

手裏劍

SECRETS of
Shuriken
THE ART OF BLADE THROWING



Introduction to *shuriken*, and a short History of the Art

There are two basic types of shuriken, *bo shuriken*, or long thin blades, and *hira shuriken* (also called *shaken*), or flat, star-shaped or lozenge-shaped blades.

The basic method of throwing of the shuriken varies little between schools, the main differences being the shape of the blades and their use.

Origins

The earliest mention of throwing blades comes from Ganritsu Ryu, founded by Matsubayashi Henyasai, a professional swordsman in service of the 18th lord of Matsuhiro in Kanei, around 1624. This school gave rise to Katono, or Izu Ryu, founded by a samurai of Sendai, called Fujita Hirohide of Katono, also known as Katono Izu, who was a student of Mastubayashi. He pioneered the use of a throwing needle, about 10cm in length and weighing about 20gm, several of which he wore in his hair. The needle was held between the middle and forefinger, and thrown like a modern dart into the eyes of an attacker. It was said that he could throw two needles at a time at a picture of a horse, hitting each hoof in turn.

Enmei Ryu

The famous swordsman Miyamoto Musashi was reportedly the founder of this school, which involves throwing a 40cm blade, probably a *tanto*, or knife. There is a story of a duel between Musashi and Shishido, an expert of the *kusari-gama*, a sickle and chain developed specifically to defeat the samurai's sword. As Shishido pulled out his chain, Musashi threw a dagger and struck him in the chest, killing him.

Shirai Ryu

Shirai Ryu was founded by Shirai Toru Yoshikane, born 1783 in Okayama. At the age of 8 he began to learn swordsmanship under Ida Shimpachiro of Kiji-ryu, and at 14 moved to Tokyo and trained daily under the Nakanishi school of Itto Ryu sword, and began teaching in Okayama at 23. Over 9 years his fame spread and he had over 300 students, but he continued to doubt his ability. In the subsequent years he returned to Edo a number of times to train with his seniors, until eventually he achieved some sort of major revelation and found peace with his technique. After this revelation, he added the word *Tenshin* to the name of his art, thus known as Tenshin Itto Ryu. The style of blade and throwing method he taught became known as Shirai Ryu.

The blade of Shirai Ryu is a metal rod 15cm to 25 cm in length and about 5-6mm in diameter. It is sharpened at one end and rounded at the other.(see *fig. 2*)

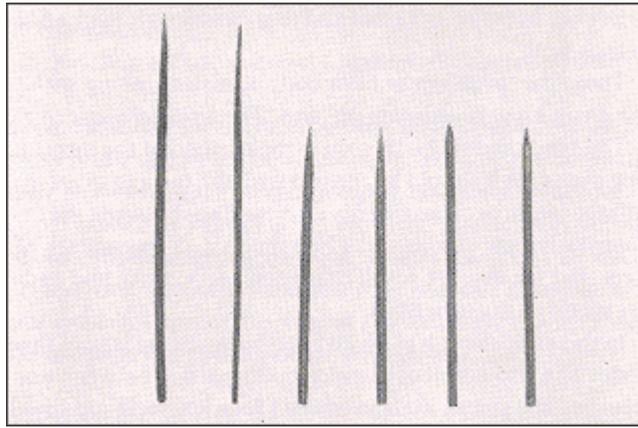


Figure 2. Shuriken of the Shirai Ryu

It is held in the hand by forming a guide with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd fingers. The little finger gives extra support and the thumb holds the blade in place. The feeling of the hand when holding and throwing is said to be gentle, like holding a swallows egg so as not to break it. (see *fig. 3*). Depending upon the distance to be thrown, the blade is held with the point outwards towards the target, or inwards to the palm.

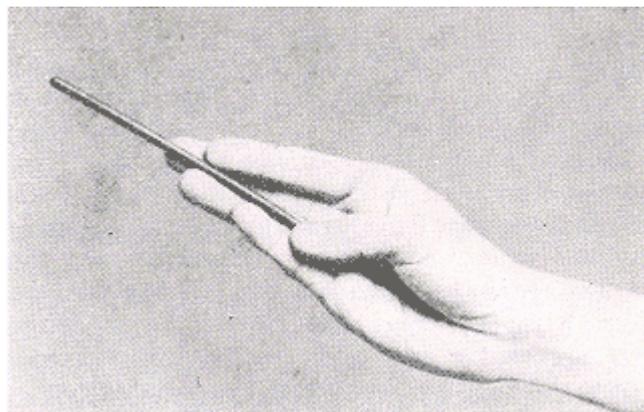


Figure 3. Holding the shuriken of the Shirai Ryu

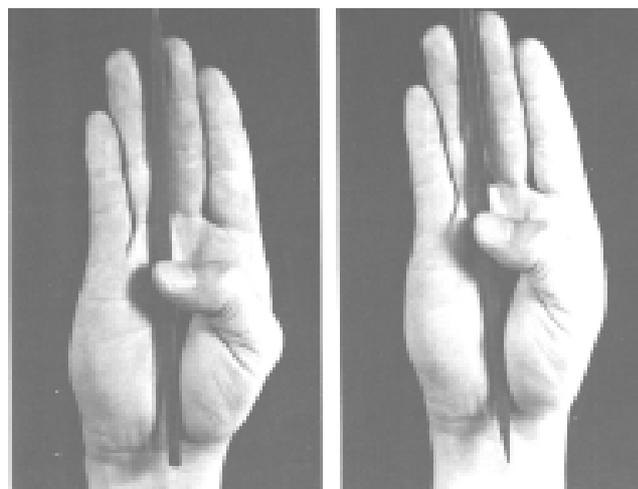


Fig 4. A variation in the hold of Shirai Ryu, for long blades.

Negishi Ryu

Negishi Ryu was founded by Negishi Nobunori Shorei, a retainer of Joshu Annaka during the last days of the Tokugawa shogunate. Negishi became a student of Kaiho Hanpei, the second master of Hokushin Itto Ryu sword, after showing promise with the use of a shinai as a child. He studied other schools such as Araki Ryu and spear of Oshima Ryu, eventually becoming the head of the Kaiho Ryu, and later taught for several years. When the Meiji Restoration ordered the abolition of swords, he became a farmer, and passed away in 1904.

The basic blade shape of the Negishi Ryu is a projectile shaped pen that has an enlarged head and tail, like a slender bomb. (see *fig.5*) They weigh around 50gm, and sometimes have a tassel of hair or cotton attached to the tail to assist straight flight.

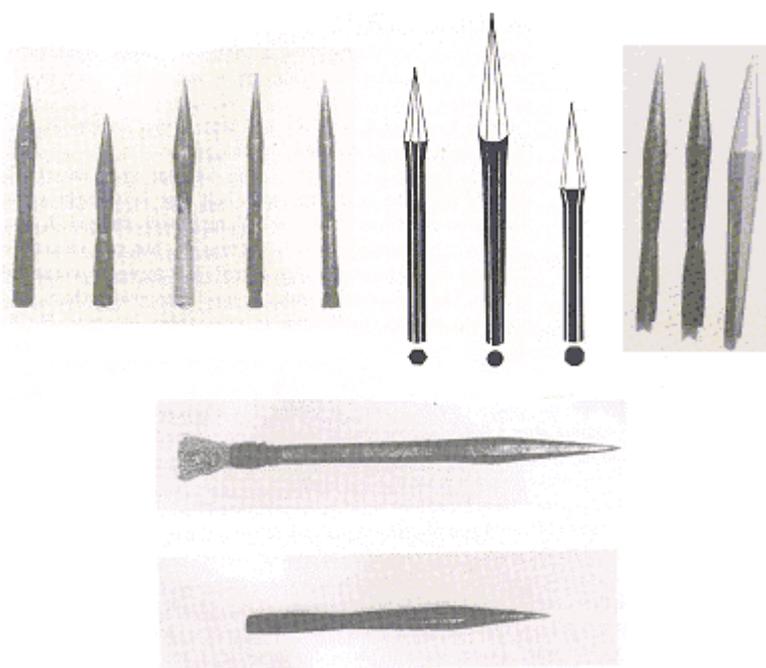


Figure 5. Shuriken of the Negishi Ryu

Much like the method of Shirai Ryu, it is held in the hand with the fingers acting as a guide, and the thumb locks it in place.(see *fig. 6*)

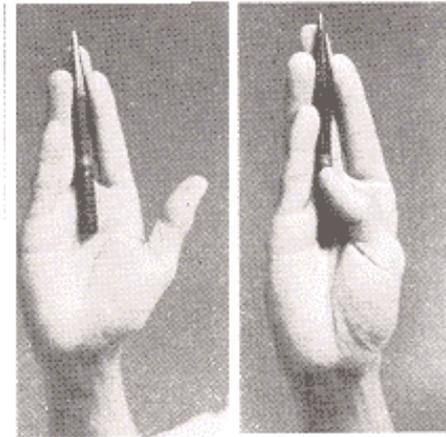


Figure 6. Holding the shuriken of the Negishi Ryu

Jikishin Ryu

Not much is known about Jikishin Ryu, and it is suspected that this is a variation in style of a precursor to Shirai or Negishi Ryu, though I suspect it may be from Kashima Shinto Ryu, as this method of holding is best thrown as one steps forward with the right foot. The major difference is in the way the blade is held (see *fig 7*). The 3 smaller fingers are curled, while the index finger points out straight, as though making a gun shape with the hand. The blade sits with its butt in the palm and the thumb applies slight pressure from above, downwards, holding it in place on the side of the curled middle finger, and holding the tail down as it leaves the hand. The index finger then rests on the side of the blade, providing support. The throw is a simple raising and lowering of the arm from the side as a step is taken forward, the arm cuts down as if it were a sword.

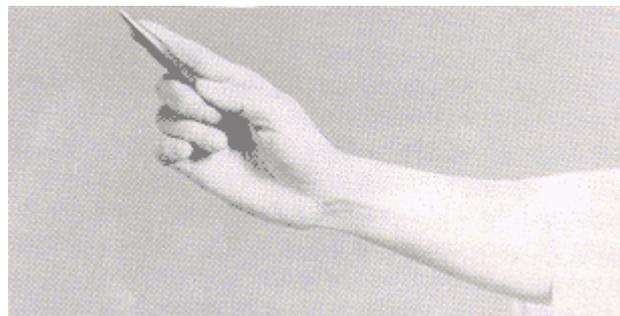


Figure 7. Holding the shuriken of the Jikishin Ryu

Other styles and types of shuriken

There are other less well known styles of shuriken, and a huge variety of blade shapes. Here are some more examples.

Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto-Ryu

This style is one of the most famous martial arts of Japan, with a long and distinguished history. It is a composite art consisting of many weapons, sword and shuriken included. As with many other schools, the shuriken was taught as part of the techniques for sword. There are descriptions of two different blades. One is *hashi*, or chopstick shaped, where it is a square stick, sharp at one end and thick at the other (see *Fig. 9*).

Figure 8 shows another version, with a hexagonal cross-section shown at the base, to give an idea of the thickness and shape.

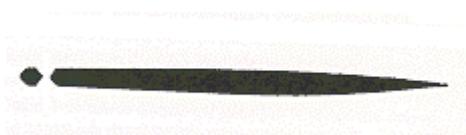


Figure 8. A Shuriken from the Katori Shinto Ryu, a famous sword school

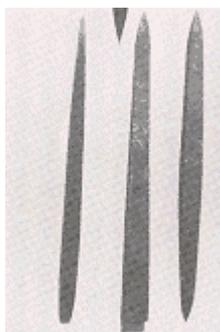


Figure 9. Shuriken of the Katori Shinto Ryu (*Left, Middle*), and Ikku Ryu (*Right*).

Tatsumi Ryu

This school is a comprehensive martial art founded by Tatsumi Sankyo around the mid 1500's, and still operates today. It teaches a complete range of weaponry, including shuriken, as well as battlefield and martial strategies. Details about the shuriken in this Ryu are scarce at present, though I suspect shuriken training was introduced into the art at a later date.

Otsuki Ryu

Yasuda Zenjiro, a master of Otsuki Ryu Kenjutsu from Hiroshima recounts that his teacher, Okamoto Munishige, an Edo period samurai of the Aizu domain used shuriken on a number of occasions during his employment in the Shogunate's security force. He reportedly carried around 12 blades in various places, including the *koshita*, or back flap of the *hakama*.

