

# Sword and Spirit

The eNewsletter of Itten Dojo

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## — Why Budo? —

**Regardless of the times you live in, or the circumstances of your life, success largely depends on things you actually can control:**

- **Building strong relationships in a community of achievement.**
- **Forging a disciplined and positive mindset.**
- **Enhancing your physical health and capabilities.**

*These are exactly the things membership in a dojo provides.*

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## *Life Hacks from the Martial Arts...*

# Why Form Matters

## A Means to Shape Yourself

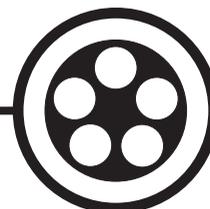
Yamate-ryu aikijutsu is a demanding art in many respects, but particularly with regard to the emphasis placed on proper form. Obviously, better form can reasonably be expected to yield a better, more effective technique. Yamate-ryu takes this a step further, positing that the more beautiful the form, the more effective the technique. Beyond an appeal to aesthetic appreciation, this oral teaching focuses students on an aspect of technique other than “making it work,” an aspect that has ramifications beyond the purely physical.

Persons entering martial arts training often cite a desire to “better integrate my mind and body” as a primary motivation. Lovret Sensei used to say, “Your mind and body are already as integrated as they’re going to get. The state of not being integrated is described in technical terms as... dead.”

Really, everyone pretty much understands this, despite what people sometimes say in their interviews to join the dojo. The understanding is reflected in our awareness that a physical illness can compromise our mental state, while extreme mental focus can sometimes enable individuals to accomplish astonishing physical feats. But those are the two most common perceptions. Most of the time, we don’t consider that completely opposite effects are also possible.

That the mind can alter the physical structure of the body has been demonstrated in studies of neuroplasticity in the brain. Recent studies have also revealed the extent to which the emotion of grief can trigger fatal coronary events. What we’re interested in with regard to martial arts practice, though, is the way in which physical postures or movements can affect the mind. Look at the cover of any yoga magazine and you’ll see titles for articles like “Four Postures for a Calmer Spirit.” In like manner, the *kamae* (postures) in martial arts can have specific influences on the mind of the person assuming the posture — a neat trick if someone finds himself in sudden need of courage.

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Another commonly stated goal of persons joining the dojo is, “I’d like to become more disciplined.” What they usually mean is developing stronger willpower — or “stick-to-it-iveness” — across a wider range of life activities, whether related to work, school, or career, weight control, or whatever. The fact is, trying to affect a mental process by purely mental means is very difficult. Most people who’ve never tried to sit still for any length of time would likely think of *zazen* (seated meditation) as a mental discipline. Nope. It’s a physical means of developing mental discipline by practicing control of the body and breath. Yamate-ryu aikijutsu shares this aspect, in that training to impose precise control of the body and breath results directly in enhanced mental discipline.

And that’s why form matters. ☯



**Robert Wolfe, the chief instructor at Itten Dojo, began martial arts training in 1975, has taught since 1985, and holds senior ranks in Itto Tenshin-ryu kenjutsu, Yamate-ryu aikijutsu, and Isshinryu karate. He has published articles addressing martial arts in magazines and journals.**

