



BODY Dialogue

Why Are These People Smiling?

Discovering Shintaido: a personal account
(Part 1 of a 2-part series)

by Paul Gordon

1984— An Important Gift

My Shintaido story starts at the age of twelve. It is Christmas, and under the tree is a large hardcover book called *The Martial Arts*. It's one of those books that are displayed in the front of shopping mall book stores arranged in pyramid fashion with big SALE stickers all over them. A Perfect Christmas Gift for parents who know nothing about Japanese fighting arts, but have a son who, unlike his friends, is trying to perfect a hip throw instead of a curve ball.

A striking series of pictures in the Karate chapter catch my attention. One of these pictures is a double page colour spread. It is taken on a Japanese beach, where a group of about ten men and women are running in a circle with their

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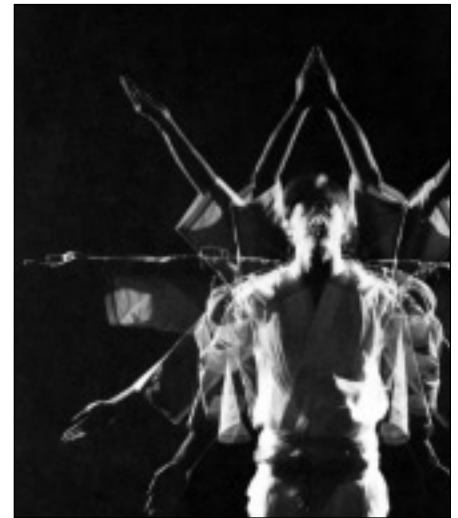
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Shintaido History: Origins of Some Forms

An interview with H.F. Ito by Eva Thaddeus

I wanted to conduct this interview in order to find out more about the origins of some of our Shintaido movements. Although I know that the roots of Shintaido are in Karate and sword practice, I have always wondered about some specific forms we practice, and their connections with ancient forms. Along the way, over my seventeen years of study, I've been told things about the origin of these movements, but I've never seen these things in print, or had a chance to check them with someone who was there when Shintaido was first developed. So I scheduled a phone conversation with H.F. Ito, who, as one of the original members of Rakutenkai, the group which developed Shintaido under the leadership of Hiroyuki Aoki, has seen our movement grow from the roots up. The first thing Ito sensei said was this:

Kazu Yanagi



Shintaido 10-position meditation

“Strictly speaking, these questions should be addressed to Aoki-sensei directly. But Aoki-sensei is so busy that we may not get an answer for a while. So I am glad to answer your question temporarily. When we hear from him, the formal answer will be printed, maybe a few issues later.”

Q: I have a question about Tensho Kata (an upper level Karate sequence, using very slow movements) and our basic Shintaido form of Tenshingoso (literally, “five expressions of cosmic truth”). I have heard that Tensho Kata is an old and

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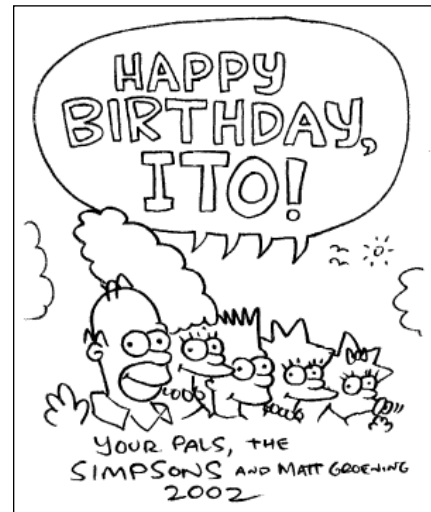
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traditional Karate *kata*. Some of the five parts of Tenshingoso are in Tensho Kata. Is this where Aoki-sensei found them?

A: The way I understood Tensho Kata, in traditional Okinawan Karate there is a way of practicing two forms called Sanchin (literally, "3 battles, 3 fighting") and Tensho ("turning-over palm") which became part 1 and part 2 of our Tensho *kata*. Aoki-sensei changed the Chinese character used to write the "ten" in Tensho from "turning over" to one that meant "heaven" so it became "heavenly palm." Go Ju Ryu practitioners still practice these *kata* seriously. In the traditional Okinawan style, the way they practice is very strange. They

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Yes, this really is a drawing by Matt Groening, creator of The Simpsons. To find out what Ito did for his birthday, see p. 11

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Shintaido History: Origins of Some Forms

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tighten their muscles— all muscles— and make noise when they breathe, sucking air in through the nose, and exhaling air audibly. We always thought the traditional way of practicing was funny. When we tried making special breathing, we ended up coughing. So we ended up listening to our own bodily reactions.

The idea for Tenshingoso came from a completely different source. But after we found natural breathing and the three hand positions of *kaishoken* (“open broadcasting hand”), *musoken* (“no phenomena hand”) and *jigyoken* (“self empowerment hand”), Aoki-sensei arranged Tensho Kata using these elements. He ended up studying Sanchin and Tensho by himself, and while he was repeating them, as he copied the traditional way, then our new discoveries of *kaishoken*, *musoken*, and *jigyoken* naturally came out in the *kata*. They were used as a kind of chemical catalyst, or filter. The old-fashioned way of practicing went through the filter and out came in a new form. Then it became part of the Shintaido program as moving meditation.

Q: If we saw the old *kata* would we recognize them?

A: You can still see the skeleton. Maybe I'll collect some more information about the old style for my September workshop.

Because we were asked to collect all traditional *kata* and make a book for Egami-sensei (Hiroyuki Aoki's teacher, a master of Shotokai karate— Ed.), we had a project team and collected all kinds of information. We benefitted from this information too, and out of it Aoki-sensei created Tenshingoso. Many parts of the Tenshingoso exercise came from Karate *kata*, like the movement of “O” which is very similar to the beginning of Kanku Kata.

Aoki-sensei also studied healing arts, traditional medicine, and did esoteric training such as Shinto and Buddhist monks practice in the mountains. He visited many temples and was interested in Buddhist statues from an artistic point of view. People often face a statue and pray, asking for something, but Aoki-sensei actually studied the posture of the statues and ended up using the posture when he did meditation.

Q: Are these like the Indian statues with many arms?

A: Yes, so many of them! When you visit a temple in Japan you see they keep this kind of sculpture as a sort of guardian angel. To pray to them, you just put your palms together and keep bowing, or expressing a wish: “I wish for my son to pass the exam,” or something like that. But Aoki-sensei copied the form of many sculptures with his own body, and found that some postures can be used like a whole body *mudra* (meditative hand position). Traditionally many people's understanding is that the form of a *mudra* is made with your hand or fingers, but Aoki-sensei realized that when you copy certain forms with your whole body, the whole body can be like an antenna in order to receive a message from the universe.

