

Kamae

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Kamae as Posture

The most basic level of understanding of kamae is good posture.

Through good posture we can move freely. Also we have a strong base where we can apply a technique or resist an opponent's technique without having to use strength.

Some of the general rules of good posture are the following:

- The Knees line up over Toes.
- The Shoulder line up over the Hips.
- The Hips are level.
- The Head is facing towards your line of sight.
- The Arms are never straight in line with the shoulder. They
should be a little bit in front.
- The Back is naturally straight.
- A correct relation between rotation in the Feet and Hips

The problem most people have is the first. In Ichimonji (or Seigan no Kamae) the back knee tends to collapse inward. This can cause knee problems. When in Ichimonji, try to have a

feeling of pushing your knees apart. Another problem area is the shoulder. When punching or applying a technique like Ganseki Nage, many people tend to over-rotate their shoulders a let

there arm get "behind" them. The strongest position is an angle of 135 degrees from the chest. Sometimes you may need to have a greater angle. Any further back then 170 and the arm becomes very weak. The last point above (7) is very important and should be explained orally.

Kamae as Signpost

Kamae are not always static. Correct posture should not be lost while moving. Therefore good movement should not be far a kamae at any time. If you are having problems with a technique, try to break it down into moving from kamae to kamae. This should help to fix many problems. Thus the Kamae are like signpost on the trail from the beginning to the end of the technique.

Kamae as Fortification

Kamae are the basic way of protecting ourself. It is similar to a boxers stance with this hands guarding his face and body. You need to devolved kamae that protects you from any attack. A strong Gyokko Ryu Ichimonji or Koto Ryu Seigan is impossible to attack against. It is only through Suki or breaks in the kamae that the attacker can enter. In Gyokko Ryu the front arm is used like a shield. It is placed at an angle to the attack to deflect it away. In Koto Ryu, the front arm is like a spear. The arm is pointed at the attacker to keep him at bay, as if a spear against a wild animal.

Kamae also protects by the space or Ma-ai it creates. In Koto Ryu this is called Kurai Dori (standing capture). You want to capture the space around you. This is easiest to see by comparing the different Ryu. Koto Ryu creates a long Ma-ai (combative distancing). This making attacks against it longer in time (Kan) and more commented giving time for a strong Uke. In Gyokko Ryu, the kamae is shorter and hence the quicker uke. In Shinden Fudo Ryu Daken, there is only "Shizen" no Kamae. Even this creates a space. The uke now becomes a snapping motion.

In this way all kamae are defensive.

Kamae and Zanshin

Zanshin is translated as "remaining mind". It is the your alertness. You most focus on the enemy not on yourself. Learn to develop a gaze that keeps an enemy at bays. Take in everything around you. Not have good Zanshin is like having a fortress with no one manning the walls. The walls become minor obstacle.

Kamae and Double Dealing

After you learn to construct a strong kamae, you can then learn to use

your kamae to bait your opponent. This is done by leaving small gaps in your kamae, while the rest of you is well covered. This will force your opponent to strike along this chosen path. Thus you lower him into your trap and spring it before he has chance to escape. This is double dealing.

Not only can the path be chosen but the time of the attack as well. If you kamae is strong your opponent will try to circle one way or another or use Kyojitsu Tenkon Ho (throwing feints) against you. You must hold fast. When you have his rhythm, let a small suki (hole) open, on the next beat he will attack. Hide the suki in your movement and let it appear naturally.

This can be worked on while practicing the Kihon, Ichimonji no Kata. Start in a strong kamae. Turn your hand over a bit. This weakens your kamae and creates a small suki to the outside. The your aite (partner) should punch. Once you have this done, start circling each other and have your aite punch when he sees the suki. Try to only let him in when you want.

Kamae as Defining a Ryu

Many people have throw away the traditional kamae. I think this is irresponsible. It is the kamae the define and shape the techniques in each Ryu-ha. The kamae sets the Ma-ai and Hyoshi (rhythm). Longer Ma-ai longer rhythm. The kamae also determine the movement of the ryu. Without these basic the techniques may out work.

Gyokko Ryu technique are quick, close in and circling. The kamae therefore has a bend front arm to get closer and cover more frontal area. The weight is more even and the back foot is 90 degrees from the line for the quick circular movement.

Koto Ryu techniques are long and powerful with angle movements. It's kamae are longer so you have more time to generate power. The weight is further back to keep as far away as possible. The rear foot is angle back to allow the angle movement.

Shinden Fudo Ryu Dakenjutsu has only the kamae is Shizen or "natural" kamae. However you stand is your kamae. It's techniques are characterized by the ability to move any direction.

Kukishin Ryu Yoroi Kumi Uchi (grappling in armor). The kamae is design to cover the unarmored areas. The arms are held close to the body to protect the insides of the arms and the under-arm. It also helps to support the weight. In this position the Sode (shoulder armor) is brought into a shielding position. The weight of the armor (60 lbs to 100 lbs) is supported on both legs. (note the only school in the

bujinkan system that is a battle field system is kukishin. One can tell this from it kamae. A straight arm can not support the weight of the armor.)

Kamae and Training

Because kamae is so important. One should practice constantly, no matter how long you have been training. Use mirrors to check the key points of posture mentioned above. While practicing techniques check to see if you are maintaining your kamae though out the technique. The key to good kamae is long hours of training until the become natural. Any training where the kamae becomes weak and techniques are done poorly will hinder natural movement in the future.