

23rd Kodokan International kendo seminar (Or Western Kitamoto)

For the 23rd seminar a very impressive line up of sensei was present including four Hachidan, and led by Sumi sensei who is of course Hachidan Hanshi. The others were Junichi Taishiro, Isao Uegaki and Fumio Mori all Hachidan Kyoshi. In addition to these were seven Nanadan: Morio Kumamoto, Toshiyuki Shinbo, Jumpei Matsumoto, Hisataka Kuronita, Terry Holt, Geoff Salmon and Paul Budden, and four Rokudan including the former chief national coach Sotaro Honda Sensei.

The visiting Sensei



In all 22 nationalities were represented at the seminar.

Sumi sensei and his party did not arrive until Friday afternoon so practice was initially led by Uegaki sensei. The usual format was employed with participants placed in 6 teams: Bokuden, Tesshu, Yagyu, Ittosai, Tadaaki and Musashi. Each team was allocated a senior to lead discussions and organise practices, and for the first time one of the teams was made up entirely of ladies.

We began with a kata session and then went on to practice Shikake Men and Kote. This practice developed finally into Oji waza against Kote and Men and was done in small groups with everyone taking turns receiving and giving attacks.

Opening Address

Sumi Sensei presented his opening address at the end of the evening's practice. He began by excusing his poor form. Due to a knee injury he is unable to assume seiza or train with fumikomi footwork. However he is able to do sonkyo and is working to develop

the use of suri ashi in all of his practices. He explained that this has led to a revelation. He is now able to relax more during practice and feels that his cutting has become sharper and more precise. He explained that when the body becomes weak willpower and mental pressure must replace physical power.

Sumi sensei said that this year's seminar was to follow the theme of integration of kata practice and shinai practice. We would study the kata in and out of armour and through this method develop an enhanced understanding of the principles of kendo.

Sumi sensei's first kata session incorporated a most impressive exercise for practicing the kodachi kata alone. One simply holds the kodachi as normal in the right hand, and the Odachi upside down in the left hand. Next you swing the Odachi over towards your head and at the last minute deflect it and make a cut (This practice should carry a government health warning).

The importance of flexibility in attack and defence

Sumi sensei led a session where we discussed the shape and feeling of the hands and arms when gripping the sword and the necessity to relax the shoulders. The abdomen and back is where the power comes from.

We practiced continuous MEN KAESHI DO changing feet to ensure good use of the hips. "Do 1000"

We practiced continuous MEN SURIAGE MEN gradually building up speed "Do 1000".

We practiced continuous KOTE SURIAGE KOTE gradually building up speed "Do 1000". When doing these practices it is essential that the hands and wrists remain pliable and that the shinai is gripped quite delicately.

Deflections are not achieved using strength but by developing timing and metsuke. Power comes from the correct application of TE NO UCHI and KI.

Even the feet must be flexible when attacking or countering. Changing feet moving in different directions or moving over differing distances should become automatic. This can only be achieved by lots of practice (Do 1000).

Oji waza from kendo no kata

We examined kendo no kata 5,6 and 7.

MEN KAESHI DO/NUKI DO taken from **NANAHONME**. The kata gives us the RIAI (theory) of how to apply the technique. Kakari Te maintains chamae and this inhibits the attack of the motodachi, making them reach over to cut men. At the last possible moment kakari Te smoothly deflects or evades the attack and immediately strikes the do. The line of cut is just up and down (not round). The shinai should stay in front of the body at all times and it is essential to strike with the datotsu bu to the side of the do (not across the front). We must not cross our hands when striking, and we must not cut through until after the strike has been effectively delivered. Just to make things even more complex we practiced this waza by cutting with the left foot, just like in the kata (it is surprisingly effective to do this).

MEN SURIAGE MEN/KOTE SURIAGE KOTE taken from **GOHONME** and **ROPPONME**.

In this practice motodachi did not attack from jodan or step back but we did apply the theory of the kata in that motodachi attacks from a wide interval, and kakari Te moves back slightly to cause an even more extended cut. Suriage is done by moving the shinai forwards towards the attack, not by lifting it up in the air. If the shinai stands up vertical during this waza (a common fault) you are certain to be struck. The suriage is performed against men by raising up the hands in a circular motion out to the left whilst

leaving the shinai forward and across to the right. Withdrawing the left foot opens the distance but we should always attempt to time the cut with a forward step (this can be diagonally forwards).

