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The Samurai

If You Are Going to Use It, Please



O-Rei: paying respects to the sword: Ken Watanabe demonstrates *tachirei*, paying respects from the standing position. Please note the position of the sword, direction of the edge and position of the head in relation to the sword.

by Kensho Furuya

Of all the weapons in the martial artist's armory, the samurai sword still has the distinction of being one of the finest handmade, edged weapons in the history of mankind. It spans more than one thousand years, and was distinguished as the very "soul" of the samurai warrior who ruled Japan for 800 years; some famous swords today are valued as literally priceless works of art and designated as national treasures.

The sword's usage is preserved in three general disciplines. In *kendo*, the techniques are found in the traditional *kendo kata*, and in the *Seitei-iai* forms. In some of the old, traditional schools of Japanese martial arts, use of the sword is still preserved along with a repertoire of nu-

merous and assorted weapons and grappling techniques. And the art of *iaido* specializes exclusively in the use of the samurai sword.

Today, the samurai sword is used in many types of martial arts, especially forms competition. Its general appeal has made

it a popular weapon in this country, and somehow it is no longer in the unique domain of the traditional Japanese martial arts disciplines. Over the last several years, I have been quite surprised when in the *Highlander* movies and television series, Scottish magicians and time travelers were shown fighting with samurai swords. And imagine my astonishment when actor Rutger Hauer, portraying an ancient vampire, picked up a samurai sword in an attempt to do away with his arch rival, a blond high school cheerleader, in the movie *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer!* This is one for the records as the most extreme and imaginative use of the sword, perhaps—as I put it earlier—"in the history of mankind."

Although the sword has increased in popularity, its usage still leaves much to be

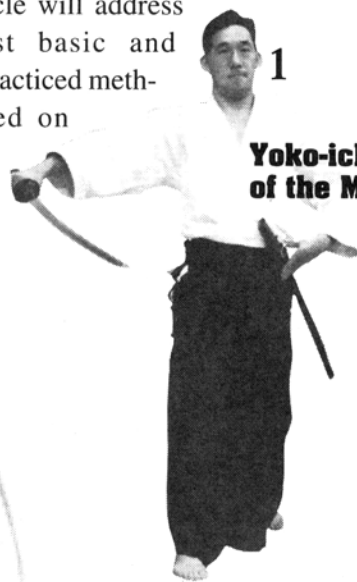
ni Sword

ase, Use It Correctly

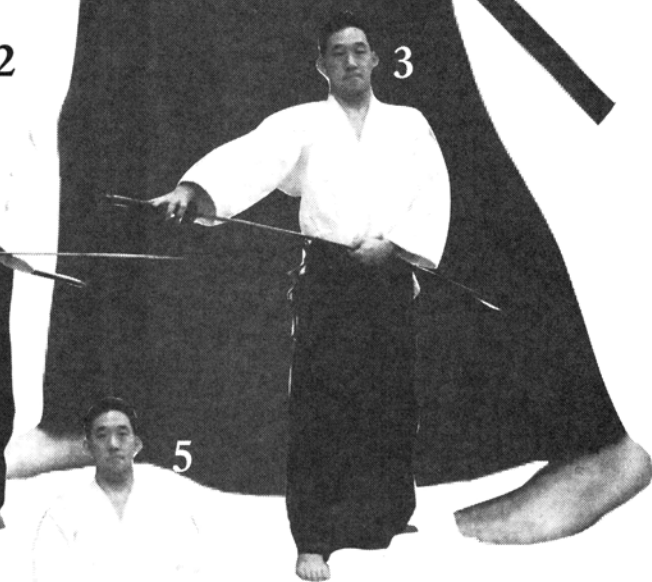
desired. Following are some simple, core elements of correct sword use. It is hoped that they assist those who share this interest and wish to study the sword further.

In feudal Japan, we count approximately 210 schools of swordsmanship through various historical eras; today, about 20 still exist. Among schools, there are many variations and fine points of distinction between methods and usage.

