

Translated from: http://www.geocities.jp/gazo_asidachi/kumagro_niki/iyashino_kendo/iyashi_01.htm.

Reference used: <https://kendonotes.wordpress.com/2016/10/04/healing-kendo-by-nakamura-sensei-forward-and-part-1/>

Forward

In my kendo, I keep in mind the fun of doing it. When I strike, I aim for the feeling of a good *men*, the feeling of a good *kote*, the feeling of a good *do*, the feeling of a good *tsuki*, and etc. Consequently, my basic kendo also is different a bit from regular *keiko*. Stated simply, it is “Healing Kendo.” Since passing the age of 50 perhaps, I have lost confidence in my physical strength. My shoulders and arms hurt when I extend them. When doing *kirikaeshi*, my back muscles hurt. When doing *hayasuburi*, my calf muscles get pulled. A variety of problems arise. I believe my present-day kendo was resulted from such conditions.

I practice the fundamentals for 30 to 40 minutes in front of a mirror and practice basic strikes with my *men* on for another 30 minutes – not even this (skip this) if there is no partner. I practice this outside of my regular *keiko* days; although, I say I am doing this, it is only once a week.

There are no hundreds of *hayasuburi*, not even *uchikomi*, *kakarigeiko* nor *kirikaeshi*. - Only I do a reasonable and relaxed kendo that I refer it to as *Healing Kendo* (癒しの剣道). In this page, I shall introduce a part of my way of *seme* in kendo.

Part 1

First of all, though I shall write about how to do *seme*, please think about your present *men-uchi*.

From *issoku-ittouno-mai*, are you striking with *tsugi-ashi* by performing *seme* starting with your right foot and then pulling your left foot? At the moment of striking, are your right foot and hands suddenly starting to move at the same time? Usually, this is how most people strike. With this, one succumbs to a perfectly timed *kaeshi-waza* from an opponent.

First of all, please think back to the fundamentals. I think one is taught that *issoku-ittouno-ma-ai* is the *ma-ai* from where one can strike with a single *fumikomi* using the right foot. From this *ma-ai*, one can strike a *men* without a *tsugi-ashi*. Please think about this a bit more. Older folks like me cannot reach the *men* by striking with a single step with the right foot from *issoku-ittouno-ma-ai* of a normal person. Well, then you wonder how we can strike. You see the kendo 8th Dan *Senseis* at their age can strike *men* easily as they intended. They draw out the opponent by applying *seme* with their right foot (*hikidasu*). They strike at the moment the opponent comes forward by half a head-length. The opponent is coming in to get hit.

When I passed for 7th Dan test, I also used the *seme* (of course, from my hips) to draw out my opponent to strike *kote* and *men*. Now I can perform *seme* much better compared to that time. I would like to take good care of what I have acquired and mastered thus far.

And here I shall share with you the instruction of the *seme*. I write this with the thought that it will help instruct myself, too. Although you may already be at a level to pass (*shinsa*), please read this while thinking “Heh” (sound effect, as in ‘Oh’). In my present day kendo, I strike *men* from a *ma-ai* where the *kensaki* (sword tips) meet. - At times, from closer distances, too. Of course, it is with one step. Though this became a little bit longer, I shall write on how to *seme* and enter. If it is ok with you, let’s continue this journey.

Part 2: First, on *kamae*

In the standing position with your left foot and right foot, please place your weight, with a ratio of 7 to 3, on the left (back foot) vs. the right. Make the right foot ready to move (with hips) at any time. Please remember this since the right foot will play an important role henceforth when attacking (*seme*) and responding (*ouji*). Please release any tension completely in the upper body, in particular, from the shoulders down to arms. Note that one’s upper body gets stiff in *kamae* when the hands are squeezed inward at wrists too tightly (because tension will return from the hands, arms, and shoulders to the upper body). I think holding (right hand especially) from the side of the *shinai* in *kamae* is good in a sense that some of the tensions from arms and shoulders are relieved.