Ikku Ryu

Ikku Ryu is the name given to a relatively modern style of shuriken, created by modern day shuriken master, and author Shirakami Ikku-ken. He was a student of Master Naruse Kanji (*d.* 1948), who had trained in Yamamoto Ryu sword, and had written a book on Japanese Sabre Fighting, after his experiences at war with China at the turn of the century. Master Naruse was a student of Yonegawa Magoroku who in turn was a student of the above mentioned founder of Shirai Ryu, Shirai Toru. From his teacher, Shirakami learned both Shirai Ryu and Negishi Ryu, and combined the blade from the Shirai Ryu with the throwing style of the Negishi Ryu, and formed a new method, which involves a double pointed blade (see *fig. 9, R*), This method overcomes the problem of positioning the blade the right way round in the hand before throwing, giving greater flexibility in distance..

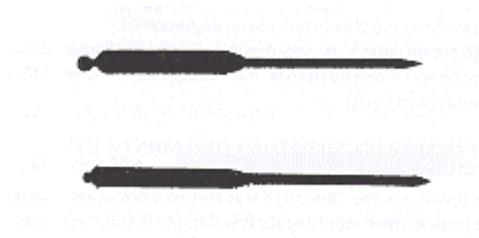


Figure 10. *Kogai*, Japanese ornamental hairpin

There is a famous story which relates a duel between Shosetsu and Sekiguchi Hayato, who faced each other off with swords. As Hayato rushed at Sekiguchi, the latter pulled a *kogai* from his hair and threw it, pinning Sekiguchi's *hakama*, or pleated skirt, to the wooden floor. It is thought that Sekiguchi used a specially fashioned *kogai* that was balanced, and made to look like a hair-pin.

Shuriken of the Ninja schools



Figure 11. Tanto-gata, Japanese knives adapted to become shuriken

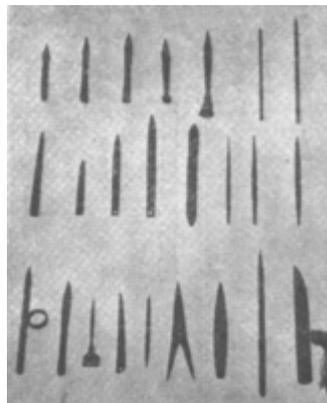


Figure 12. Some straight blades from various schools and sources.

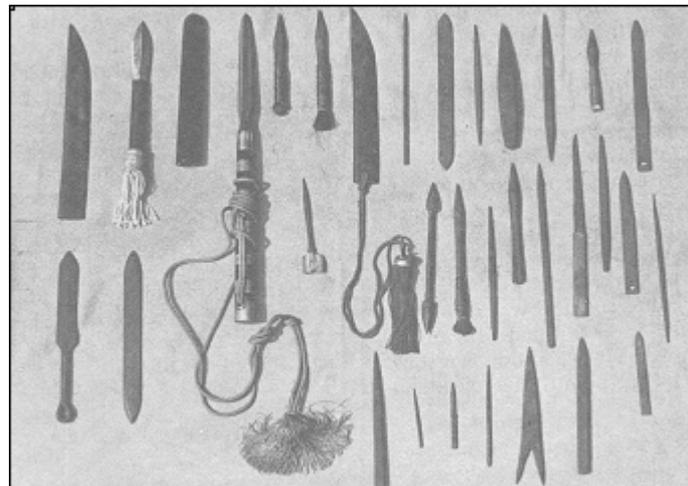


Figure 13. A variety of straight throwing blades from the collection of Dr. Masaaki Hatsumi, current Head Master of Togakure Ryu Ninjutsu.

This interesting collection of blades (*fig. 13*) shows a wide variety from a range of schools. The large blade with long tassel, and the second from left, top row, are called *uchine*, which are actually throwing spears. They are held and thrown much like a modern-day javelin (see *fig. 14*). The long chord was used to retrieve the *uchine*, and also the *tanto-gata* (top row, 7th from left) immediately after the throw, so it could be thrown again, in rapid succession. The smaller *uchine* has tassels which are used to

create drag in flight, ensuring a straight hit. Centre row, 4th from the right is a *kozuka*, a small utility knife that fits into the scabbard of a *katana*, or long sword. There are several blades peculiar to Ninjutsu, such as the flat spatulate blades, and the arrow-head shaped blade, as well as several from Negishi Ryu and Shirai Ryu. At some point in history, Negishi Ryu became utilised by various schools or clans of Ninjutsu.



Figure 14. Posture for throwing the *uchine*.

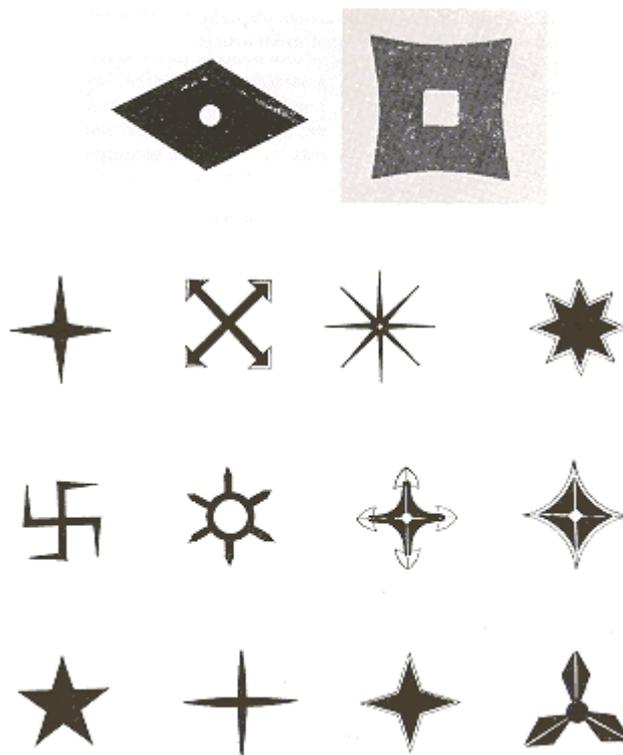


Figure 15. Some disc or star-shaped shuriken from various Ninjutsu schools.

From top left, examples 1,3, and 4 are shuriken of the Koga and Iga Ryu. 5 and 6 are from Kobori Ryu, 7 is from Yagyu Ryu, 8 from Koden Ryu or Shosho Ryu, 10 is from Yagyu Ryu and Koga Ryu.

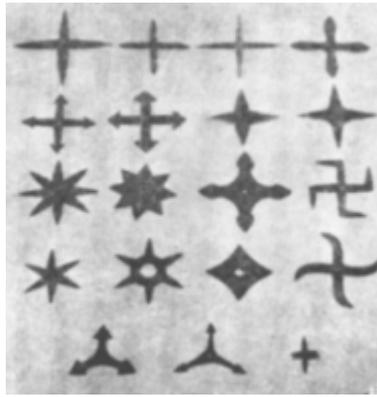


Figure 16. Some throwing stars from various schools and sources.

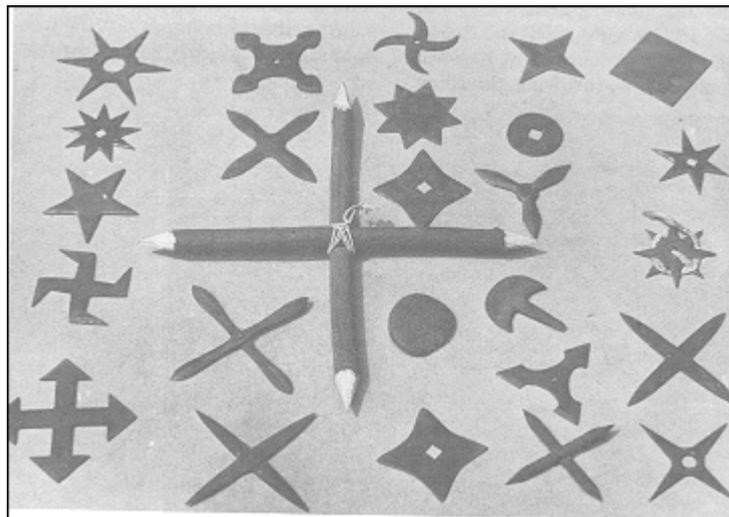


Figure 17. A Variety of *hira shuriken*, or *shaken* throwing blades from the collection of Dr. Masaaki Hatsumi, current Head Master of Togakure Ryu Ninjutsu.

The star and cross shaped shuriken, known as *hira shuriken*, or *shaken*, use an entirely different principle in flight than do the *bo shuriken*, as they spin at a rapid rate, and have multiple points which can make contact with the target. There seems to be some dispute over the method of throwing. Dr Hatsumi, current Head Master, or 33rd *soke* of Togakure Ryu Ninjutsu, shows throwing the shuriken as one would throw a small "frisbee", that is, the blade is held horizontally, parallel to the ground, between the thumb and first finger. The wrist makes a flicking action forward as the arm straightens out in front of the thrower's stomach. Several shurikens are held cupped in the left hand like a stack of coins, and are passed to the right hand in rapid succession. Shirakami Ikku-ken however, states that this method is wrong, and that the blade is held and thrown vertically, in much the same way as a *bo shuriken*. (see fig. 18, below)

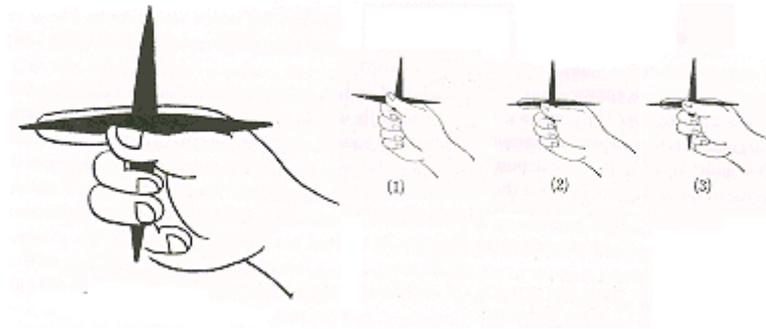


Figure 18. Holding a *hira shuriken* of the Ninjutsu schools. (1) shows an incorrect method

Both types of throw are feasible, however, the latter method can generate much more power.

Wearing the Shuriken

The shuriken's tactical advantage is its small size and concealability, and ability for a quick draw which helps one gain the upper hand by using surprise when attacked. With practice, great accuracy with the shuriken can be achieved, and this enhances its tactical advantage. By momentarily disabling an attacker who could be from 3 to 15 paces away, this gives one precious time to collect your thoughts and move to better position from which to deal with the attack.

To make better use of this advantage, a thorough understanding of the draw is necessary, and how the shuriken are worn can either help or hinder your ability to respond to attack effectively. Traditionally, in Shirai and Negishi Ryu, a number of points around the hip were used as places to wear the shuriken, and each position would offer some advantage over another, due to hand position, angle of the hand to the opponent, and position of the blade as it comes into the hand.

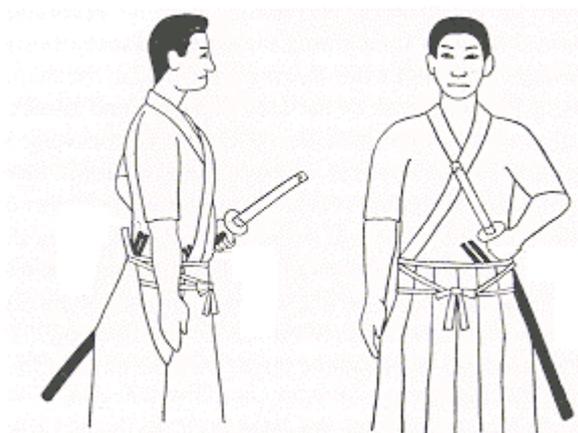


Figure. 19. Wearing the shuriken

The illustration above shows 3 positions, each convenient for a right hand draw in a variety of situations. The points of the blade are embedded in the clothing, so whether one takes the front or back set, the blade will fit in the hand ready for a turning or a direct hit, dependent upon the situation. (Particularly important in Shirai Ryu) In feudal times in Japan, Samurai did not have the restrictions on wearing such weapons as we do these days, so their blades could have been in view, or hidden, as the left illustration shows.

Ninjutsu practitioners hold their *hira shuriken*, up to 8 or 10, together like a stack of coins wrapped in a leaf of cotton, which is then pocketed or secreted in any number of pouches built for that purpose.