Against a kote attack the left foot moves to the rear diagonal as the hands and shinai move out to the right with the kensen remaining as much as possible directed towards motodachi's face. The cut is made as the right foot is brought towards the left.

The basic suriage counters found in the kata can be adapted to suit a variety of attacks by the motodachi/opponent but this needs careful thought and lots of practice (Do 1000)

Sumi sensei Kata master class 2008 by Ian Parker-Dodd

First a reminder of where Uchidachi is with respect to Shomen i.e. on his/her right side

Ipponme - Just a reminder that after YAH-TOH the movement comes from uchidachi and the response is shidachi's zanshin

Nihonme - when the bokken come together there should be sideways pressure so that when uchidachi lifts for the kote cut shidachi's bokken moves slightly to their left which opens the way for a cut; shidachi to move to their left sufficiently to allow the uchidachi to charge past them without collision if they were to run through.

Sanbonme - nothing new

Yohonme - if the distance is too close during practice stop and start again until you get the distance correct. If it happens in a grading then correct it by uchidachi moving back. Uchidachi begins the thrust with downward rotating pressure on shidachi's bokken. Makiotoshi - shidachi is to move immediately they feel that movement.

Gohonme - Sensei emphasised the lightness of the cut to allow shidachi to learn suriage properly. Strong spirit light cut.

Ropponme - shidachi to concentrate on giving uchidachi pressure by threatening the hands-so slight lean forwards as the bokken comes up-the retreat to jodan is followed quickly by pressure to the uchdachi's left hand. When uchidachi comes to chudan shidachi's bokken is left with the tip slightly up to invite the kote cut. Shidachi's move to jodan must come quickly after the suriage kote to close down any Katate waza by a one handed uchidachi.

Nanahonme - nothing new.

Late night kata practice



The Stars of the show



Mizoguchi kata

Shiai and the Role of the Referees

Shiai always takes a significant role in the seminar. As usual there was considerable difficulty with refereeing with many points being missed and some matches having to be stopped so that the referees could be given further help.

The shiai generally ran smoothly and there were many top quality matches with great points being scored, although not always awarded.

There were some changes this year. Everyone was asked to sit or kneel whilst watching the shiai, and chairs were provided for competitors who would be next on the shiai jo.

This is apparently what is now happening in Japanese competitions

For shiai, charts were placed on the wall. These same charts were developed last year but have now been typed up and laminated. Below is the content of the charts:

Refereeing	Conditions Of Ippon	Elements Of Judgement
Listen	A. Fullness of spirit	1. Strength and sharpness of strike
Look	B. Appropriate posture	2. Grip - Te No Uchi
Look	C. Striking region on opponent	3. Body control
Listen	D. Striking zone of shinai	4. Chance and timing
Look	E. Direction of sword edge	5. Distance
Look	F. State Of Mind: Full spirit and ability to respond naturally after the waza.	

Position is important. If you cannot see it is very difficult to make a judgement.
Teamwork is important. If you don't know what the other referees are thinking it is possible to become confused.
Decisiveness is essential.

Sports lectures (Budden sensei and IPD sensei)

Last year Budden Sensei talked to us about Buteyko a treatment for those with asthma and other breathing disorders that was developed in Russia in the 1950's.

