

The goal of these classes is to offer a practice structure for the 2 sword library taught by Saotome Sensei in Shobukan Dojo. There are few people left that attended class every day at the Shobukan during that time and had direct instruction in 2 swords from Sensei. Saotome Sensei taught us in the classic experiential manner. That means that Sensei did, we tried, and he often called us names. These are my ideas and interpretations about 2 sword work done regularly at Shobukan during this time period. I have found looking at other 2 sword styles helpful to explain what Sensei was doing with his swords. When studying Saotome Sensei's weapons, please remember, to him it is all part of Aikido. Only the tools are different.

1. Why practice 2 swords anyway?
 - a. You don't need to do 2 swords at all. There are lots of paths to skilled Aikido. 2 swords can help if it interests you. I would rather not see unskilled 2 swords.
 - b. Sensei maintained that 2 swords provided a very good model for studying Aikido. At the time I felt it was a distraction or even showboating. Looking back, I was wrong.
 - c. When you look at good Aikidoka some similarities come out. They have straight back, erect head, slightly bent knees, stable hips, and soft shoulders. With these qualities, you can physically do some interesting things. Without them, your body gets in the way. Walk and swing 2 swords while looking in a mirror. Unfortunate flaws such as frozen shoulders, hunched shoulders, stiff legs and hips show up easily.
 - d. Our Aikido almost always uses 2 hands doing coordinated separate functions. Those functions only work well when moved using our entire body. Our mind has to be calm under stress and perceive small details all around us. With 2 sword partner work it becomes obvious that most of us do one function with one hand at one time. We have trouble moving or even standing while doing that function. We often disguise those problems with a compliant uke.
2. Postures to use
 - a. Swords to each side, for multiple attackers. Swords can be low or reaching out and threatening. Swords low is the fastest to react. Swords out keeps your opponents distanced.



b.

c. Shoulder height out and to the eyes, threaten with both swords.



d.

e. Long sword vertical by shoulder, short sword on guard to throat, left foot ahead.



f.

g. Long sword at waist, pointed at throat, short sword in guard, swords create triangle, left ahead.



h.

- i. Long sword wrapped behind on left side, below left arm. Left sword on guard to throat, right foot ahead.



- j.
 - k. Other sword schools use long sword dominant postures.
 - l. Schools have variations on how high swords are held and where the point goes.
3. Blocks
- a. It is always easier to block and strike if you slide one side or the other while blocking, For stability, drop your weight slightly as you move your arms.
 - b. For high X block, arms lift up while rotating thumbs down, swords press against each other.



- c.
- d. For X block down, similar, except swords go down and particularly for tsuki your body must shift one side or the other.



- e.
- f. Strong strikes to your side can be blocked by bringing both swords down in over arm strike against the attack, similar to a drummer using 2 drumsticks on a large drum.

- g. Low attacks can be blocked with x block or single sword with movement. Single hand low blocks give a leverage advantage to your opponent and you have to carefully study how to use your body weight and movement.
 - h. X blocks can only act as temporary trap. X blocks moving into a strike can change over time into a parry with one sword and strike with the other.
 - i. Single sword parries use the Ikkyo idea even more, move your body and create a spiraling movement from your core that deflects your opponent's sword and transfers into your attack with your second sword.
4. Drill overview
- a. Start slowly, stay erect and use your body movement to move the swords.
 - b. Drill to do cuts, thrusts and blocks while holding one or both swords
 - c. Start with a slow X block to strike movement, working on changing the block to trap with one sword and strike with the other.
 - d. Always c
 - e. Consider that blocks and traps are ephemeral, swords must attack, be ready to attack, guard or be ready to guard.
 - f. Have your partner attack while you practice movement and single sword parry.
 - g. Have your partner in guard, while you practice attacking the sword with a short or long sword.
 - h. Have your partner attack you while in various kamae. Use movement and parry with one sword. Study how to move to open attack possibilities
 - i. Drill slowly to learn how to use both swords doing different functions at the same time.
5. Solo exercises
- a. In all exercises, move into a position with torso erect, head up, hips lowered. Arms move as an extension of your body.
 - b. Single hand cutting practice
 - i. Long sword in right hand and cut and step together.
 - 1. Cut top of head
 - 2. left neck
 - 3. right neck
 - 4. left torso
 - 5. right torso
 - 6. left knee
 - 7. right knee
 - 8. left upward torso
 - 9. right upwards torso.
 - ii. Change to left hand and do the same.
 - iii. Step forwards with left foot while doing left cuts, right foot for right cuts except the last 2 cuts that are upward rising. They are easier done with opposite leg to side.
 - iv. Most of us are dominant right side, we must drill to develop the ability to use both sides.
 - c. 2 sword cutting practice

