



Episode 364 – Sensei Shaffee Bacchus | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



#### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey there, thanks for coming by. This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio episode 364. Today, I'm joined by my guest, Sensei Shaffee Bacchus. My name is Jeremy Lesniak. I'm your host for the show. I'm the founder of whistlekick. I love the martial arts, and I love my job because my job is martial arts. I get to talk to wonderful people, and I get to participate in creating amazing products and you can find all those products at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). Don't forget the code `podcast15` to save 15%. Now if what you're after is maybe a transcript or one of the other 363 episodes that we've made, you can find all of them at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). You can listen to every episode there or on YouTube, but the website is where really where we could be the most background, the most context photos, and videos and transcripts, and we've got episodes broken down by location and styles so if you really wanna dig in to something from someone near you or someone that practices a similar or the same style that you do that's the best place to go, [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com).

But let's talk about today's guest. Like many of our episodes, Sensei Shaffee Bacchus was a listener referral but this listener actually goes back quite a way and is one of the listeners that I had the opportunity to meet and train with. And so that always means a lot, I don't want to say more, but gives me more background. So, with this particular person, shout out to Chris, we've shout and said "you know I really want you to interview this man who I'm training with now." We bounced some messages back and forth and I came to understand why, even with all the training that Chris had, my Sensei Bacchus represented something different to him and for him and why I was excited to have him on the



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show. I'm not gonna spoil any of that for you, but I did enjoy today's episode so I hope that you do as well. I want to welcome him to the show now. Sensei Bacchus, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Thank you very much. I really appreciate the opportunity especially to be interviewed by whistlekick that has interviewed you know some of the world's greatest like John Ray and so forth so thank you very much for the opportunity.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well thank you for being here. I've been looking forward to this. You were, as we've just talked about you were a referral from someone who's been listening to the show for a very long time and I'm sure he's gonna hear this episode so shout out to Chris. Thank you for your support and for making this connection.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Yes, Chris is one of my very dedicated students and I have a lot of respect for him and I'm thankful you know, he was able to identify this opportunity for us.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. Yeah, I've been looking forward to it and I've gotta say I think our conversation today holds the record for the furthest scheduled out. It's been a few months since we've had had this on the calendar.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Oh wow.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know what? That's ok. Good things come to those who wait and and all those clichés we've been looking for this and planning for this so I have no doubt it's going to be a great time for both of us.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Excellent.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Well we are a martial arts show and we do talk about martial arts. And the thing we always start with is simple as it seems it's pretty important. How did you get started in martial arts?

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Well, I am one of those people that grew, you know every Saturday watching kung-Fu martial art movies and in the genre of the "5 deadly venom" and so forth. I grew up in Guyana which is a very small country in South America in the northern most tip of South America, and there is not a lot of martial arts there. I think we had some taekwondo and Shotokan karate. And I was there. There was no judo, Jiu-jitsu, definitely no kung-Fu but I would religiously go to movies every Saturday and I'll come home and I'll practice. Around thirteen years or so, we moved to a house, and in that house, I found a couple of martial arts gi that was left back by the previous tenants. These were the Japanese style white gi. So at least I have the uniform and that prompted me to go looking for dojos and I found the Shotokan karate dojo. My parents weren't too thrilled about it. It was not something that people generally did in Guyana, but that's how I started. I remember going there and my Sensei his name was (05:05), he is now a (05:07) living in Canada and I often train with Frank when (05:11) Sensei who's an 8th degree black belt now. Back then, these guys were all second and third degree when they were at their prime, and I started Shotokan karate.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well, you know we've heard a lot of different origin stories on the show but I think you're the first person that had a uniform, a gi before they started training.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Kind of a funny way to get into it, isn't it?

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Indeed. Indeed. You know it's something I always wanted to do but by just having that symbol. Yes, you know it just kind of prompted me into taking the next step, right? Because I wasn't in a community that kind of promoted martial arts, you know, growing up in the (06:01) the game we played the most was soccer and cricket, you know. Those were the sports, not martial arts. And there was only Japanese martial arts that we have in Guyana. I think that one who was at taekwondo which is Korean. But that was it.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Do you think that you would have ultimately found martial arts without that random occurrence that left behind uniform?

