



BODY Dialogue

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Sitting Shintaido

by Paula Kerby

Some of us need a gentler Shintaido. Age, illness, or disability do not preclude a practice, but ask for a softer form. My teacher Ito has long been aware of aging practitioners; he has been developing and refining a gentler form for years.

About 11 years ago I was quite ill and was diagnosed with a condition that explained my symptoms, but was offered no medical correctives. However, a rarely noted gift of an incurable disease is that you are free to work with it as you wish. Shintaido came into my life around that same time, first via Masashi Minagawa; and later in workshops with Ito, Lee and John Seaman, and Tomi Nagai-Rothe. I never looked back.

November, 2012, marked the ten-year anniversary of my simple daily practice of *kenko taiso*, *Tenshingosho*, and some *Taimyo*. It's what I do when I get up each morning, and what keeps this arthritic and increasingly creaky body from seizing up. I calculate that I have missed fewer than ten days out of this past decade, not because I am terribly disciplined but because I'd be crazy not to do a thing that makes this kind of difference.

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Making Your Own Boh

by Brad Larson

Three years ago, someone stole our Honda Civic from our front driveway. Eventually we got the car back, but I never recovered the boh that I had been practicing with for nearly 20 years. A lot of memories were in that boh, stretching back to early practice with David Franklin, Eva Thaddeaus, and Michael Bogenschutz and Cambridge Shintaido near the Charles River. But as it turns out, one positive thing came out of the theft – it spurred me to make my own boh, since there was no one else still making bohs here in the U.S.

The process begins. I thought it would be a relatively quick thing to come up with a plan and make a boh, but it ended up taking me a few years. First, I had to get access to the tools. A few years before, I had taken a woodworking course at a local vocational school, and had managed to build a humble bookcase that still stands in our son's room. I signed up for the advanced class to have access to the full array of industrial woodworking tools at the school.

I emailed Michael Buckley, the boh maker for Shintaido a few decades ago. He had some helpful suggestions about setting up a second fence on the table saw. But in truth, the suggestions didn't sink in, because at that point, I could hardly distinguish which machine was the table saw. The instructor nearly kicked me out of the advanced class when I asked that question on the first night of class. Michael's inspiration was that a boh could indeed be made by one person and a table saw.

Doubt was planted in my mind by my woodworking instructor. He took a look at the backup boh I brought to class, and shook his head. He said I'd need a high end lathe to make the 16 sides on the thin stick; it couldn't be done on their equipment. But I knew it could be done -- Michael Buckley had been doing it for years. I continued my explorations without the instructor's support, telling him I was making a Swedish lawn game whose eight-sided sticks are a convenient first step to making a boh.

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Because we're electronic now, we can update the newsletter at any time. Please check back to see if we've added new articles since your last viewing. Thank You! [the Editors]

Special request for articles

As you can see, this issue of *Body Dialogue* is a bit short. We are always looking for content. Where else can you be almost guaranteed of having your writing published?! If you have an experience of Shintaido you would like to share, please send to newsletter@Shintaido.org. THANKS!

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS

The next issue of *Body Dialogue* will be in September 2013.

Please submit articles, poems, pictures to the editor at newsletter@Shintaido.org. Deadline for submissions is August 15, 2013.

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Nothingness: The Art of Living Every Moment Fully

by Jennifer S. Wilkov

Um is the first part of Tenshingoso as well as the last. This state of nothingness is one I know can sometimes be hard to reach – for me and others.

I find it quite insightful that Um is at the beginning AND at the end of Tenshingoso, as it suggests that we start the movement by clearing our minds and energy so we reach nothingness as a first step. Then we progress through the rest of the Tenshingoso movements, moving in this way and that, using our voices is a big way, gathering and pushing out our energy from the inside out, and eventually coming back into that same state...of nothingness.

I believe that Tenshingoso is a great model for any life situation, conversation or experience. It demonstrates one of the best ways to enter and exit each one.

By bringing oneself into a state of “nothingness”, we become clear enough to be present in the moment—without encumbrances that might keep us from fully connecting in the moment at hand.

Nothingness is described in the dictionary as emptiness or containing nothing.

Imagine the freedom you can feel when you experience Um in your life situations and conversations! The ability to open your heart and mind to the present has the potential to be limitless in that moment, if you begin it with nothingness.

During the 2012 Shintaido International Gasshuku, Aoki Sensei led a keiko where he suggested a way to get to Um, which has stuck with me and which I will reiterate here for reference for those who attended and for those who were unable to make it to the event:

As you stand on the earth, imagine below you, several feet down, a ravine that is merely sitting there, like a cavity deep below the surface with water running through it.