If tension creeps in, one cannot respond with instant movements. Furthermore, one’s movements can be discerned by the opponent. Please learn a natural *kamae* like the willow tree that does not oppose the external power of the wind. Even if one’s *shinai* is flicked away, the attitude to have here is a one of naturally returning to the original position without opposing that force (by instantly gripping *shinai* with left hand). When this happens, the opponent thinks “this dude is good.”

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In your standing position, please make sure not to lean forward. Typically, we are told to extend (straighten) the back of the left knee (*popliteal fossa*). However, since over-extending it causes the movements to be awkward, please hold the left knee flexible with a light amount of extension.

Please place the left fist, if possible, in the area below the belly button (it is said that the first joint of the thumb at the base of the thumb is in a direct line in front of the navel). I think it is good to have the *kensaki* (shinai tip) at the usual height (usually opponent's throat or eye level, or it can be chest or solar plexus level). The point is to remove any tension in the upper half of the body. That is quite difficult. The left heel should feel as if it is floating lightly. Please be careful not to raise the left heel too high, because that will shift the body weight to the front foot.

Part 3: So, finally, we delve into *seme*

One slides the right foot and goes forward in *seme*, and one's center of gravity moves forward. However, during this phase, please never raise the hands. If the hands are raised, one's movements can be read by the opponent and one can be taken in (deceived) instead. When the opponent is about to initiate a strike, his hands are raised. This moment is the instant for one to strike.

Next, I shall explain a bit more detail about the sliding of the right foot as a part of *seme-komu* (*seme-in*, carry the attack). One would fall forward with a thud if one were to release the tension from the right knee while in the *kamae* position. To prevent one from falling, if one pushes one's weight lightly with the left leg, then one does not fall, and one's center of gravity moves forward parallel with the floor. (Try this by wearing a sock on the right foot to make sliding easier.) With regards to one's speed going forward, please imagine the *shinkansen* (Japan's high-speed bullet train) starting to move. The bullet train starts moving quietly (with stealth) to the extent that one cannot sense or feel oneself starting to move. One can carry the attack with this kind of movement while sliding the right foot forward. The distance one *seme-in* with the right foot will vary depending on the opponent and *waza* used. With this *seme*, along with a quiet (stealthy) initial movement and hands which are not raised, the opponent will be unaware initially (of the movement). At a certain point, as one comes closer, the opponent will realize this with "Ah" and initiate a strike in a panic. At this moment, the opponent comes in closer by half a head-length in an attempt to strike. One advances the right foot further and then, at the same time, kicks the left foot and strikes. Since one's motion is launched a half to a single heartbeat faster than that of the opponent, one can secure a strike while the opponent is at *itsuita-tokoro* (standstills unconsciously and about becoming conscious), at *degashira* (about to move in to strike) or at *aimen*.

At the instant of striking, it is better not to raise the right foot high to extend the (*fumikomi*) distance. It may seem that raising the right foot high would allow one to jump further out. However, the raised foot returns and lands considerably short of the distance jumped. This result was verified by actual testing. A greater distance was resulted by extending the right knee forward with the lower height of the knee, which is an ideal. Rather than advancing with the foot, advancing with the knee is as if entering with the hips.

Rather than kicking off strongly from the left leg, the sensation is pushing off a little to help pull the body's center of gravity, by the right leg, forward. The point is not to jump at the instant to strike, but rather to have the feeling as if the right leg pulls the body weight forward (*fumikomu* with the right foot). With this approach, the Achilles tendon is unburdened. I believe it is an ideal way to strike. - Like "sssss-Tong" (sound effect).

The next important point is the heart (mind). If one intends to attack (strike) and *seme-komu* (invade), one can be taken in. The mindset of "Please strike my *men*" and to "give" one's *men* is important. This mindset may be the most difficult one. Please "die" before striking. If one "dies," there is no fear. It is only a bamboo stick that strikes the surface of thick *bogu*. Next, please believe in yourself. Your unconscious instincts should protect you.

From the time I memorized and committed to this way of striking, the sole of my left foot has no more cracks. Nowadays, my sole has been completely clear with no beans (bumps). Though I do not know whether this is good or bad, I believe this has happened because the movement of my body became smooth.

