

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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A Deeper Exploration of the Martial Arts...

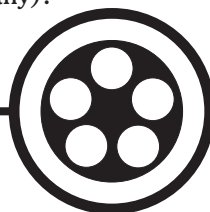
Tachi-dori Ude-garami

As was presented in the September/October 2018 issue, which focused on Tachi-dori Kiri-age, many systems of *kenjutsu* (Japanese swordsmanship) incorporated a variety of weapons and unarmed techniques. In older usages of the term, *jujutsu* was not just a category of unarmed techniques, but rather any supplemental technique or weapon employed to cover the gap in response between an attack and the moment the primary weapon could be brought into action, or to cover instances in which the primary weapon was lost.

The *jujutsu* curriculum of the modern school of *kenjutsu* we formerly studied encompasses *waza* (techniques) designed to deal with a variety of threats: *nuqi-dome* (stopping a draw), *kiri-dome* (stopping a cut), *tachi-dori* (disarming a swordsman), and *tedori-gaeshi* (returning a grab — methods of countering a grip on one's wrist, so that a draw can be completed).

Although there are historical references to *tachi-dori* having been accomplished successfully, it would have been spectacularly difficult given the disparate lethality of a swordsman attacking an unarmed opponent, and would have depended on a very large measure of luck. Still, methods that worked have been preserved, and there are clear benefits to the modern *budoka* from training these techniques. As with any classical, weapons-based art, there is greater intrinsic danger than is the case in unarmed training. As Lovret Sensei used to say, "If you don't understand that you can kill someone with a *bokken* (wooden sword), I don't want you using one in my dojo."

Standing one's ground in the face of a *bokken* slicing toward one's head requires self-control, but is absolutely necessary because moving too soon allows the swordsman to re-target — only by moving at the last possible moment can the defender enter and counter the cut. In addition to helping develop courage, the practice of *tachi-dori* builds fine control of *maai* (the interval between the opponents, in time and space), rapid perception of *hasuji* (the trajectory of an incoming threat), an enhanced sense of *hyoshi* (timing), and greater awareness of one's own body (knowing where all the pieces are at every instant prevents losing any).





Uchitachi (literally, “striking sword” — the attacker) and *shitachi* (the receiving sword, or defender) take positions at an open distance, from which *uchitachi* can connect with two steps and a cut to *shitachi*’s head. *Shitachi* centers and settles himself, physically and mentally, in preparation for *uchitachi*’s attack.



Uchitachi attacks with *nissoku*, *kiri-oroshi* (two steps, with a vertical cut coordinated with the second step). It’s critically important that *shitachi* make not the slightest move prior to *uchitachi*’s cut passing through a point about two-thirds of the way through the cut. Prior to that point *uchitachi* can re-target; past that point it is especially difficult for him to do so. This requires real nerve on the part of *shitachi*.



Turning his body to the right and entering with his left foot, *shitachi* strikes with his open, left hand into the base of *uchitachi*’s right deltoid. This strike, properly applied, has the effect of deflecting *uchitachi*’s cut and tipping him slightly off-balance, preventing an immediate, follow-on cut. *Shitachi* must enter directly forward — this move is a counter-attack, not an evasion. Any flinch to the side will enable *uchitachi* to cut *shitachi* somewhere on his right side.



Still facing forward, in place, *shitachi* drops his left hand to *uchitachi*’s right wrist, simultaneously establishing a grip on the wrist with his right hand, from underneath. Having imposed himself on the center zone of the engagement, *shitachi* begins to take control of the sword while blocking *uchitachi*’s ability to turn toward *shitachi*. Control is established by virtue of position, not strength.





Shitachi pivots in place to a deep, left foot forward stance, drawing a large circle with his right foot and pulling uchitachi's right elbow into an anchored position against shitachi's ribs (essentially an arm-bar). The pivot must be accomplished by turning the left hip into uchitachi rather than by swinging the right hip around. The former starts to break uchitachi down, while the latter will open a window for his escape.



As he pivots, shitachi pushes out with his belly and pulls with his arms, potentially to break uchitachi's elbow, and drives uchitachi down. Shitachi must lower his own center, following uchitachi down, to maintain control.



Stretching uchitachi's arm even further to loosen his grip on the sword, shitachi removes the bokken from uchitachi's hand. Shitachi assumes a position known *ten-no-gamae* (heaven-stance), with the bokken held and aligned in readiness for *kashira-ate* (a strike with the base of the hilt) if needed. The fingers of shitachi's left hand grasp the pad of uchitachi's right hand, and his thumb is between uchitachi's index and middle knuckles on the back of his hand, in position to apply *kote-gaeshi*.



Keeping his left arm relatively relaxed, shitachi steps back with his left foot. Moving this way applies the *kote-gaeshi* without shitachi having to twist uchitachi's wrist.





The kote-gaeshi forces uchitachi to lean back, exposing his throat. If shitachi applies a hard twist to uchitachi's wrist, he will cause uchitachi to roll onto his back and thereby lose control of uchitachi. Shitachi places the bokken at uchitachi's throat and forearm. Continuing the step back with his left foot, shitachi cuts uchitachi's throat and the tendons of his right arm with *hiki-giri*, a "pulling cut."



Shitachi slides a bit further away to open the maai and assumes *gedan-gamae*, a low-level guard. The edge of the sword is rotated up, as is our practice when an opponent is on the ground. Obviously, if this technique were applied successfully, the opponent would be completely out of commission. But just in case, we place the sharp edge up to prevent an opponent pushing the sword into the ground and resuming an attack.



When practicing in the dojo, there is a proper method for returning a bokken to your training partner: Hold the sword in your left hand, clear of the *tsuka* (hilt) and with the edge away from your partner. Extend the sword horizontally for your partner to grasp the tsuka and pull the bokken from your hand. The purpose to put yourself at a tactical disadvantage and demonstrate non-aggressive intent as your partner comes into range. The partner pulling the bokken away leaves no doubt as to whether someone has control of the weapon. ☸

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*.

