

Ninjutsu Training

A System for Fighting and Living

by Bud Malmstrom

Cover photo adapted from
The Complete Ninja Collection by Stephen K. Hayes.

The word “ninja” brings to mind a sinister-looking figure attired in black and armed with ropes, shuriken, a small straight-bladed sword, smoke bombs and poisons. People see this picture because these items were some of the physical tools of the ninja of feudal Japan. Americans react in a similar manner to the words “Apache” and “Souix.” Thoughts of savages, scalps, massacres, flaming arrows and war paint are conjured by the mind’s eye. We see these pictures because of the way these subjects were presented to us in our past. The movies, books and images of yesteryear have told us of the savage brutalities of the American Indian. We view these acts as unscrupulously vicious, just as most people see the ninja as only a stealthy assassin.

Conversely, we see the American minutemen as heroic freedom fighters of the Revolutionary War, men who would drop their plows or close their stores at a moment’s notice and

“Why are the feudal ninja seen as assassins? The answer, simply, is perspective.”

grab their muskets to fight the oppressive British. These heroes would hide behind rocks or in trees and sneak around at night to take the enemy by surprise. Perhaps they blew up their enemies’ munitions and destroyed food supplies. Or, feasibly, their objective might have been to kill a British leader to create chaos among the troops.

Why then are these revolutionaries seen as heroes and the feudal

ninja, who shared many of the same characteristics of the minutemen, seen as assassins? The answer, simply, is perspective.

If you went to a high school football game and asked the fans on one side, “Who are the good guys?” they would answer, “We are!” But if you went to the other side and asked the same question, they would say, “We are!” So who is right?

With this perspective in mind, it is easier to look at the feudal ninja and see that he too could have been viewed as a freedom fighter—especially by those who believed in his cause, which was to fight the oppressions of Japan in that era. Ninja were men and women with the vision to see a need for a balance of power, and who had the fortitude and knowledge to achieve the desired end.

There are some correlations between the American minutemen and Japan’s ninja. The minutemen didn’t fight in a uniform style, march in a straight line, or attempt to honorably defeat their opponents as did the British. Naturally, the British saw these American heroes as sneaky cowards who fought without honor. Isn’t this the same image the samurai had of the ninja?

This elaborate explanation was not to show the ninja as good guys or the minutemen as bad guys, rather to simply show the difference of perspective. In all confrontations in to-



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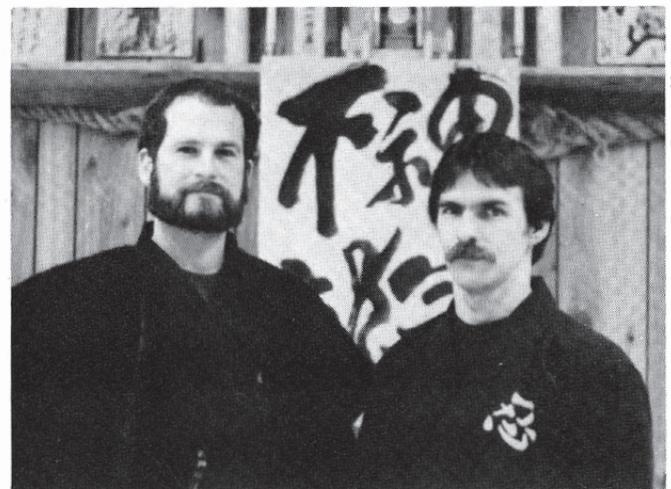
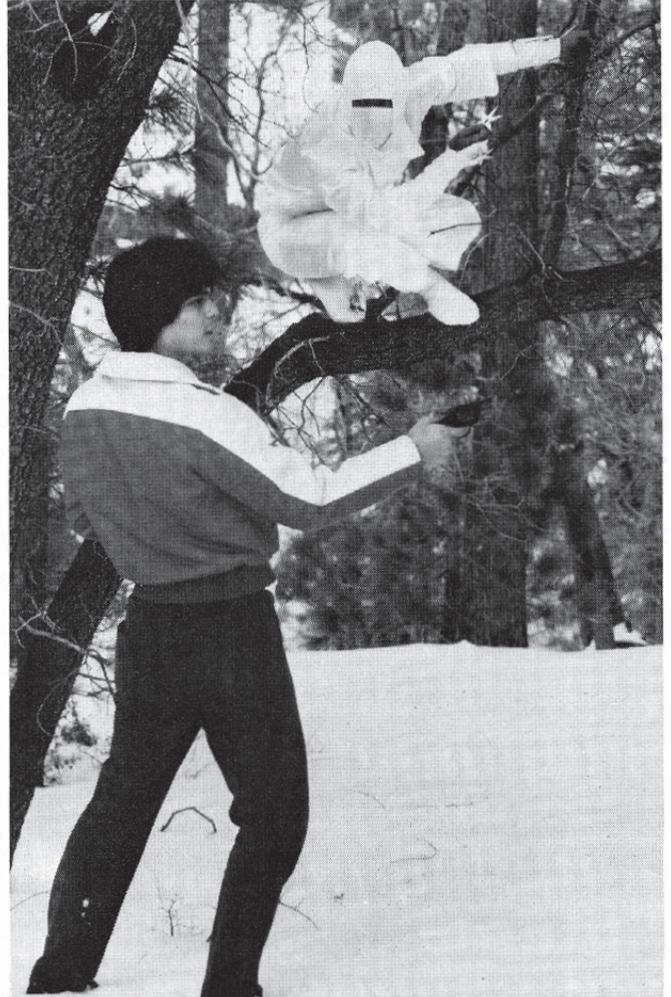


