



From Conception to Today

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Introduction

Moments of reflection such as the opportunity to write this essay, allows me to acknowledge the history of Shingen Academy of Martial Arts and the vision for the future. As the founder of Shingen my goal is to create a place where people can pursue excellence in a physical, mental and spiritual environment through daily martial arts training. I also want them to realize that at the highest level all martial arts have at least two common goals, survival and growth. Survival, in that the techniques are practical and enable people to defend themselves effectively from physical and emotional attacks. Growth, in that the daily practice of Martial Arts is a practical and never ending path of self development.

In order to present the Shingen style of martial arts it is essential to consider the background and development that has allowed me the privilege of many years of excellent tutelage. It was from the kindness and shared knowledge of others that my personal development was brought to a stage where Shingen Do could become a reality.

Background

To this day, I can vividly remember the first time I entered the Dojo in Christchurch New Zealand. The sights, smell and energy that existed in the air stays with me now some 33 years after my first nervous sessions on the floor that became my personal battle ground and growth area. For many people like myself, the martial art takes hold of your heart and you become totally absorbed in continual improvement through dedication in the training and practice.

My first introduction to a Martial Art was surprisingly enough as a result from being introduced to dancing. As a youngster of seven years of age, all I wanted to do was dance. I would prance around the living room whilst my father played classical music. This prompted my mother to enroll me in ballet classes. On my arrival at the classes, I noticed in the next room they had Judo classes and I quickly changed my dancing shoes for a Judo Gi.

In 1973, I entered into high school after having trained four years in Judo. It was during this time that the rising young star, Bruce Lee, was at his peak and along with many other young aspiring martial artists I was attracted to the high kicking and fast moving action. This encouraged me to expand into other types of martial arts. There was only one other martial art available in my home town and that was karate. At the age of twelve my introduction to Karate was the start of a lifelong journey which continues to enrich every part of my life.

After 26 years of training with Seido Karate Do, I endeavored to take greater responsibility for my own development as a martial artist. Throughout these formative years I had successfully competed in many tournaments and taught many classes. With the experience, knowledge and skill I had learned over these years I decided it was time to move on from the Seido system and continue to enhance my personal development. I felt that the best way to do this was to create an opportunity to instill my own thoughts and beliefs into a training system and pass on the knowledge and skills acquired to others.



I had reached a crucial decision point in my personal development. I recognized that my training had enriched my life, and I had been part of an organization that had helped me acquire skills and knowledge that I could share with others. During this period I realized that my dream consisted of establishing my own club, taking with me the learning's and enriching them with my own thoughts and beliefs. It was time to leave home and create my own family, where I could pass on the same wonderful gifts that had enriched my life.

It has been seven years since I resigned from Seido and established Shingen however I still feel a great sense of connection with my original instructor Shuseki Shihan Renzie Hanham, other instructors and friends from the Seido family.

This continued relationship and in fact the ability to create meaningful long lasting relationships is in my opinion one of the key skills that I wanted to develop in my students. I also felt a need to utilize my own creativity and to do so in a way that did not compete with or challenge the structure of the system that I as a senior Dan grade was responsible for maintaining.

Creating the Shingen Academy

The decision for me to leave the comfort and support of the Seido family and to take a leap of faith, took many years of consideration and preparation. The process from the initial idea to the fruition of leaving took over three years and in looking back, it was during these years that I formulated my own strategies for what was to become the foundation of my own style of teaching.

In response to a burning internal need, it was with great sadness, that I made perhaps one of the most difficult phone calls of my life. The response from Shihan Renzie was as I had expected, he was very supportive, compassionate and encouraged me to continue my journey. At this point, I acknowledged his role in my life as for many years he had masterminded my development both as a martial artist and as a man. His joy over my capacity to make such a difficult decision heightened my confidence tremendously and reassured me I had chosen the best path.

All the knowledge, skill and experience during my years with Seido are part of my being as this was the foundation on which my personal journey began. I integrated this foundation with my own creative approach and developed my own teaching techniques. I then began to search for the guiding principles to use as the basis for the system I wanted to create. After plenty of research I uncovered the principle of Shingen, which I felt truly captured the essence of my beliefs.