Q: So was it an ancient tradition that he revived, by assuming these positions himself?

A: I think so.

Q: And the origin of Flower Walking (Kenkai-in-hoko, the flower walking meditation)?

A: Some years ago, I saw a documentary film about Tibetan Buddhism taken by some British explorer before the Chinese invasion. I realized that in one part, when they were showing their way of walking meditation, their stepping was exactly like our Flower Walking. I was so impressed by Aoki-sensei's inspiration in finding this form.

... Aoki-sensei copied the form of many sculptures with his own body, and found that some postures can be used like a whole body mudra

One more thing— when we were studying Karate all day, of course part of Egami-sensei's quest was for the strongest punch that would enable us to express ourself, and to keep developing our power of concentration. In this context many Karate practitioners undertook esoteric training. Some people ended up having very strong powers of concentration, but using their power the wrong way, for instance for gambling, or in order to make someone fall in love with them, or something like that— they were not clear what was white magic or black magic. Very often those esoteric trainings were practiced as black magic too. While they were developing their supernatural powers, or powers of concentration, many ended up studying black magic by mistake. Quite a few of my colleagues or *senpai* (senior students) became mentally ill. So it was urgent for Aoki-sensei as an instructor to clarify what was white magic or black magic.

When he arranged 10-position meditation, Tenshingoso, Eiko, etc. his focus was to come up with a nice healthy form so that people did not have bad reactions. That's what I appreciate Aoki-sensei's efforts. I started teaching Taimyo Kata as white magic in order to first develop perfect peace in ourselves, then to practice community, at last hoping we can send out nice energy all over the world. On the other hand, if Aoki-sensei had not done this kind of clarification, I am not sure how much we could do— if Shintaido could be a nice, strong martial art as well as a self-healing exercise. •••

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arms outstretched and gazes elevated. The sun is shining, the waves are rolling in the distance, and they are all— *smiling?*

This group, draped in white against a backdrop of blue sky and black sand, make up the most beautiful picture in the book— a stark contrast to the clenched fists and grimaces that crowd the pages around it. But mysteriously, despite the picture and subsequent interview with Hiroyuki Aoki, the name of the art that they are practicing (obviously not Karate) is never revealed.

I flip through the pages, and find more pictures of Mr. Aoki's "Karate" students running and punching in the sand. I want to be like them. I want to go there— to Japan and train with a real master. Within a year I settle to join the local Karate club, deciding that it is vastly superior to the Judo that my father had signed me up for a couple of years earlier.

I love Karate practice, and immerse myself in it. At the ripe old age of twelve, I have found purpose in my life. I know what I want to be when I grow up.

1987— Fleeting Glory

After three years of hard training (almost every weekday three or four hours) I have reached brown belt level (1st kyu) in the Shotokan style, and have become a keen tournament competitor. After winning some smaller local tournaments, I have secured a spot at the Canadian National Karate Championships in Toronto. Now fifteen years old, this will be my first tournament competing in the adult division.

I gradually fight my way to the top at Canada's largest and most prestigious tournament. Sparring against more experienced and mature opponents from all over North America, I am the unknown skinny kid in a plain white gi (uniform) winning over and over again, eventually taking first place in a field of sixty participants. I win a trophy that is over six feet tall.

Overnight, I go from being virtually invisible at these events, to center stage. My ego swells as I start traveling to major American cities and entering all the big tournaments. I compete in Boston, New York, Chicago, Miami, Atlanta. I consistently place in the top three. I strut around like a peacock and start wearing brightly coloured uniforms, learning that especially in the *kata* (form) division, how you look and act is just as important as how well you perform.

Eventually, I begin to tire of spending all my weekends inside stuffy, loud gymnasiums with high expectations being placed on me all the time. But I'm hooked on all the attention. This is a game, I start thinking, not an art. This game has distinct

rules, such as: when your opponent gets a good clean point, still act surprised when the judges award it. Or, even if someone touches you lightly on the face, act hurt, so they are disqualified. Read the judges and perform accordingly— hard moves, soft. Yell, frown, jump? Whatever it takes to win.

Once in a while, I pull out the book and study the pictures of Aoki's students on the beach. *What would it be like to practice just for yourself?*, I wonder.

1992— Reality Bites

I am now a black belt and a young father. My career as a competitor is essentially over as my life shifts gears into parenthood, but I am making a good living from my Karate.



The way that I accomplish this is less than ideal. In essence, I facilitate introductory kids classes that serve the purpose of selling expensive long term memberships to wealthy parents who have high aspirations for their children. Many of these children are only five or six years old. Many of them will quit Karate within a few weeks. Knowing this full well, I sell their parents one year memberships for thousands of dollars. *Oh well, I think, It's a dog-eat-dog world.*

When time allows, I visit *dojo* (practice halls) in and around the Toronto area, sparring with anyone that I can. I start to attract more and more visitors to my own *dojo* who want to challenge me because of my past tournament exploits. I sense that my own instructor, who has been my idol and mentor since I was a child, is starting to resent me because I am surpassing him in my fighting skills. I hold back when we fight, so as not to embarrass him in front of the other students.

1993— The Romanian Connection

Down the road from my own *dojo*, Lucian Popa, a Romanian Karate instructor who had recently immigrated to Canada, was teaching in another commercial Karate school. Although highly regarded in his native country, the third degree Shotokai instructor, like me, was relegated to teaching beginner classes for children— most of whom would have rather been playing Nintendo than practicing their front kicks.

At some point, my own instructor had decided to buy out the *dojo* where Mr. Popa was teaching, and he sent me over one night to show Lucian how to teach "our way."

I remember sitting and watching his class for the first time and thinking that he was doing everything wrong. He was harsh with the kids, making them sit still for long periods,

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using lots of Japanese terminology— and yet... there was something there that I couldn't quite put my finger on.

After the class was over, I gave him some advice on things he would have to change once we took over the school. Basically, I suggested he run his class more like an aerobics instructor, and less like a medieval warlord. He respectfully accepted my suggestions as having some value from a business perspective, and then demonstrated some arrangements that he said he was working on to hopefully add to the curriculum. His technique was impeccable. He seemed totally disinterested in the business side of the martial arts, and almost obsessively interested in the art of Karate itself, and in his young students. Eventually, I asked Lucian if he would like to do some sparring with me, and he graciously accepted my challenge. I will never forget what transpired over the next half-hour.