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

I have to tell you that by 13, I have already had my makiwara in my yard. I already had, I had built like a.... I built something to practice on, you know. So, I was already practicing seriously. I had gotten a book, a couple of books from the library and one was gozo shioda aikido. And in that book, it was described how to do break fall. And I would practice and I had the (07:05) was concrete and we have like some old mat and whatnot I had put down there on carpet. I made my friends with practice. Across the street, our other friends were practicing break dancing and we were practicing like how to take a fall. You know, so there was a lot of interest there and I think gi or no gi, I would've found martial arts somewhere in some shape you know, eventually.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know I have this theory, I have a lot of theories, I'll be honest but one of the theories I have is that people that are destined for martial arts, will find martial arts. We've heard too many weird stories on the show of people who ended up in martial arts thru strange circumstances you know including someone miraculously leaving behind now a couple of gis to catalyze you into going out and finding your training. Do you think martial arts was something you were destined for?

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

I wouldn't be so bold, but definitely it's something that I've always kind of connected with. I think our societies today were based on ideology that sprung out of a martial methodology, a martial way. I think could be critical to our survival as a species and I think its kind of a (08:41). Some of us tend to gravitate it more, some less. But a lot of people are somewhere in between there. It's just, you know, whether there is that catalyst that gets you involved, right? It's that competitive spirit that's exhibited in us all, right? And I mean that's really linked to our success and how we express ourselves successfully in life. And so, all these portion, everything that we do, to me they are all martial arts because they all involve strategy, and to me that's really the core of martial arts and what guides a martial artist. We just use different methods, you know, to express it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You talk about that a little bit more. You're reminding me of the definition of kung fu that I hear so many people use. The idea of mastery that everything could be "kung fu-ed" depending on how you approach it.



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**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Absolutely. I mean, everything could be everything, right? Because when it comes down to the core of it, the person that do it is a human being. And so, the limitation that are there for every human being, right? Two arms, to lives they have, and so forth. And so, in space, you can only move in a certain way regardless, you can't break those boundaries. So regardless of whatever art you are doing, I mean, one of the sports that I connect to (10:23) to is ice hockey. I mean. I'm up here in New England so I do kind of watch a lot of ice hockey but ice hockey is feet going in one direction, body in the opposite direction, and then you have your hockey stick in another direction, right? And you're coordinating 3 different parts to your body and phase, and you are on ice so resistance on the ground is minimal. And then you as a whole, your body, your sword or your feet, your body, your sword, they are all moving together or your hockey stick. And you are moving through space, and at the same time, your mind is thinking, looking at all the different players and strategizing on how are you gonna get between and moving so forth. I mean, that's really a good expression of martial arts because you have to have balance, you have all those things have to happen without you thinking. And any good martial artist gets to a part where they are not thinking as much, just reacting, and not even reacting because once you reacted, something has happened already on the other side. But if you are proactive, that means you have a level of awareness that is beyond that situation, and then allows you to control that situation, or to remove yourself from that situation if that is what you need to do. And that's how you survive as a martial artist for very long. I think.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I would have to agree. Now of course, where you started in life, is not where you are in life today. Can you tell us a bit about how you got from there to here, Sensei?

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

From Guyana to the U.S.? Well, I've always been you know, a very dedicated student. I always believed in, or my family always believed in putting the best foot forward right? So, growing up, you know I was very studious in martial arts, in Shotokan karate, and also my studies and so forth and around 18-19 years of age, I was able to get a student visa to come to the U.S. to study. That was in 1990. I came to the U.S. then and I studied forensic toxicology at the University of New York. And then I went on to study pharmacy, and after pharmacy I did a pharmaceutical residency, and today I am working with Johnson Pharmaceuticals. I'm the lead for the U.S. reward value (13:13) team. And I'm based on Boston. I think that martial arts has been the core, or rod that kept me stable and strong through all that time. You know a lot has changed. It's not possible for foreign students to do what I did today because things are different. But when I came to the U.S., I was able to get a work permit, and I was able to work as a paramedic in New York City. And I worked as a paramedic for around 14 years. And it really gives me an amazing exposure to American society at all levels. I worked all those years in Manhattan. I met everybody as you can imagining meeting, racist cultures and so forth. Granted, it was 45 minutes of that person's emergency, right? So, they probably weren't at their best and it really gave me the opportunity





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to learn about people. (14:23) for them at that time. It's just been wonderful, I've been very lucky. I'm very blessed in that sense with those opportunities that I had since then to now.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I haven't thought of it until now but when we are hurt, when we are sick, if we go into an ambulance, it's one of the few places in society that we don't have these tears. There are better hospitals, maybe less hospitals, better cars, lower scale, lower class cars, food, restaurants, housing, but when we break a leg, we are going in the same ambulance, aren't we?

