



The Canadian Isshinryu Way

Everything Karate & Kobudo

Isshinryu Canada

Volume 7, Issue 1
January 2011

Keep Isshinryu Important in 2011

Happy New Year!

The current poll on Isshinryu.ca is "How Important is Isshinryu in your Daily Life". While a few people answered only in the Dojo, most answer that it is more important than that.

Isshinryu training, hard as it may be can be a very positive aspect of your life. The hard work and challenges in the dojo can teach you that you can accomplish much more than you thought you could. In addition to the physical training, the mental training allows both creative and analytical thinking to expand.

What else in life can make you stronger AND smarter?

So, in this new year, I hope everyone continues there training and strives to improve each and every day in their martial arts whether they are in the Dojo that day or not. True martial arts training starts in the Dojo can continues everywhere. If you limit your understanding of the martial arts to the dojo, you miss 98% of it.

Have a great 2011, keep training, keep improving and keep contributing to the newsletter!

Osu!

Essential Isshinryu has been Released!

For more information on the first Canadian Isshinryu book, visit www.essentialissheinryu.com!

ATTENTION NEEDED!

Do you know of someone great in Canadian Isshinryu? If so, please e-mail Sensei@issheinryu.ca with the contact details to be pro-filed in future newsletters.

Upcoming Events

Seminars

Hanshi Mady in Thun-der Bay—Spring

Tournaments

AOKA Championships—Chicago, IL

Other

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Being good is an all time thing



Itosu Anko

Understanding the history of Isshinryu and karate can provide the Isshinryu Karateka with a greater knowledge of the masters of Karate and their contributions to creating Isshinryu. Understanding the people involved leads the student and instructor alike to a deeper respect for the evolution of the art.

Itosu Anko (1831-1915)

Who he was

The top student of Matsumura Sokon and one of the top teachers of his era responsible for bringing Karate into the school system and creating a number of Kata.

He also penned the 10 precepts of Te which outlined the principles and benefits of Martial Arts training.

Key Instructors

Matsumura Sokon—The last “Bushi” and already profiled, you should read the previous newsletters!

Key Students

Yabu Kentsu—“The Sergeant” one of Itosu’s senior students.

Hanashiro Chomo—The man who first penned Karate as a term.

Chibana Choshin—Founder of Kobayashi Shorinryu.

Oshiro Chojo—Master of Yammaniryu Bojutsu

Mabuni Kenwa—Founder of Shitoryu

Motobu Choki—Well known martial Artist and instructor of Shimabuku Tatsuo

Funakoshi Gichin—Founder of Shotokan and father of Japanese Karate.

Kyan Chotoku—Another famous martial artist on Okinawa and instructor of Shimabuku Tatsuo.

Plus many, many more than could be included here.

The Individual

Rather than outline the training and many details of his life, which exceeds the space allocated for this article, I will instead share a specific incident from his life.

Itosu’s physical conditioning was said to be incredible. He became well known for his ability to take the blows of other karate men without any noticeable effect. He was short and stocky and it is said he could crush a bamboo stock simply by squeezing it in his hand.

One highly remarkable attribute of Itosu Anko was his calm nature. Itosu was a practitioner of the Buddhist faith and through his long life there is not one story of Itosu becoming involved in a fight. His calm demeanor and polite manner always enabled him to avoid confrontation. Itosu’s true calling was teaching. His students stood out far and above most Okinawan Masters and most became great masters for the next generation. When the military draft was imposed on Okinawa by Japan in 1890, three Okinawans greatly stood out to the Japanese for their physical conditioning. The three men were all students of Itosu Anko, namely Yabu Kentsu, Hanashiro Chomo and Kudeken Kenyu.

Itosu’s greatest contribution to the practice the martial arts was having Te added to the school curriculum on Okinawa. In April of 1901 he began teaching it as physical conditioning at Shuri’s Jinjo elementary school. Through his dedication in April 1905 he also began teaching at Okinawa’s First Junior Prefectural High School and at the Teachers College. It was at this time that he introduced his largest contribution to the techniques of Te. Itosu created a series of five training kata named Pinan based upon the Chinese form Chiang Nan. They were employed to introduce basic techniques and allowed easier progression in a class situation.

I sincerely hope that you enjoyed reading this series of articles on the history of Isshinryu. For more information about this master and karate in general, please refer to Essential Isshinryu.

