

Kenjutsu

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The Art of Japanese Swordsmanship

By David T. Bish, Shichidan

A master swordsman must size up his opponent. No two swordsmen fight the same. Ito Ittosai, a great Japanese swordsman was reckless in his style. "Learn by being cut" was his philosophy. He believed one should be concerned more with not losing rather than winning. Proper timing is a key element of this concept.

In his book *Go Rin No Sho* (A Book of Five Rings), Miyamoto Musashi, remarked that his entire strategy was based on timing and rhythm. Musashi was the founder of the Nito or two sword method of fighting in Japan. It is believed that he learned the rapier and dagger techniques of the Europeans from traders in Southern Japan and used these techniques to develop his own style.

In traditional martial arts, no other weapon has held the status of the sword. It is the center of training for the majority of the arts. Ken-jutsu may be studied as a separate art or as a subordinate art of another major system. At the Red Dragon Ju Jitsu Dojo, the basics of Ken-jutsu are required for advancement to the rank of Blue Belt. It is also taught as a stand-alone art.

In terms of skills, few weapons require the demands of swordsmanship. The sword moves much faster than the fastest person, the skill in timing and judgement will benefit the Martial Artist in all other aspects of their training.

Ken-jutsu should not be considered the same as Kendo. Kendo is a sport form of swordsmanship and an offspring of Ken-Jutsu. In Kendo, the targets are restricted to the head, wrist, body plate, and throat. In Ken-Jutsu, any target is fair game.

The study of Kenjitsu has no belting system. It is a pure study of the art and mastery is developed through practice. Students must learn the basic stances along with the basic attacks and defenses. Mastery is derived from actual combat or Kumite using a wooden Bokken. After the student has been properly instructed in the techniques of combat and practices of various timing drills they are pitted against other students under the direct supervision of the Sensei who referees the match.

Training Sequence

The study of Ken-jutsu is more than merely wielding a sword. One not only learns the Kihon Dachi (basic stances) and attacks with defenses, there is much more to the study of the art of the Samurai. Any butcher can swing a sword but to be a master you must develop the mental and spiritual aspects of the art as well as the physical.

Shin-Ku-I (Body, Mouth, Mind) or more accurately Action, Word, and Thought is how the Samurai were evaluated. What makes the difference between a swordsman and a master is Ken Shin Ichi Nyo, or Sword and mind as one. One must train as if the sword was a part of them, if it is looked at as a separate entity you will never develop the skill to master the art.

The sequence of training in Ken-jutsu is as follows:

- **Kihon O Manabu** - Emphasize the basics
- **Kaisu O Kasaneru** - Development through repetition
- **Jiga Ni Tsuite** - Controlling your ego
- **Dai - Kyo - Soku** - Kei - Big - Strong - Fast - Light
 - Develop the techniques
 - Add power to the techniques
 - Increase your speed in the techniques
 - Perfect the techniques so that the power is derived from the speed and no longer requires strength.
- **Saigo Made Einoku Suru** - persist to the end - NEVER GIVE UP. This is true for both the practice of the art and the attitude in combat.
- **Yudan Nashi** - Never off guard

The motto of the Samurai was *Shinu Kikai O Motomo*, Looking for the opportunity to die. This was not a defeatist attitude. The Samurai held life in great esteem and were very selective on what "cause" they would lay their life on the line for. It is easy to kill a man when you yourself are willing to die.

Carrying the Sword (Teito)

The sword should be carried in the left hand with the thumb over the Tsuba. The sageo or strings should be secured between the index and middle fingers to prevent them from dragging. The Ha should be toward the floor in a natural drawing position.

Rei ni hajimari, rei ni owaru (Everything begins and ends with respect)

Bow of Respect (Hairei)

When bowing into the dojo or to the alter, the sword should be transferred to the right hand with the Tsuka toward the rear and the Ha toward the ground. This is a sign of deepest respect and trust since holding the sword in this position makes it impossible to draw.

Bowing to the Sensei (Shirei)

All Seito line up in front of the Sensei taking seiza. The proper way to take the position of seiza is to snap the left leg of the hakama back between the legs and kneel onto the left knee then bring the right knee down. NEVER use the sword as a crutch to support your weight. This is a sign of disrespect. It would be better to fall on your face than to disgrace yourself in this manner. The sword should be lying on the floor on your right side with the Ha facing toward your right leg and the Tsuka toward the front. Seizarei is performed by first placing the left hand on the floor in front of you in an "L" shape with the tip of the thumb on midline. Next place your right hand down in the same manner so that the thumb tips meet forming a diamond shape. Bow the head approximately 4 - 6 inches from the floor centered on the diamond formed by your hands.

After the Sensei has returned your bow return to a seiza position by returning your hands to the rest on your knees in the reverse order of placing them on the floor. Rise to your feet, first the right then the left. Again, do not use the sword as a crutch to assist you.

Bowing to the Sword (Torei)

Depending on the school you attend, the Torei may be performed from either seiza or the standing position. Nevertheless, it is always performed prior to and immediately following any practice session. This is a sign of respect to your sword and a joining of your spirit with that of the sword's.