As mentioned above, shuriken were also worn as hairpins.

It should be mentioned here that there are weapons regulations in place that govern the possession and use of shuriken, so if an individual is endeavoring to begin practice by purchasing or making one of their own, they should check the laws of their area.

Shuriken in the Modern World

It is difficult to justify to the authorities the ownership and use of shuriken, especially with the high rates of violent crime in today's society. Offences relating to sharp, concealable and throwable weapons are quite common these days, and prohibitions on such weapons are a logical and easy solution. Yet, still the problems of violence remain, suggesting that the root of the problem lies deeper within the fabric of society itself. It is simply not feasible to continue placing endless prohibitions on everyday objects which can be adapted to become weapons, because if violence and hatred are still present, crimes will continue to occur. This is one area where Martial Arts can have a positive rather than a negative influence, and one that often gets overlooked. I believe there are many reasons for training in a Martial Art, especially a traditional art which places great emphasis in moral values such as respect, humility, honor and integrity as well as techniques of self defense.

Arts that are aimed at developing skill in fighting are useful only for military purposes, and simply remain as a *jutsu*, or method. Arts that follow the principles of Japanese *Budo*, are deeper in that they become a way of life, and that these moralistic principles become a strong guiding influence over the student, and for them the art becomes the way. Development and mastery of a Martial Art requires years of patience, perseverance, dedication and humility, and this kind of training can only have a positive influence on a student. For this reason, I believe that proper practice of shuriken can and does have a place in the modern world. The skill in throwing a blade is to have it strike the target perfectly, and such is the danger of the weapon, but to achieve such skill requires a calm and relaxed mental state, free from distractions and feelings of egocentricity. Such a mental state can only be achieved by years of dedication and understanding, which makes it an unattractive proposition for persons of ill intent who wish to maliciously cause others injury.

Shirakami Ikku-ken tells a story in his recollections of how a problem student of his at high school turned his life around after studying the shuriken art. The student was throwing a knife in a classroom, and Shirakami walked in on he and his friends. Shirakami got angry and reprimanded the boy, then told him that if he was going to throw a knife, he should throw it and earnest. Shirakami took the knife and threw it at the wall, embedding deeply. This act so impressed the student that he came to ask Shirakami to teach him, to which Shirakami replied that violent, dishonest and lazy people cannot throw a blade correctly, so he wouldn't teach him. The boy was disappointed, and practiced on his own, vowing to surprise his teacher, but couldn't make the blade stick. He came to his teacher and asked again, this time promising to work hard and earnestly. Shirakami agreed and showed him the basic form. As it turned out, the boy trained diligently, and his parents noticed a change in their son. Over time, the boy began to apply himself more to training and less to troublesome activities with his friends, and eventually he earned a new found respect for teachers, and his grades began to improve. The student went on to be accepted in University.

This story serves as a good example of how Martial Arts can lead those astray to a focused and worthwhile path in life.

As a final note in this introduction, it is interesting to hear that some American Special Forces and other military units are becoming interested in shuriken, because, aside from their combative characteristics, the shuriken has potential in survival applications, where one needs to hunt for food.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

The shuriken in flight

The shuriken travels through the air to the target in 3 different ways, depending upon the school, grip, and throw. The "direct hit" method, *jikidaho* or *choku-da*, involves holding the blade with the point out, towards the target. This method is employed in the Negishi Ryu, and also as a short distance throw in the Shirai, Jikishin and other Ryu. (see *fig. 20, below*)

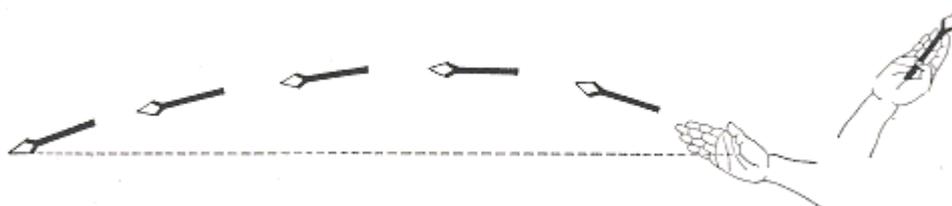


Figure 20. "The direct hit" method

The second way that the blade turns, the "turning hit", is called *hantendaho*, or *ikkaiten-da*, and involves holding the blade with the tip pointing into the palm. During its travel through the air to the target, the blade turns 180 deg, or 1 turn. This method is employed by the Shirai and other Ryu. (see *fig. 21, below*) but not by Negishi Ryu, however I believe nowadays students of Negishi Ryu also learn the throws and about the blades of other Ryu, including Shirai, .

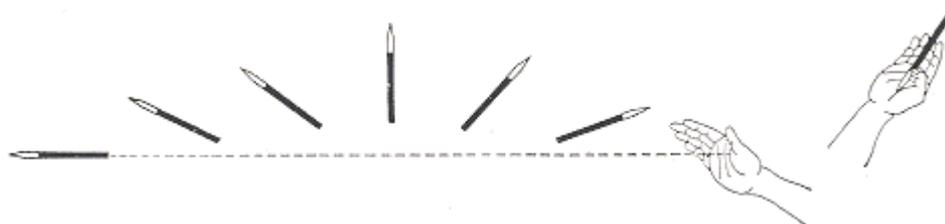


Figure 21. The "turning hit" method

The third way a blade turns, the "multi turn" method, or *dakaiten-da*, has the blade turning 360 deg. or more as it flies through the air. This method is employed by the *hira shuriken* schools, where the many points of the star shaped blade will rotate and have no difficulty piercing the target at any distance. This method is also employed by the Shirai Ryu over long distance throws, (up to 18 steps). (*Not illustrated.*)

Distance

Distance from the target, especially in Shirai Ryu, is measured in steps, rather than units such as feet or metres, because distance varies for each individual. A taller individual has a longer stride, but they also have a longer arm reach, so proportionately, the relationship between the travel of their arm and their distance in steps from the target is exactly the same as for a shorter individual. This makes standard units of measurement useless as a guide to learning distance. In Shirai Ryu, throwing distances are multiples of 3 steps from the target, from 1 to 15-18, (about the maximum effective range for throwing a blade). This is due to the fact that Shirai Ryu is based upon the

principle of the "turning hit" method of throwing. Each turn in the air is equivalent to 3 steps of added distance, which is a kind of limitation, as one can only throw from one of these distances. 1 step's distance is measured by standing in a right *zenkutsu dachi*, or right forward stance, with the right arm extended forward touching the target with the tip of the shuriken. By taking one deep stride backwards with the right foot, then withdrawing the left foot so one is standing in *shizentai*, or natural stance, this process measures the 1st step's distance. From this stance, the form is practiced (*Manji no kata*, with blade, see below), utilising the "direct hit" method, as there is not room enough for the blade to turn in flight..

The next throwing distance from the target is 3 steps, which involves turning the blade in the hand so the tail is pointing to the target. Standing at the target as before, take 3 deep strides backwards, so that the left foot is forward. From here, withdraw the left foot, and stand in *shizentai*. This is the 3 step's distance, and from here the "turning hit" method is utilised, as this distance dictates, according to the Shirai Ryu technique, a turning hit.

For the remaining distances, this same process is repeated, each time turning the blade in the hand. When retrieving the blades from the target, stride forward counting the steps, so one gets a disciplined and repetitive experience of measuring the distance by steps. Ultimately, one should be able to judge automatically whether one should hold a blade in hand with the tip or tail pointing out.

The technique of Negishi Ryu does not have this problem of turning the blade, because the principle of the throw is different. As mentioned above, Negishi Ryu solely utilises the "direct hit" method of travel, with the tip of the blade always held pointing outwards, so throwing at any distance can be achieved. However, the technique is much more advanced and much more difficult to master, though technically, it is superior to Shirai Ryu. Judgement of distance is purely by feel based upon experience, and minute adjustments in technique (see below) are made to allow for the minute variations in distance. To develop this judgement, one must train quite severely and repetitively, otherwise a good hit of the target will be an impossibility. Training starts at 1 steps distance, arrived at in exactly the same way as above for Shirai Ryu. The individual practices at this distance for about 2 weeks, ensuring that mastery of this distance is achieved.

After 2 weeks, the next distance is begun. From a left *zenkutsu dachi*, the left foot slides back so the heel meets the instep of the right foot, weight is transferred to the left foot, then the right foot slides back, stepping again into *zenkutsu dachi*. This action decides the next distance, and is actually a shuffle, however it is exactly the same change in distance as a full step, except that one remains with the same foot forward, rather than the opposite foot, as described above with the Shirai Ryu.

The throw is then practiced, with the necessary adjustments made (eg. earlier release, see below), for another two weeks. Each day, the individual at first throws at 1 steps distance, until they are comfortable with their ability, then the next distance back is trained at. After 2 weeks of this, the slide backwards is repeated, and the 3rd distance is added to the routine. Once again, the individual starts at 1 steps distance, progresses to 2 steps, then onto 3, and practices like this, each day, for a further 2 weeks. Every 2 weeks, a further backstep is added, only practiced after each of the shorter distances have systematically been practiced. So after 9 months of dedicated training, one should be reaching the limit of their throw.

The throw of Jikishin Ryu is only used for short distances, as its grip does not allow for a "turning hit" method of throwing, nor does it allow for earlier release. The practice of Jikishin is primarily a development in speed, as it is only used for short distance. Because it can only be used at short distance, the reaction time to attack is necessarily much shorter, therefore the goal of the training is achieve a quicker draw and throw.

Striking the target

There are many forms of target, so only a brief discussion will follow. Shuriken were developed as a quick response shock weapon that caused the enemy to be distracted while the thrower rushed closer for a killing technique, usually by sword. This is why shuriken appears to be have been taught as part of swordsmanship. So it can be said that it is not a weapon that can deal deathly blows. In its role as a distracting weapon, it therefore was targeted at the softer and more vulnerable parts of the body, such as the head, especially the eyes, the throat, and various exposed regions of soft tissue, such as the back of a swordsman's hands. It was not meant to pierce armour or to be able to kill with one blow from a distance

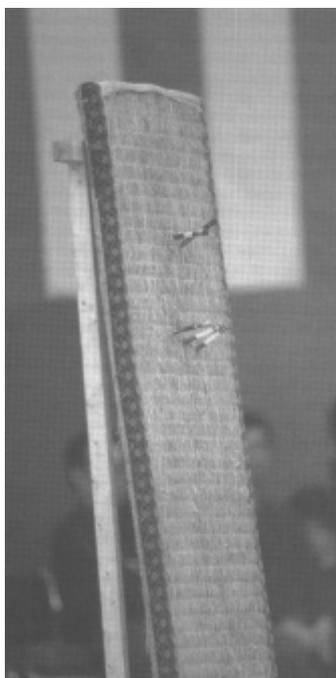


Figure 22 Tatami used as target

For this reason, practice with a hard target is not necessary, and it also tends to damage the shuriken. Traditionally, tatami, or straw matting was used (see *fig. 22*), although more elaborate targets consisting of frames holding various types of material, ranging from screens of paper, boards of wood, or even blocks of wood have been developed. Trees have been often used, especially by "yamabushi", or mountain warriors, whose retreat to the wild had left them without resources. Today, cardboard boxes, or sheets of cardboard, with a piece of white paper and a target image drawn on it and pinned to the box would be sufficient.

The shuriken can hit the target in a number of ways, and the ideal is to have the full weight of the blade moving down its length through the point into the point of impact. This gives maximum force to the hit. If the tail is swinging up or sideways as the point strikes, much of the blades force is lost to lateral movement, and penetration by the blade is reduced.

Because the blade is falling due to gravity, and turning during flight due to the force of the throw, there is an ideal moment during the rotation of the blade for it to hit the target, and that is as the blade is just becoming horizontal, or just as it becomes aligned with the direction of the throw. If one were to draw a line from the hand that releases the blade directly to the target, then the blade should hit the target just as it becomes aligned to the trajectory of the throw.

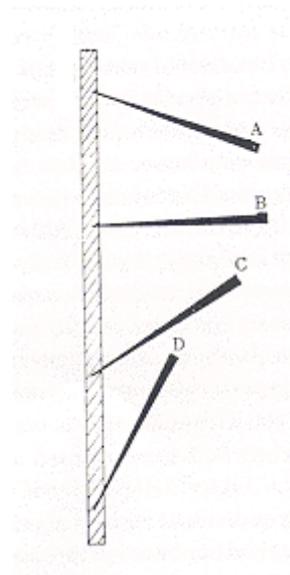


Figure 23 The "Live" and "Dead" Hit

This illustration shows a number of possible angles the blade can hit the target if thrown in a horizontal trajectory. Any angle between A and B is ideal, because as the tip hits the target, the body of the blade is still rotating and applying force down its length to the tip. This type of hit is said to be a "live hit", as the blade is still applying force directly to the strike after it touches the target, thus is more penetrating..

