

Sword and Spirit

The Journal of Itten Dojo

November 2024



— 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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Happo-giri

Of the many innovative training methodologies for iaido developed by Nicklaus Suino Sensei and his senior assistant instructors at the Japanese Martial Arts Center (JMAC) in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the most unique is bokken fencing. Most students of martial arts would assume that training in iaido is exclusively a practice of solo forms and, in many instances, they would be correct. But, thanks to the initiative of JMAC's Nick Miller Sensei and Dan Holland Sensei, our training in Muso Jikiden Eishin-ryu iaido includes free-sparring with wooden swords. Under the guidance of Suino Sensei, bokken fencing has evolved to be a well-defined, step-by-step paradigm in which students can explore and safely integrate practical applications of the techniques learned in the solo forms. Although there are certainly tactical aspects to bokken fencing, the focus, perhaps surprisingly, is not at all combative—the real goal is to induce a joyful flow state in the participants. A future issue of this journal will address the progressive stages of bokken fencing in detail. For now, let's examine the first step in the process: the drill of *Happo-giri* (Eight-direction cutting). Initially a solo drill, Happo-giri can also be a paired practice with a partner.

As described by Suino Sensei, "In bokken fencing, it's critical to learn how to move yourself and your weapon in a structured manner without tension. Our Happo-giri drill helps students learn to make large, useful motions in alignment with the eight most common paths taken by the sword. At higher levels, the drill also helps teach awareness, distancing, timing, breathing, and *seme* (pressure)."

In the JMAC iaido curriculum, Happo-giri first appears in the requirements for 5-Kyu, a rank typically targeted about 18-months into a student's training. As the iaido class at Itten Dojo continues to advance, there are more than a dozen members that need to be proficient in Happo-giri. But I want everyone in the iaido component of the dojo to have at least basic understanding of the drill, so I am including several repetitions of Happo-giri more frequently in regular practices. Most students at this point need a lot of work on the solo version of the drill, and I am focusing their attention on achieving what Sensei refers to as moving in a relaxed but structured manner.



The transitions between cuts are at least as important as the cuts themselves. Although the cuts in Happo-giri are targeted, there should not be pronounced stop-points at the completions of the cuts, or pauses when the student passes through a *kamae* (posture), a physical geometry optimized for the generation and application of power. The emphasis on flowing movement in this drill is intended to help preclude students becoming static in any particular position during fencing. Consequently, in Happo-giri the *kamae*—when such postures occur—are not strictly defined, particularly with regard to placement/alignment of the feet. While there is a defined,

proper positioning of the sword expected, ideally setting the trajectory and alignment of the blade for the subsequent cut, footwork can be more natural.

The sequence of Happo-giri is: A vertical cut, two reverse-angle rising cuts, two angled cuts, two horizontal cuts, and a final thrust. Because a detailed, written description accompanied by still photos fails to present properly the exercise—or, worse, misrepresents the exercise—please use the included QR code to access a video on the Itten Dojo YouTube channel. This video has been reviewed and approved by Suino Sensei for use as a reference. 🌀

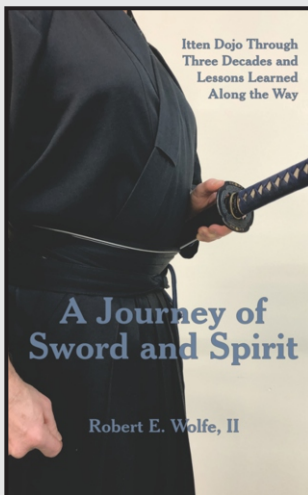


Use this QR Code to access the Happo-giri video on the Itten Dojo YouTube channel.

Alternatively, you can use the following link:
<https://youtu.be/pChh-9DTor4>



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*.



A Journey of Sword and Spirit

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“In an age that has largely lost touch with many of the traditional values that built the world we all currently inhabit, this work (and the dojo from which it sprang) serve as a welcome oasis of wisdom, strength, and serenity.”



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