

Sword and Spirit

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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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Kenjutsu and Movement

Part Two — Fundamentals and Applications

Koshi-mawari (hip rotation) is the driving force behind many forms of *tai-sabaki* (body movement). By basing locomotion on hip rotation, instead of on simple, gross movements of the legs and feet, the swordsman optimizes the ability to generate forward pressure while maintaining flow and the ability to change direction—and thereby engage multiple opponents—at will.

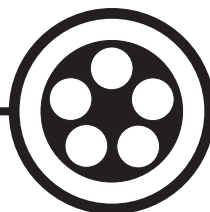
Mastering *koshi-mawari* requires long-term, focused training, but the benefits extend beyond the dojo, and include development of body continuity, the integrated patterns of movement that in themselves deter attack (described in “Benefits Beyond Technique: Posture and Movement in Aikijutsu,” in the March 2018 issue of this journal).

Ayumi-ashi #1: Forward

Many of the primary *kumitachi* (combative forms) in the modern style of kenjutsu we formerly studied are a response to a two-step attack with a vertical cut (*nissoku*, *kirioroshi*). *Uchitachi*'s (the striking-sword) two-step attack employs the form of movement known as *ayumi-ashi* (normal steps), which is actually anything but normal for a Westerner. *Ayumi-ashi* is a poised and gliding manner of walking. Rather than utilizing the legs as the primary source of motion, *ayumi-ashi* is heavily dependent on *koshi-mawari* and treats the legs as secondary instruments of movement.

From a right-foot-lead *sankakudai* (triangular stance), the swordsman initiates a powerful rotation of his hips to the right, from their 45-degree resting angle to the opposite 45-degree line. The rotation of the hips will drive the left foot forward. The track of the left foot is an “S”-shape (Figure 1a.), turning out to the left just prior to the completion of the step. As the hips are snapped back to the original 45-degree line, the right foot is driven straight forward, to resume *sankakudai* (Figure 1b.).

Both feet should stay just barely in contact with the ground throughout the two steps, as though rolling a grain of sand. Add a sword, swinging up to *jodan* on the left-foot step and cutting down vertically on the right-foot step and you have the basic cutting exercise, *nissoku-suburi*.



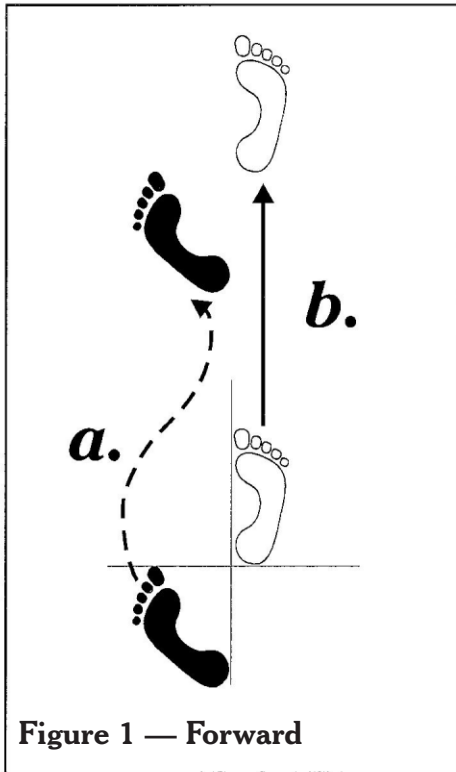


Figure 1 — Forward

With equal emphasis on the two hip rotations, the attack will track straight forward, while changing the point of emphasis yields some rather interesting variations.

A preparatory drill is used to set the stage, with the swordsmen starting in chudan-gamae (middle-level guard), kissaki-maai (with the tips of their bokken touching).



Shitachi (on left, in white jacket) steps back to jodan-gamae, to “open the gate” and lure the attack.



Uchitachi attempts to attack with a two-step, overhead cut, but shitachi steps forward to cut uchitachi’s wrist, as uchitachi reaches jodan-gamae.



In the first application of extra hip rotation, when shitachi steps forward to cut uchitachi’s wrist,



uchitachi pops his hips very powerfully on his second step, throwing himself off the center line (to evade shitachi's descending cut) and counters by cutting shitachi at his forehead.