C and D are termed "dead hits" because at the moment of impact, the weight at the base of the blade is no longer being transferred to the tip, but is being carried upwards, laterally to the point of impact, and is therefore much less penetrating.

The throw

Needless to say, the throw is the most important aspect of the shuriken art. How important it is though, is the obstacle we have to realize and overcome. All schools and methods stress the importance of "form" when throwing, it is not just a matter of throwing the blade at the target. Adhering to the throwing form is absolutely necessary for achieving consistent and controlled accuracy.

In throwing the shuriken, at the moment of the throw, there are two major variables that affect the outcome of the throw; **distance** and the **throw**. The distance we are subject to, so it is a variable we have to account for by adjusting our technique. The extent of variability in the throw can be decreased through training, to the point where it becomes a constant. When the throw becomes constant, the only variable facing us in hitting the target is distance, which we can learn to adjust to through regular training at different distances. It is very difficult for the mind to be able to judge and adjust to 2 variables at the same time, so by making 1 of these become close to a constant, it makes the task of judging 1 variable easier. The principles are very similar to the game of golf. In golf, there are also two variables, distance and swing. The variability of distance is compensated for by changing between heavier and lighter clubs, it is the swing that has to be refined so it becomes constant. Once the swing is mastered, its variability has been reduced to close to constancy, and the trick becomes choosing the right size club according to the distance.

In shuriken, once the throw has been mastered, and thus becomes constant, minute changes in technique can be made to adjust to changes in distance, thus creating a more controlled and accurate throw. To achieve a constant throw, great attention must be paid to practice of the form.

Breathing

The Breath is very important to the throw, one must coordinate their breathing pattern with the physical movements of the body for the technique to become natural and effective. Due to the physiology of the body, power cannot be generated as effectively on the in-breath as it can on the out-breath. This is because generation of power in a strike is an outward force, as is breathing out, whereas breathing in is an inward force. Breathing in as one exerts force tends to sap power from the body, and severely limits physical performance. Therefore, it is important to understand the physical movements, and the type of breath that should be associated with these movements.

In Japanese swordsmanship there is the concept of "*In-Yo*", probably more widely known as "Yin-Yang". This concept describes how all things in the universe can be represented by two opposing yet inter-related sets of alternating polarities, that combine to form the whole of things that we perceive. In our body we have *In-Yo*, it is found in our footwork: step with the left foot, step with the right foot. With our breathing it is: Inbreath - Outbreath, in cutting with the sword it is raise and lower. If we take certain movements to be related to *In*, and other movements to be related to *Yo*, and combine them, we can through an understanding of this concept, unite various groups of movement into a unified whole, thus making our overall performance much more harmonious, and efficient.

In the ultimate form of throwing a shuriken, *Koso no I* (see below), there is only two components, the raising, and the lowering of the arm. Thus the in-breath is coordinated with the raising of the arm, and the outbreath is coordinated with the lowering of the arm, or the throw.

Observing and judging the strike

At the end of each throw there is a moment of stillness. At this point, one must hold their intent with the feeling of *zanshin*, or readiness and observation. At this point one concentrates on the feeling at the end of the throw, and observes the result of the throw.

In simple terms, one examines the position of the blade in the target, and how close to or far from perfect it is, then observes or remembers how they felt during the throw. One can then judge how their body influenced the blade and its flight, then assess what postural and other adjustments need to be made for subsequent throws.

Observing the position of the blade in the target can tell you a lot about the throw. Not only can it tell the weaknesses in the throwers technique, it can also give an indication of the psychological state of the thrower. On an individual throw, its position can tell you about the throw itself. If 3 or more were thrown in a row, the grouping, and the relationship between each blade in the target can tell you about the state of mind of the thrower at the time. If the positions of the blades are observed over a whole session of throwing, details of the throwers technique and their general state of mind can be observed. In effect, the results of throwing a blade can be a good barometer for measuring the mental state of the thrower.

BASIC TECHNIQUES

Basic Forms of Throw

In the Negishi and Shirai Ryu, there are 2 basic types of throw; to the front, and to the side. Front throws involve 3 forms, 1. *Koso no I*, 2. *Jikishin* and 3. *Uranami*.

Front Throws

The Basic Form, *Manji No Kata*

The method of learning the front throw, indeed all throws, is by first going through a series of steps from basic form to advanced form. The basic form is called *Manji no kata*, and is practiced for the first 6 months without holding a blade. It is a simple set of 8 movements, which form the essence of the constant throw, and cannot be neglected. The reason why it is practiced without a blade is to prevent the mind from becoming attached too early to scoring a hit, which would otherwise distract one's concentration from the form.

For any throw, there are several steps one must go through, in order to set up the conditions for an accurate hit, and this kata, or form, drills the body through these steps. Even though the form looks very rigid and the movements seem superfluous, this is necessary as it causes the body to succumb to the form, and allows the correct throwing movement to dictate how the body moves during the throw, rather than have the untrained body upset the movement of the blade during throw.

Manji No Kata, the basic form

Preparation, *Nyujō*, or entrance. Just before the desired distance, stop, and bow to *shōmen*, (shrine) or the east, then step with the left foot to the throwing position.

1. Stand in *shizentai*, or natural stance with the heels slightly apart, and the feet open at a 60 deg. angle. The arms hang relaxed down by the sides, and face directly to the front, towards the target. Look at the target in a state of *metsuke*, which is striking a line from your *hara*, or abdomen directly to the target. As you strike this line, feel a response from the target, as though the target is informing you of the correct line.





2. *Yoi*, or ready. Turn the feet inwards, so they are pointing forward, and straighten the arms, holding the fingers together and palms flat to the sides.



3. *Manji* (a). Raise both arms together, swinging them forward and up in an arc, so they meet palm to palm directly in front of the chest horizontally to the ground, as though making a diving posture with the hands.



4. *Manji* (b). Slide forward with the left foot along the line, and turn the right foot so it is angled about 60 deg. from the front, until a long but comfortable stance is achieved. As you slide forward, open the arms horizontally backwards, so they are 180 deg. apart to your sides, both at right-angles to the line forward. This is the *manji*, or swastika shape.





5. *Manji (c)*. Turn on the hips, 90 deg. to the right, while maintaining your gaze on the target, so that the left hand is pointing directly to the target, and the right hand is reaching directly behind you. Both hands remain upright with the palms at right angles to the ground.



6. *Shuriken no kamae* Raise the right hand by bending at the elbow, bringing it up behind the right ear. The hand and wrist remains straight, and the rest of the body does not move.



7. *Te no uchi*, or throw. Turn on the hips to face forward, lean forward on the left knee, and cut the right hand downwards and forwards as though it were a sword, straight towards the target.





As the right hand cuts down, the left hand drops to the left side in a natural position.



The hand follows through down next to the left knee,



then returns upwards to the forehead, where it stays for a moment. The right hand remains at the forehead, fingers together pointing upwards, thumb resting on the hairline, while you maintain *zanshin*, where you feel the result of the throw, but are in a state of readiness.





8. Step back to *shizentai*, dropping the right arm to its side, and pause for a moment, looking at the target.



Once the 8 movements of the form have been absorbed by the body and become familiar, the form begins to control how the body moves, and at this stage the student is ready to hold a blade while practicing the form. *Manji no kata* then becomes an 11 step form, as it now incorporates extra steps which involve passing the blade from the left hand to the right. The shuriken are carried in the left hand, tips pointing to the rear as you step up to the throwing position. This is an inoffensive gesture, as having shuriken in the throwing hand would be seen as offensive action. Between step 2 and 3 of the sequence above, 3 further steps are added. 1. The left hand is raised, holding the shuriken, to the front of the *hara*, tails pointing to the right. 2. The right hand raises to meet the left, the thumb goes behind the blade while the fingers cover the blade, thus hiding the blade from view. The grip is transferred to the right hand. 3. Both arms drop to the side together.

The second level of *Koso no I* (see fig. 24) is called *Toji no kata*, and simply involves a shortened, or abbreviated number of steps to the *Manji no kata* form. The swastika shape, or *manji* is subtracted, and the arm is raised to *shuriken no kamae* (step 5) behind the right ear from the side as though raising a sword (*shomen uchi* movement in Aikido). This arm movement is the same movement used in Jikishin Ryu, although the Jikishin grip of the blade is different, and the right foot does not step forwards during the throw.

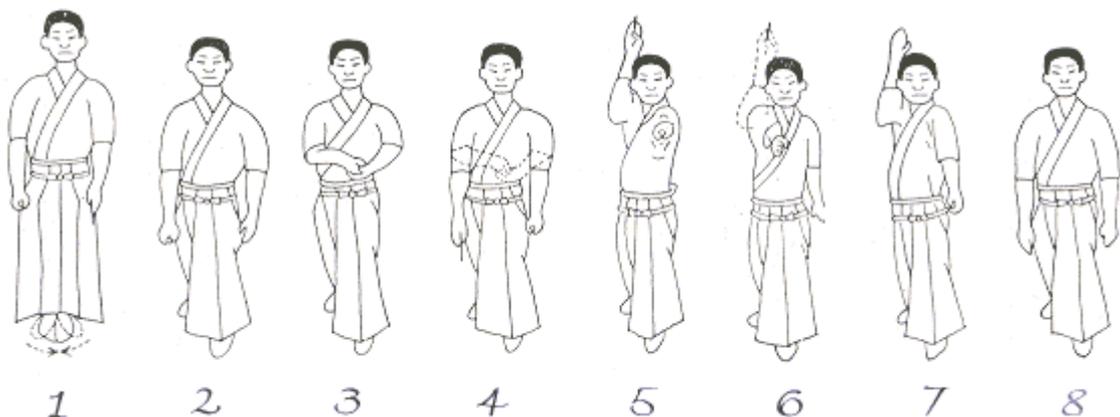


Figure 24. The *Toji no kata* form.

The third level of *Koso no I* (see fig. 25) is called *chokushi no kata*, which involves a further shortening of the form. The holding of the right arm by the side is subtracted, making the movement go directly from "passing the blade" (step 3) to *shuriken no kamae*, (step 5). The arm moves in a round movement, travelling past the side to the rear, then raises to the position behind the ear (*yokomen uchi* movement in Aikido).



Figure 25. The *Chokushi no kata* form.

The final level called *Koso no I*, is really the essence of the front throw movement. Over years of training, the shape of the throw becomes more natural, free and smoother, even appearing casual, yet the core movements, the *Koso no I*, remain internally, even though the large, rigid and superfluous movements have gradually been whittled and trimmed away. The posture is such that the throw is available immediately, without having to adjust before cutting down with the right arm. It is pure readiness. The ultimate goal is to be able to simply look at the target and strike it with a shuriken.



Figure 26. The *Koso No I* of Shirakami Ikku-ken



Figure 27. The *Koso no I* of Satoshi Saito Sensei, current head of Negishi Ryu

The second form of front throw, *Jikishin* is really a simplified form of *Koso no I*, but its emphasis is on surprise and speed. It is used for short distances, and uses a different method of holding the blade. (see *fig. 28*)

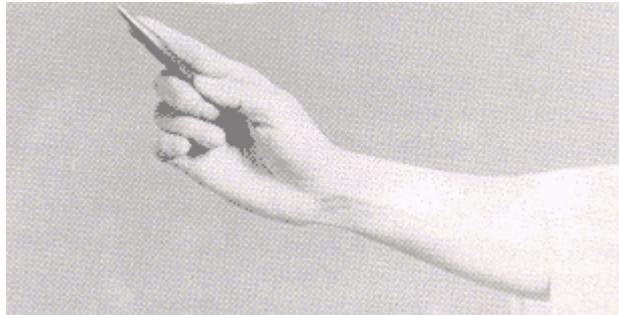


Figure 28. The *Jikishin* grip.

This method of holding the blade facilitates a quick draw...it is a simple yet natural grip; the right hand can reach for and take the blade in one movement quite quickly and easily, and can be thrown as quickly as one can raise their arm, however, the grip does not facilitate a long distance throw. As with all other grips, the hand is light and relaxed, as if holding a swallows egg. The arm movement on the throw is as though one is cutting with a sword.