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Part 4

I shall supplement the explanation of *seme*. Regarding the height of the *kensaki* (sword tip), I use the following positions when the right foot slides forward during *semekomu*. I set it to the height of the chest, solar plexus, or *tsuba-moto*, and attack. Attacking *tsuba-moto* is usually executed by bringing in my *shinai* below my opponent's *shinai* near the lower part of the opponent's *tsuba*. The effectiveness of this varies with the opponent. Please check to make sure.

During the entire step of *seme*, please do not raise your hands. Fly into the *men-uchi* with a "tong" (sound effect) when the right foot slides forward and is about to land on the floor (that is, the left to right foot weight ratio changes from 7/3 to 5/5). It may be difficult initially not to raise the hands as one extends the right leg. However, you can do it. Next, I have my "ultimate" *seme*. I relax my hands; shift my *kensaki* away from the opponent's face and then *seme-komu* (invade for attack). Of course, I offer "please hit my *men*." In response, most people come to strike *men*. Because my *kensaki* is off the center, my *men* strike will be late. Therefore, in this case, I respond with a *nuki-do* or *kaeshi-do*.

For 7th Dan, you need to acquire the power to draw out the opponent (*hikidasu*). The recent passing rate for 7th Dan is 9%. It was about 22% when I tested six years ago.

Part 5

I shall write about the method of striking from *seme* using *tenouchi*. One strikes with "tong" (sound effect) when one catches a cue of the opponent's intent to strike during one's *seme* stage. However, strike this *men* with the left fist as if nicking opponent's nose by extending the left fist forward. Please be careful here not to pull and raise the right hand. The *kensaki* will come up rotating about the *shinai's* center of gravity (practically right-hand is not carrying the weight of the *shinai*, but hooking up with index finger) if the left fist is pushed forward (forward down and forward up). The *kensaki* will not only rise upwards but also will come fairly close toward one's body. Once this point is reached, you will feel the opponent's *men* is below your *shinai*. From here, the righthand pushes the *shinai* toward the opponent's *men* target and the *kensaki* surges forward. The right hand is also referred to as the pushing hand (*oshite*). The job of the right hand here is only to go for hit the opponent's *men*. However, the extended left-hand changes simultaneously to that of a pulling hand. Even though the job of left-hand may be called the pulling hand, the feeling is as if the left fist returns to the solar plexus area. With the action of the two hands, the sword gains cutting power and one can strike a tremendously sharp *men*. After the strike, the body (using the hips) advances and assumes *zanshin*.

With regards to the position of the left fist when swinging up (*furikaburi*), it is (raised to) at about the height of one's mouth. According to the fundamentals, the left fist is raised up to the forehead. However, with a large *furikaburi*, it would take two motions (two heartbeats) to strike, and one cannot strike this way quickly. In fact, if one watches slow-motion videos of high-level *senseis*, it is raised only to about the mouth. Nevertheless, the *kensaki* comes above one's head. I think this way it looks as if the swing is large. In the case of the *kiri-otoshi waza*, the left fist is raised slightly higher.

If one commits to memory, this operation of extending the left fist forward, one can use a heavy *shinai*. No matter how heavy it may be, as long as the left fist is pushed forward, the *kensaki* comes up above the *shinai's* center of balance. Afterward, it is just the operation of the right and left hands as mentioned here (*tenouchi*). If this operation succeeds, it will lead to (comments such as) "the *tenouchi* is good" or "the strike is sharp and crisp."

Part 6

Well then, with only *men-uchi* (strike), the opponent would exploit this. For the 7th Dan level, drawing out (*hikidasu*) the opponent and striking a *yuko-datosu* is desired.

If the opponent raises the hands to strike in response to one's *seme* mentioned earlier, then the *waza* to use is *kote*, *nuki-do* or *kaeshi-do* (if delayed concerning the opponent's *men*). (The *seme* mentioned is a shift of one's center of balance L/R weight ratios from 7/3 to 5/5 starting with one's right leg with 3). One can switch to a variety of *waza* with this *seme* that moves one's center of balance starting with the right foot since the right hand is not raised.

