

# Sword and Spirit

The Journal of Itten Dojo

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## — Benefits of 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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701 W Simpson Street, Suite C  
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-3716  
[www.ittendojo.org](http://www.ittendojo.org)

## Nihon Jujutsu Update

Over the weekend of 17–19 May, Itten Dojo hosted Suino Sensei and some of the JMAC black-belts for another fantastic seminar focused on Eishin-ryu iaido and Nihon Jujutsu. Accompanying Sensei were Nick Miller, Mike Mancini, Amber Cathey, and Dylan Carter—having these phenomenal examples in the mix is the quintessential force-multiplier in terms of the benefit we receive from this kind of event. The fresh insights, corrections, and new material we received on the iaido side were every bit as significant as all that happened during the jujutsu portions of the seminar, but for this issue I’m going to focus on the jujutsu.

Before I do that, I want to note the excellent work done by the iaido students during the examinations for promotion in rank that were conducted Saturday morning. Jeo Santiago actually set the tone Friday evening when he tested for 7-Kyu (he had to report for another kind of training Saturday morning). In addition to Jeo, Jenn Bennett, Gary Misiti, Tim Horstmann, Bill Shellhamer, and Visrant Choudhury all advanced to 7-Kyu. Dekan Wietholter and Aidan Drahn both made the mark for 5-Kyu, with performance that was noted as being especially good. Freddy Lebron and Jake Sterner passed their exams for 2-Kyu—the goal of *shodan* (first-degree black-belt) is starting to appear, out on the horizon. Charles Hudson reached that milestone and is now the third iaido black-belt at Itten Dojo (and this is his second black-belt rank, to date). Congratulations to all!

Our iaido program continues to be the largest component of the dojo. It’s unprecedented for a weapons-based study in our dojo to have this level of participation—more than half of the active membership is training in iaido. More significantly, it’s unprecedented to have access to the level of instruction in swordsmanship that we now enjoy. I’ve trained with a number of the most-highly regarded swordsmanship instructors in the world, both Japanese and American, and Suino Sensei is by far the finest. Although we have a very long way to go to reach the expertise embodied in Sensei’s senior students, our in-house instructor cadre is sufficiently experienced from past training to take full advantage of the help we’re receiving from Sensei and JMAC in a process that while extremely challenging is still somewhat comfortable.



Jujutsu is also extremely challenging, in a very different way. And, for me, comfort is not yet in the mix. The core group within Itten Dojo has decades of experience in aikijutsu and aikido, and that's definitely a help, but what we've found in Nihon Jujutsu is an art that is continually astonishing. I've written elsewhere about how exposure to just the introductory levels of Nihon Jujutsu has forced me to reevaluate pretty much everything I thought I knew about grappling arts. Fortunately, Nihon Jujutsu has a very accessible pedagogy and an internal logic that enables even new students to acquire some practical self-defense skills early in their training, and provides me a well-defined template as I rewire my own core skill sets. Challenging, yes, but gratifying in a way that's difficult to describe. All of the exhilaration and fun of previous training, plus immediate, practical benefit. I've gone from reluctant convert to ardent evangelist.

Nihon Jujutsu is the creation of Sato Shizuya (1929–2011), and is an amalgamation of ancient and modern Japanese martial arts, including pre-World War II Kodokan judo, *aikibujutsu* (through the lineage of Takeda Sokaku to Ueshiba Morihei to Tomiki Kenji), and *taihojutsu* (Japanese police arresting and immobilization methods). As continuing to be developed by John Gage Sensei, current leader of the art, Nihon Jujutsu addresses all four ranges of unarmed combat: striking, arm's length grappling, close-contact grappling, and ground fighting. These elements, when combined with Suino Sensei's "real-time self-defense" methodology, result in the most comprehensive unarmed training I've ever experienced. This is why I'm so excited to be able to help bring this incredible art into central Pennsylvania.

The members of our Nihon Jujutsu class are playing a key role in the mission of establishing Nihon Jujutsu in this area. Their efforts and dedication also were reflected in successful examinations for rank. Alton Whittle and Trevor Spencer achieved their first milestones with promotion to 7-Kyu; Wayne Fleming, Joseph Bailey, and MaKenzie Cuthie all made 6-Kyu; Bill Shellhamer and Christopher Migatulski passed the requirements for 5-Kyu; and Charles Hudson (in what was a particularly demanding day for him) was successful in his exam for 3-Kyu. Again, congratulations to everyone!

Through Eishin-ryu iaido, Nihon Jujutsu, and our affiliation with Suino Sensei and JMAC, Itten Dojo has been reborn. I'm very grateful. 🌀

*Special thanks to Bailey Sensei for providing all the photos used in this issue. She also shot an incredible amount of video during the weekend that will doubtless prove to be an invaluable reference.*



*Off to a good start Saturday morning with the JMAC warm-up exercises.*



*Suino Sensei adding details on execution of a fundamental exercise, with Itten Dojo member Christine Cairo assisting as uke.*





*JMAC and Itten members observing intently as Sensei demonstrates prior to the testing session.*



*Lining up and bowing-in to start the testing. The exams included fundamental drills and the kata and judo techniques specific to the ranks students were testing for.*



*Three successful 6-Kyu candidates—Joseph Bailey, Wayne Fleming, and MaKenzie Cuthie—remove their white-belts in preparation for being presented with green-belts. The first level of a new belt color includes a stripe of the previous belt color, signifying that while a step has been made, it's not a huge step.*



*Sensei congratulating the Itten Dojo members that were advanced in rank. While rank in itself is not all that important, the process of obtaining rank with the positive changes that happen on the way, is very important.*





*Saturday evening, a small group of Itten members were included in a dinner with our JMAC instructors at the 1700 steakhouse at the Harrisburg Hilton.*

*The focus Sunday was judo techniques and continued introduction to Kihon Kata II. Here are some scenes of the judo training.*



*A lot more color around the waists of our members when we lined up to start training Sunday morning.*





*Kihon Kata II photos are on the following page. This kata starts with three idori-waza (seated techniques) and then segues into standing applications. Sensei described the importance of this kata as “the gateway to advanced jujutsu training.” I should be used to this by now, but once again techniques that we practiced in our legacy training have analogues in Nihon Jujutsu that are not just more effective than the legacy versions...the techniques are astonishingly more effective and practical.*





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 with his senior student Alan Starner founded Itten Dojo in 1992. His articles on martial arts have been featured in numerous publications, including the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* and *Bugeisha*.