The Jikishin throw



1



2



3



4



5

The third form of front throw is called *Uranami*, and is the more difficult of the 3. It is like a softball pitch where the arm swings at the right side, from the natural, downwards pointing position, forward to a horizontal angle facing the target. It is the underhand version of the *Jikishin* throw, as it utilises a right forward step as the blade is thrown. As with the *Jikishin* throw, it is fast, immediate, and a surprise.

The Uranami throw



1



2



3



4



5



6

Side Throws

Side throws also involve 3 forms, 1. *Hon uchi* (the basic over-arm throw), 2. *Yoko uchi* (side-ways throw) and 3. *Gyaku uchi* (under-arm throw). In practice, these throws can be done from standing, "*tachi uchi*", or sitting in "*za uchi*", in the traditional Japanese style of sitting on the knees and ankles (see below).

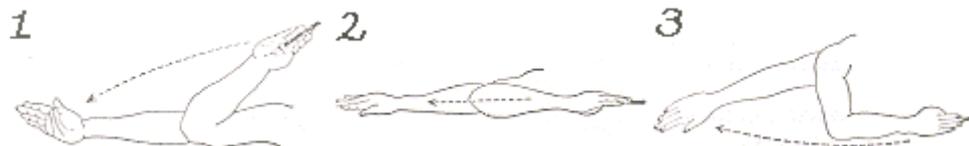


Figure 29. 1. *Hon uchi*, 2. *Yoko uchi*, 3. *Gyaku uchi* (4. *Ura Uchi*)

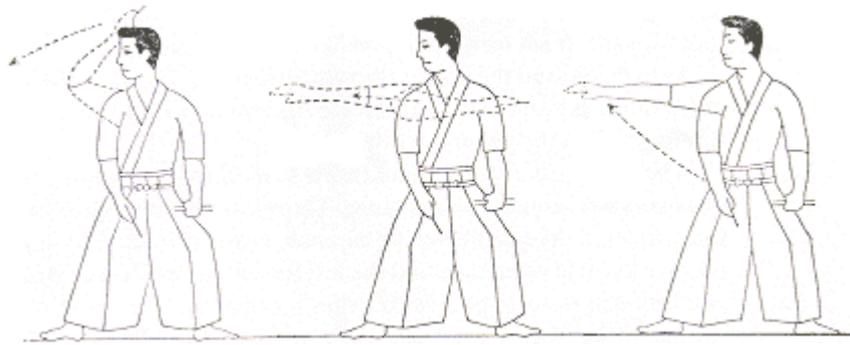


Figure 30. *Hon uchi*, *yoko uchi* and *gyaku uchi* from standing posture (*tachi uchi*)

Hon uchi is the basic throw, *yoko uchi* is more difficult, and *gyaku uchi* being the most advanced. The latter two are not usually practiced until the *hon uchi* form is mastered. Mastery of *hon uchi* requires practice at various levels of performance, which starts with *Manji no kata*, which progresses to *Toji no kata*, then to *Chokushi no kata*, leading to the final form *Koso no I*. This final form is the essence of all levels of the over-arm throw, which is done completely naturally and without thought, and consists of only 2 movements; raise and throw.

The Hon-uchi throw



1



2



3



4



5



6

The Second Form, *Yoko Uchi*

The action of *hon uchi* focusses on the bending of the elbow, and is not a powerful throw, while the second form, *yoko uchi*, (see *fig 29-30* above, *fig. 31* below) will produce more power and is quicker. The lesson in this form however is the change in hand movement to allow a fast and powerful throw sideways, either right or left. In the second and the third form, most of the technique is an extension and variation of principles of the first form; if the first form is mastered first, these will be easier to attain, despite them being more difficult throws.



Figure 31. *Yoko uchi*.

The illustration shows the basic form, where one steps as the blade is passed to the other hand, then the throw is made from a static posture. The more advanced form is one movement, stepping and throwing together. From *shizentai*, the blade is passed hands, the right arm raised to the chest, and swung out and towards the target, as one steps sideways. The moment the right foot is placed on the ground, the right hand is just completing the throw.



Figure 32. The end of the *yoko uchi* throw by Shirakami Ikku-ken.

The Yoko-uchi throw



1



2



3



4



5

The Third Form, *Gyaku Uchi*

In *gyaku uchi*, the throwing action comes from the shoulder, and is more difficult than *hon uchi* or *yoko uchi*. The arm raises with the palm down until it points towards the target. At this point, the hand stops raising sharply, and the blade is allowed to depart the hand. This throw is different from *Uranami*, as the hand raises from the front of the body, and the palm is face down in *gyaku uchi*, whereas *Uranami* comes from the side, and the palm faces to left at right angles to the ground.

The Gyaku-uchi throw



1



2



3



4



5



6

Rear Throw, *Ura Uchi*

Ura Uchi uses a similar throwing action as *Gyaku uchi*, but it is aimed at the rear, and the palm is not facing flat to the ground, but vertical. Elevation in this throw is gained by leaning the body more forward, and angling the hip more sharply at the end of the throw.

The Ura-uchi throw



1



2



3



4



5

ADVANCED TECHNIQUES

Throwing the blade in Negishi Ryu

Adjusting to distance

When adjusting to the variation in distance while throwing in the Negishi Ryu, one cannot make the same simple adjustments possible in Shirai Ryu, where one just needs to turn the blade in the hand. In Negishi Ryu, the hand grip is constant. To make the adjustment to different distances, slight postural changes need to be made, both in the way the hand is held, and the leaning of the body at throw.

1. Leaning the body "When close to a target, lean back on the throw. When far from a target, lean forward on the throw"

On close throws, as the arm sweeps down, pull the torso back at the last moment to add turn to the throw. This causes the shuriken to straighten earlier in the shorter distance, thus allowing a more direct hit. It also has the added benefit of pulling the head back from target slightly, in case the blade miss hits and bounces back.

On distant throws, leaning forward on the throw adds the body weight, creating a more powerful throw, necessary to cover greater distances. It also has the added effect of intensifying the concentration forward, giving the psychological advantage by creating the illusion of being closer to the target.

2. Timing the release "For close targets, release later, for distant targets, release earlier".

When the arm is raised in *Koso no I*, the blade is pointing upwards. In its flight towards the target, the tip tilts forward and straightens in relation to the target, so it is in line with the angle of trajectory at the moment of, or just before, striking the target. So when closer to the target, the shuriken has less time to tilt in flight, so a late release means that the shuriken is more horizontal as it leaves the hand (see *fig 33*). When further from the target, the shuriken needs to align with the trajectory just before striking the target, because of this tendency to tilt, so an early release will compensate for this tilt.(see *fig 34-35*)



Fig. 33. Late release, and turning the palm, for close targets.



Fig. 34. Mid release for mid-range targets



Fig. 35. Early release, and facing the palm, for distant targets

3. Turning the hand "Face the palm for distant throws, turn the palm for closer throws."

The shape of the hand is very important for the trajectory of the blade as it leaves the hand, as this is the last contact with the body to have influence over the blade's flight. Not only does the blade need to be gripped lightly, as though "holding a swallow's egg", the hand must facilitate a clean, smooth, and even departure called *hanare*, from the hand. Early and late releases have different effects on the position of the blade in relation to the trajectory, and earlier releases have a less controlled hold, so their departure tends to be more variable (see *fig.35*). By turning the hand so the palm faces the target on early release, there is more weight and support behind the blade.

For a late release, the blade has already developed velocity, so the grip then tends to require more gentle guidance. By turning the hand so the palm faces to the left in relation to the target, the hand is really only offering a straight pathway for the blade to depart the hand. The thumb catches on the butt end of the blade as it departs, preventing the blade from turning excessively before reaching the target (see *fig 33*)

In training, one should start at a close distance, and practice late release with the turning of the palm, as basic technique (as shown above in *Manji no kata*). As the student becomes more proficient, the distance is increased

Aim

When aiming at the target, the basic shape of the aim is to have the tips of the blades in the left hand in line with the eyes and the target (see *fig.26, above*). However, on a more advanced level, the idea is to try and take aim with the navel, rather than take aim with the eyes. By looking at the target, our focus is outside the body, and our thoughts are with striking the target. Rather, we should feel the target, by placing our awareness in the navel, and try to feel some sort of connection between our centre (the *tanden*) and the centre of the target. Mr Shirakami relates a story of how his teacher felt confused by this concept, and mentioned this to his teacher, Tonegawa Sensei. The two of them went to the dojo at night, and began to throw shuriken in the dark. The first

blade made the sound of piercing the target, then the second blade made an unusual sound. Apparently it had hit the tail of the previous blade.

This story illustrates how one can learn the perception of the target by feel, rather than by relying in sight alone.

Variations in Training

Training can be made more interesting, or to focus on particular skills, by varying the training method. One of the basic forms of variation is to train on the knees. In several traditional martial arts, training in a number of techniques, called *suwari-waza*, is still done on the knees. This form of training builds up necessary strength and stability in the hips, and also teaches the body movement to be more precise. The seated form of the throw is called *za-uchi*, (see fig. 36) and can be done directly facing the target, as in a) - b) or in the stance called *tachihiza*, c) where the left knee is forward and the foot on the ground, and the right knee is back and placed on the ground.

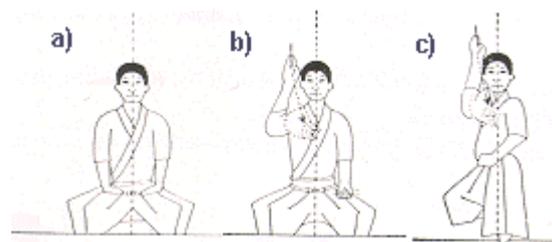


Fig. 36. *Za Uchi*, or seated throw.

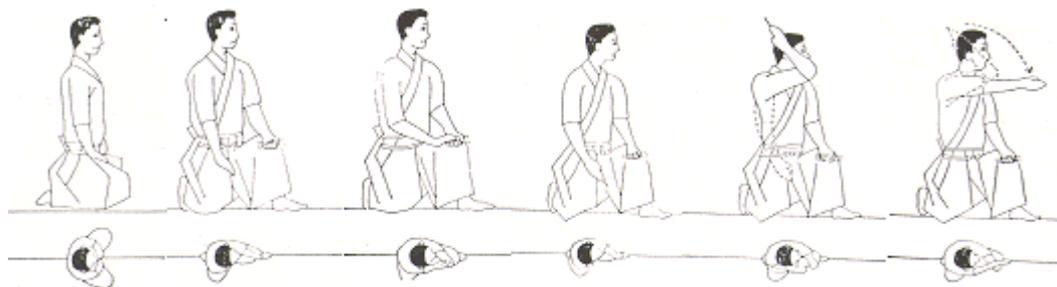


Figure 37. Here the *toji* form on the knees in *tachihiza*, is illustrated .

The side throws can also be performed in seated posture. Note that the front throw is performed in either *seiza*, (full seated posture), or *tachihiza* with the right leg back, whereas sideways throws are made in *tachihiza* with the left leg back. (see fig. 37)



Figure. 38 *Hon uchi*, *yoko uchi* and *gyaku uchi* from kneeling posture (*tachihiza*)

Throwing from a "still distance" and from a "moving distance"

There are training methods for throwing the blade while running, jumping and turning, and also lying down. When the basic form is practiced, the distance is set, and training progresses incrementally from 1 and beyond. At each step, we throw repetitively until that distance is mastered, then we take the next step back. So arises the desire to be able to throw one step further away. However, we are bound by the throw from a static position, which is a constraint preventing us from being able to throw at any distance. The tendency when throwing at greater distances is to unconsciously add more power to the movement, which in fact adversely affects the technique. Mr Shirakami writes of his teacher Naruse Sensei that even when he was throwing at great distances, his movement was relaxed and appeared as though he was throwing only a close distance, yet the blade flew powerfully and struck firmly. To be able to achieve this, we must overcome our thoughts about distance as being an obstacle.

