

# 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](#).

15 MARCH 2009

## Why we jump

Shintaido includes many jumping, hopping and walking movements with the center of gravity lowered (*shin shin kaihatsu taiso* 身心開発体操, literally "heart-mind and body opening exercises"). These exercises are a significant part of most Shintaido practices and are unique to Shintaido— no other martial art or movement discipline that I know of included such unusual ways of moving forward through space. But the precise purpose of these exercises remains a bit mysterious and might benefit from deeper analysis.

The phrase "moving forward through space" may be the key, since moving or jumping forward is typically emphasized more than, say, jumping as high as possible. Many of these movements call attention to the act of moving forward. In this age of mechanized transportation, we sometimes take the simple act of moving through space for granted— just step on the escalator, push the elevator button for the floor you want, or get in the car turn the ignition and put the pedal to the metal. We may forget the degree of direct personal effort that was required to move from one place to another in past times.

On a more basic level, most people simply see what they want or where they want to go, and reach for it or walk to it. But even for people without a disability or injury, it wasn't always so easy. Imagine the infant we all once were, moving towards something intentionally for the first time, every resource it has engaged in the incredible struggle to move itself forward.

The infant represents our past, our earlier self, for whom moving forward through space was a challenging step along the path of engaging with the world. In some ways, the jumping exercises in Shintaido return us to that struggle. But we can look back further to the evolutionary past to consider the meaning of "going forward."

In the 1950s, the American neuroscientist Paul MacLean proposed the concept of the [triune brain](#). While his ideas are no longer considered scientifically valid (see this article in [Scientific American](#)), his concept of a "reptilian brain"— an evolutionarily older structure that persists within our modern human brains and controls the most basic instincts and urges such as sex, hunger and aggression— may still carry some metaphorical or psychic meaning.

Reptilian brain or no, we do carry the history of evolution written in our DNA and in the structure of our bodies, but applying the word "aggression" to those primitive drives may be somewhat misleading. We usually think aggression has

something to do with anger or hostility, but it's difficult to imagine that fish or reptiles take things personally, feel insulted and angry, and then behave aggressively. In fact, the Latin root of the word *aggressive*, which we can also see in words like *egress* or *progress*, is **gradi**: to step, to walk. So in this sense, aggression is something quite neutral: simply going forward.

Going forward is one of the most basic expressions of life. Of course, one may believe that everything in the universe is "alive" in some philosophical sense. But from the practical point of view, it doesn't seem that a rock feels hungry, and then takes action to fulfill its needs. A lion, on the other hand— or for that matter, even a bacterium— actively moves towards sources of food. In this sense, even bacteria behave "intentionally". They don't just sit there passively, letting the chaos of the environment take over. They make efforts to stay alive, going forward to seek what they need from their worlds. They embody a self-organizing principle, which is about as close as we have come to defining "life."

Symbolically, consciously moving forward through space suggests progress, stepping forward into a new world, leaving our old selves behind. Because they are a never-ending challenge, the jumping movements of Shintaido can re-introduce even the most athletic among us to the struggle to move forward, and by this they let us feel our connection with the primal foundations of all life. Fish gotta swim and birds gotta fly; bacteria wiggle, salmon swim upstream, and here and there on the surface of the earth in practice halls or on green fields, people dressed in white hop and jump.

POSTED BY DAVID FRANKLIN AT [15:17](#) 

## 2 COMMENTS:

1.

**Anonymous**[17 March, 2009 23:22](#)

Thanks David for this and your other interesting blogs. We so often talk about jumping in terms of shin shin kaihatsu taiso, but it seems so much more: often if I am going to do mitorigeiko I just tell people 'I am going jumping': it contains so much of what we are about.

It strikes me that the only similar activity is the TM yogic flying <http://tmyogicflying.org/index.htm>. there was a time a few years ago that the TM people stood for election in all the British constituencies and everyone laughed at them for flying. But to me it seemed to express a positivity of mind that was much needed in the political process. Whether or not it has the benefits of Shintaido jumping I don't know. Have any readers ever done it? Peter Furtado

[Reply](#)

2.

**Anonymous**[19 March, 2009 04:09](#)

These essays are so intriguing, informative, and well-written. They tackle hard-to-grasp concepts with such clarity.

I look forward to learning more about breath. My experience has been that coordinating breath with Shintaido movement enhances the focus and potency.

And your report on magic eye movements seems to cleverly demonstrate a bit of magic itself.

Thank you for sharing your work.

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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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