



SHINTAIDO

OF AMERICA

Spring 1991 Newsletter

San Francisco, California

Education as Sacred Initiation— *An interview with H.F. Ito*

by Jean-Rémi DeLéage

A few years ago at an international conference on research in education and social anthropology, a French researcher told me, "The most basic question is whether education allows the child to manage his/her contradictions in order to transcend them." Then he added, "In order to understand and communicate with other human beings, you must learn to remain as you are—coherent—while retaining the ability to become *other*."

He revealed to me the danger of education becoming a whirlpool where "anything goes"—one created by market pressures, academic models, and the latest buzz words. As a result, education is in an endangered position which I think Shintaido can face and conquer.

After all, education in our schools is nourished by its roots in the real world. What is this school which ignores the evolution of the sciences and of our consciousness? Which ignores poetry and the body?

It is the body that poses the ultimate problems. In the flesh are found the enigmas that we must solve before approaching the mysteries of the spirit—body of joy, body of suffering. This is why I believe Shintaido is a movement that will allow us to run ahead of the insanity of this century in a decisive Eiko.

I met Ito-sensei during the Kangeiko which led us into the new decade. I was itching to pose the question of education. I hesitated at first, since asking for a definition of Shintaido's "pedagogical use" seemed simply like the ignorance of Western curiosity. However, I launched into my first question anyway.

A Modern Language of the Body

JEAN-REMI DeLEAGE: In what way is Shintaido a modern "method," open and suitable for the study of life?

ITO-SENSEI: Shintaido is one method, based on the language of the body. That is why a Shintaido instructor can play the role of a film director or orchestra conductor as well as that of a teacher. An instructor shows movements so others can copy them, and through the simple fact of trying to imitate movements people enter into the philosophy of Shintaido. With the body you can go beyond the intellect, beyond linguistic barriers. In this sense, Shintaido is really modern. Another reason is that it has shown itself to be completely open to the world and to fellow human beings.

Although he was born in Japan, Aoki-sensei studied Western arts and traditions and was nourished by the spirit of Christianity. It is relatively rare to be a Christian in Japan because the essence of our culture is permeated by Shintoism and Buddhism. That places one in a somewhat marginal

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position—or even that of the avant-garde—if one is able to live an original life. Master Aoki took the path of one of our most Japanese traditions—that of the martial arts—as well as a path that ran against these traditions, because of his faith. His three original sources of inspiration: the practice of the martial arts, fine art, and religious faith, allowed him to create a movement that is uniquely placed at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. It is a movement that offers access to Japanese traditions, as well as Chinese and Indian, with an open mind and heart, avoiding the “guru” connection. At its core, Shintaido is a method that enables one to “know thyself.” Nothing more and nothing less.

Educating the Body/Mind/ Spirit

J.-R. D.: The Japanese writer Yukio Mishima wanted to make his life a work of art. Can we approach Shintaido in this sense—as a means of educating the body, mind and spirit in order to realize this dream?

ITO: Before putting art in our lives, we must first learn to know ourselves in order to free ourselves.

Individuality is truly a French tradition. For you the Self is very important, and even if you follow your sensei in your practice, you have great difficulty in abandoning your ego. For their part, many Japanese are lacking this sense of self and it is therefore difficult for them to liberate themselves.

Shintaido can lead to a practice in which one's individuality is put aside or, on the other hand, a practice where one can learn to be a unique and individuated person. Each of our cultures has weak and strong points which must be recognized. Ultimately, we must learn to *harmonize* our being and not lose ourselves in excessive rationalism, mysticism, or idealism for their own sake.

J.-R. D.: Those who love God shouldn't forget their fellow humans.

ITO: Exactly. Mystics can do a great tenso, but their shoko might not be so good—not to mention their kumite.

No "You", No Two

J.-R. D.: What is the pedagogical originality of Shintaido?

ITO: In order to answer that question, I have to explain where Shintaido comes from. Most Japanese martial arts have been developed from a dualistic view of the universe: two universes confront each other when two individuals face each other in combat. Kyudo is a little different though because it is an individual practice.

Before putting art in our lives, we must first learn to know our- selves in order to free ourselves. . .

J.-R. D.: Perhaps it is a different form of kumite—between the arrow, the bow, the target, and oneself?

ITO: Yes (laughter). . . In Karate and Tai Chi we can see the practice of kata, which is a less dualistic view of the universe. Aoki-sensei integrated this tao of complementary opposites from the Chinese culture. That is why Shintaido calls upon cooperation more than competition.