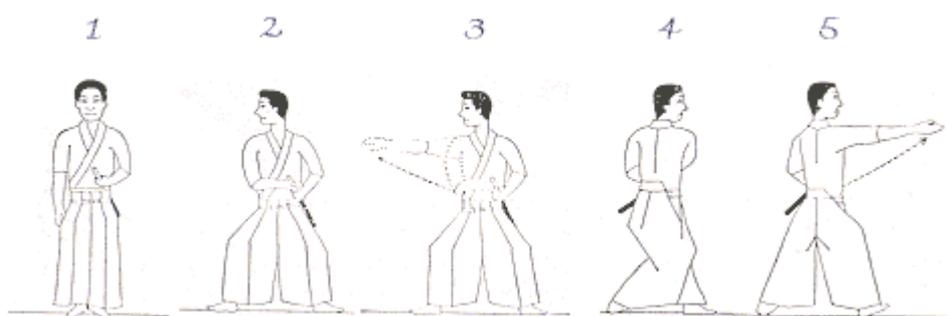


Figure 39. Multiple throwing can also be practiced while walking.

Note: 1 - 3 shown from the front, 4 - 5 are shown from the back. The action is a continuous stepping to the throwers right side.

Figure 39 shows a method of multiple throwing in time with the stepping of the feet.

The training method of throwing while running, either forwards or backwards, is another such method. Training at *Sei no Maai*, or "still distance" lays the technical foundation for *Do no Maai*, or "moving distance". By training at static distances, one learns the mechanics of the form. When we count the steps and throw, the concept of distance is always at the back of our mind. By training during movement, one is using the form. At each distance, one must make minute adjustments in their technique to have the blade strike effectively, and while static, we have plenty of time to think about the distance and achieve this. But when moving while throwing, at the moment of departure of the blade, our posture and movement has to be adjusted quickly and precisely to allow the blade to strike effectively. This form of training cuts down the time we think about distance, thus decreasing the obstacle that is always at the back of our mind. Eventually, we lose the concept of distance entirely, and merge with the target at the moment we think of throwing, enabling us to throw a blade and have it stick at any distance without thought.

Rapid throwing.

There is a certain posture with a technique developed for rapid throwing, where the left hand is held above the left eye (see *fig 40*), so passing the blade from left to right hands could be done with the raised throwing arm. This allows for the rapidity of throwing blades in succession. There is a phrase from olden times that says "*Ikki Goken*", which means to throw 5 blades in one breath. A strong or prepared adversary may be able to receive the first blade (ie. deflect or ignore), so it is sometimes

necessary to be able to throw several in rapid succession. Before the 1st blade strikes, the 2nd blade should be on its way, closely followed by the 3rd, and so on. When we practice the basic form, we are taught to pause and observe momentarily, in *zanshin* or readiness. This is because we are learning the throw. But we have to be detached from the throw, and to be able to continue our movement without caring if the blade strikes well or not. The art is in being able to detach ourselves from the throw immediately after the blade has departed the hand, and throw the next, or commit ourselves to the next action.

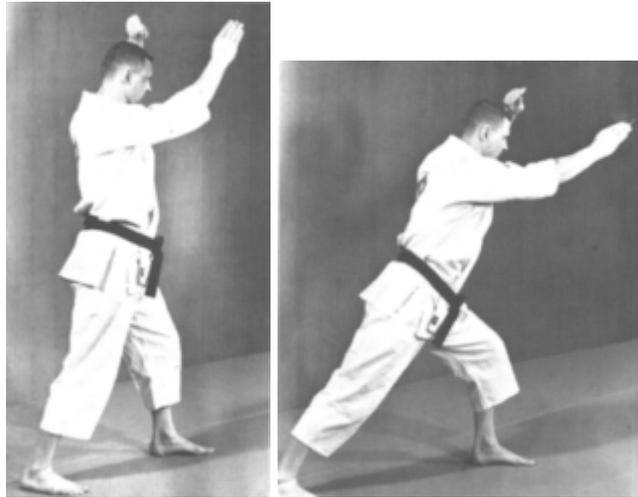


Figure 40.

Throwing the blade during a sword cut

There are also techniques that involve throwing shuriken while holding a sword. Because the throwing position of the right hand, and the throwing action of the right hand is the same as the position and action of the right hand as it holds and cuts with a sword, the two weapons can be blended in such a way that they do not adversely affect the movement of each other. There are 5 forms in a *kata* called *Tojutsu Kumikomi no Kata*, (see fig. 37) where the sword is held as normal by the left hand, and the right hand is held in *Koso no I*. The throw is made, then the right hand returns to the sword, gripping the handle.

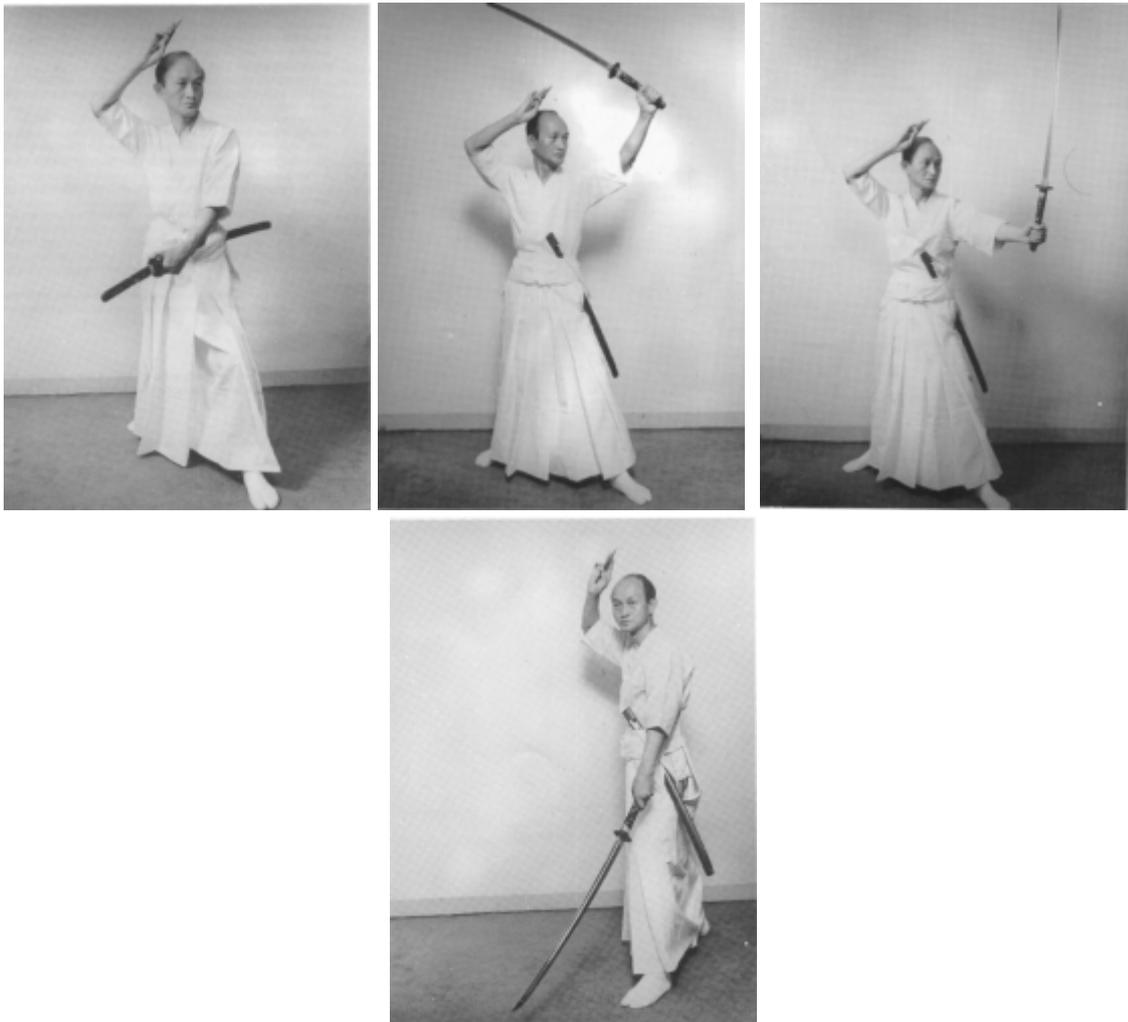


Figure 41. Some of the postures of the *Tojutsu Kumikomi no Kata*



Figure 42. Satoshi Saito Sensei demonstrating shuriken throwing with the sword.

The idea is that one develops the ability to throw shuriken quickly while one is drawing and cutting with the sword. Most swordsmen trained only in the sword know only the rhythm of the sword, which has a certain timing, due to the weight and size of the weapon. The shuriken, being smaller and lighter, can be drawn and thrown much quicker than a sword, so it can be said that you can attack inside the rhythm of a swordsman's attack. Thus one could be able to launch 1 or 2 shuriken at the opponent before they are in sword distance, giving you an advantage already.

Receiving a blade.

An advanced level of training involves not throwing a blade, but having a blade thrown at you. This stems from the days of the Samurai where a swordsman would defend himself against attackers throwing or propelling objects at him, such as a shuriken, or an arrow. There are stories of famous encounters where swordsmen could deflect the flight of arrows and shuriken in battle, though this is generally thought of as being the stuff of legends. However, within the arts there are training techniques designed to develop this ability, so we should not discount the possibility that an individual can perform this sort of feat. Mr Shirakami tells of his experiences where he asked his student to shoot arrows at him, while wearing fencers protective face gear. He was able to develop the ability to deflect the flight of an arrow.

The key seems to be in the mental attitude one takes when faced with such an attack. Rather than wait to see the path the arrow is taking, then react to it by trying to block it, the idea is to move at the same instant, with the same feeling as the attacker, and cut the arrow down. I believe this feeling is the same as *awase* training with sword, in *Aikido*. Here the idea is to match your feeling and movement to that of the attacker's without the thought of reacting to their movement.

The shooting of an arrow, or the throwing of the blade is seen as being like the cutting of a sword. There is the moment in the attackers mind where they commit to action, then the body follows, acting out the mind's intentions. So by using *awase*, the idea is to unify yourself to this moment, to cut as the attacker cuts, and providing the sense of timing in *awase* is correct, it does not matter whether the weapon attacking your centre is a fist, a sword, an arrow or a shuriken, correct performance of the technique will protect your centre, thus deflecting the attack.

Wrapping the blades with paper, varnish and string

There is mention of shuriken being wrapped in paper, string and lacquer (Interview with Saito Sensei in Skoss, 1999), and Fig. 18 above shows this, but I have no idea what it is for. There is the practice of gluing pigskin to the end of the blades, with the hairs pointing backwards, to assist in the smooth departure from the hand, and create drag in flight for a straight trajectory, however this seems to serve a different function to that of wrapping the blades. In the interview Saito Sensei makes mention of this in conjunction with the balancing of the centre of gravity of blades to accentuate close or distant hits. Perhaps this wrapping is a method of adjusting the centre of gravity. The illustration in Fig. 18 shows a number of blades each with a varying amount of wrapping.

The notes on this page in relation to the shuriken throwing art are more theoretical and intellectual, and are not necessarily so important for learning the technique of throwing a blade, however if one wishes to study the art more deeply there could be something of interest here to think about.

Distance with various weapons

Some martial arts teach weapons after one has mastered empty-handed forms, others teach empty-handed forms after one has mastered weapons forms. In Iwama Aikido, the development of hand techniques is seen as a progression from sword techniques. Morihiro Saito Sensei, the current head of Iwama dojo, teaches sword, staff and empty-hand techniques as being 3 essential components of Aikido training. Less well known is that he is also a master of Negishi Ryu, and was once quite famous among the local gangs as being a person not to cross. It is also reported that Sokaku Takeda, the teacher of Aikido's founder, O-Sensei, was also a master of the Shuriken, although it is not known which style. I found it interesting that shuriken is part of the technical repertoire of these masters of empty-handed and sword techniques.

Various weapons have various effective ranges, and when one looks at how the ancient warrior was required to master a range of weapons to deal with a range of situations on the battlefield, one can see there is a well organized and logical plan behind the choice of weapons that a warrior learns. With mastery of techniques comes the control of distance. If one has mastered hand techniques, then one is able to control an opponent who is in close enough range to hit you with their bare hands. If one has mastered the bow and arrow, one can control attackers at a great distance. But outside, or within the ranges of those weapons, if one has not had the proper training, one will not be able to control the distance beyond or within the range one has trained in. Therefore, by learning various weapons, one also learns to control various distances. In real terms, the closer the opponent the more of a threat, the further the opponent the less a threat.