My research uncovered the following information which I have chosen to incorporate, beginning with the translation of *Shingen Do* the meaning of which is 'Compassionate View Way'. The term Shingen, originated from the concept of *Bugei no Me* or 'Eyes of the Samurai'. This is a concept of progressively gaining a deeper understanding of human nature in various situations. This begins with the first shallow view which is *Nukigen*, moving through *Tengen*, then *Egen* and finally to *Shingen* (compassionate view) or *Hogen* (Gods Eye View) as expressed in the following table:



<i>Nikugen</i>		<i>Tengen</i>		<i>Egen</i>		<i>Shingen/Hogen</i>
→		Deeper Insight				
→		Greater Compassion				
→		More Natural				

This process describes a gradual increase of awareness, both of the self and the interaction of the self with others, ultimately achieving the avoidance of unnecessary thoughtless acts. By participating in the martial arts training, this process also represents the ability to progressively achieve greater control of the skills and responsibilities that are being developed. In turn this allows the student to grow and use wisely the position of influence that can be achieved through diligent study and continuous improvement.

This development can be seen on the physical, technical, and skill base levels, as student's progress. Firstly, in their ability to move by themselves and secondly by developing cohesion of their movement with that of their opponent. Ultimately the student master's the ability to perceive both themselves and their opponent as if from a distance. This distant or external perception enables the student to understand the interdependence and flow of energy between themselves and their opponent.

Masters of martial arts operate at a highly intuitive level giving them the ability to sense the opponent's intent, before it is expressed as a physical action. This allows the master the time to gain the intent, develop a strategy that incorporates a compassionate response and act accordingly all in the time frame of a split second.

The relational basis of the development of Shingen enables a student to consider a balanced view prior to making an important decision. The student ultimately develops the ability to comfortably hold two diametrically opposed viewpoints, without the need to resort to a fundamentalist approach of one action being inconsequential to the other, this is Shingen.

In traditional times senior martial artists were often used as negotiators and mediators due to their ability to remain calm, acknowledge both parties viewpoints, and seek a unique truth gained through the integration of all aspects of the situation at hand. I believe that these individuals would have been applying the principles underlying Shingen and these are the skills I would like to pass to my students at the Shingen Academy.

Training in Shingen Karate Do

Discipline comes from the root word of 'Disciple' or follower and within Shingen the principles of Compassion and Openness to alternatives, are those that the students are encourage to discipline themselves to follow. This is not to say that classes have no structure or that students have the freedom to disrupt the learning of others. It is not a simple thing to encourage adherence to structure and to promote flexibility at the same time. Classes therefore are subtly changed for each grade level and the nature of interaction between the students and the instructors also changes in the following ways.



Basic classes include the introduction of with basic moves, katas and set self defenses according to the syllabus, with various fitness components dispersed throughout the class. General classes take students from beginner through to and including black belt, these involve adding a greater level of progressive combinations of techniques and more explanation of technical application.

Significant learning in Martial Arts is gained through the modeling of others. Students traditionally locate themselves on the Dojo floor, with senior students whom they can model, directly in front of and beside them. The power of this implicit modeling is clearly demonstrated when a cluster of students are performing a technique almost identically. This also presents an opportunity for instructors to develop insight into their own technique through feedback such as when an identical flaw is repeated within a group, alternatively it can provide instructors the ability to identify students in the group that are being modeled and require technical guidance. This enables group development resulting from the correction of one student's technique and in turn the other students that model them will also improve.

Senior classes are designed for students that have enough knowledge of the basics to begin learning the true variety of applications, both singularly and as a continuous flow. This is taught by challenging the student, through encouragement to develop a flexible approach in situations, usually by presenting extremely difficult measures in such a way that they will not succeed if their thinking remains fixed. For example a wrist lock applied to a stronger opponent may need modification or require combination with another technique in order to achieve the same result on a weaker opponent. As each attempt to utilize a basic form of the technique is stymed, new interpretations must emerge in order remain effective.

The senior classes also encompass drilling down to the finer points of distinction of techniques and raising the level of awareness relating to the higher principles in order to challenge senior students spiritual, physical and intellectual development. Senior classes take on an interactive and experiential learning experience. The students elicit more effort to gain insight and the teacher becomes less explicit encouraging the student to struggle into the emerging light.