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Absolutely. One of my mentors, told me once I was complaining because in New York City, you get call after call after call. When I was a medic field, we would do 1.3million calls a year which was just crazy. And I was complaining and he.. I'll give you his first name as Al, and AL said to me like "Shaffee, why are you complaining. This is not your emergency, you are fine. It's their emergency and it doesn't really matter whether it is a broken leg, or a minor cut. You are not them. You don't know what that is. It's their emergency. And that just clicked something in me as a mindset, right? It's their perception of their emergency so you just accept it. Once I was able to do that, the job got so much easier. And what you said, you put somebody in an ambulance, it's their emergency, this is your hotel. This is where you take care of them This is your space in the universe and you are gonna provide the best experience for them possible during their time of emergency. It's only about 30 minutes. It's not a whole lot of time, right? And it's really easy to make a bad impression. You definitely don't want to do that, right? I mean if it happens now and then maybe that can be avoided but in general, you don't want to make a bad impression to somebody who's going through what is perhaps the worst time in their lives. And that really set me straight. And I think if I, because I was able to get that mentality, and express it on a daily basis, I was able to last that long because the average time for (17:08) New York City is around 5 years and they will be bought out. It's very stressful, it still continues to be stressful because some of my best friends are still working and I stay in contact with them. A lot have changed and gotten better. The technology is a lot better today. However, all the other stress in the human aspect is still there, still a very stressful job and I recently heard that there were several, 3-4 injuries in Manhattan to medics. I'm grateful for my time doing that job.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's an amazing job and I have the utmost respect for people who are first responders. People who are gonna show up when things by definition are not going well. The frame of mind that someone in that role has to have. It's something that I feel like I've experienced sometimes. But I'm not gonna do well when someone's guts are hanging out or when somebody's bleeding. If I was around someone who passed away even if I had no ability to save them, but if happened "on my watch", I will be useless for



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months if not years. So, I respect what you do so much or what you have done I guess. So much, and the others out there.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Well I still distinctly remember my first caress and that lady that passed away, I can still see her face today. And I can still see my partner telling me with his eyes that it's ok. But to come back to the topic of this radio station, I could tell you that I learned a lot of martial arts as a paramedic. For example, if you have an emotionally distraught person that's failing about, and you wanna take the blood pressure, which side of the body should you stand up? Should you take a blood pressure with them sitting or standing? It's better for them to be sitting, you standing because you being in a superior position. Should be on the left side of them so you have your right hand free. There's a lot of strategy in taking care of people too because they are not mindful of what they are doing. You have to survive for the other person, right and the next call. When I first started, we worked with the firefighter, the police department, and we would respond to the police department when the police have made a call, we would go with them. We stay outside and get those with injury or whatnot to take care of the police and to take care of whether that's the perpetrator may need help. And later we did that for the fire department as well. And a lot of those guys were military trained. A lot of them knew martial arts. They knew military style martial arts. So, we had training groups and I didn't officially trained for about 10 years while I was working as a medic to school and I did both full time. So that was quite a work load but I was still able to train. We have little groups that we train at the precinct. The precinct that was right across the metro (20:55) precinct back then, I don't know what it is now. We used to train there. Usually boxing and just body avoiding techniques, that kind of stuff. A lot of aikido's style technique. A lot of restraining technique like how can you restrain because when you are restraining somebody that's not a drug like you know acid or those drugs that were ran in the 90's, they are not really aware of, their pain receptions don't act react the same way. So, if you are restraining them and you over restrain them, you can break their hand or you can break their wrist and they are not able to understand that that's what happened. So, you have to be able to restrain them and protect them at the same time. That's only best done in movies. And you realize it's a whole different story. I learned a lot about doing that and working with some really good police officers out in the 23rd(street).