In Aikido we have techniques trained in 2 forms, *kihon*, and *ki-no-nagare*. *Kihon* involves training in a strong, static form where one is already gripped. *Ki-no-nagare* training is a flexible, moving form which involves the opponent taking one step towards you to attack. These forms of training gives one the control over the closest combat distances, the ones with the most immediate danger. Training in empty-handed techniques usually begins with the left foot forward, as the weaker left hand is used for defensive maneuvers leaving the stronger right arm free for counter-attacking and controlling maneuvers. Training in sword is usually done one step back with the right foot forward, and adds another step's distance to the effective range of control, as the blade can hit an opponent who is further than 1 step away. Training in *jo*, or staff, is usually done with the left foot forward, and this is an extra step in distance away from the opponent, making the effective range of the staff a step greater than the sword.

Perhaps it is by no coincidence that the next step beyond the staff's effective range is covered by the minimum effective range of the shuriken, with the throw of *Jikishin*. The maximum practical effective range of a shuriken is 15-18 paces, which is half the minimum range of a bow. Weapons such as the bow, the spear and the halberd were battlefield weapons, thus were not used indoors. This leaves the shuriken to control the distance indoors.

Finding a "Live Blade"

Just as a batsmen may feel more comfortable, even perform better using certain bats, or billiard players preferring certain cue sticks, so one will find that some blades feel, fly and stick better than other blades. Shinto mythology of Japan holds that all things are imbued with elements of the spiritual, and tools and weapons do not escape this idea. There are swords in museums and collections in Japan that are so historically valuable they have become designated as national treasures, and aficionados report that such blades emit a presence and power that can be felt when handled. Whether or not events in the past have given these blades any particular power perhaps can never be determined, but such ideas have a great influence on the mind of an individual, and these psychological influences can seriously enhance or decrease a persons physical performance.

So when making, or finding and throwing blades, be mindful of which blades tend to feel more comfortable, or tend to fly and stick better in the target. While there may be no physical markings or signs to differentiate between the blades, there may be differences in their performance, so one must judge and choose by feel. If a blade feels more comfortable to handle, and seems to strike properly more often, and with greater and unusual ease, then this blade is said to be a "live blade", and should be kept as one's own special blade that no-one else handles. One builds up a collection of live blades by discarding the "dead blades".

Achieving Higher Accuracy

It is natural for us to want to have good accuracy, as that is the impressive thing about throwing a blade. Yet to throw with the desire of achieving an accurate hit is detrimental to actually achieving an accurate hit. What we should be striving for is to achieve accuracy without trying to be accurate. Accuracy comes as a result of employing the principles of the throw correctly, rather than of trying to throw an accurate blade. To achieve this, there are 2 things to consider. First, is experience, which is on the physical level, and second is our attitude when throwing, which is on the mental level..

1.The Physical Level

When you have just completed an excellent throw, where not only did the blade strike the target beautifully, but your throwing action was effortless and natural, the feeling one experiences is indescribable. To develop accuracy, all one need do is count averages. As a beginner, you may experience 1 perfect throw out of 100 unsuccessful throws, however over time, this ratio gradually increases.. Rather than judge your accuracy by your best throw, one must judge accuracy by the average of all your throws. The idea is to raise your average of perfect throws per throw, so that you reach 100%. This of course is theoretically possible, but practically impossible, due to all sorts of factors. Nevertheless, our aim should be to increase that average.

We must remember that perfection in the dojo does not equal perfection in the real world. The dojo is a controlled training environment, and therefore our performance is somewhat contained by this environment. The real world does not have this controlled atmosphere, thus rendering all situations unique, variable and potentially dangerous. Our performance in the real world is only going to be a fraction of our performance in the dojo. For this reason, we cannot judge the level of our ability by how well we may have once performed a technique. Because of the pressure of situations in real life, we may not be able to recall that singular moment when we performed the technique perfectly in the dojo, and thus when the time comes, it is likely that we will perform poorly.

If we measure our ability by a percentage of perfect techniques per techniques performed, then we have a much more reasonable estimate of our ability in the real world. And by concentrating more on raising the percentage of accurate and perfect throws in the dojo rather than improving the accuracy of an individual throw, then we can effectively increase the potential effective performance of technique in the real world. This obviously requires a long time of repetitive training. So in effect, training to develop accuracy, on the physical level, should be geared towards repetitive practice, and our focus should simply be to increase the percentages..

2. The Mental Level

One of the intriguing aspects of shuriken is that the reason for throwing a blade is to make it stick, yet the best way to make the blade stick is to have no desire to achieve a good hit, so in effect, the reason for throwing a blade is in fact *not* to make it stick, however the best indication that you are employing the principles correctly is that you can actually make it strike well, and often. This paradox reflects the Zen outlook on life, to act without desires, do something without doing it.

It is when we develop and refine a physical activity so highly and precisely that we begin to experience the effect the mind has on our body and physical function. When performing simple activities that require little motor skill, our body tends to act somewhat predictably and reliably. But when we impose strenuous conditions on the body, such as developing fine and complex motor skills to a high degree of accuracy and reliability under situations of stress, the body often tends to act less reliably and capably. One of the reasons for this is that our body has not had sufficient physical training in the required activity, and this can be covered by technical development in training on a physical level.

Another factor that influences this hindrance to our physical ability is our "mental state". It is all very well to theorise about the connection of the mind and body, but there appears to be little in the way of instruction on this in everyday life. And when the teachings of a martial art begin to discuss this area, too often it gets passed off as religious dogma, and therefore largely ignored. If we can make the leap of faith in agreeing that the body and mind are indeed connected, and can and do influence each other, then we can begin to learn what these teachings may have to offer, and perhaps gain some of the benefits they purport to bestow upon the student.

When we require of our body the performance of actions that utilise fine and complex motor skills, as well as a resistance to stress, distractions and external conditions, our ability to perform is greatly affected by our mental state. Just as our body chemistry is regulated by hormones produced by various mental states, so too are our actions regulated by our mental state. There appear to be a number of mental triggers that enable our body to perform to great levels of ability, and although the methods by which these operate may not be fully understood, they nevertheless seem to work in the individuals who apply these principles in their training.

Almost of all these philosophical teachings I believe are designed to improve the utilization of the hip in the body's movement. As most martial artists will already know, the center of our power and movement is in the hip, as the hip both controls the stability of the legs, which in turn provide support for the hip itself, and the upper body. as well as controls movement in the upper body. The hip is also the center of the body's weight and mass, thus is called the center of gravity. The closer the center of gravity is to the ground, the more stable and solid a person, and with stability comes speed and power. From a physical point of view, having a lower center of gravity is a great advantage. The philosophical teachings of martial arts appear to be methods of drawing the attention away from the upper body and bringing it down to the hip. Meditation and abdominal breathing bring the mind's focus on the body's center of gravity. By focusing on the "*hara*", or "*tanden*" the breath becomes abdominal, thus lower, rather than in the chest, or higher. Many teachings also require the stilling of thoughts and desires, which tend to raise the heart rate, thus bringing the feeling of focus up into the chest. Once the hip is physically identified as the major factor in improving body movement, one has to learn how to control this new-found ability, and the secret appears to be the ability of the body to relax. Stiffness and rigidity are looked upon as being detrimental to natural physical movement, as stiffness usually means a contraction of the muscles, which severely limits flexibility and ability to move quickly. By being relaxed, the body is able to quickly change direction and to fluidly react to changes in its environment, but it is also the physical state in which one can better perceive the condition of one's own body. If you are relaxed, it is easier to listen to what's happening with the body, hence you are in a better position to make the necessary changes, which are now easier to do since the body is relaxed.

So by instituting rules which govern the activity of the mind, we are able to subtly control the activity of the body. Over the long term, as we utilize these mental tactics to trick our body into what we believe is better performance, the body begins to react to this new method of control, and physical performance can increase. Once we see this increase in physical performance, we begin to realize the benefits of such mental states as being relaxed, stilling the mind of thoughts and desires, of breathing abdominally and focusing the mind on the center, and accept them as a valuable mental state to cultivate. Long term exposure to this type of mental state begins to influence us on a deeper and more psychological level. Since the body and the mind are very adaptable organisms, this influence can effect an adjustment in the psychological makeup of a person, and cause great changes in the personality. In the long term, training in traditional martial arts can have a great beneficial effect on the student.

Shuriken training is the perfect vehicle for such mental processes to be experimented with. Because the basic movement of the throw is such a simple and gross utilization of the body, and the ability to achieve a high level of accuracy depends upon a great deal of refinement of this physical process, the influence of the mental state over the body is easily observed in this movement. If your mind is unsettled, distracted or unfocussed, the effects of this can immediately be seen in the results of your physical movement, in this case, the shuriken's strike of the target. To be able to consistently throw accurate and controlled blades, not only must one have mastered the technical aspects of the physical movement, one must also be able to relax, settle the breathing from the chest down to the abdomen, empty their mind of thoughts and desires, focus their attention on the center, and develop a feeling of oneness and unity between their mind and the surroundings.

In this way, proper shuriken training can offer great benefits in not only physical, but also mental and spiritual development.

The Way of Shuriken

In their summary of Negishi Ryu in "Sword and Spirit", Meik and Diane Skoss mention an abstract teaching called shichi, or "Four Knowledges", those being the exponents ability to correctly understand a situation, other people's intentions, principles of the art, and the "Way" itself. Unfortunately I haven't had exposure to those teachings, but I have had instruction in something which sounds very similar, so I will write about it here. It wasn't explained to me as being 4 types of knowledge as such, rather it was on how to make the transition from basic and varied principles from within the dojo to a realistic application and understanding in the real world, something like moving from "practice" to "doing".

1. Training

When training is still at the stage of learning technique, it is said to be "*shuriken-jutsu*", or the method of shuriken. When training is at the stage of doing technique it becomes "*shuriken-do*", or the way of shuriken. "Jutsu" is practiced in the *dojo*, "do" is done in the real world. This means that in the *dojo*, we are learning and practicing techniques and principles etc, that we intend to apply later, at some given stage, rather like having a skill developed and fine tuned. Our consciousness is molded, governed and protected by the rules and atmosphere of the *dojo* itself, as it is a center of learning. When we leave the *dojo* and go about our regular business, we are faced with the real world, or have come back to reality, and are faced with the rules of that reality. In the real world we need all our skills for survival, and thus all that we have learnt, in the context of education, now comes to use. When we apply our skill and knowledge to the outside world, then methods have become ways. Likewise for shuriken, when we use shuriken in our daily life, it becomes "*shuriken-do*".

From the perspective of *Budo*, or the Martial Way, reality contains two parts, Wartime, and Peacetime. This is all the person of *Budo* is concerned about. Wartime is not necessarily an official declaration, but rather the point at which the peaceful fabric of our personal world becomes threatened so much so that it requires the use of Martial Skill in order to protect it.

During Peacetime, one continues practice of their Martial Art, and one reaps the benefits of such physical, mental, and spiritual training. For example, after one has studied in the *dojo* one also continues practicing at home, on a daily basis. The practice becomes a part of the daily routine, and the benefits such practice has to offer begin to shape our experience of the world outside the *dojo*. In effect, one is "doing" shuriken, or one is living the "Way" of Shuriken. During Wartime, one uses the shuriken for self defense, and again, one is "doing" shuriken, or living the "Way".

To live the way during Peacetime, daily practice of shuriken is a method of controlling both the consciousness as well as the physique. The mental focus and concentration, as well as the physical and mental relaxation required for proper flight of the blade (as mentioned above in "Philosophical Considerations") affects the consciousness that in turn affects one's experience of reality in the real world. Thus training in shuriken is having an effect on one's life in this way. For it to have such an influence, the practice must be regular, and held with equal importance as other daily activities.

During Wartime, the shuriken is used as a form of protection of Peacetime, the techniques one has learned are used in order to achieve a return to the state of peace.

In order to achieve this return to peace, the rules of War come into effect and take over the decision making processes, until the state of peace has been achieved, then the rules of Peace take over. Chapter 57 of the "Dao De Jing" says: "Use the orthodox to govern the state, use the unorthodox to wage war". Peacetime has its own rules, as does Wartime. In the *dojo* we learn the rules of War, and that is how to engage the opponent. Understanding these differences between Wartime and Peacetime, and how to apply our Shuriken Art to them, is the Way of Shuriken.

