

# Half a Century III

About fifty pages of thoughts from Kim Taylor.

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Kim Taylor (that's me) is a long time martial artist living in Guelph Ontario. I've written a couple dozen books on the subject, several scholarly articles, edited several magazines and generally done what I can to spread the word.

Having tried all that, I also post short essays on the 'net and these have been collected here for your convenience. Since I'm only offering these in ebook form the formatting is pretty simple, one might even say "default".

Most of these will cover the martial arts that I am concerned with, Aikido, Iaido, Jodo, Niten Ichiryu and a couple more which will probably get mentioned along the way. If you don't know about them there are loads of resources available on the 'net.

You will also find a lot of martial arts jargon. Again I refer you to the 'net where you will find definitions of most of the words I use. I don't expect there will be many non-budo types reading this so I'm not going to worry about defining the foreign words or even identifying them as foreign by, for instance, putting them in italics. My book, my rules.

If someone out there figures this stuff could be edited into a proper book and published, get in touch if you've got the editor, I thought about it once but would rather write something new than edit something already written.

If you want to check out any of those books you can do so at <http://sdksupplies.com/> where you might also find more of these Half a Century ebooks.

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## Why Don't I Look Like Sensei?

Beginners worry. They research, look at other students, look at other sensei, look online and find videos. They find stuff that doesn't look like what they're doing so they worry they're doing something wrong.

Often they start to worry that their sensei isn't doing things right. Questioning sensei is great, a necessary step in our progress once we're far enough along, but take it too far in your own head and you're out the door looking for someone who looks like that youtube video you saw.

Feet fascinate students. They really get into foot positions, probably because sensei tells them that it all starts with footwork. Students worry about what angle a foot must be, is it 45 degrees, is it on the attack line, is the rear foot at 90 degrees to the front? What they need to learn, and what they will learn eventually, is that the foot is just an indicator of what our hip is doing. We really need to worry about our hip, learn what our hip should be doing at each stage of our movement, and the feet will follow. Unless we're duck-footed or pigeon-toed.

These worries are especially easy to develop when we're practicing koryu. Unfortunately trying to figure out what your line of koryu is doing correctly or incorrectly by asking what other lines are doing is like trying to figure out what Tiger Woods is doing right or wrong by watching Jack Nicholas. There isn't a correct or incorrect in most koryu any more since the founder is dead. It's all a big argument about who's closest to the "original teachings". We can agonize over who's closest to some past headmaster or whether or not we're studying under the current headmaster but again, rather pointless. Most of the koryu in the West are now too big for a single headmaster to deal with, too many lines of practice.

Even in a tiny art like Niten Ichiryu you get arguments and lines fracturing.

But the bottom line is that at the end of it all the art fits the man, not the other way around. That's a big secret that takes a lot of years to learn so most of you reading this should probably put your hands over your eyes.

It comes down to "I don't look like my sensei.... why?"

That's your starting point right there, not "why doesn't my sensei look like those other guys" but "why don't I look like sensei"?

I'll leave it up to you to make a list of reasons for yourself. Have a good look at it.

# Katate Tenouchi

Quite a while ago we had a "shoto seminar" where we examined the short sword techniques from the kendo no kata, Niten Ichiryu and Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu. The following question came out of the seminar and I thought I should finally try to answer it.

Since the seminar we had here I've been thinking about tenouchi. In particular I've been thinking about tenouchi for one handed strikes since I practice Jodan no Kamae. A few of the "whys" you gave during the kodachi Kata about how the wrist works, etc.. have gotten me thinking on how I am doing tenouchi when I strike.

Cutting out all of the details that I've been going over from what I know, think I know, saw at the seminar, etc... I was wondering if you could give me an explanation on how you particularly do tenouchi when you do a one handed strike in Iai...

...and perhaps how you think you would do tenouchi if you were to do one handed strikes with a shinai fighting in Bogu.

I've been focusing on what I do with my thumb; how and where I move it, how i squeeze with it, etc. And similarly for the wrist; how it bends, torques, flexes, moves, and where.

First, let me define tenouchi and shibori as I use them. Tenouchi is how and where you grip the hilt of the sword and pull it into the palm of your hand. Shibori is how you twist your two hands together when you cut.

On grip, you can check out the articles here [http://ejmas.com/tin/tinart\\_taylor2\\_0100.htm](http://ejmas.com/tin/tinart_taylor2_0100.htm) and here [http://ejmas.com/tin/tinart\\_taylor1\\_0300.htm](http://ejmas.com/tin/tinart_taylor1_0300.htm) which explain a couple of the concepts behind a two-handed and one-handed grip.

On to the thumb and the squeeze. I have tried to take some shots of myself with the point and shoot on timer, forgive the ugly backgrounds.

Here we have a recap of the grip.



fig 1. two handed grip



fig 2. angle on palm of two handed grip

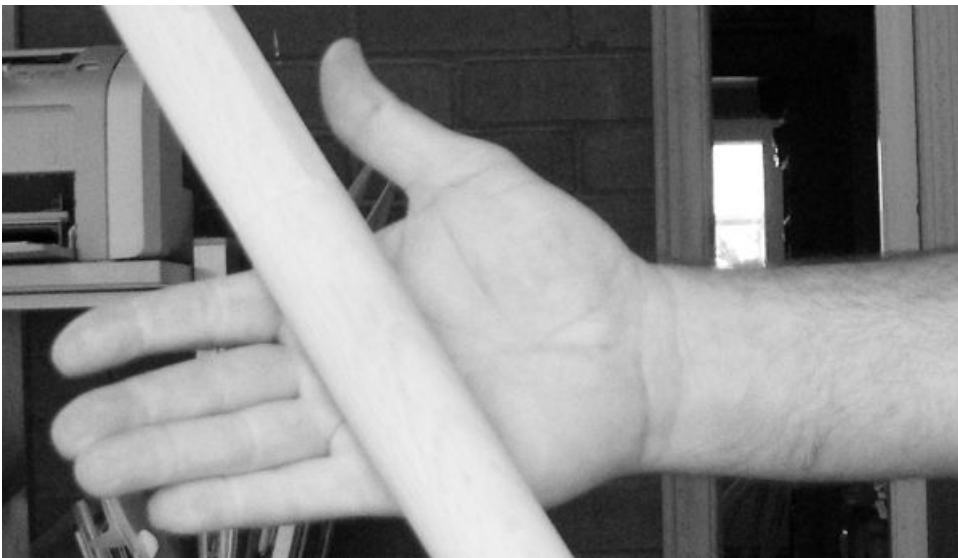


fig 3. If we move the angle to a more square position across the palm we get the one handed position.



fig 4. one handed grip



fig 5. for comparison, here is a one handed grip using the two-handed position across the palm.

In this last shot take note of how the wrist turns off to the side of the hilt naturally. To hit with this grip would mean that the blade would not be lined up with the arm and a lot of power and speed would be lost trying to keep the edge on line by torquing the forearm. The more square grip puts the wrist directly over the hilt.



fig 6. This is the classical "ping pong ball" grip, whereby a ball would not fall off the hand if placed on top. I have seen this in books and heard it taught.



fig 7. This is the "straight thumb grip" that I recommend for one handed grips. The thumb falls straight down the side of the hilt, in line with the edge of the blade. You can see that this grip again pulls the wrist over the hilt and puts the forearm in line with the edge.





fig 8. Tenouchi



fig 9. Shibori

When it comes to the actual strike we may want to pull up with the thumb, into the palm as we also tighten the index finger. This is especially tempting with one handed strikes but as you can see in fig 8 above this will tend to twist the edge offline and roll the hand inward where it may even collapse. By squeezing the thumb sideways rather than pulling upward as in figure 9 we see that the wrist again moves over the hilt and the edge of the blade stays on line.

If you would take a small test for yourself now we can make a final point on grip strength in one handed strikes. Grab anything in your hand and roll your fingers inward as if gripping in fig. 8. How easy it is to keep a strong grip with your fingers? Now roll your wrist inward, driving the thumb down and the fingers outward. What happens with the grip?

For me, the way my fingers work, I can keep a grip on the hilt if my wrist bends outward, but when it bends inward (as if trying to touch my wrist with my thumb) the fingers naturally open.

Finally, by pulling up with the thumb and forefinger we are actually slowing down the strike. In a one-handed swing the tip is accelerated by the muscles of the forearm through the leverage from the little

finger to the base of the index finger. If we pull up with the index finger and thumb we remove the forearm from the swing and it all comes from the extension of the arm and the shoulders. Much slower tip speed.

I hope, with the previous two articles, that this gives folks something to think about at least. The best advice of course is to try this out and see what works for you.



*Nate Bain and his grip on a kukri*

## Being Japanese

From time to time the discussion of who can teach the martial arts comes up. Quite often the talk turns to the "Japanese bias" of students, where they will tend to assume that anyone from Japan is a sensei, and all Japanese, despite their rank or skill level, are more knowledgeable than Western instructors.