The second application places greatest emphasis on the initial hip rotation. As shitachi steps forward to cut uchitachi's wrist, uchitachi turns very strongly to his right with extra hip rotation, completing a full pivot and cutting shitachi at his abdomen.



Ayumi-ashi #2: Backward

Backward motion in ayumi-ashi is completely different than forward motion, and should be thought of as a separate technique. Stepping back is initiated with a turn of the hips to the right, but movement of the feet is accomplished, for the most part, in two, slightly "C"-shaped steps, powered *entirely* by the hips. The turn of the hips to the right pushes the right foot to the rear (Figure 2a).

The hips turn left and drive the left foot to the rear (Figure 2b). As this happens, the right foot pivots on the ball to point forward. At this point, the feet may be too widely spaced for a proper sankakudai, in which case the right foot is allowed to slide back, closing the distance between the left and right feet and forming a proper sankakudai (Figure 2c).

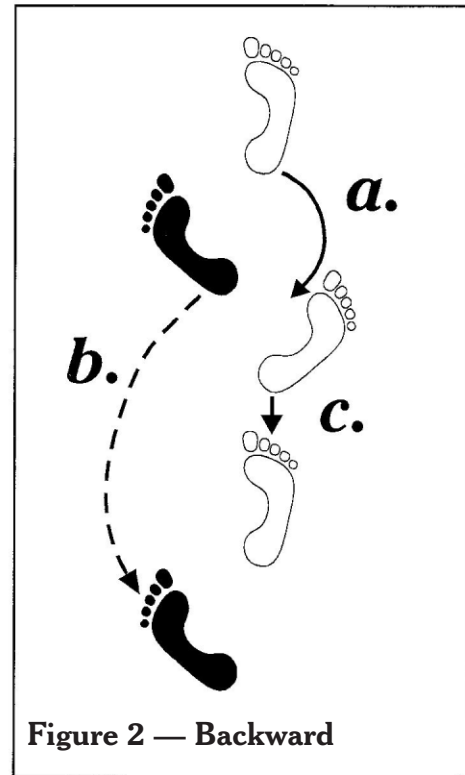


Figure 2 — Backward

Beginning students apply ayumi-ashi to the rear in a fundamental kumitachi called *Ki-musubi* (Spirits tied). From kissaki-maai, shitachi (on right) opens the gate.



Uchitachi attacks with a two-step, overhead cut,



which shitachi forestalls by stepping backwards with ayumi-ashi, floating his bokken to catch uchitachi's timing.



As uchitachi steps forward again for a second attack, shitachi steps forward and cuts uchitachi's wrist.



Kiri-gaeshi

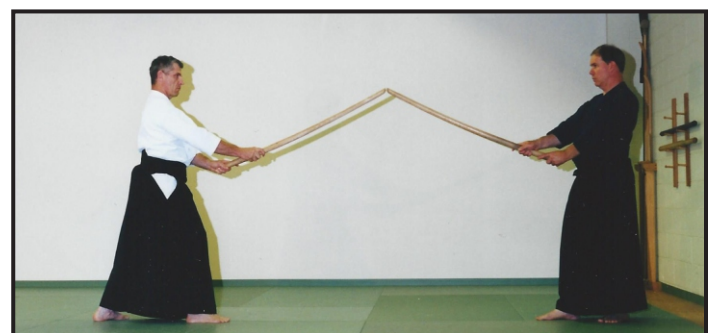
The forward and backward components of ayumi-ashi are combined in a drill of immense importance, called *kiri-gaeshi* (returning the cut). In the most basic form of the drill, two swordsmen commence in chudan-gamae, kissaki-maai.



As one attacks with a two-step, overhead cut, the other retreats, attempting to mirror exactly his partner's attack,



and finishing in chudan-gamae, kissaki-maai.



Then the lead reverses, and the swordsman who made the initial attack attempts to match his partner.



Throughout the exercise, both swordsmen must start at the same time, stop at the same instant, and finish each cut with kissaki touching.



One of the purposes of kiri-gaeshi is to teach exact control of the distance between swordsmen. The greater the degree and power of the hip rotation, the greater the speed and depth of the resulting step. By paying greater attention to uchitachi's hips than to his bokken, shitachi should be able to maintain the prescribed distance.

