

Sword and Spirit

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— Why Budo? —

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

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

These are exactly the things membership in a dojo provides.

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A Deeper Exploration of the Martial Arts...

Posture And the Divine Triangle

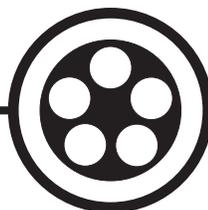
Since ancient times there has been the teaching of *tenshin shoden*, the “divine correct principle.” This has to do with the triangle formed by one’s eyes, the tip of the sword, and the abdomen when standing in *chudan-gamae* (green triangle in the photo at left). The essence of the teaching is that if, when the *mono-uchi* of your sword touches the target you have maintained the triangle, you will strike with your complete being: mind (from the eyes), sword (from the body), and spirit (from the *hara*). This, however, is not the end. There is a second triangle.

Most students, in the early days of their training, learn of *sankaku-dai*, the “triangle-stance,” but few of them stop to consider that it isn’t really the triangle-stance. The literal translation is *triangular-foundation*, and it refers to much more than just a certain foot position. A proper stance creates a triangle based on your feet, your *hara*, and a point on the floor several feet to your front (blue triangle in Figure 2, next page). It is this triangle, not the one created by your two feet, that is the true *sankaku-dai*.

With few exceptions, a proper *kamae* (in any martial art) will feature a significant flexure of the lumbar vertebrae. In many traditional schools this is taught with the *kyuden* (oral teaching), “Point the navel downward,” as forcing the abdomen forward with a feeling of pointing one’s navel down generates the proper inward curve to the lower spine.

A proper curvature of the spine shifts your shoulders slightly forward (note the yellow line in Figure 3, next page). The tips of your little fingers should hang naturally at the exact centerline of the sides of your thighs. Compare this with the normal, straight-backed position, in which the tips of your index fingers are aligned with the sides of your thighs, and you will see it has a profound effect on stability.

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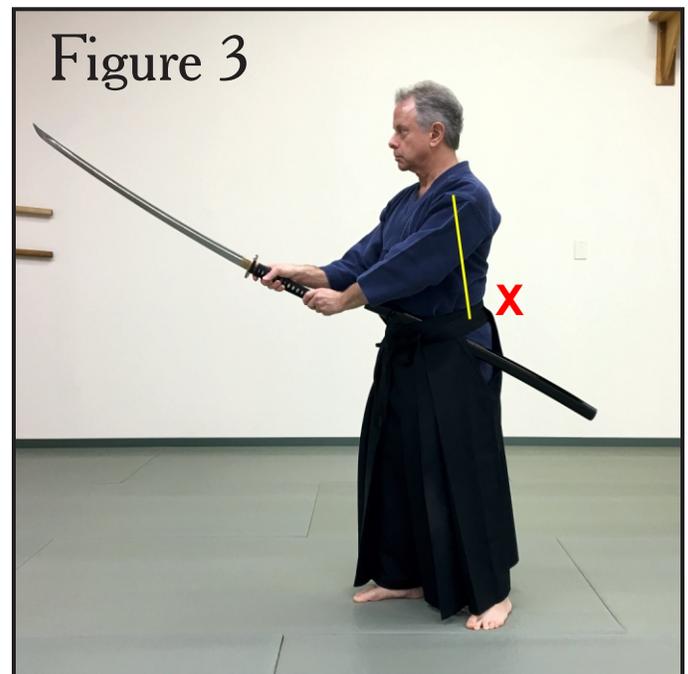
There is a very simple way to insure that you always have a proper curvature to your back: Constantly be aware of the pressure of the upper edge of the *koshi-ate* of your *hakama* on your lower back (red X in Figure 3). If you don't feel this pressure, you're not standing correctly.

When first experimenting with *sankaku-dai* you will probably find that it tends to make you feel a little off-balance, as if you were about to tip forward. This is because there are a couple more things to do in order to complete the posture. First, you must grip the floor strongly with your toes. This will, by slightly raising the balls of your feet, shift the weight back toward your heels. Secondly, lightly press the ring finger and little finger of each hand together. This, too, shifts the weight slightly to the rear. The result should be a feeling of *fudotai*, the "immovable body" — you should feel rooted to the earth.

Trivia: This is the secret of that fantastic *tai-sabaki* you see in *Noh* drama and *Kabuki* theater. The actors, after learning how to stand with *sankaku-dai*, exaggerate it so that the increased forward angle generates a feeling of spiritual tension, and then learn how to move smoothly with their bodies tilted forward but the majority of their weight on their heels.

The advantage of *sankaku-dai* is obvious: A proper foundation permits maximum power to be applied to a technique. There is, however, another advantage that is even more important.

Remember how *tenshin-shoden* generated a feeling of cutting with the entire being? *Sankaku-dai* has a similar effect, except that the feeling is of cutting with the entire world — because you are so rooted as to feel part of the earth, your techniques feel as if they are driven by the earth. This is one of the more profound aspects of *budo*, and it merits serious study. ☯



Fredrick John Lovret, the person responsible (at great personal sacrifice) for the successful transplant of the Itto Tenshin-ryu and Yamate-ryu from Japan to the United States, passed from this world in May 2015. His students are his legacy, and — collectively — we are determined to preserve and propagate the arts he bequeathed us. This essay was originally published in *Budo Shinbun* and is reprinted here by permission of Taseki Holdings LLC.

