

The Kendo Reader

About Noma Hisashi (1910-1939)

Noma Hisashi was born on the 24th April 1910 in Tokyo. His grandfather trained under Mori Yoza, a famous Bakumatsu swordsman and senior student at the dojo of Chiba Shusaku. His mother, who was the eldest daughter of Mori Yoza, was a skilled writer as well as an exponent of Kendo, Kusarigama and especially, Naginata. In 1924 he enrolled at the Yushinkan dojo where he received instruction from Nakayama Hakuda sensei. At the age of 17 he began to receive instruction from Masuda Shinsuke. In the same year the Noma dojo was established and Hishashi began the instruction of children. On the 1st July 1930 aged 21 he was presented with the Kendo seiren award by his highness Prince Nashimoto Miyamori Maso chairman of the Dai Nihon Butokukai. Also Hisashi began training under Mochida Moriji at the Noma dojo. During 1934 he travelled to Kyoto and other parts of Kansai and Chugoku districts for special training. In September of that year he entered and won the army Kendo championships. He received the trophy from Shirakawa Yoshinori the army minister. On 1st March 1935 he was awarded the rank of Renshi. April that year was spent in Kyushu and in May as Tokyo representative he entered and won the tournament that was held before the emperor in honour of the birth of the crown prince. On 6th July 1937 he was awarded the rank of Kyoshi and on the 7th November of that year he passed away due to illness.

When we read the bare outlines of his life, sketched out above we can easily understand that here was a remarkable kendoka who sadly, passed away at the very moment that he was about to flower with his own deep insight into swordsmanship. But we do have his writings and these are also remarkable for this young man was able to express himself in a clear and natural manner. He was a born communicator and throughout his book he brings the reader a sense of his natural enthusiasm and deep love of Kendo. Not only that he constantly refers to famous masters of the past to keep things on an even keel. He is able to pass on to us an enormous fund of teaching. A legacy that one could only otherwise acquire by placing oneself for many years under similar masters.

Why Practice Kendo?

Why do it ? Before starting any activity this is the first question that naturally comes to mind, and when one has fully satisfied oneself as to the reasons for doing it and the task is begun. Not only does one feel reassured that ones efforts will not be misplaced, but one is also able to concentrate all ones strength on what is crucial for its achievement, consequently the task comes to life. Even so, if we must always be asking ourselves the question "Why do it?" and embarking upon nothing until we have worked out the reasons for everything we will do we are likely to run into problems.

Why was I born? Why should I carry on living? Why do I have to work? And so on. This line of thought is not necessarily meaningless but if we try hard to seek answers "Why do it? Then our doubts and confusion will only increase resulting in an unmanageable situation. Honen Shonin (1133-1212) founder of the Jodo sect of Buddhism is recorded to have said, Just continue single-mindedly with the invocation as a shortcut to nirvana.

Again surely it must be said that there can be nothing more detrimental to our endeavours than to consider as most correct our own shallow and immature ideas and to decide for ourselves all the answers to the question Why do it? During ones years of immaturity, one must be especially careful not to become a victim of ones own dogmatic attitude. When ones ideas and thoughts seem incomplete seek the opinion of others or else just follow the instruction given by those who are senior to oneself. This must surely be the correct path.

It is the same with the question "Why practice Kendo". Because this cannot easily be answered does one refuse to practice Kendo? Even if one enquired deeply into finding an answer to this problem one would find it a most difficult problem to solve. Even if the problem could be partially solved, ones answer will not necessarily amount to anything of real significance.

That being said it may be that the dwelling on this problem would in some way serve to heighten ones perception and understanding of Kendo. Below I have related some simple examples of observations and attitudes pertaining to Kendo. Among them I have also added some of my own thoughts on the subject and I leave it to the reader to judge their merits for themselves.

It is not certain just when the sword came into widespread use, but that they were in use in ancient times has been proved and is a fact of history. With the development of the sword, it also became necessary to research into the most effective methods of its use. This, the skill and development of technique itself became an ongoing concern which in turn ultimately gave birth to the Michi or way of the sword. We can say then that the wellsprings of Kendo were formed far back in ancient times.

Later the systematised or organised forms and styles of Kendo and the ancestral families of Masters of the Art known as Shihan-ke (1) seems to have first appeared during the Muromachi period (1338-1573). From then on, the skill of swordsmanship passed through each historical phase, through times of growth and decline and while experiencing many changes over the course of time it never really disappeared altogether. Rather it does seem to have enjoyed a relatively healthy development up to the present day, which is something to be grateful for.

From long ago it is alluded to by the teachings of the Ken-Zen-Ichi, the Way of the Sword and of Zen as one and with the same objectives, Kendo also has become to be considered in spiritual terms. Generally, however, as Bujutsu it was primarily developed with the aim of "destroying the enemy and protecting oneself". Even in this day and age there are not a few people who continue to hold on to this primary objective.

To give one example there is said to be an old master of swordsmanship living in seclusion somewhere in Hokkaido. When ever anyone came to visit him and knocks on his front door he is first heard to demand "who goes there", after which he takes hold of a pair of iron tongs and comes forward to greet his visitor.

Now this may appear to be a rather eccentric way of doing things but when we look at the records that describe the behaviour of the Bugeisha of old we discover much that is similar. One cannot discount out of hand this attitude as being among other things out of date for there is something about it that makes one stop and ponder. That old master in Hokkaido is not the only one of his kind: there are quite a number who view Kendo first and foremost as Bujutsu.

In fact that with event of the Haito Rei² after the Meiji restoration in 1868 together with the combined influences of pacifism and the introduction of western thought and the decline in the number of opportunities for the actual use of edged weapons, the age no longer permitted Kendo to be thought of solely in Bujutsu terms. Between the first and the last years of the Meiji period (1868-1912), the practice of Kendo suffered a serious decline. One reason for this decline we may assume, was the result of it being viewed only in terms of Bujutsu. As far as the purpose and role of Kendo was concerned a time for its re-evaluation had come and it was studied from many different angles.

Now I would like to tell you about an old man of very stern character whom I once knew. He had practised Kendo every day for more than 20 years during which time he never missed a single days training. Regardless of whether it was extremely hot or cold, he continued to train with ceaseless enthusiasm. Throughout this period he never had any particular desires or ambitions about becoming especially strong or skilled, instead he just kept training for the simple reason that he enjoyed it. Setting aside his actual ability he told me once that he had never once caught cold and, that as far as he was concerned, it was all due to the training.

People practice Kendo for many different reasons. There are those who attempt to master it as Bujutsu, others who practice it as a form of physical exercise, some emphasise it as a form of ascetic exercise, still other see it as sport, some simply because they enjoy it, others because they have an interest in contest using a shinai. In general, however it seems to be most broadly perceived to be either as a form of physical exercise or character cultivation and physical discipline. This appears to be the order of the present day as regards to Kendo practice and it does appear to be a line of thought adapted to the times. Unfortunately, however it also seems to indicate a tendency most people have of paying scant regard to the original Bujutsu role of Kendo, i.e. to destroy the enemy and to protect oneself.

Nowadays, apart from the unique situations that arise in times of war, there are almost no opportunities for us to cross swords in mortal combat. In place of the sword there are now more advanced and efficient weapons available. Consequently, to say that the aim of Kendo is "to destroy the enemy and to protect oneself" is naturally going to invite ridicule for such an outmoded idea.

No, within Kendo there is something to be sought of much greater value, something of profound spiritual significance. But to learn of this significance one cannot bypass the original function of Kendo as Bujutsu i.e. "to destroy the enemy and protect oneself". It is only through a deadly earnest razor edged course of Kendo training that one can truly experience the lofty way towards spiritual understanding.

To class Kendo as merely another form of physical exercise is to view it as another form of sport and to that I think is to miss the mark completely. Having said that, I do not want it to appear that I do not acknowledge the excellent attributes that sport has to offer, not only from the physical aspect but also the spiritual aim. It is just that Budo was devised for and deployed in situations where ones life itself was at risk. For this crucial reason it differs greatly from sport, and it is on this point that the true value of Budo is to be found. Therefore, I must emphasise strongly that if one ignores the original function of Kendo as Bujutsu, where life and death are held in balance, then one greatly diminishes the value of Kendo. Although it is quite all right to view Kendo in the light of physical exercise and character cultivation, if any situation one forgets the primary role of Bujutsu one will not be able to comprehend the true meaning of Kendo. As was said earlier, in the present age there are practically no opportunities for mortal combat with a sword (shinken shobu). If that is the case how is one to come even close to experiencing the mental state on shinken shobu, of bringing Kendo to life as Bujutsu? The answer is to attach great importance to the outcome of one to one engagements (shohai). In Budo, shohai must be held in the highest regard. Questions of shohai may have to be set aside for purposes of instruction and so on by shohai is the difference between life and death, be it with the real sword or the shinai. It is vital to realise that to be defeated means that ones life is lost.

The method for achieving victory is encompassed within Michi. To put it another way, through long and serious training and investigation into the ways and means of taking victory, one finally becomes master of them and this is the path of Michi. The word Michi encompasses both art, or skill and ways and means. If we delve even deeper to the ultimate concept we discover that it includes the will of god, the law of the universe and truth itself... Where the will of god, the law of the universe and truth are revealed there lies the law of obtaining victory, and this is the law we shall arrive at if we comprehend the principles of shohai. In Buddhism this concept is known as Bodai or Satori. Through ken we may awaken to the meaning of life, and even beyond the laws of heaven and earth and the truth of the universe. This I think it may be said is the ultimate aim of Michi.

To understand the basic law of one Michi is to comprehend the laws of all others, this is the great value of the Michi. Thus it is not enough to study and master ken alone. This principle of all Michi (3) is known as Ippo Hanbo and is supported by the words of Miyamoto Musashi (4) "Trusting all to the laws of Heiho (arts of war) in mastering the arts and skills and in all things, I have no need of teachers"

Concerning the aims of Kendo, Yamaoka Tesshu (5) wrote the following;

People believe that the reason for mastering swordsmanship is to be able to cut down one's enemies. For myself, however I seek to master swordsmanship because through it I seek divine principle. If once I attain this my heart will be as still water, calm and quiet, like a clear mirror lucid and bright, able to cope instantly with any situation. For when faced with any incident my spirit will react on its own. Of what comes to pass, my comprehension of it will be instantaneous. To truly attain to this plane is to be one with the way of heaven. Throughout earnest training and by clearing the mind (kokoro), I seek only to awaken to the one root principle of the heavens.

Tesshu, emphasised the practice of Ken as Bujutsu, here indicates clearly the higher aims of Kendo. The above passage was written by Tesshu when he was a mere 23 years of age. Later in the Kenpo-Jasei-no-Ben, he wrote.

The secrets of Kenpo do not stop at merely being the secrets of Kenpo. Having gained this knowledge one may apply it on the battlefield, in government, in diplomacy, in education and religion, in trade, manufacturing and farming, only good will result from it. This is why I say that the "Truth of Kenpo", is part of the ultimate truth of all creation.

Does this not settle the point of how all human action is intimately connected to the highest aims of humanity? Therefore, simply put, I like to think that the highest aim of humanity is to make this place (world) a better place. In accordance with the will of the highest and almighty. And although it may be necessary to view Kendo from various angles, in the end by attaching the value of Kendo to the highest aims of humanity we will, I believe, be adding the more to the achievement of the quest.

I have raised a number of points above, but after all is said and done, Kendo is not something to merely theorise about it is something that should be put into practice. Or rather we can say that the true value of Kendo lies at the point where theory and practice come together in unity. Old wisdom says;

"What cannot be put into practice does not exist within Michi"

Shugyo no dotei, or The process of Shugyo

In Shugyo training there are two paths that can be taken; the first path is via the training of the mind - the Kokoro, and the second path is via the training of the physical form, or katachi. In Kendo, Shugyo practical experience is highly valued so emphasis is placed on execution rather than on theorisation; hence to begin via katachi is considered to be the normal course.

The process is known as entering via form to exiting via form, to pass by way of katachi (training the body) to reach the way of kokoro (training of mind and heart) and finally to graduate away completely from both. The ultimate end is to master the formless mysteries. At the beginning of shugyo the essential task is to perfect ones physical skill.

For this purpose it is important to master the basics of Kendo, the kihon of Kendo. Kendo kihon are as important as the basic movements and openings of the games of Go and Shogi (Japanese chess). In Kendo it is of the utmost importance to correct ones posture and striking skill. At the beginning one must refrain from concentrating too much on contest Kendo, or upon trying to rush ones progress. The shortcut is always the longest way. Rather one must work at it properly and correctly and to that end one must never be swayed by ones own opinions. Always aim to follow exactly what one is taught. If one trains with a modest attitude of mind, one will acquire the basics correctly and to some extent the progress will follow naturally.

