



For those familiar with Japanese culture, it may come as no surprise that there exists a highly specialized martial art focused on learning to draw the Japanese sword.

IAIDO (pronounced "ee-eye-doe"), is the Art of Drawing the Japanese Sword.

And, right here in Central Oregon, we have the unique opportunity to study this highly disciplined, traditional martial art. John Pritchard, a 4th dan (or 4th degree black belt) in Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Iaido, teaches classes each Tuesday evening from his dojo in Bend, OR.

When asked to comment on studying iaido, John replies, "Iai tends to attract individuals who are highly detail and precision oriented, and not afraid of a challenge. It looks easy, but learning to control and integrate your mind, body, and spirit with the sword requires intense concentration, and lots and lots of practice. It can be extremely humbling."

John began teaching iaido in 2000 while living in Nelson, British Columbia. There he ran the "Nelson Eishin Ryu Iai Dojo" from 2000 to 2003, before returning to the United States to focus on his career.

John and his family moved to Bend a few years ago, and he's been teaching iaido locally since March 2008.



Iaido classes are fairly formal by western standards. There is a lot of emphasis on etiquette, or "Reishiki". One of John's mentors, Esaka Sensei, would frequently stress that Budo begins and ends with Reishiki, "Rei (bowing/respect) is the most important part of Budo - forms of budo that take Rei lightly are not Budo. People practicing iaido should at all times endeavor to be

respectful with a sincere kokoro (heart/spirit)."

New students are encouraged to come and join the iaido classes. Previous martial arts experience can be helpful, but it isn't required. Beginners typically start training in loose-fitting clothing and practice with a wooden sword or "bokuto". After a few months, dedicated students will progress to using an "iaito", or unsharpened metal sword. Depending on the dojo, practitioners with several years of experience might practice their iaido using a "shinken" or "nihon-to", a live sharpened blade.

Iaido is largely a solitary pursuit where the practitioner continues to refine a series of highly controlled, precise movements in response to combative situations involving one or more imaginary attackers. John explains, "When you first start, the focus is on learning the physical movements of a form. But, this is quickly expanded to encompass both the energy and intent of the encounter. Nearly every iaido form is premised on imminent fear of death. You train yourself to react to these situations using deadly force, and at the same time maintain your control, composure, and presence. It's very mature, sobering subject matter."

"There is an interesting paradox that comes from the study of martial art so focused on that razor edge between Life and Death. You learn very quickly that Life is an extremely tenuous thing. And, in knowing this, that Life should be valued and protected at all costs."

Iaido is performed in a very calm, solemn manner and requires significant concentration and focus as careful repetition is used to polish the techniques.



The Oregon Eishin Ryu Iaido Kai is currently accepting new students in Bend, Oregon.

Classes are held weekly every Tuesday from 7:30-9pm.

For more information and class locations, call 541-633-7619.

Photo images courtesy of [Paul Clark's Red & Black Photography](#) .