's nuances layered en route to the core. It nevertheless has the advantage to serve as a work in progress map for exploring new territory. The territory of Kumite kata.

Why kumite?

But one can argue why on earth try to crack the code of kumite? Magic, alchemy and relationships are bound to be mysterious and subtle, aren't they? Quest is research, research is learning, learning is the Way and I am meandering into the bushes of uncertainty. I am definitely trying to find a way to peaceful and joyful co-creation. Despite Internet increasing contacts, I am still looking for peaceful human interconnectedness.

I have come to believe, like many of you, that many aspects of Shintaido Practice gives insight into real life attitudes, postures, processes. Reading *Be Like Water* from John Cardillo just before last International Gasshuku (2012) has

BODY

Dialogue

Kumite *Continued from p.7*

confirmed something lingering in my mind and body for a while as I became aware of the change inducing power of Shintaido katas. His words have highlighted the importance of showing the way to go beyond the dichotomy of Dojo Kumite exercises and real life Kumite.

If a competency is the ability to mobilize all the necessary resources (knowledge, capacity and attitudes) in order to adapt to a specific situation, it appeared to me that Kumite Kata has been revealing as a pretty good tool to develop a competency helpful to 21st Century life, to be able to create benevolent, learning and creativity inducing relational spaces. It could even be envisioned as the missing link of social transformation.

Kumite appears as a real and incarnated way to reconnect. Full stop. It also appears to develop the capacity to:

- **tune in to our environment** (me+you+us/nature) and be part of the outside upheaval while keeping three concomitant movements (energetic balance, relationships perspective) nurtured by multi-level perception;
- **cultivate auto-motivation** through curiosity of heart, body and mind and adapting to the flow of movement;
- **develop benevolence** as being aware of our human communality and honoring this common ground by protecting and nurturing it as one of the many ways to connect at the source of intuition, inspiration, creation;
- **learn how to trust** by being open to commitment and even to intimacy through outliving our own limits of interconnectedness; developing strong personal connections by knowing deep down the right space to keep;
- **become responsible** as we learn to anticipate the impact of all our movements, adapting them to our own evolution, to people and to circumstances as we become aware that a relationship is a two way street;
- **develop new body learning** useful in tapping emergence inherent in every connection, relationship, team;
- **reinvest learnings** emerging from a BA as it becomes a means of sustainability in common transformation and lies at the heart of peer-learning, team-building, Collaboration CO-operation, CO-creation;
- **to anticipate** (timing A) as a result of high level adaptation process that helps defuse difficulties before they become conflicts and helps install and sustain harmony;
- **reveal the blind spot** from where I, we and they understand, feel, intend, before taking action;
- **choose wisely** in what conditions activate leadership, followership or fellowship, ingrained in self-leadership;
- **to envision** multi level **connective learning** driven by curiosity and benevolence **as healing**;

This becomes possible without a word being uttered! But the bodily feeling of all this? Precious!

As the world is marked by ecological, social and spiritual disconnections (Scharmer, 2007), it has become in desperate need of disruption. This in order to manage excesses of all kinds, to care for a real body in connection with real nature while living in virtual worlds; to create innovative socio-economical systems and to foster relationships with a new kind of humanity. Many call for "the importance of including moments in which we accept collective responsibility to heal both ourselves and the world".

Others call for action and a needed passage from the individualistic stance to the group stance. But in order to induce action, give purpose, believe in possibilities and finally grow hope (Ganz, 2011), we have to be able to go from ME to WE. But how? Can political activism, education or spiritual practice lead to social change? I know that this is a question that still lingers in many of us. What can I personally do to be part of the change? What about learning to engage in Kumite as a stepping stone?***

新
体
道

"Shintaido" means "new body way." It is an art form, a health exercise and meditation through movement developed in Japan in the 1960s. Shintaido grows out of the roots of ancient martial arts and meditation traditions, but the aim is to help modern people rediscover the original wisdom known by the body and realized through movement.