It is the same for the archer (kyudo) who first masters the correct posture before aiming to hit the target. The painter also pays careful attention to the way of sketching before using paint and the calligrapher masters his brush. In this way one can see how important it is to master the basics of any activity. In the case of the larger tree when the roots are well spread and sturdy the branches above flourish.

In Zen Buddhism, there is the teaching of Shu, Ha, Ri. If we take for example the game of chess, Shu - to obey or adhere corresponds to the first stage of practice when one studies and adheres to the basic moves that have been set down by others. When a certain amount of progress has been made through ones own efforts and ability one begins to break away from this mould and this is the stage of Ha, to break. If further progress is made with the training then eventually a natural breaking free from the conscious attempt to be different will occur, and finally without being aware of it one will part entirely from all such intentions and establish ones own individual path, though remaining within the bounds of the original principles and rules. This last stage is known as Ri, to separate. In the beginning however one must not fail to be obedient to the instructions given by the sensei.

In Kendo there is the following teaching; *Dai, Kyo, Soko, Kei.* (largeness, firmness, speed, alacrity)

These are the qualities to aspire to for physical perfection, though it would be very difficult to grasp all four at the beginning of training. First ones efforts should be focused on achieving the first two. I.e. Dai, Kyo and with progress via Shugyo go on to acquire the remaining two i.e.

Soko and Kei. As in the art of calligraphy, where there are three stages called Shin, Gyro and So, so in Kendo Shugyo there is a natural progression of stages. By taking each one a step at a time one eventually reaches the desired destination, this after all is only a shortcut. Any attempt to rush through this process in the main, gives rise to dubious results and more often than not entrance into the inner sanctuary of Michi becomes impossible.

Moreover, the one thing that is especially important for the shugyosha, or trainee, to keep in mind is **never give up or quit Shugyo**. During the course of Shugyo training one develops and suffers from many doubts and dilemmas and because of these ones zeal for training disintegrates. However it is only by resisting the urge to quit and carry on that such problems that do arise will eventually solve themselves and without fail ones vision will become clearer. The following passage is from a lecture given by Yamaoka Tesshu to his students. In it he tries to explain the process of Shugyo

There are three methods the carpenter adopts when using his plane. They are rough planing, medium planing and finish planing.

To practice rough planing make your body firm, stretch out the stomach and brace the lower trunk then with equal strength in both arms plane to a rough finish. In other words use the strength of your whole body without relaxing it. If you do not use sufficient effort you will not manage to rough plane.

Next there is medium planning. With medium planning it is not merely a question of using all your strength. You must plane the surface flat by adopting a natural modulation of strength in the hands. This is to prepare it for the finish plane. However without the experience gained from rough planing it will not be possible to succeed with medium planing.

Finally there is finish planing. This time the wood that was prepared by earlier medium planing is made even smoother and free of flaws. To do this you must plane with one single stroke at a time, from one end of the timber to the other. If your heart is not calm when you make this single stroke, you will score many flaws and faults into the wood and if there are flaws then the timber has not yet been finished. For the carpenter in his use of the plane this is the most important stage.

First of all you must be in possession of mind, body and technique. For the carpenter mind, body and technique equals plane man and timber. If the man thinks to plane the plane will catch; if the plane is thought to plane it will rise off the timber. To possess mind, body and technique is represented here in the action of one plane, man and timber. If this is not mastered thoroughly then however much you train to be a carpenter you will never plane timber well.

In order to become proficient at planing timber the most effective way is to begin training in the way of rough planing. If you can do this well then you can also manage medium planing and finish planing.

However, in order to finish plane well there is a secret. Although I say it is a secret, actually it is nothing so special. Just put mind, body and technique out of your head and plane away. It is by doing it in this way that you do a good job. And here, without being aware of it, you will have mastered the secret of finish planing. There is something quite interesting about this secret, I think.

Before you have mastered this for yourself, nothing that has been taught you will be of any real use. Thus, there is no other way than to try to discover it for yourself. No matter what you do, there is no way that anyone can communicate this to you.

An important lesson worthy of consideration from a great master of Kendo.

Dojo-no-Saho

In Kendo the greatest importance is attached to proper manners and etiquette, but what is required above all is a serious attitude towards the Michi. If one can fully appreciate from the

bottom of ones heart the value of Kendo as Michi then everything in relation to Michi will be done with an attitude of seriousness and modesty.

If this is the case, it is only natural that the dojo where the Michi is pursued will be considered a sacred place. We are taught to correct our manners starting with outward appearances so when entering the dojo one must be suitably dressed, i.e. if one is wearing Japanese clothing a hakama should be worn. At every dojo one will find venerated upon the alter the martial deities Tensho no Daijin, Katori Myojin (Futsunushi-no Mikoto) and Kashima Myojin (Takemisazouchi-no-Mikoto). When entering and leaving the dojo always make a reverent bow towards the alter as a sign of respect. One must also make a bow towards the alter before and after each and every practice match.

It may be asked why the deities are present upon the alter and why we respect them in this way? Well, there are various reasons for doing so and one reason is to nurture the feeling of awe that is always experienced when one is conscious of their presence. Also we do not wish to lose the open and fair spirit, free of shame that one feels compelled to maintain before such holy onlookers. Moreover, Kendo is the path by which one seeks to be at one with the deities and thus ennoble oneself, so it is fitting for us to train before the representatives of such high ideals. In the Dokugyodo (19 admonitions written by MM during the later part of his life), Miyamoto Musashi has the following admonition for shugyosha.

Pay homage to the deities and Buddha, but do not seek of them

However this was written for the benefit of the more accomplished amongst us. For the novice on the other hand it would not seem to be an inappropriate course to seek the deities' aid in for example taking victory in a tournament or for making progress in general.

As mentioned earlier proper manners are of the greatest importance in Kendo so much so in fact that one always begins and ends procedures with a reverent bow. Also one must behave correctly not only before ones masters and seniors but also before ones peers and subordinates. Bad manners must be admonished.

During shiai or keiko one must not forget to be serious and correct in attitude and action. Unnecessary chatter or laughter by participants and spectators should be censured, especially during shiai. Again, what is particularly reprehensible is the indiscriminate criticism of others when it is not for the purpose of serious study.

Bougu and shinai must be handled with care. The bougu is ones suit of armour and the shinai is ones sword so care must be taken to see that they are not thrown around, sat upon or otherwise treated with disrespect. It need hardly be mentioned that with minor details of this sort that bad habits easily develop. However if one is truly earnest in ones attitude towards Michi then all due care and attention in such matters will be maintained.

It is not enough however to say the one knows that the dojo is a sacred area or that the bougu and shinai should be handled with respect. The primary concern is wither one appreciates the value of Michi. The warrior in the past looked after his sword as his soul. It may also be said that he looked after it because it was a deadly weapon, but more than anything else his respect arose from his high regard for Bushido, The Michi of the warrior. In Kendo this high regard for Michi is a prerequisite. If one is at least possessed of this then all else will follow in good order.

Dojo-kun-jukajo

1. When entering and leaving the dojo make a reverend bow
2. Do not enter the dojo untidily dressed, if dressed in Japanese style a hakama should be worn
3. Maintain a respectful attitude and the most correct posture
4. Be quiet and conscientious, do not engage in noisy chatter, laughter, clapping or cheering
5. After eating allow a suitable amount of time to elapse before training.
6. If you have taken alcohol do not enter the dojo, let alone engage in training.
7. The sword is ones soul, the bougu is ones armour, handle them with respect according to the correct method.
8. The dojo interior must be cleaned morning and evening and kept tidy.
9. Do not comment on other styles of swordsmanship or in each others technique.
10. For those who are training in swordsmanship take caution against shortness of temper or selfishness, do not be quarrelsome but always remain serene of heart.

Shinai-ni-tsuite, or About the shinai

The official length of the shinai (1939), inclusive of the tsuka is 3 shaku 8 sun (115cm). During the Bakafu government which ended in 1868 the length of the shinai was left entirely to the individual or to the tradition in which one trained. However, during the last years of the Bakafu in the Bakamatsu period, masters from every tradition gathered together at the recently established Kobushu¹ dojo in Edo, Tokyo and decided on a length of shinai as standard for normal practice. This is still in use today.¹

Tsukuhara Bokuden² is recorded to have said in regard to the length of the shinai that it should be decided according to ones height. There are many opinions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of using either long or short shinai. Generally speaking a long shinai is useful in developing technique and a short one in developing spirit. In the Muto ryu, a short shinai is used. Yamaoka Tesshu, who founded the style, had the following to say about this;

If one is lacking in natural ability and strength, and there is difficulty in the mastery of technique, begin by training the spirit. It is for this reason that we always use the short sword.

If the skill of swordsmanship is mastered a folding fan or even a tobacco pipe can be used for defending oneself. One may even cope without even the smallest weapons to hand, relying instead on physical agility and what is known as the way of Muto or no sword. Until then in ones years of shugyo keep to the standards that have been set and if necessary adjust the length of ones shinai to suit ones particular stature.

¹ In the third year of ansei (1855) to help prevent the decay in the attitudes of the warrior class, and to encourage training in Bujutsu, the Tokugawa Bakafu founded the Kobushu dojo for the benefit of the Hatamoto (senior retainers).

² Born in the village of Tsukahara, hatachi province (Ibaraki prefecture). His foster father, Tosa-no-kami was a swordsman and student of Iizasa Yamashiro-no-kami. Having mastered the Shinkage ryu under Nobutsuna he eventually established his own style, the Bokuden ryu. It is recorded that he taught swordsmanship to the shoguns Ashikaga Toshiteru and Ashikaga Yoshiaki

Differing opinions also exist regarding the weight on the shinai. A light shinai gives rise to trivial spirit, besides which the mental activity of the individual becomes instantly perceivable through the kensen (point of the shinai). There is also likely to be a bias towards small slick and light technique.

On the other hand, when using a heavy shinai, there is a natural tendency towards calmness, striking is more positive and it helps to cultivate the body and mind. If the shinai is too heavy, however agility and posture will suffer and there is also the possibility of developing certain peculiarities of movement that the opponent can take advantage of. Therefore, it is necessary to select a shinai that accords to one's stature and strength.

As one makes progress in training and so becomes stronger, the shinai one first thought a little heavy eventually becomes easy to handle; therefore during normal training in may prove worthwhile to use at first what seems a slightly heavy shinai.

In Sado (the way of tea) students are taught to handle heavy implements as though they were light in weight and light implements as though they were heavy. In Kendo, too, it is said that we must use a heavy shinai lightly and a light shinai heavily or positively. Consequently when using a light shinai one should strike more positively than with a heavy shinai.

The size and weight of shinai will have a direct bearing on technique. Hence during the course of training one might want to try varying the type of shinai used. For example in order to develop technique one might use a comparatively light shinai. And for training the spirit a comparatively heavy shinai. The same applies to the length of shinai. This may be varied to suit the objectives of training at the time.

Finally I would like to mention the length of the tsuka, which has an important bearing on striking. With a short tsuka one can strike firmly with the hasuji (cutting line of the blade) correctly delivered. If the length of the tsuka is too short in proportion to the entire length of the shinai then the shinai will feel cumbersome and smooth action with it will prove impossible. In the case of an overly long tsuka although the shinai will feel light, striking will not be positive and the cutting edge will not follow through in a sufficiently straight line.

Shisei

The subject of kamae (stances, positions) will be taken up in a later chapter. Here I would like to touch on the subject of Shisei or posture.

Kendo posture is not a subject fraught with particular complexity; on the contrary the essentials may be summed up by saying it comprises of that which is normal and natural. This is true not only of posture but of all aspects of kendo. Through training we are trying to evolve a situation where we are in mind and body devoid of all fixation, stagnation or rigidity. It is said that one must be free of all intention, striving, and attachment or self. In outward posture the highest level to attain is one that is free and unhindered or in other words possessed of that which is normal and natural.

When focusing on one's own posture it is important not to let it dominate one's attention as to so would probably result in something rather stilted and unnatural. Instead try to be natural and aim to follow the principals of nature's way.

In Go Ri No Sho³ Miyamoto Musashi wrote the following concerning posture.

As for posture do not try to raise or lower the head or lean it to one side. Do not let the eyes wander and without wrinkling the forehead form a furrow between the eyebrows, Steady your gaze and try not to blink, narrow your eyes a little more than usual.