I am talking about a music of the body with different modes of expression. In Shintaido we can practice alone, with a partner, or in a group. Through *hitorigeiko* (private practice) we can develop our inner expression; through kumite, the ability to communicate with others; and through group practice, how to live together, to attune and unify ourselves with another, knocking down barriers and becoming a single body. At the same time, we respect their freedom—that which makes

them different and gives them their identity. Experiencing freedom does not mean doing anything we want, but respecting the integrity of others and ourselves. In this respect, practicing in a group is a great tool to study how to live together in a very small space.

The work of the gori allows us to learn about transmission of our learning—about managing human energy. At each level of expression there are very rich experiences.

Systemic Education

J.-R. D.: These days there is a lot of talk about “systemic” or even “holographic” education (although this is rarely put into practice!). According to what you have been saying, Shintaido is a concrete example of this kind of method.

ITO: Yes. In a movement such as Tenshingoso, all the other movements are included and more still. You could study only Tenshingoso and that would be complete. Each movement in our practice is a holon. You know, most martial arts teach one how to become a good fighter and only a good fighter! And perhaps if you are very, very lucky you will become wise! In Shintaido we are trying to develop something else.

Hikari— Seeking and Receiving

We have the example of *Hikari*.^{*} *Hikari* has its origins in a very powerful style of combat. I must attack my opponent's midsection unceasingly, and of course my destructive energy can last a long time even if I am unrelenting in my attack. But there comes a moment when this destructive force grows weaker of its own accord and is transformed into a positive, constructive, and creative force. If I do *tsuki*, it's not because I want to kill my partner but because I want to find the form of truth that resides within her. In its original form, *tsuki* is very destructive. Here, it becomes something like a “life-seeking missile.” My partner keeps pulling me toward her by asking,

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^{*}*Hikari* to *Tawamureru*: “playing with light.”

"Can you catch me? Can you catch me?" And I respond, "I am searching, I am searching, and I will never abandon my search as long as there is a spark of life in me and a spark of truth in you."

From an artistic, biological, and metaphorical point of view, we can consider tsuki to be the expression of the masculine energy of an aroused penis, and receiving to be the expression of the feminine energy of the vagina. In this case, tsuki is like the sperm seeking an egg; a seed attracted by the reproductive cell. But since there is only one that can penetrate the egg to fertilize it, each one has to double its efforts.

J.-R. D.: If I understand correctly, kumite is an exercise that brings to the fore the dual nature of a human being: the male and female principles that must seek, find, and unify with each other.

ITO: Exactly! The biological and cultural conditioning of our species causes the male to show only his masculine component and the female, her feminine component. Thanks to the practice of hikari, women can apply themselves to seeking and men to receiving. Both men and women can become aware of and integrate their two natures, which can then lead to the elimination of sexist distinctions. In this way, two men can experience great joy in playing, in turn, the roles of seeker and receiver, as can two women. You don't have to be gay or lesbian for that.

J.-R. D.: Simply human.

ITO: Yes! That's what's so great about this kumite. But it's not easy for many people to accept. They don't want to be human beings—they just want to be men, males!! That's all. Through Shintaido we can develop our androgyny as described by C.G.Jung in his notion of animus and anima. It's a flowing, non-linear movement.

An Ecology of Thought

J.-R. D.: School is often described as a site of profane initiation. How might

Shintaido contribute to a renewal of sacred initiation, an ecology of thought that has been filtered through the body?

ITO: Following the samurai period two centuries ago, the Japanese government invited hundreds of foreign consultants to Japan. That's why our technology was influenced by the French, our naval fleet by the English, and our army by the Germans. And even though certain problems ensued, we profited enormously from that exchange. That is why I think France has everything to gain by welcoming wisdom that comes from other countries.

Now if French education develops only ideas and information that issue forth from its own culture, and does not understand that our life itself is a school, a dojo, the children will have great difficulty in opening themselves to the world, and in developing a consciousness without borders—a human consciousness in its widest sense.

For example, since the Chinese invasion of Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism has opened to the world, and that has been beneficial to Western cultures.

Shintaido causes us, in a certain way, to enter into the sacred. But I don't mean that Shintaido is the best initiatory program. It is one among others. Moreover, the essence of Shintaido does not solely come out of Japanese culture, but has also been fed from other sources.

With Shintaido, we can find Nature in ourselves, and rediscover the meaning and wisdom of the elements through wakame. We can rediscover the feeling of respect for that which is greater than us. This is not an intellectual perception of nature, but one which is living and participatory. It really is possible to begin to communicate with a tree, a lake, a mountain. In this respect, Shintaido has a deeply ecological, intercultural, and meta-physical dimension.

Moral and Physical Development

J.-R. D.: Should we be trying to develop Shintaido as a program of

alternative or supplementary education? In other words, should we try to integrate it in schools or develop it as a counterculture?