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

One of my favorite questions to ask people is about the stories that they carry, that they've taken from life, that you got this interesting background even though you've talked about this 10 year gap in formal training that you were not only still training but I'm gonna venture to say what you learned from that time not only helped you in your martial arts but I would say likely defines who you are as a martial artist now.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**



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I would have to agree.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, when you look at your past and I'm gonna guess that you might go to that 10-year period. If I ask you for your favorite martial arts story, what would that be?

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

It's not a fancy story. A pretty simple story but if I reflect back to that period, I trained very hard in Guyana. I was on a national team and I been in a lot of tournaments and when I came to the U.S., I did want to continue training. I went to the 6th avenue Kaioshin Kai karate dojo or Maseyama dojo to train because that was the closest thing to the Shotokan style of what we were doing and the way that we did Shotokan. If we did a very hard style, a lot of punches, even though it was non-contact, it was like contact. And my Sensei recommended me to go there. But I couldn't afford it. It was a 120usd a month or something there about. I think that was what I was making a week or something back then. There's no way I could afford that. So, I did a lot of different training and I think I was young then and I really didn't have a lot of experience but I still took that journey of finding out about other martial arts style so I trained kendo for a couple of months. I did ninjutsu. I did jiu jitsu, judo, with different people that I knew and for the most part, it was all free. I added what I knew from Shotokan to a thousand exchange. Historically, a lot of martial artist go in that journey where when they do that though, they have already attained mastery in something. I had. And they go to test them also to understand what is it they truly know, and what is it that they are still learning, what are their gaps, what are their strengths? And that is the most important thing to understand about yourself. What are you really good at. And that's what you should live with. I think one of the things that I've noticed about myself is that I'm really good at being aware. And that's what my story is about. I was at (25:18) hospital in Brooklyn. If you are familiar with that area, it's not the best, the most fairly area after 9pm. I was doing my pharmacy residency and I came out late, I think around 11pm and they have like a block and a half to go to get to the parking garage. The bridge from the hospital to the garage was out. They were doing some renovations, so I couldn't go across. I had to walk on the street. Up ahead of me, I noticed this individual coming towards me. I don't know, there was something about how nonchalant he was and how disengaged with everything that was going on around him that just struck me as odd. It just didn't seem right. At 11pm, if you are walking on the street, you are going somewhere and you are trying to get there quickly, you are not just loitering around, right? It just don't feel right, so I just started looking around, and I looked across, I saw the garage and I saw the attendant that was standing at the entrance, but had his back turned. As this guy approached me, I was just being very aware and he just suddenly took a swing at me. In his hand, he had this 6-inch piece of pipe probably loaded with lead. I'll tell you, if that struck me, that would have been it. I would have been down, and he would've take whatever he wanted to take off me and just left. Because I was aware and because I was kind of looking at him, I was looking at him but I'm trying to appear as if I wasn't. I really couldn't cross that street. I didn't have time. That's what I would've done and that's what I would tell people that if you notice something like that, cross the street. I didn't have the chance but I was aware so I was able to duck. That's all I did, I was able to duck. The thing went





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over my head and I crossed the street. (27:24) If I got struck in my head, I probably wouldn't be able to do anything afterwards. I don't know what the injury would be. And that story still fazes me very vividly. It was a very close brush, I think, but a very intentional about hurting me. That's possible, that happens in just one move. There's no 2 moves, 3 moves, just 1. One thing, very quick, very fast. One move, and one quick response to avoid it so we call that (28:07), body movement, and very quick. That's why I always emphasize at the dojo being able to specially align yourself in religious (28:14-19). There's not a really big story with a lot of involvement but it happened really fast, in less than a minute, I was across the street. The attendant have seen the end of that and then he started yelling. I got away. I gotta tell you my heart rate was like at, it was up there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I wouldn't be surprised if it was up for days. Not that I'll be able to sleep at all after an incident like that.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