As you imagine this in your mind's eye, let all that is distracting you from this moment sink down into this cavity in the earth, away from your mind, body and spirit. Breathe. Feel it all fall away from you and into the earth where it will be whisked away by the running water below. Now, enter into and engage in the present moment.



I've thought a lot about this concept of Um lately, and letting that which might distract me from the situations at hand that need my full attention right now fall away. I've learned a lot about letting go so I can get clear. I've also learned to value clarity and presence over holding on to things, ideas, and feelings that might interfere with my ability to be clear and present. By being willing to let go, I have been able to be deeply engaged in some really important moments in my life lately that I might have otherwise missed if I had been distracted by other things at those times. It has been a big revelation for me – one filled with great rewards and one I'm really grateful for.

I'm inspired by Tenshingoso, since it not only starts with this concept, but it ends with it too.

So what would happen if when the situation at hand ended, you were willing to let go of THAT situation, right then and there, and let THAT situation fall away from your mind, body and spirit so you can be open and free to enter into the next situation or conversation that you choose to give your attention to? Are you willing? What cost are you paying by getting so caught up in one situation that has already ended so much so that you miss engaging in the next one fully? Are you willing to miss other moments in your life because you simply can't get over that last one? How will you ever get on with your life if you are too busy living it in the moments that have already passed and ended?

What about all of those worries, anxieties and fears you may have about the future? Are you willing to cast these aside too and let them go in return for being able to give the present moment your fullest attention?

Is Um a model and the key to being present in as many moments in your life as possible?

Maybe. Maybe.

[Images from Wiki Commons. Ed.] ###

Sitting Shintaido

Continued from p.1

My friend Cindy has practiced with me regularly for years. She copes with her own disabilities. Northwest Shintaido students will remember her participating in sessions using her walker or wheelchair. At 67, we both in our distinct ways have been forced to accept that some movements are difficult or no longer possible. Speed is definitely diminished.

Our practice has become subtler, more mindful. It is less calisthenic now. I would say the key words are flowing, opening, allowing. My awareness is that the movements allow energy to flow freely throughout my body. I aspire each morning to pay attention to the body I woke up in today, which may be different from yesterday's or last week's. It is a meditation.



Ito is taking us further along this path. Last summer, before he and Nicole Beauvois came to Whidbey Island for a holiday, Ito proposed that Cindy and I would be good candidates for a test run of his newest work-in-progress, "Sitting Shintaido." We were delighted to oblige. On a sunny afternoon in July we met in my tiny, grassy back yard. We brought out an assortment of stools and chairs, and Cindy's walker, looking for whatever would allow free arm movement while supplying a reliably stable foundation.



We tested them all as Ito took us through a whole set of sitting warm-ups, some of his current Life Exercise work, culminating in sitting Tenshingoso and Tenshingoso *kumite* (partner practice). It was a revelation! He called the warmups "awakening movements"—a perfect description, as they not only woke us up but took us over thresholds into new territory. Despite some earlier forays into partner practice, Cindy and I have never done much kumite, and with this personal guidance from both Ito and Nicole we got a great new start with the sitting version of Tenshingoso kumite, both form and philosophy.



Our class in Sitting Shintaido continues to unfold for me, months later. Some new health issues this past winter limited our opportunities for getting together, but it is not a setback. What I am trying to say is that from his life experience Ito modeled what we can do for each other: He injected our practice with fresh energy. With daily practice we continue to gain and use the tools to live with the infirmities of approaching geezerhood, with a bit of grace and humor, and are deeply grateful for guidance on the journey.

###



Selecting the wood. With access to tools established, the next step was to select the type of wood. This is an important consideration -- you want something both strong and flexible. Some of the candidates were woods that are used in tools that strike, like hammers or shovel handles or baseball bats (hickory, oak, and ash came to the fore).

White oak has been used traditionally in Japan, but I couldn't find it here. Purple heart was our selection for many years here in the U.S. But after reports that purple heart tended not to be sustainably harvested (a lot of other trees were cut down to get to it), we stopped using it.

The hardwoods we need for bohs aren't sold in typical lumber yards or home projects stores. I found a specialty hardwood store nearby. What a wonderful thing, to walk up and down the aisle examining woods from around the world, imagining that each might become a boh. Some of the woods I was considering included: bubinga, wenge, padouk, ipe, sapelle, zebrawood, ash, hickory, hard maple.



I ended up going with hickory. Though not as immediately stunning as the bright red padouk (which I also tried), it has a very interesting interplay of dark and light colors, is strong, and, here in the U.S., is local and sustainably harvested. I bought a 2" thick plank (technically referred to as "8/4") that was 7 feet long (to allow for mistakes at the ends) and 5 inches wide (to allow for multiple bohs from the same plank). In retrospect, you could buy a thinner plank if it's not warped (1.5 inches or "6/4"). This would require less tooling to get it to the final thickness.

