

WEAPONS

Philosophically speaking, the destructive elements of bu spring from the same source as those fundamental powers active in the formation and development of the universe. When these destructive elements manifest in budo, it becomes the so-called 'killing sword' (setsuninto); but if they are buried and kept far below the surface, then the 'life-giving sword' (katsujinken) can manifest itself through aikido and become accessible to everyone. So in this way the two aspects of kassatsu (katsu, life-giving and satsu, death-dealing) are firmly linked in a philosophical sense.

K. Chiba, interview in Aikido Journal, v. 22, number 2

In *Aikido*, we work with three weapons: *bokken* (wooden sword), *jo* (wooden staff), and *tanto* (wooden knife). There are two main reasons for weapons training: one is to learn to face an attacker with a weapon, and the other is to learn to move properly when wielding one.

BOKKEN

The *bokken* is a wooden *katana* (japanese sword). Although the *bokken* is made of wood, you must treat it as if it were a sharp steel blade. Show it the same respect you would a real *katana*: never hold it by the blade, and never rest the point on the ground.

When holding the *bokken* by your side, it should be held in your left hand, with the cutting edge up. Your fingers should be curled around back of the blade, with your thumb located where the *tsuba* (sword guard) would be on a *katana*. Some people prefer to hold the *bokken* at the waist as if it were fed through their *obi*, others prefer to straighten the arm into a more relaxed posture. In either case you should not grip the *bokken*, but rather let it rest on your curved fingers. In this position, the *bokken* is considered to be in the scabbard. For this reason, and to keep from dropping the *bokken*, your left thumb should be placed over the area of the *tsuba*, both to prevent the blade from sliding out of a loose scabbard accidentally, and to assist in the drawing of the blade from a tight scabbard by pushing the blade forward.

Because the *bokken* is a surrogate, you do not need to formally draw or sheath it. With your right hand, grasp the *tsuka* (handle) near the *tsuba*, and rotate the *bokken* up and around the end of the *tsuka*, grasping the end of the *tsuka* with your left hand as you bring the *bokken* into position. Proper orientation of the *bokken* is with the right hand immediately behind the *tsuba* with the left hand at the far end of the *tsuka*, the cutting edge down, and the tip pointing at the throat of your opponent. When you are using the *bokken* in solo practice, your opponent is considered to be your height, and standing about 6 feet in front of you. To sheath the *bokken*, merely reverse the draw. Rotate the blade up and around the end of the *tsuka*, finally resting the *bokken* in your left hand by your side.

When handing the *bokken* to someone else, the proper form is to hold it in both hands (palms up) with the blade parallel to the ground, pointing towards the other person and the *tsuka* to your right. This prevents the other person from quickly turning the *bokken* against you. When accepting a *bokken* from someone, take it with both hands, and remember to grasp it only by the *tsuka*, and never by the blade.

When sitting *seiza* with the *bokken*, it will usually be placed on the floor to your left, with the blade pointing away from your leg, and the *tsuka* near your knee (so the point is behind you). The exception to this rule is when you first bow in with the *bokken*; then it rests to your right to demonstrate your peaceful intentions. If, while the *bokken* is resting on the ground next to you, you have occasion to turn, be sure to take the *bokken* with you as you go.

JO

The *jo* (short staff) is a very simple means of extending your reach. Unlike the *katana*, both ends of the *jo* can be used to strike or poke, and the entire length can be used to block. Because the *jo* lacks a sharp edge, it is much easier to use against an opponent without severely injuring or killing him.

The ready stance from *hidari hanmi* (left foot forward) is with one end of the *jo* resting on the floor about an inch in front of your left foot, with the *jo* held vertically in the left hand. The left forearm should be roughly parallel to the ground. While using the *jo*, there are some general principles to follow. One hand should be in the center of the *jo*, such that, if the opposite hand releases it, it remains balanced in your hand. The opposite hand should remain within an inch of the end of the *jo*. This combination allows for both speed and power in your technique. In general, you will always grip the *jo* with your hands on opposite sides. When using the *jo* in solo practice, your opponent is presumed to be your height and standing about six feet in front of you. While practicing with the *jo* in class, please be aware that it is a long weapon and take care to avoid hitting anyone with it.

When handing the *jo* to someone else, the proper form is to hold it in both hands (palms up) and parallel to the ground. This prevents the other person from quickly poking you with the *jo*. When accepting a *jo* from someone, use both hands.

When sitting *seiza* with the *jo*, it will usually be placed on the floor to your left. The exception to this rule is when you first bow in with the *jo*; then it rests to your right to demonstrate your peaceful intentions. If, while the *jo* is resting on the ground next to you, you have occasion to turn, be sure to take the *jo* with you as you go.

TANTO

The *tanto* (wooden knife) is a very simple weapon; in general it is treated just like a *bokken*, the obvious difference being that it is held in only one hand. A less obvious difference is that the *tanto*, being small and very maneuverable, is sometimes treated very casually. Both *nage* and *uke* should always treat the *tanto* as if it were a real knife.