2. Engaging the Opponent

In the *dojo*, one has learnt specific techniques and principles that govern the use of the shuriken. At some stage, one must learn how to apply this knowledge in Wartime. While an individual's ability to defend themselves when faced with an opponent is greatly enhanced by the study of a Martial Art, the final outcome of the engagement rests solely on the actions of the individual. Practicing technique can only take one to a certain stage. Elsewhere in an individual's consciousness, decisions have to be made, and realizations achieved in order to prepare the individual for engaging an opponent.

Shuriken has largely been taught as part of a "*koryu*" or a traditional system that involves a number of arts, such as sword, staff, empty-hand and other weapons. Satoshi Saito Sensei also will only take students who have been studying another martial art. It appears that the reason for this is that shuriken is a supplemental art that "piggybacks" on the basic principles and techniques of a major Martial Art system, typically *kenjutsu*, and that one can take the principles regarding engaging the opponent from that Art, and apply them to a certain extent, at some level in the shuriken Art. Therefore, the instruction on this topic I received was very general, and did not touch upon the specific use of techniques. It was suggested that I take the principles of engagement from the Art I was studying and by following a set of guidelines, apply them to the use of the shuriken in developing my own method of dealing with an opponent. In my case, the main Art is Aikido, which involves empty-hand, sword and staff techniques, and I have developed my understanding of the application of shuriken based upon my understanding of the martial principles of Aikido.

The basic guidelines are simply

1. Assess the level of threat
2. Decide upon what outcome and its consequences
3. Decide which actions to take to best facilitate that outcome.

1. Assessing the level of threat.

In assessing the level of threat, 5 things about the opponent must be observed immediately.

1. Distance
2. Angle
3. Momentum
4. Nature of attack
5. Intention

These 5 things are determined through an understanding of the main art.

"Distance" is determined by number of steps away the opponent is. As the opponent takes steps closer, they are closing the distance, but also shortening the reaction time, and increasingly limiting defensive options, thus increasing the level of threat.

"Angle" is determined by the relationship between the opponents centre and that of one's own, by drawing an imaginary line between the two. Certain angles, such as rear attacks are harder to defend than, say a side attack. Various techniques of the various main arts will have varying levels of threat assigned to the various angles of attack.

"Momentum" is the speed of the opponent's oncoming attack, but it is also the weight or power behind the physical movement that is counted as well. If an opponent is attacking quickly, but their structure is not well grounded, the level of threat is less than a similar attack from a stronger structure, which would have greater application of power than an attack from a weaker structure.

"Nature of the attack" is the weapon, and the target. The weapon is the type of weapon being used to attack, and thus has a variety of threat associated with each weapon. One's own body has areas which are more and less defensible than others, and are more or less vulnerable to certain types of attack than others. An understanding of the vital areas of one's own body is just as important as an understanding of the potential damage various weapons can cause.

"Intention of the opponent when attacking". Even though the opponent may be at a close distance, at a dangerous angle, with considerable momentum towards a particularly vital area, the level of threat may not necessarily be so great if the opponent does not intend to attack. Likewise, if a relatively distant opponent is showing non-aggressive signs by turning the body, focusing away from your center and not moving, the level of threat can be dangerously high if the opponent intends to harm you. One must be able to look into the opponents soul and determine if they intend to attack or not, if so, with how much intensity, and with how much capability. This is a very intangible ability that is entirely up to the individual and their application of their training, it is not something which can be taught systematically.

2. Deciding Upon the Outcome. Understanding of how things work - worldly knowledge

All actions have consequences, both short term and far-reaching. Much of human suffering is derived from the consequences of negative actions, so to allay suffering, one must choose actions that do not lead to such negative consequences. One must observe the world and develop an understanding of how consequences derive from actions, then one will be in a better position to know the consequences of their own actions. At this point, the individual must take a stance, or make decisions based upon a form of morality or philosophy, where they choose what they are prepared to do, and are not prepared to do. Is one prepared to kill or to injure in order to protect oneself, or is one resolved to preserve life at all costs, no matter what the situation is? It is here that the individual's integrity, honor and responsibility are tested, yet it is here that the individual is judged as a human being.

However, the individual is also part of a society, or culture, and there are both written and unwritten rules that prompt and inhibit action, behavior and recourse to the law. Within this culture, there are certain expectations one is expected to abide by, and these can be limiting factors in making decisions. Very often the social situation or the

cultural setting will call for particular types of action, and here there may be conflicts with one's own morality, but there also may be opportunities for action. One may be able to act while protected by the requirements of the situation, or one may be forced to act against their principles. How one follows, breaks or stretches the interpretation of the rules of society will determine the social standing of the individual within society

So in determining how one wishes the threatening situation to turn out, one must consider these two factors.

3. Deciding Which Actions Best Facilitate that Outcome

This is a logical decision based upon the assessment of the level of threat, what kind of outcome you desire, and the technical understanding of one's art. All one is required to do, once the choice of actions have been made, is to commit to them fully, to act to the best of one's ability, and to be prepared to accept the consequences.

Attaining Mastery

The final goal of shuriken-do, indeed with any art, is to attain mastery. Not having much experience with being a master, I can only speculate on what mastery really is.

Appendix A. Laws.

Australian Weapons Law - Update 26 April 2001

There seems to be a somewhat grey area when it comes to the law on shuriken in Australia. The yellow posters shown hanging in gun shops with an array of prohibited weapons depict both *shaken* and *bo shuriken*, along with blowpipes, folding butterfly knives and nunchaku etc. They state that possession of these is illegal and penalisable by \$5000 fine and/or 2 years imprisonment, a pretty hefty penalty by any standard.

According to a security-industry based colleague of mine, the wording of the law is deliberately left ambiguous to enable room for discretionary action by the state and federal police forces in interpreting the law on a case by case basis. This means there is room for various interpretations regarding possession and use of shuriken, and that it is up to the officers of the law in their line of questioning to establish the intent of the individual.

Summary - the Regulations

Shaken, or throwing stars are classified as Category R weapons, under section 8 (m) of the Weapons Categories Regulation 1997 and therefore need to be licensed. Possession is prohibited unless the person:

- a) is licensed or holds a permit, or
- b) has other lawful authority, justification or excuse.

And is not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Maximum penalty is 100 penalty units (1 unit = \$75) or 2 years imprisonment.

Bo shuriken do not appear to have a specific classification under the regulation, though according to the Weapons Licensing Branch of Queensland Police Headquarters, they are classified under Section 51 Subsection 5 of the Weapons Act 1990 as being a knife, although even that may be open to dispute, because the relevant clause states that it must cause injury when held in one or both hands, whereas the shuriken's purpose is to be thrown. "A grey area"

A person must not physically possess a knife in a public place, unless the person has a reasonable excuse, which may be to perform a lawful activity, duty or employment, form of entertainment, recreation, sport or exhibiting, and is not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Carrying for self defense is not a lawful excuse.

Summary - the Interpretation

Police and law enforcement officers interpret the regulations according to their perception of the situation. Their questioning is to establish the intent of the person found possessing a weapon. If you are caught carrying a *shaken* you must be licensed and/or have lawful authority or justification, otherwise you will be subject to the penalty mentioned above. If you are caught carrying a *bo shuriken*, it will be interpreted in much the same way as carrying a knife. If it cannot be shown that the weapon is in your possession due to some connection with a lawful or reasonable activity, then you will be subject to a penalty of 20 units (1 unit = \$75) or 6 months imprisonment. It is also important to note, whether you are carrying weapons lawfully or not, being under the

influence of drugs or alcohol while in possession of Category A - H and R weapons, and knives, is an offence.

These are the laws regarding carrying. The laws regarding use are different altogether. While you cannot lawfully carry any weapon for self defense, it must only, if at all, be for protection of property. When the situation arises that you or someone else is in immediate, life-threatening danger, that you are, or that someone else is "fearful for their life", then you are allowed to use any means at your disposal to protect that life. If one is carrying weapons of any kind, serious questions will be asked about your intent, but if it can be shown that you were within the law in carrying and use of the weapons, there will generally be no penalty. However, as in all cases, the final decision rests with the satisfaction of the law enforcement officers, and/or the presiding judge if it goes to trial.

There is talk at the moment of prohibiting the carrying of a screwdriver without due cause, no doubt because of this tool's use in a number of attacks recently.

WEAPONS ACT 1990

Source: The Australasian Legal Information Institute

WEAPONS REGULATION 1996 - 1996 Amendment to the Weapons Act 1990

Source: The Australasian Legal Information Institute This law covers licensing and all its definitions

WEAPONS CATEGORIES REGULATION 1997 - 1997 Amendment to the Weapons Act 1990

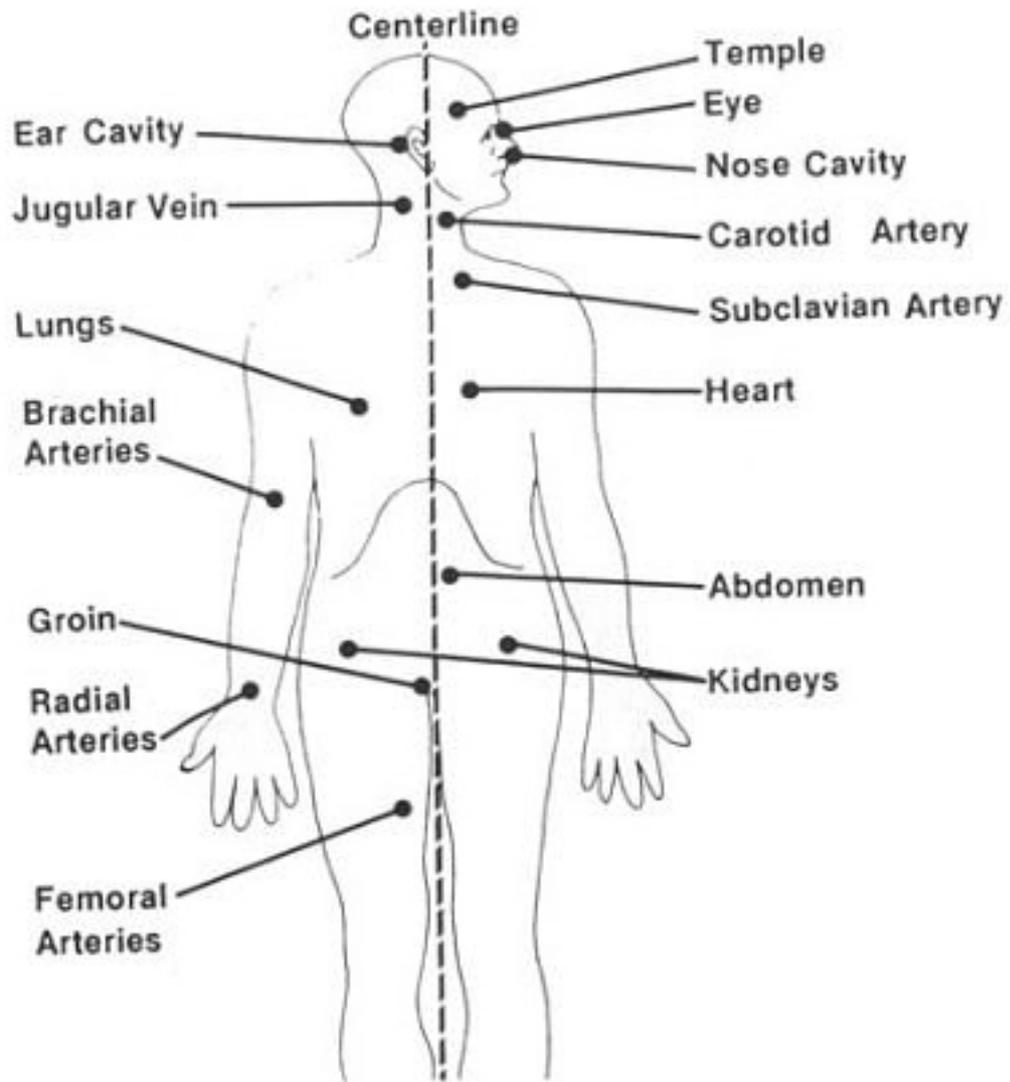
Source: The Australasian Legal Information Institute Lists the various types of weapons and groups them in certain categories.

Overseas Law

US: Code of Virginia, Chapter 829 relating to personal protection; permits; penalty; study.

Appendix B. Targets.

The main target areas (basing on human anatomy).



The main target areas in our ryu tradition are:

- Between eyebrows
- The upper lip
- The throat
- The heart
- The abdomen
- The thigh
- The foot