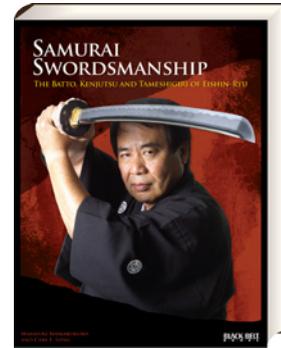


SAMURAI WEAPONS PHILOSOPHY

HOW THE
SAMURAI SWORD
CAN ENHANCE LIFE
RATHER THAN
SIMPLY TAKE IT

by Masayuki Shimabukuro and Carl E. Long
Photos by Robert Reiff

This essay was adapted from the acclaimed book [*Samurai Swordsmanship: The Batto, Kenjutsu and Tameshigiri of Eishin-Ryu*](#) by Masayuki Shimabukuro and Carl E. Long, available now in the Black Belt Store.



Throughout the ages, man's achievements and failures have been framed by this one single inquiry: Why are we here? The search for an answer has become the "Great Conversation" that has taken place between men of great intellect over time. Every society and culture that has existed has posed the question and attempted to find the answer through some form of exploration — science, arts or religions — in order to move closer to enlightenment. Eastern approaches have taken a holistic approach to solving the riddle, whereas Western approaches have dissected methods of research and exploration into categories that concentrate on a single aspect of the physical, mental and spiritual in order to get at the facts. In the end, the answer to "why are we here" still seems to be elusive.

In a modern world with so much available at a person's fingertips, it's easy to ignore the "Great Conversation." It's much easier to believe in the delusion that the struggles of one person or country are not shared by others — that pain and suffering is somehow unique only to the individual or a certain segment of the population. It's as if a person chooses to view his place in the world within the reach of his hand rather than as part of a larger organism that functions only

when the health of the entire system is good.

For the men and women born to samurai families of ancient Japan, they understood their purpose as it was part of that larger organism, and it was simple — to serve others. The reality that they might have to give their life in the service of their *daimyo* or country at any moment was constantly in the forefront of their consciousness. To a samurai, the last day could always be the present one. How they chose to live became the quintessence of their existence. The things that mattered most to them were those things that would benefit society as a whole, such as acts of loyalty, courtesy, sincerity, compassion, courage, justice and honor. For the samurai, these acts were the things that defined him and answered the question, "Why are we here?"

It is the authors' opinion that the ethical and moral tenets that the samurai lived by are characteristics that are beneficial to all societies. Hundreds of years have been invested in developing this system of service and behavior that takes into account the welfare and protection of others. Even though the methods associated with Japanese swordsmanship may be an antiquated means of waging war in this modern age, they offer a suitable way to live life in peace.

DISCLAIMER

BLACK BELT COMMUNICATIONS, an Active Interest Media Publication, as publisher, does not endorse and makes no representation, warranty or guarantee concerning the safety or effectiveness of either the products and services advertised in this magazine or the martial arts or other techniques discussed or illustrated in this document. The publisher expressly disclaims any and all liability relating to the manufacture, sale or use of such products and services and the application of the techniques discussed or illustrated in this document. The purchase or use of some of the products, services or techniques advertised or discussed in this document may be illegal in some areas of the United States or other countries. Therefore, you should check federal, state, and local laws prior to your purchase or use of these products, services or techniques. The publisher makes no representation or warranty concerning the legality of the purchase or use of these products, services and techniques in the United States or elsewhere. Because of the nature of some of the products, services and techniques advertised or discussed in this document, you should consult a physician before using these products or services or applying these techniques. Specific self-defense responses illustrated in this document may not be justified in any particular situation in view of all of the circumstances or under applicable federal, state or local law. Neither Black Belt Communications nor the author makes any representation or warranty regarding the legality or appropriateness of any technique mentioned or depicted in this document. You may be injured if you apply or train in the techniques illustrated in this document and neither Black Belt Communications nor the author is responsible for any such injury that may result. It is essential that you consult a physician regarding whether or not to attempt any technique described in this document.

