

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 Three — Fundamentals & Applications: Tsugi-ashi

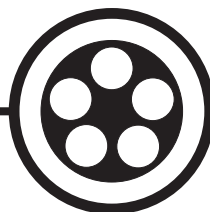
The simplest form of movement is *tsugi-ashi*, the “sliding step.” *Tsugi-ashi* can be used to cover a surprising distance, without changing the lead foot, and in application can be used to move forward, backward, to either side, or on an angle.

There are two forms of moving forward with *tsugi-ashi*, with the first using hip rotation (*koshi-mawari*, as described last issue). From a right-foot-forward *sankakudai* (triangular stance), the swordsman digs the outside edge of his left foot into the mat, such that his ankle and knee are essentially locked. He then punches forward with his right hip, which has the effect of adding a rotation (to the left) to his advance. This form of *tsugi-ashi* is not as often seen in techniques.

More commonly the form without hip rotation is used, often from *moroashi-dachi* (a stance derived from the *Itto-ryu*, in which both feet are parallel and the heel of the back foot is raised). The swordsman lowers his hips an inch or two (to break his stationary posture) and pushes strongly with his rear leg. As his hips drop, the swordsman’s lead foot slides forward, then his rear foot is pulled along as well. To go backwards, the hips are lowered as before, but the footwork is reversed. In all forms of *tsugi-ashi*, it is important to note that it is the *trailing* leg, relative to the direction of motion, that is the prime mover.

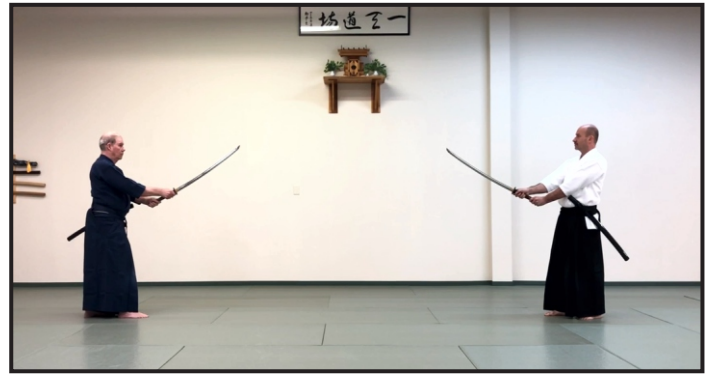
Beginning students in our former, *gendai kenjutsukai* learned *tsugi-ashi* through a number of basic drills, including *Kihon-suburi* (as described in the March 2020 issue of this publication) and *Happo-sabaki*, which is a set of simple counters to a single, overhead cut, each with an entry to one of eight directions. Several of the eight drills utilize *tsugi-ashi*.

Students training in *Ono-ha Itto-ryu* encounter *tsugi-ashi* in the very first *kumitachi* they learn: *Hitotsu-gachi* (One Victory). Within the named *kata*, *Itto-ryu* techniques are counted in terms of victories, so that a single, named *kumitachi* might be counted as one, two, or three victories. The *Go-juppon*, the first set of *odachi* (long sword) *kumitachi*, include 50 victories in 36 *kata*.



Hitotsu-gachi

Uchikata (literally, “striking person,” the person providing the attack to help his opponent learn the technique) and *shikata* (literally, “using person,” the person executing the technique) start in *seigan-gamae* at an open interval.



Uchikata steps forward to *in-gamae*. After a short pause, he advances with a normal step (left-right-left) until he is within striking distance. *Shikata* advances to meet *uchikata*.



When *uchikata* comes within range, he shifts through *jodan* and, on the final, left-foot step, attacks with a vertical cut.



Shikata, on a right-foot step, receives the attack with *kiri-otoshi* (dropping cut) / *tsuki* (thrust). The *kiri-otoshi* is executed on the step, and deflects the attack of *uchikata*...



...while the subsequent *nodo-tsuki* (thrust to the throat) is executed on the *tsugi-ashi* to close the distance.



Uchikata slides back to *hidari jodan-gamae* to avoid the thrust targeting his throat. Uchikata must first execute his *tsugi-ashi* to the rear, prior to assuming *jodan*; otherwise, he'll raise his arms into *shikata's* blade (or push *shikata's* blade into his own throat).



With another *tsugi-ashi*, *shikata* advances and cuts *uchikata's* left wrist.



Shikata executes a slide-step to the rear and cuts to *gedan-gamae*.



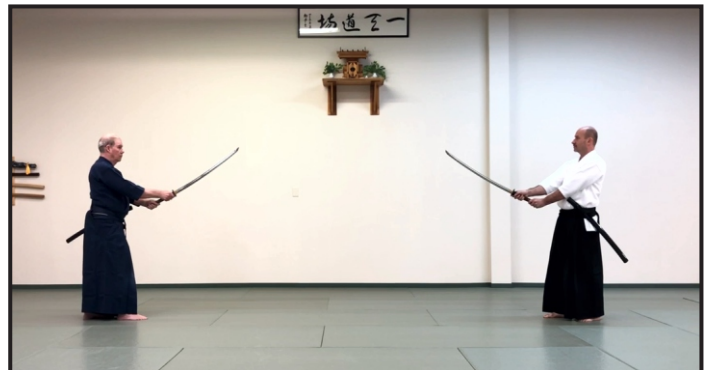
Both swordsmen assume seigan-gamae, *kosa* (with kissaki — the tips of the swords — crossed).



They retreat to their starting positions...



...and resume seigan-gamae. 🌀



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*.