I think the bias is something that anyone who hangs around long enough to start teaching this stuff runs across eventually. The thing is, we had it ourselves when we started. It's not really all that much of a problem, since everyone who sticks around for 20 years comes to a better understanding of the difference between race and talent, but it can be annoying and in some cases, for instance in arranging seminars with local instructors, it can be a problem.

Beginners like the exoticism of a Japanese martial art so of course they are going to like the experience of being taught by a Japanese sensei. It's just a natural reaction, the same desire for a foreign flavour that took you to budo in the first place is going to incline you toward a Japanese instructor. There's nothing wrong with that, especially if what you're after is a cultural experience.

This same search for the exotic will lead to such assertions as you have to be in Japan to learn a koryu, that you have to understand modern Japanese culture in order to really understand a 400 year old martial art, and that anyone who has gone to Japan suddenly gets "touched by the kami" and knows some secret.

Western instructors often play this up as well, making a fetish of their time in Japan, their access to the Japanese sensei and implying that they have certain secrets that they can impart. This helps perpetuate the assumptions and is mostly harmless if the students are only after the exotic.

It can, however, be a problem if students are serious about the arts and are preventing themselves from learning by not listening to Western instructors who are both experienced and local. By ignoring these sensei the students are losing a valuable and regular source of training.

The Japanese themselves understand this problem, and there are several here in Canada who recognize and lament the rather silly assumption that a Japanese instructor is worth more than a Westerner. This is apparent even in what you can charge to attend a seminar with a Japanese (even if a local Japanese) instructor compared to a non-Japanese instructor.

In Canada we've been lucky to have many Japanese issei and nisei instructors who have no respect whatsoever for the idea that "being Japanese" implies superior skills. They are as happy to see a westerner sweating on the floor as they are to see a Japanese, and more importantly, just as frustrated

with a Japanese who won't give it their best at practice. In other words, we get over the Japanese thing earlier here because we are exposed. In other places with no Japanese population I've seen more than one cult grow up around westerners who have "talked to Japanese".

The fact remains, whichever budo we practice, it's a Japanese art and while there are many westerners who are quite good at kendo, iaido and jodo, there are many more senior Japanese sensei out there. We would be as foolish to ignore them as we would be to ignore senior Western instructors in our own countries.

The beginners will always believe that any Japanese has great skill in Budo, just as, I am sure, the "man on the street" in Tokyo believes Canadians know about hockey, Americans know about 6-guns and Europeans know about football. We should simply accept this and move on, confident that anyone of any nationality will eventually be skilled in our chosen arts if they continue to train for a couple of decades with good instructors, regardless of where they were born.

*Outside the Nippon  
Budokan, 2009*



## Cruel to be Kind

It occurs to me that I teach in two different ways when I'm teaching the martial arts or self defense.

In the martial arts I can take a long time with each student, usually years, to get them as far along the path as I can. I can let them set their own pace, and respond carefully and thoughtfully to their needs along the way. Once they are at a certain level, both mentally and physically I can give them a shove to get them to the next level. This can often seem a cruel process, involving perhaps a bruise or two (on both sides), but it rarely results in the student feeling bad or quitting if I've done my work correctly.

Teaching self defence is another thing altogether. In that case I'm taking a large group of women and, over the course of 10 weeks, getting them into a place where they feel they can resist an attack. I need to get them quickly to a place where I might take several years to get a martial art student. In one case the process is physical with a concentration on good technique, in the other it's almost entirely mental. With plenty of time I can teach the fine points of fighting to a martial art student and let the confidence of that skill soak in to affect their mental state. In the case of the short-term self defence class I have to switch the mental processes around so that they can give themselves permission to resist an attack. This has to be done quickly since we don't have years to correct mistakes and a small slip can result in an entire class being no better off than when they came in the door.

This is something that most martial artists don't understand about self defence classes. The emphasis on fighting skills and the conviction that you can't learn how to fight in less than several years will prompt martial artists to doubt the effectiveness of short courses. Fortunately, the research on assault and resistance suggests that being a harder target, resisting in just about any way imaginable (except begging, crying, pleading and of course not doing anything at all) works. The point is to get the women efficiently to a point where they can give themselves permission to resist.

The cruelty in a self defence class becomes quickly apparent when someone has an injury, is suffering from mental doubt about their own ability, or is simply moody. As an instructor with a room full of semi-trained women who are seeing the material being taught for the first time I can't step out of the teaching role to take care of individuals, and I can't allow the energy of rest of the class to be dropped by that individual. As a result a student occasionally gets left behind as the class moves forward. If they have an injury, a pulled muscle or twisted ankle perhaps, the usual procedures are applied, Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation, but they are applied by an assistant or a fellow student. If the injury is more severe as has happened once in the twenty years I've taught the course (a pulled abdominal muscle while running), the professionals are called in and the rest of the class moves on.

Injuries aren't a frequent problem, and a certain amount of bruising and muscle soreness often becomes

a mark of pride. Self-doubt, fear, internal chatter and just plain whining are the more usual problems in a self defense class. Cruel can seem the response to these problems. As an instructor I will usually confront the student verbally, and perhaps physically challenge them to see if I can solve their doubts, cure their fears or stop their internal monologue quickly. If that doesn't work they have to be left behind to deal with their own problems as the class as a whole must move along. The good instructor will still be looking for a way to bring that lost soul back into the class but occasionally they simply drop out and we can only hope they got something from what part of the class they attended.

In a martial art class the instructor will usually deal with physical injury and especially with mental problems personally, showing the care and concern of a parent while letting the rest of the class get on with some self-directed practice. In the self defense scenerio that parent gets replaced by the drill-master by necessity. The rest of the class can't be left to stand around getting cold while the instructor takes care of one person's bruised shin or ego.

So what have I just suggested... simply that martial arts students are often coddled and chided along while believing that they are being treated roughly (for their own good). On the other hand, the women in self defence classes are being pushed hard in order to make them push back from a position of inner hardness. Pushed in a way that would likely make a martial art student quit in disgust at what a jerk their sensei was.

Reading that over it sounds much more dramatic than it actually is. I suppose the baseline is that in the martial art class we're teaching individuals, while in the self defence class we must teach to the masses and sometimes that means the individuals get left a bit behind.

## A Little Gloating

I'm not really all that good at Iaido, or Jodo. Nor was I all that good at Aikido for that matter.

I'm not better now than I was, I'm getting heavier, the joints are wearing out and my techniques are starting to look a bit "old man", but none of that bothers me much.

You see I've got students out there that are better than I am. I have students with me now that will be better than I am one day. Many of these students are now teaching and have every chance of having students that are better than they are.

That's the thing that keeps me going in this stuff, seeing the art grow, seeing the students "get it" and watching them as they pass me by, protesting every moment that they'll never be as good as I am.

Delightful liars. You gotta love them. The only thing better has been watching my own kids grow up and find their own way of being better than the old man.

## Some Explanation of the Gloating

It occurs to me that the previous note was a bit cryptic. Allow me to expand a little on teaching in the martial arts since I've been thinking about it.

It's a pain in the butt, always has been. I've never had enough instruction around to allow me to simply be a student. The Aikido club at the University of Guelph was started in 1980 by Peter Yodzis who taught twice through the week as a third kyu. Bruce Stiles came up from Toronto once a week on Sundays to teach a class. As a result I was doing some of the teaching within a couple of years, maybe from third kyu.

The same thing happened when I started teaching iaido formally at the University in 1987. I went down to Toronto to study with my instructor (Goyo Ohmi sensei) and brought back what I had learned to the students here in Guelph. There wasn't any grading in iaido until 1991, some 8 years from my first lesson, so I was practicing and teaching for quite a while without any rank at all.

The rank doesn't matter, but the teaching certainly does. There are many students of budo who can't wait to start teaching, figuring that this is the ultimate goal of their training. After all, sensei gets to tell folks how to train and seems to know it all so hurray when we get to teach. We're a big cheeze now!

These folks are, I'm afraid, almost always a real drag on the system and not good instructors. The desire to teach is, in that most Platonic of ideals, a big recommendation against teaching. Teaching slows if not entirely prevents your own progress in the art. It is also the place where you start getting into all the nasty grimy stuff like finding a place to practice, dealing with landlords or administrations, and finding continuing instruction for yourself and for your students within a larger organization that is inevitably as hard to get along with as all organizations are.

Like I said, a pain in the butt.

But at some point you usually need to start teaching, often out of necessity when you move away from your teacher, sometimes because the art is very small, or eventually because you are simply the "last man standing" and you outlive everyone above you in the hierarchy. Yippee for those who avoid this until they're 6 or 7dan, as is the case for many in Japan, but here in the west it's unusual for a 5dan not to be teaching.

