

3 ■ How to Practice Suburi

Suburi (素振り), is a Japanese term which refers to the repetitive practice swings in sports (golf) or strikes in martial arts (kendo). In my earlier writings I have established the fact that regular practice of suburi strengthens basic skills in Aikido. Now I will explain how to practice suburi correctly.

Since suburi is part of Aikido *bukiwaza* (weapon techniques), let us first review the various levels of bukiwaza to put suburi practice in perspective.

There are generally four levels of bukiwaza training. At the beginning level, the student's main goal is to learn the physical form, including how to hold the weapon so that it becomes an extension of the body and how the different parts of the body move in relation to each other to optimize alignment. At this level, the solo practice of Suburi is the focus of bukiwaza training. The correct way to practice is at low speed, with no power and with emphasis on the general accuracy of the form.

Next, at the intermediate level, the student's goal is to make the movement more effective by injecting some speed and power and adding target practice. For this purpose the student practices at moderate speed, and learns how to move from the hips and use *kokyū* (breath power; focused extension of *ki*). A partner will serve as the target, sometimes stationary, sometimes moving; thus, timing of motion and alignment with target become important aspects of practice at this stage. Suburi practice is still a mainstay.

At the advanced level of bukiwaza, the student further refines the form to capture the energetic footprint and begins to use intent to direct the form. To these ends the practice should be at slow speed with

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meticulous attention to the detail of the form and to the direction of energy. Suburi practice is still done regularly in the background. The practice also includes resistance training to elicit the use of intent in creating and directing the *ki* (life force). In paired practice, the focus is on receiving the *uke's* (training partner) energy and neutralizing it.

Ultimately, after decades of assiduous practice, the student will reach a point at which handling the weapon feels like handling a rod of energy and much of the practice can be done at the mental-feeling level, with or without an uke, including suburi.

Suburi is a core practice throughout these four levels, with special emphasis on the first two levels. I elaborate below on suburi practice at the advanced level of *bukiwaza*.

Advanced Suburi Practice

Five phases of movement can be discerned in any suburi: beginning stance; collecting; discharging; grounding; and ending stance.



1. Beginning stance. We often refer to this stance as *kamae* (stance). This is an important and integral part of the suburi which is