

KENSHINKAI meets SHINKENDO (NOVEMBER 2009)

An email arrived in the Kenshinkai inbox, it was titled "Seminar Invitation" and described a seminar to be taught by Toshishiro Obata Kaiso in England, May 2010. At the seminar Obata Sensei was to teach Aikido and Shinkendo. Obata Sensei, the name was familiar, we had read the books Samurai Aikijutsu, Crimson Steel and Naked Blade many years ago, and were excited at the opportunity to not only meet the author but to receive tuition from him also. Kenshinkai members were also aware of Obata Sensei's time spent as an Uchi Deshi at the Yoshinkan Aikido Headquarters in Tokyo, under the direction of Shioda Sensei.



We quickly replied saying we had members who were very interested in attending the seminar and asked whether there were any pre-requisites for participating in the Shinkendo sessions, as it was not something we had practised before. The host, Byron Shepherd Sensei, quickly responded, reserving our places and offering to travel to Portsmouth and teach a free "Introduction to Shinkendo" seminar for interested members, an offer we gratefully accepted.

We arranged for Shepherd Sensei and his uke to stay in a local hotel for the Saturday evening as the seminar was due to start early on Sunday morning. Shepherd Sensei and a few senior members from Kenshinkai braved the terrible weather (rain and floods) to meet at the hotel and participate in some welcome drinks after which a meal was enjoyed in a local restaurant to welcome Shepherd Sensei to Portsmouth and Kenshinkai.

Everyone arrived promptly on Sunday morning for the Shinkendo seminar and after a light warm-up the session began. Taking part were members of Kenshinkai graded from 6th Kyu to 6th Dan who in addition to Yoshinkan Aikido, had differing levels of knowledge of Aiki-ken, Kendo, Iaido and Kenjutsu. In addition we also had two guest Karate Instructors who had also practised Yoshinkan Aikido with Kenshinkai many years ago, however no-one had experienced Shinkendo before.

The first 2 hour session was for all levels, and Shepherd Sensei spent time explaining the principals of Shinkendo and the main differences between Shinkendo and other forms of practice that focus on the use of the Bokken as a wooden sword rather than a cutting blade. Throughout practice Shepherd Sensei recounted information that he had obtained from Obata Sensei to explain and clarify particular aspects of the Shinkendo training. This was found to be very interesting to the participants and also helped to explain the purpose behind the methods of training and forms that were being taught. Participants were told about the five different streams of practise (Goho Gorin Gogyo) that are used within Shinkendo.

To begin with students were taught the correct way to hold the Bokken. Then the five kamae (basic positions) of Chudan, Gedan, Waki, Hasso and Jodan kamae were practised. Following this 3 different methods (Chudan, Jodan and Gedan) of Chiburi (shaking the blood from the sword) were demonstrated, explained and practised in addition to noh toh (returning the sword to the saya). Participants gained a basic knowledge of goho no kamae (the basic five kamae).



Next the five basic cuts were practised, Shomen Uchi, Kesagiri, Kiriage, Yokogiri and Tsuki, used within Shi-shi no ken (suburi), with the emphasis on the importance of Kamae.

A quick drink break, then a quick recap of the first part of the session, and then we move on to practise one of the Tanren no Kata (solo training of pre-arranged movement to learn techniques and their application), called Happogiri. The Happogiri included the five basic cuts that had been shown earlier and included a cut called Dotangiri used as an execution cut.

The last part of the first session moved on to look at the first few techniques of Goho Battoho, following this, the first session came to an end and the Kyu grades left, leaving the Dan grades for the additional session. For the second session Shepherd Sensei explained some background to the Toyama-ryu and the participants were given the opportunity to practice the 7 forms of the kata gunto soho.

Time passed quickly and the session was over, to the disappointment of those involved who were enjoying their introduction to Shinkendo. All agreed that the tuition was very good, with a logical approach making the tuition easy to follow for beginners to Shinkendo. Although participants had felt to be outside of their "comfort zone" due to not having any previous experience of Shinkendo, all had enjoyed the session very much and had achieved their aim of gaining an understanding and basic knowledge of Shinkendo.

It was understood by all that it would take many years of practice in Shinkendo to feel comfortable with the art, however a new knowledge was gained by those who participated, which is felt to be very important within the Kenshinkai organisation, which practices Yoshinkan Aikido but with an open mind to all other styles of Aikido and Martial Arts in order to enhance the students training through knowledge of arts that reflect the principals and practise methods of the organisation.

Members are now eagerly awaiting the opportunity to train with Obata Sensei in 2010 and add to their newly gained knowledge of Shinkendo.

Our thanks to Shepherd Sensei and his Uke for taking the time to educate members of Kenshinkai in the art of Shinkendo.

Dee Masters
Kenshinkai Yoshinkan Aikido UK
6th December 2009