Up next in the Isshinryu history will be additional biographies of Okinawan Karate masters. If you have corrections or comments regarding this article or any future article, please feel free to contact me directly.



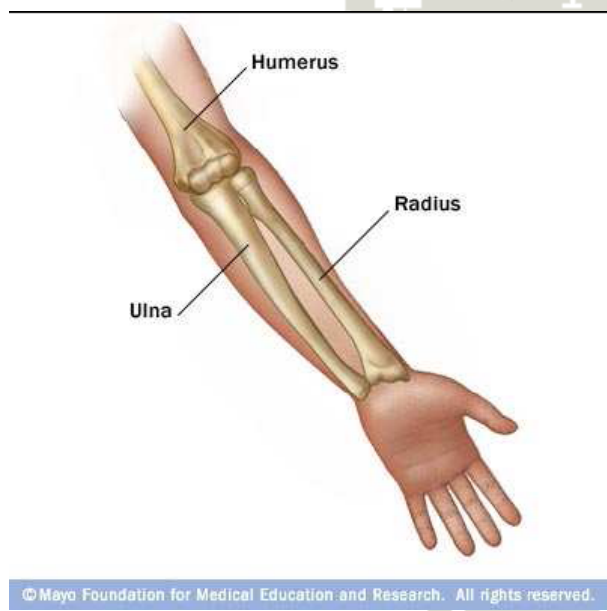
Chudan Uke: An Old Okinawan Secret? or Simple Bio-Mechanics?

By Andrew Tam

A few months ago (during the summer of 2010) I had the chance to investigate an Isshinryu basic named "chudan uke", the mid-level block. What I found was that the chudan uke was not as effective as I thought it would be out of the box. For this article I plan to look at the anatomy of the arm, the basic motion and blocking principle to try and understand the proper body mechanics that should make an effective mid-level block.

One of the 8 codes in Isshinryu states that the manner of drinking or spitting is either soft or hard. This in its simplest terms essentially says that for this specific block, the chudan uke, can be a soft block or a hard block. The chudan uke is described as a double bone block where radius and ulna are used simultaneously to make contact with a strike. This motion was taught as a mid-level cross body block, where the arm fans across the body and stops at the outer shoulder line with the wrist positioned so that the outside of the forearm is making contact with the strike.

If we look at the anatomy of the arm (Figure 1), you will notice that there are 2 bones that make up the forearm, the radius (thumb-side) and the ulna (pinky-side) as well as the muscle encasing the bones.



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Arm Bones

The muscle surrounding the two bones acts as a shock absorber/dampener and as a sensitivity receptor. Single bone blocks can be made by intercepting a strike with just the ulna or radius bones, these blocks do not include the bulk of the muscle so the majority of the force is transferred directly onto the bone. Theoretically, this should be weaker compared to a block that intercepts a strike across both arm bones.

By making contact with 2 bones simultaneously we can deduce that the force acting on the two bones and the muscle protecting the bones would be dampened and the remaining force divided between the two bones giving the block much more strength compared to a single bone block. If you are still skeptical, mathematics will show that if you increase the surface area under which there is a load, the load will be equally distributed across the entire area, this basically says that the more surface area you put between your opponent's strike and your block the less it should hurt, think pounds per sq.- inch. So, by understanding your body mechanics you can see that by adjusting the position of the wrist you can change the angle that your forearm rotates which will change the block from a single bone block to a double bone block. This is a concept that I fundamentally agree with.

When using the chudan uke against a fellow karateka's vertical punch, I realized that no matter how hard or fast I threw the chudan uke I was always getting hit. As this was being used initially as a hard block, there was a lot of force on force blocking. My forearm took a beating and I was still getting tagged in the chest. There was bruising, pain and frustration.

So why doesn't the block work?

To answer this question, I have to look to the insights of my seniors and at my own body mechanics. The blocking principle of the chudan uke, as originally taught, is a block over the lead leg where the block strikes the inner forearm or bicep of a mid level punch while taking a step back. Theoretically this should work. However, in practice it wasn't very effective.

At a seminar recently held at the Toshikai Dojo in Ottawa, Sensei Richard Ruberto discussed that bio-mechanically, the force of just your forearm swinging

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Chudan Uke: An Old Okinawan Secret? or Simple Bio-Mechanics?