At Shodan (first Dan Black Belt) and above the student is required to study laido and Jodo. This provides students with insight both through training under another instructor and from another style of martial art. Having the privilege of attaining the skills and qualifications in these arts under the tutelage of specialized instructors helped to expand my skill base. I feel there is great benefit from the students acquiring this training from an instructor who specializes in these arts. This enables student's to gain greater appreciation of the teachings provided at the Shingen Academy. I believe my acceptance of students training elsewhere generates greater loyalty to the Shingen Dojo as a place of open learning.

Another practical reason for including laido and Jodo is that these arts are not as hard on the body as Karate Do. The senior students whose bodies no longer cope with the rigors of Karate Do, are able to reduce their involvement in Karate training but not feel less a part of the Shingen Dojo.



Style

The style of Shingen Karate Do is what could be considered a hard style, in that training involves physical contact and sparring, but more on that later. The techniques are based on the principle of 'point and circle'. Striking techniques focus on specific points and blocking techniques are circular to absorb and deflect the force of incoming attacks. In the early formative classes the techniques appear rather linear and stiff however at a higher level of understanding they smooth out without losing focus into a strong connected flow.

Stances and movements are developed around the integrated use of energy from the Hara so that direction changes are swift and strong. A lot of effort is put into correct movement as the basis of good technique. The term 'trying to fire a canon from a canoe' is often used as a metaphor for students who try to deliver powerful techniques from poor stances.

Sparring

Sparring consists of full contact; in that there is neither encouragement to miss nor a point system of scoring. There are various skills and knowledge contact sparring has that non-contact styles cannot deliver, the application in real life, impact fitness and the human touch.

My principal reason for maintaining a full contact system is that in my opinion, if the techniques are to be applicable in real life, training should be performed with an actual situation in mind. It is well known that under stress people resort to basic levels of training, those that have been drilled into them. If student's basic training consisted predominantly of striking to miss or score points, then they will be less effective in any real situation.

Another important aspect relates to major differences between striking in mid air, however impressive, and the actual impact of hitting a target or being hit in a fight situation. There is a level of impact fitness that is developed through repetitive contact that cannot be gained in any other way. For example, rugby league players take massive hits during the game without bruising as these people have achieved impact fitness.

In today's society we are involved less and less in physical contact with each other. The effect of reducing this human touch has resulted in people developing extreme positions with respect any form of contact. People are becoming hypersensitive and resulting in the denial of the intense communication that can only be achieved through physical contact. Martial arts are perhaps one of the last activities where physical contact is encouraged, in fact absolutely necessary to achieve the physical and mental goals.



The Shingen Academy's Karate Do program provides full contact sparring which is taught progressively across four distinct levels. The use of these levels allows for students that have attained sufficient grade to learn the language of sparring (physical and psychological) in a reasonably comfortable way. Many people consider the thought of fighting someone or getting hit as terrifying. I believe it is necessary to desensitize students from their preconceived fears and gradually develop a realization that sparring does not involve a beating nor invoke anger or emotionally charged reactions. Sparring is a fun technical and skillful exchange, where strength and size can be countered by superior technique.

Shingen allows the student to first face the challenge of having an opponent that is not bound by a prearranged sequence. The techniques, however, are limited to encourage the development of timing and distance of these techniques. The second stage is to apply the techniques lightly and quickly to encourage speed and accuracy. The third level or Jyuu Kumite allows the students to engage in sparring at a level determined by themselves, with appropriate consideration of the skill level and age of their opponent. Sweeps and throws are allowed at this level in which etiquette and control are paramount. The final level or hard sparring is reserved for high grades under the direct supervision of the Sensei or in full contact tournament conditions. At this level the students have an imaginary line behind them which they cannot cross, therefore they must continuously attack forwards. Sparring at this level is not always pleasant to watch however the challenge and learning for the students involved is often significant.

Safety

There are certain restrictions even at this level which include; no kicking or striking to joints or the groin, no attacks to the face, only controlled sweeps or throws (that is the attacker must always be able to control the person on the way down). Chokes and strangle are only allowed at the highest level and to submission only. Protective gear is compulsory including, head gear (for protecting the back of the head when swept), a proper mouth guard, gloves, and groin guard and foot protectors. Regrettably, people can develop a dependency upon protective equipment however in our litigious society we have to reduce the risk to the Dojo and the student.