³ Go-Ri-N0_sho was written by Musashi during the last years of his life when he lived in Higo-no-kumi (Kumamoto prefecture). The work comprises 5 written scrolls entitled; Earth, Water, Fire, Wind and Emptiness. They are a detailed discussion on the theory and technique of swordsmanship. At the time of his sudden illness which led to his death in 1645 the work was passed on to one of his pupils Terao Shigemasu. It consequently became the traditional teaching manual of the style established by Musashi, the Niten Ichi ryu.

With a calm facial expression hold the bridge of the nose erect and thrust the chin slightly forward. As for the neck, keep the tendon at the back of the neck straight and tense the nape. From the shoulders down maintain an even distribution of tension throughout the entire body, lower the shoulders hold the back straight and do not stick out the buttocks. Tense the legs between the knees and toes and tighten the abdomen so the hips do not bend.

There is teaching which commands us to tighten the knot (of the obi) and hold the stomach in with the sheath of the short sword in such a manner as not to loose the obi.

In all Bujutsu it is essential to make the everyday stance the combat stance and the combat stance the everyday stance.

You must examine this carefully

What Musashi here calls the natural stance is known as shizentai (natural body). In clarity or detail Musashi's description of posture leaves little or nothing to add, however at the risk of being repetitive and for the benefit of the reader I would like to reiterate a few essential details. Hold the head up straight and do not tilt in any direction. Pull the chin in slightly. View the opponent so his face is at the centre of vision, and in such a way, that one can perceive the whole stature. Keep the mouth firmly closed, loosen the shoulders, and free them of any stiffness. Brace the lower stomach, soften the hand joints and grasp the shinai lightly. Furthermore straighten the back, brace forward at the waist and remember not to be stiff in the knees.

If this list were to include every detail for correct posture it would be endless and rather than be of assistance it would only confuse and it is very difficult to describe in words just what is needed for the mastery of posture and so on. I think it is best for the reader to discover what is required for himself. One must achieve a posture free from tension and strain and one from which complete freedom of movement is possible.

Ashi, Footwork

It can be understood from the teaching: Ichi Gan, Ni Soku, San Tan, Shi Riki⁴ Ashisabaki or footwork is one of the most important concerns in kendo. When striking do not strike from the hands but from the koshi, from the legs. The greatest emphasis is placed on footwork as the basis of all physical movement.

Place the right foot forward and the left foot to the rear, with a space of about half a step between them. The feet must point straight forward. The weight of the body should be equally on both feet, taking care to lean neither forward nor back. Relax the tension in the toes. If there is too much tension in the toes, there is not only the danger of tripping up but footwork will be awkward.

Raise the left heel slightly taking care not to bend the knee excessively. If this happens, ones whole body will lean to the rear resulting in a loss of agility and movement. In Go Ri No Sho Musashi wrote the following on the subject of footwork;

As for footwork, slightly raise the tip of the toes and step somewhat firmly on the heels. In footwork, according to the circumstances; There are long strides and short steps, fast and slow but walk with your usual gait. As for the steps call flying (skipping) foot, the floating foot and the firmly locked foot. I dislike all of them. In footwork, In-yo (Yin-Yang, positive/negative) is considered important. The In-yo foot means not just moving one foot. In-yo is to tread with the feet right and left, right and left when cutting, retreating or parrying. One must not just move one foot over and over again. Also, one must not favour one foot over the other.

⁴ Literally Eyes, Legs, Guts, strength (strength can also be interpreted as Perception, Footwork, Spirit and Technique)

Musashi also wrote the following in Heiho Sanjugo Kajo⁵

Concerning two legs, the two legs mean that for one strike of the sword both legs are carried along. When bearing onto the other mans sword, when retreating or when stepping forward or back, the legs move as one. This is what is known as bringing up the rear foot. Stepping only on one foot upon each strike with the sword, your movement will be confined and unable to react properly. If you think of both feet you will always have a walking step. You must study hard!

Issoku Itto means one step one strike with the sword. However there are occasions where nisoku itto or two steps for one strike are required.

The function of kendo footwork can be roughly divided into two, there is footwork by which one retains the physical centre of balance, and there is footwork by which one moves forward and back, right and left. In order to master both, constant practice is essential. Footwork may be linked to a horse on a battlefield, however brave and skilful the warrior riding on its back, if the horse is an inferior pack-horse it cannot possibly be expected to perform well and all will be lost. For warriors in the past strong legs were considered essential. It appears that a great deal of research was carried out into finding the most efficient ways of walking and marching and so on. I have also heard that they used to walk and trek across mountains and plains specifically for the purpose of training the legs.

Boxers train their legs by skipping and running, for kendo also, perhaps exercises such as there are useful methods of training.

To-no-mochikata, the way to hold the sword

When holding the sword do not have the right hand in contact with the tsuba but just a little way from it. With the left hand, hold the sword to reveal just the tsukagashira at the bottom. When holding the shinai there is the possibility of slipping within the hands; to counter this clasp the tsukagashira mid way into the little finger. Also when holding a 3 shaku 8 or 9 sun shinai the correct position for the right hand is four grips distance from the tsukagashira.

The shinai must be held neither too lightly or too loosely. The fist should be wrung inwards so that the gap between the thumb and the index finger is placed along the back of the tang, or in the case of a shinai over the stitching of the tsukagawa.

The sword must be held gently with all the tension taken out of the hand and finger joints. Because most people are stronger in the right hand than in the left there is a tendency to strike using the right hand strength. If too much strength is put into the right hand, the result is hira-uchi⁶ and a decrease in the clarity of the cut. Therefore one must determined to strike with the left hand and as the right hand is the accompanying hand it should be clasped lightly.

For both the right and the left hands, the little, ring and middle finger should clasp the sword with a little firmness while the index finger and thumb should simply be curled around the tsuka. The left hand grip should be slightly firmer than the right hand. When clasping the right hand we are taught that it should be as though holding a hen's egg, though it is difficult to discover the knack of this; the individual should find this for himself.

When striking or when just holding the shinai we are taught also to clasp with a feeling of wringing or twisting in the hands as one would when wringing moisture from a wet tea towel. Be that as it may this subtle skill for clasping the tsuka known as te-no-uchi defies understanding through verbal description, so once again this is something that need be discovered for oneself.

⁵ Heiho Sanjugo Kajo, the 35 articles of heiho was written at the request of Hosokawa Tadatoshi, lord of Higo.

⁶ Hira-uchi or flat striking. When the sword strikes with anything but the cutting edge, a strike made in this way cannot cut. There is also the danger of breaking the sword.

There may be some who ask why so much attention is paid to the correct method of holding the sword. The answer is that if one is unable to hold the sword adequately well not only will correct striking be impossible, but subtle technique or sword skill will prove difficult to develop. Much explanation would be needed in order to describe the correct way of holding the sword for striking, for free execution of technique, for swift reaction and retaining ones grip even when the sword is strongly knocked or brushed aside.

Let us refer once again to the Go-Ri-No-Sho and look at a passage that deals with holding the sword.

As for the manner of holding the sword, hold it rather lightly with the thumb and index fingers neither firmly nor lightly with the middle finger, and firmly with the ring and little fingers. It is not good to have slackness in the hands.

One must always take up the sword with the idea of cutting down the opponent, Also, when one cuts the opponent; grasp the sword without changing the grip in order to prevent the hand from flinching. Even when you strike, parry or force down the opponents sword, slightly adjust the position of the thumb and index finger and in all events grasp the sword with the aim of cutting down the opponent. The grip for test cutting and for actual combat from the standpoint of cutting a man is not different.

In general, whether with long swords or in the manner of holding a long sword, I dislike rigidity, Rigidity means a dead hand and flexibility means a living hand. One must understand this fully.

As may be realised from this the sword is held for the purpose of killing the enemy. Hence the killing of the enemy must be kept in mind at all times... Even when parrying the opponents sword, knocking it downwards, or brushing it aside one must keep in mind that the object is to kill the enemy. A sword that is held with this attitude is a live blade and a sword without it a dead blade. It is vital to hold the sword with ease though at all times be readily and able to dispatch an opponent in an instant.

Kirikaeshi

The importance of basic training has already been mentioned in an earlier chapter dealing with the process of Kendo, but of the many methods used in basic training, perhaps Kirikaeshi is the most essential.

Kirikaeshi is an exercise that all kendo Shugyosha (those who seek to polish the spirit through hard training) must not neglect. Some may think that it is an exercise necessary only for beginners but they are quite mistaken. Of course, it is an important drill for the novice but it is also a drill that is invaluable for the more experienced.

During the first stages of training a student may move to keiko, shiai and the like only after first constructing a foundation for his kendo through basic training. If however, from the start he engages solely in keiko and shiai, excessive concern for winning will result in the development of small technique and bad habits. Attacking with abandon, leaping from a distance and positive striking will all suffer remiss. For the stemming of bad habits, the correction of already established bad habits and for the fostering of large, correct and relaxed kendo there is nothing as effective as the practice of Kirikaeshi. Even so, however effective the practice of Kirikaeshi may be, if it is not done properly it will not have the desired result.

The way to practice Kirikaeshi is as follows; from toi-maai (long distance) raise a load attacking kiai and leap in to strike men with a large and straight blow, follow it with 5 or 7 or 9 more oblique strikes to the left and right men, beginning and ending with a strike to the receivers left side. Again break off and step out to the required distance and repeat the process. When making the oblique strikes they must be accompanied by load attacking kiai (men, men, men)

Kirikaeshi-no-chou (does and dont's of Kirikaeshi)

- Relax the shoulders
- When striking straighten the elbows
- Do not sway the head, waist etc, to the rhythm of the strikes
- Keep control of the gap between the feet, and of posture during the advancing and retreating
- Take care to avoid striking with the back or side of the shinai
- Always strike to the obliquely to the men with the feeling of actually cutting it
- Always raise the shinai and fully strike

It is essential to practice Kirikaeshi fully and correctly, if one seeks only speed, striking will become imprecise, insufficient and small. Always aim for precision and then with improvements gradually increase the speed.

Kirikaeshi-no-toku (the benefits of Kirikaeshi)

1. Improves posture
2. Develops fiercer technique
3. Increase stamina
4. Develops stronger and surer striking
5. Makes the shoulder more supple
6. Develops clear and sharp te-no-uchi
7. Develops free and fluid arm action
8. The body becomes light and agile
9. Develops free use of the long sword
10. Develops the ability to maintain posture
11. Develops sharper eyesight (i.e. powers of observation)
12. Develops swifter technique
13. Improves footwork
14. Develops a calm mind
15. Develops awareness of striking distance
16. Corrects tachi-suji or understanding the cutting plane of the blade (hasuji??)
17. Develops the ability to strike form toi-maai
18. Strengthens the arms
19. Strengthens the spirit
20. Strengthens the whole body

There are many other benefits that could be added to the list. At times for instance when technique does not flow as it should, when ones confidence for shiai is low, or when the spirit in general is at a low ebb, the practice of Kirikaeshi is the best remedy.

The person who is receiving Kirikaeshi must allow enough distance for striking. He must alter the intensity of the practice according to the ability and strength of the student while at all times drawing him out spiritually.

Kirikaeshi-uke-no-toku (the benefits of receiving Kirikaeshi)

1. Posture improves
2. The body becomes light and agile
3. Develops clearer eyesight
4. Develops awareness of the opponents skill
5. Develops awareness of distance
6. Develops surer and sharper te-no-uchi
7. Develops parrying skills
8. Calms and quietens the mind

Again, if we were to take into consideration other more subtle benefits we would discover many more advantages to be had from receiving Kirikaeshi. If sound and correct Kirikaeshi is practiced continually and without falter one will never cease to make good progress and an excellent style of keiko will result.

Uchikata - The way of striking

Before explaining the way of striking, the targets for striking are as follows;

sho-men
migi-men
hidari-men
migi-kote
tsuki

and in some cases, jidare kote, migi-do hidari-do

The hidari-kote may only be struck as the opponent is raising his shinai to the jodan position or just at the moment he moves the shinai from that position to strike; in other words upon the age-kote or rising kote. In the case of real combat of course it would not matter where one struck or thrust in order to kill the opponent, but for convenience and safety during keiko only the above mentioned areas may be attacked. The purpose of cutting is to kill the enemy, and although there is no absolute rule that insists one should have to strike either here or there, a strike when made should conform to the following;

1. It must be sufficient to cut as if one is using a real sword
2. Upon striking one must remain in control of ones stance and posture
3. Also upon striking, a position must be taken from which if necessary a further cut or reply can be made freely and immediately (zanshin)

It is written that "strikes and cuts are not made with force of strength; even when striking a drum, the correct sound is produced by using a sharp wrist action"⁷

One must not use strength alone. If too much strength is applied to the strike and it fails to reach the target ones posture will be thrown into disarray and one will be unable to follow up the attack would there be a need to.