This isn't easy to do, even at a soft and slow level of practice, and becomes exceptionally challenging at more advanced stages of training when kiri-gaeshi becomes something of a contest. Since uchitachi sets the pace and shitachi must match him, the advanced form of the drill permits uchitachi to do anything he wants to try to

befuddle his partner. While limited still to the two-step, overhead attack, uchitachi can vary the speed and depth of his steps: he can take a small first step and a large, fast second step, he can do the opposite, or he can pause at any point. Regardless, shitachi must mirror the technique.

In this style of practice, it quickly becomes apparent that uchitachi can cover more ground with a dynamic advance, and do it faster,



than shitachi can retreat with conventional, ayumi-ashi footwork.



To maintain the proper distance, shitachi can counter uchitachi's attack with a specialized form of sabaki utilizing a skipping step to the rear. As uchitachi commences his attack, shitachi takes a right-foot step to the rear as normal. As this is happening, it becomes apparent to shitachi that uchitachi is attacking vigorously and shitachi is likely to be overrun, so shitachi raises his left



knee as high as he can and swings the knee to the rear, while keeping his left foot relatively close to his right knee.



The result will be shitachi sliding several extra feet to the rear, maintaining the maai.



We practice this form of movement by standing in left-foot-forward sankakudai, with the left arm extended horizontally to the side.



Kicking high enough with the left knee to brush the sleeve of our jacket,



we slide to the rear.



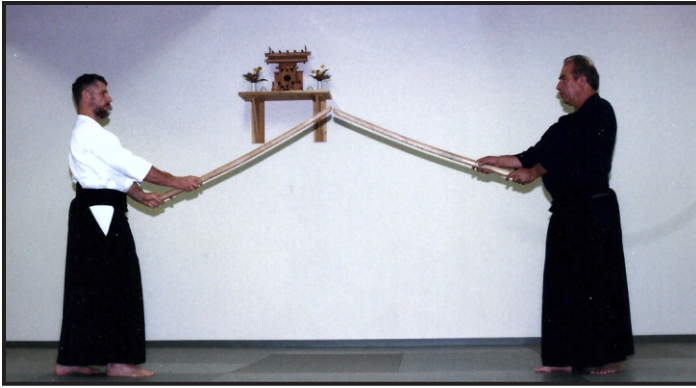
We pivot, according to the method described in Part One, last month. (Start to pivot on the ball of the rear foot and the heel of the lead foot. Then, at the half-way point of the turn, shift the pivot points from heel to toe and toe to heel.) Once facing the opposite direction in a proper sankakudai, we extend the right arm and repeat the exercise, ending on the mat where we began.

It can be very illuminating to test this method of moving by placing the left toes on a mark and noting how much distance can be covered with a conventional retreating step, compared to the distance covered with a skip-step.

Kote-giri (Cutting the wrist)

Koshi-mawari can also power sideways movement, in this case to clear the line of attack by shifting to a more advantageous position. Shitachi and uchitachi commence the kata in chudan-gamae, kissaki-maai (next page).





Shitachi, as uchitachi advances and raises his sword, swings his right side back as if he were starting ayumi-ashi to the rear. However, although his motion is made purposefully to appear the same as a normal, two-step retreat, his right foot stops at the half-way point.



Then, as uchitachi takes his second step, shitachi, with a powerful snap of his hips, swings his left foot around—the result should be another sankakudai, but offset to the right and at an angle to the center line. As shitachi rotates from beneath the descending sword, he cuts downward to uchitachi's left wrist.



Immediately after the kote-giri, shitachi snaps his sword up to threaten uchitachi's throat. Uchitachi leans back (to avoid the point) and leaves his sword in gedan.



Shitachi, firmly, drives uchitachi back two large steps.



Retaining intense spirit, shitachi and uchitachi assume any other kamae and pause for a moment, then shift to gedan-gamae and return to their starting positions.



This technique is not an evasion—shitachi must wait until uchitachi is committed and, if the action is executed properly, uchitachi's sword will clip shitachi's left sleeve. ☸