Sword-drawing technique or *battojutsu* is a unique practice that is different from *kenjutsu*. Of course, many *kenjutsu* styles include *batto* as a component of their training, but there is a difference between styles designated as *kenjutsu* and styles classified distinctly as *battojutsu*. *Kenjutsu* refers to sword methods that take place once the sword has already been drawn. *Battojutsu* also addresses a scenario of face-to-face combat, but it is a response to an attack or combative situation while the sword is still in the scabbard. *Battojutsu* imparts methods of instantaneously defending against an attack, often from a disadvantageous position, which means the practitioner must draw his sword and cut

kenjutsu styles, too.

When you understand the *waza* of the curriculum of a given *ryu*, you'll see that a single *waza* actually contains many possibilities — one sword can become 10,000 swords, and one *waza* can become 10,000 *waza*. This concept is perhaps best represented in the classical *kenjutsu* style of *Ono-ha itto-ryu*. In this style of *kenjutsu*, the application of *kirioroshi* is the most important technique learned in the first *kumitachi* (paired drill). This first *waza* is the most important of all the *kumitachi* because everything in the *ryu* is built off of it and always returns to it. This is, in fact, the very meaning of “*itto*,” which means one sword.

This same idea is found in all *kenjutsu* styles,

simultaneously. *Kenjutsu* refers to everything that happens after the draw has been completed.

There are obviously many *waza* in *battojutsu*. The *waza* recreate possible combative scenarios, but it is a mistake to think of a *waza* as a single method of dealing with a specific attack. Instead, you should think of the curriculum of *waza* as an alphabet in that each technique represents a letter. However, just knowing the alphabet is not enough. You must understand how each letter can be combined with other letters to form words.

Waza works this way, as well. Each technique imparts principles and methods of properly using the sword, and like the letters of the alphabet, they can stand alone or in combination to express an idea. Eventually, the various techniques and principles of one *waza* can be combined with methods from other *waza*, resulting in *kae waza*, variations that express an alternative strategy or concept. In fact, the combining of *waza* into formal techniques is seen in many other

like in *nukitsuke* of *Eishin-ryu batto-ho*, which is the technical focus of the book [Samurai Swordsmanship: The Batto, Kenjutsu and Tameshigiri of Eishin-Ryu](#). You'll see how everything begins with and comes back to *nukitsuke*.

But, from the standpoint of self-defense, what is the value of understanding *battojutsu* in the modern age? The sword is an archaic weapon, but *battojutsu* actually contains principles that are applicable to the root of many empty-hand *jujutsu*-related arts. An expression of this idea is found within the practice of *muto-dori*, which refers to unarmed methods of defense against an opponent wielding a sword. In short, you take the sword from the attacker. (This is why Japanese swordsmanship also can be applied to auxiliary weapons, such as the *tessen*.) Practitioners with a high level of *battojutsu* skill and understanding will probably even be able to create empty-hand techniques directly from the study of *battojutsu*, but it will be the result of many years of dedicated practice.



THE DEFINING ELEMENTS OF BATTOJUTSU

The basic components of Eishin-ryu battojutsu can be distilled down to four primary techniques. These essential components are the first draw, the finishing cut, the ceremonial cleaning of the blade and the

return of the blade to its scabbard. Although they may seem to be independent of one another, they are all considered a continuation of the very first movement, which is known as nukitsuke.

NUKITSUKE



1-4: When performing nukitsuke, the drawing action begins slowly as if to allow the opponent the time to reconsider the outcome of his actions. Therefore, nukitsuke becomes a life-giving technique. The practitioner does not focus on winning but rather on stopping his opponent's aggressive behavior and preserving life. In the last moment of nukitsuke, known as saya banare, the sword leaves the scabbard. This action appears to happen seemingly on its own accord to cut down evil intentions and therefore restore order. Immediately following the initial drawing action, the practitioner moves to raise the sword above his head to perform a downward two-hand cut.

