



BRITISH KENDO  
ASSOCIATION  
IAIDO



居  
合  
道





***laido*** is a fast-growing martial art in the UK with an increasing number of people practising within the BKA each year. We welcome individuals with or without experience of sword arts, including those who practise other recognised schools (Ryu) of lai.

We look forward to seeing you at national and international seminars.



## What is iaido?

***iaido*** is the Japanese art of drawing the sword quickly, dispatching one's (imaginary) assailants, and sheathing the sword whilst maintaining a ultra-alert mind and preparedness to further attack





## Stages in training

### 1. Keiko

This means quite simply training or practice. This is the stage during which the essential movements are perfected by slow repetition, by breaking the *kata* down into its component parts, by understanding how the techniques work in a fighting situation. With this practice the swordsman begins to understand the principles of *Metsuke* (correct use of the eyes), *Seme* (pressing or pushing) in order to control the opponent, of *Mai* (combative distance) and *Ma* (timing). This study takes about five years of regular practice. Overlapping with it, from about the third or fourth year, the swordsman will begin the practice of ***Tanren***.



## Stages in training

### 2. Tanren

This means to forge in the same way that a sword blade is forged, with hard work, and sweat, and many hours of dedication, folding together the hard and soft elements in the body, mind, and movement just as the sword gains its strength out of hard and soft steel. The student increasingly practises without concern for the correctness of the movements (though they must remain correct and effective) and repeats the *kata* uninterrupted with a feeling of *Shinken Shobu* (a fight to the death with a real sword). During this phase posture improved, movements become more natural, techniques become more effective because timing is better controlled and less predictable. As confidence increases and *Kigurai* (bearing, demeanor) develops, training moves into the phase called ***Renshu***.





## Stages in training

### 3. Renshu

*Ren* means to polish, to perfect by continued practice of both *keiko* and *tanren*. It also means to polish the spirit and character through the requirements of detail and interpretation. To demonstrate a compassionate nature that can pass on knowledge without egotistical pride and arrogance. This leads to the award of *Renshi* meaning a person whose performance and character is polished by training. This grade is not awarded below the rank of 6th *Dan* and is only available from the All Japan Kendo Federation (ZNKR). After this stage the actions become slower and softer, appearing to a bystander to be less effective-but the technique comes from refined efficiency, not using force until the moment of the sword is actually cutting, remaining relaxed in body but constantly aware and prepared in mind. Only after leaving all of these stages in the past and demonstrating the simplicity of the correct action and knowing all of these stages by direct experience can the student who has by now gained 7th *Dan* receive *Kyoshi* (teacher grade) from the ZNKR.



## The Curriculum

After learning basics of how to hold a sword and cut with it the beginner is gradually introduced to the twelve *kata* of the All Japan Kendo Federation. These forms were developed in the 1960's and 70's as a national and later, international, standard for teaching, grading and competing. The moves are derived from the most popular of old styles (*koryu*), and, although they represent basic study in preparation for *koryu* practice, they continue to be the forms through which instructors and *sensei* demonstrate basic principles at all levels. Following these there are old style *kata*. Most common in the UK and Japan are *Muso Shinden Ryu* and *Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu*.

As the student progresses through the sets, the range of interpretations widens, so that whereas the beginner had a very strict defined set of moves, the more advance student is able to imagine *Kasso Teki* (his imagined enemy) moving or acting differently, and adapt the *kata* accordingly. Similarly, with the two-man *kata* the student (*Shidachi*) must learn to cover his weak openings (*Suki*). If he does not the teacher (*Uchidachi*) will show him where he is weak by attacking other than as prescribed by the *kata*. This is the start of how we learn to become prepared for any eventuality.





## The Equipment

*Iaido* is normally practised wearing a *hakama* (baggy pleated trousers) and *keikogi* (training jacket). An *iai obi* (sword belt) is worn under the *hakama* cords to hold the sword in place. The *hakama* is usually black or dark blue, and the *keikogi* matching colour or white. A white *hakama* can be worn, but this is usually considered to be summer dress. There is no indication of grade by any means in the costume. A *zekken* is worn on the left chest indicating your name and club, or country when attending international events. The swords used range from *bokuto* (wooden sword) for beginners, to *iaito* (plated alloy blunt practice swords) for the more experienced. Please don't turn up to a *dojo* for your first lesson with a sharp sword and expect to be allowed to use it! The *dojo* needs to be an area of plain floor, preferably wood, without mats, and with sufficient headroom to swing the sword. For individual practice a squash court can be ideal.