With the two of us all alone in the *dojo* after all the students had left for the night, I fought the toughest match of my life. Using a style that I had never encountered before, Lucian sent me hurtling to the mat time after time until I finally had to crawl away nursing my sore limbs. I had been utterly humiliated.

The deciding factor in the match was an *irimi* (entering) movement that he used whenever I threw a high kick. Instead of moving straight back to avoid an attack (as I was used to my opponents doing), Lucian would simply advance on me, his timing perfect to get inside my kick so that I was vulnerable to a grab. Once he had taken hold of my upper body, all I could do was cringe, and prepare for the fall as my feet were swept out from under me and I was instantly pinned to the mat. Struggling after this point seemed futile, and even a bit dangerous!

This experience caused me to reevaluate everything that I had done up to this point in my martial arts training. Inwardly, I



knew that if I was to continue martial arts as a lifelong pursuit, and not simply as a money-making venture, I would have to follow Lucian and give up my career as an instructor/salesman. Going against all rational judgment, I quit my job, and announced to everyone that I was now practicing the Shotokai style under Lucian Popa.

I began to realize that this Shotokai Karate style was very effective as a fighting art, but with its soft flowing move-

"Great" I thought, "I've managed to locate a west coast new age cult that will probably brainwash me into running around the desert and howling at the moon"

ments, it had limited mass appeal. Most prospective students didn't seem to "get it." I had chosen a difficult path for myself, and my childhood dream of making a living by teaching Karate was becoming more and more just that— a dream.

1994-1995— Finding Ito

My search for gainful employment led us to Canada's east coast, where my in-laws had experienced a devastating fire that destroyed their century farmhouse on the Saint John River in New Brunswick. For a couple of years, we moved to the farm, and I helped rebuild the house in exchange for modest pay with room and board thrown in.

Eventually, I started teaching Karate at the local community center twice a week, and ended up with quite a few students. During this time, I kept in contact with Lucian back at home, and he would often tell me stories about great Karate masters from the past.

His favorite, by far, was Shigeru Egami, who had been the head instructor of the Japan Karate-Do Shotokai Association. Egami had written a book entitled *The Way of Karate Beyond Technique* that for Lucian was like a bible. Far from being simply a technical manual of techniques, it described how Egami's philosophy toward practice had changed between WW II and 1976, when the book was published.

At this point in time, the sole basis of our Shotokai practice was this one small, tattered book. We had no contacts in the Shotokai world, and it seemed like we were the only practitioners of this obscure art on the North American continent.

One day, Lucian requested that I start searching for an

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instructor for the two of us. An instructor who, ideally, had practiced with Egami in Japan, but was now living in North America. It seemed like a long shot, but he gave me a tip to get me started. “You remember that book you’ve had since you were a kid with Aoki-sensei teaching on the beach?” he went on, “I think that Aoki is practicing a new art that he developed called Shintaido. Through Shintaido you may find an instructor that used to practice Shotokai— or still does.”

Lucian also told me that Egami had written another book that was very rare called *Karate-Do For The Professional*. I desperately wanted to find this book that was supposed to contain pictures of Aoki demonstrating many *kata*. In those days I didn’t have internet access, so my search involved mostly browsing in libraries and bookstores. After a year or more of doing this with no results, I had more or less given up. Then, one day, flipping through a book called *The Martial Arts Dictionary* in a suburban shopping mall bookstore in Fredericton, New Brunswick— BINGO!— I found a single paragraph with the heading: Shintaido.

My initial excitement quickly dissipated as I began to read. The book described Shintaido as a strange religious group started by an artist named Hiroyuki Aoki with ties in California. “Great” I thought, “I’ve managed to locate a west coast new age cult that will probably brainwash me into running around the desert and howling at the moon.” (Actually, I was wrong, it would be a public beach and I would be howling at other people).

Not quite ready to give up, I read on and encountered a reference to *The Body Is a Message of the Universe* published by a group called SoA. I rushed up to the counter and asked if I could order this book. The woman behind the desk pulled out an old volume of Books in Print. She examined it for a short time, and then said: “I can’t order this book for you, but the telephone number of the publisher is here, would you like it?” I scribbled the number into my notebook and took off for the grocery store where I suspected my wife would probably be waiting for me.

The following day, the phone rang a few times at Mr. Ito’s apartment on Judah St. in San Francisco; it was me calling. His message machine came on and I heard a thick Japanese accent in a low voice that I could barely make out: “Not in right now, leave message...” What was this?, I thought, it sure didn’t sound like any publisher, more like someone’s home number. I started to lower the phone to hang up, then feeling uncomfortable, brought it back to my ear. “Hi” I said, “I’m looking for a book by Shigeru Egami called *Karate-Do for the Professional*, if you can get me this book give me a call back.”

I had never really expected a response. Then, about a week later, I was teaching a class and the phone rang. Normally, I wouldn’t have left to pick up the phone, but for some reason

this one time I did without hesitation. It was Mr. Ito. He introduced himself, and said that not only could he get me this book, but that he had practiced Shotokai with Master Egami in his university days. “Why don’t you meet me in Quebec City next month for a Shintaido workshop and I’ll bring the book!” he said.

I had hit gold, and my Shintaido journey was about to begin.

•••

This story will be continued in the next issue of BodyDialogue.

Kazu Yanagi



The picture that started it all

Paul Gordon lives in the village of Creemore northwest of Toronto with his wife Sara, and their three boys: Lucas, Theo and Eliot. He has been volunteering as a Karate instructor at a local dojo for the past six years, and leads a small local Shintaido group. For the past six years, he has worked for Honda Manufacturing of Canada, where he continues to dream up reasons why they should send him to Japan on “business.”

Teaching and Learning: Students and Teachers

Two Shintaidoists discuss the roles we play

Part 1: Living with a Teacher— Life Principles by Tomi Nagai-Rothe

My thoughts about student-teacher relationships have been shaped by all my Shintaido teachers and senpai, though I begin by noting those with whom I have studied formally, chronological order: Ben Schireson, Jim Sterling, H.F. Ito, Bela Breslau, Connie Borden, Lee Seaman, John Seaman, and Jennifer Peringer.

These are some of the life principles I have gleaned from living with one of my teachers, H.F. Ito, for the past four years.

10 years ago we were looking for a house but didn't have enough to buy in San Francisco. A friend of Ito's and former Shintaido practitioner in Tokyo was looking for a U.S. investment and liked the idea of becoming a financial partner in a Shintaido household. H.F. Ito introduced us, Bela Breslau brokered the deal and we bought the house. Then four years ago when Ito was evicted from his apartment of 18 years and asked if he could move in with us. How could we turn him down? After all, he had made it possible for us to own the house in the first place.