ITO: Today, the main goal of educational systems in the world is simply to furnish information. At best, they can teach us how to read, but not to become human beings. To be sure, the ideal would be a school that corresponds philosophically to Shintaido, but this will take time—a lot of time. That is why I think it is better for now to think of Shintaido as supplementary education. Through our experience of existing educational systems, we already know what we would want to avoid or change.

In Japanese we say, *chi iku*, intellectual development, *toku iku*, moral development and *tai iku*, physical development. Shintaido constitutes a remarkable program for the last two. We can teach our children to know and love their neighbors. We can also teach them to apologize when they are wrong, to forgive, to understand others, to become compassionate, and to learn to be served as well as to serve. If you become too humble you end up devaluing what you are given, by making opportunities for exchange impossible. This ethical factor which is so important is never taught anywhere.

J.-R. D.: And also, *toku iku* and *tai iku* effect *chi iku*. My way of moving changes my way of thinking. Perhaps it is a question of changing ourselves, through our bodies, without waiting for someone to change us, and without spending our time judging others.

ITO: Exactly. As you were saying yesterday, it is necessary to kill the Nicholas Ceaucescu* in ourselves first before giving advice to others. It is always easier to see others' faults than the plank in our own eye!



Translated by Michael Thompson, Bela Breslau, and Laurence Mourey; condensed for the SoA newsletter by Tomi Nagai-Rothe.

October 1990 Gasshuku: *Red in Tooth and Claw?*

by Eva Thaddeus

"Harmony" is one of the catchwords of New Age lingo, and at the East Coast October gasshuku we tried to discover what this word means to us. Is our goal in Shintaido to resolve conflicts to harmony? Is the core of our natures, and of all Nature, harmonious? Why do we try to be cooperative rather than competitive? Is this a way of harmonizing with the natural world? Or is conflict also deeply natural?

At the advanced workshop we had a long and honest discussion that centered around difficulties with "wakame" or seaweed exercise. People who had been at Santa Cruz this July described a variety of reactions to the final, climactic group wakame, where everyone was simultaneously leading and following everyone else. Although some felt safe and cared for, others felt afraid or even abused. Michael Thompson noted, that the different reactions and feelings people brought away from the exercise must have had a lot to do with their own receiving.

It was obvious as we talked that even in an exercise as cooperative as seaweed, conflict is not left at the dojo door. And people who felt negativity expressed in the exercise were responding to something real, either in themselves or in their partners. Just acknowledging these feelings, I think, helped keep us from blaming ourselves personally for a discord that might be seen as going against the Shintaido spirit. We realized that we weren't isolated misfits in a scene of group euphoria, and that difficult experiences could teach as much as easy ones.

We also discussed some ways to

work on this negativity. One choice might be simply to leave the kumite if we find ourselves expressing or receiving ill will. If we realize that we are involved in personality conflicts of some kind, it may be best to remove them from the keiko field. Most of us felt that uncontrollable emotion was out of place in seaweed exercise. Jim Sterling said that what he likes about wakame is its impersonal, ocean-wave feeling.

The other point is that in an uninhibited exercise like group wakame, we can't let the loss of inhibition mean lost awareness. We shouldn't move around the dojo heedlessly bumping into people. And we shouldn't assume that others won't bump into us. Ito-sensei explained the idea of active receiving. The ideal in wakame is not to be passive, "dead seaweed," but completely sensitive and alive, anticipating the movements of your partners before they even touch your skin. He said that he too had been bashed in the head during group wakame, but his reaction was to realize that "I was late," rather than get angry.

We took up the themes of conflict and harmony again in the general gasshuku, when we talked about biology and asked whether nature was really "red in tooth and claw" (*The New Biology: Discovering the Wisdom in Nature*, by Robert Argros and George Sancin). The book we discussed denies the existence of struggle in Mother Nature, claiming she operates through harmony and cooperation. Most of us were dissatisfied with a theory that didn't acknowledge struggle as a natural force. Certainly in my own Shintaido practice, conflict, struggle, and effort haven't diminished over the years, nor do I have any

illusions that some day it will all be easy for me. I think that we keep learning only through continuing effort.

Ito-sensei tied things together well in his final lecture. He said that struggle or "survival of the fittest," is embodied in the martial arts aspect of Shintaido. However, cooperation, harmony, and "organic wisdom," as he put it, are also vital to Shintaido. To show how these aspects of our practice combine he had the instructors give a "sixth sense" demonstration during the last keiko. They received bokuto attacks with their backs to their partners, using intuition to know when to turn. Watching this probably did more for our understanding of harmony and struggle than any amount of discussion could.