By Andrew Tam

in a cross body block is much weaker than the force an opponent's incoming punch even if you are equally matched. This makes sense since the incoming punch includes forward moving mass of your opponent's entire body versus the mass of just your forearm. I first thought about moving off centerline when stepping back to offset some of the force of the incoming attack. This however, changes the block into an evasion and in essence is no longer a block.

Other karateka have talked about stuffing a punch before it reaches you. This would require the step to move forward as opposed to backwards. Fundamentally, this does not change the block only the direction in which it's being applied. It does however improve the blocking ability by reducing the amount of kinetic energy delivered by your opponent by taking away 6-8 inches of traveling distance. This step forward also makes it seem like your block is faster. The prognosis is that this works better but is still not entirely desirable since it's still a hard, force on force, block which ends up hurting me more than my opponent. Remembering the aforementioned code that there are other ways to use a given technique and returning to the above mentioned seminar, Sensei Ruberto shared with us another way one might use the chudan uke; softly. Instead of blocking force on force, use the

sweeping motion of the chudan uke to intercept the strike and deflect. While this also does not change the block it changes the application. By softly intercepting the punch as it's coming at you, you can then adjust the timing of your deflection by matching the speed of your opponents attack. This will take more training in sensitivity until it can be effectively used in combat but it's much less painful than blocking force on force against a heavier mass. Thinking about the chudan uke as a deflection gives it a lot more versatility as an effective block.

Perhaps the soft block has remained hidden for so long due to the fact that the block is performed with a closed fist which is symbolic of an attack and naturally tensing the muscles in the forearm. This tensing of the muscles in the forearm severely reduces your sensitivity as the muscle and skin are the most receptive to changes in the environment when they are completely relaxed. This brings about one last thought, if holding a loose fist in combat allows for better sensitivity than a tight fist, should the chudan uke fist also be held loose and only tensed at the moment of deflection? I think so. Now the only way to find out is to put this in to practice.

Travelling? Don't Forget to Pack your Karate

By Justin Johnson

If you are like me, the night or even the morning before a trip is filled with running around the house trying to ensure you have everything you need. The one thing that I never have to worry about packing though is my karate (weapons for kobudo are another story). For several years my job would result in me spending weeks to months in hotels, trailers, fly-in camps or tents. One thing that always stayed the same no matter where I was located was boredom. It did not matter what was provided for entertainment or how many books I brought, it would not take long to become boring. This resulted in longer and longer hours spent working as it was the only thing that helped pass the time. I tried various things from fishing to a wide range of hobbies (astronomy to whittling) but was not able to stick to any of them, then came karate.

I was a late starter in Isshinryu, not starting until my late twenties. Once I had karate I discovered I had so much to do. Granted work would always take lion share of time, but I now had past time that could be done anywhere and at anytime. From the mountains of British Columbia to the swamps of Northern Ontario and even unclassifiable locations in Mexico. Now there was more than just a simple way to pass time, there was something worth doing. One side effect of this will be the stares you can get while trying to do a kata in the middle of a pasture but I can guarantee you it is no stranger than the looks you will get while do a kata in front of a window or by a pool in a hotel.

Practising Isshinryu while traveling, either for business or pleasure, does have noticeable benefits. The first and most obvious is that you are doing karate.

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Travelling? Don't Forget to Pack your Karate

By Justin Johnson

Your training will not suffer, or at least not suffer much if you make the time to practice even a little every day (I'm sure all of you have heard this from your sensei). The second and perhaps more valuable lesson is learned when trying to adapt your karate to various terrains. Have you ever tried to do a mewashi geri on gravel while wearing boots? How about the double snap kick from Chinto or Kusanku up hill or in snow? Even performing Seisan kata, a kata that you may have done in numerous times before, changes depending on your footwear and the terrain. Practising your karate in diverse areas gives you an appreciation of not only how techniques have to be modified for the situation but also how easily many of the techniques, many of which may have been drilled into you for years, can be modified.

Next time you go on a vacation or business trip, remember to bring your karate. Try a kata or even a few basic techniques on a beach, in a pool or around the furniture in your room. Just remember that any temporary things that you do change because of your surroundings are just temporary. When you return to the dojo and its even smooth floors do Isshinryu the way it is meant to be done and save how to adapt to the terrain until needed.

Why do we break wood over People?

