

PACIFIC SHINTAIDO



Pacific Shintaido Bulletin

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Contributions, please

Please send entries to the Pacific Shintaido Bulletin, care of:

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Shintaido Down Under!

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Interview with Tomi Nagai-Rothe

This is the latest in a series of interviews with Shintaido instructors.

How did you find Shintaido?

In February 1988 our family moved next door to Jim and Rosemary Sterling. Their car displayed a Shintaido bumper sticker, which I assumed was an advertisement for some sort of Japanese cosmetic like Shiseido. The bumper sticker was clearly visible from our kitchen window and I remember wondering why the nice Caucasian couple next door was selling Japanese cosmetics. Ah, little did I know! One day we asked and pretty soon Peter was going to Jim's keiko. Two months later Peter convinced me to join him, and twelve years later we're still going.

Among the instructors, you and Kazu Shibao are the only Japanese-Americans. As such, you are uniquely positioned culturally to see both the Japanese and the American understandings of Shintaido. In your opinion, how different are they? Can Americans really comprehend a body movement so deeply steeped in the traditions of an ancient and long-closed society?

I think it's incorrect to think that my ethnicity necessarily gives me additional

insight into your question. For example, John and Lee Seaman (non-Japanese instructors) lived in Japan for more than ten years and have much more understanding about the cross-cultural aspects of Shintaido than I do. That said, I do think the cultural sensibilities surrounding the practice, like hierarchical relationships, make for a strange graft onto American culture. American Shintaido practitioners are faced with creating new hierarchical/egalitarian relationships. For example, Ito joined our household 18 months ago and we were immediately faced with a host of complex roles that crossed two cultures: student/teacher, landlord/tenant, elder/junior, family member to family member, colleague to colleague and, most recently, advance instructor/gasshuku manager. I try to be aware of which roles are active at any one time and the two years I spent in Japan help. Shintaido as a body movement seems to cross borders very easily and directly. My kumite experience with American, European and Japanese practitioners tells me that the core movement and philosophy hold meaning wherever they go — Shintaido is Shintaido.

My impression is that you grew up as a fairly typical American child. For example, I understand you were (or are) a Chicago Cubs fan. Is that true? What do your relatives think of your practice of an esoteric Japanese martial art?

I grew up in a suburb of Chicago. But being a part of any minority group in the Midwest could hardly be described as typical. There were 2+ Asian-American families and one Jewish family in my town of 5000 and we really stuck out.

Yes, I was a Chicago Cubs fan and a Chicago White Sox fan. And I was, for a short time in high school, the president of the Jay Johnstone Fan Club. (In usual Chicago fashion, Jay became really successful after he left the White Sox!)

As for my relatives, I think they are happy if I'm engaged in something that nourishes me. I think they would rather not know the particulars — it's too messy! My two cousins—whom I talk to coming to and from Shintaido studies in Bellingham, Washington—are intrigued with where Shintaido and my life interests have taken me. It isn't anything they would ever try, but they are always curious to know what I am exploring. It makes me think that Shintaido can impact many people — even those who never practice.

Is Shintaido a spiritual path for you? Do you think it can be one for other people?

This is a good and provocative question, and it really depends upon your definition of "spiritual path." If you define it as a gateway to spirituality or a series of spiritual experiences, then Shintaido qualifies. If you define it, as I

do, as a time and experience-tested set of spiritual practices, then Shintaido is not a spiritual path. It is still too young for that. Shintaido is a wonderful spiritual development tool — a shovel in the garden of life (and it's a long row to hoe!). I use Shintaido as a tool in my Christian practice which, interestingly, has Japanese roots in my grandmother and great great grandmother. The most important thing is to use our Shintaido practice to open ourselves to the heart of the universe.

Your husband practices Shintaido, and your children have also shown an interest in it. You have even turned your home into a way station and boarding house for Shintaido practitioners. How's all that going? Does it sometimes feel like Shintaido is consuming your whole life? If so, what if anything do you do about it?

Boarding house is a good word. When Ito conducted our house blessing ceremony in 1992, Peter and I envisioned it as a Shintaido community house. We had no idea that eight years later we would have had five people from the Shintaido community living with us for a total of 4 1/2 years! It all makes sense though. Ito introduced us to Tamiko Sato, a former Shintaido practitioner in Tokyo, and we bought the house together as partners. It's only fair that we make it available to the Shintaido community.

I've been known to get claustrophobic when the house count goes over 50 but otherwise, the ebb and flow of people is great. We all love the kitchen table conversations and it has been fabulous for Elli and Kai to grow up around so many interesting folks. For now I'm still in the "more keiko, more Shintaido" state of mind.