I understand the outlook of the biology book's authors. It is disappointing to have to acknowledge conflict in nature, especially when society has used natural models to justify so much cutthroat competition and exploitation. What makes Shintaido such an honest and ample body movement, for me, is its inclusiveness. If we are going to have a true chance to investigate our inner selves and our relationships with others, we can't deny the unpleasant parts.



Letters

Dear Friends,

Here is a photo of my son Joshua, 21 months old, running Eiko at green Gulch Farm Zen Center, where we live and practice Zen Buddhism. Josh loves Shintaido and uses it to spontaneously express his vital energy. He picks up sticks, wooden spoons, hammers, etc. and points them at the sky, shouting "Ahh!" He runs Eiko on the beach and does wakame.

These forms were passed on to him by my boyfriend Chris Nash with a playful, enthusiastic spirit. Joshua's response has impressed me deeply. He seems to find Shintaido natural and expressive.

As a lay practitioner of Buddhism, with a background in monastic training, I am interested in how spiritual practice manifests in everyday life and work. I have participated in some keiko and have heard from close friends that Shintaido has been transformative in their lives. The



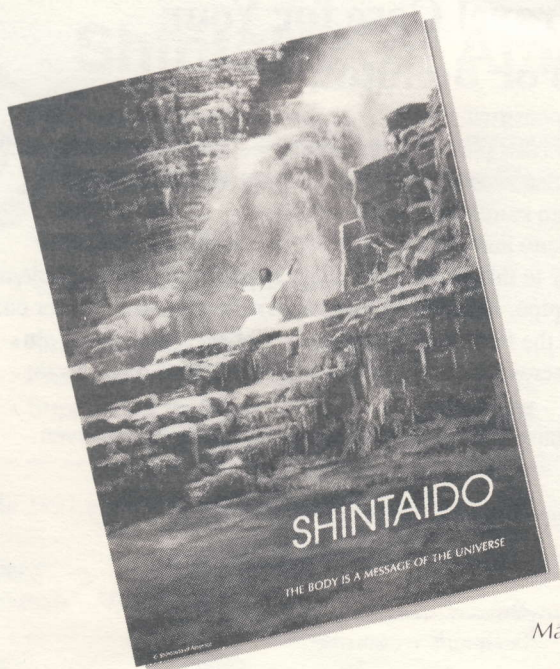
questions I have now are applicable to both Shintaido and Zen: How can this practice manifest itself beyond its forms? Also, how do we use these forms to reveal rather than conceal ourselves? How do we practice while driving in rush-hour traffic, watching images of war on television, changing diapers, resolving a friction with a friend or co-worker? Any intense, committed practice usually generates a feeling of being part of an "in" group which is doing something different or

special. How can we genuinely look at those beyond our group with love and understanding, free of self and other?

Shintaido alludes to Buddhism and Zen in its imagery and philosophy. Perhaps some Shintaido practitioners would be interested in learning more about Buddhist teaching and meditation. Zen is widely misunderstood in this culture, often vaguely associated with samurai fantasy movies, Japanese aesthetics, and ideas about enlightenment and psychic powers. Zen is actually a real way of life for Americans like myself, who are raising our children in an environment informed by Buddhist teachings, meditation practices, and ethical guidelines. It is the way of kindness, gentleness and peace practiced for over 2,500 years.

I hope to continue learning more about Shintaido, and I invite you to Green Gulch to walk with me and Joshua, and to talk. We are grateful for your friendship and support, your teachers, and your practice.

Mushin Ikeda



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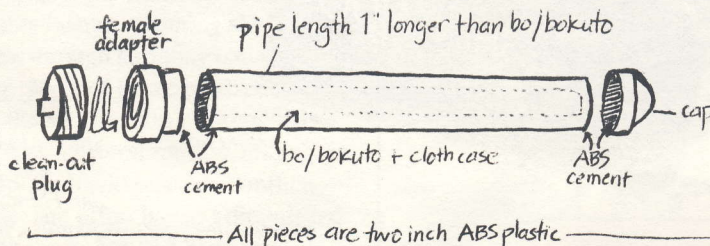
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Measure your bo or bokuto and add one inch for the cloth cover. Cut the plastic pipe with a hacksaw to this length. Next, apply glue to both the inside of the cap and the end of the pipe. Join them. Then apply the glue to the other end of the pipe, and the part of the female adapter which slips over the pipe. Join them. The clean out plug screws into the female adapter, allowing access to your bo or bokuto.

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contributed by Michael Buckley

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Calendar

1991

May

17-19, Meditation Workshop in Bellingham WA

June

27-30, National gasshuku in Northfield MA

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- Support for the National Instructors' Council

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