Do not think of striking with the right hand, strike with the left, do not think of striking with the left hand, strike with the koshi (hips), strike with the legs and feet. To put it another way, strike using the whole of ones body, and ultimately strike with the kokoro. There is nothing better than positive striking; the difficulty arises from knowing the right amount of strength to apply. There are two degrees of intensity of striking. Men and Do must be struck soundly, but only a light strike is sufficient for kote. The teaching Dai-kyo-soku-kei appeared earlier, but this is a particularly pertinent teaching when applied to striking. It is important for the beginner to aim for large and positive striking at first and then in the course of time to train for speed and alacrity. Positive striking is particularly important.

One result of paying too much attention too much to contest Kendo is light striking, so keep in mind the concept of real sword combat and Itto-ryoden - cutting in two with a single stroke. In the Kendo Meijin-ho (a collection of thoughts and anecdotes about Kendo), there is the following;

When thrusting thrust with the feeling of thrusting two or three feet through the back of the opponent. In jujutsu-keiko you will have difficulty in throwing your opponent if you only think of throwing him to the mat. It must be through the floorboards and three feet into the ground. Kaiho Hanbei, of the Itto-ryu once said that when striking the men of the opponent from jodan you should strike it with the feeling of cutting right through to his anus.

A common tendency for beginners when striking is for them to put all their strength into raising the shinai and using none when striking forward. Only after much practice do they eventually learn to reduce the use of excessive strength and inject only what is sufficient at the moment of contact. However firmly a strike is made, if the hasuji is not correct the blade will not cut, so striking must be made with correct hasuji. In the Heiho Sanjugo Kajo there is the following;

⁷ The above quotation is from the Itto-ryu Kikigaki

Concerning the use of the sword, if you are not familiar with the use of the sword, you will have difficulty in wielding it as you wish.

If you wield it with insufficient strength, if you strike with the sides or the back of the blade, or if you wield it as you would a short sword, or use it as you would a rice masher, your efforts to cut an opponent will fail.

Always try to understand the way of the sword and when using a heavy sword wield it calmly; train hard in how to strike properly⁸

Knowing the ways of the sword and being familiar with its principles are important elements for knowing the way of striking. In the previous chapter, we looked at the proper way of holding the shinai. The basis for correct striking begins with knowing how to hold the shinai so first of all study the correct way of holding and then practice the correct way of striking.

The skills with the sword may be divided into the categories of striking, thrusting and parrying; but if one masters the skill of striking the skills of thrusting and parrying will follow automatically. Of the methods for developing striking skill, suburi, iai and tameshigiri are probably the most effective, though suburi is simplest to do and is the most favourable for the beginner.

Again in Heiho Sanjugo Kajo we find out;

Concerning the hit and strike, to strike is to cut the target positively, as in test cutting (tameshigiri). Again to hit is to aim a blow at the opponent where you cannot see where to make a proper cut. A hit can be made with strength, but not a cut. With a hit it does not matter if you hit the opponent, his sword or even if you miss. However, always try to make a true cut with the intention of using the whole body.

If when you strike you fail to strike with a straight hasuji, and instead strike with the side or the back of the blade, the action cannot be called a strike or a cut, rather it is more accurately called a hit. In this day and age (1925) with the emphasis on shinai contest it is inevitable that not enough attention is given to studying the proper way of striking. However skilful ones technique may be if striking is not properly performed ones skill will serve no useful purpose if one suddenly had to revert to real swords.

Here follows a simple explanation of the ways to strike various targets;

Striking Shomen: Raise both hands until the left hand is about one fists distance above the forehead. While making one step forward, reach forward with the arms and strike to opponent directly to the front. The right arm should be about shoulder level and the left arm should be about level with the breast. The back and waist should not be bent. The right hand should not be too strong. Strike with relaxed shoulders and brace forward the stomach at the moment of impact. Shomen is the most important strike and if this can be made sufficiently well all other techniques will follow with ease.

Striking Kote: Raise the left fist to a fists distance in front of the forehead and strike the Kote as you step forward. Take care not to bend the left knee.

Striking Migi do: Raise the left fist to a fists distance in front of the forehead the right hand above and the left hand below. With the two fists in contact with each other strike diagonally the do as you step forward with the right foot. If the hands are not turned correctly at the moment of impact the hasuji will not pass through correctly, so take care. Upon contact straighten the back and brace forward at the waist.

Striking Hidari do: The same method as above, advancing one step forward the arms from the right diagonal and strike the left do.

Thrusting Tsuki: advance and stretch forward hands and arms to thrust the opponents throat protector.

⁸ Kaiho Hanbei, a native of Mito and a senior student of Chiba Shusaku, founder of the Hokoshin Itto-ryu (1794-1855)

These are only brief descriptions of Kendo techniques: there are others such as naname-men, katate-tsuki and so on. The explanation of which I will leave to later.

Kamae (Positions and Stances)

Kamae can be roughly divided into two main groups, namely physical kamae (*katachi-no-kamae*) and mental kamae (*kokoro-no-kamae*). *Katachi no kamae* pertains to the physical stance taken in confronting an opponent, they resemble the battle formations known as Gyorin, Kakuyoku and Ganko⁹ On the other hand *kokoro-no-kamae* pertains to ones mental stance. This refers to the formless and mentally adaptive stance.¹⁰

There are 5 stances relating to the *katachi-no-kamae*: these are *jodan*, *chudan* and *gedan*, *in* and *yo*. The five are known collectively as the *goho-no-kamae* or *gogyo-no-kamae*. The kamae most commonly used today are *chu*, *jo* and *gedan*. I shall explain briefly about the *gogyo-no-kamae*.

Jodan-no-kamae may be either right or left handed. With the left hand or *hidari-jodan* the sword is raised above the head and the left foot advanced. With right handed or *migi jodan* the right foot is advanced. Both positions are taken with a feeling of looking down on the opponent with a spirit resembling a raging fire. It is used to suppress the opponent with the threat of striking his *sho-men*. It is essential to suppress the opponents will and action with ones own and to give away not even the slightest opportunity to attack.

With *chudan-no-kamae*, a threat is projected at the opponents throat by way of the point of ones sword. The left fist is placed at about a fists distance from the navel and a little below. The feet are positioned with half a steps distance between them, the right foot to the front. The position should be taken as if one had come to a natural halt while walking.

In *Gedan-no-kamae*, the tip of the sword is aimed at a point a few inches below the knees of the opponent, and its use is similar to that of *chudan-no-kamae*. Rather than being a position from which to launch an attack it is more suitable for defence and allows a free reply to an opponents moves.

This covers the explanation of the three kamae otherwise known as *Ten-no-kamae*, Heaven position, *Chi-no-kamae*, Earth position and *Hito-no-kamae*, Man position.

Another name for *In-no-kamae* is *Hasso-no-kamae*. It is similar to *Hidari jodan* with the right fist lowered to about level with the right shoulder and the left hand held in front of the pit of the stomach. From this position the opponent is observed and countered.

Finally in *Yo-no-kamae*, the sword is held to the right of the body with the tip aimed down to the lower rear (*waki-kamae*). The right foot is retreated to leave the left foot forward. This position is also known as *Waki-no-kamae* and is used similarly to *In-no-kamae*. The positions of *In* and *Yo* are found within the forms of *Kendo-no-kata* but are not used nowadays on *keiko* or *shiai*. Among the traditional styles and disciplines of swordsmanship there are many variations of kamae but those mentioned are above are the 5 main or root positions.

In fact, as may be gathered from the teachings of *Uko-Muko*¹¹ there are no hard and fast positions. There is no such thing as a position from which victory is certain, or from which any opponent can be defeated. Of the different kamae their advantages and disadvantages should be understood in order to respond readily and flexibly to all situations. Ones ultimate aim must be to draw away from any attachment to *katachi-no kamae* and to emphasise *kokoro-no-kamae*.

⁹ Gyorin, a battle formation resembling the scales of a fish. It was used by a small force to deal a decisive blow against a larger force. Kakuyoku: like the expanded wings of a crane, it was used to surround the enemy. Ganko originated from the way wild geese fly in formation, a variant on the other two and used to press down upon and surround the enemy,

¹⁰ The word used here is *kyojitsu* which can be translated as emptiness and reality, void and substantial, is not and is etc. Takano Sakichiro Mitsumasu in the *Itto-ryu kikasi* says of this, ***When the skilled swordsman strikes he makes as if not to strike and strikes. The unskilled swordsman makes as if to strike and does not strike, making as if not to strike is kyo, striking is jitsu. Kokoro is kyo and the sword is jitsu: empty the heart and mind and make technique the reality.***

¹¹ Literally there are positions and no positions

As long as one continues to rely on ones sword and ones stance one is still a long way from becoming an accomplished swordsman. Ones mind must strike the mind of the opponent and with it penetrate through the opponents defence.

The katachi-no-kamae must be compared to the moat, walls and fortifications of a castle. However strong these are if the general in command is not master of the arts of war the castle will not always be successfully defended. In the same way it is the mysterious workings of the mind and heart that control the physical form and this is what I call kokoro-no-kamae. However splendid in appearance the outward form may be, if it is not under the skilful command from within it is like a fine castle without a general only waiting for the enemy to march in and plunder it. Thus the outward and inner stance shares a deep and inseparable relationship, and the emphasis must be placed on inner stance.

An important aspect of kamae is the inner compensation for outward weaknesses, and vice versa. The subtle tactics of deception indicated here can be most interesting.

At this point let us refer again to Go-rin-no-sho and learn about kamae from a swordsman of the past.

The five positions, jodan, chudan, gedan, migi-no-waki and hidari-no-waki. Are called the five directions (goho-no-kamae). Although the positions are divided into five, they all have the aim to cut men. As regards positions, there are no other besides these.

No matter which position you take, do not think of it as a position, think only of it as a process of cutting. As for great or small postures, it is good to take the most efficacious stance according to circumstances. The upper, middle and lower are fixed (firm) positions. The two side positions are fluid. The right and left positions are useful when there are obstructions overhead or to the side. Whither to elect to take the left or right position is to be decided according to the circumstances.

One must understand that the best position, the secret of this school (niten-ichi-ryu) is the chudan position. The chudan position is the essence of this school. Figuratively speaking the chudan position is analogous to the seat of a general in a great battle. The other four positions follow and obey the general. One must study this very hard.

When I speak of having position and not having positions I mean that it is not necessary to have fixed long sword positions, However when it is pointed out that there are five positions, it is indeed possible to have five positions.

The jodan position, depending on the situation of the moment, becomes chudan, likewise chudan depending on the circumstances becomes jodan.

Both side positions depending on the position if moved slightly to the centre becomes either chudan or gedan.

For these reasons it is true that there are, and there are not positions. Above all when taking up the long sword it is important to cut the opponent. Even if one blocks, hits, strikes or touches the long sword of the opponent when he attacks, these are all opportunities for cutting the opponent. One must study this.

When one thinks of blocking, striking or hitting or holding or touching one cannot concentrate on cutting,

In all events, it is important to think of all things as a means of cutting. One must study hard.

Thus the aim of all kamae is to defeat the opponent. The position must serve well for defence or attack and can be accompanied by a spirit directed at cutting down the opponent.

Me-no-Tsukekata, the way of perception

As shown in the kendo teaching Ichi-Gan, Ni-Ashi, San-Tan, Shi-Riki the importance of perception is indicated by the fact that it is accorded first place.

It is usually thought that the eyes should be focused on the opponents face, or else upon a particular point such as the eyes or hands. At the beginning the novice usually looks straight at the target he wants the strike immediately prior to cutting it. By doing so it is practically the same as telling the opponent ones intentions and therefore extremely disadvantageous. The eyes should always be directed towards the opponent so that his face occupies the centre of vision while at the same time remaining aware of the opponent in his entirety. In the same way as looking at a distant mountain, one must view the opponent with a long focus and be aware at a single glance of his whole aspect, from head to foot. When you are at close quarters with the opponent if you focus only on his face or hands your field of vision will be very narrow, but if you view him with a feeling of distance you will see not only his whole figure but also the areas on either side, without having to move the eyes.