When it finally happens and you're out there in front of a bunch of beginners looking at you like you're some sort of intelligent being, you want to do your best for them. You want to do your best for the art. You want to teach as hard and as well as you practiced while you were a student. You want to survive until the beer at the end of the class.

If you're very, very lucky you will teach long enough and have students who are smart enough to become better than you are. Those students will take the art forward to something better than it was when you started practicing.

Despite teaching way too early, and having to grab instruction where and when I could for myself, despite not being as good at this stuff as I could have been if I'd had a sensei to kick my ass four or five times a week while I was in my 20s and 30s, I have some of those students.

And that's something to have a little gloat about.



## Be Careful What you Read

I am trying to get back to writing the books I have had hanging over my head for many years but I have to be careful when I'm working on them at home. When I have a fast connection to the internet it's too easy to take a bit of a break and check out a discussion forum to see what's up.

Problem is, I often find my thoughts derailed by the egotistical ranting of experts, so much so that I lose all desire to write. I'm talking about those who have a little bit of an insight and then post over and over, hinting about some hidden knowledge they possess but won't share.

It makes me want to throw up my hands and go practice.

Now I do know better, I really do and nothing forces me to go look at the discussions online but occasionally there are some good thoughts that come up, and sometimes I can answer a question... sometimes find an answer.

The latest "revelation" that is slowly being dragged out of one of these experts is that in some sword schools a hit on a bokuto during a kata is actually not intended to be a hit on a bokuto.

OMG!

I'm sure it will take another three or four days before our hero finally says it, and then he'll say it over and over again for months before disappearing again. He's had other secrets before and tends to follow the same pattern.

Just to set the record straight for anyone reading this here, kata are sometimes not what they appear, and you should instantly say "duh" when reading that. Here's an example, in Uchida-ryu tanjo there's a kata called kobushi kudaki which means "fist smashing". In it the defender is attacked by a sword cut to the side, the walking stick blocks the sword, then strikes down the sword and finally strikes the swordsman on the head.

What? Why is it called kobushi kudaki when we hit the sword and the head...

Umm. It's a secret?

There, I got that out of my system and can probably go back to my writing now.

This derailment from work doesn't only happen when I'm trying to write about martial arts. Looking at

images on the net can prevent me from picking up my camera and taking pictures. It isn't that I see so much good stuff that I'm discouraged, it's that I see so much crap that I despair. What's the point of trying to do good work when it will only get lost in a sea of banality.

The fragmentary nature of the net also tends to disrupt any sort of linear thought development. An art project or a book requires a clean, clear mind which holds the main idea so that the work has a unified theme and the development of the ideas from base to conclusion. The net is just so much chaff flowing around in the wind, it gets in your eyes and between your teeth. You can't see, you can't speak clearly, you're just distracted and frustrated.

Better to go sweep the kitchen floor for a break while working on big projects. Late at night when you can't sleep and you're bored is probably the best time to surf the net.

*Uchida Ryu Tanjojutsu.  
Can you spot the secret?  
Look carefully at Pam's  
right hand.*



# The Invisible Man

An invisible man is only invisible to someone who can see. The property of sight makes being invisible possible.

I ran across a mention of the invisible man today and that thought flashed instantly into my head. In a very similar way a hurtful, spiteful, vengeful, irritating, annoying and otherwise man is only such to someone who can receive those things from him.

If you can't, don't or won't feel hurt, spited, venged upon, irritated or annoyed, the person acting that way toward you loses all power they may have had. It's that simple. Emotional harm can only be inflicted on someone who allows himself to feel harmed.

Physical harm is something else of course, and what we usually assume we're preparing for when we practice the martial arts, but budo can go deeper than that.

The difference between emotional harm and physical harm is that with the first we can receive the attack and have no harm, while with the second we must avoid the attack to have no harm.

But in learning how to avoid physical harm we must also learn how to receive emotional attacks without being affected by them. If we can be goaded into fighting, or distracted by rage, or thrown off balance by shocking language, we won't be able to perform our budo. On the other hand, if we can let emotional attacks pass straight through us we can avoid most physical confrontations and a great deal of the stress that will kill us more surely than a knife in the back alley will.

I have had little problem letting the immediate emotional attack pass me by over the years, but my problem has been the "secondary" attack, the realization that someone who is close to me is trying to hurt me or to "push my buttons". The words and deeds themselves don't bother me but the idea that someone I care for is deliberately trying to upset me has made me upset for decades. It is only recently that I have been able to start throwing off this secondary burden.

Unfortunately I still struggle with the "third person" attack where someone who is angry at me tries to harm a third party we both care for. I really can't figure out what to do with this one, and it still makes me upset. After all the third party is always an innocent bystander and I always feel that their pain is somehow my fault, even though I know they're being hurt by someone trying to hurt me through them.

## Sweeping the floor

As a beginner, at my very first class in Aikido in 1980, I found a push mop in the corner of the room and swept the floor. From that day to this I have swept the floor of whatever dojo I'm in if there is a handy broom.

A couple years ago I challenged my seventh dan in Iaido in a room that is huge. I arrived at the dojo very early in the morning, grabbed a push mop and swept the floor. It took about 15 minutes at a sedate pace and was a wonderful preparation for my exam. Sweeping the floor is a meditation, a way to settle the mind and body, a way to warm up, and most of all, a way to own the dojo.

If you clean it, you own it.

Somehow, in the West we have come up with the idea that the most junior student has to clean the floor, and they will compete amongst themselves to take the broom away from their seniors.

They should compete, but not because they are youngest and it's their job to do so, but because they want to own the dojo.

I was recently in the dojo of a hachidan hanshi, a menkyo kaiden of his art, and at the end of a day of training the wet rags came out. This 70 year plus teacher whipped my ass at running back and forth across the floor with his hands down and his butt in the air. It was a great communal exercise at the end of hard and serious training. A time for everyone to laugh and compete while cleaning the floor to get ready for the next class.

Go sweep the floor of your dojo.

# The Joys of Beginners

You gotta love them, these beginners, and I refer to those students up to 4 or 5 dan. They are absolutely necessary to an instructor, but they can be irritating as all get-out.

From about shodan to about 4dan I was an absolute whiz at knowing names of kata, all the details of the variations, all the little fiddly bits of the techniques that can be written down and described. Hell I wrote manuals and produced instructional videos.

I noticed during that time that my sensei would often look at me and say "what's next?" or "what's the name of this kata" or even "really, it's the other foot forward? OK do it that way guys". I was sort of embarrassed that I knew more than my sensei but I never mentioned it and tried to keep my pride in check.

So now it's ten or twelve years further on and I find myself turning to my students and saying "how's this one go again?" They'd better know because I'm damned if I'm going to remember stuff they should be up on, stuff I could just go read in the manual.

Me, I'm concerned with other things these days, timing, distancing, the feel of this or that basic movement. The kata are becoming less important to me than the kihon, the basics. Sometimes I am content to do a single swing for hours at a time, just like I used to do as a raw beginner. Collecting kata just isn't as much fun as it used to be, it just means that much more delay before I memorize the dance steps and get to the juicy stuff.

Why did this come to mind? Well I just read a couple of comments on the net about a video that shows a couple of 8dans doing a kata. One fellow commented that they had mixed two kata up together. The second comment stated that since they were two 8-dans they likely did no such thing.

I looked up some other postings from the first fellow and he sounds like your typical expert, in other words a beginner who has all the moves memorized and at his fingertips. Since there isn't likely to be any video of him online to look at (there never is from the biggest experts) I haven't a clue if he knows anything about the art in question. However, he's right about the two 8-dans. I never noticed the first time I watched the demonstration but sure enough, they mixed two of them up, right in the same spot I, and everyone else in the universe who does that art, mixes them up.

But only a beginner would comment on it because it's completely meaningless in a demonstration. These guys absolutely know they mixed the kata up, you can see where they realize they've done it the instant they do it, but on they went and finished it up. Me, I was happy they continued on for a bit

longer than they would have, I got to see the timing, the shape of the strikes, the distancing, the wonderful interplay of energy and communication going between them for a few moments extra.

The take-home lesson? Remember the last time you heard a 5-year old state something completely obvious and simple in a big voice of authority? Yeah, and we don't stomp all over your correction of our kata any more than we would stomp all over the little guy's statement. We'll put on our serious face and say "thank you for the correction", but consider that you're trying to teach your grandma how to suck eggs.

*Kim Taylor heading for the mat in 1982. Two years into his budo career.*

*Bruce Stiles sensei instructing.*



# The Misuse of Technology

I just put up a new article on Physical Training [http://ejmas.com/pt/2009pt/ptart\\_taylor\\_0907.html](http://ejmas.com/pt/2009pt/ptart_taylor_0907.html) that argued in favour of using technology to help you learn the martial arts.

There is a downside to bringing a camera to class, and that is when a student uses it as a substitute to paying attention.

What I mean is the guys who whip out the camera and start filming the second you start teaching something new. They are filming but not watching so the instant they put the camera down they are asking you to tell them what you just blasted well told them.