I sat in my car for a couple of minutes just shaking, trying to get over. I dissected that afterwards. And then I realized, I didn't do a whole lot of thinking to be quite honest. I noticed, then I responded and then I ran across the street. That was it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We talked on the show often about awareness, and how important awareness is because when you have a circumstance like this where there is no real root cause. It's not you bumped into somebody in a bar that creates the violence. This is the ultimate definition of random violence. And when something is random, it becomes that much harder to detect, to predict. But because you were aware, you had the opportunity to not die or be seriously injured. And it's something that when I talked with my non-martial arts friends, they don't always understand. I think, I suspect you, I certainly know I do, I'm gonna get some majority folks listening right now don't like sitting with their back to the door at the restaurant. Why do we do that because we have, most of us have been trained to be alert, to be aware, to observe, to try and detect trouble before it comes up. I've been in circumstances, parties or whatever where I've been with friends and said we need to go now. I'm not always right, but the risk versus the reward, right?

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

You are on the side of caution. And the opposite is true from a strategy perspective that when we assume those positions in the restaurant, per se, right? We're taking the position of power because we are taking the higher ground. It gives us the bigger view. Helps us understand the whole room, right? We have to see the exit and so forth. But if we switch things around and put somebody else in that position purposefully, we're giving them the position of power. Maybe we'll have somebody sitting across from



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them that can alert us the danger but in my business, we have a lot of executive level meeting. I'm trying to convince a group of folks about a medical situation and benefits versus the risks. Sometimes, that conversation is better presented to the person when they are in a position of power, or even if it is perceived. So that strategy, is a martial strategy that applies to the boardroom. So, there's a lot of strategy around that samurai mentality and samurai art that are directly applied to business. That's one of the things we do at the dojo. We have team events where we will invite groups from different corporations to come and we will talk to them about awareness, awareness of each other, trust, building strong relationships, leading with their strength, interaction with each other, setting up a boardroom, conveying a message in a right way for maximal impact and so forth. Being very concise and timely in so doing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How do those conversations go? Are people receptive to those?

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Yes, absolutely. This year we've had 2 groups, both groups coming from my company actually, Johnson and Johnson but we also have a hotel group that came as well. And they spent an hour at the dojo. We generally started out with tai sabaki movements and we make it a lot of fun. During my early days of studying Shotokan karate, I wasn't able to always pay my dues. Then my teacher told me "fine, you could pay your classes by teaching the kid group, the youth group", so I taught them. And he told me the key to training the young kids he says "it's all about fun, make it fun, never never try them about doing something wrong, but always look when they do something good, and praise them, so start with fun, always praise, never ever lose your temper, never be the bad example, never get mad with them, never show them that you are upset, and always end on fun, always end with something fun." That'd exactly what I do until to this day. When we have this corporate groups come in, we always start with a fun activity, we try to go with our strengths are, and praise them about it and then utilize those strengths to have a very focused initiative that they are interested in working on, and then we end on something fun again. There's a lot of that in martial arts. Just in any sport, there's a lot of fun to have.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And I think we downplayed the fun. One of the things I've observed and I've spent a lot of time teaching a lot of different groups, in ranging from working with people for, maybe I'll get them for 30 minutes and never again up to I had my own school for a couple of years, And I've found that if people are having fun, their mind is so much more open receptive to everything else that you are doing. If they are not having fun, they are closed off and it's gonna be really hard to get any knowledge crammed into that brain.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**



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And they are not coming back. That's what the dojo should be. The dojo should be a safe place where you come there to learn about yourself, the medium is martial arts, and the players are all the students, the teacher who's reading the book you know, Sensei means the person have gone there before. You traveled that road before so you know the pitfalls and whatnot. It doesn't necessarily mean that you are the master of that road. You are also trying to get there as well. You are just farther along than the rest so you are the guide, and you experiment to see what your trying to start to figure out using the medium of martial arts. The different martial arts depends on Sensei, what he knows best to lead the group. If he does a good job at it, folks figure out what their strengths are. I think life is too short to be working on your weaknesses unless there are really crucial like there is something that you needed to start out. I think that we should identify what our strengths are as a person and then develop those and lead with those. The things that you're weak on, you partner up with somebody that's strong in those areas. That's just my feeling.. I'm a big strength finder person.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well we all have our strengths, right? We can go furthest when we're all leveraging our own strengths. That's leadership101: identify everyone's strengths and play to those strengths. Give them the position that leverages it.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Absolutely, right and it's the same in the dojo, that's what you need to empower. You find out as a teacher and then you empower that person along their strengths. Then you help them develop the weakness, weak areas so that they are as well rounded as possible but mainly getting them strong where they are strong already.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right, and I'm gonna put a very fine point on this because sometimes, people missed these and maybe it'll stir the pot a little bit, but if someone is really good at forms, and they love doing forms, and all you ever do is harp on them about their poor fighting skill, you are missing an opportunity. The moment someone leaves your school, your dojo, dojang, whatever you choose to call it, and they don't come back, you can't help them. So, to give them the freedom to develop as the martial artist that they want to become, I think is a gift as an instructor because everyone's different and thus everyone's place in the martial arts is gonna be a little different.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

