

## The essence of Shintô Musô Ryû Jôdô

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"The essence of Shintô Musô Ryû Jôdô" is written with the aim of helping and stimulating the Jodoka in their quest within Shintô Musô Ryû Jôdô, and of sharing my knowledge. It is meant to challenge you to think about your training within Shintô Musô Ryû Jô. Sometimes an explanation is strange to a student or he/she hears something that is not known to them and immediately they form an opinion about it. But personal differences do not mean that it is wrong. What one is doing one has seen at a certain occasion, one has experienced and interpreted it. Every Menkyo Kaiden has his/her own Jôdô and interpretations, but it still remains Shintô Musô Ryû Jô. Shintô Musô Ryû Jô therefore has many directions/styles, but in the end there has only been one source. «*Kawa no nagare wa taezushite shikamo motono mizu ni arazu*» (the water of the river is uninterrupted but at the end, the water is not the same as it was at the source). This explains the meaning of the Ryu by stressing the point that it has been passed down the generations, but cannot help to be enriched or polluted by the successive teachers.

This is why Shintô Musô Ryû Jôdô still exists. It goes without saying, therefore you cannot claim the truth in this. The essence is the basis (Kihon) of the Ryu and must be the main focus for the Jodoka. What I have written mainly comes from what I have learned from my teacher(s), my insights and experience through training. This has shaped my Jôdô into what it is now.

### The essence of Shinto Muso Ryu Jôdô

(Suburi, Uchikomi,  
Honte-Uchi, Gyakute-Uchi, Hikiotoshi-Uchi, and Makiotoshi)

The fastest way to proficiency in Jôdô is to have a good working knowledge of the twelve Jôdô basic movements (Kihon). All of the Jôdô kata (pre-arranged combative forms) are based on these basic movements. Therefore, it goes without saying that a Jôdô practitioner will not progress very far without a good understanding and practice of these movements. Of course, you are doing them regularly at the beginning of your training, I hope. All Jôdô training should start with this exercise: Suburi of Honte-Uchi, Gyakute-Uchi, Hikiotoshi-Uchi, Makiotoshi. Why then, are there not more practitioners who have more proficiency in Jôdô? There is no satisfactory answer to this situation, or maybe there is? I'm still thinking about this. One of the reasons, in my opinion, is that knowledge of the Kihon is insufficient, but what can we do about this? Students who do

not have a teacher or a (good) Uchidachi to practice with tend to gradually give up what has been learned, in my opinion. This is a waste of time and energy.

Of course each of us encounters problems in their Kihon. Furthermore, everyone moves differently, but fundamentally there should be the same problems. To understand the Kihon well and to feel them properly, you have to do this with your body rather than your mind. Too much thinking and analysing blocks the movement. Therefore, in addition to the usual Suburi, it is necessary to do Uchikomi frequently. You have to learn to feel what the Jo does or what the Jo should not do. The Jo is controlled by the one holding it, and a good Uchidachi can let you feel what the level of your technique is at the moment. What the role of Uchidachi within SMR Jôdô is, I want to leave aside for now.

It is thus important when you do a Budo discipline that Uchikomi is part of your training. But... only physical training is not the solution. You can train as hard as possible in the Dojo, but the moment you leave the Dojo you quickly tend to forget what you did during the training. It's my opinion that today's Jodoka, (this «ka» means more than just training, it means deep study) does not go deep enough in what they have learned. Think about what you have learned, let it sink in and reflect on the process again the next day - on what you experienced during your training. Additionally, it is very important that the basis (Kihon, Tandoku, Suburi, Uchikomi) must be repeated all the time. Regarding the Kihon Tandoku, they are often performed thoughtlessly and therefore it is also important that you always have the feeling that an imaginary opponent is facing you. This is important, especially for the more experienced Jodo practitioners. It intensifies the rhythm of your technique and will increase the strength of your technique.

### **Why is Uchikomi so important in SMR Jôdô now?**

The Uchikomi that I want to accentuate here have become the 4 most important basic movements for me, namely, Honte-uchi, Gyakute-uchi, Hikiotoshi-uchi, Makiotoshi. That's because they follow practically the same Hasuji line.

