

a commentary on the
technique of

SWORD DRAWING

as told to D. F. Draeger

by Risuke Otake

*Editor's Note: Risuke Otake is the current technical authority of Japan's oldest historically proven martial tradition, the Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu. A breeder of horses by profession, Otake sensei is regarded as one of Japan's best swordsmen, his particular skill in iai-jutsu (sword-drawing art) being nothing short of fantastic for the speed and effortless fluidity of execution. Herein read a simple explanation of the difference between iai-jutsu and iai-do, and how this expert trained to develop his skill (see *Judo Illustrated* Volume 4 No. 5 . . . October-September 1970. . . for background on this famous kenshi (expert swordsman).*

Contained within the classical martial arts (*bugei*) and ways (*budo*) of Japan are the combative systems which center on drawing the sword from its scabbard. Techniques of sword drawing extend considerable attention to the humblest minuted of discipline which, aside from gracing some of the most exacting and difficult skills to master, are perhaps also the most dangerous. A live, razor-sharp blade characterizes all training in classical sword drawing; no adult exponent, serving under a competent master, is ever permitted to substitute a false or edgeless weapon.

It is not my purpose to explain the history of sword drawing, or to render a "how to do it" in this short article. Rather, I will briefly explain the differences between iai-jutsu and iai-do, and then mention some of my training experiences with the former entity so that the reader may learn something about the nature of the art.

Essentially, iai-jutsu is a practical discipline concerned with combat. Like all *jutsu* forms (the *bugei*), iai-jutsu was developed by warriors for use by warriors. Iai-do, on the other hand, is an aesthetic discipline which is concerned with self-perfection; more often than not, styles of iai-do have been developed by the non-warrior class. The kenshi practicing iai-jutsu, does what he must do in order to get to the target, his enemy, with the greatest of speed and accuracy, and with the avoidance of *suki* (weakness in one's position); he is interested in combative effect. Kenshi who engage in the practice of iai-do are freed from this critical element. . . . though they may execute their techniques with

Above—Master teacher Risuke Otake of the Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu about to draw his sword during a training session in "iai-jutsu".

Below—The proper form for the draw in the "iai-jutsu" of the Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu as demonstrated by master teacher Risuke Otake.



mental and physical energies that suggest actual combat. They are primarily interested in the spiritual development that *shugyo* (austere training) can produce.

The development of speed and accuracy in iai-jutsu is measurable in different ways. One interesting way by which my teacher measured my skill was to have me stand beneath the eave of the house or barn (I was born and raised on a horse ranch) after a rain, and at a place where rain drops fell at a slow, but steady rate. I would position myself, sword in its scabbard, and wait for a drop to fall from the roof to the ground. I trained myself to stare intently, fully concentrating on the formation of a drop of water. Gathering size, the drop which formed would elongate, then break by its own weight, and fall to the ground. Mine was the task of, at the moment of breaking and falling, to unsheath my sword and to execute a draw and cutting action in an attempt to slice the falling drop of water in two. There were many failures, but, after many hours of training in this fashion, I had some successes. This method is one which can be useful to any exponent of iai-jutsu.

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