

1 Shiho MAE

前

Starting position: Tori at left, uke at right.

1 Tori starts with bokken in belt, facing uke, feet together. Uke starts in chudankamae, sword drawn and held at middle guard, facing tori.



4 Tori steps forward to the right with the right foot, cuts one handed do, horizontal cut on waist level, while uke's arms are still over the head. Uke steps forward with right foot.

5 Uke does chudangiri, vertical cut to middle level, in the direction of tori's original position.



2 Uke steps forward with left foot, lifts sword to jodankamae, over the head.

3 Tori steps forward with left foot, nukitsuke, drawing the sword.



6 Tori lifts sword to jodankamae, over the head, and turns toward uke. Men, straight cut to the head.





7 Uke yields sword to miginowaki, right side guard. Retreats three steps.

8 Tori lowers sword to chudankamae, middle guard.

9 Tori does chiburi chudan, "shake off blood" to the right on middle level.

10 Tori does noto, sword back into scabbard. Steps back to the starting position.



Details

Shiho, four directions, is a common concept in iaido, found for example in the first four forms of *Omori ryu*. It is, of course, a way of preparing for attacks from any direction. In a more elaborate training, it can be done by *happo*, eight directions, the first four being the same as here and the next four in diagonal directions to these. In a shoden basic system, though, there is no need for more than four directions – front, back, left, right.

Seiza, the sitting position, is usually the starting point for the first few forms of a iaido kata system, but in aikibatto shoden, all exercises are performed standing up. This makes better sense in relation to most aikiken, and also to the way in which swords were used in old Japan. The samurai never wore the katana in the belt when seated.

I would not call a swordplay system with walking on one's knees an ideal start for learning the basics of sword moves, especially not for the non-Japanese, unacquainted with *suwariwaza*, the knee walking.

Mae, front, is the first of the four *Shiho*. Uke comes straight at tori. In most iaido schools, some kind of *mae* is the very first form, because of its basic character. Here in aikibatto it does not deviate much from the iaido standard, except for the *taisabaki* move to the right, taking place at the fourth movement, and the consequences of this.

Normally in iaido, *nuki-tsuke*, the draw, finishes with the sword tip in front of the left eye of uke, who has not yet drawn the sword. But here, where uke's sword is already raised, the draw is immediately followed by a cut to uke's waist in movement four, right before uke's sword comes down in *chudangiri*, a cut to middle level.

In the *taisabaki* step to the



right, of the fourth movement, it is important to let the left foot follow a bit, so that none of tori's body is in the way of uke's sword when it comes down in the fifth move. Not even the heel of the left foot.

The horizontal cut in movement four is not as easy as it may seem to the beginner, since it needs to be done so that the edge of the sword is exactly in line with the movement, that is completely horizontal. It should strike at the soft waist – between the hip bone and the lowest rib. Here, some contact is both allowed and of benefit, for checking out how the cut is performed. Make sure, beforehand, that the bokken used has no flaws on its surface that might harm uke.

Uke cuts *chudan*, to middle level, in movement five, but actually a cut to *jodan*, high level, or *gedan*, low level, would work as well – making no difference whatsoever to tori. Not even *yokomen* or *kesagiri* would cause any complications. That goes for most of the ten shoden exercises – uke's attack can usually vary without tori having to change any movement. This is of quite some importance, since it is almost impossible for tori to know what cut will come.

So, in training it can be beneficiary to the awareness of tori, if uke actually changes between cuts – sometimes *chudan*, sometimes *jodan* or *gedan* – but not until tori has developed some confidence in the moves.

When uke cuts in movement five, already being cut in the waist at movement four, this would for obvious reasons result in uke tipping forward somewhat, not able to maintain a straight posture. This happens although no actual cutting is done by tori when using a bokken. The move cuts uke's posture. It cuts the flow of ki through uke's central pillar, necessary to keep a straight back and neck when moving quickly or forcefully.

The fact that uke will end up bending forward is the reason for the cut in movement six being straight, not diagonal as in *kesagiri*. It still lands on the side of uke's neck, just as it would by *kesagiri*, and not on the top of uke's head. Otherwise a *kesagiri* would no doubt be more efficient.

Raising the sword to jodan and turning toward uke in movement six, is done simultaneously. The body turns at the same time as the sword is pulled to the jodan guard of where the body will be at the end of this step. At the very same instant when the body has reached its position, so shall the sword have done.

The cut of movement six should really be to chudan level, but in partner practice it stops right above the head if uke stands straight, or above the neck if uke is bending forward. Here, no contact is safe, so tori should stop the sword at a proper distance from uke's body.

The yielding of the sword to the right side, done by uke in movement seven, is not to a proper guard. That would make it unwise for tori to do *noto*, sheathing the sword. Instead, uke's sword drops downward, while moving toward the right side, so that the sword tip ends up near the floor. Uke's attitude should be relaxed, calmly surrendering. Having retreated three steps, uke waits for tori to do movements eight to ten.

Usually in aikiken, this ritualized ending is not performed, and it can become tiring at length. But being able to do it is very good for developing sharpened awareness and concentration throughout the exercise.

Tori's lowering of the sword in movement eight is done in a spirit of continued domination of the situation. The *chudankamae* guard at the end of it should be alert, with an ability to immediately charge anew.

At the *chiburi* in movement nine, the alertness is thrown away with the imaginary blood on the blade. It empties the mind of the previous duel, with an attitude of opening oneself up. This is the most basic of the many *chiburi*



to be found in iaido. The sword is thrust to the right, with the edge of the blade in that exact direction, to get the blood off. The blade is not horizontal, but tipping a little downward,

or the blood might pour onto tori's hands.

Noto, sheathing the sword, is done in just as numerous ways as *chiburi*, and always related to the sort of *chiburi* chosen. With a sharp blade, one should take care, because it is usually in *noto* that one accidentally cuts oneself.



When done with a *bokken*, the left hand forms into an opening – just as it would on the top of *saya*, the scabbard. It is not held by the side of tori's body, but immediately in front of tori's center, *tanden*. The sword slides with the back of the blade on this opening –

more precisely in a track formed by the thumb and index finger. This movement is not to the side, but rather as much forward as possible, extending *tsuka*, the hilt, to the front instead of sideways. The left hand is close to the body, moving to the left. When the tip of the *bokken* enters the opening formed by the left hand, that hand pulls the belt a bit, for the *bokken* to be stuck inside of it.

When a *hakama* is worn, its top strap can equally well be used instead, so that the *bokken* will rest on the belt instead of inside it. There are several ways of doing the *noto* with a *bokken*, but this I find to be a good compromise between what's practical with the *bokken* and what still serves as a preparatory exercise for the proper *noto* with the real sword.

When *noto* is completed, tori moves the left foot forward to the side of the right foot, at the same time sliding with the right hand to the end



of the hilt. Then the hand falls down to the side of the body in a relaxed way. At this point, tori should have let go of all that went before, as if it never happened. A completely relaxed state of mind. Then tori walks backward to the initial position.



Iai considerations

For *iai* style solo training of the tori movements in this exercise, the modifications of the above would be only three: The *do* cut in movement four should be fully extended, cutting through, and the *men* of movement six should cut through to chudan level, that is to the chudankamae position. Finally, in the *noto*, returning the blade to its scabbard, the left hand stays on the scabbard until the blade is completely sheathed. Then the thumb on the tsuba is used to press it in the last bit, at the same time as the right hand reaches *kashira*, the end piece of the hilt.

Uke's movements in this or any other aikibatto exercise are not very meaningful to practice in a *iai* solo style.