Even that wouldn't be so bad if they would go away and look at the video they shot before the next class, but they don't do that. They come back to class no better off than the guys who missed the class the previous week.

They are using the video instead of their brains, as a substitute for understanding and remembering.



## The Man and the Position

I'm not a very formal guy, in fact I think I'm known as a pretty informal fellow. I often catch hell at seminars from folks who haven't met me, for not having a new top or not wearing an under-top or for having my collar folded under or... well you get the idea.

My students usually call me Kim, even in class.

All of which is just fine with me, as long as they know enough to act differently with other instructors, especially other instructors who don't know me well enough to forgive them for their rudeness.

But that's just me, just the man himself. On the other hand, I hold some pretty high posts in my federation and that is something else altogether. I may not mind some familiarity and healthy disrespect, but my positions are not subject to the same treatment.

That's something for students to keep in mind always, your teacher, your regional director, your President may be a pretty friendly guy and you may even feel that you can slap him on the back and share a big laugh. Why not? But never, ever forget that the position deserves your utmost respect.

This isn't hypocritical or inconsistent. The man is not the position for most of the day, but there are certainly times when the position is the man. During those times you should not, must not, will not act with disrespect. At that time good old Whatzisname becomes "sensei" or "kaicho" or whatever other title he is currently inhabiting. Anything less and you are declaring your contempt for your organization.

Keep those differences in mind, and remember always that the beginners learn from ALL their seniors. That's everyone who was in the dojo when they arrived. Make sure you teach them to respect the position even after they befriend the man.

## Yes You Should Call Me Sensei

The same thing happens the other way around. Maybe you are teaching under another instructor who is far away. You've only been doing this stuff a couple of years but you're the guy in your area so you find yourself teaching.

Whether you like it or not, whether you figure you deserve it or not, let your students call you sensei. You don't have to make a big deal about it, but don't tell them not to call you sensei. You inhabit that



position and if you won't accept the title you aren't fulfilling the role. If you figure you shouldn't be called sensei, you shouldn't be teaching.

There are responsibilities that come along with that title, things that are required for the role, and you must accept them. There are no benefits from that title, if you think there are you shouldn't be teaching. There are only duties. The duty to give your best at each class, to show up for class, to fight for your students in your organization, to defend your organization to your students.

Look deep enough into the role and you may find yourself paying seminar fees for a beginner who really needs to go to a seminar, or perhaps you'll find yourself in court, posting bail. You may find yourself being a marriage counselor or a math tutor. What you should not expect to see, is students buying you beer, painting your house or cleaning your garage.



*Helping to collect free lumber, on the other hand, is an altogether different story.*

## Canada day

I am spending Canada day at the cabin. First time to do that in quite a while. My daughter is lying on the couch reading, my son and his friend are fishing by the lake and Brenda is sitting in the rocking chair with its missing arm taking advantage of the final rays of the sun.

Listening to CBC and their stories about Voyager, the guitar made of things from all over Canada I suddenly come all over weepy about being able to pass on my country to my kids.

This is not unusual, all things eventually get passed over to kids, to students, to someone, but I do remember my time as a 20-something, hitchhiking across the country (because I didn't have the money to do it any other way) to and from the West Coast. In the years that followed I managed to find most other places by meetings, seminars and occasionally, just a vacation.

I came over all weepy because my kids, barely into their teens, have an ownership of this country that I still don't really feel. They count Ottawa, Vancouver, Calgary, Quebec City, Halifax and Fredericton as their own. They complain when they are away for too long, and they have their favourite places to visit each time they are there

I wonder how long that will last. I wonder how much longer cheap oil prices and cheap airline flights will allow them to be citizens of a massive country like Canada.

We really have no other way but flying to join this country together, there are no bullet trains from Toronto to Yellowknife. Days on the road or the airport is our choice. When I'm too long away from other regions of the country I begin to think locally.

The same thing happens in the martial arts organization I belong to, we have regions for the West and the East (OK Vancouver and Toronto as the organization was created, to reflect where the Japanese who were the major participants lived). These regions often tend to drift when we go too long without face to face meetings, there are just too many ways for phone calls and emails to be misinterpreted.

I think there's a reason why empires fly apart, and why huge countries are mostly empty, but for now, it's great to look at my kids and realize that they consider the entire country to be theirs by right, by inheritance, and especially by use. I wish the same for my national organization.

## Moron Tools

Still at the cabin, I just spent a large part of the morning messing around with the settings for this editor, with the manuals for the computer itself, and with all its possible configurations.

Now it's raining and I have to take everything back inside.

It occurs to me that this is similar to messing around with the sageo, my hakama and all the other things that I need to have for iaido, but I don't really need to mess around with.

Your uniform should be clean and in repair, your sword should be cared for, and safe to use. Beyond that there is no need for frills.

*2001 Iaido grading shot taken with one of the very first digital cameras, the Sony Mavica.*

*Uniforms clean and repaired*



## Youtube videos

There are hundreds, if not thousands of videos going online to youtube each year, showing lots of the "secret" and rare koryu sword arts, as well as just about every other martial art imaginable. Many of these videos are shot at public demonstrations by non-members of the ryu and it is often suggested that putting these videos online for everyone to see is something that folks should not do. The argument being that demonstrating in front of a small crowd is different than having the demonstration shown to the whole world. At the very least, the argument goes, the camera operators should ask permission before showing the videos.

First, from a purely photographic point of view, I've got to point out that the filming of public demonstrations is usually permitted under both copyright and privacy laws. There are a few countries out there that are starting to restrict the ability of photographers to shoot on the street but I hope that will not spread. These laws are mostly in response to complaints by celebrities that their privacy is invaded. The actual reason, I suspect, for such complaints is that these photos are valuable commercially, and I suspect the courts feel that celebrities, being those who make a living largely off their celebrity, should be able to control such images.

This has little to do with most martial artists, who don't make a living off their image or their art, and as I said, most countries still allow what happens in public to be recorded. It's public, it's news, it's a matter of interest to the wider population.... and so on. There are good reasons for allowing folks to film in public.

So, on to the martial arts demonstration that gets filmed and put onto Youtube. A public demo is public and the demonstrators can't be unaware that such things as video cameras exist in this day and age. If sensei is so old and out of touch back in the mountains of Japan that he doesn't understand such things, he's got to have students who can explain it to him. After all he somehow made it into the big city and to the demonstration without being hit by the horseless carriages. It would be nice for everyone to ask permission from everyone but that's not the reality of the world today, nor has it ever been in public demonstrations come to that.

I was recently at the Kyoto taikai for the ZNKR and they had koryu demonstrations the very first thing. I missed them, not being aware that the demos started so early, so it was nice to see some of these demos appear on Youtube where I could watch them. These demos were public and there were hundreds of cameras being used from the audience. They were not in danger of being missed by anyone involved. They were there and they were being used. It's no surprise to anyone that they are now being shown to folks who were not at the demonstration.

The very next day at the same event, during the second round of the 8dan iaido gradings the organizers came around and told the audience to put away the cameras. In this case I suspect the feeling is that seitei is not private (the first round, during which everyone demonstrated 7 seitei kata, was thoroughly filmed) but koryu could be, so don't film it. The challengers have to demonstrate their koryu so go ahead and watch but don't film. Fair enough, it's a ZNKR grading and not a public demonstration. The ZNKR would be perfectly within their rights to kick everyone out of the room if they so wished, it's a private event.

But in other places, if you don't want your art (or more likely, your performance of it) to be seen AND filmed, don't show it in public demonstrations where you have the choice. The reality is that video cameras are very small and portable and you will be filmed and it will be on Youtube.

A small reality check. One of the films I watched was put online three days ago, I have watched it three times and the count for viewers now stands at 106. There were easily ten times that many people in the room while the demonstration was being performed. Youtube may have the "long tail" but compared to the actual demonstration it's the "small crowd".

*Screen Capture of Kim Taylor demonstrating in 1987 at a Toronto Sword Show.*



## Make it Your Own

I have said for years that students of a martial art will eventually have to "make it your own".

In a very real sense, the hachidan and especially the hanshi (or in other organizations than the ZNKR, the top top sensei) are the embodiment of the art, they neither innovate, nor preserve. They are the art. Where else would it reside? Where else is it? A martial art is something that is practiced, it doesn't live in books, in history, or even in the teachers of the past, but as a living thing. As a result those who are at the top are, in a very real sense, those who own the art. Stick around long enough and you will get to the point where you are one of the owners, it's a matter of practicing (and living) long enough.

On a more basic, and much earlier level of practice, many people think "making the art your own" is to add some sort of signature move. This is not what we're talking about, that sort of action in a beginner is the result of misunderstanding or an excess of ego. There isn't any room for signature moves or innovation for the sake of being distinctive in the martial arts, we leave that for the movies. Instead, the beginner should simply try to learn all they can with as little of their own interpretation as possible. As understanding grows, the student will start to find answers to questions that remain within the art and outside the realms of fantasy.