Uchikomi should not be seen as a physical activity, but rather as a search for the right angle during the movement.

In Kata as well as in Uchikomi a stationary sword is hit away. What is the thought behind this? The problem during the execution of Uchikomi is that the Bokken is used as the target in itself. This is a big misconception and a wrong interpretation of Uchikomi. The focus is too much on the Bokken and it is seen as a target that must be hit away with great force. If you think about this you will soon recognise that Uchidachi is at a safe distance and really only positions his weapon in front of Shidachi.

What we are actually looking for is the right angle and the Hasuji - the cutting line (edge). That is what we ultimately want to perfect, also in Kata; that is my opinion. Looking at technique, make sure your wrist is going in the same direction as your Hasuji. This is very important. If you don't feel this, your technique will change. This already starts with taking your Kamae. When the wrists are correct the cutting edge is aimed at Uchidachi. With incorrect grip the technique will change. I think this is important to experience. The above gives Shidachi more speed in the movement, as it is a more economical way of

moving. Shidachi must not forget that a round weapon has 360 cutting edges. With every action, a cutting edge must be chosen so that the hands are in the right position. When the hands are in the correct position and especially when they remain that way, both the effectiveness and speed of the action will improve and increase. You will notice that the grip changes during the strike, and rarely remains constant, which again affects the Hasuji. In the beginning, make big and circular movements.

Besides that, it is important during the training to understand and above all experience the effect of the Hasuji. There is a Honte grip and a Gyakute grip. It is important that we learn to recognise and distinguish both principles so that we can learn to use them in the right way. With the Honte grip, you can use the Jo softly, freely and flexibly. When you use the Gyakute grip, you can make optimal use of the Jo without using force. You make of course use of the weight of the jo and gravity. Honte (soft), the breathing is low and deep. Gyakute (hard way), the breathing is high and superficial. Uchikomi is inseparably connected to the principles explained above. Without correct application of this you will not understand Hasuji.

Ultimately, power is produced by the correct use of the hips and an active role of the legs, instead of using only the strength of the arms. What I don't want to do here is to give a technical manual on paper. Keiko takes place in the Dojo under the guidance of a teacher (Menkyo Kaiden). Nevertheless, I would like to give an example that may appeal to your imagination and can bring you think about it.

**Example:** Hikiotoshi (the practicing form) this is not the real Hikiotoshi - the real Hikiotoshi is Kiriotoshi. First of all start, slow = smooth and smooth = fast! It's important to understand this, practice slowly at first, especially in the beginning. Let your body learn the proper motions and actions before you expect proficiency. The key is developing "muscle memory". It will develop faster when the movements are done slow and very deliberate. This is the development of physical skills. Your movement needs to be coordinated, so that you do not waste energy or lose your feeling for the movement by making a lot of excess movement. The essence of Uchikomi is to use big movements, a big circle generates a lot of power. The hip moves forward in order to build up the tension. Then wait, that's very important. If you don't wait, the Jo will be faster than the hip and it will not stay behind. It is like throwing a ball: the movement originates from the hip. This is where the speed and thrust are produced. Only when the hip is in place, the throw follows. Without the hip movement, the throw is completely different. Even if you move the hip fast, it not the same. So, the hip moves forward, but the arm still stays back. That's very important! Again, wait. If you don't wait, it will be like showing your opponent your intention. Most students leave the hip behind, and try to make a cut from there. As a result, they bring their shoulder forward during the movement, resulting in a problem. If you don't understand this you cannot do the Kihon. Try to feel the movement, live in the situation, don't worry too much about the technique yet, it will come by itself.

Finally, I will ask you again to be aware of the importance of the basics, and to practice Suburi and Uchikomi in the correct form, and study and brush up your techniques.

刃 *ha*-blade or - more correctly - "cutting edge" 筋 *suji*-line, reason, muscle.

Don't feel inhibited to pose questions, whichever way.

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