

Suburi Practice at Home

(Upper body motions with cross-legged sitting down position)

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Yes, practice suburi at home with sitting down position. Remember not to hold shinal too hard, but only at the moment of the strike, and then release the strength of grips immediately after the strike. Try to use mostly your little fingers, ring fingers independently in conjunction with your thumb and index fingers. The thumb and index fingers are used to hold and support the weight of shinai in the position, and the pinky and ring fingers are “Kime no te,” used to cut, snap-action of kensaki (tip of shinai). Hold the shinai like holding an “ochoko,” Japanese sake cup, and do not let the shinai held at the base of the thumb and index finger (called “Tora-kuchi”).

Keep the CG (center of gravity) of shinai near a straight line as you swing over your head to Men uchi position. The swing must be from the shoulder, the elbow is naturally bent, and the power of cut is from your wrists. The sequence of joint force transferred during the swing up (Furikaburi) is, starting from your lower abdomen (Tanden), fingers/wrists, elbows, and shoulders.

During furikaburi, imagine that you are squeezing a towel with the two hands to maintain the same form of hands/arms position as the chudan stance. The sequence during the swing down (Furioroshi) is, starting from your lower abdomen, shoulder, elbow, wrists/fingers, and then the CG of the shinai, just like a whipping transmits its power to the tip.

When arms are extended and ready to cut, squeeze the pinky and ring fingers (called Chakin shibori) as you bend your wrist down. Create a spring action to do this wrist work. Also, create a spring action (image training) as you swing it up/back and then down/forward. Image as if the CG of shinai is hitting your forehead when you swing up/back.

Review Figure 2, page 14, in the article, Kendo Training Handbook:

http://industrykendo.com/Articles/Kendo_Training_Handbook.pdf

I prefer (use) Fig. 1, to keep the left-hand near a fist distance away from the upper forehead, and not to let the CG of shinai to drop lower.

The tightening and loosening of the grips may be explained as “tenouchi” in detail as follows:

When arms are extended, say, for Men-strike:

- 1. Tighten** your grips (pinky and ring fingers) as your right wrist bend down (snap action, Kime) from the neutral position of your wrist. The right hand at this moment is a push-hand with the thumb and index fingers, supporting the weight of shinai and pushing toward the target Men. Your left-hand at this time is slightly a pull-hand with the wrist motion helping the right hand/wrist snap action, not to interfere.
- 2. Loosen** your grips immediately as you return the bent wrist to the neutral position. At the same time, return the left hand near your solar-plexus level in front of your body. Readiness for zanshin is here on after.
- 3. Left-hand power and control:** You hear sensei says to swing using your left hand. Yes, during the furikaburi to furioroshi (swing up/back and swing down/forward), the right hand is only helping the left hand, not to interfere, but adjusting the balance between the two sides. The hand means, here, your shoulder, elbow, arm, and wrist.

Practice this tenouchi when you practice suburi with shinai at home. If you can exercise at home in standing position, remember your body (tanden) and right foot must move forward at the same time as you do furikaburi, and your left foot must be pulled behind your right foot at the same time of furioroshi. Try to move your body slightly sooner than your hand of furikaburi. Then, you will find that you must swing faster! This way meets the spirit of kendo, “Sutemi.”

It will be nice if we can take a side view video of individual who practices this suburi so that one can study how the CG of shinai (need to mark this point) move. And see if one can stand up from the cross-legged position as a samurai does, just a thought, as you swing the shinai down/forward.

FYI, the word “tenouchi” is defined by the dictionary published by AJKF as follows. “It is the overall use of the hands when striking or responding, including the way of gripping the shinai, the tightening/loosening of the grip, and the adjusting of the balance between the two hands.”

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There is another way of practicing suburi at home. The above method, let's call it method #1, is focusing on the speed and how the CG of shinai moves. This method, let's call it method #2, will focus on breathing and how you handle shinai swing with spiritual feeling like kendo kata. Let me introduce the method #2 suburi practice at home as follows.

The way of swinging shinai (furikaburi and furioroshi) is the same as the method #1. The speed is also the same once you decide to swing. After the wrist work at the end of the cycle, compose yourself calmly with zanshin, narrowing the distance of your hands from the body by loosening at the extended shoulder—the time-lapse to do this zanshin maybe about 8 seconds. Toward the end of this time, you must include seme (ki-zeme, spiritual pressure/attack) before you decide to do furikaburi—the time-lapse to do this furikaburi is as short as possible, a fraction of second. Now you guessed it right that the breathing of this suburi practice is as follows.

Breathe in air through your nose using your diaphragm as you do furikaburi. Let your voice out yelling, “Men,” kiai out from your mouth. Continue breathing out using your diaphragm, keeping the residual kiai, keeping remaining air in your lung, and starting ki-zeme for next furikaburi. This completes the cycle of the suburi method #2. This breathing method in kendo is called “tanden kokyu (丹田呼吸).” Refer to the article “Pursuing Life Time Kendo,” page 2, on our website for the detail. http://industrykendo.com/Articles/Pursuing_Life_Time_Kendo.pdf

I want you to note that the timing and performance of each cycle of this suburi would be different. Also, note that these methods of suburi given here are for a guideline based on the principles of kendo, and we know that each one of you will do differently just like no one has the same face. So, enjoy how you can do it!