

The Diamond Eight Cut & Life Reflections

By H.F. Ito



Shintaido is 50 years old this year, and like a 50-year old malt whiskey, it is rich and mature through its expression in our bodies and our lives. In his essay in *Body Dialogue*, Michael Thompson described Shintaido planting a new tradition in Japanese martial arts by having students sit and bow to one another in a circle at the start and end of training – rather than in lines facing the teacher. The circle radically changed the relationship of the students to their teacher, and to one another. This innovation by Aoki-sensei marked a new epoch.

This past year, as part of Shintaido's half-century maturation, Minagawa-sensei developed the Diamond Eight Cut – a Shintaido improvisation* that marks another new epoch. At the Paris Workshop in November 2016, Shin Aoki said the Diamond Eight is a crystal. To him it is a crystallization of Minagawa-sensei's 50-year practice of Shintaido.

Five Aspects of the Diamond Eight Cut

The Diamond Eight is a graceful, dignified and accessible movement that unifies Tenshingoso and Eiko. It allows anyone and everyone to reap the benefits of *Kiri-oroshi kumite*. While *Kiri-oroshi kumite* is deep and rich – incorporating both *Tenshingoso* and *Eiko* – it is demanding for many people to do and impossible for older people. Amazingly, even a physically weak person can do the Diamond Eight.

The Diamond Eight is simple to remember and easy to practice.

- 1) **The Diamond Eight can be used a celebration, purification or initiation process.** Shinto incorporates purification rituals, and Shintaido draws on that practice for many of its cutting movements – *oharae no kata*.

In the past I have used *Toitsu-Kihon* and the *Ei-Ya-To! ki-ai* for rituals of house purification, celebration of those who have died, clearing energy and sending off people who are in the process of dying. I sometimes used the diamond mudra and the chanting of the Heart Sutra. However, the Diamond Eight encompasses all of this so there is no need to shout or chant. It is also peaceful and non-combative because it lacks a martial arts tone.

2) The Diamond Eight requires little or no warm-up so you can focus immediately.

An instructor can lead straight into the main practice with the Diamond Eight immediately after lower body stretching or simple floor stretching. Other introductory exercises are not necessary. You can practice the Diamond Eight seated on a folding chair or standing.

4) The Diamond Eight provides energetic healing. In Reiki or Amma, you put your hands on someone and through visualization and meditation can foster healing. With the Diamond Eight you can do the movement in your imagination as a healing process.

A personal story. Nicole's mother has been in great pain due to rheumatism. Because it isn't possible to massage her, I have been sitting with Nicole's mother and simply holding one of her fingers with both hands. I keep *Tenchijin* while sitting and do the Diamond Eight cut in my imagination with my eyes closed and without moving. We imagine cutting the night sky together. While holding her hand, my *ki* and consciousness travel through the Universe and back into her finger like an acupuncturist's needle or a surgeon's knife.

At one point I used a *To-ate* image but now I just imagine cutting and opening — and Nicole's mother can feel it. She says something inside her starts moving.

5) The Diamond Eight is the key to leading Hikari. As you know, the *Hikari* follower starts by holding the leader's wrist but eventually the follower's grip loosens and then releases. As the leader I used to move my wrists up, down and side to side, but now I don't need to move my hands or wrists at all. I use the Diamond Eight in my *hara* and it leads to an amazing *Hikari*.



It's important to lead *Hikari* with *Sagari Irimi* and not *Mae Irimi*, to avoid taking advantage of people or harming them. This is easier to keep in mind by visualizing the Diamond Eight.

- 3) If you are physically able, you can cut/carve/trace the farthest corners of the Deep Universe in the sweeping 180 degrees of the number 8 cut: *Dai-Uchu Tengai*. If you do this while moving freely, Diamond Eight becomes *Cho Taiki Mai* (Super *Taiki Mai*) — an amazing dance with *Ten/Heaven* and *Chi/Earth* reversed.

After practicing the Diamond Eight, I understand *meiso* (meditation) in a deeper way — in a way that monks probably understood intellectually, though not somatically. It is an amazing gift.

**developed independent of Aoki-sensei.*

The Diamond Cut as Crystal: My Life Refracted Through Aoki-Sensei



I. The Story of Buddha's Palm

A Chinese monk named Sanzo goes on a journey to India to copy the heart sutra. He encounters many demons along the way and three guardian animals come to protect him. One is a guardian monkey named Goku, with supernatural powers. Goku thinks a lot of himself, so Sanzo asks him to demonstrate his powers. Goku heads to the edge of the world and sees five pillars in the clouds. Very proud of himself, Goku pees his signature near the pillars as evidence that he was there.

