

IAIDO

Syllabus of Iaido

Iaido (eee-eye-doe) is the practice of Japanese sword techniques which embody a series of cutting and thrusting movements in the drawing and resheathing of the blade. These movements are performed against one or more imaginary opponents and require great concentration. The art was developed and perfected during Japan's one and a half centuries of civil war by samurai warriors, who in times of peril were able in the blink of an eye to have their weapons in hand and the enemy dead.

During the 17th century, in a time of peace, these movements were slowed down and became an art form we call iaido, a way of developing a state of constant awareness of ones surroundings. In this art the sword is no longer used for self-defense but for self-development. Iaido is used as a tool of physical fitness and coordination. Once the movements have been mastered, the sword can and will appear at any speed the practitioner wishes.

“Iaido is an art that enables the exponent to contrast the concept of ‘life’ with ‘a life worth living.’ It is a system of character building that can be explained in the elaborate terms of intellectual education, moral education, or physical education, but its purpose , stated in the simplest possible terms, is to build a spiritually harmonious person possessed of high intellect , sensitivity, and resolute will.” Donn Draeger.

We begin with the basics.

How to hold the sword, and the names of different parts of the sword in Japanese;

Kissaki (point section)

Ha (cutting edge)

Monouchi (area of maximum force generated by the blade in motion, from an inch in from the point to about six to ten inches down the blade)

Hamon (pattern on the cutting edge)

Hi (longitudinal groove)

Mune (back edge surface of blade)

Tsuka (hilt of the sword)

Tsuka-gashira (butt-end cap on hilt)

Menuki (pair of ornaments used to enhance grip of each hand)

Mekugi (hilt-retaining peg)

Habaki (blade collar socket)

Tsuba (hand guard)

Saya (scabbard)

Sageo (flat braided cord attached to the kurigata knob on the saya)

SEITEI-GATA

In 1967 iaido was introduced into the All Japan Kendo Federation because students were getting too involved in just winning contests, and the fact that the shinai (bamboo sword) is so unlike a real sword in how it is handled. A group of seven masters were brought together to develop a representative series of formal techniques that could be used for dan (black belt) ranking as in kendo. Initially seven kata were chosen; three forms the seiza sitting position, one tatehiza standing knee position, and three standing forms. In 1977 three more standing forms were added followed by two more standing forms added to the syllabus in 2001.

The seitei-gata (representative techniques of iaido) have four fundamental parts; nukitsuke (draw and hit), kirioroshi (killing cut), chiburi (blood throw), and noto (resheathing the blade). These movements are each done with feeling of Jo (slow) Ha (medium) Kyu (fast) speeds. This rhythm gives the feeling that you do not want to kill your opponent and are willing to end the confrontation at any time. Each student advances at his or her own rate. Iaido requires continuous practice and much attention to detail.

The names of the kata (forms) reflect the direction of the opponent or the technique used to deal with the situation. The embu (demonstration of techniques) is continuous with the practitioner returning to the starting point after each exercise is completed. There is also an opening and closing form of etiquette that adds both ceremony and a feeling nobility to the art.

1. Ipponme - Mae (front)
2. Nihonme - Ushiro (back)
3. Sanbonme - Uke Nagashi (deflection)
4. Yohonme - Tsuka-ate (striking with the butt end of the hilt)
5. Gohonme - Kesa-giri (cutting on a diagonal)
6. Ropponme - Morote-zuki (two-handed thrust)
7. Nanahonme - Sampo-giri (three directional cutting)
8. Hachihonme - Gammen-ate (face-strike)
9. Kyuhonme - Soete-tsuki (joined-hands thrust)
10. Jupponme - Shiho-giri (four-directions cutting)
11. Ju Ipponme - Sou-giri (continuous cutting with five techniques moving directly forward)
12. Ju Nihonme - Nuki-uchi (sudden attack)

Any or all of these could be subjects in class. It is important to ask questions during class if you do not understand something. Your questions will add to your experience and will deepen your knowledge of iaido and of yourself. Iaido is considered to be the most philosophical of all martial arts.

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