This article will address the most basic and widely practiced methods based on



Yoko-ichimonji Style of the Muso Shinden Ryu

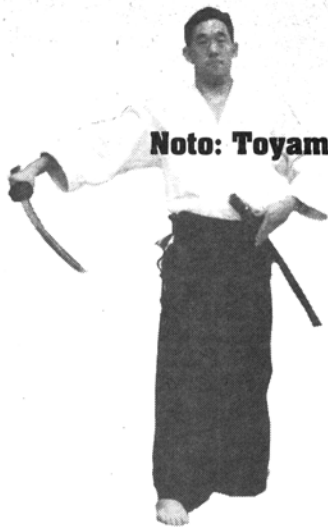


O-Rei: paying respects to the sword. Zarei is bowing to the sword from the sitting position.

Noto: Returning the blade to the scabbard. With proper instruction and training, noto can be one of the most beautiful movements and techniques in swordsmanship. It is one of the important moments when one indicates his school and lineage and clearly demonstrates his level of skill and mastery. If one cannot execute noto properly it proves the contrary. This technique requires a great deal of study and daily practice.

1. Stance from chiburi.
2. Blade contact with scabbard.
3. Bringing scabbard over tip of sword.
4. Allowing blade to slide into scabbard.
5. Finish and zanshin or mental concentration.

Noto: Toyama Ryu Style



Position just before noto



Bring blade to scabbard. Notice that the scabbard is positioned at one's side. In the previous technique, the scabbard is brought to one's center. This is one major difference between the two methods.



Scabbard is drawn back as the sword is drawn forward. Please note that in the previous technique the scabbard is drawn to the side.

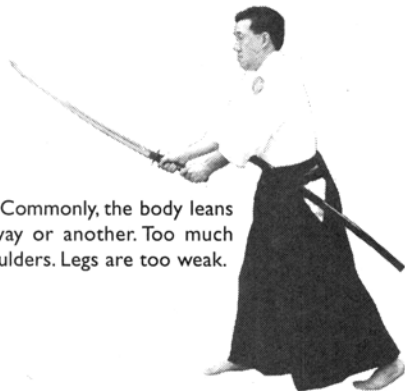


Sword enters scabbard



Finish and zanshin.

my personal area of expertise: the Muso Shinden Ryu and Toyama Ryu of Iaido. While the most effective method of learning is, of course, to consult a local authority on the samurai sword, I know that many aspiring students throughout the country have no instructor available to them. It is hoped that the accompanying information will correct some common errors and misunderstandings.

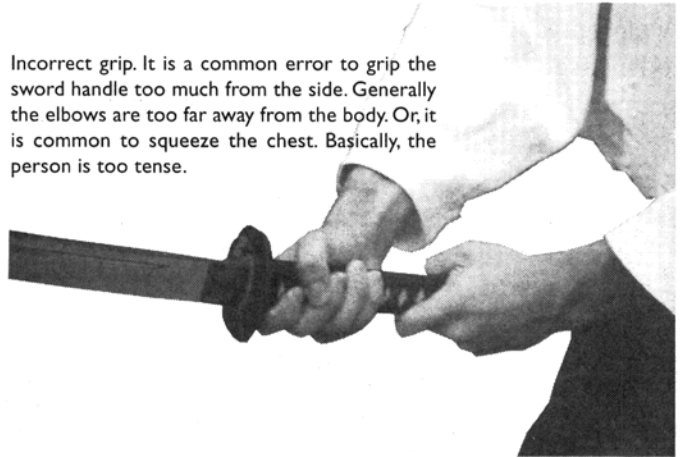


Incorrect stance. Commonly, the body leans too much one way or another. Too much power in the shoulders. Legs are too weak.



Correct stance. Stand straight. Relax your shoulders and keep your chest open. Be well-centered.

Incorrect grip. It is a common error to grip the sword handle too much from the side. Generally the elbows are too far away from the body. Or, it is common to squeeze the chest. Basically, the person is too tense.