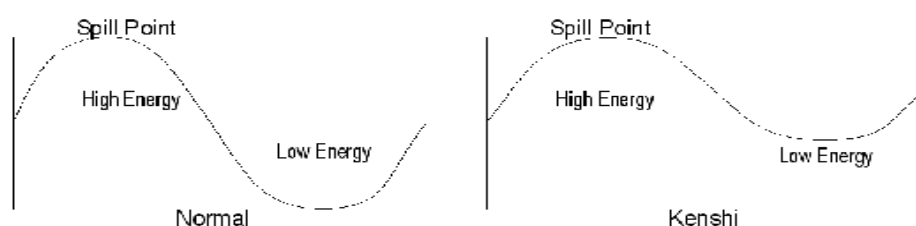
This year the two lectures looked at breathing again but honed in on ways to train one's breathing method to enhance health and performance. For many hundreds of years priests, yogi and others have used the recitation of mantras or rosary prayers to place themselves in a state of calm and grace. Modern methods can be used to reproduce the same results without the necessity to pray, and in a more structured and controlled way. It seems that the key to relaxation is the slowing of the breathing and the increased exhalation required in order to "say" or "chant" the prayer. During the recitation of a mantra one takes in quite shallow breaths and then exhales over an extended period whilst chanting. The breathing rate slows down to less than 10 breaths per minute (sometimes as slow as 2 or 3 breaths) and the intake of breath is outweighed greatly by the output. This leads to a feeling of great calm.

Machines that monitor and give timing hints are now available that can retrain one's breathing cycle. They are used quite widely with patients who have breathing difficulties or hypertension and most specifically high blood pressure. Health and wellbeing are enhanced by spending time in the therapeutic zone (less than 10 breaths per minute). The study of ZEN (integration of mind breath and body) and the feeling of great calm even in the midst of situations of stress and physical exertion has a great part to play in the development of kendo performance. Controlling ones breathing during activities like Kata, kiri kaeshi, uchikomi geiko and kakari geiko are perhaps some of kendo's versions of these changes in breathing patterns. The main point of the lectures I'm told was to show the direct relationship between breath control and the heart, both in its rate and pressure.

Through either traditional 'mantra practice' or 'high tech 21st century approaches' we can learn to actually lower our blood pressure dramatically, whilst also benefiting from the calming sensation of being in the 'therapeutic zone'.

To find out more contact Budden Sensei or Parker-Dodd sensei

My own experiences in kendo have shown me that remaining relaxed and breathing deeply into the abdomen greatly improves the ability to concentrate, improves the quality of techniques produced and also leads to greater endurance. I remember several year's ago Sumi sensei gave a lecture on breathing during Keiko in which he talked about energy levels and tied these into breathing patterns. He showed us a wave pattern (Sine wave) and explained that ordinary people breathe like this, but then redrew the pattern to show how an experienced fencer should breathe, see below:



Sensei explained that the area of the wave that is below the base line represents the point where one is breathing in, and where one's energy level is too low to be able to effectively defend or attack. In order to minimise this weak period in the energy cycle we must hold in breath or exhale slowly over an extended period of time. When it becomes necessary to inhale we should be disengaged from the opponent (TOI MAAI) and this should be done very quickly. He compared fencing a match to singing an opera, I found this to be quite profound and have worked on breath control ever since.

Uchikomi and Kakari - Differences and similarities

Sumi sensei led a session on how to develop fundamental kendo skills. He began by asking "What is the difference between Uchikomi Geiko and Kakari Geiko?" After a stunned silence a few people began to make suggestions. Sensei said that all the answers given were roughly correct but he wanted to give a definitive description/explanation and discuss different types of each.

UCHIKOMI - Sensei said that Uchikomi is the best way to develop the ability to deliver basic cuts, but there are three quite different ways of doing it.

Whichever type of Uchikomi is being done it should always follow these principles:

- 1) Start from a wide interval and use a step in
- 2) It should be done rhythmically
- 3) Use a large cutting action.

The Motodachi presents the Kakari Te with a target as soon as they step in (basic seme). They should adjust distance and give additional targets where multiple attacks are desired (Kote-men, Kote-Do, Kote-Men-Do etc.). Motodachi must clearly show the targets at the appropriate moment for the kakari te to smoothly continue their attack. Kakari te must learn to recognise and strike the offered target/s.

Type 1 (Basic) - The kakari te approaches from a wide interval and delivers a large strike then moves through to a wide interval turns and repeats this, attacking always where there is an opening.

Type 2 (Intermediate) - The kakari te approaches and delivers a large strike to the open target, the motodachi moves to accommodate multiple strikes but then uses Taiattari. After Taiattari the kakari Te always does a hiki waza to the offered target (Kote, Men, Do) opens the distance to a wide interval and then approaches again.