Photo by Bonnie Malmstrom



Many people mistakenly view the ancient ninja as stealthy assassins who hid behind rocks or in trees to launch surprise attacks on innocent victims. In fact, the feudal ninja shared many of the characteristics of the American minutemen, those freedom fighters of the Revolutionary War. At left, Stephen Hayes (on left), the Western world's foremost authority on Togakure-ryu ninjutsu, poses with his top student, Bud Malmstrom.

day's society there will be a good guy and a bad guy. By knowing there are at least two viewpoints, it might be easier to solve the confrontation.

There are only two requirements to use this type of philosophy in everyday life. The first is an open mind—the ability to truly see another person's opinion. The other requirement is the courage to do just that. It is often difficult to convince our egos that there are

perspectives other than our own. This task, if done in earnest, will undoubtedly help to relieve the situation.

There are many philosophies of ninjutsu which are appropriate for physical combat and just as appropriate for maintaining a desired course in your life. Athletes competing in sporting events use many different strategies to win, but these strategies are not taught to them as a life system.

For instance, when a judo competitor wants to throw his opponent backward, he sometimes pulls him forward first. Or a short-armed boxer often falls back against the ropes to draw his opponent in so he can explode with a flurry. These are good examples of allowing your foe to be where you want him to be. As the judo competitor pulls his opponent forward, his adversary resists and wants to pull backward, which is exactly the first player's original desire. The same is true for the boxer. He falls back weak against the ropes so his adversary *wants* to move in for the kill, which is the boxer's primary goal. These are subtle, but effective, strategies for winning.

Recently, one ninjutsu student wondered how he might better control an existing situation in his life. He is a young man in his early 20s and works for a man who is a Vietnam combat veteran and a black belt in another martial art. The problem is that the young man's boss

“ Suddenly the boss pulled out a closed pocketknife and jabbed it in the man's ribs. ”

degrades him about studying ninjutsu and is always playing childish pranks on him in front of other employees.

One day, for example, the man and his boss were talking informally with other employees. Suddenly the boss pulled out a closed pocketknife and jabbed it in the man's ribs. The boss laughed heartily and said, “Wow, you really handled that well!” Then he walked off leaving the ninjutsu practitioner feel-

ing disgusted and somewhat belittled.

Obviously, there's more than one way to handle such a situation. One method would be to get physical and punch the boss right in the nose. But that would likely cause the employee to lose his job. Very few people would ever handle the situation with such bluntness. You would probably just walk away shaking your head, mumbling some inaudible obscenities. Pranks of the kind the boss played on his employee are usually only performed by friends. Strangers don't generally know if you're a martial artist, or don't feel free enough to possibly offend you.

Another way to handle such a situation would be to quit associating with the jokesters who are always embarrassing you. But who wants to be a loner? This suggestion narrows your relationships with others and the world around you. Why don't we do something that will broaden our relationships instead?

The real problem, per-

“Ninjutsu is attaining that which we need while making the world a better place.”

haps, is that the employee's boss still sees him as a kid and not an adult. So he feels free to publicly critique the man's decision to study ninjutsu and makes fun of him. The ninjutsu student would like to retain his friendship with the boss without being sarcastic or rude. The problem boils down to how to compel his boss to *want* to stop embarrassing him.

If you were to grab someone by the back of

the arm and attempt to pull him, he would resist and it would be difficult to move him. However, if while grabbing his arm you were to touch a pressure point, he would probably raise up on his toes in pain. Now he would *want* to go wherever you wanted just so you would let him go, thereby making it much easier to reach your goal, which, as it turns out, is now his goal too.