That's a fact. That's a big ongoing conversation. I gotta tell you, I kind of stay out of the conversations around those kind of things and I don't follow them too deeply. The people are gravitating to those conversations than that. For how they are defining themselves. I don't study martial arts because I'm



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living in a martial society where we need to have a level of awareness. It's good to have it and it saved me but that's not what I'm doing every day. Everyday I'm trying to better myself. I'm trying to evolve and I'm trying to become stronger, and I have to be very honest, and have to be very very truthful. I think Bruce Lee said "it's very hard to admit something the truth about yourself". I'm paraphrasing, but he said that it's very hard to accept what is true about you. What is actually weak or bad about you that you need to work on. You need to use your strengths, leverage your strengths to develop that weakness or that thing that needs to be better. If you look at that, I sent you a drawing with a Buddha, a mask and a sword, and a word shin below it, and to me that's my ideology right there and that's why I evolved to study sword because sword training is very up there. People live and die by the sword during the samurai era and for many thousands of years I was talking to my student only this Sunday about people building their houses in such a way the the steps would creek in such a way that when people are coming up, you know that they are coming up the back stairs or the front stairs, or they are walking on which part of the porch. Can you imagine that mindset of people like that living on a daily basis? Always on guard. We don't sleep that way. We close our doors. More than likely people are not breaking in. But that's how people lived. Today when you approach the training of swords, you gotta approach it in that same way though. For you to get there, you have to approach it in that way. That's the only way you will learn what is true about you. When you do category from heaven to earth, from Jordan to (40:49), it's like you are defining your entire life there. If your punch is not true, and controlled, and directed and under your control and guidance, you are not living your life the right way. Every time you do one cut from top to bottom, it has to really be an expression of your entire life because that's how you are defining yourself every time. That's how you learn the truth about yourself. That's how you face and you understand all the different masks that we wear in society or society requires of us. That's how we learn to shelve those. And to understand exactly what our expression in live is. That's how we attain the realization that, that self-realization and that's how your life becomes art or something that others admire. That's how you express yourself with beauty. That's how society looks at you and that's how you are able to impact society. Ultimately, that's what you want your life to do, right? You want your life to be clean and pure and strong as much as you can have with yourself, and the next level is your family and your closer society, your friends and family. And then third, is the society at large. You wanna be able to have that impact. I think underlying each and every one of us, we wanna have that but what we do today is we go out to that third piece and we do ridiculous things and we put on shows and we do things and we post on Facebook just doing ridiculous stuff for attention and so forth. I understand that there is a culture like that for social media and so forth, we're missing so much. We should all start with our self and then expand out. That drawing, one of my longest student, he is one of our instructors, he is also an artist, and he was an artist in training at North Eastern University. While he was training with me, we would have this conversation. This is like 10 years ago or so, we would sketch things out and he was doing a show on different math that evolved through society historically over thousands of years. They found it together in pieces and we end up putting this together and presenting it to obasa Sensei. Our concept for shinkendo in compose a lot of philosophy in shinkendo and so forth from our dojo. That's why our dojo is called So Shen Khan, shen means true you know social place of earnest training, learning about the truth. Whatever that is about sword, about yourself and so forth.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Tell us a bit about shinkendo, if you would.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Oh absolutely. I make this analogy sometimes and I'll do it this time again. When I look at Bruce Lee, I see a man that truly understood kung-Fu. Truly understand that concepts, the use, the techniques of kung-Fu, but he also understand other martial arts. What he did is he broke it down for us, for the world. He brought it to us, he broke it down, he made it accessible. He just cracked it open for everybody to practice it and to learn that martial arts. Then, if you think about it, he talks about form, without form, and so not being captured into all this stuff. I think that Obato Kaiso did the same thing for Japanese swordsmanship. He truly cracked it open and brought it to us as a whole and across the world. If you look at swordsmanship in Japan today, there are still hundreds of schools, they still practice rigidly by the lines of that practice that was done several hundred years ago. Obato Sensei studied a lot of those styles, and while he was in Japan, he became a Sensei in the wakahoma. The wakahoma is a Japanese stunt group, but they are also responsible for ensuring the authenticity of all Japanese martial arts as expressed in movies. So, if you go and see a movie and they are doing yari or they are doing naginata, Obato Sensei would be the person to say that's wrong, that's right, we didn't do it like that, this is how they did it. So, for many years, his job was to go and learn other martial arts. That's how he was able to cross-train across different schools because he had that job and those Senseis understood that that's what he was doing because there's a lot of secrecy across different sword styles. One sword style would not accept a practitioner from another sword style. What Kaiso learned and noticed is that one style did battoho. So, if you look at iaido, is a Japanese swordsman style. It's great. I'm not criticizing it. But the real focus is only un-drawing the sword by powerfully and 1 or 2 techniques afterwards. They don't focus on tachi uchi which is sparring. They don't focus on suburi which is strong swinging. They don't do any cutting, but now they do but before they didn't. Tameshigiri or target cutting is a recent phenomena I would say for the last maybe 10-15 years. So shinkendo if broke it down by the name it would mean shin-ken-do. Shin means true, ken is sword, do is the way of. If you put that together, it means "the way of the true sword" or "the true way of the sword". And the only way you could study sword is you have to do all the components. So, if you practice in karate and all you did was punches, you are missing out on your kicks. And if you don't put them together, kicks-punches combination, then you are missing out in using everything. So shinkendo puts it all together and it most closely mimics how samurai actually practice sword 2000 years ago. So, we do suburi, strong suburi, how to swing the sword in transition from different cuts. Battoho - how to draw the sword very powerfully and generally from a standing position. If you are in a sitting position and somebody is attacking you, you are missing out. You are at a disadvantage. You don't want to be in that position. If you are gonna have your sword with you, don't sit. Simple. It was very uncommon for people to take their long sword into an enclosed area. That just don't make sense. So, we don't practice from sitting position. Now if you are hiding and you are hiding your training because people are looking at you, and you are training in an enclosed setting, then that makes sense because whatever reason maybe it was banned after (48:41) and you have to practice in an enclosed place. I'm not being critical of that way of practice as a whole. But from shinkendo, we don't do that. We have 10 cutters where you can practice on your own. Those are very simple to learn but very difficult to master. We do tachi uchi which is sparring and we don't use shinai, we use