What's it like to have Ito sensei, the man who brought Shintaido to America and the only Master Instructor in the world, living in your home?

We have a great time cooking together. Like any family of choice, we have to work at making the relationships and the "commons" strong by contributing as much as possible to the household. We have a barter system for airport rides and we share our cars.

There are great kitchen conversations and we often get to hear Ito's latest thinking about Shintaido philosophy. I really believe that living as a nuclear

family is lonely, expensive and environmentally unsustainable in the U.S. Ito has showed us a great deal about making resources go a long way. He has a knack for connecting people and resources and sharing like crazy, while owning very little himself. You should see how many publications, gifts, equipment and "Shintaido mail" parcels he carries on behalf of the global Shintaido community! He often checks in the maximum — two bags weighing 65 pounds each.

Perhaps the best thing is that Ito showed me a great way to cook vegetables with sake and soy sauce. As a vegetarian, I'm really grateful!

Do you have any feelings you'd like to share about your experience of co-managing Kangeiko 2000?

All in all, I really enjoyed co-managing Kangeiko 2000 with Jennifer Peringer. It really is a good gorei challenge which I highly recommend as part of keiko. As Ito says, "You have to make battlefield decisions." Some days it really was like being attacked from all sides!

What are your aspirations for yourself, your family, the Bay Area group, and Shintaido in the world at large?

I hope that I can do shoko for many years to come. It's the most potent form of prayer I know. I also hope that my family continues to deepen its spiritual development. My aspiration is that Shintaido 1) be enriched through expression in many more people's bodies — especially people unrepresented in our current ranks and 2) be easily found by those who need and really want what it offers (which we all know is boundless).

Are the Cubs ever going to win the World Series? How can Shintaido help?

This IS the millennium for the Cubbies. I'm sure of it. Shintaido will keep me alive until I can see the day. Glory hallelujah!

The View From the Pacific Rim

Michael De-Campo and Vera Costello are Shintaido practitioners who live in Australia. I asked them to send along a few words about their practice.

Michael's contribution

This morning (Sat. Jan. 29. 2000) had deep desire to share my keiko, and from all the past experiences felt very depressed & low in spirit & direction, since I know from first-hand experience (since 1982/3) the benefits of keiko. So I just went & did some keiko...

At the beginning (of my hitori-geiko practice) I remembered Aoki Sensei's comment about the birth of Tenso: "almost gave up... it might take a hundred years or more to come into existence" and also thought of the pioneering work of Rudolph Steiner who was said to be a century before his time! So I just accepted, OK, Shintaido is for the future, yet I can really enjoy it NOW and keep some small light of keiko burning & share it with family & others.

I even wonder if Australia is ready for Shintaido, since we (Australians) have not come to ask for forgiveness from the Aboriginal people and must do so before "Reconciliation" can take place. C.G.Jung spoke of "Reconciling all the diverse parts of our psyche / self... in order to be complete / whole / integral / healed..."

I believe, through my own keiko practice / experience, that you can heal the gap between your distant spirit and your everyday reality, the two are perfectly compatible.

And to quote Stanislav Grof ... "Inner transformation can be achieved only through individual determination, focused effort, and personal responsibility. Any plans to change the situation in the world are of problematic value, unless they include a systematic effort to change the human condition that has created the crisis. To the extent to which evolutionary change in consciousness is a vital prerequisite for the future of the world, the outcome of this process depends on the initiative of each of us." (p.432 Beyond the Brain State University of New York, Albany USA 1985)

So, even at times it seems utterly unrelated, i.e., jumping, shouting, moving in all kinds of ways that push our conscious boundaries out, what we are really doing (on deeper levels) is

beyond words & philosophising; beyond our day to day situations of good & bad, easy & difficult; beyond our plans & expectations. We are, through the keiko process, touching / reaching / opening to the richest & most fertile & florescent dimensions of our being. And it does not depend on money / status / knowledge / power etc. It depends on just going beyond our conscious self with full & honest expression and connecting with that energy we call Spirit. With that light shining bright we naturally affect positive change around us.

Vera's contribution

I was going to write about mental health and connectedness. I thought of so many things to say. I also value brevity... I wish I could write in Haiku style. There's already too many words, thoughts...