An important point to mention here is that you cannot change someone else. You can only create circumstances so they *want* to change. You are only capable of altering yourself or the situation.

As far as the ninjutsu student's problem with his boss is concerned, it may be best if he were to allow his boss to see him as an adult and an equal. How to do that specifically is his decision. He knows his relationship with his boss better than anybody else does. If the situation is altered correctly, his boss will not even know the transformation has occur-

red. This requires time and foresight, but when complete, is quite rewarding. One of the true beauties to this philosophy is it not only remedies the problem, but has helped *both* people grow better and stronger.

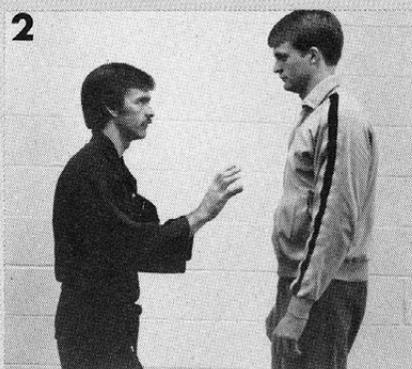
Few people are easily coerced into change. But everyone adjusts to natural, subtle changes in their lives. People's priorities, musical tastes, automobile choice, political views, etc., change with growth. We should try to "allow" people to grow in a direction which improves our relationship with them. These are only a few of the truly "invisible" techniques of ninju-

tsu. Such philosophies are the heartbeat of the style and make it a living art, appropriate for A.D. 1100, or as a 20th-century life system.

In the book *Ninjutsu: History and Tradition* by Dr. Masaaki Hatsumi, the 34th grandmaster of Togakure-ryu ninjutsu, the author shares an essay written by his teacher, Toshitsugu Takamatsu, concerning the essence of ninjutsu. Hatsumi writes: "More than merely delivering strikes and slashes,

It is difficult to move a person who doesn't want to go (below), so you must do something, such as inducing pain (right), to make him want to go with you.

Photos by Bonnie Malmstrom



Togakure-ryu ninjutsu instructor Bud Malmstrom (left above) would like his larger opponent (1) to move forward so he may initiate an attack. To do so, Malmstrom reaches up to push his foe backward (2). His opponent resists (3), making Malmstrom's goal that much easier to achieve. Malmstrom grabs his adversary and pulls him forward (4) and off balance, slamming his head into the ground (5), thereby accomplishing the ninja's original intent. Malmstrom rolls up on top of his victim (6) and is ready (7) should there be any sign of resistance.

