

For thousands of years man has flailed and slashed weapons through the air. Mostly to defend and protect. The inherent DNA in our genes still stimulate our bodies and minds when a knife or other bladed instrument is placed in our hand or in front of us. We don't really understand why this happens or what causes this phenomenon. But we do know this... The inherent feeling in one way or another is in all beings.

In the early stages of development, tools and weapons made from the earth were crude as man's existence. Wood and stone weapons slowly evolved into metal, thus the Bronze Age had begun. This age saw great advancement in bladed weapons. Especially, the mighty sword.

Through out the ancient world. The sword, one of mans most prized possessions represented both power and wealth. Man designed, built and studied the use of the sword. Most all design and technique were created for the practicalities of war and defense, that country's geography, culture and way of life.

The Japanese culture reverend the sword and all it represented. Throughout history Japan has always been the front runner of martial technique and the making of consistently well built and sought after swords.

Japanese warlords trained their Samurai with various metal and wood practice weapons. This was difficult for most Samurai because one wrong move or poorly executed technique could result in injury or even death. Every warlord and his Samurai army had their own special fighting technique. These techniques were tested out on the battlefield. The survivors later would polish the most effective techniques and throw out the ones that proved useless.

Over centuries of civil unrest and war a single government finally united Japan. The Samurai no longer fought wars. But the warrior spirit was as strong as ever. In the Edo period there were as many as 30,000 sword schools of thought. One of the larger schools itto ryu discovered and added on to a new combative sport called Kendo that used protective gear and over time

turned into a national sport. Now a combatant could practice difficult technique without the chance of great bodily harm or death.

Kendo's weapon, the bamboo shinai is about one meter in length split long ways into four pieces tapered at one end and held together by leather. This practice sword and the combatant's protective head and body gear made for a good game of physical chess. An excellent way to polish one's technique.

From modern Kendo came a new era of swordplay. Through science and technology this last century has offered the combatant a larger selection of materials that has made sword play easier to practice and master without pain or injury.

40 years ago Japanese martial artists and sword masters came together and created a new style. The Founder, Tanabe Tetsundo and his group of some of the strongest swordsmen in Japan called this new school of thought, Goshindo.

Goshindo has 3 divisions.

1) Iaido- the art of drawing the sword.

The long sword (katana) and the short sword (wakizashi) are studied.
The Japanese Imperial Army practiced Toyama-Ryu Iaido.

2) Tameshigiri- The art of cutting.

Teaches and polishes sword cutting skills. Battodo, Roku dangiri and other cutting techniques are honed to perfection.

3) Kendo/Kenjutsu -The art of fighting.

Kendo and combative sword technique are practiced to perfect rhythm, speed, focus, ki and a well-rounded education in sword fighting strategy.

Toyama-Ryu Iaido: the style designed for the Japanese Imperial Army

The Toyama Military Academy was founded in the 6th year of the Meiji period. Japanese heitai (military troops) were educated extensively in the art of fighting and strategy then drafted to protect and serve their warlords. Toyama became a very respected and distinguished military academy where many of Japan's military elite graduated. This Japanese version of West Point included many fighting styles of old and new in basic and advanced military education, including Battojutsu, Iaido and tameshigiri.

At the turn of the 20th century the Japanese Imperial Army gained fighting experience in the Sino-Japanese war and through the military annexation of China. The Japanese military once again as it did centuries before employed the sword in combat providing practical and useful fighting strategy and technique. Many of these techniques were given to Toyama, which designed an easy, fast and straightforward way for the military to instruct "the way of the sword" increasing the soldier's fighting ability.

In the 1st year of Showa, the Toyama-Ryu was created and changed the way Iaido was taught in the military. Up until then, most all Iaido styles were practiced from kneeling or ground positions called seza toho. The Toyama-Ryu, designed for battle, was now practiced in a standing position in rugged terrain and in the harshest surroundings...conditioning the soldier's ability to fight anywhere and everywhere.

Tameshigiri:

Tradition, respect and ritual are most important. The strictest of rules are observed in tameshigiri. Long hours of practice improve the harmony between the swordsman and his weapon.

The first basic strike is the cut from left downward to the right bottom. The sword's blade produces an optimum cut when the sword enters the object at a 30 to 40 degree angle. Right cut top to bottom, left cut bottom to top, right cut

bottom to left, right cut side to side, left cut side to side, vertical cut top to bottom all must be done with conviction, sincerity and determination.

The first few cuts are usually practiced on thin tatami or bamboo. After one has warmed up on the thinner pieces the swordsman goes on to the thicker/larger ones. Everything is considered in Tameshigiri. Stance, posture, rhythm, ki, angle of cut and even the way the severed pieces drop.

When cutting bamboo, tatami or other material the cut must be precise. The severed piece must be propelled at a 90-degree angle from the cut's exit. This is called tobi kata. This assures the swordsman a close to perfect cut. If the severed piece is propelled away at a wider or shorter angle, the cut is inferior. If the cut were inferior a larger object would prove too difficult to sever completely.

Kenjutsu

Over the years the warrior went from killing with real swords to practicing and maiming with wooden ones. Hence, to preserve the fighting spirit of the Japanese warrior, a sport using bamboo swords called Kendo emerged. Its protective gear was well designed to prevent bruises and broken bones. Thanks to advances in science and technology, today's swords wield considerable strength and power, yet they will not injure the combatant. Goshindo gave the civilized man a chance to capture the rigors of real combat without having to experience its by-products - pain, suffering and painstaking training.

Kenjutsu, is where 80 percent of its members spend time and effort perfecting the techniques that are used in Iaido and Tameshigiri. Kenjutsu is practiced to successfully win the battle on the street or in the dojo. Many levels of fighting and competition can be chosen according to the swordsman's strength and ability.

Kenjutsu is more dynamic and far more challenging. Enter the essence of the real fight. You will be drained in a few breaths of time. Your lungs will feel like they are going to explode from the exertion. Beads of sweat will sting your eyes. Long bouts will be followed by short ones, just as in the real battle. Your martial art training will now be put to the ultimate test.

Up until 40 years ago, studying sword fighting technique was virtually impossible for the martial artist. Swordsmen spent countless years honing and perfecting their speed focus and rhythm. Competing was dangerous. Therefore, masters limited their demonstrations to Iaido or Tameshigiri. Many swordsmen widely practiced Kendo. Kendo, however was and still remains a very linear and rigid sport. Moreover, excessive protective armor encumbers the combatants.

Kenjutsu will refine your stroke, your stance, your breathing, your balance, your rhythm, your speed and mold you into a confident and proficient swordsman.

Kenjutsu offers a program, which can meet your ambitious goals and dreams. You might even discover the answer to the warrior's age-old question.

What is the sound of one hand clapping?