There's one word, though, that I find really fascinating - "autopoiesis" - it's one of the three cosmogenetic principles of the universe, which govern the basal intentionality of all existence (The Universe Story From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era, A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos, by Brian Swimme & Thomas Berry, 1992, p.71). Autopoiesis can be described in such words as "subjectivity, self-manifestation, sentience, self-organization, dynamic centers of experience, presence, identity, inner principle of being, voice, interiority" (ibid, p.72) or, in a phrase, as "the tendency in all things towards fulfilment of their inner nature" (ibid, p.53), or "the power each thing has to participate directly in the cosmos-creating endeavour" (ibid, p.75). Now, it's hard to convey the depth and richness of the whole of the Universe Story, which has been very restorative for me personally, and it takes time to make the paradigm shift....but I feel like Shintaido's forms and spirit have been like a pathway (morphogenetic field, if you like) to realign my being to the Universe so that the unfolding could be less hampered. Now, that doesn't sound like anything new, you might say, that's what has always been said. I guess what we were lacking, and I'm sure I can speak on behalf of all humanity here, is an updated story of the universe, what's actually (as much as we can grasp) happened over the past 15 billion years, because that's OUR story.

Now, coming back to my topic (mental health and connectedness),

keiko for me brought things out, for review, for dealing with, whatever you like to call it. The first 7 years of keiko (1975-82, in Japan and England), I resolved my mentally ill mother's life and death, and over the past 18 years back in Australia, so many many things came up, and I'm sure Shintaido has been the catalyst, the crucible, the alchemical process, for bringing them 'to my attention.' Of course, there's other things, environment - the Blue Mountains, where we've lived for the past 11 years, was regarded by Aborigines as a place for transformation, and there's other people's journeys, through books or the media. For me, my journey was from a strong sense of isolation, an inheritance of both my parents (one 'survived', one didn't) to feeling more and more a part of the cosmic unfolding and of course, intellectually, I now know there's no such thing as separation. All galaxies are bonded together by a primordial attracting power permeating the universe (ibid, p.24). So, in a nutshell, at the risk of being over-simplistic, I was born with the inherent unfolding urge of my unique being. By social conditioning, parenting, etc, things distorted that natural process. I got screwed up. I found Shintaido. Something was re-awakened. The Universe Story tells us that "once the self-organising dynamics are activated, they set to work with great efficiency" (p.70). Haven't you wondered, sometimes, that your life has a certain intentionality about it that you can't quite fathom? Autopoiesis, for me, is more satisfactory than "it's in the stars" or "karma", "destiny" and so on.

To sum up, I don't know exactly how but Shintaido was very instrumental in revealing my wholeness and the Universe Story is very exciting in articulating an updated cosmology, and both of these enable me to reshape my relationship to everything.

(Would love to get your feedback or thoughts on any of the above: azura@pnc.com.au)

Kangeiko 2000 Exam Results

Many people took exams at Kangeiko 2000. Here are the results:

Karate

Robin Hathaway	10 kyu
Derek Richardson	10 kyu
Michael DiPietro	9 kyu
Richard Griffith	9 kyu

Sandra Bengtsson	7 kyu
Eva Thaddeus	6 kyu
Chris Nash	3 kyu
Michael Bogenschutz	3 kyu

Bôhjutsu

Duncan Ewing	9 kyu
Richard Griffith	7 kyu
Tomi Nagai-Rothe	6 kyu
Michael Robbins	6 kyu
Mike Sheets	5 kyu
Bela Breslau	Ni- dan
Robert Gaston	Ni- dan

Shintaido

Richard Griffith	Advanced Student
Florent Neyret	Advanced Student
Deirdre Crowley	Assistant
Michael Robbins	Assistant

Congratulations to all who took exams, and thanks to the examiners for their insightful feedback!

Special Events

Mount Tam Hike

Come join us! Hike to the top of Mt. Tamalpais in the light of day and enjoy a meal while watching the sunset and the full moon rise!

What a great opportunity to celebrate the arrival of Spring, the renewal and rebirth of Nature herself, and the coming lushness of Summer.

We will meet at Mountain Home Inn at 4 pm on Saturday, March 18 and begin our ascent after a short warm up. Be sure to bring plenty of water and dress in layers as temperatures can vary on the mountain. You may wish to bring a flashlight for our descent. Don't forget something to eat for dinner!

Questions? Call Cheryl @ 415-441-3317 or e-mail cwilliams1218@aol.com. In case of rain, call Cheryl's voicemail @ 415-441-3317 after 3 pm.

