

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](#).

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Shintaido from the physiological perspective, part 2: stability and extension

(Interview with physiotherapist and Senior Instructor of Shintaido Ula Chambers, continued from previous post)

David Franklin: What I'm thinking about is, we have this traditional Japanese philosophy called Ten Chi Jin (天地人 lit. "heaven earth human" — what Mircea Eliade called the axis mundi). It puts such an emphasis on verticality and balance. Ten Chi Jin philosophy equates keeping your spinal column vertical with a cosmological or natural, harmonious relationship with nature. What I'm aiming to explore is what goes on in the body about keeping the spine vertical. What goes on in the nervous system, or the brain, or the interaction of all of them.

Ula Chambers: Well here's a thought: there are ways of moving that require more or less energy. If your body is tense for some reason and your muscles are contracted, it's using more energy, naturally. That makes sense doesn't it, because the muscle needs oxygen and glucose etc. to be able to contract. It needs the whole metabolic process to be able to keep contracted. So you're using energy. If your spinal column is vertical it's more efficient. For example, people doing *fudodachi* stance (不動立ち, "stable stance") often lean one way or the other don't they. Their arms are out like that and they often tend to lean towards their arms, which isn't a very energy-efficient way of moving.

If you align your body in such a way that doesn't require unnecessary muscles to become tense because they're keeping you in an abnormal position, then you have more energy to use for other things. So then you may be to continue, for instance, or to think. So there's an energetic reason, an energy efficiency reason.

And that's why it's "natural movement." And the unnatural movement happens because we're not used to, or we haven't understood the movement, but that's part of the process of learning the technique. It's not to say that people don't move naturally when they do move, because when we're moving for our normal day-to-day things, we do move naturally— for us— we each have our own movement patterns. But some people don't move as well as they should, they're putting more loads than they need to on certain structures and so forth because of their habit of movement.

In a way, Shintaido is challenging the habits of movement that people come with. For instance even such a simple thing as standing in *seiritsu-tai* (正立体 neutral meditation stance), will make us aware of the sensation in our body, and it will make us aware of the habit of movement. One of the key things that happens to people is they learn to relax their

shoulders and move. So instead of keeping the shoulders tense, you actually have the energy available for core stability. I think that's what happens when you have that sensation in your *koshi* (腰 center of the body) that it's stable. You've lost the tension maybe up here (indicates shoulders) and the energy is more concentrated in the muscles that are keeping you stable, the core muscles.

Core stability muscles help with balance. There are neural feedback mechanisms which, for instance, if you learn to stand up, the trunk muscles are working to keep you stable, hip and thigh muscles are working to keep you upright. If you then move your arm, that actually disturbs your balance. And the only reason I haven't fallen over is that my brain has learnt that what happens when I lift my arm up is that the forces in the body change, and even before I've lifted my arm, muscles in my body are working to prevent this movement from unbalancing me. And this is what I've learned just by going around normally.

In Shintaido we do a lot of this (extending arms) and in fact when you look at beginners, they fall over a lot don't they? This extension is a big challenge to our balance. And you see that beginners often stumble or lose balance a bit.

DF: Or, they don't reach out enough.

UC: Or they don't reach out enough! Because actually, this is comfortable (reaching somewhat), but that isn't comfortable (extending more), that's going to make me fall over, so I'm not going to do it. That's why they don't do it.

DF: And where is this leading?

UC: This is leading to core stability. Part of it is that you have to re-learn that your body can cope with this extreme extension, so we have to encourage people a lot, we really have to encourage them to reach out far and push out far, because when they've done it often enough, the body will learn. I can feel, stretching my arms out now, pushing out really far, I can feel these stomach core stability muscles are working really hard. And if I put an object in my hand, a *bokuto* or a *bo* (*bokuto*: 木刀, wooden sword; *bo* 棒 long staff), they're working even harder!

But what happens is, when people begin, they try and stabilize this (the *bokuto* or *bo*) with the upper body. And they can't relax. But that whole thing about pushing out with your *koshi* is about moving the stability from up here (shoulder area) to down here (waist and hips area) — even while extending the arms holding something. These muscles (around the hips and waist) are huge, and they're capable of handling really big forces.

POSTED BY DAVID FRANKLIN AT [15:14](#) 

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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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