

SHINTAIDO: ANCIENT TEACHINGS, NEW BODY LANGUAGE

EXPLORING THE PRACTICE OF HOLISTIC MARTIAL ARTS, MEDITATION AND HEALTH

[Shintaido means "new body way"](#) from [d franklin](#) on [Vimeo](#).

04 FEBRUARY 2009

Seek the center?

Unlike many martial arts, Shintaido does not always advise the practitioner to "seek the center" or to "be centered". While a T'ai Chi practitioner might try to be always in balance and centered -- near the center region of the area representing the ability to keep balance -- a Shintaido practitioner often explores the regions where s/he is out of balance or almost out of balance. The most representative and distinguishing movements of Shintaido (*ageoroshi*, *shoko*, most *kaihotai* movements, *eiko*, *shintaido jump* and other jumping, many of the meditation postures...) demand that the practitioner extend and reach out beyond or almost beyond the limit of keeping balance.

When you operate near the limit of the range of balance, important muscles surrounding the spine, in the lower back, and around the pelvis -- muscles related to keeping balance -- are powerfully engaged and trained. So this can have a beneficial and therapeutic effect on the spine, the root of our ability to balance ourselves vertically in this world of gravity (which weighs on us relentlessly 24/7 from the moment we're born till the day we die). It can untangle and detoxify the distortions and maladjustments imposed on our bodies by the demands of the modern "civilized" lifestyle.

At the same time, the psychological and emotional effect of operating near the limits of balance is to encourage psychological and emotional growth. The will to challenge our limitations psychically is not really separate from the process of challenging physical limitations. So an important part of Shintaido training is overcoming fear. Shintaido practice helps to develop bravery through physical challenges that push us beyond our "comfort zone" -- yet with minimal actual physical danger (in contrast to challenging adrenaline-addictive activities such as skydiving, rock climbing, walking across beds of hot coals and so on). Rather than just physical bravery, this is a more internal bravery: the bravery to handle whatever experiences are difficult for you.

POSTED BY DAVID FRANKLIN AT [15:12](#) 

5 COMMENTS:

1.

Anonymous [05 February, 2009 10:05](#)

This is interesting to me, David, as I have just 'taken over' a local Adult Education tai chi group whose teacher absconded and no others were available; so the organisers were faced with an option of closing the class or changing to Shintaido instead. Some, at least, of the class have withstood the shock and stuck with me. But I have had to approach exactly this question of how to move outside the zone of balance without

losing them, considering that balance is such a key aspect of tai chi.

Last night we did soft-jogging renzoku, which they experienced as being out-of-control like on a roller coaster: exhilarating but scary (but also - assuming as goreisha you are doing your job properly - also safe). But I was also able to show them that the quality of emptiness and freedom in the spine experienced after you stop is exceptional. I followed it up by their introduction to wakame kumite - which they 'got' extremely easily.

I don't know how many of the class will stick with Shintaido (we never know that), but I want to show them possibilities they may never have imagined before, while still respecting the fact that they haven't actually asked or expected to be taken outside that comfort zone.

[Reply](#)

2.

Anonymous[05 February, 2009 10:37](#)

Hi David, interested to read your piece. I do a lot of tai chi in the UK with teachers linked to acknowledged master, Chen Xiaowang. An important part of our practice is to do exercises that explore where the centre is and where our point of balance is, which includes going to 'the edge' but I think that tai chi approaches this edge more quietly and perhaps even tentatively which may suit the more cautious or perhaps physically vulnerable. A key thing I have heard from bodyworkers is that if you shock the body, it may just retreat into habitual patterns (and this may include invoking old injuries) whereas if you nag away at structure and work slowly at building internal strength, you can disarm the armour built by the traumas of daily living. The thing that has always bothered me about shintaido is the possibility of injuring oneself and I think there are quite a few, myself included, who have dodgy backs where shintaido has not been helpful. Tai chi works to build up the core muscles, rather like pilates, and with good teachers it really IS a martial art with applications explored and partnerwork to ensure you can't hide from the emotional and psychological ramifications. Shintaido has always seemed rather ultra yang to me, and perhaps some tai chi appears ultra yin. But there are important crossovers and it's good to know that quite a few shintaido people are exploring tai chi too as I think they have a lot to offer each other as movement-based therapies. best wishes Ann Furtado

[Reply](#)

3.

Anonymous[06 February, 2009 10:36](#)

I began a journey into eastern spirituality in the mid 1970's, beginning with transcendental meditation. That was profound, but no idea of a center. I then practiced hatha yoga intensely for 3 years, and found that I had become very introspective and withdrawn from the events of everyday life around me and that experience was even more profound and deeper. I then came across Oki yoga or zen japanese yoga, which was based on martial art exercises and stretching, that seemed very balanced as it allowed me a certain confidence to enter the business world. Having more energy, and being more bold I then graduated to Aikido for about 5 years, and to me this was the absolute ultimate, my experiences led me to believe that there could be no greater art than the way of love and peace that Aikido engendered. Then, in the early 1980's I was introduced to Shintaido. From the very first open handed tenso that I tried to do, with a croaky voice and a willingness to explore, all my previous assumptions, beliefs and preciously held experiences were overtaken by a sense of openness that I really had never experienced before! That was about 25 years ago now, and just 2 nights ago, practicing the Tenso meditation that Aoki Sensei showed at Verbania, Italy last year, I experienced one of the most profoundest and deepest of meditations that I have ever experienced. I'm not sure if I'm trying to make a point, I suppose what I am saying is that every art has its own experiences, I have practiced a little tai chi in my past, however I'm not sure comparing the arts is that much useful, as compared to actually doing them, since they are body arts. Shintaido has captured my imagination more than anything else and to be able to keep capturing my

imagination and keep developing my greater center of being, which I sense Shintaido does, allows me to really appreciate and enjoy life as fully as I know to. Thanks for this Blog, David.

[Reply](#)

4.

Patrick06 February, 2009 15:21

This comment has been removed by the author.

[Reply](#)

5.

Anonymous09 February, 2009 08:58

That's an interesting distinction between tai chi and Shintaido. You reframe feeling off balance as an opportunity rather than a problem- and suggest that seeking off-balance experiences is a path to courage.

This is a great project!--and it's enriching to read the experiences and thinking of others.

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ABOUT SHINTAIDO

Shintaido (新体道, literally "new body way") has been called an "avant-garde martial art." Developed in Japan in the 1960s by Hiroyuki Aoki and the Rakutenkai group, it draws on a number of traditional martial arts. However, it is also inspired by fine arts, tea ceremony, theatre, etc. Thus the purpose of Shintaido goes beyond the confines of fighting or self-defense: as a meditation in motion and a way to express our creative intelligence, Shintaido aims to be a comprehensive art of human growth and development.

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