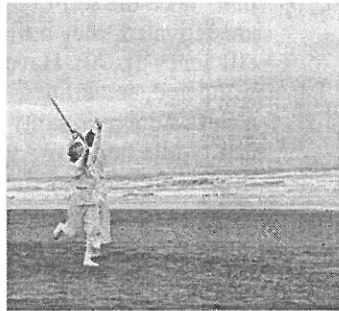
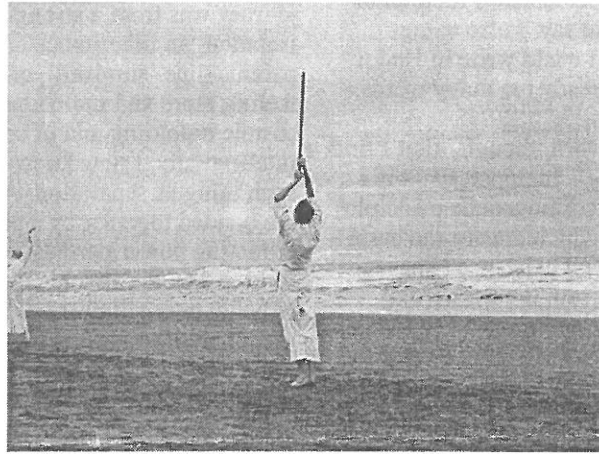
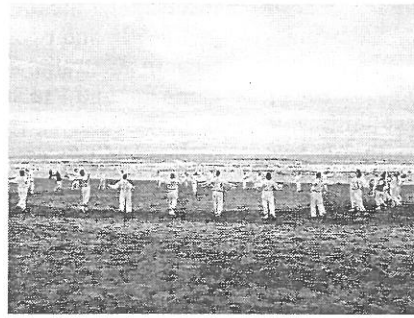
Special Sunday Keiko March 19

Jim Sterling's open Sunday morning keiko is going to be held outside in Tennessee Valley on March 19. We'll meet at the Tennessee Valley parking lot at 7:30A.M. Call Stephen Billias for details 459-5803

April Fool Bôhjutsu Video

Ito and Kai Nagai-Rothe are planning to make a video of Bôhjutsu on the weekend of April 1st. Please contact Kai Nagai-Rothe at 221-0463 if you want to participate in the making of this video.

Pictures from Kangeiko 2000



Current Class Schedule

Note the change in location for the winter for Shin Aoki's class and Stephen Billias' class.

Class	Instructor	Date and Time	Place
Shintaido Meditation, Breathing, and Kata	James Sterling (call Stephen Billias at 415 459-5803)	Sundays 8:30am-10:00am	Marin Academy, Mission and Cottage Streets San Rafael, in the Old Gym
Shintaido	Tomi Nagai-Rothe (call Tomi at 415 221-0463)	Mondays 6:00pm-7:00pm	George Washington High School 30th and Anza, San Francisco
Shintaido Bôjutsu	Jennifer Peringer (call Jennifer at 415 586-1177)	Wednesday evenings 6:30pm-8:00pm	St. Mary's Park and Rec Center, 95 Justin Drive, San Francisco
Shintaido	Robert Gaston (415 454-4749)	Wednesdays 5:30pm-6:45pm	San Rafael Comm. Ctr. 415 485-3333
Shintaido Karate	Shin Aoki (call Shin at 925 284-3318)	Saturdays 8:00am-10:00am	January to March - "Berkeley Adult School" (University & Curtis, Berkeley) BART available. The above location is used regardless of weather. Lake Temescal and JFK won't be used until the end of March.
Shintaido	Stephen Billias (call Stephen at 415 459-5803)	Saturdays 8:00 – 9:30am	Honshin Kan Martial Arts, 51 Middle Rincon Road at Route 12, Santa Rosa

Beyond the Small Comfortable World

by Jonathan Mensing

The womb isn't designed to hold you forever
and when the inevitable winds of change come,
and your world begins to quiver and shake -
bend and sway, be moved by the current.

When the contractions of destiny bear down
and force you into the dark tunnel
with your amniotic sac torn and draining fast,
and you can't see what's on the other side -
go softly, swim toward the sliver of light
out into the sea of change, the ocean of universal love.

We are all, by surviving birth itself,
Born courageous and open-minded.
Is it a wonder that not everyone comes out alive?
For some, birth and death are one and the same.

There's nothing to cling to in the ocean, that's its nature.
The same gravity that held you safely to the ground
will sink you here.

You must swim.

Don't waste time denying that you're no longer on your feet.
Like a whale, come up for air when you need it
then dive and feed on the things you find in the depths.

The world isn't designed to hold you forever,
all of our footprints dissolve
when the water washes over the sand.
You have a lifetime to practice for your second birth
and when it comes, you can let it in,
or try in vain to lock the door.

Waiting to be reawakened
is your memory of what lies beyond
when a small comfortable world
begins to quiver and shake.

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