By Tim Boykin

In accordance with Isshinryu tradition, I recently tested two of my brown belts for Nikyu, which not only involved the performance of sanchin kata and the customary breaking of wood over their arms, stomach and upper leg. I was very pleased with their performance and they were subsequently promoted. I relayed the good news to my wife, who responded with, "Why in the world do you feel it necessary to break wood over a student?"

I choked back my first answer (because sensei had broken wood over me) and took a moment of careful repose before answering. My retort was that sanchin teaches many important lessons and is a "rite of passage" enroute to Shodan. In essence, it is an initiation to make you truly appreciate your accomplishment. Sailors observe the "Crossing the Line" ceremony as pollywogs at the equator, new pilots solo and have the back of their shirts torn away and displayed as a trophy of that event, college fraternities/sororities, sports teams, Native American Tribes, et al exercise similar traditions.

Sanchin kata teaches the obvious lessons of focus, breathing and dynamic tension; but it also reinforces body mechanics, stance and confidence. Without proper body mechanics (locking the arm, tying in the various muscles of the upper torso), the arm will absorb the brunt of the wood strike, bend on impact and the wood fails to break. Breaks across the abdomen and thigh are relatively easy in comparison.

However, the most important aspect of sanchin, in my opinion, is in the development of the student's confidence. Students endure the time honored tradition of strikes to the arms, legs, and torso, which allow them to progress mentally and physically to the point of having wood broken OVER their body. This also symbolic for a couple of reasons.

First, the mind, body and spirit are now unified and able to operate as a unit to overcome the trauma of impact while maintaining their focus. The karateka now ascends to a higher level and is prepared for the real work of achieving Shodan and thus proving himself worthy to continue to train and learn.

Secondly, at some point in your life, you'll encounter a seemingly insurmountable obstacle which prevents you from achieving a significant goal. It could be graduating from college, or completing a marathon or just progressing in rank. The point is, somewhere, sometime, you'll meet a challenge you struggle to meet. Sanchin prepares you for those challenges and gives you the confidence to proceed.

Lastly, the student and instructor develop a bond of trust. The student trusts the sensei to prepare him and break the wood safely. The sensei gives the student individual time and attention in order to mold the student in a unique way. This bond is crucial to further development of the student and to ensure that this traditional way of instruction continues from sensei to student.



The Kata as a Learning Tool

By Mike O'Leary

All traditional styles of Okinawa karate are based on kata. There are lists of accepted kata in Okinawa that are recognized by the Okinawa organizations as traditional and have history over the years. It is these that make up the meat of Okinawa karate styles.

Many styles utilize the same kata, the details of which may vary from style to style. Within those styles are multiple teachers, each of whom adds something personal to the form. Eventually the form evolves through the generations and in the end we have subtle to extreme difference in kata. The same can be said for kobudo.

In both disciplines, the definition of a style is characterized by its basic moves as shown in bunkai or interpretation of the moves. Which teacher you trained with, when you trained, where you trained is defined by the bunkai that is associated with your kata. If we experience more than one teacher in the same style, we will often find the same move with a difference in focus, cadence, sequence or definition; this can also be seen in Kobudo. The same sequence, different emphasis, slightly different bunkai, all within the same system. In Isshin Ryu Karate, the pull back motion of the arm in the opening moves of Seisan, are commonly interpreted as blocks, but also as wrist breaks. Most North American students are aware of this over the years. They will often ask "Which one is correct".

Some teachers teach only one, some teach both, one as the primary and the other as a secondary possibility. Some teachers will go into the body mechanics behind each of the techniques, the movement of the arms and hands, letting the student discover for themselves logical and effective techniques. There are also teachers that teach kata for competition and negate any application to self defence at all. We have all heard the argument that kata has nothing to do with fighting at all and fighting is to be learned in the sparring ring. This unfortunately has been said all too many times.

What does kata teach? Fighting techniques? Or does it teach the characteristics of the style? Does it teach balance, focus, power? Does Isshin Ryu Kata teach natural stances, vertical fist punching, natural or 2 bone blocks? Or does it merely teach a sequence of movements meant to win medals and accolades in the sport ring.

Let's start with Stance, each kata will teach a new

stance or a new way to use a stance or later will teach transition from stance to stance. Stance is a factor.

