

Rolling out of Danger

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"If you do not know the essence of ukemi, you might as well be a mindless animal, for you will not survive many combat situations."

In order to become a Ninja, one must learn and fully comprehend the unique concept of Ukemi. Although it is extremely difficult to translate, Ukemi involves rolling or falling movements in different directions in response to an attack. This is done not only to escape danger, but also to assume a new position that will confuse or distract your opponent.

Muute Zenpo Kaiten (tumbling forward without using hands) The obvious advantage of this roll is that it leaves the hands free for other, perhaps more aggressive purposes.

			
From a standing position (1)	the knees are bent slightly, the upper body leaning over from the waist and the head tucked under (2).	The hands do not touch the ground, though the arms may as the body makes smooth rolling contact with the ground (3).	Coming out of the roll, the feet are planted firmly and straight, allowing the ninja to continue progress in the direction he chooses (4).

Kata Zenpo Kaiten (tumbling to either the right or the left).

			
Using only one hand, the head is tucked under (1)	and the body leans forward toward the shoulder it will roll over(2).	Coming out of the roll (3),	the legs are in position to support the ninja to continue on in any direction (4).

In ancient Japan the Ninja were always in danger, no matter what the environment or the situation. If they did not totally understand the real meaning of Ukemi, they could not have survived or left the legacy of their extraordinary accomplishments to posterity. In the old days the Ninja were referred to as masters of escape, sometimes thought of as superhuman beings because of their awesome ability to avoid danger and, whenever possible, elude confrontation completely. Today, however, there are those who do not have a true understanding of the Ninja; they have the wrong impression that Ninja are weak, afraid and run away from danger. This is most unfortunate because, in reality, it is just the other way around. It takes courage and cunning and great wisdom to know just when and when not to fight.

If you know only winning and you do not know losing, there is much to learn. Samurai who know only attacking, moving forward with aggression, are called Inoshishi Musha (boar samurai), because they only know how to go forward like mindless animals. If you do not know the essence of Ukemi, you might as well be a mindless animal for you will not survive many combat situations that require more than just brute strength. Even Budô masters, when attacking, will lose in the end without this knowledge.

Our school of Ninja stands on 900 years of history and, unlike those who knew only how to go forward and ultimately lost like Napoleon, for instance. We have survived all these centuries because we understand and have mastered the principle of Ukemi and, with that, the truth.

In the following photographs and text, I will illustrate and explain some of the concepts and techniques of Ukemi, one step at a time.

[\[Text associated with photos\]](#)

All rolling/tumbling techniques must be executed silently and painlessly. Whether rolling forward, backward, to the right or left, if there is sound, it not only alerts the opponent, it also means you are making hard contact with the ground. You are therefore subjecting your body to pain. These techniques must be practiced again and again until they can be performed without sound or pain, even on concrete or other rough terrain.

The action of this technique is extremely swift. Accuracy and control, as a result of countless hours of practice, is absolutely essential.

<p>(1) As the opponent begins his downward strike, Dr. Hatsumi quickly falls backward,</p>		<p>(5) Hatsumi lunges with his left shoulder/elbow against the man's sword arm and body</p>	
<p>(2) blocking the sword at its hilt with his right foot and striking his opponent's right knee with his left knee.</p>		<p>(6) causing him to fall backward while Hatsumi grasps the sword.</p>	
<p>(3) Hatsumi lets the attacker's momentum carry him just a little forward and off balance (2,3) at which point Hatsumi slaps the side of the sword,</p>		<p>(7) His left leg pinning the opponent's right, Hatsumi, with sword in hand, is now in complete control.</p>	
<p>(4) guiding it away from him, while pushing his left knee against the attacker's right leg.</p>			

Kata no Oshasite Zenpo Kaiten (tumbling with sword)

<p>(1) From the standing position,</p>		<p>(2) Dr. Hatsumi swings his sword in front of him,</p>	
<p>(3) at the same time moving his right arm out then down in front</p>		<p>(4) so the momentum will roll his body over his right shoulder</p>	
<p>(5) The side view shows the completed roll, hands on sword</p>		<p>(6) and then the drawn sword ready for action.</p>	

Omote Ukemi (rolling or falling backward) This technique is called "showing the front of the body to the sun or moon" and rolling the "bed of air" behind you. If the technique is performed properly, there should be no pain felt when the back makes contact with the ground.

		
<p>In photo #1 Dr. Hatsumi demonstrates the normal position of the legs when executing the backward roll. It is important to note this because many life-saving maneuvers can be performed as a result.</p>	<p>In photo #2 we see the ninja has fallen back from a sword attack, using the natural leg extension to block at the sword hilt and at the same time drawing the shuriken that he is in excellent position to toss.</p>	<p>In photo #3 we see a kick that can be executed even while beginning the backward roll.</p>

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