- i. Alternate cutting sides
 1. Vertical cuts
 2. Outside in
 3. Over your head to cut inside out
 4. Swing both swords up, around your head and cut down the other side.
- d. X block practice
 - i. Move swords to X block, long sword on top.
 1. As you move the block to top, right, left and bottom, slide your body in all 4 directions.
 2. You can place the opponents sword in the top, left and right quadrants of the block.



- 3.
 - ii. Repeat with the short sword on top.
 - iii. When doing X block, think of kokyu ho with the swords touching and reinforcing each other.
 - iv. Encounter the attack with the feeling of the initial body lift in kokyu ho.
- e. Holding 2 swords, do single sword parries.
 - i. Block high and low to each side.
 1. You can think of this as the entrance to classic katate tori shiho nage
 2. slide your body sideways as your arm moves the sword to parry.
 3. Move to the best place to absorb force
 4. Stabilize your body
 5. Your arm rotates the sword into the block with a kokyu rotation.
 - ii. Over head parries
 1. Move one sword hand over your head
 2. Sword can form angle on either side of your body for strikes against your head or neck.
 3. Either sword can block either side, so a total of 4 alternatives.

- f. Holding 2 swords do single sword parries with simultaneous cut.
 - i. The rhythm is important, first have a stable block and then continue into strike.
 - ii. Block strike on left with short sword and cut wrist or neck with long sword
 - iii. Block strike on right with long sword and cut wrist with short sword.
 - iv. The wrist cuts above can be rising cuts to the underside of the wrist or cut down on top of the wrist.
 - v. The goal is to work on smoothly arranging your body structure to parry and strike without a gap in time.
 - vi. Ikyo and Irimi Nage are examples of how you want your swords to work together while doing different actions.
- 6. Partner exercises
 - a. Do parts c, d and e of the solo exercises with a partner attacking you. Slowly with relaxed, stable posture is better than just hammering each other wildly. However you must develop a combination of strength, balance and speed to deal with other people regardless of how strong or fast they are.
 - b. 2 person walking drill
 - i. I based this drill on a single sword walking drill we often did during my early years in Washington DC.
 - ii. The single sword attacker will do a series of attacks and the 2 sword person will respond with parries and cuts.
 - 1. Both parties will maintain balance, posture and accuracy of cuts.
 - 2. The single sword attacker will initiate with right step forward.
 - 3. The defender will step right foot backward.
 - 4. Both parties will alternate afterward.
 - iii. Steps of the drill
 - 1. Step 1 attacker cuts defenders head and is met with X block
 - 2. Step 2 attacker cuts defenders right torso and is parried with long sword and cut to wrist with short sword.
 - 3. Step 3 attacker cuts defenders left side of head and is parried with short sword and cut to torso with long sword.
 - 4. Step 4 attacker cuts defenders right knee and is parried by long sword and cut with short sword to wrist.
 - 5. Step 5 attacker thrusts to abdomen and defender moves to X block with attacker sword in the left quadrant.
 - 6. Step 6 attacker cuts defender right wrist quickly without taking a step.
 - 7. Step 6 defender parries with short sword while withdrawing right foot and long sword. The defender strikes the attackers head.
 - 8. The defender then withdrawals to poster 2a above.
- 7. Sensei did numerous short forms during the 2 sword time period. A few are on the 2 sword video he did in the Chicago Dojo. Most of these forms only had one attack. Some interesting ones involved the 2 sword person doing the attacking.
- 8. Multiple attacker drills

- a. In DC dojo during the 2 sword time multiple attacker 2 swords regularly resulted in injury.
- b. Go slowly and know where all the swords are.
- c. 2 attackers but attacking one at a time. Control your posture and space.
- d. 4 attackers, 4 directions, one attack at a time.
- e. If you habitually are moving arms without moving your body, reset yourself and have your attackers slow down.
- f. Reduce power and speed, this is not a movie.
- g. Bad practice reinforces bad habits. You will be sorry later.