Even so, although the whole figure of the opponent may be viewed in this way, there are two places upon which one should remain particularly aware. One is the point of the opponents sword, the other is the area of his hands. If either of these do not move it is impossible for the opponent to come forward and strike, so long as they remain within view one should naturally be able to divine his moves. Again it is said that the eyes are the windows to the heart, whatever is being contemplated within never fails to be revealed through the eyes. Thus when one is confronted by an inferior opponent look into his eyes and penetrate his thoughts. On the other hand when opposite someone superior there is a possibility that ones own thoughts and intentions will be read in this way. To counter this avoid the gaze, and, as is taught in some traditional manuals, look elsewhere, for instance towards his obi (belt) as a tactic to confuse him.

The purpose of correct vision is of course to clearly comprehend the situation but should one become fixated on a certain point there is the danger this may cause fear and confusion. There once existed a tradition of swordsmanship called the Mugan-ryu¹². The no eyes style. Perhaps it evolved to counter this danger ?

In Izawa Banryo's¹³ Bushi-Kun there is the following;

An old teaching says that as soon as you open your eyes you begin to err. This means that you become attached to where you focus your gaze. For example when you look to the left you forget the right, and when you look to the right you forget the left. If you look at the opponents hands your attention will be directed to his hands and if you look to his feet, your attention will be drawn to his feet. In this situation you resemble an empty house. A thief could steal into an empty house as there is no master at home to prevent it. Therefore keep a broad view and avoid fixated vision.

Again, in Go-rin-no-sho;

Look by the eyes of kan and ken (kan the profound and intuitive eye of the psyche, ken the physical eye of superficial vision). Strengthen the kan and look into the heart of the opponent, look at the situation, look widely with the eyes, watch the aspect of the battle, watch the weaknesses and strengths of the moment. It is the only way to discover directly the way to win.

Kan and ken, the two ways of looking, kan to look from the heart and ken to look from the eyes; one sees broadly with kan and from point to point with ken. To strengthen the eye of kan, in other words, to make the general view your aim, you must attach importance to the eye of your heart, shingan. This is indeed a point to be taken seriously. In short do not look at the narrow points but take a general view; do not look with the naked eye but with your heart.

Furthermore, in the Itto-ryu densho¹⁴

¹² There are no sure records of the Mugan-ryu tradition, It is said to have developed during the mid Tokugawa period by a student of Miura Genemon Masatame named Sorimachi Mukaku

¹³ Izawa Banryo, a samurai from Higo province in the mid-Tokugawa period. Other names; nagahide, Jurozaemon, Banryosji. A scholar of Chinese and Japanese classics, he studied under Yamazaki Ansai: he also practiced sekiguchi-ryu iaijutsu

When trying to beat the opponent by attacking him at the left side of his sword (ura), cast your eyes on the right side of his sword (omote). If you do the opponent will defend his right side and leave his left side undefended.

In the same way, when about to strike men glance down at the opponents kote and so draw his attention towards the kote, this will reveal a weakness at his men, which can be struck. This is rather a crude tactic but one to be kept in mind.

There is a teaching which says 'attack the enemy at a place where the sun shines into his eyes' perhaps as a result of shugyo training the eyes develop an intensity that can dazzle an opponent like the morning sun.

Takegoe, the shouts

One way in which kiai (vital spirit) is expressed and directed at the opponent is through the making of takegoe; however takegoe for its own sake may also serve to give information about ones mental position which the opponent can use to his advantage. Takegoe causes the following;

1. It stimulates the spirit
2. It focuses ones resources upon a single point, thereby producing greater than normal power
3. It makes the opponent aware of ones power and spirit
4. It forestalls the opponents intentions
5. It confuses the opponent
6. It draws the opponent on
7. It nettles the opponent
8. It startles the opponent
9. It declares ones victory

Mitsu-no-koto - The 3 yells. The 3 yells are divided into Sho, or pre-yell, the Chu or daring Yell, and the Go the post yell, depending on the circumstances, yelling is very important because yelling encourages us, we can yell at such things as fires and also at the wind and the waves. Yells demonstrate spirit.

In large scale battles, the yell given at the onset of the combat is loud in order to overawe the other side. Again, yells during combat are pitched low from deep within the abdomen. Furthermore , following victory in battle, the yell is strong and loud.

In single combat, also one yells 'EI' just before initiating a strike in order to shake up the opponent and after the yell delivers a blow with the long sword, again the yell given after scoring a hit on the opponent is the yell of victory. These two are called sengo no koe, or before and after yells.

One does not yell simultaneously with the delivery of a strike with the long sword. Again, because the yells are used in actual combat to help maintain timing, they are pitched low. These things are to be studied diligently.

The above is taken from the Go-rin-no-sho. Depending on the aim of the moment the nature of ones takegoe should change to a high or low, larger or smaller, quick or slow pitch, but also differing in tone and pitch. This requires careful study.

The novice is easily confused as to the difference between takegoe and kiai; it is hoped that this explanation has helped to make this difference clear. Kiai is not expressed only through takegoe, one must also realise the importance on silent kiai.

It is said we must move 'from the voiced to the non-voiced' It has long been the teaching that as we advance technically and spiritually, we should shift the emphasis from voiced to non voiced

¹⁴ itto-ryu densho, the main teaching manual of Itto-ryu, it is composed of 5 sections; Mokuroko, Somokuroku, JunMenkyo, menkyo and Hiden

kiai. However this can only take place after ones skill has matured and spirit cultivated. Normally one must make loud and strong kakego. In order to do this one must train hard. Kendo kakegoe should resemble the roar of a lion and have the power to send a shudder through the opponent. An acquaintance of mine, who is also a swordsman once told me that he had learned much about kakegoe by going to the zoo and listening to the roar of the lions.

Waze ni tsuite, concerning technique

How to strike with the shinai has been explained in the earlier chapter (Uchikata). The techniques used for the way of striking are called waza. In other words the earlier chapter deals with how to deliver a blow and waza refers to the skills and techniques for striking the opponent.

In Sumo wrestling there are 12 arching techniques, 12 twisting ones, 12 throwing ones and 12 attacking ones, making a total of 48 techniques, but these are only the basic forms. If all the variations of these techniques were included in the number, it would be infinite. It is the same with Kendo. The number of techniques possible is limitless and to try to list each and every one would prove to be a difficult task.

Of course, knowledge of these techniques must be left to individual study. However it is advantageous, particularly in shiai to increase even a little the number of waza in ones repertoire, and to this end one must strive to develop ones technique during normal training. Also it may be well to develop techniques that one is particularly strong. Especially among 2nd and 3rd Dan students, there is a great difference between those who have and those who do not have specialities. It may be said even that given the same training experience the possessor of speciality techniques will win every time. The Shogi (chess master), Kimura Terao, once said that during the novice stage if one can develop a particular forte his chances of winning are greatly improved.

However, if one becomes over reliant on these specialities, ones skill will become lop sided and while one may possess a certain skill with a few techniques one will be poor at the rest. The ideal position is to raise all techniques to the level of speciality, to develop all waza to the full and be deficient in none.

Just as every technique has its weaknesses as well as its strengths the result in favouring one or a few particular techniques is to produce strength on the one hand but also a great vulnerability on the other. If ones stock of waza is full and all embracing all situations can be handled and great Just as every technique has it's weaknesses as well as its strengths the result in favouring one or a few particular techniques is to produce strength on the one hand but also a great vulnerability on the other. If one's stock of waza is full and all embracing all situations can be handled and great blunders avoided. Moreover, of the many and various waza there are those for attacking (sen) and those for parrying and replying (Go). Of the two, special emphasis should be placed on the attacking waza. This is particularly so for the novice who ought first of all to concentrate on developing positive and direct attacking forms.

Also, there are single, double, treble, quadruple waza; that is multiple technique, or renzoku-waza.

Takuan Zenji¹⁵ writes in the Taiki:

'The master swordsman may take life or give it. When it is needed to take it he takes it, when it is not needed to take it he does not. Whether to kill or let live is decided from within.'

The secret of kendo is to strike heart with heart, where actual technique is no longer needed; however, there are steps and stages that have to be passed through first as there is no way of leaping right to the peak of this mountain. Essentially speaking, to slay the opponent with a single blow and to reduce the need for multiple technique is the ultimate aim of sword technique, though at the beginning one cannot expect to be able to do this. If one's first blow misses a multiple technique should follow immediately until the opponent is stopped, In shiai, renzoku-waza is extremely effective so thorough training in this is recommended.

¹⁵ Takuan Zenji, a Zen priest and founder of the Shinagawa Tokai-ji temple. He discussed swordsmanship from the standpoint of Zen with Yagyu Tajima-no-kami Munenori instructor of the Shogun (early 17th century). The Taiki deals with the relationship between swordsmanship and phsycology.

In the following chapters, I shall try to explain in concrete terms the various waza, though due to limited space it is impossible to detail each and every one. First, I shall examine the more general one stroke techniques of men, kote, do, tsuki and the waza from jodan.

Men Waza

Kote-o-semete Men - threatening Kote strike Men

Plying the point of the opponents sword with full spirit, make as if to strike Kote. This will draw the opponents attention towards defending his Kote thus revealing a weakness at his Men which one immediately takes advantage of.

Tsuki-to-misete Men - Appearing to thrust tsuki, strike men

With full spirit make as if to strike tsuki. The opponent will attempt to parry this and reveal a weakness at his men which one immediately strikes.

Do-o-misete Men - Appearing to strike Do, strike men

As with the threat to Kote as explained above, draw the opponents attention down to Do and strike men.

Semikomi- Men - Drive in and strike men

Overwhelm the opponent with force of spirit and launch in and attack as his position disintegrates and immediately strike men.

Harai Men - Sweep aside the opponents sword and strike

When the opponents defence is strong and an opening does not present itself, sweep his sword aside to the left or right and immediately strike shomen.

Debana Men - strike men at the onset of his technique

Just as the opponent appears to launch his attack, immediately strike men

Hikihana Men - strike men at the moment of his retreat

Just as the opponent moves to the rear leap in and strike men

Nuki Men - Avoid the opponents strike to kote and strike men

As the opponent moves to strike kote, raise the sword to avoid this and at the same moment strike men.

Suriage Men - Sweep away the opponents sword and strike

As the opponent makes a strike at men, sweep his sword away to the right or left using the shinogi, the ridge of the sword, and strike.

Ojikaeshi Men - Parry and strike men

As the opponent moves to strike men, parry or deflect his sword to the right or left using a flick of the wrists and strike men. In order to strike a step must be made to the left or right.

Makiotoshi Men – drive down the opponents sword and strike men

Screw the opponents sword to the right or the left and cast it down (or omit the casting action) and strike men as his sword is out of centre.

Nuki-yoko-men - Avoid the opponents technique and strike oblique men

As the opponent attacks kote, release the right hand grip and step to the left and strike his right men with an oblique cut. Again this technique can be made by stepping to the right and striking his left men, using the right hand to make the stroke. Either of these techniques can be used against a tsuki attack.

Semekomi-yoko Men - Drive in and strike oblique men

Drive in to attack as if making to strike kote., or lower the point of the sword as if to threaten tsuki, thus producing a weakness in the opponents men. Immediately strike his right men using the single left handed technique, remembering to stretch the left arm and strike with correct hasuji. It is also important when making this technique to keep the right hand close to the waist or stomach and have the chest out at the moment of striking.

Hanari-giwa-no Men - strike men upon retreat from tsubazerai

When close in with the opponent at the position known as tsubazerai, take advantage of the opponents weakness and strike men as you withdraw. The opportunity to strike can be created by overwhelming him with spirit, catching him as he loses balance, or at the moment of separation.

Kote waza

Kote - Direct strike to kote

Perceiving a weakness at the opponents kote, advance immediately and strike it.

Men-o-semete Kote - threaten to strike men and strike kote

Make as if to strike men and cause the opponent to protect this, thus revealing a weakness at his kote, which one strikes immediately.

Tsuki-o-semete Kote - Threaten to thrust tsuki and strike kote

Same as for the above technique

Harai Kote - sweep aside the opponents sword and strike kote

To sweep down (from the left side of the opponents sword to the right) and swiftly strike to exposed kote.

Osae Kote - Strike the kote as the opponents sword falls

As the opponent strike for men, strike his kote while stepping aside

Age Kote - Strike the kote at the onset of his attack

Just at the moment the opponent is about to launch an attack to the men or do, strike his kote at the instant the sword raises to attack.

Oji Kote - parry and strike kote

As the opponent tries to strike kote, men or migo do, parry his sword and strike kote.

