

Sword and Spirit

The Journal of Itten Dojo

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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 an authentic dojo provides.

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Back to JMAC

In July 2018, we first met in-person Suino Sensei and several of the key seniors from the Japanese Martial Arts Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan. After more than a decade of correspondence on various topics and in direct consequence of Suino Sensei's comment on my social media post featuring a photo of one of my wife's fantastic Italian dinners, I extended an invitation to lead a weekend seminar at Itten Dojo. And have dinner. Training featured sessions focusing on iaido, judo, and newaza. As Suino Sensei and crew were loading the famous JMAC pickup truck to return home, I jokingly said that should our (then) current affiliation ever blow up, I would probably apply to become JMAC-East.

That former affiliation did, in fact, blow up. And here we are, becoming more JMAC-like by the year. The process started with Jevin Orcutt's prescient suggestion that we inquire about training with Suino Sensei in Muso Jikiden Eishin-ryu iaido—what began as a class intended to be a supplement to the other arts practiced here grew to become the largest component in the dojo and a major focus of training.

Until relatively recently, for a dojo logo I had used a *mon* (crest) based on that of our aikijutsu instructor. But because two of the three arts in the dojo by then had no connection to that instructor, as well as the fact I decided I'd prefer a logo more generally appealing in its design, I asked Suino Sensei whether we might be permitted to incorporate the JMAC *tsuba* (sword guard) graphic in a new logo. Suino Sensei very graciously agreed to allow it, and the result can now be seen at the bottom of this page, on our website and social media, and on a variety of dojo logo clothing. Adopting the new logo led eventually to blowing up the relationship with the aikijutsu instructor...

Which left me in a bit of a quandary.

Although certifications and endorsements of our aikijutsu practice were subsequently issued by Miguel Ibarra Sensei of the Yamabushi Jujutsu Aikijutsu Ryu and Salahuddin Muhammad Sensei of the Nihonden Aikibujutsu Senyokai—I am eternally grateful to both these gentlemen, for that and their ongoing support—the form of our practice became a subject of internal debate. One option was to take what we had and build on it.



Ultimately, though, that path leads to the same issues we've faced in the past: what is the art, really, and where did it come from? Personally, I've never been a "just make-do" or "settle-for" kind of guy. As I'm getting older, I have even less inclination to make-do or settle-for.

While still on the "build something" path, Suino Sensei suggested we learn Kihon Kata I from the Nihon Jujutsu founded by Sato Shizuya. The idea was having this limited exposure to Nihon Jujutsu would at least facilitate Suino Sensei working with us on his "real time self-defense," a system of free-sparring that takes *waza* (techniques) learned in *kata* (forms) and develops practical, effective self-defense skills. During our JMAC trip earlier this year, Alan Starner and I were introduced to Kihon Kata I and found the experience somewhat unsettling. Some of the *waza* had direct analogs in our legacy aikijutsu. No problem there. But the Nihon Jujutsu versions violated key principles of the legacy techniques that we'd been taught could not be violated for the techniques to work...and on top of that the Nihon Jujutsu versions had the temerity to work better. Very much better. Big problem.

After a lot of discussion within our *yudansha-kai*, the cadre of Itten Dojo black-belts, I've decided to transition our aikijutsu practice to Nihon Jujutsu while retaining some of our legacy aikijutsu techniques that we enjoy practicing and that won't conflict with the primary focus.



Friday morning, loading the rental van for the road trip. This time, just a six-passenger van, rather than the as much as 12-passenger models we've used on previous expeditions.

Once again, what was initially intended as a supplement supersedes a legacy art. Here's why:

There is a school of thought we've experienced in the past that propounds the most important thing in budo is only the techniques and the associated *reishiki* (ceremonial etiquette), and that knowing the detailed history and lineage of an art is not only unimportant, it's an affectation. This seems to me a particularly Western, mechanistic attitude. If not cover for a lack of either history or lineage. Not to mention an attitude that we know from experience training in more than one *kyoryu* (old-style) martial art is not how the Japanese see it. Heritage definitely affects the content and quality of training.

Of course, it's most important to focus on what your sensei teaches in the dojo. In a manner of speaking, that's a film in black-and-white. When you know the textbook history and lineage of an art, the film takes on color. But when you can hear, as we have many times, your sensei talk about what his sensei said or, even better, what his sensei said *his* sensei said, the film becomes 3-D. Not just because there are stories, but because these instances of verbal instruction are often in-depth expositions of the innermost essence and elements of the art.

All this to say our November road trip to JMAC had as its priorities continuing work on iaido and a crash-course on material we need to jump-start our training in Nihon Jujutsu.



Sure—let's drive to Michigan in November. What could go wrong? Actually, despite some heavy snow squalls, travel this time was quick and easy.



Iaido

Our goals for swordsmanship this visit included being checked during the Saturday sessions on our execution of the stepping and bokken drills, and review/correction of our performance of the waza in *Seiza no Bu* (Seated Set), *Batto Ho no Bu*, (Drawing Methods Set) and *Tachiwaza no Bu*, (Standing Techniques Set). Having done well enough during the review, we were introduced to the first three waza in *Tatehiza no Bu* (Half-seated Set). These are all sets of solo forms, of increasing sophistication and challenge. For detailed descriptions, see Suino Sensei's book, *The Art of Japanese Swordsmanship, A Manual of Eishin-ryu Iaido*.



