

Sword and Spirit

The eNewsletter of Itten Dojo

March 2020



— 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.

Copyright 2020 Itten Dojo, Inc.
701 W Simpson Street, Suite C
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-3716
www.ittendojo.org

A Deeper Exploration of the Martial Arts...

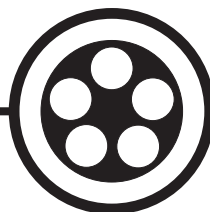
Kihon Suburi (Suwari-ho)

All styles of kenjutsu and many derivatives of aikijujutsu include *kihon suburi*, fundamental cutting exercises, in their training curriculum. In the *gendai* (modern) style of kenjutsu we formerly studied, *kihon suburi* is a specific, supplemental exercise that is typically one of the first things taught to a new student. The intent is to start imbuing proper body mechanics, cutting technique, hand positioning, posture, movement, and flow.

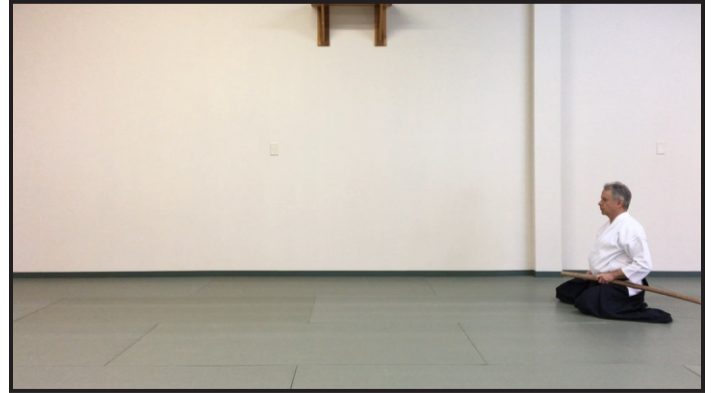
Normally, this is accomplished using a standing version of the exercise, comprised of eight components: 1) a stationary, vertical cut; 2) a right-foot lead sliding step, with a vertical cut; 3) a normal step to a left-foot lead, with a vertical cut; 4) a left-foot lead sliding step, with a thrust at throat-level; 5) a pivot to a right-foot lead step, with a thrust at throat-level; 6) a step back with the right foot to make the body very narrow in profile, followed by a right-foot step forward and an angled cut; 7) a flowing reception followed by a step forward to a left-foot lead, with a vertical cut; 8) a flowing reception followed by a step forward to a right-foot lead, with a vertical cut.

Our original dojo was located on the second floor of an office building (see photo at left). The suspended ceiling was normal, office ceiling height, so standing we could only practice seven of the eight components—number six was not possible with proper form. Consequently, we decided to incorporate a seated method (*suwari-ho*) of performing the exercise as a regular aspect of the conditioning routines for both the kenjutsukai and aikijutsukai. This was not an original creation, by any means, but for us it was at the time our primary form of *kihon suburi*.

Our second dojo had and our current dojo has much higher ceilings, so we'd gotten away from the seated version of the exercise. Because it's really an excellent strength building exercise for the legs, we'd started to bring *kihon suburi*, *suwari-ho*, back into regular use. Now, with so many people stuck in their homes due to the pandemic and unable to train normally with residential ceiling heights, it seems like a good time to share this method.



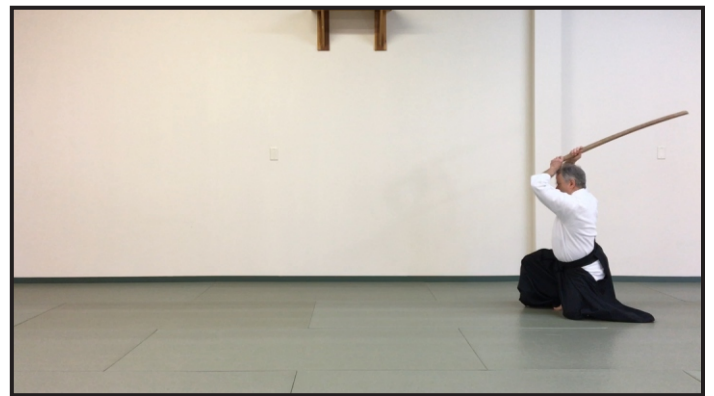
Start the exercise in seiza, with your bokken resting at the junction of your hip and thigh.