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This time, I shall write about *kaeshi-do*. Although there many ways of striking, use this *kaeshi-do* if you would like to use. My fear of *men* strike has disappeared after mastering how to use this *kaeshi-do* strike. I can counter with a *kaeshi-do* no matter how fast the opponent's *men* strike is. However, if I use this *waza* too much, the opponent stops striking *men*, and I am in trouble. Think of using this technique in moderation.

There are many ways of inviting the opponent in (*sasoi*). For example, invite the opponent without moving either foot from the position of *kamae* by slowly shifting one's weight forward and backward between the width of the back foot and forward foot. The head (face) moves slowly forward and returns. And if one advances one's face slightly faster and move forward more, the opponent is invited to strike *men*. The feeling at the time of invitation is, as expected, like giving the opponent *men* strike. As the opponent comes in to strike *men*, counter with a *kaeshi-waza* at the moment the *men* is about to be hit. One can respond with a *kaeshi-do* at the instant the opponent thinks he or she has the *men* strike.

Now, how to strike the *do* is similar to the 7th *kendo kata*. Step the right foot slightly toward the right, and at the same time raise the hands to receive the opponent's *shinai*. At the instant it is received, send the left foot diagonally toward the right and strike *do*. To come out, escape using *ayumi-ashi*, immediately turn around, and take *zanshin*. At the instant of hitting *do*, please have sufficient composure and calmness to check to see where your *shinai* strikes the opponent.

The left foot is advanced at the same time *do* is struck. This cut is possible given a slow *men*-strike from the opponent because the *ayumi-ashi* footwork is slow. This footwork does not correspond to fast *men*. However, the image of advancing the left foot and striking is important. In practice, the left hip first rotates toward the right while advancing with the left foot when responding with a *kaeshi-do* against fast *men*. At the time of the hip rotation, the *do* is struck. Naturally, the left foot is pulled in by the hips afterward, and one advances. At that point, the *do-uchi* has already been completed, and the body is passing through the opponent.

As supplementary comments, there is no rule saying that it must be with this *seme* on the first invitation (*sasoi*). One can develop good composure and calmness in the middle of *koubou* (attacking and defending) if one can do *kaeshi-do* anytime. Let's not be content with this *kaeshi-do* *waza* alone just because it is easy. Rather please do not forget about various *seme* in your kendo. I pray that you devote to the pursuit of this truth.

Part 7

Well then, this time, I explain how to strike *nuki-do*. The explanation of this *waza* will serve as the end this time. Although there are others, I have come to write at length on the *waza* which I think are good.

On to *nuki-do*. This *waza* is similar to *kaeshi-do*, as the *do* is cut with (the timing of) the left leg. The *seme-in* and offering the *men* (*hikidasu*) were explained many times. First, start *seme-in* from the right leg, with "guuuuuh-toh" (sound effect). The hands are in the same position as when in *kamae*. At this point, the opponent is about to strike my *men* since I entered into his striking range (*ma-ai*). Following the right leg, the left leg advances toward the right, and at the same time, the *do* is drawn out (*nukeru*). Starting with the right foot and as if flowing along with the left leg, cut the *do* while pulling out (*nukeru*) with *ayumi-ashi*. With "sururi" (sound effect), one can slip out (*nukeru*). As once before, one can briefly see the *do* when cutting the *do*, at the instant one's *shinai* takes the opponent's *do*. Of course, one cannot even fall or lose balance because the left hip enters. This *do-uchi* feels good. Please master it.

With the above, this ends the explanations. Next is a summary up to this point: 1) The right leg slides forward, and the hands are never raised when *seme-komu* (invade for attack). 2) While entering the opponent's *ma-ai* with *seme-komu*, if one sees cues, this is the time to strike instantaneously in one heartbeat. 3) If you can learn how to use the left foot, the breadth of your kendo widens. 4) The technique of *ayumi-ashi* is equivalent to that for dance and traditional Japanese dance. That is difficult. With what I have written thus far, you may think that I have become very strong. However, I have not really become that strong. Conversely, I may have become weaker. 5) Nonetheless, I can continue to enjoy kendo. Thus, I think this is good.

Postscript

Well, I have written quite a lot. Thank you for reading. I am grateful. If the opportunity arises, I think I may write again.