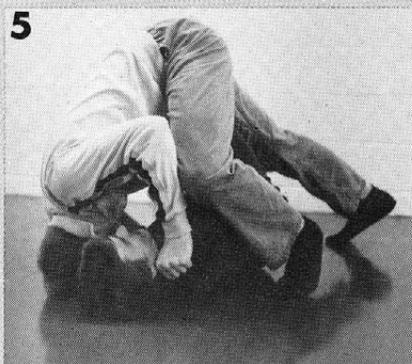
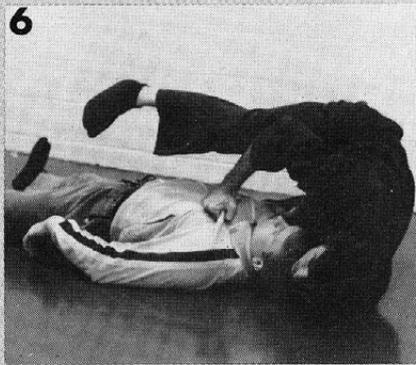
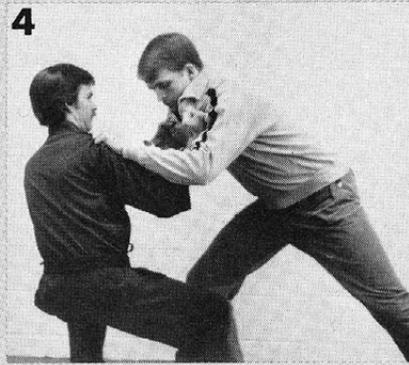
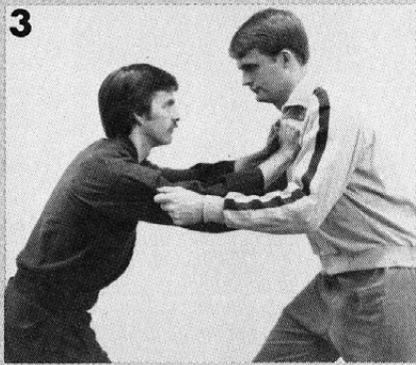
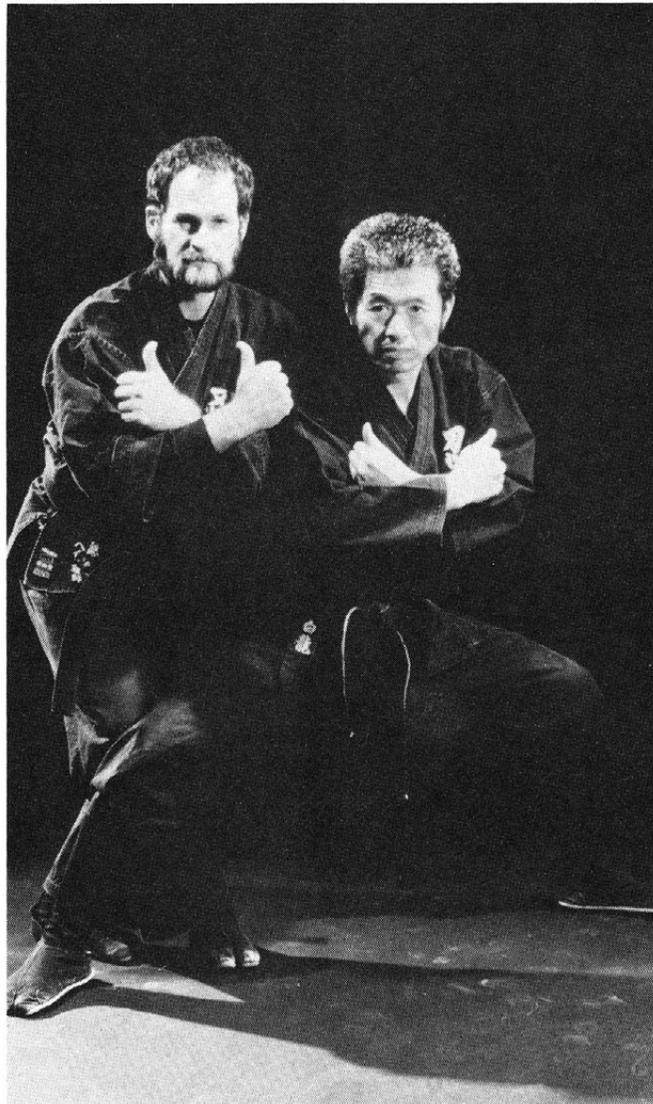


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and deeper in significance than the simple outwitting of an enemy, ninjutsu is the way of attaining that which we need while making the world a better place. The skill of the ninja is the art of winning."

There is more to winning than just being able to physically beat up another person. Every individual is composed of two strengths. Our exterior, or outer, strength is our physique. To believe we are strong when only developing our physical



strength is foolish. This strength succumbs to sickness, fatigue, injury and old age. It doesn't help us plan strategies or gain knowledge about other aspects of ourselves or our world. It simply helps us in areas where physical strength is involved.

Then there is our inner strength. This power is infinitely more difficult to develop. However, once it is developed it remains through sickness, fatigue, injury and old age. It is our personality, our life's force, and without it, we are mere flesh and bone.

A martial art without the proper balance of these strengths is incomplete and weak. A business without the proper physical assets (physical strength) and proper motivation behind and belief in its product (inner strength) is also unbalanced and weak. The balanced development of both strengths is necessary for the growth of every individual, business and government.

There is a Japanese phrase that helps explain

“... imagine if someone put a blade to your heart and demanded you not move.”

this philosophy: *nin-po ikan*. *Nin* is made up of two Japanese characters: 刃, which means “blade,” and 心, which means “heart.” Combined they form the word *nin* (忍), which can also be pronounced *shinobi*. Either way, its meaning is the same: patience, perseverance, or endurance. Don't misunderstand it to mean the type of patience you might have when teaching a child. Instead, it represents the kind of pa-

Photo by Bonnie Malmstrom



SUGGESTED READING

Ninja History 101: Ninjutsu Training

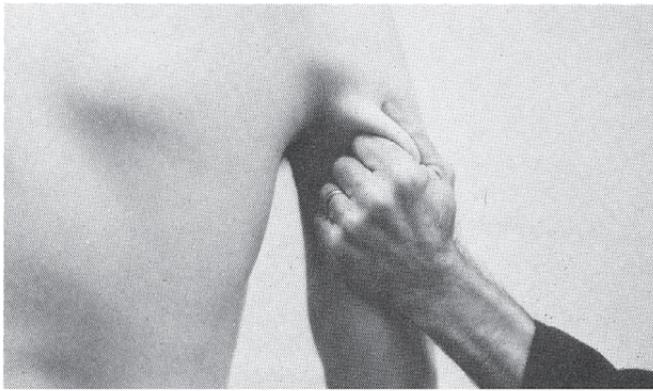
Masaaki Hatsumi, one of Japan's few remaining ninja practitioners, describes the ninja of old as the perfect all-around athletes of their day. Learn about their intense regimen!