Katsugi Kote - striking kote from the shoulder

Raise the sword to the left shoulder and as the opponent is confused by the variation, strike his kote without delay.

Do Waza

Nuki-Do - avoiding the opponents attack, strike do

As the opponent attacks men, sink slightly at the waist and advance to the right front. With a feeling of brushing the shoulders with the opponent strike the right side of his do.

Tobikomi-Do - leap in and strike do

With abandon, raise the sword above your head, as the opponent raises his hands in defence a weakness will be revealed at his do which must be struck immediately

Oji-Do - Parry and strike do

As the opponent strikes men, parry his sword and strike do as you advance to the right front.

Men-o-semete-Do - threaten to strike men and strike do

Move as if you are about to strike men and strike the revealed opening at his do.

Tsubazerai-Do - strike to do from the tsubazerai position

At the moment of tsubazerai slightly oppress the opponents hands and as the pressure is returned immediately withdraw and strike do.

Gyaku-Do - strike the left side of the do (opponents left)

As the opponent tries to strike migi-yokomen with a single handed technique parry his sword to the right, return the hands and strike the left side of his do. Again, if the opponent tries a single handed thrust (tsuki) parry this in the same way and strike left do.

Tsuki Waza

Morote - tsuki Double handed thrust

If a weakness is revealed at the mune (throat protector) of the opponent thrust forward the arms and strike tsuki, remembering to wring inwards with the hands (te-no-uchi). Also do not forget to withdraw immediately.

Omote - tsuki thrust to the right side of the opponent sword

Thrust past the right side of the opponents tsuba and thrust in with the blade angled to the right (the mune or back to the left)

Ura - tsuki thrust to the left of the opponents sword

Same as above with the blade angled to the left and the mune to the right.

Hidari Katate-tsuki - Thrust made with the left hand.

Thrust with the left hand only, with a turning inward action of the fist. At the same time release the grip of the right hand and keep it at the waist.

Kote-o-semete tsuki - Threaten attack to the kote and thrust tsuki.

Threaten an attack to the kote and thrust at the appearance of an opening at the men-tare.

Harai-tsuki - Sweep aside the opponents sword and thrust tsuki.

Sweep the opponent's sword aside with a Harai-waza, a winding deflection and thrust at once at the exposed men-tare.

Tsuki-kaeshi-tsuki - counter a thrust with a thrust.

As the opponent thrusts to tsuki deflect this with a snap of the wrists and return the thrust immediately.

Maai, Distance and Interval.

Maai, in its broadest interpretation, in physical terms pertains to the distance or interval that is maintained between two swordsmen. In terms of time, it pertains to the momentary lapses of awareness that are manifested in the opponent's mind. These may be compared to the swinging to and fro of a clock's pendulum. Extended further, it also embraces the concept of Kyojitsu. These momentary lapses of mind, and Kyoritsu, we may call the 'kokoro-no-maai' (mental interval). The import of kokoro-no-maai is that although the physical distance between

combatants may be mutually advantageous, the mental interval possessed by individuals will determine who will have the decisive advantage. Much of the mysteries of maai are encompassed within the workings of mental interval. As may be deduced from the old teaching 'For him it is far, for myself it is close'

However, maai is generally interpreted to mean the actual distance between the combatants.

Amongst the specialised terms used in kendo today are some that have remained unchanged for three or even five hundred years. Not all these terms are particularly suitable for what they are supposed to describe and we cannot help but think that they are a little vague and perhaps deserve new and more suitable interpretations. Be that as it may, these terms are used to express extremely subtle, technical and spiritual concepts and therefore make redefining with more modern and appropriate terms a very difficult task. All said and done, at least for some time to come, we have to rely on these traditional terms.

In kendo, there is the teaching: 'Issoku itto-no-maai' or 'the distance equalling one step to make one strike'. This refers to the distances of about two metres between opponents; from which either need advance only one step in order to strike the other. Normally, most techniques are initiated at this distance. A distance narrower than this is known as 'Chika-ma' (close distance), and a distance greater is known as 'to-ma' (long distance). At to-ma, there is a small margin of time to allow for a reaction to be made against an opponent's attack. But at Issoku itto-no-ma there exists almost no margin at all, so that at this distance one's attention has to remain constantly alert and unbroken. Furthermore at to-ma, if the opponent is fleet of foot and his footwork is good, in other words, if to-ma happens to be his strongpoint, then the situation becomes the same as for Issoku itto-no-ma and again one's guard cannot be relaxed in the slightest. Usually however there is comparative safety in taking up a position at to-ma, as when rising from sonkyo to face the opponent.

It is not possible to leap into the attack from to-ma unless one's footwork is up to the mark; therefore always endeavour to train from this distance, as there are great advantages to be had from so doing. At to-ma an opponent inept at footwork and technique can be struck with ease while at the same time a position of safety can be maintained. Of the various maai the Chiki-ma is the least demanding physically and is this the easiest to find oneself drifting into. To counter this, especially at the beginning of one's shugyo always try to train from to-ma.

Concerning maai in more concrete terms, if the opponent at issoku-itti-no-ma need only take one step in order to strike men, then it follows that if one takes one step to the rear the opponents sword will fall short.

Again, if by retreating one cannot avoid the opponents sword one may cause it to miss by stepping either to the left or right. Or else one could avoid the blow by leaping into the opponent himself.

These actions belong to the tactics of maai, consequently we could say that maai is the way by which advantageous distance is maintained through movement to the rear, front, left or right.

Even as one is trying to maintain a suitable distance from the opponent, he too, is active for the same reasons, so one must continue to manoeuvre in accordance with his activities and the changing situation. "know the opponents maai and know ones own" and always take an advantageous position, although this is most difficult to do. First of all it is vital to be aware of ones own maai. To know that from a certain distance one can strike successfully and that from any other one cannot: this must be grasped thoroughly through regular training.

The beginner will come to understand his maai through exercises like Kirikaeshi and uchikomi and through being taught that such and such a distance is enough for striking in, or striking stepping out and so on.

It has already been said that every effort should be made to train from to-ma but at the same time one must not neglect the study of chiki-ma. Just as there are techniques from to-ma so too there are techniques from chiki-ma and it is necessary to study these too. Again it is not a good thing to develop a bias towards either distance, one must, rather, practice to become fully confident at any maai. Moreover against one who is strong in to-ma engage him in chiki-ma,

and against one who is strong in chiki-ma engage him in to-ma. The strategy of attacking the opponent where he is weakest is most advantageous.

If one could watch Miyamoto Musashi at shiai, one would notice that although the opponents appears to strike or thrust at Musashi's head or chest, in fact it fails to touch him at all. One day when some of his more able pupils who were amazed at this ability asked him how he managed it; Musashi explained it like this;

'That is well noticed. It is known as 'tachisaki-no-mikiri'¹⁶, and is the most important thing to do in shiai and shinken-shobu.

When you are a beginner, you must train hard at the five positions. After that, you may train in the way of tachisaki-mo-mikiri. Without unnecessary use of the five positions, you must learn to avoid being touched by the point of the opponent's sword.

Just how does tachisaki-no-mikiri work?

Well you must gauge a distance of just one-inch between the point of the opponent's sword and yourself. If there is at least the distance of one inch, even if he strikes or thrusts, the point of his sword will not touch you. If you are unable to gauge a distance of one inch then his sword may strike you, so you must either receive or parry. However, at first it may be difficult to gauge one inch, so first of all train by gauging a distance of five or six inches and then three or four inches gradually decreasing the interval until you gauge one inch.

Well, there is no doubt that one inch is quite minute, but it is the way of kenjutsu that what is important is usually minute and subtle. If you train with this in mind, you will come to grasp the way of mikiri. From now on, I will instruct you in this.'

After this explanation he chose from his pupils those skilled in footwork and had them attack him with various techniques while he called out to them the distance by how much the points of their swords were falling short; by one, two, three inches, and so on. On occasion, he also struck back at his pupils, purposely missing them and calling out the distances by which he missed.

The above story is taken from the 'Kenjutsu Rakuba-shu' said to have been written in 1912 by Ueda Yorizo, comprising a selection of stories and anecdotes taken from the sword traditions. It is an excellent account of maai and one worthy of contemplation.

KATA-NI-TSUITE - Concerning kata

Before the introduction of protective armour, kata training was the sole method by which the skills of swordsmanship were mastered. Through training in kata, posture was corrected, eyes sharpened, bad habits were mended, speed and agility developed, cuts and thrusts made sound and sure, maai, sho'ai and tachisjui were realised, the spirit was kneaded, waza perfected and so on. In fact, it served as training in both the principles and practice of swordsmanship.

Originally each tradition contained kata composed of basic techniques that conveyed the essence and points of strength of the particular style of swordsmanship; however with the arrival of bogu, armour and the resulting spread of shinai-uchi training, the importance of kata came to be forgotten amongst shugyosha. Those that have remained to this day are just the mere bones of what had formerly existed. Even so, the kata represented the essence of the individual traditions and for this reason an in depth study of the various traditions can reap considerable rewards.

Up until the Bakamatsu period, the third quarter of the 19th century, shinai practice with bogu had not fully replaced training in kata which was still for many the sole method of training and through which not a few swordsmen achieved the very highest levels of understanding. Even when shinai-uchi was practised, it was only after a thorough grounding in waza had been gained through extensive kata training. Kata was always the first step in kendo shugyo.

When shinai-uchi was practiced it was only after a thorough grounding in waza had been gained through extensive kata training. Kata was always the first step in Kendo shugyo.

¹⁶ Tachisaki-no-mikiri Judging the gap between oneself and the point of the opponents sword.

Since that time extensive study and research has been carried out into all aspects of kendo; into basic movements, instruction methods and so on. So that it is no longer necessary to begin training in kata. However if one is intent on a mastery of the way of ken then at some stage a serious study of kata will have to be undertaken.

Be that as it may, a thorough study of every tradition would be an exhausting undertaking so first of all I would recommend the study and mastery of nihon-kendo-no-kata which was compiled by the Butokukai in Kyoto (the dai nihon butokukai was founded in 1895).

Compilation of the Nihon Kendo-no-Kata was completed in 1912 following long and arduous discussion and careful selection by a committee consisting of members of the butokukai and senior masters from the higher college of Kendo instructors (Koto Shihan Gakko) in Kyoto. Masters from every part of the country attended, including most importantly the following;

Naito Takarahara	Kendo Hanshi	Hokushin-itto-ryu	died 1930
Monna Tadashi	Kendo Hanshi	Hokushin-itto-ryu	dies 1931
Neigishi Shingoro	Kendo Hanshi	Shinto Munen-ryu	died 1914
Tsuji Shinpei	Kendo Hanshi	Jiki Shinkage-itto-ryo	died 1915
Takano Sasaburo	Kendo Hanshi	Ono-ha-itto-ryu	died 1951

The kata was created with a view to being applicable to the needs of shiai, match kendo. When practicing the kata one must face an opponent as if one were using a real sword; ones guard must not be relaxed for an instant and one must practice exactly according to the rules and patterns set for the kata. It must not be practiced as though it were merely a set of rigid movements, and must be practiced with full spirit. Moreover kata should not be practiced only for its own sake but with a view to adapting the lessons learned for actual use in keiko or shiai.

Kendo - Practice

The two characters that form the word keiko mean 'to think' and 'the past'. Put together they form the word which means 'to work out and study the teachings of the past'. Hence the action of thinking is very much part of this word. Besides the word keiko as distinct from shiai, we also use the word Renshu to mean training as such, but in kendo the word keiko with the meaning 'to think' or to 'deliberate and develop' being the most important requirement is also adopted and is more profound in meaning. At this point it must be emphasised that, especially for the beginner, too much thinking is to be avoided as this tends to result in constricted techniques, confusion and hampered progress. For at least the first year or two, in order just to become accustomed to kendo itself, it is best to simply follow unquestioningly the way one is taught and just try to practice as often as possible, by increasing the number of times one practices waza will develop naturally, and without being aware of it oneself progress will be achieved. Again, as waza develops, doubt and dissatisfaction will arise and these problems will require much thought and consideration in order to be answered which in turn will give birth to further progress.

Even so there are some who despite years of training give not even the slightest thought to any problem but continue to train in a purely mechanical way; of such people not much progress can be expected. Keiko is a matter of physical and mental endeavour. In sum, it is a question of applying the mind and multiplying the number of times one trains. By applying ones mind alone or by simply multiplying the times one trains, one cannot hope to make good progress. The two must go hand in hand.