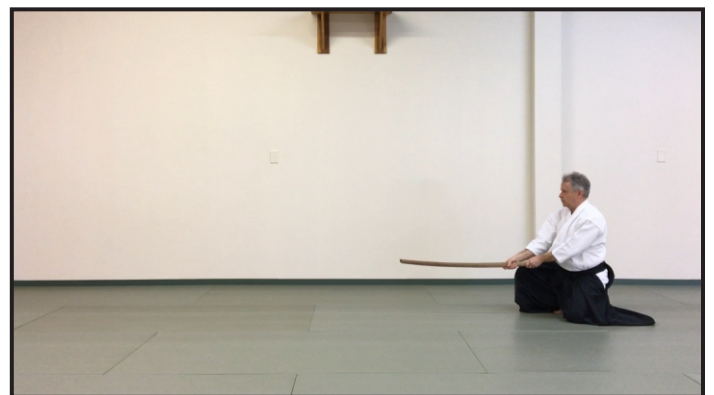
Commence the draw by rising to kiza (seiza with toes curled under), then shifting forward to iai-goshi, chudan-gamae. The kissaki (the tip of the sword) should be at your eye-level, your arms in tegatana, your hands “melted onto” the tsuka (hilt) of the bokken, and your hips and shoulders positioned on a 45-degree angle (hanmi).



The first cut in the exercise is a standard kiri-oroshi. Furi-age to jodan, in place, but while “opening” your hips to your right. Note that the angle of the bokken in jodan is 45-degrees—allowing the kissaki to drop below that angle doesn’t add effectiveness to the cut, but does add additional time, and hence a potential opening.



The kiri-oroshi is executed with proper hip rotation (koshi-mawari), to a depth that results in horizontal alignment of the bokken. Careful attention is required in this and every other kiri-oroshi in the exercise—the bokken must remain in a consistent, vertical plane, and the kissaki not allowed to hook or drift to either side at any point.



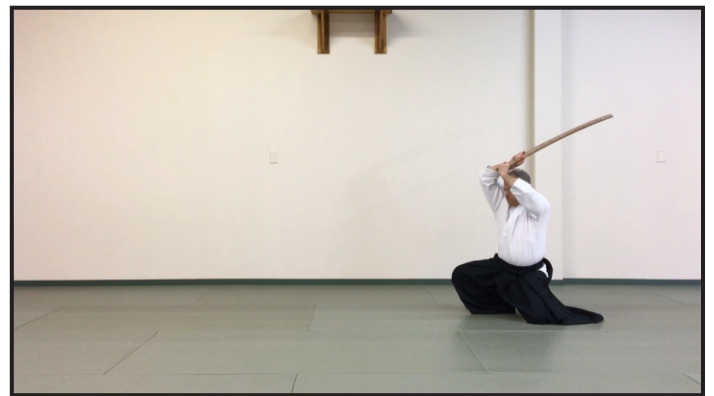
Moving from your center, push your right foot forward and raise the bokken to jodan.



Draw your left foot forward—this type of shift is called *tsugi-ashi*, a sliding step—and execute the *kiri-oroshi*. Move directly along the *embusen*, the center line of the exercise, and limit raising the level of your center to the minimal degree necessary to complete the sliding step.



The third cut is unusual, in that it is executed with the opposite lead foot, compared to what is typically the case. From the right-foot lead, open your hips to your left, while executing the *furi-age* to *jodan*. Again, be certain to maintain the bokken strictly in a vertical plane.



