

Katori Shinto Ryu

The Katori shrine is a notable Shinto landmark that is located in Katori, Sawara city in the Chiba prefecture, and is dedicated to Futsu-nushi-no-mikoto. This mythological deity played a great role in pacifying the ancient land of Japan, bringing it under the rule of the grandson (Ninigi-no-mikoto) of the Sun Goddess (Ama-terasu-o-mi-kami) and ancestor of the imperial family. The Katori shrine was erected in praise and memory of Futsu-nushi-no-mikoto, and he was installed as the guardian deity of state security, industrial development, and martial valor. The Katori shrine is traditionally said to have been first erected in the eighteenth year of (642 B.C.) of the first sovereign Jimmu's reign.

Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu was founded by Iizasa Choisai Ienao (1387-1488) and is the oldest martial tradition in Japan. Ienao was the son of a goshi (country warrior-gentry) who distinguished himself with the sword and spear on the battlefield. Young Ienao participated in many individual combats and was never defeated. After the downfall of the Chiba family, his clan, he built a dojo within the enclosure of the Katori shrine at the age of sixty.

He worshiped daily at the shrine, performed austere purification ceremonies, and engaged in a strict regimen of martial training for one thousand days. While he was in this state of spiritual discipline, we are told, he perceived a vision. In it a powerful deity, Futsu-nushi-no-mikoto, gave Ienao one volume of heiho shinsho, that is, a book on martial strategy as was written by divine hands. The vision also predicted: "You shall be a great teacher of all the swordsmen under the sun." Tenshin Shoden means divine sanction, and Ienao taught at the Katori shrine dojo until his death at the age of 102.

Many of the students of Katori Shinto Ryu went on to found their own styles of swordsmanship. The most famous ones are listed along with many more interesting pieces of information in 'The Deity and the Sword' Volumes I, II, & III written by the present headmaster Risuke Otake and translated into English in 1977 by Donn F. Draeger. This document owes much of its information to them.

This Ryu (way or school) includes in its martial curriculum: iai-jutsu (sword-drawing art), kenjutsu (sword fighting art), bojutsu (staff art), naginata-jutsu (halberd art), jujutsu (flexible art), shuriken-jutsu (throwing blade art), ninjutsu (espionage art), sojutsu (spear art), senjutsu (tactics), and chikujo-jutsu (field fortification art).

After entering the ryu and signing an oath in his own blood (keppan) the student is expected to train himself diligently over the course of his lifetime so as to become and remain strong enough to be able to kill an enemy with a single stroke or his sword. Swordsmen of the Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu must be physically strong, but at the same time must also develop their mental power to the extent that nothing can over-awe them.

Classical bujutsu (martial arts) is essentially a means of combat, a means by which the exponent defends himself or his homeland; but by a process of repetitious training he also cultivates a natural, morally right state of mind. The true understanding of heiho (strategy) is possible only after one engages in sufficient rigorous training.

If the spirit of humility, an intrinsic element of Bushido (Warrior's way), is removed from the teaching of classical martial studies the lack of this important virtue makes of such studies mere systems of violence.

My interest in this art began when I purchased the three volumes of the Deity and the sword in 1973. In 1982 I saw the art come to life in the form of Yoshio Sugino. He took part in an exhibition of Japanese martial arts given in California which was filmed and became the genesis of Panther Videos. Sugino-

sensei was famous as the swordsman hired by Akira Kurosawa to choreograph the fight scenes in 1957's 'Seven Samurai' and many of his subsequent movies. It was the first time authentic swordsmanship appeared on the screen.

Through my many decades of karate training and a gift of observation, I started training myself in the art of Naginata-jutsu. Without proper instruction however, it was like training in the closet without the lights on.

In 1989 I was introduced to Sekiya-sensei, a student of Sugino-sensei, and was enlightened to its proper use as a weapon. Since then I have been a Zealot in the art of Katori Shinto Ryu. In recent years I started a study group and am striving to become an adept in the art.



Masatake Sekiya-sensei

The techniques below are ones I have chosen to study.

Techniques of Iaijutsu from iai-goshi:

- a. Kusa-nagi-no-ken
- b. Nuki-tsuke-no-ken
- c. Nuki-uchi-no-ken
- d. Uken
- e. Saken
- f. Happo-ken

Tachi-ai Batto-jutsu Techniques:

- a. Yuki-ai Gyaku-nuki-no-tachi
- b. Zengo Chidori-no-tachi
- c. Yuki-ai Migi Chidori-no-tachi
- d. Gyaku-nuki-no-tachi
- e. Nuki-uchi-no-tachi

Techniques of Kenjutsu Omote-no-tachi (surface long sword techniques);

1. Rei-shiki (etiquette)
 - a. Itsutsu-no-tachi
 - b. Nanatsu-no-tachi
 - c. Kasumi-no-tachi
 - d. Hakka-no-tachi

Swordsmanship with two swords (ni-to)

- a. Eietsu-no-tachi: Nio-no-kurai

- b. Suigetsu-no-tachi: Tenchi-no-kurai
- c. Isonami-no-tachi: Fuha-no-kurai
- d. Murakumo-no-tachi: Sasu-no-kurai

Swordsmanship with the short sword (kodachi)

- a. Hangetsu-no-kodachi
- b. Suigetsu-no-kodachi
- c. Seigan-no-kodachi

Naginata-jutsu;

- a. Itsutsu-no-naginata
- b. Natatsu-no-naginata
- c. Kasumi-no-naginata
- d. Hakka-no-naginata



Sekiya-sensei and Diane Zingale-sensei