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something called (49:11) or we use wax wood which are very sturdy pieces of wood and allows us to strike very powerfully and safely because when wax wood breaks, it breaks on the inside first. So, you hear it breaking inside but it doesn't break outside, it doesn't get splintered so could put it away. If you use bokken and it breaks, or splinters or shatter and that can cause injuries. That's how hard we strike. Then the last thing we also practice in those 5 aspects is tameshigiri which is actual cutting with a real shinkendo like blade. We do iaido practice as well and then we graduate to tameshigiri. That's the 5 main aspects of shinkendo called (50:02), suburi, tanrenkata, tameshigiri, tachi uchi and battoho. Also, when you want to become haiku or black belt, you also practice nii touken which is how you use 2 long swords. The concept of that is that if you are in battle and you lose whatever shield you have, or you are fighting multiple people, 2 swords are better than 1. It gives you a wider radius of control and if you extend your arms, and extend your swords on both end, you have a really wide radius. So, it's like having a bolt or a spear. So, you could be able to control that space better with 2 swords. We have a whole curriculum on nii touken.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Nice. What you were talking about with the wax wood. That's something that I've never known. I've trained in a number of styles and whenever we went to sword practice, it was always a hardwood bokken as you said or shinai but makes complete sense. We don't tend to think of something that is harder, that is sturdier as necessarily being safer. I think there is some interesting analogy to draw from that, to apply to life.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