For example take the simplest act of making a bow, o-jigi. How many times do I bow in a single day, or in ten or fifteen years? how many times have I bowed up to this day? the number must be enormous, yet I have still not reached the stage where I can make the perfect bow on every occasion. When I ask myself the reason for this, I realise it is because although I have bowed frequently I have not given the action the slightest thought or attention, alternatively, how ever much attention I gave to bows, if I fail to practice it, again I will fail to make a reasonable bow.

In Kendo there is the teaching of 'Ri-gyo ichi' (theory and practice go together as one). The attempt to bring theory and practice together as one is the aim of keiko. To accomplish this the theory has to be understood, and to do this the one and only way is to apply ones mind. Also, practice must follow the dictates of theory and for that, the best one can do is to multiply the number of times one trains.

Some Shugyosha hold the notion that keiko and shiai are thoroughly distinct from each other, we sometimes hear these people say for example, I always lose in shiai but I am strong in keiko. Or I'm weak in keiko but strong in shiai. I have to say that such people are grossly mistaken in their attitudes.

Keiko is for the benefit of shiai and nothing else. The objectives of keiko include the development of waza, the cultivation of spirit, the removal of bad habits and so on but the ultimate objective is to be victorious in shiai.

The highest aim of kendo is the discovery of the all-encompassing truth, but this is not possible when separated from study of how to be victorious in shiai. The practice and study needed in order to be victorious in shiai is the justification for keiko, keiko and shiai are inseparable therefore comments about one being strong or weak in either is proof of shallow understanding.

In shiai to win is essential, though in keiko the outcome is not necessarily always the prime concern. Shiai may be compared to the final copy of a piece of writing, keiko being the rough draft upon which mistakes and excesses may be excused, bad habits corrected and techniques developed. At times, depending on the situation, it may be useful to undertake keiko free from concern about winning or losing. In this way the true efficacy of keiko may be realised separate from the frantic methods employed for the sake of immediate victory. I wish only to emphasise strongly the practice of keiko for the benefit of shiai.

However, just as the amateur painter can look at the work of a master and to some degree appreciate its beauty and the artists technique so too can the beginner in kendo perceive to some degree what is good and what is not. In time and after much careful observation of shiai ones ability to appreciate what one sees will result in the cultivation of a discerning eye. If a discerning eye is not cultivated through kengaku, progress in ones shugyo may be seriously hindered. From this standpoint alone it must be said that kengaku is an essential part of kendo shugyo.

For the novice an effective method of observing is to pay particular attention to certain points such as hands, feet, posture and so on. The same applies to the technique where keiko and shiai of superior people can be viewed analytically. After progress has been made one may even try to assess other peoples weaknesses and strengths. Again, it is very instructive when observing to ask oneself how one would attack this or that person if one were the opponent, or how would one counter them were they particularly strong ? or how could one destroy the position and so on.

In a sense it could be said that through kengaku one could learn everything and that all we have studied so far and everything from here on could be understood by focussing ones attention and observing closely others in practice.

For example, through careful observation one could grasp the elements of dojo etiquette, how to hold the shinai, where to focus the eyes, how to make kakego, about technique and so on. It could also be said that in some cases it is more significant to watch keiko or shiai of highly skilled people than to actually don bougu and practice oneself (mitori geiko).

As the eye is cultivated through kengaku one becomes able to discern an opponents strengths and weaknesses at the merest glance. Eventually a persons ability may be deduced without even watching him in shiai or keiko.

There is a story told about how one day Yagyu Hyogo¹⁷ and Miyamoto Iori¹⁸ were passing the by the outer walls of the Nagoya castle. Despite having never met each other before that day, both had already perceived whom the other was some paces from each other. The story may seem slightly stretched but there is nothing strange about it at all. Between true masters it is probably the norm.

¹⁷ Yagyu Hyogo son of Yagyu Tajima-no-kami Muneyoshi and younger brother of Mumenori. He served Tokugawa Yoshinao of Owari province (early Edo period)

¹⁸ Miyamoto Iori foster son of Miyamoto Musashi, born sometime during the Keicho period (1596-1611) in Komeda village. Innan gun Harima province. In later life he held the position of karo (councillor) to the Ogasawara in Kokura Kyushu

It is said that to make true progress in writing one must 'read a lot, write a lot and correct a lot' it is the same in Kendo. Perhaps kengaku in Kendo corresponds to reading a lot in the art of writing.

KIKAI - The opportunity to strike

The following is something I heard from a 7th dan master of Go, named Shiokoshi Kensaku

During the course of the game of Go there are perhaps two or three opportunities where victory can be grasped with certainty, but if one is unaware of these opportunities as they arise victory becomes quite uncertain.

Kendo and Go are quite different in character and therefore it is impossible to direct the course of a game of Go in the same way as one would a Kendo match and vice versa. However, concerning principles related to victory and defeat they have much in common.

To understand shobu one must have knowledge of what Mr Shiokoshi calls opportunities for victory. In old Kendo manuals these opportunities are known as shio'ai. Understood simply this means 'chance'. To be alert to these chances is the key to all shobu. Mori Yozo¹⁹ in the Kempo Gekishiron has the following to say on the subject of kikai and shobu.

When in combat against an opponent there appear countless changes and variations of situation. If you understand the principles of offence within defence, then defence and offence become as one. Being mature in technique and understanding the principles ones technique will follow exactly the principles i.e. technique and principles become as one. When in accord with the spirit of heaven and earth, upon striking nothing remains, and when advancing there is no form as if one could pass at will through the broad heavens above and the bottom of earth below.

In that world of no thought or intention there is neither sound nor smell, neither gods nor devils. Take for example the mirror, as the mirror reflects what is before it, so does the heart, and thus it is known as the heart-mirror. When the heart of the opponent is observed in the mirror of ones own heart, one cannot be struck, however when ones own heart releases its image it ceases to be the true heart-mirror. Kanzan, in a poem he wrote to Jittoku, said;

***'Though there is no dust that needs to be swept away
Do you keep hold of the broom for the dust within your heart'***

Jittoku's reply to this was;

'This is the broom to sweep away such utterings of yours'

An interesting question and reply, it reveals that which has yet to acquire thoughtlessness. If there is a mirror then there exists just such an object; thus where there is nor mirror that may project, though there is reflection, this is the true secret of the heart. In an old poem it is written;

'The moon is not aware of its projected image
the water thinks not of reflection
the wide pool'

This is the realm of the great masters, well it is not for me to instruct students upon the higher things alone. For the benefit of those Mokuroku rank and below, I shall turn to the subject of shio'ai for striking.

What are the places that are known as shio'ai ? They are the moments that occur unfailingly during the course of combat where victory can be won. These are the shio'ai; avoiding his strengths, strike him where and when he is weakest, strike him at the moment of his attack;

¹⁹ Mori Yozo, also known as keishin was a senior student of Chiba Shusaku. As a swordsman he served the Hosa family of the Iino-kan in Kazusa (Chiba prefecture) during the Bakamatsu period in the middle of the last century. The Kempo Gekishiron was written in 1862 and describes the general principles of Kendo

strike him when he is confused; strike him when he stops; strike him when he moves to attack; harass him and strike, also, when in combat there are eight methods;

1. Treat him according to his position
2. Treat him according to the position of his sword
3. Treat him according to his ways and habits
4. Oppress him with spirit at the instant of his move
5. Make it far for him but close for oneself
6. Draw him out and force him to act
7. When he defends strongly treat him with deception
8. When his grip is strong treat him without drawing close

When the opponent is very strong treat him with the second and third methods. In all, it is the pulling cut that is important. In Heiho also even, when one has slain the enemy do not loiter on the battlefield. When pursuing an opponent, know when to call off the chase. One must think about this deeply.

There is much that we can learn from the teachings of our ancestors. There is something else that must be realised at this point. It is that a place of victory is at the same time a place of defeat; what may be seen as a chance for oneself is also a chance for the opponent. In the midst of a great victory there is the possibility of a great defeat and vice-versa.

Itto-Ittosai²⁰ wrote the following;

Exponents of the art should know the places of defeat and where victory may be sought. Places of defeat are first and foremost places of victory. The places where victory cannot be sought are the places the opponent guards well. The places of defeat are on ourselves; the places of victory are on our opponent. The person who tries recklessly to win does so because he is ignorant of the places at which to defeat the opponent. If I cannot be beaten I cannot be defeated; if I cannot beat I cannot defeat, thus where there is complete victory, there is complete defeat. To know the places of winning in order to defeat and to know the places where to defeat and win victory is to be master of the art. I alter my ways, and he surmises it, and depending on the opponent the situation alters.

Sun Tzu wrote;

Know your opponent and know yourself, and in a hundred battles, you will know no defeat.

Not knowing your opponents though knowing yourself, you will win once and lose once.

Knowing neither your opponent nor yourself you will know only defeat.

Always stand upon undefeated ground and endeavour to direct all opportunities towards victory. Again in the Heiho Sanjugo Kajo we find;

Concerning the linking hit. The linking hit is when the opponents sword approaches to strike, with out sword we may force it back, receive it or hit it. Whether we receive, force back or hit, it must be thought of as just a link to striking the opponent. When forcing down, releasing and thrusting are all made for the purpose of striking, then our body, heart and sword are united for striking. Think carefully on this.

Musashi's teaching is that all actions must be linked to striking the opponent, a definitive teaching from a master that warrants our contemplation.

Offence and defence, the use of all as a means to defeat the opponent, this is in the realm of the masters. In this sense there is no need to discuss this chance or that case; all chances and all cases are, at all times, places of victory. They are all shio'ai.

²⁰ Itto Ittosai, the founder of Itto-ryu. His given name was Kagehisa. He mastered the principles of swordsmanship under Kanemakim Jissai (Kanemaki-ryu). Amongst his students were Mikogami Tenzen Tada'aki (later known as Ono Jirozaemon) and Kotatda Toshinao (circa 1560-1653), the extract is taken from the Ittosai Sensei Kenpo Sho

KAN - Intuitive perception

Earlier we have looked at the opportunities or moments that if attacked would assure victory, avoiding the opponent where he is strong and attacking him where he is weak and so on; but to what extent is the opponent strong or weak, that is not easy to determine.

Though it is possible to give verbal instruction about this place or that place of victor, or sho'ai, in actual fact, it is most difficult to seize the chances at the instant they appear. In the midst of shiai with its limitless variation of circumstances, if one attempts to attack at the moment one recognises a chance it is already too late. At the moment of a bolt of lightning, the thunder is released; at the moment of seeing an opportunity to strike, already the opportunity no longer exists. Therefore at the moment of being aware of the existence of an opportunity one must already have launched in to attack it. One must strike on the T of There and upon the H of here is what we are taught. How are we to manage this. The answer lies ultimately in the use of Kan. When one possesses Kan, chances for attack project themselves as though they were reflected in a mirror.

All senses develop keenness through constant and repetitive use. For example, take the case of learning to play the shamisen (Japanese lute). First it is necessary to learn how to tune the instrument. Those who are endowed with a particularly good sense of tone will manage this without much need of instruction, though this might not be so for the majority of people. They will not so easily distinguish whether or not the instrument is in or is not in tune. Therefore at the beginning of instruction the teacher will have to tune the instrument for the student before it can be played.

However, after about a year and the student has become accustomed to the subtle sounds of the shamisen, he will be able to tune it for himself. What I would like to point out here is that the student, by listening to the same tones everyday over a long period unconsciously develops a sense of tone; the sense is refined, hence the teacher tunes the instrument in silence while waiting the time when the student develops naturally the ability to do it for himself. The teacher refrains from lecturing on the theory of what is required knowing full well that to do so is fruitless, and that in fact may even hinder the students progress.

The above is from a chapter entitled 'Polishing the Senses' from the book Bunsho Dokuhon (the writers reader) by Tazizaki Junichi. In the book the author makes a strong case for the importance of developed sense of writing.

If asked what Kan is we can say that it is the most superior of senses. First, we sense small things by way of the five senses; the eyes for vision, the ears for hearing, the nose for smell and so on, but if we go a stage further, we may even hear the soundless and see the invisible and be aware of the wonderful and the marvellous.

Even with time to think and consider, it is most difficult to make a correct judgement, but when there is no time for making judgements that have to be constantly successful they can only be achieved through Kan.

When there are two possible moves that can be played and you are at a loss as to which one to take, as so often happens, ultimately it is only through Kan that the final decision is made. Kan is not easily developed, if one isn't at least 4th dan or above then I don't think that you can have true Kan.