Correct grip. The wrist is over the top, conforming more closely to the shape of the handle. Although uncomfortable at first for the beginner, this is a stronger, more solid grip.





The most common problem is the incorrect placement of the rear foot. The distribution of the body weight should *not* be in the heels.

Please note the feet and their almost parallel alignment. Keep the weight on the balls of the feet. You should feel very little weight in the heels.

Finally, remember that correct use of the sword is not only important to the proper understanding of the technique, but is also the safest way to practice swordsmanship. The bottom line is that every movement must demonstrate proficiency, effectiveness, respect for the opponent, respect for the sword, respect for the art, and finally, respect for one's self.

Good luck in your training! ㊦

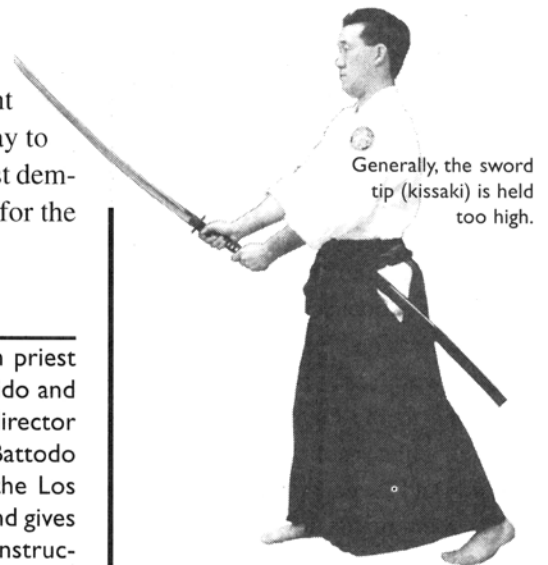
About the author: Reverend Kensho Furuya is a practicing, ordained Zen priest and full-time professional teacher who has devoted his life to teaching aikido and iaido. He is the chief instructor of the Aikido Center of Los Angeles and director and head instructor of the official Los Angeles Branch of the All Japan Battodo Federation headquartered in Japan, and president and chief lecturer of the Los Angeles Japanese Sword Study Society Kenshinkai. Furuya Sensei lectures and gives seminars throughout the country and is the author of many articles and instructional videotapes.

Incorrectly drawing and cutting with the sword still in the scabbard. This is the cause of many accidents: cut hands and broken scabbards.

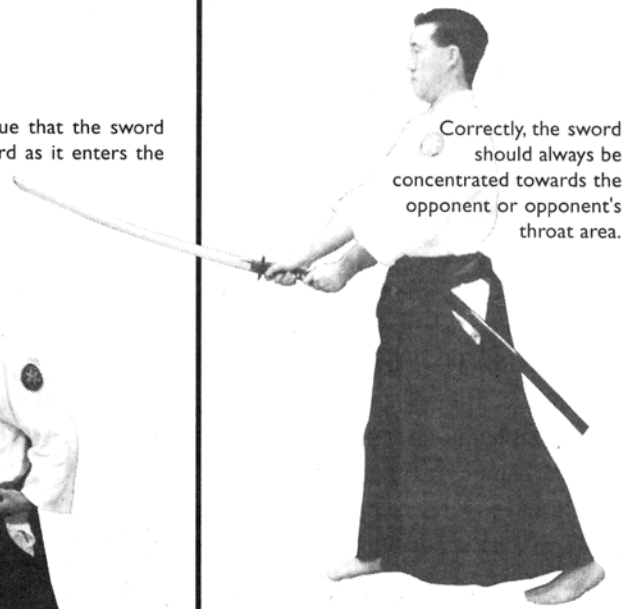
It is essential to the technique that the sword completely clears the scabbard as it enters the cutting mode.



Remember that correct use of the sword is not only important to the proper understanding of the technique, but is also the safest way to practice swordsmanship.



Generally, the sword tip (kissaki) is held too high.



Correctly, the sword should always be concentrated towards the opponent or opponent's throat area.