Type 3 (Advanced) - This is identical to type 2 except in this third style of uchikomi the motodachi will open for but then block or counter about 50% of kakari Te's strikes. Kakari Te must maintain posture and keep going, looking to deliver additional strikes where they have been unsuccessful.

Total Uchikomi is a mixture of all three types listed above and is what is most commonly seen when we practice Uchikomi. Type 1 is quite easy allowing the kakari Te to catch their breath. Type 2 is much more physically demanding but type 3 is the hardest as it is difficult to keep a good rhythm.

KAKARI GEIKO - This is not a cutting practice but an attacking practice. When practicing Kakari geiko the motodachi does not open targets. Instead they should point their shinai slightly over the kakari Te's left shoulder to make it easier for them to approach. When doing Kakari geiko there are four principles that must be adhered to:

- 1) Use mind contact to enter
- 2) Keep a closer, more realistic distance
- 3) Use many different waza and methods of opening up the motodachi for a strike
- 4) Break up the timing of the attacks

Kakari Geiko requires a much more deliberate approach where you are looking to practice ways of opening up an opponent for an attack. In kakari geiko the motodachi can choose to block attacks or apply oji waza and this should be done on any waza that do not meet the above principles. Aikakari geiko can also be used to develop spirit and stamina.

Grading



This is not a grading seminar but a seminar with a grading, an important distinction. That said the grading has become an important aspect of the seminar in recent years. This year the panel was the most impressive yet with four Hachidan sitting for the Godan element. A pass rate of 100% was achieved across the board, from Shodan to Godan. At the end of the seminar Sumi sensei remarked on the 100% pass rate saying that



he had thought hard about why this should be: Were the panel too kind? He does not think so. Was the teaching so excellent? He does not think so (I disagree). In the end he felt everyone had listened and given

100% effort. He also felt that a major contribution to the success of the grading had been the effort put in to the Uchikomi and Kakari practices on Saturday afternoon.

Hachidan Geiko

Is there anything else like this in kendo? Each of the Sensei has their own distinct approach. And even though they have all reached the pinnacle of technical skill their cutting and timing is quite different as is the experience of fencing them. Matches with Sumi sensei could be summed up perhaps as a marathon of continuous

pressure. He draws the very best kendo out of you but really makes you work for it.

Uegaki sensei was very tricky to read or time and matches with him were very hard, both mentally and physically.

With Taishi sensei there is a feeling of furious power that he exudes, the speed and power of his cutting is unnerving.

Kata with Mori sensei



Mori sensei is a man of many talents: break dancing, light sabre fencing, staying up very late. He has a great sense of humour and enjoys all of the social aspects of kendo, but most of all he has a talent for Shomen. Fencing him was the most intense experience of the seminar for me. The pace of his matches was excruciating. He is like a

Men-cutting machine. He seems to have an endless variety of timings and lines of attack for his men cut and just when you think its over there is what could only be described as Shomen torture where you have to cut Aimen over and over again until you can do no more. The more you do the bigger his smile gets. You then go and collapse in the corner whilst he does the same practice with the next opponent.

Conclusion

Wow! What an excellent seminar. Sometimes the Kodokan seminar surpasses all expectations and leaves you with a feeling of having moved on. Sumi sensei is certainly the most impressive teacher that I have ever met and I do that as my job.

In the war of the sexes the ladies were victorious with the all lady team winning the team competition this year.



The victors



The wooden spooners

I'm sure that everyone as usual left the seminar with lots to think about and work on. Next year the seminar will be held in Malta, I'm looking forward to that, and all four of the Hachidan have promised to return as have many of the Nanadan sensei. I'm sure that I speak for everyone when I say thanks to Budden sensei and the members of the Kodokan dojo for organising such a marvellous event, Look out for the koryu kata seminar that will be held later this year at the same venue. I'd also like to publicly thank the sensei: Masatake Sumi Hachidan Hanshi, Junichi Taishiro, Isao Uegaki and Fumio Mori Hachidan Kyoshi and all the other seniors who gave their all, for their support, help and inspirational teaching throughout this year's seminar.

Gary O (Do Shin Ken Yu Kai)