At the time we were a family of four and today we are a family of three, plus other housemates. Our household is like co-housing in miniature: everyone has private space, some folks have their own bathrooms, and the kitchen is the communal meeting place. The rack of martial arts weapons in the basement, stashes of Shintaido of America publications, frequent visitors from the global Shintaido community and most importantly, the long dinners with conversation about *keiko* (practice) mark it as a Shintaido household.

Principle 1: Learn to Navigate Multiple Roles

My formal relationship with Ito began as my teachers' teacher, and when I attended his workshops, I was his student. Our relationship began as a vertical one, marked by deference, respect, and explicit teaching. When Ito moved into the house he became part of the household, and is now a member of our family (a horizontal, egalitarian relationship). That means sharing menus and meals, news and stories about people in the household, consultations and advice on life decisions and sharing life stories.

Ito jokes that I am his landlord. This flip flops our teacher/student relationship. But it also takes me off the hook for being his *deshi* (live-in apprentice). Thank goodness—because devoted student though I am, I would make a terrible *deshi*. Being a *deshi* requires a single-minded purpose and role

over a sustained period of time. I know my complicated life well enough to understand that I need to find other ways to show my devotion to Ito outside the well-trod paths of traditional apprenticeship.

In fact, Ito and I have come to juggle multiple roles, sometimes within a ten minute period: teacher/student, landlord/tenant, family member/family member, head of household/family member, *senpai/kohai* (senior/junior), colleague/colleague. It is the challenge of reading the contextual cues in any situation: sensei care (teacher/student), friendly ribbing (family member/family member), or handling business (landlord/tenant). The roles we juggle are a curious mix of vertical (formal, hierarchical) and horizontal (informal, egalitarian, democratic), Japanese and American, Shintaido and world-at-large. It helps to have enough bicultural experience to know the context for each of the roles. There are many shared Japanese cultural understandings about indebtedness and reciprocity, and the use of space (e.g. the only people to live in the house and place importance on taking up little space have been Japanese or Japanese-American). It's a dance and a *kumite* (partner practice) that we enjoy. The game is knowing which roles are in play. The rest is jazz.

I think the *senpai/kohai* and colleague/colleague roles developed more recently through mentoring. Ito has helped me develop my Taimyo teaching practice by sending students my way and weaving my activities into his, and debriefed innumerable classes and workshops, noting mistakes made and successes celebrated. And when he couldn't be available for a recent hospice caregiver workshop, he asked Connie Borden and me to teach for him and supported us in taking over his role. Ito and I talk at length about the unique and essential value of Shintaido, compared to other practices, and what is needed to support *keiko* (individually and collectively). Sometimes I help with short translations into English and we confer about meanings and nuances of language. Perhaps most importantly, Ito shared his recent experiences as a scuba diving student which he says have made in a better teacher.

Ito says that karate came easily to him in Japan and he excelled early, achieving 5th-*dan* by age 22. As a teacher, he expected his students to progress as quickly as he had himself. Diving, on the other hand, was very hard at first— the movement was completely different than Shintaido, he was an adult student sometimes studying with very young and naturally talented students, and he struggled with exams in his second language that often had "trick" questions which were impossible for a non-native speaker to catch. It sounded like a frustrating and even demoralizing experience. But it was his

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Teaching and Learning

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teachers who made the difference. When he admitted that he was doing the best he could but still struggling, they smiled and said, “We’ll do whatever it takes to help you pass the free diving instructor certification.” And they proceeded to take extra time to coach him on the diving skills and let him retake the test. Ito was stunned. It hadn’t occurred to him that they

He assumed that they would let him fall behind and fail, and when they refused to let that happen it shattered his assumptions about teaching

were committed to everyone’s success regardless of their natural ability. He assumed that they would let him fall behind and fail, and when they refused to let that happen it shattered his assumptions about teaching. This is the story I have heard Ito tell about his experience: (In my early years) “I was a good Shintaido instructor, but very “kibishii” (serious, strict, and impatient). Since becoming a diving instructor I think that I have become more gentle, kind, and patient when I teach Shintaido, because in diving training, I struggled so much as a student. I truly understand how close to death the training can be and how important it is to be patient and compassionate (“yasashii”).”

Principle 2: Master the Medium of International Exchange (Shintaido’s Charles Schwab)

I have attended enough meetings in which someone has pointed to the formidable business built by Charles Schwab & Co. with very few of its own assets. It is a master of customer relationships parlayed into an amazing array of services and attendant income streams. It occurred to me that Ito illustrates this principle in a community setting better than anyone I know: he owns remarkably few things for someone who has been on the planet for 60 years, yet has a vast holding of social capital that spans the globe. His arrangement of partners for the house purchase is one example— he put together people in the US and Japan with similar needs and interests, even though there is no tangible personal gain in the short term.

Ito seems to revel in moving *ki* energy around the world and dislodging acts of good will along the way. “One good deed deserves another” becomes “One good deserves ten others!” He parlays a Shintaido lesson into a piece of furniture or a dinner that connects two other people to contacts or services they need, which cascades into a series of barter exchanges of massage or translation services or workshops. It’s a game and also a philosophy of life.

Principle 3: Treat Relationships Like Your Bank Account (Put in more than you take out)

When Ito moved into the house he was able to reap the bene-

fits of an earlier act of kindness. But it wasn’t anticipated. The original act was sent out in the world like an untethered prayer or *kiai*.

Our most pedestrian practice of this principle is the “ride to the airport.” This is a medium of household exchange since I travel fairly frequently and Ito travels for a living. We nearly fall over each other in offering rides to and from the airport. It’s like money in the bank. The game is to see if you can give more rides than you use, so we’re always on it!

I think I’ve learned, in all my dealings, to be clear about what I can offer and what I expect in return. The neat thing about the bank account principle is that there is always more left in the account, which can be built or bartered into something larger and more interesting that benefits even more people. I think this is good martial arts technique: how to have the most effect with the least amount of force.

An Illustration of Principles 2 and 3: This is my ringside view of these principles at work. Ito packs two duffel bags with things like used fax machines, step stools, SOA materials, sake or wine (by departure time the two bags weigh a total of 140 pounds). I drop him at the airport and he arrives home with bags filled with *bokuto*, *tabi*, *hakama*, French madeleines, *Hyakunen-cha*, organic vegetable pate or Indian curries. People whom I know and many whom I’ve never met call or fax or e-mail Ito. Some of these people arrive to study with Ito and/or stay at the house. Some of them write to be included in my Taimyo Workshop from Europe. We sit at the kitchen table and talk about the people and their interests and the curriculum of the last workshop and trips and events get spawned and the whole cycle repeats. Everyone is unwittingly woven together into a global tapestry.