KIRIOROSHI



1-3: Throughout the history of *Eishin-ryu*, the master's responsibility has always been to give life to the traditions and spirit of the founder while at the same time adapting the art's relevance to the modern world. A critical wound on the ancient battlefield meant untold suffering. The samurai considered the two-hand, downward finishing stroke, kirioroshi, to be the humane way to end the suffering of a mortally wounded enemy. Kirioroshi should remind a practitioner that ethical and morally just actions should be an aid to ending the suffering of others. It is through the act of kirioroshi that a swordsman can end suffering through his practice of samurai swordsmanship. True understanding of compassion through the sincere intention to end the suffering of others leads the swordsman to make positive contributions to society. Through kirioroshi, the practitioner seeks to attain both social and self-perfection.

CHIBURI



1: There are many methods of ceremoniously cleaning the blade, and each waza ends with a procedure for acting out the cleaning process. These methods would be done quickly on the battlefield before resheathing the sword. Later, a full cleaning of the blade would be required after the imminent danger of combat had passed. This ritual act of cleansing the sword is known as chiburi. Within the art of battojutsu, there are several methods of cleaning the blade. Each method utilizes a particular series of movements to symbolically as well as practically remove the gore from the sword. The blade is also thought to mirror the intentions of the warrior. It is for this reason that the katana is often referred to as “the soul of the samurai.” For if the swordsman has performed nukitsuke to preserve life and kirioroshi as an act to end the suffering of another, then his conscience and soul are free from the negative aspects of violence for violence’s sake. Therefore, the actual physical cleaning of the blade is always done with the proper equipment.

NOTO



1: In each waza, the swordsman must return the sword to the saya (scabbard). The act of resheathing the sword is known as noto. Noto gives the swordsman the opportunity to practice lingering awareness because he must return the sword in an efficient manner without exposing himself to attack. This action is performed with the feeling of completing the waza and maintaining the awareness that there may still be evil in the minds of others. Resolving the past and being ever mindful of the present, the practitioner generates the realization that he must be ever diligent to control his mind and not allow it to become complacent or lulled into an undue sense of security.

Because nukitsuke endows the swordsman with insight that lives hang in the balance of this very first drawing cut, nukitsuke is often referred to as the “life of *iai*.” Unlike empty-hand techniques, a sword cut will always leave an indelible mark in the world. Once the sword has left the *saya* (scabbard), it will change a life forever because it is meant to strike down the enemy before he can attack or retreat. The separation of the sword from the *saya* is intentionally meant to separate the life force of your opponent from his body. You can easily draw parallels to how the sheathed sword represents the stable and balanced forces of nature whereas the lethal cut of the sword separates the manifest and non-manifest union of what is recognized as a human’s existence. Battojutsu changes the life of your opponent, his family, community and everyone whose life he may have touched in even some small way, forever. Likewise, the victor in this encounter will change forever, as well. Therefore, the trained practitioner strives to confirm that all life is precious and that the taking of such is not without consequences. After all, if a person is the sum of all his experiences, then he will eventually become a result of his actions and experiences.

Today, practice should promote the notion of a life-giving sword (*katsu jin ken*). Your practice is meant to preserve the life of the swordsman and not to take the life of your enemy (*satsu jin to*). Although this may seem like an argument of semantics, it is actually predicated on what the swordsman’s intention is that gives life to his technique. Nukitsuke with a sword in your hand is much like the words that come forth from your mouth. Think of how people are sometimes accused of having a sharp tongue. Once the words have left your lips, they can never be retrieved. No apology can take back the suffering of those that have been hurt by harmful statements. Impetuous actions lead to regret and are the result of a lack of self-control. Through these four seemingly simple acts — nukitsuke, *kirioroshi*, *chiburi*, *noto* —

the modern swordsman develops *heijoshin*, which is a calm and peaceful spirit that is unaffected by the daily ups and downs that modern living presents. He may not need to carry a sword in modern society, but the need to develop a razor-sharp mind and a clear, focused spirit is as much a part of battojutsu today as it was centuries ago.

SAYA NO NAKA NO KATCHI

The spirit and intention of the ancient and modern samurai is focused on achieving his highest goal: attaining victory without drawing, cutting or killing an enemy. He wants to win without violence or confrontation. This philosophy is encapsulated in the phrase “*saya no naka no katchi*,” which means “victory while the sword is still in the scabbard.” Of course, this is a noble view of *budo* ethics, but how does the practitioner accomplish it in his everyday interactions?

