

# Sword and Spirit

The Journal of Itten Dojo

January 2023



## — 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.*

Copyright 2023 Itten Dojo, Inc.  
701 W Simpson Street, Suite C  
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-3716  
[www.ittendojo.org](http://www.ittendojo.org)

## Kagami-biraki 2023

As was reported in the January 2022 issue of this journal, 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,” and is 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, a martial arts dojo generally uses the ceremony exclusively for New Year’s observations. This year, we were able to schedule our observation of Kagami-biraki for Saturday, January 21st, the day before the actual date of the lunar new year ushering in the “Year of the Rabbit.”

On normal Saturdays, we do our weekly cleaning starting at 8:15 a.m. For Kagami-biraki, we open the dojo a little later than normal, at 9:30, to perform *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 (about half the current enrollment this time), 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 for our being able to be here now, doing what we do. Each of the four separate groups presented a selection of their respective curriculums, along with formal *reishiki* (ceremonial etiquette). The aiki-jujutsu students went first, followed by the kenjutsu class. Bailey Sensei presented a demonstration of shodo, and then the iaido class closed out the formal portion of our observation.



After the demonstrations we took group photos, had the traditional *sake* toast (and *mochi* cake from Bailey Sensei!), and headed over to Mikado Japanese restaurant for lunch. It was an especially good day.



O-soji started with assigning everyone jobs, which included scrubbing floors and cleaning ceiling fans.



We routinely perform *zokin-gake* (cleaning the mat), running the width of the tatami pushing towels soaked in a multi-surface solution.



The aiki-jujutsu class presented the kata Goshin Ho I. Here Ms. Cairo applies a wrist-lock to Ms. Bailey.





Later in the sequence, Mr. Bailey applies another variation of the wrist-lock to Mr. Hudson.



We want to preserve some of the legacy, aikijutsu techniques that were our previous focus. Dr. St. Angelo and Mr. Hudson provided a sampling.



Ms. Bailey steps back, after throwing Ms. Cairo over her hip with one of the judo *waza* (techniques) found in the kata.



The Ono-ha Itto-ryu kenjutsu class began their demo with reishiki; Hague Sensei looking on.





Waiting in *waki-gamae* (side-posture), *shikata* (the person performing the technique in a kata, “lures” an attack by *uchikata* (the person striking).



*Shikata* drives *uchikata* backwards, ultimately striking for his head. *Uchikata* must quickly position one of his

heavy gauntlets to absorb her full-power cut. The gauntlets are called *onigote* (devil’s gloves).



Bailey Sensei began her demonstration of calligraphy with a description of what she would be writing. Bailey Sensei chose the famous phrase, *Fu-Rin-Ka-Zan* (風林火山—Wind, Forest, Fire, Mountain).



Originally from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, the phrase was adopted by the warlord Takeda Shingen as the motto for his troops: "Swift as the wind; Silent as a forest; Fierce as fire; Immovable as a mountain."



Members of the Mudo Jikiden Eishin-ryu iaido class demonstrated last, presenting techniques from the *Seiza no Bu* and *Batto-Ho no Bu* sets.

Mr. Kristy participated and did well, despite it being only his fifth or sixth time in the class. New members are usually limited to just wooden swords at this point...

Both forms of swordsmanship are dynamic. Kenjutsu is more combative and externally focused, while iaido is more inwardly focused, almost meditative in nature. The two styles are unique and quite dissimilar.





Following the demonstrations, adult participants shared a *sake* toast. Youngsters had to settle for water.



This little one is officially the record-holder for youngest Kagami-biraki spectator ever.



Everyone was able to enjoy the *mochi* cakes baked by Bailey Sensei.



The festivities concluded with a hibachi luncheon at The Mikado Japanese restaurant. 🍣





**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*.**

