

# The warrior & the sword

There are three fundamentally different types of swords in today's 21st century sword fight. Just as there are three fundamentally different types of humans.

There is the wooden sword, the Bokto or in Europe called the Bokken, it is mass-produced or made to order and costs between 15 and 150 Euros, depending on the quality. No matter how noble it is, it is always made of wood, and no matter how noble the wood is, it remains a blunt weapon. What can you do with a wooden sword and why is it useful? Wooden swords have been developed to make practicing easier and above all safer for beginners. In the strictly Japanese schools a beginner is only allowed to use a wooden sword for the first year, so it is also a sign that one is not yet able to handle a real weapon and therefore a real danger.

Furthermore, the wooden sword is mainly used for relatively safe partner exercises, because a hit by mistake does not normally kill the other, it only

makes "clonk!" and hurts very much.

A master, however, can even kill with a wooden sword, as Musashi did. But that's extraordinary.

Practicing with the wooden sword can be useful as an introduction to swordplay. However, when I was teaching young hard to educate boys, I always let them practice with a sharp sword, so that they could experience their limits in danger for themselves...

Movement sequences can be practiced well with the wooden sword. You can even practice them without a sword by imagining the sword and leading your body and hands as if you had a sword in your hand.

The wooden sword is in many respects different from the metal sword: it is lighter, therefore moves differently. So also a Shinai from the Kendo is not to be compared with a real sword, not even with a wooden sword, because it moves completely differently. Kendo has absolutely nothing to do with sword fighting.

If wooden swords hit each other or against each other, they bounce or slide, because they are made of wood. Metal behaves differently. It doesn't spring, one sword can cut into another and cant because of the differential hardening.

What kind of person is that who resembles a wooden sword?

The advanced form of the sword fight takes place with the metal sword (Iaito). The metal sword is

not a mass production, because it can be defined exactly in length and weight and with its fittings by the owner and is tailored exactly to one person. It consists of a zinc-aluminium alloy, is produced only in Japan and is much more expensive than a wooden sword, from 350 and up to 1500 Euros you can easily spend there, depending on quality and equipment. So this is already something noble, with which you can practice much more complex. With this practice sword the right pulling is an art, because both hands have to do, the left hand pulls back the sword sheath (sayabiki) while the right hand pulls and cuts with the sword. The left hand determines the cutting angle, the right hand exerts the right pressure and the right speed at the place where the cut is performed. A very complex process, which is repeated similarly when the sword is put back into the sheath (noto).

These swords are very pointed, which also makes them more dangerous as the wooden swords, but they are blunt, so that you can hardly hurt yourself. And one cannot do partner training (kumitachi) with them, because the metal would break immediately. Iaitos must never touch each other, they are very sensitive. But you can work with them almost as much as with a real sword.

Noble practice swords have great advantages over wooden swords, and some also use steel practice swords, which are heavier, but less sensitive. According to German weapons law Iaitos are not weapons, but sports equipment, because you can't really sharpen them. In English they are therefore also called "imitation sword", in actual new German speech "fake sword". Blunt practice swords made of steel are weapons, because you can shar-

pen them.

So the swords used in Japanese sword fighting are noble, very individually tailored to the user and extremely sensitive. You can do incredibly beautiful exercises and combat sequences with them.

But you can't test if everything would work. Because you never have a real opponent or partner, and you never know if a cut would really work. You practice very complex procedures, you learn to concentrate, to control the body and the sword, to imagine sequences and so on.

This kind of fight developed in the 20th century, at a time when everything became more and more virtual. You can also play sword fights on the computer that are even more virtual. This kind of sword fighting reflects very nicely the modern man, who develops individually complex in a protected world, in which the real dangers seem to be defused and pushed back more and more.

However, it also expresses a defencelessness and helplessness.

This becomes clear when one has experience with real swords. Real sharp swords are of course real weapons and are subject to the weapons law, which is very different in different countries and leaves many liberties to the practicing in Germany.

Of course Japanese swords (katana) are very noble, very expensive - between 3000 and 30000 Euro you have to invest - but also very sensitive. Today you can get high quality swords from China for a

few hundred Euros, which can endure everything and are beautiful. I have experienced it, how swordsmen destroyed their expensive hand forged swords with a wrong movement, there it does not help anything that a Japanese forged them.

What is the most important difference in the question whether I use a sharp or a blunt sword? It is my spirit. I need a completely different inner attitude because I can hurt myself badly with a single movement because the parts are razor sharp. So I need courage, self-confidence, a great alertness and presence and of course then - experience! For me these are synonyms for joie de vivre and life energy. The real sword can convey great liveliness in dealing with others.

The Katana cannot be deceived. Whether one would have hurt oneself with a sword, one realizes that only if it actually bleeds. This is the difference to our "modern" world, which is more and more packed in cotton wool, in which people make mass pilgrimages to the Europapark or other institutions to experience pretended adventures, but at the sight of a spider get a screaming cramp or do not dare to go into the forest at night in the dark.

For a real sword you need real muscles, because it is made of steel and weighs a lot. And you really have to adjust to it, because a sword knows no pity. When you cut yourself, it doesn't start crying.

But that is only one side, the other is the tameshi-giri, the cutting, not of the air as with the laito or Bokto, but of mats or wood. A sword is a weapon, it is there to kill, it must be able to destroy some-

thing. This is not for sissies. It demands the inner readiness for a correct cut. I have seen people who have wonderfully cut their forms through the air with the laito, but even with hours of effort with the sharp sword could not cut through a thin mat. What a frustration. But instead of mobilizing their inner powers and developing into warriors, they put the sword aside and gave it up.

Wooden sword, practice sword, sharp sword - which person are you? And which person do you want to be? I myself have gone the way from wood to metal and to sharp danger - I have become a warrior, a master of the sharp sword, not only with a weapon in my hand, but also in everyday life. It took years and decades, but every minute of it was worth it. It's worth it for everyone!

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