Ninjutsu Training Tips Anyone Can Use!

Because of its birth during violent times, *ninjutsu* focused on methods that worked in the worst situations. Learn how YOU can apply them to your martial arts training!

Ninjutsu Training Myths: Does Ninjutsu Embody the Dark Side of Martial Arts?

Stephen K. Hayes, *Black Belt* Hall of Fame member and author of six ninja books, offers his take on the public's perception of *ninjutsu* vs. the history of its origins.



Photos by Bonnie Malmstrom

tience and endurance you might be able to imagine if someone put a blade to your heart and demanded you not move.

Po means “way” or “method.” If we could philosophically expand the meaning slightly, we could understand it to be “way of life” or “life system.” *Po* is more involved and contains more importance than the word *jutsu*, which means “technique.”

The combination of the two words, *nin-po*, means a life system of perseverance and endurance. Again, not just physical endurance, but the endurance of adaptation and change. It is the perseverance to live each day to its proper end, the patience to understand the true laws of the universe, and understanding ourselves, our relationships to others, our world and our universe.

The word *ik* is a short form of the word *ichi*, which means “one.” Its placement in the phrase *nin-po ik-kan* means that the life system of *nin-po* is the “one way.”

Grabbing a handful of skin (top) will likely make your subject want to follow your lead. Or, sensitive pressure points (above) are excellent persuaders.

The last word, *kan*, means to “keep going.” It adds the final ingredient to make the philosophy complete.

Now that each word has been explained, it will be easier to understand the true meaning of the phrase *nin-po ik-kan* with the following analogy. Imagine yourself on top of a hill with an endless water supply (universal knowledge), and you begin to let the water run slowly down the hill. If you watch the water, you will see that it never stops. No matter what obstacle it encounters, it is able to find the path of least resistance and take it. The easiest path may be to go around the obstacle, or perhaps to build up enough pressure to wash it away. Whatever path the water takes, we know from the laws of nature that it will endure the obstacle and take the

one true and correct path which will allow it to keep going.

If you are able to see events in history from this perspective, you can possibly obtain a more profound and proper understanding of each event. Let's refer to the examples mentioned earlier in this article. The American Indians allowing themselves to be restricted to reservations can now be seen, not as defeat, but as a means for their people and tribes to persevere. It was the one and only true way for their culture to endure the test of the white man. As for the boxer falling back against the ropes, his strategy can be seen as one way to persevere and endure long enough to go the distance.

These philosophies and others are taught in 20th-century Bujinkan dojo to help people cope with life's obstacles. They are an integral part of *ninjutsu* and help make it, truly, a life system. ✕

About the Author: Bud Malmstrom is chief instructor of the Atlanta Bujinkan school of Togakure-ryu ninjutsu and has studied under Stephen K. Hayes, the sole American disciple of the system's grandmaster, Dr. Masaaki Hatsumi. Malmstrom is one of the first ranked instructors in the Togakure-ryu tradition in the Western Hemisphere.

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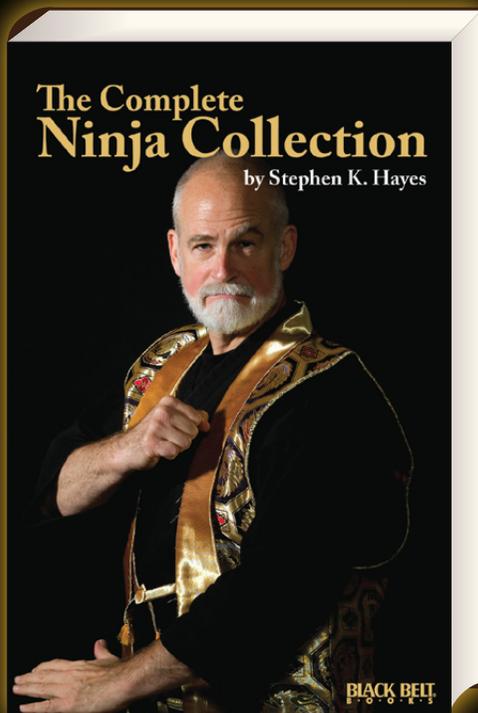
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