I recall these words spoken by the eminent master Kimura Yoshio, in something he had written. In all things when one has acquired Kan one is an accomplished exponent, especially in activities such as Kendo, where victory and defeat are decided in a mere instant great significance is accorded to kan.

Hirayama Shiryo²¹ wrote the following in the Kencho

²¹ Hirayama Shiryo was a member of the Tokugawa bakufu (government), his name was Hisomi and he was also known as Rembudo, Heigen and Uchushnjn. He was a man of stern and righteous character,

Chaung Tzu, in the kakuihen wrote; upon sensing, act, when attacked, reply. The meaning here is that upon sensing in your guts the murderous intent of an enemy one must move quickly to nip these intentions in the bud; moreover when the opponent strikes with his sword then one can strike; hence one may take advantage of the tail end of his spirit.

In the Go-Ri-No-Sho, Miyamoto Musashi wrote.

What it means to know prevailing conditions. To know the prevailing conditions means to make decisions as to how best to move ones troops and which strategy to use in conflicts involving large numbers of people; knowing whether or not the spirit of the opponents is high or waning, knowing the psychology of the opponents troops, having a grasp of the prevailing conditions of the site of conflict, and observing the condition of the opponents.

In one to one conflicts, it is essential to understand the flow of the opponents personality, to find out his strengths and weaknesses, and to plot against the opponents expectations. To know the ups and downs of the opponent, the rhythm of the intervals between them, and thereby to take the initiative. The flow of such things can always be seen if the intelligence is good.

Once Heiho (the art of warfare) becomes part of you, you will be able to surmise the opponents thoughts and think of numerous ways to achieve victory. This must be fully thought out.

Ultimately, comprehension of the prevailing conditions becomes a question of Kan. Train diligently and build upon your merits, for foundation of Kan is through long experience.

An important condition for developing and sustaining Kan is the possession of a clear and unsullied mind, uninhibited by unnecessary thoughts and intentions that will only mar its effect and its magical power will be lost. The conditions necessary for the fostering of Kan are long experience and a clear and serene frame of mind.

SEN - The initiative

Just as it is important to seize the initiative in Shogi and Go in order to win, so, too, in Kendo one must constantly strive to have the initiative or sen. When one has the initiative one defeats the opponent i.e. to take sen, or to have it taken from one will make the difference between victory and defeat. In the Go-Ri-No-Sho Miyamoto Musashi wrote;

What is meant by the three initial attacks ? The first of these initial attacks is the Ken-no-sen, where you make the initial move. The second is the Tai-no-sen (the waiting attack), is where your initial move takes place instantly after the opponent makes the first move. The third one is Tai-tai-no-sen, (The body and body attack), which is the initial attack where you and your opponent attack at the same time.

In any conflict there can be no other attacks than these three. Since it is possible to achieve a quick victory depending on the way in which the initial attack is made, this concept of first move is of primary importance in Heiho.

Although there are numerous aspects of this concept of first move it is not such that it should be written out in detail, since the question of which initial attack should be taken is primarily answered by the circumstances of each situation. Victory is achieved by reading into the designs of the opponent and the knowledge of Heiho.

First the Ken-no-sen. This is when one considers taking the initiative by attacking first. You quietly assume the position from which to initiate the attack and then swiftly make the attack without hesitation. This should be an initial attack which is made with substantial strength of will, with the leg movements made faster than usual so that when

dying a bachelor at the age of 70 in 1821, he trained in various martial arts, The Kencho is a collection of quotations and anecdotes concerning Kendo taken from old writings.

the attack is made, one closes in on the opponent in one swift breath, also, this is an initial attack in which one empties out ones spirit. From the beginning to the end, you thoroughly overpower the opponent with enthusiasm and forcibly win under any circumstances. This is under the category of Ken-no-sen

Second the Tai-no-sen. First of all, when the opponent lunges forward towards you, make as if it does not bother you in the least and feign weakness. When the opponent has come in quite close, suddenly increase the distance by retreating and make it seem that you are leaping away. Come forcibly in with one short breath and win as the opponent shows signs of slacking; this is one of the ways of Tai-no-sen, also, when the opponent attacks with force, if you counter attack with an even stronger attack, the rhythm with which the opponent attacks is altered. Take advantage of that moment of change and attain victory. Such are the principles of Tai-no-sen.

The third, Tai-tai-no-sen. This is the attack which is used when the opponent comes forward quickly and when one responds quietly with strength, and when the opponent has come on sufficiently, one suddenly attacks in one swift breath and achieves victory. When th opponent comes in quietly, you move yourself a little more quickly than usual in a manner which can be likened to floating, and at the point where the opponent has come in closely enough make a feinting move, watch the reaction of the opponent and then quickly attack and win. This is the Tai-tai-no-sen. It would be difficult to write and explain more as to the details of this.

What has been written in this section is merely the basics and can be elaborated upon. Regarding the three sen, it should not be taken that one must always be the first to attack regardless of the situation or circumstances, but at the same time it is generally desirable to be the one to initiate the attack and thereby put the opponent in a defensive position. In either case, whether one is attacking first or the opponent initiates the attack, the concept of the initial attack is the principle of knowledge of Heiho with which one always obtains victory.

The three forms of initiative explained above are also known by the terms;

SEN-NO-SEN	(the first initiative)
GO-NO-SEN	(the after initiative)
SEN-SEN-NO-SEN	(the initiative after the two initiatives)

These are, in the main initiatives derived from the use of actual technique, but there are also spiritual initiatives by which the opponents intentions are forestalled. On this subject the section in the Go-Ri-No-Sho entitles 'restraining the pillow' is of significance for this kokoro-no-sen section.

To restrain the pillow means not allowing the head to be raised. It is especially bad to be dragged around by the other side or to be placed on the defensive, particularly in the way of Heiho. No matter what happens, the ideal is to be in a position in which one can freely lead the opponent around, that is to be on the offensive.

It can be assumed that the opponent thinks likewise, and that you will think likewise, but all this is of no use unless one is aware of how the other side will come forward. To restrain the pillow as it is understood in Heiho, is to stop the opponent as he tries to strike, to restrain the opponent as he tries to lunge, and to wrench away as the opponent tries to grapple with you. This means that he who is well versed in my Heiho, when crossing swords with an opponent. When the opponent tries to strike he will be stopped at the very onset of his attempt, at the S of Strike and not be allowed to continue on. For example you must stop the opponent when he tries to attack at the A of the Attack. You must stop the opponent when he tries to jump at you at the J of jump; you must stop the opponent when he tries to cut you at the C of the attempt to cut.

When the opponent set up a move, it is important to leave that which is of no use to the opponent and to hold down that which can be of use so as to make it impossible for the opponent to carry out his plans. To always be trying to hold down an opponent is in itself, to be placed on the defensive.

He who is skilled in Heiho, first of all, accomplishes all his moves no matter what, according to the way. When the opponent attempts to execute a move, frustrate it from the outset, make whatever the opponent was trying to accomplish of no use, and achieve freedom with which to lead the opponent. This too, is the result of practice. To restrain the pillow should be well and truly appreciated.

In the Sum Densho²² it is written;

The principles of initial and counter attack pertain to the strengths and weaknesses extant between the opponent and oneself. Victory does not exist for the initiator of the attack alone. By countering the opponent during his attack in Go-No-Sen many are defeated. Therefore, the skilled man seeks the initiative from start to finish, and the unskilled from start to finish is hounded by him.

Consequently, it is no exaggeration to say that the taking of the initiative, or sen, is the one crucial factor that will decide who wins and who loses.

KEN-TAI, Offence and Defence

The words Ken and Tai mean literally to attack and wait, but they are more readily understandable as attack and defence.

In Kendo the thoroughgoing and direct attack is the most highly valued, of old we have been taught 'not to think of receiving, but of striking'. However this does not mean that it is right merely to strike or attack recklessly. In shogi this is known as over-advancing the pieces, and in kendo as over-striking, or over-attacking and is something to be avoided. The old teaching informs us that, 'In pursuit and retreat one must know the limits'. Over attacking tends only to invite disaster.

In the book on strategy (The Art of War) by Sun Tzu it is written;

The master of encirclement always leaves a route for the enemy to escape, he never rushes in upon an entrapped enemy.²³

So, what is the correct thing to do? The answer is to attack when one should attack and wait when one should wait. Moreover there is the teaching Ken-Chu-Tai (defence within attack and attack within defence). While attacking one also watches and waits, and while waiting and watching one is on the verge of attacking. When this is achieved it is known as Ken-Tai-Ichi (attack and defence as one).

Ken-tai is explained in the following way in the Shinkage-ryu Heiho Kadensho²⁴

Ken means to attack single mindedly, to strike fiercely in order to be the first to strike a blow. Whether possessed by the opponent or by oneself, the feeling of Ken remains the same.

Tai means resisting making the initial technique while awaiting the opponents first move. It must be understood that tai is a position of the utmost watchfulness. Ken and tai mean to attack and wait.

Concerning the principles of ken-tai pertaining to the body and sword, advance upon the opponent with an attacking posture and hold the sword in a position of waiting, making efforts to entice the opponent to make an attack and counter it. In this way ones posture is in an attitude of ken and the sword in one of tai. The ken posture is used to induce the opponent to initiate the attack.

²² The Sumo Densho is a manual on sumo wrestling written during the Edo period by Kimura Gyozen which includes a description of sumo refereeing.

²³ The reason is that if an enemy feels himself to be completely cut off from escape and is attacked, he may resolve to die fighting, thus causing great damage to the attacking army.

²⁴ The teachings of the Shinkage-ryu principles of combat was written by Yagyu Meneyoshi (1527-1606), the founder of the tradition. It is made up of three sections: Shin-ri-kyo, Satsunin-to and Katsujim-to. The above quotation is taken from the Satsunin-to section.

Ken-tai pertaining to the mind and body. The mind should retain an attitude of tai and the body an attitude of ken; this is because if the mind retains an attitude of ken and it races and this is not good; thus have the mind wait in tai, and with the body in ken induce the opponent to make the first move and defeat him. Again there is the principle whereby the mind takes an attitude of ken and the body in one of tai; the reason for this is that with the mind in ken it is put upon its guard and with the sword in tai the opponent is induced into making the first attack. One should think of the body as being the hand that holds the sword. Thus the mind takes an attitude of ken and the body one of tai. Ultimately both methods are the same, the aim is to induce the opponent to make the first move and defeat him.

Again, a poem from the Hozo-in-ryu tradition of So-Jutsu²⁵ (spearmanship) reads;

With hands in tai and legs in ken advance unflaggingly, like waterfowl.

Here we are taught the way of ken and tai as one. Also in the Itto-ryu Densho concerning Ken-chu-tai and Tai-chu-ken we find;

In nature, a one sidedness of either Yang or Yin does not exist. At the extreme of Yang, there emerges Yin. In the different stances, there are those of Yin and Yang, attacking is one of Yang and stopping is one of Yin. The stances of Onken, Jodan and Inhonken²⁶ all are of Yang. When I am trying to strike the opponent I watch the colour of his sword and react accordingly, not merely trying to initiate the first blow is to take a position called tai. Induce the opponent to make the first move and react accordingly. When you advance in trying to make the initial attack in a one sided attitude of Yang and without the aid on Yin, you will find great difficulty in opposing a strong opponent. Therefore try to combine the attitudes of Yang and Yin during combat.

In tai-chi-ken, to wait does not mean to stand still in waiting, if you stand still in this way you will become stiff and fast and lack power and you will be defeated when you stop.

Again, the stances known as seigan, shinken and gedan are all of Yin. These are the stances of receiving and stopping the opponents technique. Depending on the situation it is difficult to leap in with lightning speed from these stances as they are by nature waiting attitudes, but when you take this to mean merely to wait you will be caught slow and defeated. Therefore show an attitude of tai, but within take an attitude of ken. With Yang within when advancing if there appears a weakness in the opponent attack immediately and defeat him. This is what is known as the place where Yang and Yin aid each other for victory. To describe the way of combat; if the opponent attacks we wait and if he waits we attack, this is the main principle of tactics. Even when we attack, depending on the opponents moves, we may suddenly take to defence, and when defending the opposite may be so. These are called the tactics of surprise and expediency; they are the application of swordsmanship.

There should be an extreme of neither Ken nor Tai.

This is all I have access to, enjoy !

Gerry Kincaid

²⁵ The Hozo-ryu was founded by Hozo-in kakuzenbu Ho-in Inei, a Buddhist monk of Nara. He studied the sword under Kamizumi Nobutsuna and spear under Narita Moritada (1521-1607)

²⁶ All posture to be found in Itto-ryo tradition