Syllabus

The breadth of the syllabus is carefully documented in a formal manual, consisting of a kyu grade (beginner to black belt) section and a separate section for Yudansha (1st Dan to 5th Dan black belts). As with most martial arts Shingen has a multi-level syllabus, in that there are set finite range of techniques taught at each level that include basic strikes, punches, blocks, throws, stances and katas and combinations. At every new level however, greater complexity is added to combinations encouraging an application of a higher skill and fitness levels for the student.

On another level, the syllabus consists of different depths of understanding of the application of the various techniques. For example, a technique described as a block for beginners may be later described as a self defense move and then an explanation of the nerve attacks inherent in the basic technique will be disclosed. Students could understand the entire syllabus at only a superficial level, or explore the deeper significance of the techniques and their applications. Great care is taken with regard to the selection of students that are taught the deeper and more dangerous applications of techniques.



The challenge facing Shingen is developing from the Seido background into a system with its own unique characteristics. This gradual change in syllabus content has been occurring over the past seven years and continues as new influences and thoughts are integrated into the training. When I moved from Seido I kept the common components of that syllabus removing only those kata and combinations uniquely Seido (those created by Kaicho Tadashi Nakamura). Katas that could be traced back to Goju ryu, Shotokan, etc, were retained with additional combinations and katas of my own creation gradually been added.

The training in weapons such as Bo and Jo has been introduced into the kyu grade syllabus to encourage knowledge of basic weapon movement. As previously mentioned laido and Jodo form part of the Yudansha syllabus These new elements which were not part of the remnants of the Seido syllabus, have been introduced gradually as an evolution of the syllabus rather than a revolution. The syllabus will continue to change and evolve as new insights are gained and incorporated in to the training.

The next step in the development of the syllabus is the introduction of meditation practices. The purpose of this step is to emphasize the need of balance between activity and stillness to provide students an opportunity to benefit of introspection. All traditional martial arts placed special emphasis on the development of the martial artist through meditation. This is a valuable tool for students in today's society as people rarely get the chance to sit quietly, reflect and listen to their internal teacher.

By itself the syllabus is incomplete in that much of the contextual information is only provided through proper instruction. A written description of a movement can never give the full richness of information as it utilizes only the sense of sight. Proper instruction utilizes all of the senses allowing for a far richer and more complete integration of the information. The syllabus however is considered a sacred document that every student is encouraged to protect and enrich by researching their own individual meaning of techniques and their journey as emerging martial artists.

Vision for the Future

The purpose of this essay has been to reflect on what the main Art or Style of Shingen is about from conception to today. It is important for any Club or Organization to be able to reflect back on what has come before however it is of equal importance to have a vision for the future.

The challenge for me as the founder of the Academy is to work towards a structure which is self sustaining. This requires attention to developing senior grades who have the ability to motivate others, promote the principles of Shingen and maintain a high standard of physical competence. It also means achieving a critical mass of numbers through and effective marketing strategy that ensures financial sustainability over time.

This should also lead eventually to the establishment of a Dojo facility which will create a greater sense of belonging and allow for greater flexibility in class times and structure. Having a home Dojo rather than using a rented hall also encourages people to stay and take the opportunity to train outside of regular training sessions. This in turn helps to develop the social networks within the Academy, creating a sense of camaraderie and involvement in something greater than just the individual's immediate concerns.

Much has been said about the declining moral standards and lack of values being expressed in today's society. I believe that martial arts systems like Shingen can provide



an opportunity for people of all ages, ethnic backgrounds, religions or levels of ability, to re-establish core values for themselves and their community.

My goal is to create a place where people can pursue excellence in a physical, mental and spiritual sense through the daily training in Martial Arts. A place of sanctuary from the daily turmoil, genuine care and support for each other, honest respectful relationships and hard work. Where reward follows effort and personal standards are constantly being challenged and raised.

The Shingen Martial Art is above all, a way of thinking and being which encourages compassion and openness to alternatives. For even as our bodies weaken, we are no lesser martial artists if we continue to hold true to the principles and pursuit of Martial Artistry.

Finally I would like to thank the Australasian Martial Arts Hall of Fame Sokeship Council for this opportunity to reflect upon my art and the Shingen Academy of Martial Arts.

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