Given enough time in an art you will likely start teaching. As you gain experience you eventually come to a point where a student asks you a question and you answer it without hesitation, but immediately think to yourself, "is that right?" or "who told me that?" At that moment you realize you are going beyond what your instructors have given you because you are starting to understand the principles.

This is when you start to "own" the art, or perhaps a better way of saying it is that the art owns you. This is different than saying that you have your own art.

Eventually you hear one of your sensei telling you or someone else exactly what you "made up" to tell your student and you realize that it isn't really "your own" idea at all, but only that you are now swimming in the same sea as all your teachers and fellow students.

The art is the sea we swim in. As beginners we are learning to swim. We are told how to move our arms and legs, and we get from point A to B in the water. We get stronger and faster and think we're pretty good. Eventually we may find a different way to move through the water, we imagine that is "ours", that we have discovered something new. Our teachers smile and say "adjust your hand like this and see if that helps" or "try this way now". We continue to get better at moving from place to place in the water.

Eventually we start to notice that no matter what we do, no matter how we get from A to B, we're still in the same sea, and one day, when we are all grown up we understand that it isn't how we bash about with our arms and legs, it's that we can live in the sea that's the important part. We are owned by the sea and we finally own it in turn.

We have left swimming behind, nothing of swimming is "our own" or anyone else's. We are swimming, we swim. How can there be anything else?



*Maya doing Choken Battojutsu Kage Ryu, 2014*

## Tools, Techniques and Creativity

This is a double post, it's relevant to both my photography blog and my martial arts blog so it's up at both sites.

Quite often we want a new tool, a Holga camera, perhaps a custom made sword or just a new belt to put it in, and we can convince ourselves that if we only had that we would be awesome, our skills will improve and our creativity will shine forth. Sometimes we want a new technique, we want to learn how to do high dynamic range digital images, or the Dragan treatment on our portraits, or we may want to learn another obscure set of sword techniques which, we're sure, contain that one instruction that will let us understand all of it.

There's nothing wrong with wanting new tools and techniques but if you want to be creative, you have to understand that nothing is going to come while you're getting used to the new stuff. Creativity isn't flash and it isn't a gimmick. A really shiny blade with a red tassel hanging from the hilt won't make a good cut, but a new sword with a strange balance can certainly prevent a proper cut. The most unusual digital filter in the world won't make a good picture, alone it can only make one that looks strange. Yes it catches your attention, for about three seconds.

To be truly creative you need to be thoroughly familiar with your tools and techniques, they have to get out of your way. You can't capture a moment, either during a martial arts kata or during a photo shoot with a model, if you're fighting with your equipment and trying to figure out where the balance is. That could be the physical balance of the sword or the white balance of the camera.

In other words, don't look for new equipment to give you inspiration or solve a problem, instead ask what you can do with the equipment you have. You would be amazed at how much you can do with what you've got in your hands right now.

As for flash, there is a Japanese word in the martial arts called Kigurai. Lots of people try to define it as dignity, confidence, maturity, arrogance, and a whole lot else. It's hard to define but easy to describe and easier to know. It's the way a craftsman does a job, it's the way a master mechanic can walk into his shop, pick up the exact right tool and fix a car without any fuss whatsoever. It's the way a musician who has been performing for 20 years will play a solo with no effort, no flash, just a workmanlike solidity. It's the way a photographer will approach a new client and adapt his lighting equipment and camera to capture what they want, with a minimum of fuss and bother. It's the way a skilled swordsman will perform a kata with such ease and firmness that you are convinced you can do it too. Until you try.

The master mechanic, the musician, the photographer and the swordsman don't need racing stripes on



their tools, they don't need to call attention to themselves while they work, they know their tools, they know their skills and they use them to create something different, something correct, something "right" each time they do a new job. It's the same tools, the same techniques, but each time the situation is different, each time the challenges are different, yet each time the solution is there at hand, the result is correct.

A beginner will say "if only I had this tool I could do this job".

Instead, ask "how can I do this job with the tools and techniques I have?" This is the first step toward mastery and creativity.

When you become thoroughly familiar with your tools and your art you will simply ask "what's the job?" and do it, even if it's something you have never done before. That's the true creativity of life-long experience. It's not finding a new way to do an old job, it's simply doing the job, new or old.



*Look how big the old dojo was!*

## You Get What You Pay For

Lately there has been much talk about competitive swimming, and specifically about the new suits that apparently take a second per 100 meters off your swim times but cost \$600 and last less than 10 swims.

Parents are buying these suits for their kids.

At the same time as I've been reading these news stories I've been discussing fees for training in the martial arts on the Kendo-World forum. I made an argument that students should expect to, and should make sure that, they pay for their instruction. People believe they get what they pay for and so if they are charged nothing for their instruction they will believe it's worth nothing.

How do we get to the mind-set that we have about various activities? We will spend thousands on coaching, club fees and entry fees, not to mention buying \$600 suits for swimming, but we expect to be taught a martial art for free, and to get all the equipment for wholesale.

We will spend big money to visit a life coach or to go on vacation to unwind for our mental health, but we throw pocket change into the collection plate at church on Sunday. Do we put a premium on spirituality fads and discount the old familiar practices in the church?

Is it marketing? Do we expect to pay \$30 an hour for dance lessons and \$5 an hour for karate lessons because the dance studios have better advertising? Or has the martial arts profession as a whole simply down-priced itself? There are no dance teachers (or fitness instructors) that I know that believe they have a duty to teach for free, or that being paid taints their profession, but I know plenty of martial artists who would be horrified at the prospect of charging money to pass on their instruction.

The same downward pressure on fees is happening in the photography field where a host of non-paid photographers are offering their work for free or for pennies in internet-based stock sites which is dragging down prices for the professional stock shooters. Weddings are the same, where there are dozens of kids willing to shoot for hundreds of dollars it's hard to charge thousands, yet think about how many wedding weekends there are in a year and how much you need to charge to make a living. Of course the absolute best example of this is the model portfolio business. It wasn't uncommon at one time to have a girl come in off the street and pay \$800 for a shoot so she could go visit the modeling agencies. Then came the internet and sites that were supposedly set up to allow photographers to advertise for these models. The photographers would pay, and models would come on for free and hire the shooters. Of course what happened very quickly is that the amateur photographers flocked to the sites and started shooting for free and now it's the models who are charging.

But, you say, "You Get What You Pay For" and quality will out, the good photographers can still charge money because their product is better. You would think so, and at the very top end it's still true but overall the market is diluted and people are getting the expectation that photography should be free.

Back to the martial arts. In this case there's a very real stream of thought within martial artists themselves that those who charge fees to their students are somehow of less quality, integrity, spirituality or honour than those who teach "for the love of the art". You Get What You Don't Pay For? I know that doesn't make sense but I think that's one of the things that keep prices down or free in the martial arts. Of course we also have our share of amateur teachers who are like the "guys with cameras" who shoot models for free, but in a large number of cases we also have the top guys arguing that anybody who charges a fee to teach is somehow a fraud or at least a grubby capitalist.

Well and good if the general public believed the same thing but they don't. They still believe you get what you pay for and the martial arts remain some sort of sketchy back-alley activity along side the mah jong parlour. At best they're cheap after-school babysitting for the kids.

## Give It To Me Wholesale

These days I pay the bills by selling martial art equipment through <http://sdksupplies.com/>, you can click the link above any time to see the site. It's a strange business and there are some lines that you'd think I would be carrying which I just can't. Kendo equipment is one of those, there are just too few students and many of those have a real expectation that their equipment will come wholesale. This is because most of the equipment has been brought in over the years by their instructors directly from Japan. I'm not too worried about kendo equipment since it's like clothing, you have to carry a huge inventory and offer several different styles to suit everyone. Nevertheless, the suggestion that selling it for anything but cost is improper, is a bit off-putting at times.

What I have come to further understand, on listening to many customers over the years, is that martial art equipment should be dirt cheap and last forever. Dirt cheap I get, the big martial art suppliers in North America seem to be catering to kids with no money, they work on bulk and buy in the cheapest stuff they can find. It doesn't have to last since kids lose interest fast so there's little quality control. I don't try compete with these guys at the bottom of the market, I don't have the resources or the warehouse space. I also haven't a clue where folks come up with "lasts forever". Wooden weapons and uniforms do wear out given enough use.

All this led me to wonder how the cost of martial art practice compares with other sports. For instance, how does hockey equipment line up with kendo equipment? What are the average costs per year of iaido compared to fencing?

As an instructor I also field questions about the cost of martial arts instruction, and as an official with my organization I've had to explain more than once "what you get for your dues" to students so how do these costs stack up against other sports?

Being lazy I asked for input and several people were kind enough to respond. Here's what they had to say.