Part 2: Teacher-Student Relationships by Eva Thaddeus

You have to understand, I’ve always had strong feelings about my teachers. In second grade I remember Miss Moore saying, “Eva, I can’t cut this cake very well with you sitting on my lap.” In third grade, I used to “talk to the teachers” for recess (they must have groaned when they saw me coming!) rather than play with the children. In fifth grade, I called my teacher “daddy” by mistake, then was terrified lest someone had noticed and would realize the depth of my feelings for him. In this context: my reflections about the TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP.

When I began Shintaido I was nineteen, and had all kinds of illusions about the teachers and the practice. I thought Shintaidoists could attain special powers or some kind of impermeable calm. I didn’t understand the difference between clarity and omniscience, and believed the *sensei* (teachers) were supposed to be right about everything. As I am naturally

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Teaching and Learning

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skeptical, this bugged me a lot; still, I sneakily believed it. Luckily, Michael Thompson, my first and foremost Shintaido teacher, takes every opportunity to de-mystify the attainments of the *sensei* and to defuse the power dynamics inherent in the teacher-student relationship. Because of this, I never wasted much time trying to make him into things he wasn't, and was able to get on with my practice. For most of my first ten years of Shintaido study, this practice was an experience of many different kinds of failure, interspersed with occasional bursts of joy. The joy kept me hopeful, the failures kept me interested, and seventeen years later, I've lost most all of my illusions about Shintaido. It's a wonderful place to have attained, this place of disillusionment. I no longer have Shintaido ambitions, or want to accomplish anything in the practice. I no longer think my teachers are omniscient: I know their weaknesses and love them anyway. I can't say I "believe" in Shintaido. What's left me is a deep and enduring love for it, and that's all. I do it because I love to do it. I hope this is expressed both in my personal practice and in my teaching.

Sometimes I wish I believed in Shintaido more. I can't sell it for the life of me. "Try it if you want," is the closest I can come to a marketing pitch, or maybe, "It means a lot to me." But forget about "It will do this for you," or "It can make you X Y and Z." Those kind of statements are glamorizing, but to me they ring false. I am resigned to having only a few students, who choose this practice themselves, with little encouragement from me. Those are the ones I want: the ones who spot it for themselves, and say, yes, this is it, this is what I want to do. I believe that Shintaido is not for everyone, not for most people. But a few people will see it and say, "This is it!" And then, I can teach them.

Eight years ago, my husband Michael Bogenschutz and I moved from Massachusetts to New Mexico. In Massachusetts



we were part of an active Shintaido group; we taught classes ourselves, but also had Shintaido peers and senior students and teachers close-by. In Albuquerque, we were it. Whatever Shintaido was going to be, Michael and I embodied it. For the

first year, we lay low, keeping our own personal practice schedule, no more. Then I applied to teach a class through the University of New Mexico Continuing Education Department, and was accepted. The very first student who showed up to my very first class was Richard Griffith. On his information form he wrote, "I'm ready to learn whatever you have to teach." And Richard has been our loyal student ever since. If

it hadn't been for his unabated affection for Shintaido, we might not be offering weekly classes right now. We might have taken a long break at some point (things have been slow more than once) and never gotten back into it. But if you have a single committed student, then you are a teacher. So we have Richard to thank for the survival of Albuquerque Shintaido.

As teachers in a new place, Michael and I have tried different ways to present Shintaido to students. We found that when we billed it as "meditation in motion," which came across as rather vague, we got students with a wide range of interests, expectations and physical abilities. It was difficult to develop a relationship with students who were just there to sample

Sometimes I wish I believed in Shintaido more. I can't sell it for the life of me

Shintaido. We have since found that a class description that is as specific as possible, and emphasizes Shintaido's difficulty and martial origin, brings in students with a more serious and enduring interest. We also no longer teach through Continuing Education. My point here is that the "teacher-student relationship" does not exist in a vacuum— it is the "teacher-student-practice relationship" that is important. If the teacher's relationship to the practice is not clear (for example, if you're diluting the practice for the sake of trying to reach more people, as I'm afraid were guilty of doing), then the relationship between teacher and student is also unclear.

Currently, I have many teacher-student relationships, not just within Shintaido. I teach elementary school, and have thirty first graders who call me "Maestra." I teach Shintaido weekly to a small group, and of course I continue to study Shintaido from Michael Thompson, Haruyoshi Ito, and other *sensei* whenever I can. And recently, I've added two more practices— that makes three! I am very busy, and very fortunate, to have so much teaching and learning in my life.

One thing I discovered in Albuquerque was that I wanted to be a student, not just a teacher. I was teaching sixth grade (then fourth, then second, then first). I was teaching Shintaido. I was tired. I wanted to drink from someone else's fountain. I wanted to go to a class and be told what to do. I tried to study some Aikido, but that wasn't a good fit with Shintaido— the movement's too different. I took some classes over time— a couple of acting workshops, one in voice— but they finished after a finite course of time. I like to study something that continues. I like to practice, and after so many years of Shintaido, I know the benefits of practice— the gradual deepening, increased connection, closer understanding of life. One

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Saturday morning, Michael and I took ourselves to the Albuquerque Zen Center. On the way home, two and a half hours later, we said to each other, "So, shall we come every week?" And since then, we have. Not only do Buddhism and Shintaido reinforce each other and overlap beautifully, but it's been interesting meeting new teachers. And refreshing, showing up and having someone else tell us what to do.

Picking up this new practice as an adult, I planned on having a more mature attitude. I was not going to idealize my teachers, or have illusions about attainment, or get sucked into any way of thinking or behaving. Interesting for me has been the

I had to free myself from the idea of being a good Zen student. I realized I felt some obligation, as a Shintaido Instructor, to be not just an ordinary Zen student but a special one

degree to which being a beginner means being a kid. I have all kinds of childlike illusions. I see them, I name them, but experience them nonetheless. One thing I need to be able to do is embrace my beginner's role more fully. At Shintaido practice, I embody Shintaido teacher. At school, I embody first grade teacher. At the Zen Center, I need to embody novice, and not think I should "be" something else because of who I "am" elsewhere in my life. When I met Joshu Sasaki Roshi in May, at our initial interview he asked me, "What do you study?" I said I studied Shintaido, and he said (of course), "What?" When I told him again, he (of course) laughed. Then he said, "You must free yourself from your Shin-tai-do." My initial response was resistance and a little annoyance, feeling I'd just been told that I had to choose Zen over Shintaido. However, later that weekend (it was a three-day retreat) it became clear to me how I had to free myself of my Shintaido: I had to free myself from the idea of being a good Zen student. I realized I felt some obligation, as a Shintaido Instructor, to be not just an ordinary Zen student but a special one. After all, I'd studied this other thing for 17 years, and it should have made a difference. Freeing myself from THAT idea would take, continues to take, a lot of work.