Movement should be on this list. We walk in kata, move from sequence to sequence, learn balance and the difference between shifting weight and taking a step and the consequences and benefits of each. How to move and how to move our opponent are prime lessons in each kata, with regard to what stance the kata uses and what techniques the kata teaches.

Techniques, a third lesson, now there is a tricky one. If we look at Naihanchi, most students will immediately respond to say that "Naihanchi teaches you to fight someone beside you" or "As if you were standing with your back to a wall." How many say that a side fighting stance is sometimes the most effective and that shifting a forward attack to a side defence can sometimes be the most effective way to deal with attacks? If we look at Seisan, most students say that it teaches to fight someone directly in front of you! How many say that it teaches to move in to your opponent and to only move back to gain advantage and it shows how to gain that advantage? An interesting fact is that in the first 3 kata, Seisan, Seiuchin, Naihanchi, there is one technique that is the same in all 3 of the kata. The difference is the stance associated with that technique is used in conjunction with the stance taught in that kata, seisan with seisan stance, Seiuchin with horse (or Seiuchin stance), etc. The move is the circular block found in the second line of Seisan.

Shimabuku Sensei seems to have been a fairly deliberate man. He chose a syllabus of 8 empty hand kata to teach the "essence" of Isshin Ryu Karate. Was it coincidence that these moves were taught in the first 3 kata, or was he making a point?

I give you a challenge:

Discuss in the dojo the 3 moves in the 3 kata. Look at the 3 different stances in each case; examine why they would be different and not the same stance. In that process examine if in fact the bunkai you are using is practical, efficient and effective. At the outcome of this exercise you should have a better understanding of stance, balance, the technique it self as well as the body mechanics behind it.

Try this and talk to other students about it. You will

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The Kata as a Learning Tool

By Mike O'Leary

be amazed at the differences you will have between students and between teachers, but the similarities in the mechanics will be the same. In essence, it's the movement and not the specific hand or foot technique that the kata teaches that is the lesson. Whether we use a circular block, or a grabbing block, whether we pull the opponent in or push him to the side. What we want to concentrate on is the movement of the body, how the power comes from the hip, how to generate power and maintain balance, how the hip is connected

to the floor, therefore maximizing our technique and minimizing the effort or strength needed.

Once you discover "How" to study a syllabus of kata, your own personal training will be gin to grow and expand. You will discover that there are multiple possibilities within the bunkai, and you may even discover your own unique versions of techniques. This is the creative aspect of "the Art" of Karate.

The Challenges!

Karate

I've long concerned Kata to be the fundamental exercise of Karate and Kobudo. The concise summation of techniques they represent is a thing of beauty, open to many interpretations, while providing a common basic understanding that can be understood by all who take the time to look.

As such, this newsletters challenge will be based on Kata. I'm going to leave the challenge to Mike O'Leary who wrote the previous article. He provides an excellent challenge that everyone reading this newsletter should try.

Challenge your training partners to better understand the why of the movements and you'll gain the ability to truly understand how to interpret the kata.

Kobudo

Training

It's quite common at the start of new year to be enthusiastic about getting shape and improving your physical condition. That is good regardless of your current physical condition to improve in specific ways for your Karate training.

The challenge is to do a short but specific workout every other day until you read the next newsletter. The three parts to the workout will serve to improve your techniques as well as your endurance.

- 1) Upper body striking—explosive pushups. Start with 10 and see how many you can work your way up to. These are just regular pushups where you try to throw yourself up off the ground.
- 2) Lower body striking—squat kicks. Bend your knees down until you are almost on the ground, stand up quickly and kick immediately. Repeat on the other side. Try 20 and work your way up.
- 3) Endurance—Kata, full power! It's as simple as it sounds. Do your kata as hard and powerful as you can. At the end of kata immediately begin another. Start with 3 and try to work your way up.
- 4) Train hard!



Coloured Belt Promotions

Chitora Dojo—Thunder Bay, ON November 23rd

Adrianna Tikka—Green (Yonkyu)
Jonathan Kaban—Orange (Gokyu)
Carter Sakiyama—Orange (Gokyu)
Camilla Tikka—Orange (Gokyu)

January 13th

Justin Johnson—Ikkyu Kobudo

December 9th

Jessie deRuiter—Brown (Nikyu)

Competition Results

None Reported

Hanshi Mady Visits Thunder Bay, ON

On January 14th and 15th, Hanshi Mady visited Thunder Bay for a series of seminars on the fundamentals of Isshinryu.