Neil wrote:

### **Golf**

Initial investment: \$275

\$200 for a set of beginner's clubs

\$75 for a bag

Assume golfing in regular clothes & sneakers as most beginners do

Most beginners don't take lessons but you might toss in another \$300

Annual cost: \$1365

Assuming 1 game/week for a 6 month season:

- \$50 green fees \* 26 games = \$1300

- 2 lost balls/game = \$65 (assuming used balls)

### **Alpine Skiing**

Initial investment: \$1200

\$500 for beginner's equipment (skis, bindings, boots, poles)

\$300 for cheap pants, shell, fleece

\$100 for misc clothing (underwear, hat, gloves)

5 group lessons @\$60 = \$300

Annual cost: \$1750

Assuming skiing once/week locally and 10 days resort, 5 month season

- 20 local lift tickets @ \$30 = \$600

- 10 resort lift tickets @ \$75 = \$750

- 10 nights shared accommodation = \$600

- assume no extra spent on meals (cook in condo)

### **Kendo**

Initial investment: \$645

\$100 for uniform

\$45 for bokken

\$500 for beginner's bogu

Annual cost: \$340

2 shinai @ 40 = \$80

\$240 for YMCA fees

\$20 for CKF fees

### **Judo**

Initial investment: \$80

\$80 for uniform

Annual cost: \$100

\$100 for dojo/Judo Canada/Judo Sask

That's my club, if you were at the YMCA club it would be more like \$400/year

One notable difference is that with kendo, judo and other martial arts instruction is included in every outing, whereas with golf, skiing, etc it's an add-on that a lot of people don't bother with.

Mark wrote:

**Cross country Skiing**

Avg 500\$ + gas. Gets cheaper per person as more from the family participate.

**Soccer**

Around \$700/year for a 12 y.o.

**Rock climbing**

When I was active 10+ years ago. Roughly \$1500/year directly. Gas and incidentals extra.

**Aikido**

1600\$ for me. 1200 for my daughter.

Gary wrote:

**Golf** \$1500 equipment/\$500 membership

**Alpine Skiing** \$1500 equipment/\$500 lift passes

**Cross country Skiing** \$250 equipment/ski-for-free

**Fishing** \$2000 equipment (bamboo fly-fisher)/\$50 licenses

**Aikido** \$150 equipment/\$360 membership

**Kendo** \$1000 equipment/\$360 membership

**Iaido** \$1000 equipment/\$360 membership

**Karate** \$50 equipment/\$250 membership

James:

I asked about the startup costs for hockey to a coworker of mine who is a **hockey goalie**. He indicated that startup equipment costs for a hockey player would be in the neighbourhood of \$500 (some used equipment) and perhaps \$400 a year if you joined a league for rink rental, etc.

Goalie equipment costs to startup would be in the area of \$2,000. Also of note, any decent goalie has started playing by age ten or earlier, and thus will be buying more sets of equipment as they grow up.

Steve:

I am the head coach at Rain City **Fencing** Center in Bellevue, Washington (<http://www.raincityfencing.com/>) where I teach classes and lessons in foil, sabre, and epee. My students range in age from 8 to 66.

Our monthly class fee for beginning and continuing classes is \$125, but that includes the use of all

required gear during the class. Classes meet twice a week for an hour each class. Our monthly classes break down to about \$15/hour. We offer a beginning equipment package (mask, jacket, pants, glove, plastron, foil, and equipment bag) for about \$300. We don't require that anyone purchase gear until they are ready to do so.

For fencers not in classes (our more advanced competitive fencers, and our adult recreational fencers) there is a monthly floor fee of \$75. Individual lessons for competitive fencers (the traditional method of imparting high level technique and tactics) are \$20 for approximately 15-20 minutes.

At the advanced (national) competition level, equipment costs go up radically, as most fencers use FIE-certified equipment (adding FIE to fencing gear is like adding Marine to hardware.) A complete FIE uniform (jacket, mask, plastron, pants, glove) and several weapons and body cords plus at least two lames can easily run \$1200-\$1500 and up. But at that level, it is the travel expenses that add up. A national level competitor going to five NACs a year could easily rack up \$5000-7000 in travel and lodging expenses. And we haven't even ventured into the world of European world cups.

So a recreational fencer could get by with as little as a \$500 investment in gear (including the electric weapons and accessories) plus \$75/month in floor fees, while an advanced junior competitor might be looking at \$240-400/month in lesson fees, another \$1500 basic investment in gear, and another \$5000 per year in travel and lodging.

By contrast, I have studied Muso shinden ryu **iaido** and Shindo Munen ryu iaido for almost 25 years. I am still using my first hakama. I am on my second gi. And I finally took pity on my elbows and bought an excellent, well-balanced iaito about 10 years ago. So my total equipment costs are about \$1500 over 25 years. I also collect and study koto era nihonto which is how I got into iaido in the first place, but that is an expense account of another color entirely.

Alan:

### **Aikido**

For kids - \$20/month and \$50/year for a new gi  
For adults - \$900/year plus \$75/year for new gi

### **Judo**

For kids - \$900/year and \$50/year for gi  
For adults - not sure

John in NYC:

Yearly cost, once per week, for fees and equipment.

1st Year **Iaidô** \$1830  
**Naginata** \$1360

2nd Year Iaidô \$835  
Naginata \$845

3rd Year Iaidô \$835  
Naginata \$2045

These numbers do not include transportation to Dojo, Seminars fees, Shinsa fees, Menjo, meals, etc etc

So on the whole, I don't think I'm going to buy into the argument that martial arts equipment or fees are expensive compared to other sports.



*How much do you need to practice?*

## What's Good Iaido?

*This is adapted from a post on Iaido-L I made in 1998. I found it while searching google for something else. The discussion involved how one would grade an old school that was demonstrated if one had never seen that school.*

I spent almost the entire iai class last night trying to pin down the key to what "good iaido" is as compared to "bad iaido". Mostly the idea was to figure out whether you were going down the right path or the wrong one in the absence of your sensei that is, if you don't have the wizened old guy with the stick behind you to whack your butt when you do it wrong, how do you tell if it's wrong or not?

Secondarily, how would you know good technique if you were seeing a school you'd never seen before, one that had a different theory of movement at its root.

Some suggestions from the class:

1. Have a picture in your head of what sensei does and go after that.
2. Hit all the key points in the movement (in seitei these are all written down and pretty easy to find).
3. What shows seme (pressure), what is without suki (openings), what's balanced, etc. etc.
4. What comes from good spirit, committed intent, is full of ki, etc.

So, all the way from "what you told me was good iai" to "spiritual practice" within 30 seconds.

We kept at it for a long time and eventually I think we more or less came around to this.

It's maximum efficiency with minimum fuss. What "looks like good iai" turns out to be "what is the most efficient way to do that particular motion".

We can argue that one over beers for a very very long time.

Now, as to judging other koryu from a panel. You've got a problem, you may not know the riai (functional meaning) of the movement you're looking at. For instance, Tamiya ryu has this really "strange" cut at belly height from the saya. Something not seen in MJER. You look at someone doing that from my perspective and it looks like a very badly done nuki tsuke. Once you know it's a cut across the belly, it starts to make much more sense, the wrist position is now justified and you can start looking to see if the cut was done to the proper target, with power, proper weight transfer at the right time, but you have to know the riai before you can judge it for what it is.

Or even more subtle, one sensei I know in my style of iai, but not my lineage, does a nuki tsuke where the intent is to just clip the opponent with the tip, good enough to open a nice cut and drop blood into the eyes for sure. We (same style) do the exact same movement but with a much deeper cut, so that a cut just using the wrist is "weak". What's good for one riai is not good for another. Both are of course



"correct" for their riai. Which riai is correct is best left for beers and wings later.

One of the sensei who was here for our <http://seidokai.ca/iai.seminar.html> made the comment that the senior people on the judging panels needed to "get out more" and see other koryu so they could judge them properly. I agree and I'm always looking, as much as I can, so I don't make too big a fool of myself passing judgements on what I don't know.

That said, should a student do Tendo-ryu jodo in front of a ZNKR Jodo grading panel? Should a Tamiya-ryu student do Tamiya-ryu as their koryu in front of a ZNKR iai grading panel? Hell yes. It's the panel's problem if they've never seen it before, not the student's. The panel has to deal with it.

A grading is your chance to say "this is what I do, you have to sit there and watch me, you don't have any other choice, here is my budo, what does it mean? SAY. How do you react to what I'm doing? SAY."

It's not called "challenging for a grade" for nothing.

I'm talking about what you should be doing in front of a panel at rokudan, not shodan. By the time you hit 6dan, if you're still worried about passing, about doing what the panel wants to see, or messing with their heads, you don't pass. At least you shouldn't pass.

Passing isn't the point, showing your seniors your budo is the point. They've been kind enough to sit and agree to watch, you must, of course, show them what you do. If you do something they don't know, they have to deal with it. That's the agreement. "ThAt's the rUles" as my little guy says.