Beth Wiggert was present for the training on Tatehiza-no-Bu. Beth is not a big person, but we've been around her when she unleashes a cut that sounds like it's tearing a gash in space-time. Unreal.

On Sunday, we were taken more deeply into *Tachiuchi no Kurai*, a set of *kumitachi* (paired swords) that are two-person, combative forms practiced with *bokken* (wooden swords). We started training these kata in August, during the last JMAC visit to Itten Dojo, but this session provided much greater insight to the elements of

distancing, timing, cadence, and strategy embodied in the forms.



Suino Sensei and Dan Holland demonstrate Kobushitori (Taking the Fist) from the Tachiuchi no Kurai kata.

Nihon Jujutsu

From the website of the International Nihon Jujutsu Association (<https://www.nihonjujutsu.com/>):

“Nihon Jujutsu is a modern Japanese martial art that focuses on practical, efficient techniques as originally found in both ancient and contemporary martial arts. Its principles and techniques derive from Japanese unarmed combat and self-defense techniques from pre-1945 judo and aikibujutsu, as well as *taihojutsu* (Japanese police immobilization and arresting methods). The founder of Nihon Jujutsu, Sato Shizuya, established this system based on his extensive studies with leading Japanese budoka (traditional martial artists), many of whom introduced ancient bujutsu methods into modern budo.”

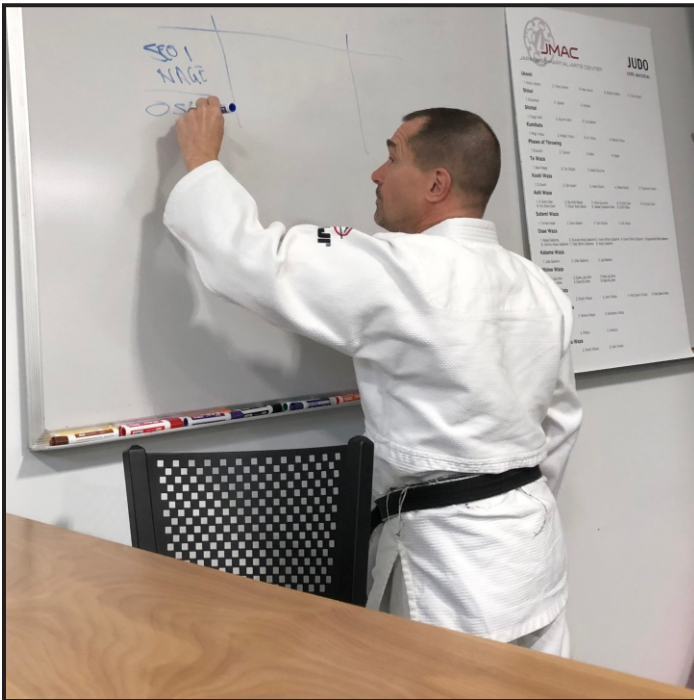
Having made the decision to transition our *taijutsu* (body art) to Nihon Jujutsu, the goal for the weekend at JMAC was to receive as in-depth a review as practical of the material received to date, and to cover the judo waza required through *yonkyu*. The reviews included the solo stepping drills (with and without hands), the “twisting”



drills, and the techniques in *Goshin Ho I* (Self-defense Methods 1) and *Kihon Kata I*. We also received the kicking set and detailed instruction on the reishiki to open and close *Nihon Jujutsu kata*.

The most intense training of the weekend—fortunately, first thing Saturday so we were fresh—was a broad-brush introduction to the first six judo techniques incorporated to *Nihon Jujutsu*: *Seoi Nage*, *Osoto Gari*, *Ogoshi*, *Ukigoshi*, *Sasaetsurikomi*, and *Hiza Guruma*.

At the conclusion of training on Saturday, I demonstrated for Suino Sensei a modified version of our legacy *Ukemi-no-kata* to see if using it would satisfy the *ukemi* (“receiving body”—i.e., rolls and breakfalls) requirements going forward. Happily, Sensei endorsed that approach.



Suino Sensei at the white board, laying out the class plan.



As has previously been the case, we were permitted to shoot video notes—an invaluable reference. All six judo waza were demonstrated in detail by Dan Holland and Richard Monroe.

So, we have a lot to work on. More than enough to keep us very busy until our next in-person training with Suino Sensei and our JMAC sempai.

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In addition to me, our contingent for this trip included Alan Starner, Charles Hudson, and Jake Sterner. Special thanks go to our JMAC sempai for the great assistance they provided (as always): Dan Holland, Jon Spengler, Mike Mancini, Richard Monroe, Amber Cathey, and Beth Wiggert.

We're very grateful for the opportunities that have been opened to us through our affiliation with Suino Sensei and JMAC, treasure the new friendships we've made, and look forward to all the future holds. 🌀

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*.

