

Sword and Spirit

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— Why Budo? —

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

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

These are exactly the benefits membership in a dojo provides.

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Kagami-biraki 2022

Kagami-biraki (鏡開き) is a traditional, samurai ceremony marking a significant change of life or the start of something new, like the New Year—the name literally translates to “Opening the Mirror,” maybe an oblique reference to opening the doors of a Shinto-style shrine to reveal the small, round mirror inside. At New Year’s celebrations, *kagami mochi* (鏡餅, round cakes of rice, shaped like a small mirror) are broken and eaten. Reportedly, the origin of the ceremony derives from an act performed 300 years ago by Tokugawa Ietsuna, the fourth shogun of the Tokugawa dynasty. On the eve of a battle, he broke open a *sake* (rice wine) barrel and prayed for victory. Given his subsequent success, a tradition was born.

Although the kagami-biraki ceremony is used on other occasions in Japan, such as weddings, martial arts dojo tend to use the ceremony exclusively for New Year’s observations. This year, kagami-biraki would have most properly been held on January 8th, but due to the proximity of that date to the holidays our observation was held the morning of Saturday, January 15th.

On normal Saturdays, we do our weekly cleaning starting at 8:15 a.m. For kagami-biraki this year, we opened the dojo a little later than normal, at 9:00, and then performed *o-soji*, a special cleaning even more thorough than the regular routine (which is still fairly involved). Once all the dojo members able to participate were assembled and family members and guests had arrived, demonstrations were staged, starting promptly at 10:30 a.m.

The demonstrations for kagami-biraki are strictly in-house affairs not open to the general public. The idea is the presentations are for each other, as well as for the “ancestors,” those passed-on individuals responsible in one way or another for our being able to be here now, doing what we do. Each of the three, separate *kai* (groups) presented the first five or six *waza* (techniques) in their respective curriculums (five *waza* for the kenjutsu-kai and iaido-kai; six for the aikijutsu-kai), along with formal *reishiki* (ceremonial etiquette). There were short breaks between the demonstrations, to allow time for those training in more than one *kai* to change uniforms.

After the demonstrations we took group photos, had the sake toast, and then headed over to Mikado Japanese restaurant for lunch. It was a good day!





Aikijutsu Tendokai. First up for the morning were the members of the aikijutsu-kai, demonstrating the first six waza from the *gokyū seiteigata* (5th-kyu standard forms).



First technique in the set is *Shomen-uchi Ude-osae*: *uke* (person receiving the waza) attempts a strike but is countered by *nage*'s (person throwing) control of the arm.



After a series of pins, *Shomen-uchi Ude-osae* concludes with *nage* executing a symbolic *atemi* (strike).



Kata-dori Kote-gaeshi can be applied to allow *uke* a simple, sit-down escape, or a breakfall can be forced.



Responding to *ushiro-tedori*, her wrists being grabbed from behind, *nage* enters and throws with *kote-mawashi*.



The symbolic *atemi* is used in many techniques performed as kata, in this example *Katate-dori Shiho-nage*.





Ono-ha Itto-ryu Kenjutsu. One of the foremost schools of Japanese swordsmanship, our kenjutsu-kai is privileged to train with authorization of the Reigakudo.



In order to allow full-contact during training, *onigote* (devil's gauntlets) are worn by *uchikata* (the person "attacking" in paired forms practice).



In preparation for practice of *kumitachi* (combative forms), formal, ceremonial etiquette is observed.



With *bokuto* (wooden swords) and *onigote* carefully arranged, *uchikata* and *shikata* (the "defending" person) bow to each other.



The *shikata* aren't aiming their cuts for the gauntlets; they're aiming for the heads of the *uchikata*. It's *uchikata*'s problem to get the gauntlet in the way!



Many of the *kumitachi* in Itto-ryu include execution of *nodo-tsuki*, a thrust to the throat of *uchikata*.





Muso Jikiden Eishin-ryu Iaido. The newest group in the dojo, our iaido-kai trains as a study group in collaboration with the Japanese Martial Arts Center.



The first five waza in *Seiza-no-Bu*, the seated set, are very similar, differing primarily in the direction the sword-person is facing when the imaginary attack commences.



All of the first five waza conclude with *kiri-oroshi*, a vertical cut that is in many ways the most difficult to execute properly.



Nukitsuke, the process of drawing the sword to a horizontal cut, is challenging as well.



The fourth form, *Ushiro*, involves pivoting through a transitional posture to counter an attack from the rear.



Kiri-oroshi is difficult, but the more correctly the cut is made, the more satisfying the exquisite sound of the blade slicing through the air! 🌀