When performed from seiza, the sword should lie in front of you. The Tsuba should be positioned so that it is in line with the left knee, the Ha toward you and the Tsuka to the left. The seito would then perform seizarei to the sword as described above.

If Torei is performed from a standing position, the sword is held in front of the head at eye level with the Tsuka toward the right and the Ha away from you. Lower the head to below the level of the sword.

Wearing the Sword (Taito)

The katana is worn on the left side with the Ha facing upward. The Sageo are tied into the Obi of the hakama. The end of the Tsuka should be directly in front of the naval.

Standing Bow to Training Partner (Tachi Rei)

Prior to Junjo (training) and upon completion of training you and your partner should perform Tachi Rei to show mutual respect. Any time you change partners or receive individual instruction from the Sensei, tachi rei should be performed.

When your training session has ended and you and your partner have performed Tachi Rei, you should again bow to your sword (Torei), Bow to your instructor (Shirei) and bow to the alter or at the exit of the dojo (Hairei).

Gripping the Sword (Tsuka No Nigiri Kata)

Many beginners tend to hold the sword too tightly. In the beginning, training should concentrate on gripping the sword properly. The sword should be held loosely but firmly. It should act as a natural extension of the dominant hand. There should be a space between the hands, this allows for better mobility of the weapon. The dominant hand should be next to the hand guard; this is the weapon's center of balance. The majority of the grip strength is applied by the little finger and the index finger is used for balance. Beginners are often taught to grip the sword with the index finger extended to train them not to use this finger for gripping. The non-dominate hand should grip the sword close to the butt of the weapon.

Drawing Cut (Nukit Suke)

Koiguchi no kiri kata - Opening the Koiguchi. The thumb of the left hand should push against the Tsuba slightly to advance the sword approximately inch from the saya (scabbard). The middle knuckles of the right hand should rest on the bottom side of the Tsuka. As you draw the sword forward from the saya with the right hand, the left hand should be pulling the saya to the rear. Do not think of drawing the sword and cutting your opponent - think only of cutting your opponent. Drawing the sword is merely a means to the end and both the drawing and the cutting are the same action.

Raising the Sword (Furikaburi)

After the initial cut is made on your opponent, twist the right wrist inward to raise the blade above the head. The blade should be brought to a position parallel to the ground as the left hand raises to the Tsuka.

Downward Cut (Kirioroshi)

This is the Men uchi strike to end the suffering of your opponent. To allow another Samurai to bleed to death or die from infection of the wound would be to disgrace him. To die at the hands of a master swordsman was the ultimate sign of respect. Te no uchi or cutting technique refers to a straight cut or hasuji otosu. A wavering hand would only butcher the opponent more and add to his suffering. The cut must be quick, clean and straight.

Chiburi (Blood removal)

There are three main ways to perform Chiburi. They are as follows:

1. **Kasa no Shizuku Oharao** - After the cut is made, twist the wrist so that the Tsuka is now in front of the head. Swing the katana in a circular motion over the head and snap the blade by twisting the wrist as it is pointing to your right.
2. **Katana O Kaesu** - Loosen the grip with the left hand except for the little finger. Flick the right wrist out while pulling the back of the Tsuka to the left with the little finger of the left hand.
3. **Chi no Shizuku O Otosu** - Tilt the blade to a 45 degree angle and rest the tip on the right outer thigh and allow the blood to run or drip off.

Noto (Resheathing)

When replacing the Katana, circle the sword in front of you, bringing the mine to rest on the koiguchi. Slide the mine along the koiguchi until the Kissaki drops into the opening. Raise the Tsuka rotating the Ha upward and slide the blade into the saya with the right hand as you slide the entire saya forward with the left hand.

Distance and Timing (Ma ai)

Ken-jutsu requires an extreme awareness of distance and timing. Unlike unarmed combat, where an accurate defense may result in an opponent contacting with a strike or kick, in Ken-Jutsu, the same mistake could result in death. Distance and timing is what makes great martial artist great. No matter how strong the attack, if you are not there when it arrives, the attack is ineffective.

Knowing when and from where to attack is paramount. An ill-executed attack is just as deadly as an ill-executed defense. Faking an attack against an experienced swordsman is useless. He will see through your fake and avoid it, launching his counter-attack before you have a chance to recover.

Unlike the movies, actual sword-combat last only for a few passes. A spectator may not realize what has happened before the combat has ended. In training, a great deal of time is devoted to distance and timing. There are multiple drills the student must work on to build these skills.

Metsuke (Eye Contact)

Where should your eyes be focused during combat? There are many different schools of thought on this question. The best advice is to look at the level of the solar plexus with Enzan no Metsuke, or Distant mountain site. This allows you to see the entire body all at once. If you watch only one portion of the body you can be fooled by a master swordsman. All parts of the body cannot fake a movement at the same time.

Kokyu (Breath Control)

When practicing kata, take three deep silent breathes attacking on the third breath. Think positive thoughts with each inhalation and disperse negative thoughts with every exhalation. The breaths should enter the nostrils, circle the crown of the head and settle to the Tan Tein.