There are essentially two ways to do it. First, the practitioner can train diligently to become a highly skilled swordsman who is physically strong and technically able. To illustrate this way, it’s best to turn to the example of the legendary Japanese swordsman [Miyamoto Musashi](#). Once, Musashi and his disciple Jotaro were walking beneath a boulder that was precariously perched on the edge of a cliff. Jotaro was afraid to walk under it because he believed the rock would crush them. Musashi responded, “*Iwao no mi*.” What this means is that the key to victory for a warrior is to be like the boulder on the cliff: immovable and containing great hidden power. It causes fear in anyone who comes near it.

Musashi believed that this was the highest expression of training. However, it’s important to remember that “*iwao no mi*” can lead to an overly aggressive mindset when not tempered with compassion, which leads to a worldview that is rooted in violence. An old teaching says, “Through your thoughts, you create your world.” Therefore, if you see someone or think of someone as an enemy, you are certain to cause them

to become one. And if you see enemies everywhere, your life will be filled with conflict. Conversely, if you treat everyone well, you can create conditions that allow for a very peaceful mind.

A legend surrounding Musashi and the Zen monk Takuan Soho once again serves as a model for these ideas. In this story, a venomous snake crept toward Takuan while he and Musashi were sitting *zazen* beside a stream. As the snake moved up to Takuan and slithered harmlessly over his lap, the motionless monk merely smiled. On reaching Musashi, however, the snake recoiled in fear and slithered into the brush. While Musashi had not moved, his fierce spirit was palpable to the snake, causing it to flee to the safety of the brush. At the same time, Musashi became aware of the difference in spirit between him and Takuan. He realized that in training for so long to cultivate such strong technique and spirit, no one would ever dare attack him. The great sword master could defeat an opponent without striking a blow, but he was also a man that no one could ever be close to. In Takuan, Musashi observed the result of equally arduous training, but his training manifested as a quiet, calm strength and great peace. Takuan's spirit of naturalness had a far greater power to affect others in a positive way than Musashi's fierce spirit ever could.

This story provides keys concerning the second way that modern practitioners can train to manifest the concept of "saya no naka no katchi." "Iwao no mi" equally provides fertile soil from which a truly authentic *heijoshin* can grow. You can most certainly train for strong martial technique, but you also must train with the proper heart and spirit. This is what will lead to true strength of spirit, which will in turn manifest as an authentic peaceful mind.

Of course, pacifism without strength is often a recipe for exploitation or domination. An old samurai maxim states, "Only a warrior can choose pacifism; all others are condemned to it." Unfortunately, mod-

ern budo is often practiced in a very passive manner, and *battojutsu* is a common example of this. Too often, *battojutsu* is reduced to a mere sword-drawing practice for "spiritual" development or "aesthetic" appreciation. It is often performed with no *kihaku* (martial content). The reality is that focusing on "pretty" *battojutsu* develops nothing. In the end, practitioners should seek the strength and confidence of "iwao no mi" tempered by compassion and wisdom in their *battojutsu* training.

CULTIVATING SOFT POWER

The role of the samurai was to protect his country, society and family. This is the true ideal of the samurai and is as important in modern times as it was in feudal Japan. Today, many people practice various forms of martial arts, including those with roots in the samurai tradition. Yet how many of them actually live according to the ideals of the samurai? How many are developing *budo no seishin* (warrior's spirit)?

Many people live lives of apathy, and that is not an example of *budo no seishin*. Instead, practitioners must live and act positively, proactively and with compassion. The practice of martial arts only for exercise, sport, self-defense or even self-improvement is limiting and, perhaps, even selfish. Instead, those who study budo must do so with others in mind. All martial artists have to have a responsibility and obligation to their society and their country. As such, practitioners of samurai swordsmanship must do what they can to help others and they must strive, through their actions, to build a better society.

Through budo training, students develop physical power, but they also must develop "soft power" so that they can become well-equipped to make sound decisions. As a result, *budoka* help to reshape society exponentially, and, at the same time, truly begin to achieve victory while the sword is in the saya. ✨

SAMURAI BOOKS AND DVDs FROM BLACK BELT