So, as Bill Mears says, the panel may deal with it by looking at the basics, balance, poise, posture, metsuke. They may look from their own perspective, but that's not your problem (it really isn't, even if they fail you because of it). They may just ignore the koryu and concentrate on the seitei kata (not uncommon I'd guess), but then really look carefully to see if you took any of that strange stuff over into seitei. (If you did, you don't have a good grasp on either, your control isn't up to separating the body reactions.)

No matter what they do, they have to judge you as best as they can or they don't belong on the panel. We won't get into the political crap OK? If they are really good, they'll quiz you about why you do that strange movement, then next time they can judge you a little more deeply.

My argument is that with an understanding of the riai (if only the surface meaning) you can start to look at the efficiency and potential or real effectiveness of the movement. If it "looks good", ie. if it agrees with proper body mechanics for the situation, if it shows no openings, it's good. If it doesn't it's bad.

Just some semi-formed thoughts in a rush between getting the kids to bed and brushing my own teeth.

# Practice Styles

Peter Boylan wrote on iaido-l recently:

On of the things I've noticed is how little independent practice goes on in North America. Maybe it's just the dojos I have been part of in Japan, but we usually don't have everyone doing the same things at the same time. Most iai practice time is spent working on your own, and the teachers come by and make corrections as they see fit. Everyone in the dojo may be doing something different. Until the end of course, when we all do Mae together a few times.

It strikes me that our practice style here may well be a reflection of how things are taught at large seminars, rather than how they have been, and are, practiced at established dojo in Japan.

I think Peter is right to note the seminar style of teaching, it's a reflection of the type of training most in the west experience. We tend to learn at large seminars from visiting Japanese instructors, and so this style of instruction is what we experience, what we assume is standard and correct.

It's also a function of the number of seniors you have in a class. Senior students can be left to practice on their own but beginners need a bit more attention. Free practice means a lot of running around from student to student correcting things. It's more efficient to do the mass instruction thing and say it all one time. After all, most folks at the same level of skill will be getting the same corrections. On the other hand, seniors just need a quiet word in the ear and to be left alone to fix it.

Typically a class in the west is an instructor who has knowledge enough to teach and students who haven't a clue. This is slowly changing of course and I suspect you'll see more dojo with free practice times, although perhaps never as much as you might see in Japan.

The western model of martial arts instruction in general is "paying for lessons" rather than "member of dojo" and who wants to pay for instruction without getting instruction? When you're all members of a dojo you will pay your part to keep it running, and be happy to come in to practice on your own, it's a way of keeping the space open and having an instructor to keep an eye on you. On the other hand, if you have the view that you have paid for instruction rather than for the space, then you have much less investment in the building itself, assuming that the instructor will take care of it when he is not teaching you.

## Iaido-L Archives

While I'm thinking about it, a great place to do some research on iaido and other such martial arts is the archive of Iaido-L which you will find here: <http://listserv.uoguelph.ca/cgi-bin/wa?S1=iaido-l&D=0>

Iaido-L started in 1994 and is still around as a very low noise discussion group.

## Swordsmanship by accident

A very popular statement about the old sword schools (koryu) is that a swordsman would use something on the battlefield, find that it worked well and then found a school or at least incorporate the technique into their own school to be passed along to students.

I have a hard time picturing untrained swordsmen fumbling around on a battlefield, trying this or that brand new technique to see if it worked. Seems to me I'd like to try out these new ideas somewhere I am less likely to die if it doesn't work, somewhere like a dojo perhaps, with bokuto or with a shinai. I think I'd also like to go onto a battlefield with some sort of training ahead of time, and I would further like to keep the accidents to a minimum thank you.

What I really believe is that a swordsman who is in battle would, if he had to use his sword, use it in a very conservative manner, keep the defences up and hope the other guy has the accident, slips in the mud perhaps, so you can cut him down.

Later, if said swordsman survives the wars and starts teaching, he may have relatively few techniques to pass along. Through the years and then through the generations of students after you would see a natural expansion and perhaps even a contraction of techniques as kata are added and dropped.

An example of this can be found in the Hyoho Niten Ichiryu which has a set of five two-sword techniques. At one point two additional sets of five kata were added by the headmasters of the school bringing the number to 15. Later however, these additional sets were dropped and so the official number has returned to 5.

This is the school of Miyamoto Musashi who was definitely experienced on both the battlefield and in duels so one would expect to see "battlefield tested" technique there. In fact I just read a piece which claimed that Musashi's two-sword style was spontaneously invented during one such duel when he pulled his wakizashi out of his belt because he needed it. Every piece of history and his own writings contradict this idea but it remains attractive to those who watch movies which seem to be set in a parallel dimension where random strangers on the street can suddenly break out in song, accompanied by an orchestra that seems to be hiding around the next corner in the alleyway.

Let's compare sword schools to sketching. If you are sketching to capture a scene quickly, let's say you're spying on the enemy and are sketching the castle defences, you are going to use a minimum of effort, a minimum of lines and a minimum of frills. Later, after you've won the battle you might take those charcoal sketches and embellish them, add some noble figures from both sides hurling lances or at least insults at each other, add some colour, maybe a few dramatic clouds in the sky. All this is done because there's time to do it, and because it may help to give the feeling of the day to those viewing it. New techniques, new additions to the picture are more likely to show up away from the "job" than when on it. You'll try out the new watercolour wash technique somewhere other than up the tree on the hill overlooking the fort.

Does that mean you won't ever find a sketch by a spy made with lemon juice or a finger dipped in strawberry jam? Of course not, and you may even find a technique that was "discovered to work" on a

battlefield in a sword school, but that's not where the majority of artistic technique or sword kata are going to come from.



*Niten Ichiryu, Nito Seiho, Jodan.*

# Patterns

Do you turn off street lights when you drive or walk under them? Have you ever thought about someone and called them only to learn that they really needed you to call them right then? Or have you ever had a dream about someone and later found out that they had died?

Yeah, me too.

I don't think you should spend too much of your money trying to fix the slots or predict the winning lottery number, just think about the streetlights you've walked under and not turned off, or the number of times a day you think about some random friend or other who hasn't just lost their job, or how many dreams of your boss you've had in the last three weeks, without him getting even a sniffle.

Humans are pattern hunters. Recognizing the break in the pattern of the landscape helps us to avoid being dinner for Mr. Sabertooth. Figuring out that the moon needs to become full five times after the first snow before it's safe to plant the crops, keeps our bellies full and our village painter busy changing the population sign.

So we notice when the light goes out as we walk under the streetlamp, it breaks the pattern, it comes to our attention. After that we fill in the details because that's the other thing we do, we tell stories. We tell stories to the kids to pass down our memories along with our selfish little genes, and we tell stories to ourselves so that we remember where we saw that nasty great brute of a tiger... Tigers like forests burning bright when it's dark or something like that don't they?

With that we come to martial arts and photography once more because that's where I spend most of my time. (I think I see a pattern here.) The martial arts are pretty easy to link to our theme today. We learn by patterns. In the Japanese tradition we call them kata, a set of movements strung together in such a way that by memorizing and moving through them we can learn certain fundamental ways of fighting. We also use pattern when we're fighting with an opponent. When he jabs two times he follows up with a right cross so we wait for two jabs, slip to our left and hammer him with a roundhouse followed up by a left uppercut to the ribs. We break patterns of movement and of timing in order to throw the opponent off guard, to make him stop and think, to freeze him long enough to beat him.

We use patterns of our own to remove the need to think about our next punch, we jab twice, pause, jab again and follow with a right cross which usually nails our opponent because he's dropped his left in preparation for a roundhouse.

In photography we create and destroy patterns every time we take a picture. In traditional photography we follow rules of composition, we look for subjects that fall into certain angles and repeating chunks of visual information and we take advantage of that to create images that make people relax and feel good.

Or we don't, in which case we may break the rules of composition, or reduce the image to a single visual item which disturbs people long enough to make them really look at the shot. Think of a headshot on a white background. We assume that's what you do these days, and commercial

photography schools will tell you to reduce the image clutter down to the subject, but when Penn and Avedon started shooting their floating heads in the middle of the frame they were shocking. Just the face, no background, no pattern to tell us the story? What's up with that?

Or we may, like Bernd and Hilla Becher, take a series of shots that at first appear to be the same thing, perhaps a post and beam house or a water tower. When we display these shots together in a group, our boring single photo becomes a matter of some interest to the viewers who start looking for breaks in the pattern. "Name three things that are different in these two pictures." Call it typology.

Make our white background blown out and combine it with a generic model's face that is photoshopped into blandness? Now you've got a Sears Catalogue shot that is totally forgettable. Or take a shot of a parking lot at night, one shot, no more, and you've got something that truly is too boring to look at. There's no pattern, there's nothing to spark a story in our minds, nothing to make us stop and look.