Later, the true shape of the Universe – as Buddha's body – is revealed to Sanzo and Goku. As they stand on Buddha's enormous hand they see, very far away, an almost imperceptible scratch on one of Buddha's fingers – Goku's "signature" left on what he thought was a pillar. The moral

of the story is that no matter how clever or powerful we are, the scale of the Universe is unimaginable and everything we do happens in Buddha's hand.

This story is emblematic of my relationship with Aoki-sensei. I see myself as Goku and Aoki World as the palm of Buddha. Whatever I do, I end up returning to Aoki-sensei and his legacy. When I left Aoki World (*Shintaido*) I could not escape aspects of Aoki-sensei in my life and work.

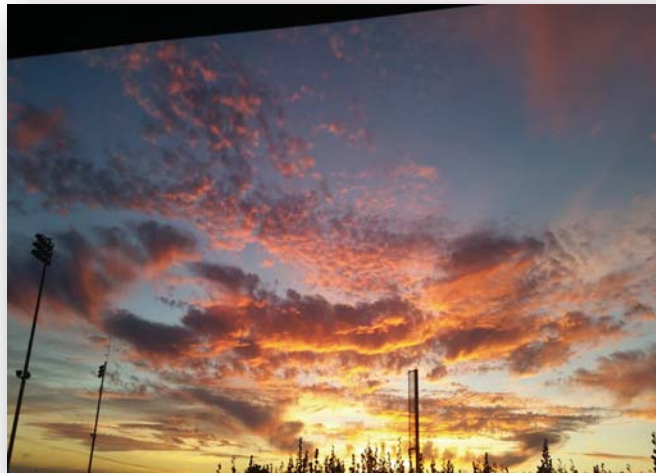
When I cut and see the crack in the night sky with the Diamond Eight, I feel myself outside the Universe. I think I can see beyond myself until I realize that Aoki-sensei was the one who told me about going beyond the world. And then I remember that Aoki-sensei's artist name is *Tengai, Ten* – Heaven + *Gai* – Outside.

2. Inner and Outer Universes

In the last part of *Tenshingosō* ○ I reach my arms back, far into the Universe. I imagine scooping up and holding Mother Earth on my hands – holding it as an offering or a form of salvation – with palms reaching up toward the Universe. I invite Mother Earth into my *hara (tanden)* as I close in Um. This is *Tanden Uchu* (Cosmic Hara) — the meeting of the inner and outer Universe.

Think of the Diamond as *Tenshin* (Universal Truth). Imagine the light emitted from the center of the body spreading in all directions and filling the universe, finally returning to the *Hara* (lower abdomen).

Travelling beyond the Universe then becomes the same as travelling toward the micro cosmos within our bodies. I now understand what Aoki-sensei means by *Tanden Uchu*. I graduated from Aoki World and kept going, but I am still arriving at Aoki World. It is so, so big and all-encompassing.



3. Blue Mountain

I am reminded of a well-known Japanese post-World-War-II poet named Santoka Taneda — a traveling poet much like Bashō. His life had many parallels with the Rakutenkai experience.

Taneda wrote:

Wake ittemo, wake ittemo, Aoi yama!

Wading through, Wading through, Yet blue mountains still!

The image is of pushing through underbrush again and again, pushing forward until finally reaching the Blue Mountain, *Aoi Yama*.

Since the beginning of 2000 my relationship with Aoki-sensei has been difficult. Aoki-sensei has been tired of our relationship dynamic, as have I. Aoki-sensei decided to leave the ISC, and then the Shintaido movement entered the Post-Aoki Era.

The past 16 years have felt like pushing through underbrush until finally reaching the Blue Mountain. In many ways I feel I've moved beyond Aoki-sensei's world. Ironically, though, I see the Blue Mountain as a symbol of Aoki World, so I have simultaneously escaped from and returned to the place I started from. It's a reminder of how Aoki-sensei's body of work is a Universe unto itself.



As I stand in this paradoxical place of freedom and returning, I reflect again on Aoki-sensei's artist name, *Tengai* (*Ten* = Heaven and *Gai* = Outside). In the ways that matter most, I feel that through the Diamond Eight movement, I have gone beyond *Ten*.

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Photo credits: Tomi Nagai-Rothe. The Buddha statue was photographed at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco