

Chiburi (血振)

血 (*chi*) literally means blood. 振 (*huri* or *burui*) on the other hand can mean shake, wave, wag, swing and even flick depending on the context. In the Japanese sword art of *iaido* it is the ceremonial method one uses to 'remove' blood from the sword. This motion is done towards the end of every *kata* before *nōtō* (resheathing the blade back into the *saya* (scabbard)). In many classic *chanbara* (Samurai Cinema) it is often graphically illustrated by drawing an artistic blood splatter line on the *tatami* (floor mat). Recently, Quentin Tarantino in his *Kill Bill* movies brought this imagery to western audiences.

Chiburi has a variety of forms, *O-chiburi* with its large circular motion, *yoko chiburi* with its horizontal movement to the side, and even *kaiten chiburi* where the sword is spun and the *tsuka* struck are just a few examples. Regardless of its appearance, *chiburi* is an integral part of almost all *iaido kata*. There are physical, economical and spiritual reasons for its existence.

The physical act of performing *chiburi* will remove the majority of the blood from the blade. In reality *chiburi* will never completely remove the blood off the blade. Blood is viscous and some will always adhere to the blade. If the ultimate goal is to clean the blade, *chinugui* should be practiced in addition to *chiburi*. *Chinugui* is the act of wiping the blood from the blade with a cloth, paper or even the fingers before *nōtō*. A small towel or *kaishi* paper neatly tucked inside the front of one's *kimono* could serve this function but in a pinch you could even use your *hakama*.

If the blood is not removed from the blade it will end up contaminating the *saya* and eventually rusting the blade. Blood is a highly oxygenated saline electrolyte with a pH of around 7.4 consisting primarily of a pale yellow sticky liquid called plasma. Any residual blood left on the blade will coat the inside of a *saya*. Once fouled there is no-way to clean it and the contaminated spots will rust the blade adjacent to them. The only solution is to have a new *saya* custom made, which can be very costly. If blood is not removed from the blade it will deteriorate the *hamon* in hours and rust the metal within a day. A rusty blade is even more expensive to remedy, estimate are in the range of \$100/inch to polish a blade.

Finally, *chiburi* should be thought of as a purifying action. The time between *chiburi* and *nōtō* is a manifestation of *zanshin*. A state of total awareness and understanding. If the sword is truly the 'soul of the samurai' as Tokugawa Ieyasu remarked you surely would want to keep it clean well maintained. The act of performing *chiburi* has meaning. It begins the final act in a *kata's* one act play. It is the final curtain call of your opponents life.

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