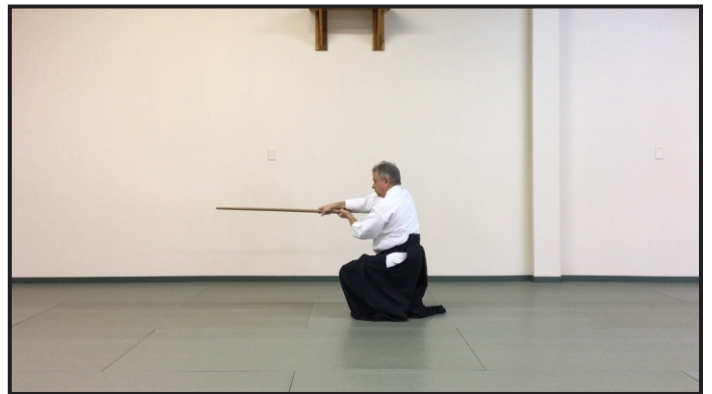
With a strong rotation of your hips to your right, shift forward with your left foot and complete the *kiri-oroshi*. This movement pattern is *ayumi-ashi*, a “normal” step.



Moving from your center, push your left foot forward, chambering the bokken in preparation for a thrust. Rather than pulling the sword back, allow your arms to relax and bring your center to your hands, while rotating the bokken on its side, ha-migi (edge to the right).



Complete the tsugi-ashi by drawing your right foot forward, and execute nodo-tsuki, a thrust to the throat. The bokken remains aligned with the ha to the right.



Snap your hips to your left, pivoting to the opposite side iai-goshi and angling the bokken ha-hidari, edge to the left.



Drive forward with your right foot and execute another nodo-tsuki.



Hito-e-mi, the “single-ply body,” is a method of making yourself narrow enough in profile to cause an enemy attacking with kiri-oroshi to miss, setting up a decisive counter. Rotate your right hip back, drawing your right foot with it, and raise the bokken to the center of the top of your head, in vertical alignment with the edge to the front.



Snap your right hip to drive your right foot forward to iai-goshi, cutting with kesa-giri. The cut tracks approximately along a 45-degree angle, stopping at a point in front of the left hip. (A “kesa” is the sash worn by Buddhist priests, draped from the shoulder to the opposite hip—and that’s the angle you’re cutting along.)



Uke-nagashi, the “flowing reception,” is primarily a means to regain jodan from a disadvantageous position. It’s also a means to deflect an incoming cut. Maintaining the tegatana-shape of your arms, open your hips to the left and swing the bokken up and to the side, such that it is angled in two planes, with the kissaki to the right of the embusen. Roll the bokken in your hands so that the impact from an attacking sword would be on the shinogiji, the surface of the blade below the mune (the back of the blade, opposite the edge). The mune is forward.



Swinging the bokken through a proper jodan, snap the left hip to drive the left foot forward, and cut with kiri-oroshi.



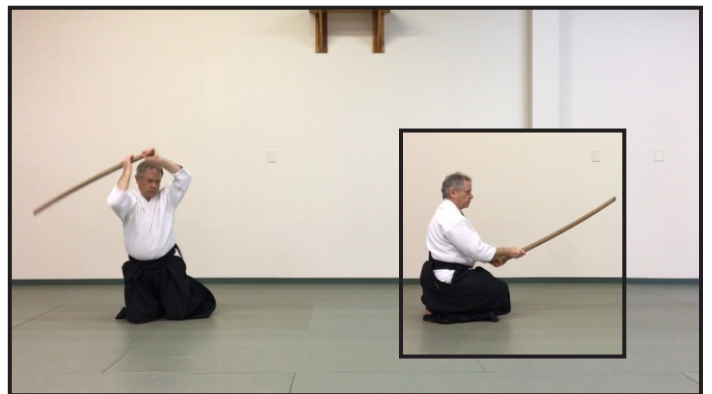
Maintaining the tegatana-shape of your arms, open your hips to the right and swing the bokken up and to the side, such that it is angled in two planes, with the kissaki to the left of the embusen. Again, roll the bokken in your hands so that the impact from an attacking sword would be on the shinogi-ji.



Swinging the bokken through a proper jodan, snap the right hip to drive the right foot forward, and cut with kiri-oroshi.



If you're practicing a number of consecutive repetitions of the exercise, you'll probably need to reverse directions. Pivot in iaigoshi, through waki-gamae and jodan, and resume chudan facing the opposite direction. ☯



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*.