## The Equipment

The format of a practice after warming up and stretching the practice begins with opening etiquette consisting of *kamiza ni rei* (bow to high side), *sensei ni rei* (bow to the teacher) and *to rei* (bow to the sword). Then follows *suburi* (cutting action practice) and *kihon* including *Chiburi* (blood shaking action) and *Noto* (re-sheathing). Depending on the size and level of the class further techniques derived from the *kata* may be practised individually before the *kata* practice begins. The *kata* practice often begins with the teacher explaining points to be practised, either to the class as a whole or to groups at different grades as appropriate. Then follows either a formal practice in which everyone performs together, following the timing of the *dojo* leader, or a free practice when everyone performs the *kata* in their own time while the instructor wanders from student to student correcting points as necessary. At the end of the session everyone performs the finishing etiquette together.



## The structure of the kata

Each kata follows the same basic design of four sections:

**Nukitsuke** (draw and cut)

**Kirioroshi** (main two-handed cut down)

**Chiburi** (blood shake-off)

**Noto** (re-sheathing).

Please note that there are, within this format, considerable variations. The most common variations include: Strike forwards with the hilt before drawing, pull the scabbard back off the blade and thrust immediately to the rear. Cut at an angle other than horizontally, e.g. vertically downwards, vertically upwards. Turn to various directions to cut opponents, or re-position the sword and stab. Deflect an initial attack instead of the single-handed cut, and then follow immediately with a two-handed cut.





The arts of the sword as we know them today probably began with *Izasa Choisai* the founder of the *Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu*. This school included the use of many weapons from sword and stick to spear and throwing knives. One part of its curriculum was the fast draw and instant use of the sword, either in self-defence or as a pre-emptive strike. This section of their study is called *Iai Jutsu*.

**Hayashizaki Jinsuke Shigenobu** (1542-1621), like *Izasa Choisai*, is reputed to have received divine inspiration, which led to the development of his art called *Muso Shinden Jushin Ryu Batto Jutsu* (*Batto* meaning to simply to draw a sword).

From the inspiration, it is said that he had the vision of a means of using the sword, to facilitate the fast draw and therefore instantly cut down an opponent. Because of this and his influence on other swordsmen, *Hayashizaki* is considered to be the founder of modern day *Iaido*.

The Japanese *kanji* (character) 'I' can also be read as 'ite' and 'ai' as 'awasu' in the phrase '*Tsune ni ite kyu ni awasu*' which means:

**“wherever you are and whatever you are doing, always be prepared”.**

Being 'prepared' means not only to have an aware state of mind, but also to have trained rigorously so that, if necessary, a decisive technique can be used to end a conflict.



Hayashizaki Jinsuke Shigenobu



The significant factor common to both of these schools as with many other sword schools, which concerned themselves predominantly with the drawing of the sword, was that the art was practised purely as *kata*. How then can a martial art be fully effective when it is practised only as solo *kata* against an imaginary opponent? This is a much more difficult question than it at first seems, the problem begins when trying to define 'fully effective', and consider what 'effect' is required.

Of course, in *kata* there is no repeated opportunity to prove your technique in combat as there is in fencing *kendo*, and in the repeated patterns of *kata* there seems to be no opportunity to modify your movements in response to those of your opponent. As a fighting art of the modern world it is all too easy to see the sword arts superficially and criticise them as inappropriate, simply because we do not walk along the street carrying a sword.

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avoid conflict.





The way of the warrior should be to avoid conflict. This was explained thousands of years ago by *Sun Tsu* in *The Art of War* and later by masters of strategy. The practitioner who trains fully and correctly, directed by a *sensei*, will develop an ability to recognise difficult situations and avoid them before they become a problem, or will engage the conflict before it has grown to become a significant matter, or will maintain a state of mind and body that will not offer opportunities for an aggressor. This is the meaning of *laido*.

With a sword, of course, the cut is deadly, there are restraining techniques, but this is not the whole point. In business you must be prepared and act decisively when required, do you have the confidence? When a friend lets you down can you deal appropriately, fully understanding the implications and effects of your actions? When crossing a road and a car appears 'from nowhere', or something falls on you as you walk along the street, is your body sufficiently balanced and your mind sufficiently clear to deal with these situations and be safe? All of these are examples of 'self-defence', and all as important as the superficial interpretation of self-defence equals fighting. *Kata* is a very difficult study.



For further information, visit the **British Kendo Association** website or Facebook page:

[www.kendo.org.uk](http://www.kendo.org.uk)