Most recently, I had the experience I want my Shintaido students to have: of saying, "That's it, that's what I want to study." I've been looking for a good improvisation class since arriving in Albuquerque, and I've just found a master teacher named Ruth Zaporah. Her Action Theater, which is rooted in Buddhist principles, she describes as "the improvisation of presence," or "constant attention to the present moment." Ruth's own training was in dance. As she tells it, thirty years ago she only danced and was unable to express herself in voice or language— was functionally mute, socially blocked.

She took some acting classes, but they didn't help her because they weren't rooted in movement. Finally, she realized that "language is movement too," and began to develop her own theater practice which integrated the elements of movement, voice and language. When I experienced her teaching and heard her story, right away I said, "Yes! This is what I want! I want to understand that language is movement too!" So now I'm driving up to Santa Fe once a week to study with her. Three practices— yes, it's very time consuming, probably not sustainable for long, but the beauty's in the whole that they form, a triangle of mutually reinforcing activity, all completely compatible, three sides of the same shape: zazen the quiet side, Shintaido the big and vigorous side, Action Theater the side that works with the human story.

Sometimes I wonder whether I am a "real" teacher. That usually happens when I observe colleagues, or study from others, like Ruth, whose attention and ability and insight as teachers are truly masterful. I feel my own teaching is not in that category, and since I know that communicating with others does not come naturally to me, I sometimes think I should go do something I'm better at. But it's hard to imagine anything more fun, or more rewarding, than being a teacher. I wish you could have seen my first graders' faces when I mixed salt dough with them this week. It's pretty simple: three parts salt, one part flour, one part water. When I poured the salt and flour into the bowl, and passed them around the circle, you'd have thought I'd just thrown pirate's treasure at their feet. "Wow! Cooooool!" It was just flour and salt! Then I added the water. There was a hush in the room as I mixed it with my hands. And I get paid to do this kind of thing.

Teaching makes me a better student. I know from experience that it's important for teachers to hear back from their students— to receive feedback, and also simply to feel appreciated. So when I am a student, I try to find ways to let my teacher know what my experience has been like. Studying also makes me a better teacher. When one of my first graders doesn't understand something I say in Spanish, and repeating it doesn't do any good, I can remember myself trying to learn something complicated with the *bokutoh* (wooden sword). Teachers are always told that if we stop growing in our learning, we can no longer grow in our teaching. It's because we start thinking of ourselves as fixed points, sources of knowledge. It's also because we lose touch with the elements involved in learning: curiosity, effort, fear.

I want to end this piece as I began, by acknowledging the intense role that teachers, and relationships with teachers, can have in our lives. A few of us devote ourselves to a single teacher, entering into discipleships that last a lifetime; the majority of us study from many people in many ways, but all of us can think of someone who taught us something important. And I bet most of us have strong feelings about that person. Teaching and learning are the most dynamic life-activities I can think of. What greater relationship is there? •••

In May 2002, H.F. Ito and David Franklin travelled to mainland China to visit a long-time friend of Mr. Ito's, Professor Tomoji Miyamoto, and interview several Tai Ji Quan masters about traditional Chinese health exercise and its background philosophy. (Tai Ji Quan, also called "T'ai Chi," is an ancient Chinese martial-arts-related health exercise and meditation).

H.F. Ito was one of the members of the group that founded Shintaido and is a Master Shintaido instructor; David Franklin is a Shintaido instructor, and speaks Mandarin Chinese; and Mr. Miyamoto is a professor of Physical Education at Chuo University in Japan, and currently a visiting scholar at Qing Hua University in Beijing, China.



a Journey to the West

by David Franklin and H.F. Ito

Mr. Hiroyuki Aoki (the founder of Shintaido), H.F. Ito, and Tomoji Miyamoto all graduated from the legal studies department of Chuo University and all studied Karate-do under Mr. Shigeru Egami (the founder of Shotokai Karate). During the time of Rakutenkai (the research group that developed Shintaido), Miyamoto also participated in Rakutenkai practice sessions. After Shintaido was developed, Aoki and Ito left the Shotokai group, but Miyamoto chose to stay with master Egami and kept practicing. He stayed as a disciple until Egami died and became the top technical assistant. You will find photos of him demonstrating forms and techniques in Egami's *Karate-do for Professionals* (published by Koudansha International).

Miyamoto continued teaching Karate at Chuo University as a formal part of the Phys Ed curriculum. When Chuo University offered a full-time faculty position (around 1990), he was a pioneer and became one of the first actual Professors of Physical Education in Japan. He started offering a combination program of Yoga and Karate for college students, taking into consideration their physical condition—the younger generation of Japanese were physically weak and could not handle the physical challenge of old-style Karate practice.

Miyamoto started to develop his own theory of "toyo teki tai iku ho" or "eastern system of physical education," through which he offered methods for development of the wholistic personality. In the old days in East Asia, this type of education was taught by professors of philosophy as a part of basic culture; but in the modern era, most professors of "philosophy" just teach the history of ideas and provide information (as opposed to an "education" that teaches a philosophy by which to live).

Because it is richer and more practical than the teaching of his colleagues, Miyamoto's way of teaching has been much appreciated by each new generation of university students. Students who want to register for his class must go on a long waiting list, which is unusual for Phys Ed instructors. Most Phys Ed instructors who teach traditional arts such as Judo or

Kendo are suffering for a lack of students, and often they have to cancel their class or end up teaching subjects such as skiing, volleyball, etc.

After Miyamoto became a professor, he initiated a project to research the true roots of Okinawan Karate. One of Egami-sensei's teachers was Gichin Funakoshi, who was originally from Okinawa. He is generally acknowledged as the father of modern Karate-do and helped introduce Karate into Japan in the early 20th century. Miyamoto's research is based partly on the similarity between the names of traditional Okinawan *kata* (forms) and the pronunciation of the same words in some southern Chinese dialects. Miyamoto believes these *kata* may have come from Fu Jian province in southern China.