Is that art? Ah, there's the one thing that makes us stop to think, but if we can answer too quickly, it's pretty much a waste of space.

While the new photography tries to reduce pattern down to its basic unit, I also said that we destroy patterns when we make an image. We do that by destroying time, that ultimate pattern because what is time except the repeating movements of the universe. By taking a photograph we stop time, we stop the waving of the grass, the movement of the clouds, the passing of day and night, the aging of our grandparents. We break the pattern of our own families by freezing our children forever at age three, thus preventing them from having grandchildren of their own.

Can we do the same thing in the martial arts? Can we not only change the timing but destroy time itself?

What are the martial arts except a search for the timeless? We train for years to get to the point where those years are meaningless, to where we enter "into the moment" and all the falseness of time is revealed to us. We become, oh dear, "one with the universe" and see everything, all at once, and our connection to it. The martial arts, like other forms of meditation, can show us the timeless eternity of creation.

Or not. Pattern can be as much a blindness as a way of seeing. We can fill in the blanks where there aren't really any blanks, we can see another tree instead of Mr. Sabertooth and now we're part of the circle of life inside his stomach.

In the meantime, if you want to get creative in either photography or the martial arts, learn how to play with patterns, how to make them and break them, and how to use them to create stories in the heads of those pattern-recognition engines we call people.

# Solitude

For the second time in as many visits to the cottage I'm writing three or four items without any effort at all. That's because the internet, television and the phone don't reach this far into the woods.

It's not like I'm Henry David Thoreau but even a small space away from the dozens of distractions of daily life let me get some serious thinking done. Or at least as serious as my thinking gets these days.

Nate tells me that it takes him about three days to stop missing television and settle down to life out here in the woods (he's living full time at the cabin while he writes his Doctoral thesis). He's run through all the movies on his hard drive and is now enjoying the change of seasons, the hummingbird fights around the feeder and reading the complete works of Nietzsche.

Other books I've seen in the place include the Iliad and ... well that's enough of an example right there. Anywhere you can read ancient Greek heroic poetry has to be a pretty quiet place.

It seems that each generation gets further away from solitude. I grew up with the beginnings of television when living rooms rearranged themselves so that chairs which once faced the chesterfield now faced the boob tube. My kids live with cell phones, the internet, facebook and twitter. They are rarely out of chattering range of someone from waking up in the morning to turn on the TV for the weather (I stick my head out the door) to bedtime which finds them watching Family Guy or Futurama if they're not online watching YouTube videos or writing emails.

Yet these kids seem to be able to adapt to a rainy day at the cottage by, yes, reading and drawing and even fishing in the lake.

So how do we find a little solitude if we're stuck in the city with our jobs, our cell phones and our televisions?

The practice of martial arts of course. A couple times a week we have a place and a space where we have to listen carefully, move carefully and think carefully. No getting distracted or we risk getting injured. Nothing like the risk of a bloody nose to concentrate the mind and get rid of the distractions.

How can we have solitude or creative thoughts while we're in a class with a bunch of other students listening to a teacher? Well the same way you have solitude in the woods actually. At the cabin you have to chop wood, build fires, charge the batteries with the generator, and all sorts of other things that occupy your mind, keeping the jabbering monkey-brain quiet.

It's this monkey-brain, this thoughtless thinking that runs in circles that is encouraged by the dozens of communication devices we interact with each day. A period of concentrated thinking will break these cycles and allow the brain to relax enough to actually get something done.

# There are no wrong notes

from Sept 6 2009

Here at the cabin we had quite a conversation last night. My daughter plays violin and Nate is quite musical as well (choirs and guitars, a regular Singing Nun as it were). Somehow the conversation got around to crescendo and Vivaldi's first movement of Winter from the Four Seasons. Of course Nate had it on his ipod, and he played it a couple of times for Lauren who then played it back to him by ear thus earning respect all around.

Lauren then played a piece she's working on, stalled and stopped and threw her head back when she hit a wrong note.

That's when it started, Nate launched into quite a lesson on the non-existence of wrong notes, the slowness and quickness of slow and quick parts, and the importance of playing rather than fixating on playing it correctly and exactly and just like it was written down. Miles Davis' Bitches Brew was played and the Jazz continued for some time after I went to bed.

The discussion sounded a lot like a lesson in the martial arts to me, especially one like iaido where you have a piece of music (a kata) which has a tune and a timing.

Students memorize the kata, they fuss and worry about each degree of angle and half an inch, they write notes on just how long a "brief pause" is. When they think they're off they stop dead, go back and repeat that part of the kata and try to move on from there.

That's fine, useful even and I have to admit I teach that way quite often, even do it myself while I'm working on this or that but that's not iaido. It's not iaido any more than a piece played with stops and starts and "Oooooowwwwwhhhs" is a Bach sonata.

Eventually you have to put it together and play it. When you do that there are no wrong notes, you just play and if it goes off the rails a little you ease it back on in such a way that nobody but your teacher should know.

You've got to feel it, breathe it, surf it, you've got to play it and remember always that there are no wrong notes.



## Nerds

One of my students recently told me that all my students were nerds. I agreed and said "it's funny that I'm not a nerd".

He laughed, a lot.

What's a nerd? Someone who is obsessed with something, someone who is way too much of an expert, much more than the average person. By that count I guess I'm an iaido nerd, and a photography nerd, and an analytical biochemistry nerd...

What I meant of course was that I didn't watch anime, play video games, or read manga. I don't have any interest in MMA or dressing up as a Shinsengumi character at cosplay conventions. I know about this stuff from my students.

When we get together and play Trivial pursuit, the Lord of the Rings edition, I just read the questions and referee the arguments about whether or not running the board on the first turn is allowed, and whether or not you have to answer every single question on the last card to win the game.

Like I said, nerds.

On the other hand I clean up when we play the original edition because I'm a boomer and they haven't heard of half of the countries in the geography section... they don't exist any more.

So why are so many of my students nerds? What are nerds? Well if anything they're enthusiasts, they get into something heart and soul. They are also flexible of mind, they have no trouble arguing whether the book or the film is the authority when talking about Middle Earth, they have no trouble learning elvish so why would they have a problem learning an obscure Japanese martial art that was its most useful in about 1670.

Bless those nerdish characteristics, long live the nerd.

# I Hate Learning

I mean it, I really hate learning new kata. I have three new sets of kata that I have to learn because they have recently been taught to me so I'm spending two or three days a week with my notes, my videos and whatever books I can find, learning which foot goes where and what my opponent is doing now.

It's like memorizing biochemical pathways, you have to keep repeating them. It will be months before the sword and the stick movements are worn into my bones and then finally I'll be able to get into the good stuff. In the meantime I am not spending the time on the stuff I already know, so I'm not doing much in the way of good stuff at all.

What's the good stuff? That's the timing, distance, and intensity of the kata. It's the fear when your partner suddenly gets ahead of you and almost hits you in the head. It's the sudden realization that you "get" what the teachers before you meant for you to learn in the kata. Up until then you're just learning dance steps.

So why am I complaining? I mean it's great to learn new stuff right? Who wouldn't want to learn a new set of kata?

Well... me for one. I actively resist new kata these days, and to tell the truth, I've got students who do the same to me. They yell stop when we are blasting through kata for them to work on. The reason I resist became clear to me the other day when I started to think about just how many kata I'm supposed to be practicing these days.

Schools I (should) regularly practice	Set numbers	Total
Zen Ken Ren Iai	12	12
Zen Ken Ren Jo	12	12
Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Iai	11(+1), 10,8,10(+3), 5, 10, 10, 4	72
HyoHo Niten Ichiryu	12, 7, 5, 5, 5	34
Shindo Muso Ryu Jodo	12, 12(+1), 2	27
Uchida Ryu Tanjo Jutsu	12	12
Shinto Ryu Kenjutsu	12	12
Keshi (Keishicho) Ryu Iai	5	5
Shindo Munen Ryu Iai (Mitsuzuka s.)	12	12
Total kata to "regularly" practice		198

Other sets and schools I could be practicing but don't

- Muso Shinden ryu iaido
- ZNIR Toho iaido
- ZNIR Batto iaido

- Kendo no Kata kenjutsu
- Aikido Ken and Jo

Other sword schools in which I have had some more or less serious instruction and in which I could/would likely practice if I had the time

- Hoki ryu iaido
- Mugai ryu iaido
- Katori Shinto ryu kenjutsu
- Kashima Shinryu

I've surely forgotten some but you get the idea. Hang around long enough, practice with enough people, and you will accumulate sets of kata as you accumulate inches around your waist.

It gets to the point where you actively avoid situations where an instructor is likely to hand you another set of 10 or 12 kata to learn. After all, it's not like I haven't got enough to work on now.

*If you want to check out any of Kim's instructional books you can do so at <http://sdksupplies.com/> where you might also find more of these *Half a Century* ebooks.*