



Kurikara: The Sword and the Serpent

John Maki Evans

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In *Mikkyo*—Japanese esoteric Buddhism—the dragon Kurikara symbolizes the internal energy developed through sword practice. Kurikara is a manifestation of the fierce bodhisattva Fudo Myo O, the patron of ascetics and warriors in Japan, who uses his sword to destroy delusions and sever attachments. Fudo’s sword represents the gaining of discriminative power and decisiveness—the ability to cut through illusion and attachment. This leads to the development of an inner energy that allows one to “burn up” all obstacles to spiritual freedom.

Kurikara: The Sword and the Serpent sets out the eight basic principles of swordsmanship common to all Japanese sword schools, emphasizing the cultivation of power and mental focus. Accomplished martial artist John Evans provides practical examples from his experience with the sword arts as well as *Mikkyo* and *shugendo* (mountain asceticism). The first foreign student to train with Nakamura Taisaburo sensei—widely acknowledged as the master of the sword art *battodo*—Evans clearly explains how skill such as Nakamura sensei’s can be systematically developed through *tanren*, exercises that meld “inner” and “outer” power. Filled with fascinating anecdotes from Evans’s training in Japan, *Kurikara* is a useful, inspiring guide to Japanese sword practice and its spiritual underpinnings.

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