He also wanted to research the relationship between *bu* and *i* (*wu* and *yi* in Chinese), or the martial side and the health / medical side of martial arts. The interconnection of *bu* and *i* was originally an essential part of traditional Japanese and Chinese martial arts, but it was lost in the process of modernization, when martial arts became more like sports. Rediscovering this essence was part of Egami's original dream, which Miyamoto is continuing to pursue.

In April of 2001, Miyamoto came to Qing Hua University in Beijing, China for his sabbatical. At Qing Hua, he is continuing his research on the roots of Karate, and has also been teaching Karate classes to undergraduate students. Chuo University and the Japanese government Phys Ed division recognized the importance of his research and allowed him to extend his sabbatical for an extra year to continue his research. His style of teaching Karate as a wholistic system of humanistic education is appreciated by Qing Hua students, because as in Japan, it is rare for Phys Ed instructors to teach this way.

Miyamoto invited Ito to witness the recent progress of his *keiko* (practice) and research. As Ito reached his 60th birthday, he decided that as a birthday gift to himself, he would travel to visit Miyamoto and learn more about the Chinese tech-

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Journey to the West

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niques for nurturing health (Jap. *yo jo ho*, or Chin. *yang sheng fa*). He had a chance to make contact with two Tai Ji masters in Beijing and interview them. Since Ito is teaching Shintaido to hospice caregivers, he also wanted to find out how great Tai Ji masters understand the moment of facing death.

Additionally, the Renki Kumite program (a set of partner exercises) in the Shintaido curriculum includes some exercises similar to the push-hands exercises of Tai Ji, so Ito wanted to research the essence of Tai Ji push-hands and improve his understanding of this exercise.

David Franklin came with Ito on this to serve as interpreter and logistics assistant. His interest in Chinese culture and language goes back to high school when he started studying Tai Ji. It was this experience with Tai Ji that first introduced him to martial arts as a way of wholistic health and human development and eventually led him to study Shintaido.

Miyamoto introduced Ito and David to a Tai Ji master he has been studying with: Mr. Chang-xun Ma. Mr. Isozaki, a former member of Japanese Shintaido, helped them make contact with another master, Mr. Chang-jiang Liu. They both practice Wu style of Tai Ji, and Mr. Ma is officially recognized as a 4th-generation Wu-style master. One unique common point is that both men originally started studying Tai Ji not as a martial art, but to rehabilitate their health because of a serious physical problem.

Mr Ma was born in 1933. Prior to the Communist revolution (or "Liberation" as Chinese call it) of 1949 Mr. Ma's parents passed away prematurely and he was responsible for supporting his two younger sisters. When he was about 24 he had a work accident and was partially paralyzed after a serious fall. He tried many medicines with no effect, and someone suggested he try Tai Ji. After about 6 months of practice there was some improvement and after 1 year he recovered completely. Miyamoto first met Mr. Ma about 6 years ago and has made several trips to China to study with him.

Mr. Liu is a retired professor of zoology and has an interest in ecology. When he was in his twenties he was infected with a communicable disease which affected his stomach. He got a gastric ulcer and tried many medicines (mostly western medicine) but they were ineffective and he suffered with disease for 16 years. It became increasingly severe, and though he continued working, he was in constant pain. He had severe diarrhea and vomiting, and he passed out and was taken to the hospital, where he was pronounced dead and taken to the morgue. Someone noticed he was still breathing slightly and he was put in intensive care. He was in a coma for nearly a

month and when he opened his eyes, his doctor started laughing, saying they had already notified his work unit he was dead and now that he was alive it would make for a lot of complicated paperwork.

After this experience, Mr. Liu decided on his own to pursue traditional Chinese medicine and Tai Ji. He practiced some simple breathing exercises while recovering in the hospital but the only medicine he took was for stomach pain. He began searching for a Tai Ji teacher. He ended up studying Wu style Tai Ji and at first he was so desperate to heal himself he practiced whenever he had spare time. Similar to Mr. Ma, he noticed positive effects after 6 months and after one year was completely cured.

Ito had a chance to practice push-hands and we also had time to discuss the background philosophy of Tai Ji. Ito asked both Ma and Liu several questions, some open-ended and some quite specifically about breathing techniques.

Ito had several reasons for asking this question about breathing. Firstly, while there are some breathing exercises included in the Shintaido curriculum, there wasn't precise instruction

from Aoki-sensei on these. As a result, Shintaido instructors may have difficulty teaching these techniques and can't answer students' questions. So Ito was looking for more clarity on this topic.

Additionally, it was Ito's opinion that people who practice breathing techniques or breath control seriously sometimes become depressed. For example, breath control is a part of certain yoga medita-

tion practices, and allegedly some practitioners have become depressed and suffered nervous breakdowns.

One of Ito's hobbies is diving. One famous figure in diving is Jacques Mayol, holder of a dozen world diving records, and the first man to descend to 100 meters. He was famous for his feats of unassisted diving and his ability to hold his breath, which he accomplished partly by studying yogic breath-control and his almost mystical approach to breathing. However, he suffered from depression and in December 2001 committed suicide, and Ito felt there might be some connection.

Mr. Ma is a man of few words, a sort of "country gentleman" Tai Ji master, but he is fond of expressing himself through written notes. This is especially helpful for Ito and Miyamoto, since the Japanese use many Chinese characters which they imported into their writing system hundreds of years ago and which retain similar basic meanings. Often Mr. Ma writes short 4-character phrases which encapsulate the essence of a

"To hold the breath effectively, even though it seems paradoxical, it's best not to think about holding it. You need to do it without thinking; you need to become the act of non-breathing itself..."

— Jacques Mayol

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concept. He writes these in a notebook, which Miyamoto takes home for further study.

Mr. Ma summarized some principles of Tai Ji in these syllogisms. (Bear in mind that these are expressed in a very condensed literary, almost poetic format. This style of writing is usually not explicit about causality, tense, or subject/object relationships. To preserve this flavor, they're translated quite literally).

"Repair the body and develop one's latent character. A bright spirit and joyful vision. The whole body relaxed and tranquil. A clear head and a quiet mind. Vital energy and blood circulate freely. Disease rarely occurs. A long and healthy life."

In response to Ito's question about breathing, Mr. Ma wrote in a more colloquial style:

"Breathing should be natural. Don't practice exercises such as slow, deep breathing pushing the air to the *dan tian*, or making a single breath last 1-2 minutes, etc. Using techniques to control breathing has many negative effects and few benefits for the body." (The *dan tian*, or *tanden* in Japanese, is the area of the abdomen below the navel).