Friday night was for senior black belts only and focused primarily on the advanced weapon Kata, while the Saturday seminars were open to anyone who knew the kata we were covering.

Throughout Saturday we intensively covered the techniques for every kata as well as Bunkai for each technique. There was a lot of opportunity to practice the bunkai with partners and try to ingrain the application of the technique into our memory.

As always everyone immensely enjoyed the seminars and learned a great deal. It is always enjoyable to attend a seminar and leave feeling nearly (or completely) overwhelmed by the vast amount of knowledge you gained.

Thanks for all the training and patience with us Hanshi, we'll keep training so you only have to correct new mistakes when you return in the spring!



Contributors



Editor & Author—Chitora Dojo

Mike Fenton—Thunder Bay, Ontario
Mike lives with his wife Kyla and has been training in Isshinryu karate for over 25 years, and has been an instructor for over 20 years. He is currently head instructor of Chitora Dojo in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Author—Chitora Dojo

Trevor Warren—Thunder Bay, Ontario
Trevor lives in Thunder Bay with his wife Maria. He has dedicated a great deal of his time to teaching and his own training with the realization that hard work is the key to success.



Author—Chitora Dojo

Justin Johnson—Thunder Bay, Ontario
Justin has been training Isshinryu Kobudo about 10 years and soon after also began studying Karate. He is currently preparing for this Shodan in Karate and shortly thereafter in Kobudo.

Author—Toshikai Dojo

Andrew Tam—Ottawa, Ontario
Started martial arts at the age of six in 7 Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu in which he attained his 5th degree black sash. Andrew also has a black sash in Wing Chun Kung Fu. For the last couple of years, Andrew has trained at the Toshikai Dojo where recently attained green belt in Isshinryu.



Author—Any Dojo

Authors are always wanted! Consider taking the time to submit something to the newsletter.

Karate Terms in this Newsletter

Bunkai—Taking to Pieces, commonly interpreted as the application of technique.

Bushi—Warrior

Chinkuchi—Bone, Sinew and Energy

Chudan—Middle Level

Dojo—School

Furi—Swing

Go—Hard

Jo—Short Staff

Ju—Soft or Gentle

Jutsu—Technique

Ka—Person / Practitioner

Kama—Sickle(s)

Kihon—Exercises

Kime—Focus

Kobudo—Ancient Martial Way, the term used to describe all the weapons in Isshinryu and Karate.

Kyu—Student rank level, counting down towards 0, being the first rank of Black Belt.

Makiwara—Striking Board

Mushin—No Mind

Naha—Port city on Okinawa

Shiko Dachi—Horse Stance

Shozenkutsu / Seisan Dachi—Small forward stance

Shuri—Capital City on Okinawa

Tonfa/Tuifa—Baton with Handle

Uchi—Strike

Uchi Hachi Dachi—Inner Eight stance

Uke—Hard block

Yudansha—Black Belt

Zenkutsu Dachi—Forward Stance

It is important to familiarize yourself with commonly used Japanese words. Try to memorize all the words each time and you will soon have a large "karate" vocabulary.



Submissions

Story Submission

Stories are welcome from anyone and everyone. They can be about anything related to the Martial Arts, a technique you think is just great; A better way to do a technique; History of a Karate Master; a tournament trick that works well; ANYTHING!

All stories are appreciated as e-mail. You can send it to your instructor to proof read and send in, or directly to me. (Mike (at) Isshinryu.ca) or (newsletter (at) Isshinryu.ca)

You can even include pictures if it helps your article!

Dojo Directory:

Any student is welcome at anytime to visit any dojo. Before class, always introduce yourself to the Sensei of the dojo and tell them who your current Sensei is.

For a full dojo list visit Isshinryu.ca We are getting too many to list here.

Affiliate Cities!

Abbotsford, BC

Contact: Mike O'Leary

Brandon, MB

Contact: Richard Wharf

Contact: Buzz Cox

Calgary, AB

Contact: Charles Boyd

Cookstown, ON

Contact: Harri T. Makivirta

Dryden, ON

Contact: Rick McGogy

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Essential Isshinryu Released!

Essential Isshinryu, the definitive book on Isshinryu by Mike Fenton and Trevor Warren is now available!

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