Indeed. We have very low injuries in shinkendo. I've never, in 10 years, we have not, I've not had one real injury. People get small injuries but we've never had any real injuries that's because of the way we train, the way we teach. We teach very safely. It is a very dangerous art. I like shinkendo because if somebody is truly dedicated to understanding themselves, and they wanna learn something, you can't really use in society except in Texas. But you are really using an instrument to chip away all those things that you needed, you're molding of training yourself. But that's not to say that shinkendo as a whole can be applied for self-defense because it's tough. We train very hard and you sweat in every class, and you become very strong. Without your sword in your hand, if you do just anyone of those strikes, I think you will be very impactful. Whoever is on the receiving end. We did do a lot of that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What are your goals? What's coming up for you for your school, your system in the future? What's on the horizon?

**Shaffee Bacchus:**



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Well next year, I'm gonna turn 50. I also do toyama ryu and I think I'm gonna be testing for my 5th degree black belt next year. That's something I'm starting to work on from a personal perspective. I think for next year, we just finished 10 years at this location and we had about a Sensei come and train with us once, years ago and next year and in the future, I would like to his son Yukishiro Obato come with us and train with us more. I think the dojo is at a point where we really have the right mix of senior students and intermediate students. So, we can really take our practice to the next level. I know it's taken us 10 years to get there but I'm really excited about it and it's really a great place for beginner students too because now they can really that full grasp of seeing shinkendo being on practice and understand where they are, what the other levels look like on what the really senior guys are doing that they could get there. So, I'm really excited about that for the future of shinkendo in Boston.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now if anyone is listening and maybe in the area and they wanna drop by or start taking classes with you, find you on social media or even just reach out to say hello, how would people find out more about you and your school?

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

It's very easy. Our website is [shinkendoboston.com](http://shinkendoboston.com). That's one word. You can go on our website, there is a place there for you to send us a message. We usually reply the same day or the next day. We require before people join the dojo that you observe a few classes and we get to know you and understand a little bit your goals, and we were very open. We allow you to train with us for a couple of times just so you can get the feel of it as well because shinkendo is one of those arts that you have to practice for a long time before you start to feel comfortable and we are willing to work with you to get you there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Nice. Of course, we are gonna link that website and other things of relevance that we've talked about today on our website [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) I wanna thank you for your time. This has been a lot of fun. I really enjoyed talking to you, getting to know you, I've been looking forward to this as we said at the top of the show for quite a while. And I'd like to ask one more favor as we fade away, what parting words would you give to the folks listening today.

**Shaffee Bacchus:**

I would say that whatever you do in your life, make it art. Make your life art. Make it something beautiful, and make it something for people to look at and behold, and make it something that takes people's breath away. Everybody could do that because everybody has something that's special about them. You just got to be brave to figure it out and don't be afraid to do that. If you study shinkendo,



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we'll help you do that as well but it doesn't have to be shinkendo. It can be anything that you do. Put your best foot forward and you'll be happy that you did that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

The more time I spend with this show, the more people I get to talk to. The more I realized how true it is that we are more alike than we are different. As people, as martial artist, in our journeys, just trying to find our path. And I feel a kinship with everyone that I speak with. But especially today with Sensei Bacchus. Even though we don't train in the same styles and we don't have the same cultural background, and didn't grow up anywhere close to the same place. The way he spoke of martial arts just clicks for me and I do hope that I get the opportunity to meet him soon, train with him, and really to see if those similarities that desire to bow to someone, to shake their hand, share some sweat that really does hold them. I'd put money on it. Thank you sir for coming on the show today. If you wanna check out the show notes with the photos and transcript and everything else that we do. You can find all that at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). And of course, you can find the show on that website, on YouTube, in your podcast feed, and I hope that you will share with others. Show continues to grow which bring us new and exciting guest and that allows us to grow more. And that allows us to bring in more guest. It's a cycle, just like our training. Don't forget, podcast15 saves you 15% at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) and don't forget you can follow us on social media. We are at whistlekick on Instagram, Facebook, twitter, YouTube, and my direct email is [jeremyl@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremyl@whistlekick.com) and I love hearing from you listeners. Thank you for your time today. Thank you for your support and I hope everything goes well for you. Until next time. Train hard, smile, and have a great day.