

# Sword and Spirit

The eNewsletter of Itten Dojo

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## — Why Budo? —

Regardless of the times you live in, or the circumstances of your life, success largely depends on things you actually can control:

- Building strong relationships in a community of achievement.
- Forging a disciplined and positive mindset.
- Enhancing your physical health and capabilities.

*These are exactly the things membership in a dojo provides.*

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## *Life Hacks from the Martial Arts...*

# A Weekend with JMAC

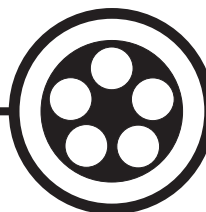
On July 7 and 8, Nicklaus Suino Sensei, Director of Training at the Japanese Martial Arts Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan, along with four members of JMAC, visited Itten Dojo for a seminar weekend of training and fellowship. Suino Sensei is a noted instructor, entrepreneur, and author of exceptional books addressing a wide range of topics, including (among others):

- *Budo Mind and Body — Training Secrets of the Japanese Martial Arts*
- *The Art of Japanese Swordsmanship*
- *Practice Drills for Japanese Swordsmanship*
- *Strategy in Japanese Swordsmanship*
- *SEO and Beyond*
- *Look Up! Inspiration and Action for Challenging Times*

The event was an opportunity for Suino Sensei and Robert Wolfe, dojocho of the Itten Dojo, to meet in person after more than a decade of correspondence, but the benefits of the seminar greatly exceeded that modest goal. In three training sessions, the members of Itten Dojo received introductions to iaido, judo, and newaza—introductions that were surprisingly in-depth and physically intense, and that embodied a heavy emphasis on the underlying principles related to the kata and techniques presented by Suino Sensei and his assistants.

The seminar opened on Saturday with iaido, with the focus of training being a selection of kata from Seiza no bu, the first section of the Muso Jikiden Eishin-ryu curriculum. Itten Dojo uses variations of the same set of kata in its study of swordsmanship, so it was especially interesting to compare and contrast the standard versions.

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While many principles were consistent, especially with regard to *te no uchi* (the grip), details related to proper *metsuke* (gaze) in the Eishin-ryu forms were in some cases different than normal practice at Itten Dojo and made for very interesting study. It's always especially difficult to set aside deeply ingrained habits to try to execute a form that is similar to one's normal practice, but distinctly different in important ways, and do it in the manner being demonstrated, but everyone did well enough that Suino Sensei was able to present a kata or two more than he'd originally planned. The kata Yaegaki ("Eightfold Fences") was particularly challenging and a favorite for the morning.



Following a break for lunch, judo was the focus for the second session. Continuing the overall theme established in the morning session, Suino Sensei emphasized specific principles on which the students were to focus: *kuzushi* (off balancing), *tsukuri* (making the technique), and *kahe* (suspension). These elements were applied by means of:

- 1) Raising the arms and bending the knees to get underneath uke.
- 2) If uke is on both legs, throw toward the weak line.
- 3) If uke is on one leg, he or she can be rotated around the axis of the base foot.

The techniques covered by Suino Sensei included *Seoi nage* (Back Follow Throw), *O Goshi* (Major Hip), *Uki Goshi* (Floating Hip), *Tai Otoshi* (Body Drop), and *Uchi Mata* (Inner Thigh). The big difference here for the Itten Dojo students was the nature of *ukemi* ("receiving body," the skills of rolling or executing breakfalls). In aikijutsu, techniques are designed to attack a joint rather than to throw, so *ukemi* is actually a counter to the technique and even in breakfalls is executed by uke in a manner designed to avoid adding momentum that results in a greater impact force upon landing.

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In judo throws, however, momentum is very definitely imparted to uke, and by the end of the second hour of being thrown, many Itten Dojo students were thinking that maybe having gone to JMAC with its sprung floor mat area might have been a better idea for this intro.

Training resumed Sunday morning with judo newaza (ground fighting). This topic was the least familiar subject for the Itten Dojo students, although the principles underlying the applications presented by Suino Sensei were readily recognizable: balance, controlling the center, and strong line/weak line. After an intense Tai Sabaki warm-up that included exercises such as *Shibori* (Squeezing), *Ebi* (Shrimp), *Gyaku Ebi* (Inverted Shrimp), and *Yoko Ebi* (Side[ways] Shrimp), Suino Sensei presented a selection of *Osaekomi Waza* (immobilization Techniques). These included *Kesa Gatame* (Surplice/Scarf Hold), *Yoko Shiho Gatame* (Side Four-Corner Hold), and *Kami Shiho Gatame* (Upper Four-Corner Hold).

An hour of instruction was followed by a half-hour of three-minute rounds of free-rolling with as many different partners as possible—this was the most physically demanding session of the weekend.



As part of the newaza instruction, Suino Sensei and JMAC assistant instructor Dan Holland demonstrated their “Add-a-trick” drill, in which the training partners alternate between action and inaction. There’s no resistance; when it’s one person’s turn, the other person is completely passive to permit the partner’s action. The intention is to find fluid and creative ways to move; not to win. Starting slowly, Suino Sensei and Mr. Holland increased speed and fluidity to the point the interaction was as smooth and connected as someone wringing their hands. Lovret Sensei had a saying something along the lines of, “When you see people demonstrating advanced techniques you expect to be impressed and it’s not really a big deal. But when you see people demonstrating *kihon* (fundamentals) and it’s impressive, you know you’re seeing top-shelf martial arts.”

“Impressive” is a good way to summarize the weekend. The members of Itten Dojo were deeply impressed by Suino Sensei’s technical expertise succinct but illuminating comments while instructing, as well as by the exceptional skills and sharing spirit of the JMAC members. For their part, the JMAC contingent was impressed by the traditional layout and atmosphere of the dojo itself, and by the enthusiasm, ability, and open spirit of the members of Itten Dojo. There was a lot of honest sweat, a great deal of laughter, and joy of making new friends that share a passion for budo. All in all, it was a weekend that exceeded everyone’s expectations. 🍵





**Robert Wolfe, chief instructor of Itten Dojo, began martial arts training in 1975 while attending Bucknell University, where he earned a degree in Japanese Studies. Mr. Wolfe has taught since 1985, and founded Itten Dojo in 1992. His articles on martial arts have been featured in publications such as *The Bujin*, *Budo Shinbun*, the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*, *Bugeisha*, *Aikido Today Magazine*, *Inside Karate*, *Martial Arts Training*, and *Martial Arts Professional*.**



**Dan Holland's martial arts career started in 1988 when he was seven years old. He began training in the traditional Japanese arts in 1998, which led him to Muso Jikiden Eishin-Ryu Iaido, Kodokan Judo and Nihon Jujutsu (under Nicklaus Suino Sensei), along with Aiki-Jujutsu (taught by the late Jeff Friedlis Sensei). At the Japanese Martial Arts Center, he currently teaches Iaido, Nihon Jujutsu, Judo, and Martial Arts for kids.**