Mr. Ma said he also practices sitting or standing meditation. He summarized the principles of standing meditation as follows:

"The whole body releases and relaxes. The mind should be quiet. Breathe naturally and spontaneously. In other words: relaxed, quiet, natural."

That was the practical side to the advice he gave, which he also rendered in a more poetic way:

"The key is that heaven and earth are infinite. The achievement is to be without a single thought arising. The technique is to be tranquil, light, spirited and empty."

Later we talked with Mr. Ma in a crowded restaurant where, over plates of vegetables, ma po tofu, duck's feet, and glasses of beer and Chinese vodka (with a few drops of snake blood!), we explained the concept of a "hospice" and that Ito has been teaching Shintaido to people who care for the terminally ill. Ito asked about his thoughts on the afterlife and Mr. Ma wrote in response:

"Human death is like switching off a light. The vital energy changes to wind and the flesh becomes mud. My fate lies within me, not in heaven. Ask nothing of the gods. The Buddha does not believe in immortal beings. Being tranquil, light-spirited and empty is healthy for the mind and spirit. Make the body strong— more practice."

We also had several long conversations with Mr. Liu, with an American student of his named Jeff Crosland serving as interpreter. Mr. Liu took us deep into the philosophy of Eastern thought, seeking the common ground of Daoism, Buddhism

and Confucianism. His background as a zoologist added a contemporary ecological twist to his explanation, which is summarized here:

All things, living and inorganic, seek balance. Everything in the universe oscillates around its own invisible ideal value, which it can never actually realize but which exists as a functional reality. Just as human beings have feelings which are intangible but nonetheless unarguably real, likewise the universe considered as a whole has this invisible value which is a functional reality and is the feeling or emotion of the universe.

The three great philosophical systems of East Asian thought differ in many ways. Each includes a cosmology with some degree of overlap. In Confucianism, which generally emphasizes sociology, this feeling of the universe is called "center." In Buddhism, which emphasizes psychology, it is called "emptiness." In Daoism, which emphasizes natural sciences, it is called "the formless."

Both "the formless" and "the appearance" arise from *xuan* or simply "mystery." The "appearance" represents the concrete side of existence, which Mr. Liu compared to the hardware of a computer. This is the aspect of the universe which manifests in the physical body, among other things. The "formless" is

the field of thought processes or mind and is analogous to the software of the system.

The "appearance" or hardware side represents the mechanics of physical body movement. The "formless" or software side represents the aspect of movement related to use or intent. If this latter aspect of movement is not

cultivated and developed, then our body movement will be merely mechanical and devoid of meaning.

Since we are not machines, human body movement always includes this element of intent, and so physical movement becomes a living manifestation of a person's moral character or level of culture. A complete system of physical education is supposed to nurture one's humanistic qualities and help each person realize this philosophy in their bodies.

Nowadays in China they don't speak much about these issues (partly because of the government's recent suppression of the Fa Lun Gong spiritual movement. Fa Lun Gong is considered by some a cultish millenarian movement and by others a legitimate discipline combining elements of Daoist health exercise with Buddhist morality. In 1998 practitioners staged a surprise silent protest in Tian An Men Square, and their movement has since been outlawed. —ed.). So-called "character development" is in vogue, but it doesn't really include these concepts. And of course these ideas are outside the scope of the materialistic philosophy of Marxism-Leninism (which in any case is hardly the driving force in Chinese society these days —ed.).

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*Human death is like switching off a light.
The vital energy changes to wind
and the flesh becomes mud.
— Chang-xun Ma*

Journey to the West

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Ito asked Mr. Liu if his work in zoology had influenced his understanding of “great nature” and traditional philosophy. Following is a summary Mr. Liu’s answer and dialogue with Miyamoto:

Liu said that by observing ecosystems, we can understand how one element affects the whole system. Living things are an integral part of the whole, as they are all united by the food chain. Inorganic matter and processes are both the background and active elements in the system: floods, drought or desertification can be caused by shifts in flora and fauna populations as well as impacting them. All over the world these days people are beginning to understand the concept of protecting the ecosystem, even when they don’t practice it effectively.

Unfortunately, the world ecosystem is already seriously out of balance, and our efforts to repair things are coming late— possibly too late. Humanity can’t really change or control the current situation to regain balance; we can only adapt. Effects such as air pollution,

All we can do is limit the future damage; we cannot control the ecology of the planet

ozone depletion or global warming are surface evidence of a deeper problem. All we can do is limit the future damage; we cannot control the ecology of the planet as a whole or the direction of its overall processes.

Miyamoto said he hopes that scientists will discover an ecological healing power in nature, analogous to the natural healing power of the body which is integral to traditional Chinese medicine and which is now recognized by wholistic health practitioners even in the West.

Liu responded that it is possible; but that even now many people do not recognize the potential power of the body’s healing abilities. Modernization, which includes economic and infrastructure development, is implemented to serve human beings, and rarely considers whole ecosystems including insects, birds, plants and animals. If, like the Greenpeace activists, our civilization could recognize that animals have the right to exist, then development would be done in a less destructive way.

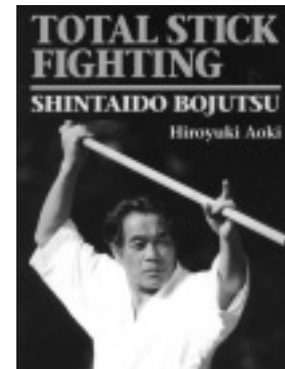
But like Western medicine and traditional Chinese medicine, these are two different conceptual systems. Western medicine takes the “appearances,” the concrete or materialistic aspect of things as its starting point. Chinese medicine takes the human life-force as its starting point, and aims to adjust and balance the life processes. The focus on processes leads to a focus on intent and consciousness and therefore to metaphysical and moral considerations.

There was a great deal more discussed and experienced during the Journey to the West, which may form the foundation for Part 2 of this article. One bit of practical advice that Liu and Ma both agreed upon was that it’s best not to practice breath control techniques.

Breathe naturally. •••

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H.F. Ito gives instruction for *kaiho-kei* (opening and challenging) exercises with Michael Thompson and Robert Bréant. Includes: group practice, bo kata (hi no kata, kaze no kata, sho-dan, nidan), jo kata (taishi, hojo), karate kata (sanchin, tensho), kumi-bo arrangements, kumitachi (sword vs. sword) nos. 1 - 9. 120 minutes.

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BOOKS

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by Michael Thompson (\$20 / 15*)

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