• **The nitty gritty details.** Over three semesters, I honed my process down, from the Swedish lawn game eventually to my first boh. I'm still working on plans for a better process, but here's the process I used:



• Use the planer and jointer (big noisy machines if you're not familiar with them) to thin the plank down to a uniform 1 3/8", or a tad thinner. (Eventually I switched to metric measurements. I consider the range of thickness for a boh to be 30.5 to 33.5 mm. I prefer the thicker ones, though I noticed many recent French bohs are on the thinner side).

• Use the table saw (another noisy machine) to cut the plank lengthwise ("rip cut") to the same size as the thickness in the first step above (33.5mm for example).



Note that the table saw is the most dangerous machine in the shop -- many people have lost fingers to it. I don't recommend starting with the boh and its challenging long rip cuts as a first project. Get instruction. I used two magnetic featherboards to help hold the long pieces in place and a push stick to keep my fingers further from the blade.

Sometimes I would breathe out and move my koshi as I pushed the piece through the saw -- this helped ease my fear while grappling with this powerful machine.

- At this point you should have a perfectly square proto-boh. Now angle the blade on the tablesaw to 45 degrees to make the four cuts needed to make an octagon. I experimented with taping a paper octagon (created in "Illustrator") to the end of the boh to make a target, and eventually created a stub boh of the right size to set the angle and distance of the blade.



- Now, you should have an octagon boh. You need to cut another 8 sides off this to get the 16 sided boh. This is the difficult part. Angle the blade by half again (to 22.5 degrees). Note that not all table saws can be set this way. Some turn the blade in the wrong direction to make these cuts. I tried drawing the faces again on the end of the boh to serve as targets, but in practice this was very difficult, and difficult to keep track of which side needed to be laid flat on the table saw to create the next facet. I ruined many potential bohs on this step.

- Once all 16 sides are created, cut the ends of the boh off (cutting mostly the end which is worse or may have some warp) so the boh is the final length, usually six feet. In my case my boh is longer because I'm tall.

- Sand the boh, then try it out in a practice. You may want to adjust it a bit with additional sanding, and when it feels right, protect it with mineral oil.

I'm still working on this process. Some other options I'm considering are: creating a "jig" or form to hold the boh in place during creation and use the planer more than the table saw. Or, creating the octagon boh (which is relatively easy) with the table saw and then using hand tools (like the Japanese plane or spokeshave) to cut the last eight sides.

Behold! A collection of bohs. Now that I've done it, I have a collection of sticks to choose from when practicing boh. If I'm in the mood for something big, I grab the oversized oak, nearly seven feet long. For something more nimble, I select the six foot padouk, which came out thinner and lighter.

My favorite is the light/dark hickory boh, which provides me a little koan to work with -- is the light end in the sky? The dark end?

Having taken the time and care to create my own bohs from rough materials, I feel more indebted to the trees for them -- and to the instructors who have taught me to use them. This simple tool, the six foot stick, when used over time, may be the thing that adds two full years to my life.

Or the thing that keeps me from shuffling bent over staring at the ground the last five years of life, walking straight looking toward the horizon instead.

Note: if you are interested in the process, or have suggestions on improving it, please email me at: boh@larsmedia.com. ###

Michael Buckley -- Update

Brad's article *Making Your Own Boh* mentions the former Shintaido weapons-maker Michael Buckley, a longtime practitioner. Last summer, four days after a retirement party from his long-time job as a school psychologist, Michael suffered a horrific crash while riding on a bicycle trail in San Rafael, California. He fell off the trail at a very steep place and tumbled down a 100 foot ravine, landing in a rocky creek bed. Rescuers flew him via helicopter to Stanford Hospital. He suffered a serious skull fracture, internal bleeding, spine damage, broken ribs, and a collapsed lung.

He was unconscious for several weeks. I visited him during that time, with Jim Sterling. Michael was comatose, though he did seem to respond when Jim touched him and whispered in his ear. Ito and others also visited, him, but the prognosis was bleak and there was talk of the family having to consider the difficult decision to end his life support.



Miraculously, Michael came back, and though his road to recovery will be a long one, he has already made remarkable progress. He is walking, talking and rehabilitating. His memory is intact. His speech is strong and clear. He's getting physical therapy and speech therapy daily, doing yoga and working to regain his physical strength and coordination. His wife Mary has been with him throughout. "She is my rock, she is my hero", Michael said when I talked with him the other day. Let's take a moment to celebrate the amazing recovery of one of Shintaido's great individuals. [Editor]###

BODY

Dialogue



photo by Brad Larson

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.